

The Warsaw Concerto



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War drama by Christian Lanciai
(2014, translated 2018)
based on the film written by Terence Young.

Dramatis personae:

Sally
two doctors
Stefan
Henryk
Krzysztof
Adam
Squadron leader
An air force captain
Other pilots
American journalists
Sally's father
Bruce Lockhart
General Franco
Wilhelm Canaris
Leslie Howard
A waiter
Guests at a night club and other high society

The action is in London, Warsaw, Madrid and New York
during the Second World War.

Act I scene 1. A hospital in London.

Sally How is he?
Doctor His case is not hopeless, but we must have patience.
Sally May I see him?
Doctor We would rather not. Let's first try all we can. If we fail with all other
methods we will let you try. (*The sound of an awkward effort at a piano is heard from
somewhere.*) You can hear for yourself. He is groping his way through an abysmal
labyrinth.
Sally How is the diagnosis?
Doctor Grenade shock but worse. He was shot down in an air fight. It's a
miracle that he is alive at all.
Sally Is he not aware of who he is?

Doctor Not yet.
 Sally What do you think? Could he come back?
 Doctor Only if he found himself again. But just the fact that he is trying to find a way through the dark is a good sign, which should give us hope.
 Sally How long must I wait?
 Doctor As long as possible, until we can be certain of a way of recovery.
 Sally I can't wait.
 Doctor You mean, you want to see him at once?
 Sally Is it too risky?
 Doctor It's definitely a risk I would advise against.
 Sally I'll take it.
 Doctor (*whispers with a colleague, who gives it a serious thought and nods.*)
 If you are prepared to take that risk, we shall do it with you. But I must warn you. His appearance might give you a shock. He will not recognize you.
 Sally I take that risk.
 Doctor If he gets the least upset we must interrupt your meeting.
 Sally Of course.
 Doctor This way, then. (*rises, and the two doctors follow Sally to Stefan's room.*)
 (*She stops at the entrance to take a view of him. He sits by a grand piano trying desperately to find an entry to his music.*) Stefan, you have a visitor.
 Stefan (*interrupts himself and turns around*) Leave me alone! Can't you see that I am busy!
 Doctor It's someone who might know you.
 Stefan But I don't know anyone!
 Doctor (*gives Sally a sign to stay quiet, walks up to him*) She has heard you play before.
 Stefan Who? I can't play!
 Doctor You could once.
 Stefan That's what you keep telling me! Don't you think I am trying? I can't find the music! If it's there, it keeps away from me! I can't hear it! I can't find it!
 Doctor Try at least to give your visitor a chance,
 Stefan (*sees Sally, stares at her stupidly, tries to see something in her, resigns*)
 I have never seen her before in all my life.
 Doctor (*to Sally*) We are sorry.
 Sally Have you tried to play his own music to him?
 Doctor He doesn't want to hear any music.
 Sally But he wants to play it.
 Stefan I can't play!
 Sally (*walks up to him, goes down on her knees*) Yes, you can. I have heard you play.
 Stefan Don't you try anything with me. I never saw you before. I don't know you.
 Sally But you are a composer!
 Stefan (*rises angrily, shuts the piano with a bang*) No!
 Doctor I am afraid we must interrupt your visit. (*takes care of her*) Come back another day.

Sally Let me try. I have his only recording. (*goes out. Stefan calms down under the soothing care of the other doctor. Soon the Warsaw Concerto is heard from a grammophone outside. Stefan listens. Sally returns.*) Haven't you played it to him before?

Doctor It was not available.

Sally Now it is. (*goes back up to Stefan*) Does this music tell you nothing?

Stefan (*like groping his way through dark dreams*) Yes, I have heard it before.

Sally (*smiling to the doctors, almost like in triumph*) Can you locate it?

Stefan It comes to me like from a very distant past. I see ruins and hear sirens and the terrible howling of bombs. It's an air raid. Did I play it during an air raid?

Sally Yes, you did.

Stefan (*returns to the piano, opens it, tries again and seems to find the melody in the music.*)

Sally (*to the other doctor*) Turn off the grammophone. I think he is finding his way. (*The doctor goes out and turns off the grammophone. Stefan continues by himself.*)

(*Sally goes up to him touching him.*) Think hard! You can remember! The music will lead you right!

Stefan This music was my life. Where did you find it?

Sally It's you who found it. It's yours.

Stefan What do you mean?

Sally You made it. You are the composer.

Stefan (*interrupting himself at once*) Who are you then, who can return it to me?

Doctor (*cautioning Sally*) Not yet. Give him the time he needs.

Sally My name is Sally.

Stefan A very ordinary name. A common, trivial, cheap name that tells me nothing.

Sally I was your wife.

Stefan (*suddenly grasping his head like in a terrible headache, whining in pain*)

Doctor You had better leave now.

Doctor 2 You have given him a push, but don't drive him too hard.

Sally (*rising*) I will be back.

Doctor (*to Stefan*) It's all right, Stefan. Take it easy. All you need is rest.

Doctor 2 (*indicating to Sally to leave.*)

Sally I'll be back tomorrow. (*leaves*)

Doctor How is it, Stefan? Do you remember?

Stefan (*slowly removing his hands from his head*) I remember more and more. I remember Warsaw. They bombed Warsaw. I saw how they reduced my lovely city to rubble. The terrible sirens and bomb explosions... It was then I composed the concerto... (*rises and starts wandering away like in a fog, leaves the room and glides into another world of memories. He comes into a music salon of a badly damaged house that once was a palace, where there is a grand piano. He sits by it and starts to play the slow movement of the Warsaw Concerto. After a while Sally enters in completely different clothes and hairstyle, like a young journalist.*)

Sally Are you the one who is playing?

Stefan (*looks around*) I can see no one else. Stupid question.

Sally All the others went down into shelters.

Stefan I know.

Sally Isn't it a bit stupid not to care for protection during a bomb raid?

Stefan The same applies to you. What are you doing here?

Sally The music raised my curiosity.

Stefan You satisfied your curiosity. Yet you are still here.

Sally Who are you?

Stefan You must be a journalist – persistent and rudely curious.

Sally It's my job.

Stefan And American at that. That's all we needed. Are you a war correspondent?

Sally No, just ordinary. And what are you more than a pianist? Any job?

Stefan I am a pilot.

Sally War pilot? Then you shouldn't be here.

Stefan I am off duty.

Sally From the war?

Stefan Unfortunately you can't take time off from the war, as long as it goes on.

Sally But if you are a war pilot you shouldn't sit here playing the piano when your fellows are sacrificing their lives for Poland up in the air.

Stefan I was forced down. We ran out of fuel. We sent boys out all over Warsaw to collect gas in deserted cars. We hope to get some litres before also all abandoned vehicles are bombed. Which paper?

Sally New York Times.

Stefan Then your family must be rich. You would never have come here without a fortune in your back pocket.

Sally Right. My father is a millionaire.

Stefan And so you assume the right to come here to instruct the Poles how to make war and to reprimand a pianist for not going up in air, when all his brothers are doing so. The rich always know best, since they believe they must be right since they don't know anything.

Sally I apologise. I am no ordinary columnist.

Stefan But you are looking for sensations. That's why you are in Poland to witness how she is raped by Germany, to be able to give all the details as extensively as possible in all their gory terror, to be able to sell as many copies as possible.

Sally I was commissioned by my newspaper.

Stefan Yes. Of course. You didn't want to come here by yourself.

Sally But now I am here. And I actually wanted to come here myself, to learn to understand the situation.

Stefan Do you understand it? Do you understand that Germany and Russia once more have to insist on cutting up Poland between themselves, when she at last after 130 years managed to make herself independent from them?

Sally No, I don't understand that.

Stefan That's to your credit. No one can understand it. No one can understand Nazism. No one can understand the Soviet Union and its communism, since Stalin

keeps it locked up and the lid on everything that goes on. He doesn't want the world to know what his party is doing with his country, just as Hitler doesn't want the world to know his plans for all non-Germans and Jews in his totalitarian empire. This war is a combat between those two about who will rule the world. No one will win, while many less powerful people and states will get squeezed between them and get crushed in their embrace of a world massacre. Poland is the first victim. That's what this war is about. Don't worry. I intend to go up in air again as soon as I get soup for my wagon.

Sally You shouldn't. You should dedicate yourself only to your music.

Stefan Thanks. Unfortunately it's impossible as long as Poland is in the war.

Sally Come with me to America.

Stefan Do you want to marry me?

Sally In America.

Stefan I will remember that, if I ever get there.

Sally I hope you will. It would save you from the war.

Stefan First I must fight it out like everyone else. My duty expects me to stay here and go up in air. We'll see after the war.

Sally I will follow your course.

Stefan That would be difficult to do beyond the clouds, where it might simply get lost.

Sally A true musician doesn't get lost so easily, even if his whole life is mainly up in the clouds. The world needs him and his music and therefore keeps track of him. (*Bombs in the vicinity.*)

Stefan It's about time we find protection, mainly for your sake. You are an American citizen and should not get bombed in Poland.

Sally I will not seek protection until you do.

Stefan Let's then do it together. I can't drown this worldly noise anyway, not even with the most beautiful music in the world. (*takes her out, and they leave together. The bombings go on and get worse.*)

Scene 2. The quarter of the pilots.

Henryk What do you think? Will we ever get up in the air again?

Kryzstof Of course we will. But it could take some time. There is no fuel, you know.

Adam As long as we have anything at all left we will not risk losing our jobs. There is no rest here on any laurels.

Henryk Attention! Squadron Leader! (*Enter squadron leader. All salute and straighten up.*)

Squadron Leader At ease! I have a mission for you, boys, but it isn't like any mission, and it's only for a selected handful. It's a special mission to Romania, and I need fifteen volunteers. Those of you who are married are exempted, since it could be a mission of no return. I need no more than fifteen. Those who are willing, take one

step forward. (*All pilots take a step forward.*) That's what I feared. So we must draw lots about it. I suspected that would be the case, so the lots are already prepared. Captain Skolimovsky, would you let each one of the squadron draw a lot of destiny, one at a time.

(*The pilots line up to the captain to draw their lots, opening them and reading them.*)

Captain Romania. You go. You stay here. You may stay at home. You have a wife and children, don't you? Romania. Romania. (*and so on. Also Stefan comes forward and draws a lot.*) Romania. (*and Henryk*) Romania. (*and so on.*)

Henryk (to Stefan) Then at least we'll go together.

Stefan I am happy about the result. I think everyone is who is allowed to get away. They would rather fight than stay at home.

Henryk No one wants to be left in Poland when the Germans come.

Stefan Or when the Russians come from the other direction.

Henryk Do you think they will?

Stefan Stalin and Hitler have agreed on it. They cut up Poland between themselves a month before the war was declared if not even earlier. Hitler would never have attacked if he wasn't sure Stalin would get a bone of it to gnaw on.

Henryk How do you know?

Stefan My friend, don't you think I am engaged?

Henryk By the intelligence?

Stefan As a concert pianist I have the best possible disguise in the world and contacts. All doors are always opened to a serious musician. He is welcome everywhere and understands much more of the whole picture of reality than a non-musician, who hasn't the same universal perspective.

Henryk What more do you know? To most people Stalin is just an enigma with an enormous question mark.

Stefan He is the same kind of dictator megalomaniac as Hitler and maybe even greater as such and more dangerous, since Hitler is quite open while Stalin is suppressive and lets nothing out. I suppose you heard about the Kremlin trials 1936?

Henryk Yes, I heard something about them.

Stefan All who were close to the power in Kremlin were sorted out by fake trials and shot for assumed high treason. Their only crime was that Stalin felt threatened by them. That threat was in most cases probably just imagined.

Henryk So he is paranoid.

Stefan What dictator isn't?

Henryk What will expect us in Romania?

Stefan We'll see. But it's probably as Squadron Leader says: we will not see Poland again for quite some time.

Henryk Then we must drink to our mission and get even more determined for a safe return.

Stefan Exactly. I think all our fellows will agree to that.

Adam I heard your conversation. We will survive Romania and only the more safely get back alive to fight for Poland!

Stefan Exactly, Adam!
Kryzstof But you are a pianist, Stefan. You should be of greater use internationally to our Polish cause in the concert halls. We can't afford to lose someone like you in unmusical circumstances.
Stefan I am one of you and have no choice but to do my duty together with you. But I don't intend to sacrifice myself in vain for anything less than Poland.
Henryk That's music to our ears!
Kryzstof Then I sincerely hope, Stefan, that you will be the insurance for all of us to survive.
Stefan I would be glad to. You are most welcome. (*Adam brings some subroverka and glasses and fills them up.*)
Adam (raising a glass) To Poland!
Henryk Life and death for Poland!
All (take enthusiastically part in the toast, even those who don't drink) Hurrah! (*Those who drink do it seriously-minded.*)

Act II scene 1. New York. A press conference.

journalist 1 How many are they?
 2 They say they are a dozen.
 3 No, only half a dozen.
 2 Fair enough.
 4 One of them is supposed to be some famous pianist.
 5 As a pilot? You are kidding!
 3 Here they are! Stand by! (*All advance with their cameras as the Polish pilots enter.*)
Henryk (theatrically, with extended arms) America! America!
Adam Just a temporary landing.
Journalist 1 A group photo of you all, guys, please!
 2 What a splendid bunch of dashing war heroes!
Kryzstof We are no heroes. We only escaped.
Henryk But survived.
Kryzstof It was more luck than skill.
Adam But none of us would have anything against becoming war heroes for Poland.
Kryzstof When will America join the war and help us against the barbarians?
Henryk Don't forget that we are guests here. We must not insult or offend our hosts.
Kryzstof Still America is a coward to stay out of it.
Journalist 3 That day will come, gentlemen, whether we like it or not. You must excuse us for staying out at least as long as possible. War should never be voluntary.
Henryk Quite correct, Sir. Only war of defence is defensible.
Journalist Which one of you is the famous pianist?
Henryk He is too modest to be seen. But he will give concerts here, he promised.

Stefan (appearing at last) Gentlemen, we are only here as guests and are grateful for your hospitality, for which we shall pay according to our sincerest intentions with what we can, for my part with charity concerts.

Sally (as one of the journalists) When may we expect your first concert?

Stefan That's not for me to decide. You have to speak with my impresario.

Sally I hope you will perform that concert from Warsaw.

Stefan (hearkens) I recognize you. Didn't we meet some time before?

Sally Many bombs have fallen since, but hopefully your music will survive them and drown their noise in beauty, as it did in Warsaw.

Stefan Now I remember you. I am sorry I didn't at once.

Sally No one could have expected that of you. After all, we only met once. More important is, that I have never been able to forget you.

Stefan Sally, was that your name?

Sally Amazing, that you remember.

Stefan Pardon me, gentlemen. The press conference is over for my part. (*brings*

Sally aside) Don't think I could ever be forgetful. I just never could imagine that you could have as good a memory as I.

Sally You are excused. Honestly I never expected that you would remember me at all and even less recognize me.

Stefan Well, the harm is done, fate brought us together again, and here we are faced with each other once more.

Sally I am glad you got out of the war unharmed.

Stefan It's not over yet. It has only begun. Do you remember what we discussed in the ruins of Warsaw?

Sally Every word.

Stefan Do you still want to marry me?

Sally That you would remember that detail is a higher grace than I ever could have dreamed about.

Stefan I can be most hopelessly impractical, but I never go back on a given word.

Sally Now you are here. Our destiny brought us together again – in America. So you really can marry me now.

Stefan I never imagined myself that it actually could become possible.

Sally In spite of the war, destiny has favoured us.

Stefan So far. Let's take care of it and not let this chance slip out of our hands.

Sally Never!

Henryk (has left the others and joins them) Stefan, have you found an old flame?

Stefan More than that. We met in the ruins of Warsaw. She came to visit me in a bombed out palace where I came across a piano still standing intact, I found her a rude and cheeky journalist, and she is still insisting on intimate information and even more impertinent intimacy.

Henryk As an admirer or opportunistic careerist?

Stefan That's the very question.

Sally Rather look at me as an old flame.

Stefan I can accept that.
Henryk Will you partake in our celebration of our successful flight from Romania?
Stefan If *she* may.
Henryk If you recommend her.
Stefan I do.
Henryk Good. We will need all American good will contacts we can get.
Stefan (to Sally) Come, – my love. (*kisses her hand tenderly*)
Sally I will gladly contribute in giving you all New York at your service by your feet.
Henryk You seem to have acquired a sponsor.
Stefan More than that. (*They go out together, Stefan with Sally by his arm, whom he already regards with tender affection.*)

Scene 2. A cottage in the mountains, from the inside.
Stefan opens the door fully dressed in cape, scarf and hat.
Sally shows up beside him.

Stefan And is this where you mean we should spend our honeymoon?
Sally Where else?
Stefan I can't think of any other suggestion.
Sally Neither can I. Could it be better?
Stefan I don't feel worthy your father's millions. It feels like a loan forced on me.
Sally It's free of charge without interest. And it's for life. No one will ever demand an indemnity.
Stefan It's my honour and integrity that are threatened.
Sally You mean your pride and vanity.
Stefan I will always remain a Pole.
Sally Be a Pole as much as you want. We are only grateful for that, since it means you will offer us so much wonderful music.
Stefan It's a melancholy world most of all filled with pain and suffering. It's our testimony to eternity that we always had to bleed to death.
Sally Still you are more alive than ever.
Stefan Maybe just because of our outrageous suffering. I don't know how long I will be able to remain here, Sally.
Sally Just stay on. No one wants you back, and nothing forces you back. Your place in the world is here where you have your music and are free to use it. We even managed to get a Bechstein piano up here for you. Your only real home is your music, which is the only thing in the world that needs and demands your soul, and it's your only responsibility to live up to it.
Stefan Why then do you demand it?
Sally What do you mean?

Stefan You use my music as a means of extortion to make me stay here with you to forget Europe and the war.

Sally Is there anything wrong with that? Isn't that the only sensible thing to do? You have no right to return to Europe just to bleed there with a dying continent. It wouldn't be right to yourself and your audience. We don't want to lose you. You have given marvellous concerts all over this continent, and your only duty now is to carry on with it.

Stefan So that I can forget myself here in your arms and enjoy your love and life and your spoiling me while Poland is raped to death with all Europe, which you demand that I should forget. It's impossible, Sally. Chopin's last wish was to have his heart buried in Poland, and so it was. In the same way my soul could never free itself or tear itself away from Poland. It's my only real home. My only true music comes from there. That's where the Warsaw Concerto was born and created. Here I am only a temporary alien guest getting spoiled and washed out in publicity.

Sally You are also my husband. Don't forget it.

Stefan But you should have known whom you married.

Sally The man I fell in love with in the ruins of Warsaw.

Stefan You allowed yourself to be seduced by my music, but you misinterpreted that music to only beauty, while it actually was Poland's own bleeding heart. You only sensed the apparent beauty but didn't feel the blood and didn't notice that the blood was out of my own bleeding heart.

Sally I want you to stay here. I want to save your life from the universal destruction of the war. Here we can survive together. You can't survive in Europe any more.

Stefan It has to!

Sally I plead guilty. I have tried to buy your soul by giving you a career, a future, a home, a fortune and a family here in America, if you would have it. What does your bleeding and burning Europe have to offer against that?

Stefan A soul. An ancient sacred soul overgrown with maturity and beauty. There is nothing like it here in America. All I find here is casual superficiality, capitalistic ugliness, revolting and ruthless materialism, deceitful welfare and the shallow nauseating hypocrisy of wealthy snobbery that knows and wants to know nothing. It's a cold and hard world without a history, like a body without a soul.

Sally So what really do you want?

Stefan Sally, I know I must return to Europe and go on fighting there together with other Polacks for the freedom of Poland and Europe. It can never be accepted to let it be enslaved and ruined by Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini, America must realize that sooner or later, and it will be forced to interfere and take part in the war no matter how much it will resist it and insist on its isolation. I can't evade and negate my responsibility as a Polack and European. Don't count on me here as anything else than a loan on short terms.

Sally I refuse to let you go.

Stefan Then come with me to Europe and continue as a war correspondent. That's where you started, and that was the only way you could find me.

Sally How much time do you think we have?

Stefan A few months at most. My friend Henryk is already pulling at me to make me join him in England together with other Polish air pilots in the inevitable battle of Britain in the air. They have great new fighting planes there.

Sally So you'll desert me for an airplane.

Stefan Not yet. And it's not for an airplane, You mustn't be that childish. It's to fulfil my duty.

Sally Your only duty is to music and your audience! That's your destiny and obligation towards the world!

Stefan If I indulge in that obligation I will fail my duty as a Polack and European towards Poland. Not even you could ask of me to abandon that duty.

Sally But it's risking your life! Music can't afford to lose you! You are unique. There are few modern composers like you. Most composers make contemporary music according to fashion with intolerable disharmonic noise that no one could stand, while you have the unique ability to in spite of an age out of joint still be able to compose exquisitely beautiful music, like an heir to Rachmaninov.

Stefan Rachmaninov is still alive and composing.

Sally Not much. He practically ceased composing when he lost Russia and had to support himself more as a pianist than as a composer and no longer had any spare time left for composing. He is also addicted to drugs.

Stefan He doesn't succumb to them.

Sally But your Warsaw concerto is finer than his third.

Stefan Not at all. My concert is only a sketch in comparison. Just like him I find it almost impossible to compose in this age of war, noise and universal disharmonics. The Warsaw Concerto was a small exception, an oasis in the desert of noise and reckless rattle, the world barbaric orchestra of howling bombs and interminable gunfire from machine guns and exploding airplanes, a tiny speckle of a parenthesis, that I perhaps never again will be able to live up to.

Sally But it's there. It exists as a finished masterpiece, and next time you will be able to do something even better.

Stefan Not as long as the war goes on. We must finish it first.

Sally You are under no obligation to be part of that operation.

Stefan Come, Sally. Let's take care of our minutes, since they will be short and few. Let's take care of our momentary general pause. We have a temporary home here with a lovely fire, a wonderful fur as a carpet in front of it, plenty of good food in the kitchen and all we could possibly desire and on top of that each other. Let's not ruin the small time we have by quarrelling about a future which perhaps will never come.

Sally For once you are right. When you bring on such soothing tunes, I can but obey you. But before we get started you must do something.

Stefan Well?

Sally We are just married. You haven't carried me over the threshold.

Stefan Formalist! (*lifts her up laughing, carries her out and returns carrying her across the threshold, and then drops her.*)

Stefan Are you satisfied?

Sally Never in my life, as long as I can't be certain to keep you with me... (*kisses him passionately, and they sink into each other and down on the floor on the lovely fur carpet...*)

Act III scene 1.

Krysztof We are all agreed then.

Adam We can manage without him.

Henryk But if he insists?

Adam His wife is right. He is more needed for the music than for the war.

Krysztof If he leaves her for the war the risk is that she will never forgive him. That's the best way for him to get rid of her.

Henryk Here he is now. Try to talk some sense into him. I have only failed.

Krysztof Stefan, old boy, you don't have to come with us.

Stefan But I must!

Henryk You see?

Adam No, you mustn't at all.

Stefan Yes, I must indeed!

Krysztof Stefan, your wife is right. You are more needed for music than for having your life sacrificed in Germany.

Stefan I don't intend to sacrifice my life in Germany. I will fight with you to victory for Poland! Everything else is out of the question!

Henryk And do you really think your wife could forgive you for abandoning her for the war? Do you really think you could have her back afterwards? You are risking more than your life. Your marriage, an unusually successful one, and your whole career are at stake.

Stefan Henryk, my best friend, do you really think that I could endure a life of luxury here with a paradise existence served on a silver plate and earn fortunes on my concerts while you sacrifice or at least risk your lives for Poland? I am as much a pilot fighter as a pianist! I can always return to music, but a chance like this to fight for Poland and help exterminating the Germans will never come again. I wouldn't miss it for all the world.

Henryk (to the others) I told you it was hopeless.

Krysztof At least we tried. Nothing can stop you, Stefan, if you insist. Join us then and become one of the boldest heroes in the battle for the defence of Britain and in the fight for Poland against an infernally superior power!

Stefan Thanks, Krysztof. I never had any choice. It was the only possibility.

Henryk But what will Sally say?

Stefan She may think and say whatever she likes. Concerning Poland I can't let an American housewife govern me, for she understands nothing about Poland.

Henryk (embracing him) Come with us then, you stubborn Polish idiot! *(All cheer and share in embracing him, and they heartily march off together.)*

Scene 2.

Father You never should have married him.

Sally Too late. It can't be undone. The marriage is consummated.

Father But you lost him.

Sally No, I have him forever. As long as I live I haven't lost him.

Father He will go back to Europe, and the war will take some years. We have only seen the beginning. England will have a long difficult ordeal to fight for her life. The Germans are invanquishable, says our ambassador in London Joe Kennedy.

Sally He doesn't know what he is talking about. The British will never give up.

Father You are a practical girl and still have your whole life and career ahead of you. If you were sensible you would already start looking around for another husband.

Sally Love is never sensible, father. You don't know what you are talking about either.

Father The fact is that you have lost him. He would rather go up in air than have a decent family life. He is a fool sacrificing you and his career for a vain and foolish war.

Sally It wasn't he who started it.

Father It's still very vain and foolish, and he is an idiot to indulge in it when he has got the music and you.

Sally I will not fail him. He will sooner fail me.

Father He already did. He never married you. He was already married with music and Poland, and they will never let him go, least of all to you.

Sally You are only chafing me. I will still never let him go.

Father You already did, who let him slip away.

Sally I couldn't stop him.

Father So he was stillborn as a husband.

Sally Stop it, father. This will get us nowhere.

Father Yes, it won't. Still, you have lost him.

Sally I will go after him to Europe!

Father Do so. Gather him up in pieces from some battlefield. That's what they do over there. They had to keep on doing it for years after the last war, and still they only found portions and less than a fraction. It will be even worse now. At best or at worst he will never be found again.

Sally Stop it!

Father I am only trying to be realistic. You should as well.

Sally (leaves in fury)

Father Poor girl. She has no chance. She will never see him again.

Scene 3. The hospital, like in Act I scene 1, but Stefan is sitting in a dark room as a patient, playing passionately – the Warsaw Concerto.

Stefan (interrupting himself, but the music continues discreetly)

Where am I? I have lost touch with time and space. Am I still left among the ruins in Warsaw? It seems like it. But I don't recognize anything. The palace in which I played was bombed to cinders. But what am I doing here? How did I land in limbo? I must back to the war, to my fellows and up in the air to fight for Poland... But all that seems so long ago. Only the music keeps me in touch with reality, but that reality seems so unacceptably and hopelessly alien...

Sally (coming in, approaching cautiously)

Stefan I know that woman. It's that cheeky journalist...

Sally (carefully) Stefan, do you recognize me?

Stefan Yes, I recognize you. You are that cheeky upstart of a journalist whose importuning disturbance interrupted me as I sat finding my music. If there is anything I cannot accept it's being interrupted in the middle of a piece.

Sally Sorry. I did not intend to.

Stefan The harm is already done. Now I am out of tune. I will never get it right again.

Sally What was it you were playing?

Stefan My own Warsaw concerto, born when Poland was raped to death.

Sally You still know how to play it.

Stefan It's also all I know. I seem to have forgotten everything else. I am totally disoriented and don't know where I am or who I am. Do you know where I am?

Sally You are in a hospital in London.

Stefan And what the devil am I doing in London, when I should be in Poland?

Sally You have been ill. You went down with your plane. You have been in coma and only recently woke up after a long convalescence.

Stefan And do you know who I am?

Sally Yes. You are my husband.

Stefan You are joking, my dear lady. I was never married. You are trying to pull my leg.

Sally You escaped the war and came to America. You gave concerts there, and we married.

Stefan Can you prove it?

Sally You must believe me. Of course I can prove it. Everyone except you yourself know that you are Stefan Radetzky.

Stefan That name means nothing to me and tells me nothing. It's just a common name that rings no bell at all, as if I was deaf. So I have been giving concerts in America?

Sally Under constant acclaim and applause, like a never ending tour of only triumphs. We all hope you will be able to come back.

Stefan I am sorry, my dear lady, but you fail to convince me. I think you are bluffing, as all journalists are experts on doing. I have never been to America. I have

only been in Poland, and if that's not where I am now, that's where I should be. For the war is still going on, isn't it?

Sally Unfortunately yes, worse than ever. But England withstood the German bomb attacks. The Polish pilots were the greatest heroes in the air defence.

Stefan Was it in such an air fight I was shot down?

Sally No, you crashed in the air with a German plane. You were never shot down, but you did shoot down many.

Stefan That makes sense. Yes, that is convincing. And my comrades? Did they manage?

Sally Your best friend is dead.

Stefan (makes an effort to remember) Henryk?

Sally Yes, I am sorry.

Stefan Shot down?

Sally Lost in an air fight. Both planes exploded in the air.

Stefan How sad. But we saved England?

Sally Yes, you saved England.

Stefan I must try to digest and consider what you just told me. I find it difficult to believe everything you say, but at the same time I can't accuse you of lying. If everything really is true I have very much to recapture concerning my memory.

Doctor (who has listened aside all the time) I think that is enough, Miss Sally. Let the patient rest now and recuperate, but we have successfully reached the beginning of a long road. Just give him time and plenty of rest and comfort, and with some patience I am sure we shall have him back entirely as himself.

Sally (coming out to him, crying, while Stefan resumes his music by the piano) He wants to return to the war!

Doctor That was expected. They are like that, those incorrigible war pilots. They can never stay grounded for long.

Sally But he is a pianist!

Doctor Yes, he is, and that might be the very thing that will save him. He survived his crash like in a miracle with almost no damages except in his head. He has his music to live for, and that has already brought him back to consciousness in present time. It might even bring him back to you.

Sally I have nothing else to live for. *(They go out together, the doctor comforting Sally, while Stefan and the music keeps on playing the impassioned concert. While he keeps playing a stranger enters, who sits down discreetly at some distance from the piano and the pianist not to disturb. The pianist gradually becomes aware of the visitor and finally stops playing.)*

The man You play well.

Stefan I should. It's my profession.

The man I am aware of that. That's why I am here. I became interested when I heard your rehabilitation was successful.

Stefan Who are you? I don't think we have met before.

The man Correct. We have never met before, and you probably never heard of me, even if I always followed your activities with great interest.

Stefan Why? Are you a musician?

The man Not at all. But I worked for many years in Prague and Moscow. I was actually in Moscow during the portentous revolution.

Stefan Have you been in Poland as well?

The man Not much. I know Czech and Russian but not Polish. That's why I come to you.

Stefan I don't understand.

The man Of course you don't. How could you? It's time I introduced myself. I am here on behalf of Winston Churchill.

Stefan You confound me. How could I understand anything of what you are saying? Are you a dream or a joke?

The man By your music you have an international network of contacts and have acquired only good friends everywhere including America. Already there your qualifications raised some interest.

Stefan I still understand nothing. And you still haven't told me who you are.

The man I apologize a thousand times. My name is Bruce Lockhart from Scotland. My work here is about the same as Goebbels' in Berlin, if my activity though is more discreet and defensive than that of my great rhetorical colleague. He only works with aggressive propaganda, while my field is defensive counter propaganda involving very much analytical work of deciphering as a specialty and, of course, espionage.

Stefan Do you want to use me as a spy?

Bruce You already have some experience. You most willingly accepted any confidential missions for Poland with your musical activity for cover. It's ideal. Now you also acquired a psychic war damage, which makes you even more valuable for confidential errands. With that cover you can get through everywhere.

Stefan So you don't regard my state of shock and mental invalidity as a liability?

Bruce We have spoken with your doctors. You are coming back with perhaps better psychic possibilities than ever. We want to detach you from flying and save you for the music. That's also what your wife desires. As a musician you could do more for us and for Poland than as a war pilot.

Stefan Does she know you are here?

Bruce No. That's the point I wanted to get at. If our cooperation is to be efficient, it's important that she is kept in the belief that you still are somewhat confused.

Stefan I always considered my duty as a soldier in the service of my country as more important than her. We quarrelled about it. She could never accept it.

Bruce You should keep entertaining that argument. Are you interested?

Stefan Anything for Poland.

Bruce If you serve us you serve not only Poland but the entire democratic world and all people who are against dictatorships.

Stefan Then I am your man. What do you want me to do?

Bruce The first most important thing is that you as quickly as possible resume your career and capabilities as a concert pianist, so that you can start touring again. The Scandinavian countries are still open to concerting musicians from the west, and the advantage there is that they are also open to German musicians. You could for example meet with Furtwängler up there. But our most interesting contact is in Spain.

Stefan No problem. Spain is not in the war. It would please my wife very much.

Bruce It's confidential, of course. Another person who has good contacts with Spain is the chief of German intelligence Wilhelm Canaris. Our first interesting operation would be to organize a meeting between you in Spain.

Stefan Is he helping the west?

Bruce Not at all, but he knows all that is going on in Germany. He knows everything that we don't know. He knows all about Germany's secret plans for instance concerning their strange experimental activities with concentration camps for Jews. He could never help us, since he then would be executed instantly and we would lose him, but he is of extreme interest as a contact and has good standing in Spain, since he helped Franco to power.

Stefan The only good fascist.

Bruce That's what they call him, although the opinion of our government is that no fascist ever could be called good. So you are willing?

Stefan Indeed, with reservations concerning the limitations of my condition.

Bruce Your human limitations as a casualty of war are our greatest assets in this enterprise of our common interest we are about to embark on. Without them you would never have become credible enough for our purposes.

Stefan I thought I would never again be able to reach for the sky. Now you have given me the comfort of the opportunity to do something else instead which could prove just as stimulating and rewarding.

Bruce That's what I hoped for. This will please the prime minister. *(extends his hand, and they shake hands.)*

Act IV scene 1. Spain. Reception after a concert in a fashionable night club.

Smoking and evening dresses.

Franco He plays too well for a war invalid.

Canaris Surprisingly well. He was hospitalized for months and was unreachable to start with. You can't believe that when you hear his music.

Franco But music is all he knows?

Canaris Don't forget that he was a Polish pilot in the battle of Britain. He shot down a number before he was shot down himself.

Franco A true Polack. *(Stefan enters with Sally, he in tails, she in a lovely evening dress almost like a swan.)* It's a great honour for us that you could come.

Stefan My wife insisted. She wants to dance.

Franco May I present admiral Canaris, a temporary guest of honour from Germany.

Stefan (*politely greeting the admiral*) I hear you were the one to provide Spain with an air force.

Canaris And I hear you contributed to demonstrating the superiority of the British Royal Air force against our Luftwaffe.

Stefan I had no choice as a Polish patriot.

Canaris Of course. But only qualified fighters survive.

Sally He survived on a hair's breadth. When I found him at the hospital he didn't know who he was.

Canaris Does he know it now?

Sally He knows it by his music. It saved him

Canaris I just told general Franco, that we can't hear from your playing that you have been an invalid.

Stefan I do hope though that you still could hear that I am a Pole.

Canaris Let's leave nationalism aside now as we talk about music. I don't want to antagonise a musician, since I believe music is the only thing that could make peace across all borders on this planet in such a critical condition. Do you know what your music most of all reminds me of?

Stefan I could never guess. I just hope it isn't Wagner.

Canaris On the contrary. It's not Rachmaninov either, although many call your Warsaw Concerto a Rachmaninov pasticcio. It isn't at all. Rachmaninov is much more muddled and overloaded with artifice, while you are free from manners and exaggerations. No, it reminds me of Schubert.

Stefan Schubert? Of all modest masters! What do you find Schubertian in my romantic diversions?

Canaris The character. I am thinking of the Schubert of his last year, the great mass in E major and the quintet in C, the sincerely sinister master of the Schwanengesang. I hear something of the same pathos in you.

Stefan You almost make me feel touched. (*to Sally*) I think general Franco longs to have a dance with you, Sally. Don't stand here and get bored, but please him, while I may discuss music with the admiral.

Sally As you wish.

Franco He read my deepest thoughts. (*leads Sally graciously out on the dance floor.*)

Stefan Then you must be musical, Admiral, if you can hear the pain in my music.

Canaris It's unmistakable.

Stefan In order to sense my Polish pain you must have known pain yourself.

Canaris Spot on. No one desired the present war less than I. No decent German wanted it.

Stefan Why then did you start it?

Canaris Don't ask me that question. Don't ask the Germans. Ask our leader and that clique which is his party, which took power over Germany by force and extended that violation to a universal rape of the world.

Stefan I hope no one else can hear you.

Canaris I would never have taken the risk of intimate openness if our security not had been watertight. This is a nightclub, no one is sober, and all here are human. We couldn't have met on a safer spot under more discreet circumstances, since almost no one here knows anyone of us.

Stefan Why did *you* want to see *me*?

Canaris Thanks for a direct question. Then we can speak directly. Do you as a Polack know what the Russians really are doing in Poland?

Stefan What are you thinking of?

Canaris Have you ever heard of Katyn?

Stefan It's a forest on the outskirts of Belorussia. Why?

Canaris You don't know what has happened there?

Stefan Has anything happened there?

Canaris According to our information, 6000 Polish officers were executed there by order of Stalin.

Stefan Do you have proof?

Canaris We will have when we reach that far. The German attack on Russia is just a question of time. If we don't attack, Stalin will take the initiative and rob us of all strategically positive possibilities.

Stefan So a German world war on two fronts, just like in the last war, is in any case unavoidable?

Canaris Yes, regrettably. I don't believe in a fortuitous outcome for any part of that matter.

Stefan Neither do I and least of all for Poland, who will be most in the clinch of all.

Canaris I regret the brutal aggression of my country against your country but beg to hold myself free from the responsibility.

Stefan Still you work for the Nazis.

Canaris I feel responsibility for Germany and must do what I can to lead it as right as I can with my insufficient means but perhaps with the means to be able to save it when the moment comes. My highest wish is to be able to contribute to a peace as soon as possible.

Stefan It will never be possible as long as Hitler leads the country.

Canaris I am aware of that and others with me.

Stefan What is your position in the German Jewish policy? There are very strange rumours being spread in Britain and America about concentration camps.

Canaris That's Hitler's greatest mistake but also what brought him to power, his reckless and unreasonable, unfounded and totally unrealistic hatred of the Jews. The Jews are just people like any people with only some greater load of history, which goes a bit further back than that of Europe. How was it your poet put it? "Does a Jew not have eyes? Does a Jew not have hands, limbs, senses, likes and passions? Doesn't he live of the same food, is he not wounded by the same weapons, is he not tortured by the same illnesses, is he not cured by the same medicine, is he not exposed to the same cold winter and hot summer as a Christian? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If we are poisoned, do we not die? If you humiliate us, should we not be revenged? If a

Jew insults a Christian, where is then the Christian humility?" And so on. A Jew is no more and no less than a human being like all others, and all talk about the Jewish race is nonsense. No people on earth is so mixed up with other peoples as the Jews, and even Heydrich and perhaps the Führer himself have a few drops of Jewish blood in their family which they never can explain away or get rid of. No one is racially pure. It's an illusion and a deceit to propagate that something like that could exist. If I am blond and blue-eyed I have no less scoundrels in my family tree than anyone else. But you are right to be worried about the concentration camps. It's a dirty project. The nightmare horrors of the crystal night were shamelessly staged openly for all the world to behold and to be terrified by. Still you chose to look the other way and talk of something else. Not even Churchill has ever taken up the persecution of the Jews on the agenda, although that issue more than any other could be used against us in your propaganda, but you are not as ignoble as Goebbels, who preaches any lies as long as they are efficient. You prefer to discreetly find out the truth. That's why you are here.

Stefan What do you want to tell me by hinting at a problem in Katyn?

Canaris That Stalin isn't any better than Hitler, perhaps even worse and more dangerous, which Churchill should be aware of before getting tied up with him.

Stefan That could be interpreted as an effort from your side to discourage Churchill from allying himself with Stalin.

Canaris I am just stating the facts. Regrettably our information is reliable. Or else I would never send it on.

Stefan 6000 Polish officers. My heart bleeds for Poland. The English will never believe me. I do have a mental hospital case history.

Canaris That's a perfect disguise. Use your information however you wish.

Stefan How long do you think the war will last?

Canaris It has only started. The initial success on the western front will prolong the war for several years, if Hitler is not removed. After Denmark and Norway it will be the turn of the Soviet Union. It could take three years before you could even start suspecting an end to the war at a far distance, if nothing radical happens.

Stefan I am afraid our general has finished dancing with my wife.

Canaris I am grateful for our contact. When needed I could use it for direct contact with England.

Stefan Just don't take any chances. Churchill calls you the only decent man in Germany.

Canaris At least I am no Nazi.

(Sally and Franco return.)

Stefan Has he been trampling your toes?

Sally Not at all! He dances like a god!

Stefan (to Franco) It's I who usually tramples her toes.

Franco I hope you got something out of each other. It's not very often the admiral gets the opportunity to discuss music with a professional, least of all here in

Spain, since most of our best musicians left for South America. They didn't like the civil war.

Stefan No one likes a civil war.

Canaris Or any war.

Franco That's why I kept Spain out of the world war (*with a meaning eye to Canaris*) which I will continue to do.

Canaris If you had had any plans to join us, as the Führer wished, I would have counselled against it. I am glad that won't be necessary.

Franco We understand each other, Admiral. It's a pleasure to have you for our guest.

Canaris (to Stefan) I thank you for our conversation and hope we will one day be able to continue.

Stefan I hope so too, hopefully when Poland is free again.

Canaris (leaves with a light bow to recommend himself)

Franco You found yourselves on good terms, although your countries are at war with each other?

Stefan He was courteous enough to apologise for the war, which he desired least of all.

Franco Hitler had everything, all Germany and Austria in a nutshell, and then he risks everything on Russian roulette, which only could lead to disaster for all Europe and most of all for Germany. How mad can you get?

Stefan Unfortunately there is no limit to any madness in politics. Already the ancient Roman emperors derailed themselves to hell.

Sally One dance with you, Stefan, before we return to the hotel?

Franco You gave a wonderful concert tonight. Especially impressing was your very rich repertoire. It's not everyone who can present both Chopin, Rachmaninov and himself in three different piano concertos in only one evening concert.

Stefan Both Chopin's concert in E minor and Rachmaninov's second lead you naturally to Warsaw.

Franco Sincerest thanks for the entire evening.

Stefan It's we who are thankful to you. (*leaves with Sally*)

Franco Even if all Europe will perish in flames, the music will ultimately conquer the war.

Act V scene 1. Another stylish occasion but in London.

Sally You must not! I will not let you go!

Stefan Sally, we have been through all this before. You know very well that I have no choice.

Sally But not with him!

Stefan I can't understand your prejudice or superstition concerning the most innocent actor in the world.

Sally The Germans are after him!

Stefan Not at all. They discard him as the comedian he is.

Sally No one has challenged the Germans more openly on film.

Stefan All Hollywood does and England too. Everybody does, and he is the most innocent.

Sally I don't like it. I am afraid. Isn't Bruce Lockhart informed about the threats against his life?

Stefan He must be, but he sees no danger. I wish he could come down here and calm you down.

Sally Here he is now. I can't help it. I see an ominous dark destiny hanging over his head.

Stefan Try at least to be polite and not to scare him off. *(rising as Leslie enters)* Welcome, flying colleague! What an honour!

Leslie For going up in air together? At last I may meet with your legendary wife.

Stefan Yes, she is good at editing legends. No one has written more legends about me than she.

Sally It's my profession, and I get paid for it.

Leslie (kissing her hand) Madame, it's an honour.

Sally I wish I could say the same.

Leslie (a questioning glance at Stefan)

Stefan She doesn't like us going up together. She is superstitious.

Leslie Only that? *(taking a seat at last, taking Sally's hand)* But my dear friend, we are only going to Lisbon. There is no risk at all.

Sally Tell that to someone else. I was informed by Bruce Lockhart that the Germans constantly patrol the bay of Biscay, and the plane you are going up with has been attacked several times before.

Leslie The Germans know it's only a civil line. When they attacked it was by mistake. Since then we have informed them in advance each time we are flying passengers, and there have been no more incidents.

Sally Not even you with all your world fame and universal charm could calm me down on that point, Mr Howard.

Stefan Obviously she is obsessed by a fixed idea.

Sally I don't want to lose Stefan. And the world doesn't want to lose you, Mr Howard.

Howard Call me Leslie, for goodness' sake. After all, we are all three equal celebrities.

Stefan When she once has got an idea into her head she will never get rid of it. I suggest that we treat it with some drinks. You would need some comfort as well, Mr Howard, wouldn't you? Personally I could never get over my grief and worry about Poland, no matter how much I drink.

Leslie We are perhaps lucky not to be the pilots.

Stefan Not this time. Some other time. *(to a waiter)* Three subrovkas, waiter, and then three more.

Leslie Did you have breakfast today?

Stefan Yes.

Leslie I haven't.

Stefan Are you not good for liquor?

Leslie Not at any amount.

Stefan Don't worry, colleague. All consumption of liquor is limited to glasses, until you start drinking directly from the bottle.

Leslie It's an art I still have to learn.

Stefan Sally could show you how to do it.

Sally When we reach that far. We have two subrovkas to finish first.

Stefan We'll finish them at once. Then you don't have to worry any more, Sally.

Sally On the contrary. Liquor only makes it worse.

Leslie What are you really afraid of?

Sally The German sentiment towards you after your two latest films.

Leslie Pimpernel Smith is a fable, and my Spitfire film is entirely without Germans.

Sally But you make reckless fun of them in Pimpernel.

Leslie That was the purpose. Or else it would have been meaningless.

Sally The Germans can't accept insults against Wagner.

Leslie Should we then accept their insults to Shakespeare?

Sally They would never insult Shakespeare. They have his death mask, you know.

Leslie Which makes them conclude that he must have been a German. That's an insult against the whole English literature.

Stefan Take it easy, Leslie. In fact, we can't be sure as to who really wrote Shakespeare.

Leslie But we know that he wrote in English.

Stefan As that German in your film, says, – if he as a German wrote Shakespeare, he could have been good at English.

Leslie Nonsense!

Stefan Now where is your sense of humour?

Leslie Pardon me. My Hungarian blood must have risen to my head, but not even Germans are allowed to insult Culture!

Stefan And we didn't even have our subrovkas yet. Where will this end?

Leslie Perhaps it's better if I get some pálinka instead.

Stefan You'll have that too. Be my guest. We are going up in the air anyway.

Sally Don't joke about that!

Stefan I beg your pardon. At least you, my American wife, I thought to be not without a sense of humour.

Sally It isn't that, but it doesn't feel right. Besides, Leslie recently lost his own.

Stefan Sorry, I didn't think of that. My condolences, Leslie.

Leslie It wasn't my wife. It was only my mistress. My wife, alas, is still alive.

Stefan So you miss your mistress but not your wife?

Sally Stefan!

Stefan Well, here we are with the subrovkas at last. Then we can finally get going and have some fun. *(The waiter serves three glasses and three more besides.)*

Leslie Shall we dare to say bottoms up, then, to all poor air pilots who lost their wives at home?

Stefan Yes, they are really pitiable.

Sally The pilots or the wives?

Stefan If the wives cool off as the pilots return home, it's really a pity about the wives.

Sally And if the pilots never return, we are only to feel sorry for the pilots?

Stefan That depends entirely on the wives.

Leslie In these war times, Sally, it's really odd if the pilots are not unfaithful when they are gone.

Sally Are then the wives allowed to be unfaithful?

Stefan As I said, that's entirely up to them.

Leslie My wife was never unfaithful. That's why I had to get a mistress.

Sally Leslie, you are abominable.

Leslie That's why I am a film star.

Stefan Shall we attack the second glass then? I think it's about time.

Leslie Bottoms up! Although it isn't pálinka!

Stefan To our safe return, although we have a wife at home.

Sally I wish I could come with you.

Leslie How much does Sally know about what you are really doing out there?

Stefan She knows that I play the piano. That's enough.

Leslie Then it's fortunate that she doesn't know about your risky engagements.

Sally What risky engagements? I know all about them. Stefan is bound forever to Poland and its cause and would most of all immediately go back there to be shot down.

Leslie We don't have to go that far. He has also secret contacts with representatives of the French exile government among others.

Sally As long as it isn't ladies it doesn't matter.

Stefan How do you know?

Sally What?

Stefan That it isn't ladies.

Sally Is it ladies?

Stefan Of course it's ladies.

Sally Then you must not go.

Leslie He is only joking, Sally. It's partisans in the resistance movement, who need to cultivate their contacts with Britain. You don't lie with those ladies.

Sally Are you sure?

Stefan You can never be too sure.

Leslie May I stand for the next round? We are to go up in air later on anyway.

Stefan As you wish.

Leslie Can you take pálinka, Sally?

Sally I can take anything. I am American.

Stefan I am afraid I already anticipated you. I already ordered a bottle of champagne. (*Sally and Leslie are impressed.*)

Leslie Any particular reason?

Stefan Many. The Germans have lost at Stalingrad. Montgomery has stopped the Germans in Africa. The war is turning. Every day the day comes closer when I may return to Poland.

Sally Be sure to live long enough, and you might even be able to play there again.

Stefan I certainly will, even as dead as much as alive, if I die.

(*The waiter brings three glasses of pálinka and a bottle of champagne.*)

Sally Shan't we have anything with it?

Stefan I didn't think of that. Imagine, I forgot all about it. What about some oysters?

Leslie Excellent.

Sally Drink deep now, so that you oversleep tomorrow and never get going.

Stefan Anything but that. Duty above all.

Leslie Even America is now in the war. Stefan has his duty towards Poland, I towards England and all three of us to a free Europe and its future.

Stefan America will never have to fear getting bombed.

Sally It's enough bombed already.

Leslie Is it? By what? Money?

Sally No, drugs and drinks.

Stefan It's the fault of your prohibition and criminalization of drinks and drugs. It turned you all to addicts and alcoholics.

Leslie Here in Europe we all were already but of wine, which only is beneficial, until the Germans ruined the party by making us sober up to the keelhauling discipline of the war.

Stefan That's how they are.

Leslie No, it's discipline that could ruin anything.

Stefan Trim your glasses now, so that we can proceed with the champagne and the oysters.

Sally (raising her glass) Many happy returns, then, to yourselves and your speedy restoration of all Europe!

Stefan We have to clean out the Germans first. Then we shall have order.

Leslie Is that why the Germans are so eager to first clean out all other peoples?

Stefan That is how you beg to get cleaned out.

Leslie Cheers, Stefan! May we Europeans never have to find our glasses empty!

Stefan For the freedom of Poland and Europe!

(*They drink handsomely and then proceed to their supper feast with champagne. Suddenly from somewhere the Warsaw Concerto is being played.*)

Leslie Someone is playing it to your honour, Stefan. They know that you are here.

Stefan It's the call of the war for me. Poland is crying for me. How I long to get up in the air!

Sally All my life with him, Leslie, was a hopeless endless fight against overwhelming rivals, Poland, the war and his flights. My totally justified jealousy had no chance from the beginning.

Leslie Still you stayed married to him. I thought music was your severest rival.

Stefan Music is my life's great unfortunate love affair. Sally is my life's great love.

Leslie That's more like it!

Stefan (raising his glass of champagne) My friends, thank you for this evening together. If I die tomorrow it will not matter, for I will die happy with you remaining on my mind.

Leslie If you die you will die together with me, but you won't because I am with you.

Stefan The great comfort in flying is that you always know that you will get down again.

Sally Last time you did you had forgotten your soul up there.

Stefan No, Sally, it was always left in Poland. I have hidden it there until I come back.

Sally The way this war goes on you will never have any Poland to get back to. *(can't stop a tear)*

Stefan (serious at once) She is right, Leslie. She is a realist. Poland is bombed out, and the cities are in ruins. There is almost nothing left of Warsaw, and all the Jews of Poland are fenced in and isolated in concentration camps for methodic industrial extirpation. The Germans think they can create a better world that way, and a better humanity, by exterminating humanity.

Leslie They will only succeed with their own destruction.

Stefan That's what I mean. That's why we have nothing to fear, who are on the side of reason, which I in vain tried to convince Sally about. But the more I labour to convince her that we will be the ones to survive and not the Germans, the more certain she becomes that I have to go under.

Leslie She is a woman. Women are like that.

Stefan I know. Don't remind me of it.

Sally We still have plenty of champagne left in the bottle to drink. What are we waiting for? It's too early to get sentimental before you are dead.

Stefan You mean that you grieve better afterwards?

Leslie That comes later.

Stefan That's what I mean.

Sally Drink up now, so that you will sleep the more soundly.

Leslie Do you want us under the table?

Sally Preferably.

Stefan No chance. Poles never get drunk enough.

Leslie If Stefan one day doesn't return from one of his missions after having gone up in the air, I will come to comfort you, Sally. I need a new mistress.

Sally And if you don't come back, Leslie, I will take care of your wife.

Stefan We will both be back, Sally, in one shape or another, I promise.

Leslie At worst we'll return in liquid shape.

Stefan You are getting round under your feet, Leslie.

Leslie I always was.

Stefan To tell you the truth, Leslie, we also did not have breakfast today.

Sally Only a boiled egg.

Stefan And a cup of tea.

Leslie Then I suggest we all three end up under the table.

Stefan Excellent idea. Do you think we have time for another bottle before we turn in?

Leslie We could always try.

Stefan Do you approve of such a wanton course of action, dearest wife?

Sally Only if I may join you.

Stefan You may join us drinking.

Sally If I can't help you go up in the air I could always help you drown under the table.

Stefan That's the spirit.

Leslie What was it that German poet said? "If music be the food of love, play on!"

Stefan He said it better in English.

Leslie That's what I mean. He only could write in English.

Stefan Still it was the Germans who made music their world.

Leslie And no bombs or wars can take it away from them.

Stefan That's what my Warsaw concert is all about. Music always overrules the war and conquers the world, since no dreadful noise can be so strong as to quash the mildest voice of music.

Leslie They will still have their music when we have bombed out their world.

Stefan Tell it to them, so that they might stop bombing us.

Sally They will not get it until they are bombed enough.

Leslie Let's finish the bottle.

Stefan And have another afterwards.

Sally Tomorrow.

Leslie So that we miss our train?

Sally No, your flight.

Leslie Are you trying to sabotage our journey?

Sally No, on the contrary.

Leslie We need more fuel. This bottle is almost empty.

Stefan Coming up. Waiter! (*coming up*) One more bottle. But it must be full!

Waiter Of course, Sir. (*leaves*)

Stefan There is always another.

(*Suddenly the sirens start howling.*)

Leslie Here we go again. The war doesn't wait on us.

Stefan Let's stay here.

Sally In Warsaw you also refused to take shelter when the bombs came.

Stefan Wasn't that how we met?

Leslie I always wondered what pianists are thinking of when they play so passionately. It couldn't be sex, since the passion is only musical. What are you thinking of, Stefan, when you play the Warsaw Concerto?

Stefan Justified retaliation.

Leslie Is that all?

Stefan No, it's somewhat more complicated. When I was young I always thought of nature when I played, to be free out in nature, preferably up in the mountains. War changed that disposition. Instead my escapes from reality became political, so that I dreamed of the excesses of revenge and saw myself in bombing planes over Germany, when I bombed cities to cinders, especially the greatest ones, like Hamburg, which I dreamed about destroying in a fire storm.

Leslie That was the home town of Brahms, though, which also musically meant much to Handel.

Stefan You asked me what I dreamed of when I broke loose on my whirling arpeggios in the Warsaw Concerto. I dreamed of justice and freedom, not just for Poland but for all the world, the total destruction of all dictatorships, Hitler and Stalin first but also Mussolini and Franco and all possible autocracies, which is the only thing that ruined the world for man.

Leslie I tend to agree with you. (*to Sally*) I am sorry, Sally, but I am afraid we still have to go up in air tomorrow. As you see, Stefan and I have too much to do for the world.

Sally And only you can do it.

Leslie Yes, for he is the greatest pianist in the world, and I am the greatest actor.

Sally So you are indispensable and must not have an accident.

Leslie So we will come back.

Sally You promise?

Leslie We always come back.

Stefan No risk, Sally. You will never be rid of us.

Sally If only I could trust that word!

Stefan You may trust it until we return. Then it's too late.

Sally Will you then stay at home?

Stefan Not as long as the war goes on. You see, both I and Leslie work for British Intelligence. There's another lover of mine I'll never get rid of and which you'll never overcome.

Sally I will never let you go, Stefan, even if you die.

Stefan I am afraid you'll have to if I die, but I don't intend to die.

Leslie Neither do I, even if I die.

Sally That sounds good. I must stick to that. Fill me up now, so that I may go to sleep and don't have to see you go up in the air.

Stefan As you wish. We'll keep you company as far as possible.

Leslie We can always buy new bottles.

Sally Give it to the engine, so it breaks down.

Leslie No, it's a better idea to keep it for ourselves.

Stefan I share your view, Leslie. Champagne is not to be wasted on anything else than dry throats. It's the only dividend champagne can offer, the result being more music.

Leslie "If music be the food of love, then never let it stop!"

Stefan That's better. Your German poet is getting better and better.

Leslie He didn't think so himself, so he wrote it in English.

Stefan That explains it.

Sally What?

Leslie That the Germans mean he must have been German since he wrote in English.

Sally I understand.

Leslie At last we have resolved the Shakespeare issue.

Stefan Save it for the Germans. Or else they will shoot us down because he might have been English after all.

Leslie We can't accept that.

Sally What?

Leslie That they shoot us down because Shakespeare was an Englishman.

Sally Least of all if he wasn't even the guy who wrote the stuff.

Leslie Especially not in that case.

Stefan Perhaps you can take that as an explanation and reason for their not being able to shoot us down.

Sally I must buy that in want of other options.

Stefan Bravo! Then at last we can safely go up in the air!

Leslie Charge! To battle! To Germany! Was it Hamburg you wanted to go up in flames?

Stefan Hamburg or Berlin or both, it doesn't matter, preferably both, then Warsaw would be satisfied and could start rebuilding itself.

Sally You are both war maniacs.

Stefan No, megalomaniacs. That's what war do to people. That's why we die in it.

Sally You must come back and write more Warsaw concertos.

Stefan No, there was only one. It could only be written when you came to me in the ruins.

Sally Come back, Stefan! (*embraces him*)

Stefan Always. You'll never get rid of me. Least of all the music.

Leslie We always come back, we artists, who refuse to accept the war.

Sally Good. Carry on with that.

Stefan Forever. That's what music is for.

Leslie Shall we retire under the table while we are still enough sober to find our way under it?

Stefan Enough suggestions, Leslie. Let's go down under the table. There's a bombing attack going on anyway.

(They drink to each other one last time in the last champagne and then cheerily retire under the table – and vanish, while the music and the bombarding goes on and gets worse. The scene

is veiled in darkness, the bombings and explosions increase until they almost become unbearable. Then slowly the scene reappears showing the same beautiful but ruined palace as in Act I scene 1. As the music slowly dies out, Stefan comes stumbling on the stage practically burnt out. Exhausted he sits down by the grand piano, which is covered in dust and ashes, which he desperately and almost angrily sweeps away with his arm, which gets all sullied.)

Stefan Here you have your war, bloody humanity! Was it worth it? Europe unrecognizable and buried in ruins, Warsaw, its most beautiful capital, annihilated to 90 percent and focus point of the most inhuman drama that ever was organized in our known history, staged by politicians of the world for their vanity. May we ever know the entire truth about the play behind the curtains of this war of destruction of civilizations? May we ever know why and by whom almost all the Jewish population of Eastern Europe was extirpated? Hitler was not alone, and the Nazis could never have reached power without financial support above all from America. They blame the world's economical system by pressure tactics from the world banks, but the root of the evil, if you try to reach the bottom of it, can only be found in the origins of the first world war, which all claim to have been a tragedy that no one in particular was guilty of. All is lost, and I can't even play the piano any more. (*tries pathetically a few keys. Enter Sally dressed very simple and common.*)

Sally Of course you are here. I searched for you everywhere.

Stefan You come in vain, Sally. I can't play any longer.

Sally Yes you can.

Stefan Impossible. My country doesn't exist any more. It's bombed out and levelled with the ground with all Warsaw only because it was innocent. It was partitioned and cut up by the Germans and Russians, and now as the Germans are being annihilated in their turn it will be the Russians who take over with a worse dictatorship than Hitler's. How do you think I could play any more in such a world?

Sally The music still lives, Stefan, and you must live with it. That's the only way for you to survive yourself.

Stefan Why? Why should I survive? I feel I have no right except to die, since all my friends have died, most of them murdered, at best lost as casualties. They even shot down Glenn Miller and Leslie Howard. They were only artists.

Sally You can't drop the music, Stefan. It's your only life, and it is eternal.

Stefan You try to comfort me with dreams.

Sally The war isn't finished yet, and you mustn't die with the war.

Stefan I already died with the war, with Poland, with Hamburg and Dresden, with London and Budapest and Hungary and all those innocent towns reduced to rubble by merciless inhuman bombings at random without control, cowardly at a safe distance. That humanity that has to survive this war will have 20 million innocents on their conscience.

Sally It wasn't you who killed them.

Stefan It was the politicians, and we represent the democratic part of the world, who elected those politicians, who deliberately carried through the fire storms of

Hamburg and Dresden. No one will be prosecuted for all those civilian innocents who were bombed to hell for nothing in Germany only because they lived in Germany.

Sally You can't take all the world's sufferings and burdens of guilt on you, Stefan.

Stefan We can't get away from it, Sally. Whoever feels it will never get away from the necessity of living with it and carrying it. Someone must take the responsibility. If the world's politicians are not enough to take the responsibility for what has happened, then we who feel it must do it.

Sally Your only responsibility is to music.

Stefan Am I then not a human being? Do I not as a man have to share the responsibility for the human soul and the dismal destiny of humanity? I can't deny my responsibility for being unjustly alive when all the world is dead and has buried itself in its own incurable folly and madness.

Sally Forget the world. You always lived outside it.

Stefan I am finally back home in Poland again and find it raped and destroyed to irrerecognizability. Man has destroyed my Poland for me. How then could I possibly play any more for man?

Sally You are not alone. Artur Schnabel and Artur Rubinstein are playing still although also their world has perished, and so does Vladimir Horowitz. They don't give up. Neither must you fall for that weakness and simple cowardly way out from your musical responsibility.

Stefan It's too late. It's gone too far. I already did. I died when Leslie Howard died and when Wilhelm Canaris no longer was given the chance to save Germany, while others are shamefully allowed to live on, like Stalin.

Sally Also I am living on. Have you forgotten me?

Stefan You came to me like by a dream when you first appeared as an encroaching guest from an alien world in this very palace, which ruins was a prelude to me and to the war. Then it constantly grew worse. But it's true. You were there all the time and returned again and again in my life, although I repeatedly tried to leave you behind me. I almost succeeded in America, when you refused to accept my insistence on carrying on as a pilot and join my brothers in the battle of Britain, but you searched me out in the hospital where I was lying a helpless wreck after having lost my head. You gave me my head and music back, but I don't think you can do it again.

Sally You must do it yourself, Stefan.

Stefan How could I, when the music no longer sings within me? The Warsaw Concerto was a one time only happening, a parenthesis of beauty in a world where ugliness raped and destroyed everything, which now is so annihilated that there could never again be any composer of melodic and harmonious music. Discord and dissonance have taken over the world and keep it occupied in the constant squall of the radio and media, the unmusical atonal music which isn't any music, the cheap and vulgar jazz, the prostitution of the popular music and the terrible town noise of industrial screeching and traffic brawl. There is no natural musicality in the world any longer. There is only inhuman anti-music.

Sally Is bitterness all that is left in you?

Stefan You were always so realistic, Sally. Can't you see that you finally succeeded in turning me to a realist, since realism is all that I have left?

Sally (comes up to him, kneels to him and tries to embrace him) No, Stefan you also have me, and I am no longer only realism. Even I have experienced the purifying process of the war, and here in me there is nothing further left than only love.

Stefan You mean you still have love left after such a war?

Sally More than ever.

Stefan We are getting old, Sally. Haven't you noticed? The war has made us older than we are. Love is a flower that only blooms while it is young and fresh, while it then has to wither in following the rhythm of its growing maturity and its disheartening learning of the facts of existence.

Sally On the contrary, Stefan. Love only grows with maturity. It could find other expressions than in youth, and that's where we have our chance. We were never very sexually oriented, but you have your music, and I can write. When earthly love perishes in its own earthal mortality, like in the war, it finds miraculously its way to survive itself by its spirituality, which is its great opportunity to continue expanding whatever happens, by finding its actual spirituality.

Stefan You really believe what you are saying.

Sally Because I am certain it's true.

Stefan I withered both as lover and pianist. The war forbade us to have children by always coming in our way, but you are right. It does not exclude neither musical nor literary activity.

Sally Give us a chance, Stefan. Give music a chance. Give life a chance. It's only the worst that is over. All the rest remains.

Stefan (rises and raises also her) Your suggestion is fair. The war is not over yet, perhaps we still have to face the worst, and the cleaning up afterwards will be a nightmare for many years, especially in discovering and investigating all the crimes, which still will continue to be committed by the dictators that still remain. We'll never get rid of them, Sally. They will always return to do their best to destroy the world.

Sally The more important then that we oppose them by constructive activity and spiritual creativity. They can't stand beauty, Stefan. That's our weapon against ugliness and brutality, oppression and violation, and it's a weapon that always will survive and prevail. It will always be there and always return when the wars are silenced.

Stefan Your philosophy takes me by surprise. You think further than I.

Sally That's what we women are for. Therefore we have our intuition, which reaches further than ordinary brain capacity.

Stefan Have you talked with Einstein?

Sally We should look him up in America.

Stefan That would be the only thing that could tempt me over there again.

Sally And then when the war finally is over you could return to Europe to Poland and help it on its feet again with your music. That's what it's for.

Stefan There are several new interesting composers in England, like Hubert Bath and Richard Addinsell, besides Ralph Vaughan Williams and Sibelius in Finland.

Sally There you are. The music is waiting for you.

Stefan I am afraid you might be right.

Sally And you don't have to go up in the air any more.

Stefan Yes, for Leslie Howard is dead. His death broke my wings.

Sally You still have them, but they are personal and will carry you higher as the wings of music.

Stefan You could well seduce anyone.

Sally It was your music that seduced me. I never cared for any other seduction.

Stefan This piano needs tuning. We will have to dig out some old piano tuner, so that we could start playing again.

Sally That's the spirit. Now I am beginning to recognize you.

Stefan I will never give another concert, if I may not begin here in Poland and in this very bombed out palace.

Sally I am sure it could be arranged.

Stefan I agree to your suggestion, Sally. I will try to give music a chance.

Sally That's all I ask.

(He embraces her spontaneously and almost cordially, and they go out together.)

The End.

*Gothenburg, Twelfth Night 2014,
translated 21-23 January 2018.*

Comment

Leslie Howard was shot down in an ordinary passenger plane together with 16 other passengers on June 1st 1943 between London and Lisbon about 80 miles out at sea from Bordeaux at a safe distance from the air zone of the war. There has been much discussion and speculation as to why the Germans shot down a civilian plane, but there seems to have been a rumour abroad that Churchill should have been on that plane. He afterwards regretted, that that rumour would have lead to Leslie Howard's death, who was 50 at the time.

The drama is for the most part based on the film that made Richard Addinsell's "Warsaw Concerto" world famous, which it still is and regularly being played. The film is not remarkable, although Anton Walbrook and Sally Grey did their best for the main characters, and the introductory scene between them in the ruins of Warsaw has gone down in film history, although the rest of the film does not keep up that level, even though Terence Young wrote the script and did it well. It was the director who was no Hitchcock, and the ones who really could have made this film into what it deserved to be were the team of the Archers, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, who later made some of the best films of art and music. The film ends when Sally reclaims Stefan at the hospital, while we just had to go on adding to the story.

6 January 2014