



# *Budapest*

Hungarian tragedy in five acts

by Christian Lanciai (1997)

*The characters:*

Ferenc

Miklos

Bela

Elizabeth

the father (Anton)

Lajos

mother (Maria)

Joszef

Georg

Istvan

Sandor

Captain Arnold Schönfeld

Adolf Eichmann

Raoul Wallenberg

Doctor Szasz

Bertold, gardener

Zsazsa, housekeeper

a beggar boy

Imre, waiter

another waiter  
Zoltan, police  
Cardinal Jozsef Mindszenty  
Other policemen and military interrogators

The action is in Budapest with surroundings  
before, during and after the Second World War.

Copyright © Christian Lanciai 1997

### *Budapest*

Act I scene 1. The celebration is prepared.

*Ferenc* Well, Miklos, why are you not at the theatre?  
*Miklos* I have seen him dancing before. I know that he will make it.  
*Ferenc* Everyone seems to take that for granted.  
*Miklos* We are sure of him, Ferenc. If there is anyone you can trust, it is Lajos.  
*Ferenc* With his background it would be strange if you couldn't. Most of his family also appear to take his success for granted, since they are almost all here.  
*Miklos* They thought it more important to prepare the celebration here at home than to be present at his first night.  
*Ferenc* Still I seem to scent a faint smell of the danger of celebrating a victory in advance.  
*Miklos* It's in the air of the time, Ferenc. Everyone does that nowadays.  
*Ferenc* And it can't just go on indefinitely without coming to a bad end.  
*Miklos* You are probably the only pessimist here today, Ferenc.  
*Ferenc* I am no pessimist. I am a realist. That's why I am no gambler. And I promise you, that if Hitler starts a war, I will leave Hungary at once.  
*Bela (an arrow-crosser)* I happened to overhear your last words, Ferenc. Why do you think there will be a war? And why in that case would you abandon your fatherland?  
*Ferenc* I didn't say 'that'. I said 'if'. As long as Hitler starts no war, we are safe, but no longer than that.  
*Bela* Do you think he wants war?  
*Ferenc* Bela, you have to excuse me, but I can't have a discussion with you since you are biased.  
*Miklos* The jurist has spoken.  
*Bela* Explain what you mean.  
*Ferenc* When you pose the question, 'do you think Hitler wants war?' you make yourself accessory in the same hypocrisy that dominates all fascist autocracies today, from Spain to Hungary including Italy and Germany. Everybody knows that you all

want war, and you don't even try to conceal it, since all you devote yourselves to is military parades and rearmament. The question is not whether you all want war or not. The question is whether Hitler will lead you into war or not.

*Bela* And if he does? Where will you then stand yourself? Will you then defend Hungary against the Bolsheviks, Russia and other forms of communism, or will you then betray your homeland and cowardly abandon it?

*Miklos* A leading question, isn't it, Ferenc?

*Ferenc* I will answer it anyway. The only certain thing, Bela, is that I will never take sides with Hitler.

*Bela* Does that mean that you sympathize with Stalin?

*Ferenc* I will even less ever take sides with Stalin. Neither will I ever support Franco or Mussolini.

*Bela* And what about Horthy?

*Ferenc* Bela, even if I neither ever will support you arrow-crossers, who are the same kind of violence advocating fascists like in Italy and the other autocracies, I can not find that Horthy has done our country any harm.

*Bela* That pleases me. Then we are on the same side.

*Ferenc* No, we are not, if there will be war, for then you would support Hitler.

*Bela* I am more of a realist than you, Ferenc, when I claim, that if there will be war, Hitler will be better than Stalin. Consider a moment that we lie between them.

*Elizabeth (interrupts them)* Always the same kind of political discussions between you, wicked men! Didn't you hear that Lajos banned all politics here today, and that we must only engage in arts and pleasures, beauty and delight?

*Miklos* Yes, it is Lajos' day today, and he is the only sensible one of us who has chosen that path.

*Bela* Against the will of his own father.

*Miklos* But with his father's support.

*Bela* With such a father he could have become anything, but he chose to become innocent.

*Father (coming up to them)* There you are, Elizabeth! Maria needs you in some matter of importance.

*Elizabeth* What?

*Father* She only wants some advice.

*Miklos* Is everything ready, Sir?

*Father* The preparations can't be more perfect. Only the object of the festivities is now missing, and he will come any moment.

*Ferenc* Have you heard anything from the theatre?

*Father* Everything has worked out as planned. The performance is over, and Lajos' debut has transcended everyone's wildest expectations.

*Miklos* Did you expect anything else?

*Father* No, Miklos, I expected nothing else.

*(The sound of car horns are heard outside.)*

Now he is here! Maria, assemble the guests! We will be seated as soon as he enters! He must be starved!

*(vanishes. A lot of guests well dressed up enter.)*

*Elizabeth (makes way)* Lajos! Lajos! *(reaches a young man with a large garland around his neck, embraces him)*

Congratulations!

*Lajos* Elizabeth, of course you had to be the first one to throw yourself in my arms after I became a star.

*Elizabeth* All your friends are here.

*Lajos* I missed you at the theatre.

*Elizabeth* There was so much to do here.

*Lajos (looks around, sees his friends)* I missed you all at the theatre.

*Miklos* This performance is better, for it is real. There in your opera world everything is just dreams, Lajos. Your real friends only exist in reality.

*Lajos* Thanks, Miklos. I appreciate your sincerity.

*Father (makes way)* My son! *(embraces him)* So now you have reached that far. All your dreams have been fulfilled.

*Lajos* It's your credit, father.

*Father* No, it's your hard work and your strength of purpose. But everything is ready. The servants are waiting to serve dinner. And you must be hungry.

*Lajos* You know, father, that art demands a fasting stomach.

*Father* No, my son, that is self-torture. Art never makes such demands. But for some reason, all artists wallow in self-torment for the sake of art. That's an entirely different thing. That's why I never wanted you to become an artist.

*Lajos* But now I am an artist, and I have succeeded.

*Father* Yes, my son, and I have to accept it. Take your seats now, everyone! Dinner is served!

*Lajos (His mother comes forth embracing him.)* Mother!

*Mother* Welcome home, my son, from the battlefield of art.

*Lajos* It was no battlefield, mother. It was only beauty.

*Father* Don't fool around now, Maria, but sit down. What are we all waiting for? Are you perhaps expecting a delivery of some speech? Because that is exactly what I am going to deliver, but not until you are all sitting down. *(The guests get busy about finding their seats.)* And don't imagine the food will wait for you, for it will get cold faster than hungry gluttons will get stuffed. But enough of ironies! I didn't invite you all here today to insult you, but only to publicly extol my beloved firstborn son Lajos, the black sheep of the family, whom all had given up as lost and especially I, but who by the means of his doubtful career has laid all Budapest to his feet. Rise, my son, once more, and come up here, to let me embrace you once more in the eyes of all the world and at the centre of everyone's attention! *(Lajos has risen and comes up to his father, who embraces him warmly and cordially.)* This was my beloved son, whom we thought was lost, but lo! He has returned to us, and as a Prince!

*(Hurrahs and applause. Everyone rejoices and joins the general mood of joy.)*

*(with feigned harshness)* Now get back to your seat, Lajos, so that I can lecture you thoroughly and talk you to some sense!

*(The father now commences his real speech, standing alone.)*

Dear friends, when Lajos at first suggested to his family that he would be a ballet dancer, the entire clan was shocked. It was something quite unheard of and threatened to amount to the greatest scandal in our family history. I immediately embarked on my lifelong effort to make him refrain from such a folly, which only prompted him to go through with it. So in spite of my persistent resistance against your plans, Lajos, you must then admit that I supported you whole-heartedly all the way! I have never let you down!

*Lajos* Father, already then you said that you would help me in whatever I chose to do. You never failed that promise.

*Father* Hear! Hear! My son speaks to me out of gratitude! Well, he became a ballet dancer, although the family forbade it and in spite of that our age is the most unsuitable for waging on an education in any art. We need no Bela to tell us that the entire world is making ready for war and would rather just march and use all industries just to produce tanks, air fighters, cannons and bombs. And in this age of insanity, Lajos still chose to be a ballet dancer, as if his intention to do away with all bombs and bombers by his dancing, by which he capped all the world's collected folly and vanity!

*Lajos* So you at least admit that ballet is better than guns!

*Father* Definitely, my son! But our family is in business. We never left a smaller fortune for a heritage to the next generation than the one we received from our fathers. And that's the very crux. You don't get rich today by beauty. It only costs money. But the most profitable business in the world today is the war industry.

*Lajos* You got Bela instead for a representative for war madness.

*Father* Alas, yes, Bela, yes, my second son, my perfect son, the born national hero, Napoleon's admirer and disciple, the nationalist with a capital N, who in addition also is an accomplished business man... Get up, Bela! *(Bela rises.)*

Although Lajos has prevailed in his career and made himself a name, it is very uncertain if he in these times can achieve any honour and survive. Even in Germany Jews are arrested and carried away no one knows where even if they are only artists. No future is more uncertain today than that of ideals, beauty and aestheticism, art and culture, all those values that Lajos has chosen to pursue in his life. Therefore it's doubtful if Lajos will even be able to create a family. But Bela, my second son, the war hero to be, knows to wage on the right horse and make fortunes on the war industry! I therefore want to preliminarily make Bela my principal heir the head of the family to be, until we know what really will become of Lajos' career. Lajos has agreed to this, and I hope he will stick to his word.

*Bela* Do you accept this, Lajos?

*Lajos* Completely.

*Bela* Then I can assume the responsibility with a clear conscience, until Lajos eventually gets a son.

*Father* We must do like this, Lajos. It's in the tradition of the family. We have never taken risks. We were always among the noblest magnates of the country, and that line must not be broken even by a successful ballet dancer.

*Lajos* I have been well aware of this, father, ever since I left school. And there is still hope that I might even succeed with a family, (*draws up to Elizabeth,*) for I am not without friends. (*Everyone cheers.*)

*Father* Then it's just for me to conclude my speech by proposing a toast, for my beloved firstborn son Lajos, his success and career as a dancer on our national opera stage, and his eventual family! Cheers, everyone!

(*Everyone joins heartily in the toast to Lajos with all their hearts.*)

Enjoy your meal now, while dinner is still hot!

(*enter suddenly three arrow crossers.*)

*Bela* Jozsef! George! Has anything happened?

*Jozsef* Yes, it has happened!

*George* The news was just on the radio. Hitler has attacked Poland.

(*The father puts down his glass.*)

*Bela (quite astonished)* Is it true?

*Jozsef* Or else they would hardly have broadcast it.

*Mother (turning to the father)* Anton, what will this mean?

*Father* Mother, it's the beginning to the end of our world.

*Bela* Don't worry, mother. It probably won't become any worse. Hitler takes Poland, like he took Czechoslovakia, and that's the end of that.

*Father* Are you so naïve, my son?

*Miklos* No one knows how a war will end. The only certain thing about a war is that everyone will regret it afterwards.

*Father* Especially all the murdered victims, who will keep on screaming after a hundred years, as they have been screaming all since the murders at Sarajevo.

*Mother* Don't be so melodramatic, Anton.

*Father* I am a realist, Maria.

*Ferenc (tries to ease up the tensions)* So there is a war. So what? Is that what we are here to celebrate? I thought Lajos' success was more important. He is now a recognized not to say a crowned artist, and what can Hitler do about that? If Hitler bombs Warsaw, Lajos will still be dancing for us in Budapest, and that's more important, isn't it?

*Miklos* To the highest degree, Ferenc.

*Ferenc* And Lajos even has a fiancée! Shouldn't we celebrate her as well? For you are engaged, aren't you, Lajos?

*Lajos (puts down his glass)* Ferenc, I will never marry until this war is over.

*Ferenc* That is no impediment to your engagement.

*Lajos* Yes, it is. (*looks at Elizabeth*) I will not bind the one I love to any engagement until I know I will be able to marry her.

*Elizabeth* Lajos is right. With a war on, everything is uncertain except our love.

*Ferenc* And it will always outlive the war.

*Miklos* Are you happy now, Bela, when you got your war?

*Bela* Very happy. By this breakthrough, it will at last be possible to have communism ultimately defeated and exterminated.

*Ferenc* You mean that Hitler should take Russia after Poland?

*Bela* Communism is a house of cards that will crumble if you just blow on it. Nothing lasts in Russia. All Hitler needs to do is to blow.

*Miklos* So did Napoleon and Charles XII a hundred years earlier. Both were blown out.

*Bela* Well, Hitler isn't there yet.

*Ferenc* And he has made a friendship pact with the monster Stalin. They intend to share Poland between themselves. After that they might wish to share Hungary as well.

*Bela (laughs)* Impossible.

*Ferenc* Yes, Bela, that's what you say today. But father Anton here knows that in war and love no evil is impossible, or what?

*Father* Yes. No evil is impossible, and in love no good is impossible.

*Miklos* That's why love never must go off into war. Remember that, Lajos!

*Ferenc* Still that's just what it does in most homes.

*Miklos* Go home with your pessimism, Ferenc!

*Ferenc* Unfortunately it's always pessimism that carries home the victory.

*Lajos* What do you mean, Ferenc?

*Ferenc* I mean, Lajos, that all good people unfortunately are pessimists. And why are they pessimists? Because they know that goodness always has to fight against the wind, and that it always in the end is blown down.

*Miklos* Still Ferenc means that also Hitler will be blown down.

*Ferenc* Like Stalin. But unfortunately I think it will take time.

*Lajos* How long do you think the war will last, Ferenc?

*Ferenc* Longer than the last war. This will be a new and greater world war, for Churchill and France will never allow Germany to have Poland.

*Miklos* Is he a realist or pessimist?

*Elizabeth* Since he is a realist he is a pessimist.

*Miklos* That sounds bad, Elizabeth. Could it be that bad?

*Bela* You just paint the devil on the wall. This is our great chance to allow common sense to make a cleansweep of the madness in the world!

*Ferenc* How then do you define madness, Bela?

*Bela* The world madness is communism of course!

*Ferenc* Well, suppose Hitler succeeds in exterminating all communists. Who do you think he will try to exterminate next?

*Bela* The communists are the only ones he wished to exterminate.

*Ferenc* No, Bela, he also wants to exterminate all Jews, whom he equals with all communists. And then he would probably like to exterminate all people except the Germans.

*Father* And finally he would also like to exterminate all Germans, to leave him alone in the world. That's the aim of all dictators: dispose of everyone else to leave them alone with all the power.

*Bela* This discussion is derailing.

*Father* All wars always derail, my son. No war can ever be controlled.

*Bela* Father, you are a fatalist. Try to see the positive side of it.

*Father* Wars and dictators have always turned all humanity and their history predominantly negative.

*Miklos* Can you see anything positive about war, Bela?

*Bela* No, but I will not allow war to impede my natural optimism. And my brother is the same. He is a ballet dancer and will not dance any less because there is a war on.

*Lajos* Speak for yourself, Bela.

*Bela* Am I not right?

*Lajos* Yes, but it doesn't make me an optimist. I will continue dancing as long as the war goes on but without shutting my eyes and without being an optimist.

*Bela* Are you suggesting that I am turning a blind eye to the war?

*Lajos* Yes, Bela, you are.

*Bela* On the contrary, I am the one with visions who sees it clearly!

*Lajos* Bela, you are an arrow-crosser yourself and admire the Nazis and the Fascists for their possibility to further Hungary and even make it great and powerful. Those are your visions, which only are personal interests.

*Bela* I only want what's best for Hungary!

*Ferenc* Lajos means, that all nationalism is national egoism.

*Bela* Then you are a socialist, Lajos!

*Lajos* No, I am an artist. And therefore I don't want to see any suffering, for all suffering is a crime against beauty and art. You turn a blind eye to the sufferings of others, Bela, that Nazism and Fascism will drive over with steamrollers and crush. And all victims are always innocent.

*Ferenc* Lajos is already looking at the end of the war.

*Father* Then he is an optimist.

*Miklos* No, realist.

*Bela* I don't care what you think. I have my duties, first of all to my family and my country.

*Father* No harm in that, my son.

*Bela* While my brother is dancing for the socialist demand of freedom from suffering.

*Lajos* That's better than war.

*Father* My sons, you are both right. Let's see now who will survive by this war. Will it be Lajos' art or Bela's conviction?

*Ferenc* Life is short but art is long. My bet is on Lajos.

*Father* For the sake of the family I will in spite of all place my bet on Bela for his loyalty to the family tradition.



*Miklos* I hope you will both make it.  
*Lajos* Then, Miklos, you are at least not waging on the wrong horse.  
*Elizabeth* And we women have to comfort the one who loses. I fear it will be both.  
*Lajos* If it will be both, which it very well might be, then we will both need all the comfort we can get.  
*Bela* I prefer then to die with my boots on.  
*Lajos* That's dying on stage. I am not sure I would like to die on stage, rather than in a protest.  
*Mother* You must not speak about death!  
*Father* Maria is right. This is a festivity of joy. Ban death, and let it be as far away from us as possible.  
*Ferenc* It is.  
*Miklos* You have a hidden meaning, Ferenc.  
*Ferenc* It is now at its farthest possible distance from us, but from now on it will only come closer.  
*Miklos* Don't say it aloud.  
*Father (rises with his glass full)* Cheers, my children, friends and beloved of kin! May nothing reduce the greatness of the coming future of Lajos!  
*Mother* Cheers to him!  
*(They all raise their glasses and heartily share the toast. Someone turns on a gramophone with sprightly gipsy music. Cheerful general mood, everybody relaxes and start chatting.)*

Act II scene 1.

A smoky political club, many people, eager discussions.

*(Enter Ferenc.)*

*Miklos* Welcome to the club, Ferenc.  
*Ferenc* You are welcoming me to hell, Miklos.  
*Miklos* You don't seem very enthusiastic.  
*Ferenc* If there was anything I was hoping for in life, it was not to have to choose sides.  
*Miklos* We are all forced to it.  
*Ferenc* But not all are forced to it against their will.  
*Istvan (passes their table)* But isn't it the great lawyer Ferenc? I never expected to find you here! Incorruptibility in person!  
*Ferenc* Don't imagine that I wished to come here.  
*Istvan* Why did you come here then?  
*Ferenc* Well, it wasn't exactly to add to your smoke poisoning of the place.  
*Istvan* Do you mean that you even became a smoker?  
*Ferenc* No, Istvan, I am neither a smoker nor anarchist, communist nor socialist, fascist nor arrow-crosser and least of all a nazist, and I am not even politically active or interested.  
*Istvan* Then what in the name of Hunyadi Janos are you doing here?

*Ferenc* I am here because you are the only ideological group in this country that indicates some way forward. You want to get out of the war, away from all that even smells of Nazis and Germans and away from all political ideologies. That's for me the only sound political ideology.

*Miklos* You talk like Lajos Kossuth.

*Istvan* Still we are here both socialists and nationalists.

*Ferenc* But I am not!

*Istvan* Then we are honoured by your presence here. (*retires*)

*Miklos* You scared him.

*Ferenc* That was intentional. I can't stand flatterers.

*Miklos* Here is Elizabeth.

*Elizabeth* (*joins them*) Ferenc! All we need now is Lajos joining us as well!

*Ferenc* Do you know anything about him?

*Elizabeth* He is sulking. He doesn't like the war.

*Ferenc* Who does?

*Miklos* Adolf Hitler.

*Ferenc* And other madmen.

*Elizabeth* Don't say that. There might be arrow-crossers here.

*Ferenc* Do you mean arrow-crossers, informers or spies?

*Elizabeth* You never know. But certain arrow-crossers work with Gestapo.

*Ferenc* In that case they are no longer Hungarians.

*Elizabeth* No, they are not.

*Miklos* Enough of that. What do you know about Lajos?

*Elizabeth* Not much. He doesn't visit me any more and doesn't get in touch. After his successful debut he hasn't said much.

*Ferenc* That was the day when the war broke out.

*Miklos* He stays away from us. He is afraid of politics.

*Ferenc* Allergic rather. So was I until today.

*Elizabeth* I heard something about him though.

*Ferenc* Well?

*Elizabeth* He is brooding. He is doubting. And at the opera he has been reprimanded for not putting his spirit into his work.

*Ferenc* It's the war.

*Miklos* It could poison anyone.

*Ferenc* What do you know about his family?

*Elizabeth* Bela is in high favours and more active than ever. His father has aged though.

*Ferenc* Don't tell me he is also brooding and doubting.

*Elizabeth* Yes, and more so than his son.

*Miklos* It's the war.

*Ferenc* It could poison anyone.

*Miklos* You took the words out of my mouth.

*Ferenc* You did it first.

*Sandor (importuning)* Everything is the fault of Pal Teleki.

*Miklos* Don't get Pal Teleki mixed up in this.

*Sandor* Impossible. He is to blame for everything.

*Miklos* You talk like a true anarchist.

*Sandor* No, realist.

*Istvan (importuning)* Explain yourself, Sandor. Do you suggest that Pal Teleki is responsible for that Hitler started a second world war?

*Sandor* No, but he is to blame for the misfortunes of Hungary and especially the coming ones.

*Miklos* Explain what you mean.

*Sandor* Pal Teleki wants a great Hungary. That's why he got us Karpatho-Ukraine and three fourths of Transsylvania. That's why he went into alliance with Yugoslavia. But in order to realize this great Hungary he must make himself dependent on Hitler. And Hitler will drag everyone with him down to hell who has joined his league. Pal Teleki has hopelessly linked the fate of Hungary with that of Hitler. It will go to hell.

*Miklos* But that's why we exist as an organization as an alternative to the arrow-crossers, and which opposes both Hitler and the communists.

*Sandor* How does that help us? Pal Teleki has already got us stuck in the handcuffs of Hitler.

*Ferenc* There is a way out.

*Sandor* That's what I am doubting.

*Ferenc* You just mentioned it yourself. Pal Teleki has allied us with Yugoslavia. But there king Michael has just carried through a coup, and he is against Hitler. This could save Hungary. Either Pal Teleki must break the alliance with Yugoslavia or take a stand against Hitler.

*Sandor* Hitler will never allow Hungary to break with Germany. He is forcing Hungary with him against both Russia and Yugoslavia.

*Istvan* The alliance with Yugoslavia is Pal Teleki's greatest triumph. He can't break it.

*Sandor* He must break it.

*Istvan* He can't!

*Sandor* He must!

*Ferenc* Slow down a moment! Pal Teleki is an astute politician. He will always find a way out.

*Miklos* There is always a way out.

*Sandor* Not in politics. All blind alleys there always end by that you have to concede to being check mate and give up.

*Miklos* As long as there is life there is hope.

*Ferenc* But look who is coming here.

*(Enter Lajos, pale and serious.)*

*Elizabeth* Lajos! What are you doing here?

*Ferenc* This is the last place we expected to find you in.



*Lajos* They understood me and regretted the situation. They expect several resignations among the artists. There are some communists among them. They will leave without even giving notice, just to save their lives.

*Ferenc* Do you mean that Hungary is already at the mercy of Germany?

*Lajos* Pal Teleki was our only protection against Germany. He alone could withstand Hitler's demands of Hungarians taking part in the campaign against Russia. Now we have to take part. We are enslaved by Germany.

*Miklos* And that's why you have come to us, to fight for a future.

*Lajos* Not to fight but to show solidarity and demonstrate by waging my life and future.

*Miklos* We have to prevail in the long run. We are the only ones representing the right way. All the others have allowed themselves to be leashed and have to follow a way they didn't choose themselves.

*Ferenc* Even we might have to follow that way with Hungary.

*Miklos* Wasn't it you who said there is always a way out?

*Ferenc* No, you said it.

*Miklos* But you said it also.

*Ferenc* There is always a way out, but if the mine caves in you will not be able to use it.

*Miklos* We haven't had that collapse yet.

*Sandor* What I want to know, Lajos, is what you think you could do for us, a hardcore fanatic political underground group, while you are just an innocent ballet dancer, almost abandoned by your own family and without any influence.

*Miklos* I forbid you to insult him, Sandor.

*Lajos* No, he is right! He only tries to be realistic. And I will answer your question. Sandor, as you say, my family has almost abandoned me, and I have no influence at all. But I represent art in its highest and noblest form. There are no higher idealists than the real artists. I am without influence but represent instead the highest imaginable moral power. The moral support of art is indispensable. This I offer you for the sake of Hungary. I hereby swear never to dance in public again until Hungary is free from all German influence.

*Sandor* Lajos has got me right and given me what I asked for. Therefore we accept him. But you do realize the consequence of your pledge, I hope?

*Lajos* Only that I will stick to it.

*Sandor* If you break it and dance for a single Nazi or arrow-crosser, you have banished and excluded yourself from our society.

*Elizabeth* Lajos does not have to give any promises. He has given us his moral support as an artist without asking for anything in return. We can't ask for anything more. He represents the universal ideal of beauty and culture in the same way as Leslie Howard and Alexander Korda, also Hungarians, do in England.

*Ferenc* And they make the best films in the world.

*Istvan* Since they are Hungarians.

*Elizabeth* You don't have to promise anything, Lajos.

Lajos I already did.

Sandor Anyway, he is accepted. No man can expect a higher favour in life than to be taken seriously. Lajos has pledged his willingness to sacrifice his career for the sake of the future welfare of his country. We take this pledge seriously. Welcome, Lajos. (*embraces him. Then everyone wants to embrace him.*)

Lajos (*receives the hugs and the recognition with humble dignity.*)

I thank you all and hope in some way to be able to be of some use to you.

Sandor (*thumps him emphatically on the arm*) At least you will surely never betray is.

## Scene 2.

Father We must get him back on stage to perform again. This will not do. The risk is that he will deteriorate.

Bela I am sure we will get him back on his feet. I have invited a special person for tonight, who will probably manage to talk some sense into him.

Father Who is it?

Bela Captain Arnold Schönfeld.

Father (*rising in anger*) Bela! How can you invite an SS man to our house?

Bela Take it easy, father. I know that he is the best friend of the Hungarians and perhaps our only friend in Germany.

Father It doesn't matter how friendly he is! He is SS! Such a fellow must not be seen in our house.

Bela He arrives here very discreetly. You do want Lajos on his feet again?

Mother If only he had not moved out of his home! Have you seen his small apartment, Bela?

Bela No, but Elizabeth has been there.

Father A third class den, a nest of rats, one dirty room, utterly unworthy of my son!

Bela But for him it's a home in the exile.

Father What exile?

Bela He says that the war makes all people victims of an involuntary exile.

Mother Elizabeth says that he manages his apartment well and has made it quite cozy.

Father I will never set my foot in it. His place is here!

Bela At least he comes home now and then. (*the doorbell*)

Mother That must be him.

Bela Or captain Schönfeld.

Father If it is him he will come in directly.

(*enter Lajos in a long overcoat*)

Lajos It pleases me that you all are still alive. (*greets his mother first of all*)

Mother My son!

Father What's this nonsense, Lajos, that you are no longer dancing? That was after all the only thing you could do.

*Lajos* Father, would you be able to appear in public as a reader of poems in a world where its cities are bombed to cinders, one after the other, and where the instigators of the world war were in the audience?

*Father* But it's your livelihood!

*Lajos* As long as the war goes on I would rather die than dance.

*Father* But you will decline! You will lose the sting! Without the routines your technique will suffer! You will fall out!

*Lajos* But I will keep and save my soul.

*Father* Your soul! Fiddlesticks! You only think of yourself! Dancing is the only thing you know, and you refuse to do it for the sake of your precious soul!

*Mother* Anton.

*Father* I know what I am saying, but that young indolent good-for-nothing doesn't know what he is doing!

*Lajos* It's all right, mother. Father is right. But father, heavier than my soul weighs my conscience.

*Father* Is it true that you have joined those dangerous motherland friends and that you for their sake have vowed never again to dance for a German?

*Lajos* Who has told you?

*Father* Friends of yours.

*Lajos* It's partly true, but I would gladly dance for any German who would keep his hands out of Hungary.

*Bela* Tell that to captain Schönfeld.

*Lajos* Who is captain Schönfeld?

*Bela* A good German who is coming here tonight.

*Father* There are no good Germans in Hungary today, but we shall see.

*Lajos* Is he a military?

*Father* No, he is SS.

*Lajos* What brings him to our house?

*Father* I asked Bela the same question.

*Bela* Give him a chance. I assure you that he will not disappoint you. In spite of all there are still good Germans.

*Father* In the SS?

*Bela* Captain Schönfeld is not like other SS officers.

*(the doorbell)*

*Lajos (rising)* I wish no contact with such a person.

*Bela (restraining him)* Give him a chance, Lajos. He wants to see you. He has seen you on stage.

*Lajos* Then I wish to see him even less.

*Father (threatening)* If he behaves in the least way offensively as a German, we will throw him out.

*Bela (calm)* You will be surprised.

*(enter Elizabeth)*

*Bela* Elizabeth! We expected someone else.

*Elizabeth* He is also coming. But I wanted to come first.

*Lajos* It was long since, Elizabeth.

*Elizabeth* Have you gone entirely underground, Lajos? Why do you never more get in touch with me?

*Lajos* You know where you always can find me.

*Elizabeth* No, Lajos, I don't, for you are never at home.

*Father* What do you know about this SS officer?

*Elizabeth* Nothing, except that he is German and belongs to that infernal SS. That's why I am here. Why are you expecting such a bloke?

*Father* That's what we all are wondering.

*Lajos* Bela suggests that he is un-German.

*Elizabeth* If he is un-German he should also have a negative attitude to the SS and have taken a stand for the communists. But what does this mean? Why have you contacts with the SS?

*Lajos* Ask Bela.

*(the doorbell)*

*Bela (interrupted by the signal)* I think he will answer for himself. *(goes to open to door to the salon. Enter captain Schönfeld.)* Welcome, captain Schönfeld!

*Schönfeld (a dashing blond German, the most Arian imaginable, in shining SS uniform)*

Thank you, brother. *(turning immediately to all)* It's superfluous to greet each one of you. I am captain Arnold Schönfeld, at your service. *(sees Lajos)* But here is the star who tempted me to come here. *(walks up to him and shakes heartily his hand.)* My mission here tonight is to get you back on stage.

*Lajos* Why?

*Schönfeld* Because you are the most promising ballet dancer the world has seen since the heydays of Nijinsky. You have the same kind of flying feet like he or like Mercury.

*Lajos (withdraws his hand)* I am sorry I have to disappoint you.

*Schönfeld* I didn't expect any better. But I don't give up that easily.

*Father* I will gladly assist you in getting my son back on his feet, if it's feasible, even if that would be our only common interest, captain.

*Schönfeld* I am positive it is not.

*Elizabeth* A person like you could have been murdered to venture to a house like this alone.

*Schönfeld* That made it the more important for me to come. Too few Hungarians know me, but those who do, know me better than the Germans do.

*Father* Captain Schönfeld, I notice your fluent Hungarian and am impressed. Have been staying long with us?

*Schönfeld* I was here every year during the 30s.

*Father* Who are you, captain Schönfeld?

*Schönfeld* The friend of Hungary and the enemy of Germany. *(All are astounded.)* It's actually true. Hitler is a mad dog that should be shot. Unfortunately three assassination attempts against him have already failed, but there will be more. The



war should be interrupted at once. It was lost at the very moment when Hitler attacked Poland, which everyone realized except all those poor naïve and dupable fools who believe in Hitler.

*Father (surprised)* Still Germany has made considerable and uninterrupted progress all the way so far.

*Schönfeld* And that will last for the rest of the year but hardly any longer. Our tanks in Russia are already rusting and getting stuck.

*Bela* But have a seat, Arnold. Won't you have a drink?

*Schönfeld (removes his gloves and is seated)* A dry sherry would be nice.

*Father* You must understand that I am rather surprised at your demonstration. You must realize that if a German heard you here tonight you would be lost?

*Schönfeld* I know that no German is here tonight and that only Hungarian ears are listening.

*Elizabeth* I don't trust him.

*Bela* You don't have to, Elizabeth. But tell me more about the downfall of Germany, Arnold.

*Schönfeld* It was made inevitable in the beginning of the year by a certain conference at Wannsee. You must have heard about our persecution of the Jews?

*Father* What is true in what is being told?

*Schönfeld* Everything is true in what is told, but that's just one percent of the whole truth. In the Wannsee conference it was decided that all resources would be applied to the solution of the Jewish problem. That means, that lots of trains and railroads and other resources, that would have been needed for the maintenance of the organization of the war, will be tied down to the maddest enterprise in history.

*Father* What could that be?

*Schönfeld* The extermination of all Jews of Europe by camps of mass destruction.

*Father* You must be joking.

*Schönfeld* No.

*Father* It must be an absurd exaggeration.

*Schönfeld* There are documents of it signed by Hitler himself.

*Father* Such an enterprise is impossible.

*Schönfeld* And for that the more costly, self-destructive and insane.

*Father* Is Hitler really that mad?

*Schönfeld* He is even madder than that.

*(a pause. Schönfeld looks around and is caught by the sceptic look of Elizabeth.)*

I can well understand your scepticism. No one can understand such madness. Rommel is furious. Canaris tries to reach Churchill. All sensible responsible Germans who know anything about it are struck dumb in terror.

*Elizabeth* And what will you do about it?

*Father* And Hungary is at the mercy of such an outrageous abomination of a monster!

*Lajos* As a result of its own egoistic politics. That's why Pal Teleki shot himself.

*Schönfeld* To do something about it is just the problem. Germany is too massive a machinery of power to be able to be stopped with any ease. First Hitler must be removed. The next step would be to make peace with England and America first. We are too far gone into Russia for the moment.

*Father* You are a brave man who dares to show us Hungarians such confidence. What do you think about the situation of Hungary, so completely enclosed by the Nazis?

*Schönfeld* You made it so far. You haven't been involved in the war, no harm has come to Hungary, and even the vast number of Jews here have so far been left in peace. That's why I have come to you. I want to help you to save Hungary and keep it safely out of the war.

*Elizabeth* And how do we know that you haven't just come here to investigate the anti-German organization?

*Schönfeld* You have to trust me like I trust you. I have come here alone as a friend, well aware that most Hungarians hate my uniform and my looks and that certainly several of you do it as well.

*Lajos* And how do I fit into the context?

*Schönfeld* You were the reason. Those who know that I am here know that I came here just to make you return on stage.

*Lajos* I have to admit you have a remarkable method of persuasion.

*Schönfeld* Lajos, it is not good for you to be inactive. A dancer must keep working or he will become useless. You would be of the greatest use for us as an invaluable link between the resistance movement of Hungary and our league against Hitler.

*Lajos* I have sworn never to dance in public as long as Hungary is in the war.

*Schönfeld* And who will be sorry and complain if you break that vow?

*Elizabeth* The motherland friends. They would disconnect and exclude him.

*Schönfeld* That would only strengthen his image. No one would suspect a former excluded member of the motherland friends dancing for the Germans to be conspiring against Hitler in the liberation of Hungary from both the war and the Germans.

*Lajos* Your offer is attractive.

*Schönfeld* That sounds better.

*Lajos* I would gladly risk my life for Hungary.

*Schönfeld* Better and better. Start training at once. I will arrange a private ballet evening for Germans and arrow-crossers with their wives. Then you will be in the game as our chosen key figure.

*Elizabeth* But what will your friends say, Lajos? What will Miklos and Ferenc and the others think?

*Lajos* Let them think the worst of me, Elizabeth.

*Bela* Don't worry about that, Elizabeth. I will arrange things. Lajos will be our trump card after the war when we join the motherland friends.

*Father* I hope you are aware of the risks, Lajos.

*Lajos* No one was more anxious to see me dancing again than you, father.

*Mother* Be careful, my boy.

*Lajos* When there is a world war going on, mother, the least thing you can do is to risk your life to achieve peace.

*Schönfeld (clasps his hand)* Welcome into the conspiracy, Lajos!  
(*This time Lajos does not let it go.*)

*Bela* Let's drink to that!  
(*All share the toast except Elizabeth.*)

*Father* You don't share it, Elizabeth.

*Elizabeth* Thank you, I will go home. (*leaves*)

*Schönfeld* Can we trust her?

*Lajos* She is worried about me.

*Bela* She is as reliable as everyone else here, for we are all just Hungarians.  
(*drinks*)

*Lajos* I vouch for her.

*Schönfeld* That settles it. The deal is struck, and I recommend myself. (*bows politely and retires.*)

*Father* An odd character. What do you know about him, Bela?

*Bela* Except that I know he learned to love Hungary during his long sojourns here in the 30s, I know quite unofficially, that he is partly of Jewish descent.

*Father* Like Heydrich. Like perhaps Hitler himself.

*Bela* Yes, whoever in this world can be quite sure he is not?

Act III scene 1. The club.

*Miklos* What exactly is going on? Has Lajos lost his soul?

*Istvan* It's worse than that.

*Miklos* Is he dead?

*Istvan* It's worse than that.

*Miklos* Out with it!

*Istvan* He has danced for the SS.

*Miklos* You are lying.

*Istvan* Explain it to him, Ferenc, you who are initiated.

*Ferenc* Miklos. Lajos is lost. He has actually danced for Nazis, SS, the Gestapo and other alien wolves who are only here to destroy Hungary. But take it easy! Don't get upset! The one who seems to have persuaded him to break his loyalty to us is a certain captain Schönfeld in the SS. We don't know anything about him. We expect Elizabeth here at any moment. She knows more.

*Miklos* I don't believe it! It's impossible! Not Lajos!

*Ferenc* His brother and father also persuaded him.

*Miklos* Has the entire family fallen?

*Ferenc* It doesn't look any better.

*Istvan* Here is Elizabeth.

*Miklos* Elizabeth, is it true?

*Elizabeth* What?

*Miklos* That Lajos is lost?

*Elizabeth* I don't know. (*Ferenc offers her a cigarette.*) Is there some coffee?

*Istvan* Any amount. (*pours her a cup*)

*Miklos* What do you know about it, Elizabeth?

*Elizabeth* (*smokes and drinks, tries to keep cool*) Don't judge him. He is a ballet dancer. He must be allowed to dance.

*Miklos* But not for Nazis!

*Elizabeth* No, but for captain Schönfeld.

*Miklos* Who is then this monstrous captain Schönfeld?

*Elizabeth* A balletomane in the SS. He persuaded Lajos to resume dancing. Nothing wrong in that, especially since captain Schönfeld speaks fluent Hungarian, claims to be a friend of Hungary and – which is absolutely confidential – is against Hitler and wants an end to the war.

*Ferenc* Well at last something digestible!

*Elizabeth* He claims to belong to a group of the higher German aristocracy that wants Hitler out of the way and an immediate peace with at least England and America, like Rudolf Hess, but I believe captain Schönfeld has other purposes.  
(*Sandor joins up and starts listening.*)

*Ferenc* Do you think he is a spy?

*Elizabeth* No. It's simpler than that. He is a bugger.

*Miklos* How do you know?

*Elizabeth* It's written all over him – his personal interest in Lajos, his anxious persistence, his insisting assurances, – everything is just a disguise.

*Miklos* The SS is the last thing in the world you can think anything good of.

*Sandor* I know more about the good captain Schönfeld.

*Istvan* Is it true what Elizabeth says?

*Sandor* I don't know. But do you know why captain Schönfeld is here? – To chart the independence movements of Hungary and above all its Jewish population.

*Ferenc* In the obvious purpose to prepare for its liquidation?

*Sandor* After him there will be a certain Adolf Eichmann coming here to do the dirty work and cleanse Hungary from all Jews.

*Elizabeth* So Schönfeld is really a spy?

*Sandor* As Miklos said, we know what the SS is all about. Their training includes the obligation to live together with a sheep-dog and to make him their best friend. To graduate they then have to take the life of that friend with their own hands.

*Miklos* So just inhumanity, betrayal and cruelty all the way.

*Sandor* Mildly speaking, – yes.

*Miklos* And such a bugger Lajos has tolerated.

*Elizabeth* Don't judge him. He is just a dancer. He must be allowed to dance.

*Istvan* Not for us. Not for Hungary any more.

*Ferenc* Who shall tell him?

*Sandor* Let him understand it by himself. (*Elizabeth rises. Lajos has entered.*)

*Elizabeth* Lajos! (*All the others turn away their faces.*)

*Lajos* What is the matter?

*Elizabeth* They know what you have done, Lajos.

*Lajos* That I have danced for the planning assassins of Hitler?

*Miklos* Get out of here, Lajos!

*Lajos* Miklos!

*Ferenc* I am sorry, Lajos, but you had better not come back here any more.

*Sandor* We don't know you any more.

*Lajos* I understand. (*wants to leave*)

*Elizabeth* Lajos!

*Lajos* Yes, what do you want?

*Elizabeth* Stick to your art and go on with it, even if the whole world goes to hell.

*Lajos* That will not be easy. Without an audience you can't dance.

*Miklos* Don't you realize what you have done, Lajos? You have allowed yourself to become duped by the worst enemies of Hungary, that want to use you for their own purposes!

*Lajos* Captain Schönfeld can save Hungary if only Hitler is got out of the way.

*Miklos* He just wants to spy us out! He just wants to get an insight into our movement!

*Lajos* He will never get that by me. He has sworn to me, that as long as I dance for him, nothing will happen to Hungary.

*Sandor* And what do you do when he breaks his promise?

*Lajos* Then I die with Hungary.

*Istvan* There is something here that goes beyond our horizon.

*Ferenc* Have you gone metaphysical, Lajos?

*Elizabeth* Don't you get what kind of man he is, Lajos? He only wants your soul and then your body! He is a Satanist!

*Ferenc* Wait a moment, Elizabeth. Suppose what Lajos says is the truth. Suppose that his contacts with the SS could keep the Germans away from taking over all control of Hungary. Wouldn't that be a commendable prospect?

*Sandor* It's stillborn, Ferenc. The Germans are losing the war. They are beaten in Africa and can't keep their front in Russia. They will have to retreat, and then the hour of destiny will come to Hungary, like it already struck in Poland.

*Miklos* What has happened in Poland?

*Sandor* The Jews of the Warsaw ghetto have risen in rebellion and caused the Germans great damage. The Polish resistance is getting organized, and the Germans have set almost all Warsaw on fire for revenge.

*Lajos* Do you mean that the same could happen in Budapest?

*Sandor* There are as many Jews here as in Warsaw. Ask captain Schönfeld about Adolf Eichmann, Lajos. That's our task for you.

*Lajos* I can do that.

*Istvan* But don't come back here.

*Sandor* Yes, Lajos, for our security. Let everyone understand that we regard you as an enemy.

*Miklos* Even as a traitor. Thus we can stay in touch.

*Lajos* As you wish.

*Elizabeth* Will you continue dancing for Schönfeld and the SS?

*Lajos* No, Elizabeth, not unless I have to.

*Ferenc* Do it, if it really could save Hungary and Budapest.

*Lajos* Only for that reason in that case.

*Elizabeth* You are prostituting yourself.

*Lajos (smiles)* Not for my own sake in that case, but for others.

*Sandor* That's good, Lajos. Go now. (*Lajos leaves without a word.*)

Well, what do you think about it?

*Ferenc* Give him a chance.

*Miklos* He might be able to save us all. But we have to join his game in that case and openly brand him as a traitor.

*Ferenc* Could it cause him any harm?

*Istvan* Hungary has never harmed an artist.

*Miklos* You are right.

*Sandor* Let him dance for Hungary as long as Hungary lives. It will probably be liquidated anyway.

*Ferenc* That might depend on Lajos.

*Elizabeth* Even a bugger has a heart.

*Sandor* In that case, Elizabeth, let's hope that captain Schönfeld really is a bugger.

## Scene 2.

(A simple chamber, Lajos' lodgings, all in one room, rather untidy but likeable.)

*Lajos* What will the world be like when the war is over? According to the news, London is almost levelled with the ground by the German mat bombings. Will I still wish to dance when the world lies in ruins? The Nazis have already lost, but they refuse to give up until they have ruined all Europe. Those people who manage this war don't know each other and don't fight each other, but instead they concentrate all their energy and attention to completely destroying each other's civilizations. No, in such a world of such people I could never dance again. (*a knock*) But someone insists on disturbing the association of my desperation with loneliness. (*goes to open the door.*) Captain Schönfeld.

*Schönfeld* Sorry to bother you by my disturbance.

*Lajos* I have asked you not to come here to my lodgings.

*Schönfeld* We miss you, Lajos.

*Lajos* So does my family. What do you want?

*Schönfeld* You are important to us as our contact.

*Lajos* You are just using me. You got me stigmatized and exiled by all my countrymen.

*Schönfeld* There is a war on, Lajos. That's not my fault.

*Lajos* You promised me to keep the war out of Hungary. But you haven't kept it out of my family and my circle of friends.

*Schönfeld* I stick to my promise. I intend to do everything in my power to save Hungary from the war and Nazism. But you are important to us, Lajos. By you I can keep in touch with Hungary.

*Lajos* I can't dance for you any longer.

*Schönfeld* We have accepted that. But you can still be important as a contact man.

*Lajos* Who is Adolf Eichmann?

*Schönfeld* An SS-officer of higher rank than I. He has been sent here to bring some order to the Jewish issue. Unfortunately he has his orders. It's good that you brought him up. He was just the man I wanted to discuss with you.

*Lajos* Is it true that he intends to send all our Jews to Germany?

*Schönfeld* That's his orders. I would give anything to relieve him of it.

*Lajos* You still have not succeeded in disposing of Hitler. Is that really your intention, or is it just a smokescreen for getting at us?

*Schönfeld* A definite assassination attempt is being planned. A certain colonel von Stauffenberg intends to execute it at the risk of his life. He has already lost an eye and an arm in the war. He is the new Germany that we wish to rescue.

*Lajos* When?

*Schönfeld* As soon as possible. But I also want to save the Jews of Hungary.

*Lajos* How? By murdering Eichmann?

*Schönfeld* A Swede is on his way to Budapest by the name of Raoul Wallenberg. He has some Jewish ancestry himself. He would be able to help us.

*Lajos* How?

*Schönfeld* By stopping Eichmann.

*Lajos (sighs)* And how do I enter this context?

*Schönfeld* Find out what you can about Wallenberg. Level the road for him if he comes. He must get as free hands as possible. No Hungarian must mistrust him in any way. He might then be able to open up contacts between us and Washington or, even better, London.

*Lajos* Raoul Wallenberg?

*Schönfeld* A young man like you. Easy ways, clear eyes, and unflinching courage.

*Lajos* Could he save Hungary?

*Schönfeld* He might help us saving Hungary.

*Lajos* We are waiting for the demise of Hitler.

*Schönfeld* Like for the first sunrays after an endless night of storm.

*Lajos* I'll see what I can do.

*Schönfeld* I promise you, Lajos, that no harm will come to Hungary as long as I am here. I pledge my life for that cause.

*Lajos* If the war will come to Hungary, captain Schönfeld, my life and the lives of all Hungarians will weigh much lighter than yours. Goodbye. (*Captain Schönfeld leaves.*)

If only he hadn't come here! If Elizabeth learns about it she will never want to see me again. And perhaps she already knows about it.

Scene 3. The office of Adolf Eichmann.

*There is a discreet knock.*

*Eichmann* Come in. (*enter Raoul Wallenberg discreetly. Eichmann rises.*)

Mr Wallenberg, I presume?

*Wallenberg* Yes.

*Eichmann* Please have a seat. And don't be so serious. I am not dangerous. To you. Yet. You are after all just an honest business man. And we wish no Swedes any harm, as little as they want us Germans any harm. Or what? Do you want a cigarette?

*Wallenberg* I don't smoke.

*Eichmann* How virtuous you are! A real paragon of virtue! I understand you wish to buy Jewish lives from me. Why? Do you think you Swedes could make better soaps out of them than we?

*Wallenberg* We don't want to make any soap of any human being. We just consider it a better idea to take care of Jews alive than dead, since the world always made better use of the living than of the dead.

*Eichmann (constantly walking about in the room)* Still so serious. I was just joking. Why is it that only Germans can understand the German sense of humour? But of course you are welcome to buy Jewish lives, as many as you want. There are so many of them here in Hungary, more than in any other European country. For here they could live in peace while we made war against France, England and Russia. The Hungarians always behaved and showed no resistance, why we let them be and manage by themselves. We didn't touch one Hungarian Jew in the entire war! But then there was Stalingrad, and the Russian front started drawing nigh to Europe. Finally its increasing closeness to the borders of Poland, Hungary and Romania became a matter of some concern. We then desired the Hungarians to side with us in fighting the Russians. To this the Hungarians proved somewhat slow and reluctant, so we had to finally deal with the country. And when we deal with a country, we also have to deal with its Jews. It has become my prime mission here in the country, to send Hungarian Jews who were too well off here to Germany to be taught some lessons. They are not the only sacred human race here on earth.

But you may wonder indeed if it is really sensible to just send off people like that. And it's because there are Germans who have asked that question that you have been brought into the picture.

You are a businessman. You must understand how we are thinking. It's no good deal to just send people off. You get no money for it. Dachau, Buchenwald and Auschwitz cost money. It's no profitable business. Also it begins to dawn to more



and more Germans that it is foolish, and that it even is more foolish than meaningless. For anyone with a keen casual eye can see that the Jews already have won this war, this Nazi war against the Jews. For who rules over Roosevelt if not the Jews? Who runs Churchill except the Jews? When England took over Palestine and Jerusalem, it was actually the world Jewry that seized hold of the British Empire with its clutches to the disadvantage of the empire, which we shall see as soon as the war is over.

*Wallenberg* I don't understand your point.

*Eichmann* Pardon me. I allowed myself a small extension or rather digression from the subject.

The conclusion that too few Germans have arrived at is, that it's hardly worth while any longer to try to advance the Nazi cause against world Jewry. If you let out a word about this to anyone else it will be my duty to kill you, which is too easy a thing for the SS to do. That's what we are trained for. We both have our roles to play in front of the world, you as the buyer for the release of Jewish lives and I as an SS officer. It must be part of my role to curse you for cheating Germany of Jewish meat. I have to act my part, and I trust you to play yours. And only since we trust each other to both be true to acting our parts, we dare now leave them aside.

In brief, we both know that the defeat of Germany is a fact. Also all the English, Americans, Russians and perhaps even Italians are well aware of it. But the one who doesn't know or pretends not to know about it is Hitler, and unfortunately there are too many Germans who still accept and follow anything that Hitler thinks or says or does and act accordingly. It's a dominating trait of man in our century to less and less think by himself, and that is not a sound development. We see that in our capacity as businessmen. And it looks like as if Germany will come to bitterly regret that development. And shouldn't it then be to the interest of every sound German businessman to avert such a bankruptcy? Especially to such businessmen who already once experienced such a bankruptcy after the First World War?

That's where you enter the picture. Your father is as well known to us as to Churchill and Roosevelt and equally appreciated by us as by them. He is in good standing with everyone in the world. You are a neutral nation, and he is a typical representative for this neutral nation. But he is an influential banker. He has uncountable business corporations and employees on his responsibility and conscience across the entire world, and to his enterprises and employees he has the obligation to maintain them economically. It's because he has such a tremendous economic responsibility that he is so greatly appreciated by both Americans, English and Germans, for all these are his colleagues: they are also concerned about economic responsibility and eager to maintain it, in opposition to comrade Stalin.

My friend, do you understand that we are all in the same boat – we Germans, you Swedes, Americans and Englishmen? The war is lost, Nazism has lost it against Jewry, but the economy of Germany and the free world must not lose it against communism! Do you understand that? The Nazi war is lost, but it must not turn into a defeat for the Germans and the Europeans against the Russians. Do you see?

*Wallenberg* Herr Eichmann, nothing of all this is new to me. Your colleague captain Schönfeld has already initiated and persuaded me of the necessity to save Hungary and eastern Europe from communism. In order to accomplish this you must get a separate peace with England and America. You confide in me because I am in contact with Washington. I cannot warrant that everything will go as we desire. Your adored Führer would rather die himself first. So let us take one thing at a time and return to our private transactions. I am really here just to buy the lives of Jews.

*Eichmann* You act your part perfectly. I appreciate it. I am positive we will get along well. (*sits down at last by his desk opposite Wallenberg.*)

Act IV scene 1. The club. Morose atmosphere.

*Miklos* This war is more and more transforming into a constantly more gruesome and derailing nightmare. The Nazis have already lost it, but they refuse to give up until they have succeeded in ruining and destroying all Europe. The ancient Italian classical towns are falling into cinders, the opera of operas, the Scala of Milan, is being bombed like the monastery of Leonardo's "Last Supper", the oldest Catholic monastery Monte Cassino has been completely devastated, as if the most precious shrines of culture were the chief targets of all war vehemence, Paris and London are half bombed to debris, if you are to believe what you hear, and each day another medieval town in Germany, Italy or Poland is forever levelled with the ground. According to what I've heard, the capital of the unhappy Poland, the ancient city of Warsaw, has been completely deleted because of the whim of one Nazi officer. What will then be the fate of Budapest, which acquires a constantly more strategic importance to the Germans, while the Hungarians grow more and more reluctant to remain their allies? And why is there no news of that the German leading dog has been shot, which is what everyone here is waiting and longing for? Why is he allowed to remain alive when nothing is more urgent than his vital death?

*Ferenc* Take it easy, Miklos. We are expecting some notice any moment.

*Miklos* If the coup had been successful it would have been broadcast in all the world and peace made long ago!

*Elizabeth* Miklos, we have to be careful.

*Miklos* And where is your Lajos, Elizabeth? Is he still hanging out with that SS captain who is helping Eichmann?

*Sandor* Cool him down, Ferenc.

*Ferenc* Do you think it is easy? We are all quaking nervous wrecks. Whatever we say will only make it worse.

*Miklos* The entire civilization will be lost if Hitler is allowed to live!

*Ferenc* Miklos, whatever happens, we will be able to survive. Let's focus on that.

*Istvan (storms in suddenly)* The assassination attempt has succeeded! I just heard it on the wireless!

*Many* Hurray!

Elizabeth What did they say, Istvan?

Istvan The situation was not entirely clear, but it was obvious that Hitler had perished.

Ferenc At last!

Miklos Nothing about peace and an end of the war?

Istvan No, not yet.

Miklos Then the case is not yet clear.

Istvan But let's at least celebrate the assassination! This is the beginning of the end! The Germans have dared to turn against their mad leader!

Sandor Here is a bottle of Tokay from before the war. (*opens it*)

Istvan Get your glasses, all who want to join!

Ferenc I have my coffee cup.  
(*Everyone shares, the bottle is poured, and Istvan raises his glass.*)

Istvan To the liberation of Hungary!

All To the liberation of Hungary!  
(*All toast in high spirits. The atmosphere is full of glee and hope. Enter Lajos.*)

Ferenc Here is an ominous figure like death itself.

Miklos What do you want here, Lajos?

Lajos What are you drinking to?

Istvan The successful assassination attempt on Hitler.

Lajos Put down your glasses. The attempt has failed.  
(*The mood is instantly changed to the contrary.*)

I just received all the facts. That's why I didn't come earlier. (*sits down tired*)

The bomb went off as planned, and the whole bunker was blasted, but Hitler got away with just a few scratches. No one can understand how. Von Stauffenberg has been arrested. Now there will be a witchhunt on all Hitler opponents all over Europe.

Ferenc And what about captain Schönfeld?

Lajos He has left. He has been recalled. He couldn't do anything more here. Eichmann is taking over. Now there is nothing that can save Hungary or its Jews except Raoul Wallenberg. Captain Schönfeld regretted the situation sincerely, but he did what he could as long as he could.

Miklos This means the end of Hungary and Budapest.

Ferenc Did captain Schönfeld say anything about us? Did he give any advice?

Lajos Yes. Dissolve the organization. Abandon the club. Go underground. As quickly as possible.

Miklos We are all done for. We stand no chance. We are probably all registered with the Gestapo by Schönfeld himself.

Elizabeth Do you give up that easily, Miklos?

Miklos I am tired, Elizabeth. I am tired of living in constant fear. And now it will only get worse.

Ferenc We must do what we can. Thanks for coming, Lajos. Evacuate the club! Burn all papers! We have never existed!

*(Total dissolvment. Only Lajos remains calm, rises tired and leaves slowly with sad heavy steps. Elizabeth stands still looking after him and then suddenly rushes after him.)*

*Elizabeth* What do you know about Schönfeld, Lajos? Could he have betrayed us?

*Lajos* No.

*Elizabeth* How do you know?

*Lajos* I knew him.

*Elizabeth* How did you know him?

*Lajos* Not like I know you. Don't worry, Elizabeth. He loved me only for the sake of my art, but I never loved him. He never even touched me.

*Elizabeth* And why then do you never want to touch me?

*Lajos* Elizabeth, there is a war on. All our lives are threatened. I can't love you with a good conscience as long as the struggle for survival has to come first.

*Elizabeth* So at least you still love me.

*Lajos* More than ever, Elizabeth.

*Elizabeth* Do you think we shall ever have each other?

*Lajos* Not while the war lasts.

*Elizabeth* Will it ever end?

*Lajos* Not as long as it continues to get worse.

*Elizabeth* Is there any end to this hell?

*Lajos* As a Catholic you must know, Elizabeth, that hell has no bottom. *(wants to leave)*

*Elizabeth* Everything can end happily as long as you live, Lajos. Everything will only go to hell if you give up.

*Lajos* And why do you attach such a tremendous importance to me?

*Elizabeth* You are the art, Lajos. You are idealism. You are the truth. You are Hungary. You are our soul and the soul we all are living for.

*Lajos* Thanks, Elizabeth. And you are right. Nothing has ever been so threatened in all history as the human soul in the age we now against our will have been thrown into. As long as there are dictators in the world, Elizabeth, the soul can never be free. There you have the supreme enemy of all the world, all humanity and every human soul: dictatorship, whatever form it takes. Come. Let us go. *(brings her tenderly out.)*

## Scene 2. Home.

*Father (goes to a cupboard and pours himself a large drink)*

I don't like this at all. The world is going to hell, and no one can do anything about it. The only one who could stop it is the only one who eagerly runs the world to hell, that ridiculous dictator in Germany, whom no German has had the good sense to remove. At the same time he is tragic, for all he really wanted was a universal crusade against communism in the east. By his gross misconceptions, communism is now prevailing in the east and advancing here, and no one can do

anything about it. A dictator started the worst of all wars, but an even worse dictator is going to win it.

*Mother (enters)* Are you here drinking again in your loneliness, Anton?

*Father* What else can you do?

*Mother* Nothing new about our son?

*Father* Which one of them? The lost one or the mad one?

*Mother* Lajos.

*Father* He is still lost. He hasn't been seen on his address for several days. Elizabeth has lost all contact with him. According to some he is drifting around in the underworld of the city between unknown clubs and bars and doesn't behave any better than I, just as sleepless and worried and unblessed and wild for the tragedy.

*Mother* If only he would come home. He will turn up eventually most unexpectedly, you will see, Anton. (*caresses him*)

*Father (embraces her)* I hope you are right, my dearest. (*kisses her*) We would calm down if he came.

*Mother* What do you know about Bela?

*Father* He is in high favours and runs constantly between different generals and tycoons, as obsessed with politics and the war like everyone else and doesn't notice himself that he also more and more is turning into a ruined victim.

*Mother* He should also come home.

(*the doorbell*)

*Father* I hope it's one of the poor devils we are discussing.

(*enter Elizabeth with her coat on.*)

*Mother* Elizabeth!

*Elizabeth* Do you know anything about Lajos?

*Father* No. Do you?

*Elizabeth* I haven't seen a trace of him for a week.

*Father* Neither have we. What is the last thing you have heard?

*Elizabeth* That he just errs around haunting weird places, always on the move between disreputable places, never sleeps, never goes home.

*Father* That's what we heard also.

*Elizabeth* Miklos has said that all he does is to go waiting for the great attack.

*Father* By the Russians on Budapest?

*Elizabeth* What else?

*Mother* Stay here, Elizabeth. You have a home here.

*Elizabeth* Thank you, but I am worried about Lajos. I have to find him.

(*the doorbell*)

*Mother* It could be him.

*Father* I don't think so.

(*enter Bela*)

*Bela* Elizabeth!

*Father* She just arrived. What is it, Bela? You haven't honoured us with a visit for a long time.

*Bela (touches his parents with anxiety)* You have to get away from here. The attack may come any moment.

*Father* What kind of an attack?

*Bela* There is an air strike coming on.

*Father* Against Budapest?

*Bela* Against Budapest.

*Father* Bombs?

*Bela* Yes, father, bombs.

*Mother (worried)* Where is my son?

*Lajos (enters)(calmly)* Here I am.

*Mother (hurries up to him)* Lajos! Where have you been?

*Lajos* Nowhere and everywhere.

*Father* You come exactly when also Bela and Elizabeth have turned up.

*Lajos (regards Elizabeth)* I saw Elizabeth on her way here and followed her. *(releases her with his eyes)* Then also Bela turned up.

*Mother* We didn't notice when you came in.

*Lajos* That was intentional.

*Elizabeth* How are you, Lajos?

*Lajos* Not very well. Is it true about the air strike, Bela?

*Bela* I am afraid so.

*Lajos* So they want to bomb our city?

*Bela* The Nazis intend to fortify themselves here. Buda offers good defence opportunities. We Hungarians have no say any more in our own country.

*Lajos* So the Germans want to sacrifice Budapest for the sake of their mortal vanity?

*Bela* It doesn't look any better.

*Lajos* Destroy our capital, our environment, the most beautiful city in the world...  
*(sirens start howling)*

*Father* Now it begins.

*Bela* We must get out of here!

*Father* I will not leave my house. We have a cellar.  
*(Lajos starts going out.)*

*Elizabeth* Where are you going, Lajos?

*Lajos* Out.

*Elizabeth (wants to retain him)* Out? To the bombs?

*Lajos* No, out to my city. If they want to destroy Budapest, they have to destroy me with it. *(leaves)*

*Father* Stop him!

*(Elizabeth vanishes out after him.)*

*Bela* Come, let's go down to the cellar.

*Father* Yes, we are safe there. Come, Maria.

*Mother* But the youths!

*Father* They have to take care of themselves.

*(Bela helps them out. The sirens continue screaming. Bomb explosions are being heard.)*

*Suddenly blackout. Only sirens and bomb explosions, increasing in terror.)*  
Lajos'(voice, roaring) No! Not my Budapest!  
*(The bomb explosions continue, with bombs whistling and howling.*  
*Gunfire. Lightnings. Lights and smokes of fires.)*  
Elizabeth'(voice, in despair) Lajos! Lajos! *(Her silhouette is seen among flames and smoke.)*  
Where are you, Lajos? *(rambles out.)*

### Scene 3. A hospital.

*All is white and sterile. Lajos unmoving in a bed with white sheets. A doctor appears taking the pulse. Then he lifts part of the sheet to study one of his knees. Then he leaves to go behind a screen, where the father and mother are waiting in suspense.*

Father *(eagerly)* How is he?

Doctor He is sleeping. The operation has been successful.

Mother May we see him?

Doctor As soon as he wakes up. But I must warn you. He might have had a serious shock.

Father What actually happened?

Doctor *(sighs)* He was lucky. He was hit by some shrapnel in his knee. We have removed it, and he will be able to walk again.

Mother Only walk?

Doctor Madam, he was lucky to keep his bone.

Mother Do you know who he is?

Doctor *(dryly)* I assume he is your son.

Father Doctor Szasz, just before the war our son made his debut at the opera as a leading dancer.

Doctor I see.

Mother How is his leg?

Doctor *(sighs)* To begin with he has to learn to walk with crutches.

Mother And then?

Doctor With a cane.

Mother And then?

Doctor *(doesn't answer)*

Father How was the knee hurt?

Doctor Unfortunately it was the very knee-joint that was hit.

Father Which means?

Doctor *(sighs)* That he is lucky if he ever will be able to bend his knee again.

Mother Oh no!

Father Pull yourself together, dear.

Doctor Even under the best circumstances there will always be a stiffness in that leg giving him a limp.

Father It can't be remedied by physiotherapy?

Doctor Yes, to a certain extent, and that practice will be most vital.

*Mother* When may he come home?  
(*Lajos moves like in a drowse and groans.*)

*Doctor* As soon as possible. But I advise you to leave the city with him. Budapest will be a battlefield.

*Father (to the mother)* We will bring him with us to Szombathely.

*Doctor* I think he is waking up. You may come in to him now.  
(*Lajos wakes up but is in pain. He immediately recognizes his parents as they enter.*)

*Lajos* Mother! Father! (*The mother gets down on her knees by his bed and takes his hand in both of hers. The father remains standing.*)

*Mother* My son! How is it with you?

*Lajos* Unfortunately I am still alive. Is there any life left in the city?

*Father* You have had a shock, my son.

*Lajos* Was the city damaged?

*Mother* But whatever did you do out there in the bomb raid?

*Lajos (impatient)* Was the city damaged, I asked!

*Father* Yes, my son, the city was badly damaged. But we expect more bombings. Therefore we will all leave the city as soon as possible.

*Lajos* I want to remain here!

*Father (roused)* And perish with Budapest and Hungary?

*Lajos (screaming)* Yes, rather that than go on living!

*Mother* My son, don't you care if others are out of danger? Elizabeth rushed out into the city after you in the bomb raid!

*Lajos (tempered)* Is she hurt?

*Father* No, she managed. She will come to see you as soon as she can. (*Sirens start howling.*) Here we go again.

*Doctor* It's only Budapest. We are in safety here.

*Lajos (screams)* No!

*Mother* He can't stand the bombs. He must be got out of here as soon as possible. He is oversensitive. He always was.

*Lajos* Where will you take me?

*Father* Szombathely. We will be safe there. It's not worth bombing and is of no strategic importance.

*Lajos (faintly)* My leg hurts very much. Is it still there?

*Father* It is still there.

*Lajos* I was hurt in the leg, wasn't I?

*Father* Yes, you have been bleeding much. But the leg is intact. You may keep it.

*Lajos* I can't move it.

*Doctor* Don't even try yet. It has just been operated on. You will only gradually recover its sensibility.

*Lajos* Why did you bring me here? Why did you save me? Why didn't you let me die?

*Father* Don't despair, my son.

*Doctor (to the parents)* Come back tomorrow. He must have a thorough rest.



*Father (raises his wife)* Come, Maria. We'll be back tomorrow.

*Mother* May we then take him with us?

*Doctor* At best, yes. I hope so. (*shows the parents out.*)

(*Lajos is left alone. The stage gets dark. Immediately the sirens and the explosions increase.*)

*Lajos (writhing like in nightmares)* Why couldn't I die out there? Why was I not allowed to die with my city? If only the first bomb that hit Budapest had stricken me!

#### Scene 4. Szombathely.

*A housekeeper is polishing the floor when an old gardener drops in.*

*Gardener (steals in to her and pinches her bottom)*

*Housekeeper* Oh! Bertold! How you do frighten me!

*Bertold* I just wanted to be reminded of.

*Housekeeper* As if everything wasn't bad enough anyway!

*Bertold* But what is going on?

*Housekeeper* Don't you know anything?

*Bertold* No, what should I know? I am just an old fogey who has outlived himself.

*Housekeeper* That's what we all soon will be.

*Bertold* But I know that the family is back.

*Housekeeper* In ruins like the whole country.

*Bertold* Yes, who is not in ruins at this time of the year?

*Housekeeper* It used to be different. Balls and festivities, music and parties, joy and exhilaration. Now everyone is just sad and lost.

*Bertold* That's the way of the season, Miss.

*Housekeeper* No, it's worse. The world has derailed.

*Bertold* Has it?

*Housekeeper* Yes. Haven't you noticed?

*Bertold* How should I notice? I am just an old...

*Housekeeper* Yes, yes, but don't you follow what is going on?

*Bertold* How could I? Why should I?

*Housekeeper* Are you aware there is a war on?

*Bertold* Didn't it end in 1918?

*Housekeeper* Have you been dead since then, Bertold?

*Bertold* Oh no. I was always present when both Lajos and Bela were born.

*Housekeeper* Yes, that was some time ago. Since then they have also derailed.

*Bertold* But they are still alive, I hope?

*Housekeeper* Yes, but not much more than that. Bela is a soldier and Lajos is an invalid.

*Bertold* If you get to be one you usually end up the other.

*Housekeeper* But Lajos was never a soldier, and Bela is not an invalid.

*Bertold* Now you make it difficult for me.

*Housekeeper* It always was, Bertold.

*Bertold* But who is here?

*Housekeeper* It's Lajos – the invalid. But beware of him. He is not normal. No one recognizes him any more.

*Bertold* I wouldn't either after twenty years.

*Housekeeper* And the parents are like gloomy ghosts. But Bela is expected home today.

*Bertold* Let's see now. Is that the invalid?

*Housekeeper* No, he is the healthy one.

*Bertold* Then he is the one who is dangerous.

*Housekeeper* You could see it that way.

*Mother (coming out)* Aren't you ready yet, Zsazsa?

*Housekeeper* I am doing my best.

*Mother* Good day, Bertold. How do you do?

*Bertold* Thank you, I do nothing as usual.

*Mother* That's nice to hear.

*Bertold* I understand that Lajos is expected home today.

*Zsazsa* No, Bela, dumbbell.

*Mother* No, Bertold, Lajos *is* at home. But Bela might turn up.

*Bertold* I haven't seen the young gentlemen since they were small.

*Mother* If only they had remained as unchanged as you, Bertold.

*Bertold* But what is wrong with Bela?

*Zsazsa* No, Lajos, nitwit.

*Bertold* I mean Lajos.

*Mother* Alas, let's not talk about it. (*goes out*)

*Zsazsa* So, now you made her even more sad.

*Bertold* But what did I say that was wrong?

*Zsazsa* Nothing, stupid. (*a faltering stick is heard approaching from the other direction*)

*Bertold* It's him.

*Bertold* Who?

*Zsazsa* The young master.

*Bertold* Bela?

*Zsazsa* No, Bertold. You will see. (*enter Lajos stumbling on his stick*)

It's getting better and better, Lajos.

*Lajos* I want to be able to walk all the way to Budapest.

*Bertold* Have you hurt yourself, master Lajos?

*Lajos* No, Bertold, it's the war that has hurt me.

*Bertold* So you know who I am?

*Lajos* Who doesn't know who you are, Bertold.

*Zsazsa* Your brother is expected home today. Dinner is soon ready.

*Lajos* My brother can go to hell.

*Zsazsa* But what are you saying, Lajos!

*Lajos* I mean it. He is one of the mad lot that wanted this war.

*Zsazsa* You shouldn't bother about politics, Lajos.

Lajos           The world order, Zsazsa, is not my fault. But I am its victim. Therefore it bothers me.

Bertold        It was better under the Habsburgs.

Lajos           I agree with you, Bertold.

Zsazsa         But why do you want to go to Budapest, Lajos? There they are all just murdering each other.

Lajos           Exactly. I belong there. My city needs me.

Zsazsa         You will only get shot or put in prison.

Lajos           My prison, Zsazsa, is here, where my family will not allow me to leave our property.

Father (*enters*) Is there any more sherry in the house, Zsazsa? So there you are, Lajos. How are you doing today?

Lajos           Let me free, father. I can walk now.

Father         What do you mean?

Lajos           Let me return to Budapest.

Father         Out of the question.

Lajos           They are destroying my city! I must stop them!

Father (*angry*) You are out of your senses, boy! Don't you know what is going on? The Germans are systematically destroying one quarter after another! No one is safe! Stray bullets will kill anyone!

Lajos    And how can your heart allow you to keep me here, when my city needs me?

Father         You are sick, Lajos.

Lajos           If I am not allowed to go there, I will walk there the whole way.

Father         Not even the trains are reliable any more.

*(Mother enters with Bela)*

Bela           Hello, father. Hello, Lajos.

Father         Bela! You are still alive! Welcome! (*embraces him cordially*) But you look serious.

Bela           The war is getting worse all the time.

Father         What news from Budapest?

Bela           The Russians have taken all Pest, but the Germans fortify themselves in Buda. There could be hard fighting for months.

Father         There you are, Lajos. You can't go back there.

Lajos           You must allow me. It's heartless of you to keep me from it.

Father (*to Bela*) The situation in Budapest has gone to his head.

Bela           How is it, brother? I see that you now walk on a stick.

Lajos           It's getting better every day. Soon I will be able to walk to Budapest.

Bela           Let him go back there, father. He needs it. He has his friends there and can keep away.

Father         Out of the question.

Bela           They might need him better than we. Here he will only get desperate.

Father         It's the shock from the bomb. He hasn't been normal since then.

*Bertold* Pardon an old man's query, Sir, but regardless of wars going on and invalidity, don't we have freedom of movement in this country? And isn't young master Lajos of age?

*Lajos* Thank you, Bertold.

*Bela* You must let him go, father, if that's what he wants.

*Father* Let them then at least finish fighting first!

*Lajos* Then it might already be too late.

*Mother* Too late for what, Lajos?

*Lajos* For me to save what can be saved. Budapest is *my* city. If she is subject to destruction and rape, isn't then the place of her son by her side?

*Father* And what can you do about it, son?

*Lajos* And how do you know, father, that I *can't* do something about it?

*Bela* Let him go.

#### Scene 5.

Blank stage – everything is white.

*Lajos' (voice in the background, possibly recorded)*

I have left Szombathely and journey to Budapest by train. The snow lies pure and white on the ground as far as you can see, it is ice-cold outside, and in every way the world seems frozen to the core. I see nothing but misery and exhaustion everywhere, and it is obvious that the Russians already are more unpopular in our country than ever the Germans were.

In spite of the fact that I know everything to be dead in Budapest and that there are still Nazis left fighting, I long to get there. I have never longed so ardently to get home to my city as I do now from this hell of frozen silence.

The train has stopped outside the city. I am tired to death and intend to spend the night in a hotel. Tomorrow I will continue my journey.

#### Act V scene 1.

*(Here the performance must be added to with pictures or film. You see the war-torn Budapest – there are authentic historical photographs – with all the ruins, as Lajos passes them by, limping on his cane. His monologue could also be recorded beforehand.)*

*Lajos* It is Sunday morning. It is not even seven o'clock yet. Heaven is grey, the air is icingly cold, but everything is quite still. I walk along the quays of Budapest.

No bridges are left. The Chain Bridge descends abruptly into the icy water, and of the Elizabeth Bridge nothing remains except vague ruins. The stately Royal Castle lies in heaps of debris on the mountain hill, and the church of St. Matthias is also badly damaged. Everything is ruined. Gradually I begin to realize that Budapest no longer exists.

I wander through quiet streets where violins used to sing and beautiful girls used to dance. Along this street, by which all the best restaurants were situated, I only find chaotic rubble. Gone are the merry guests, and gone are also the efficient waiters. Even the trees are gone.



*(enter a small ragged beggar boy)*

*Lajos*        *Servus.*  
*boy*         *Servus.*  
*Lajos*        *Where are you parents?*  
*Boy*         *They are dead.*  
*Lajos*        *Where do you live?*  
*Boy*         *I don't know.*  
*Lajos*        *Where did your parents live?*  
*Boy*         *At home.*  
*Lajos*        *Where is your home?*  
*Boy*         *Bombed.*  
*Lajos*        *What was the name of your father?*  
*Boy*         *Baron Erdödi.*

*(Sudden clatter of gunfire. The boy runs away.)*

*Lajos*        *I continue my limp with my cane, and naturally my eyes are all wet. Budapest, which I left four months ago, has during my absence been turned into a ghost.*

There is still some firing going on disturbing the morning silence, but it leaves me completely indifferent. I don't care if a Russian or a German shoots me to death who doesn't even know the name of this city.

The opera is still there but has been damaged and plundered like everything else. In the house of the theatre I find traces of violent fights, ruthless love of destruction and terrible orgies. A dead woman is lying stinking in the orchestra.

But from somewhere I hear the voices of playing children. Their laughter is like echoes from a happy world of yesterday which today is hopelessly dead.

I depart from the theatre to go limping on my stick home to my flat the house of which oddly enough still is standing there. I lock up my door, enter my room and...  
(*enters his flat, reaches his bed, lies down without undressing anything – and bursts into desperate tears of unstoppable heart-rending crying.*)

## Scene 2.

A shabby café, the most basic and primitive thinkable joint.

*Elizabeth sits by herself at a table, smoking a cigarette.*

*Enter after a while Miklos, haggard and war-torn, almost unrecognizable.*

*Miklos* Elizabeth! You here?

*Elizabeth (butts the cigarette calmly)* You also seem to be still alive, Miklos.

*Miklos* It's not to my own credit. Those who survive now are not volunteers for it.

*Elizabeth* But those who do simply have to.

*Miklos* Have you seen Lajos?

*Elizabeth* He is the one I am waiting for.

*Miklos* Here?

*Elizabeth* Yes. We are having lunch here.

*Miklos* Do you mean that you can eat what they serve here?

*Elizabeth* It is black and disgusting but eatable. Rather that kind of food than none at all.

*Miklos* How is their goulash?

*Elizabeth* Fresh diarrhoea.

*Miklos* Well, I suppose that's better than nothing if you have the appetite.

*Elizabeth* But how are you yourself? You look rather wasted.

*Miklos* I *am* wasted. We are all wasted. Hungary is no more. The communists are taking over and are governed by Stalin. All we can do is to organize the resistance.

*Elizabeth* Against Stalin?

*Miklos* He is worse than Hitler.

*Elizabeth* You will be arrested like Raoul Wallenberg and taken away.

*Miklos* Rather that than not to make resistance.

*Elizabeth* Keep Lajos out of it.

*Miklos* Is that what he wants?

*Elizabeth* He is more finished than you. He would let himself be taken away without resistance if he just became a suspect.

*Miklos* Is he that apathetic?

*Elizabeth* No, but passive and indifferent.

*Miklos* How is he?

*Elizabeth* He just keeps crying.

*Miklos* Can he walk?

*Elizabeth* With difficulty.

*Miklos* Our youth, when we were young and happy and owned the whole world and had everything to look forward to, seems gone since a hundred years. But it's just six years ago since we celebrated Lajos' first night, when the war broke out.

*Elizabeth* Don't talk about it. It's two hundred years ago.

*Miklos* How old we have grown!

*Elizabeth* Miklos, you had better leave. Lajos will come any moment. I can't endure crying for both of you.

*Miklos (pats her gently in a farewell)* Take care of him. I have to go. *(leaves)*

*Elizabeth* It will not be easy.

*(You hear Lajos' stumbling steps with his cane before he enters.)*

*Elizabeth has started smoking another cigarette.)*

*Lajos* Have you been waiting for long?

*Elizabeth* No.

*Lajos (indicates the cigarette)* What brand is it?

*Elizabeth* The worst imaginable. Surrogate.

*Lajos (sits down)* Have you ordered?

*Elizabeth* They only have one item on the menu here.

*Lajos* Goulash?

*Elizabeth* So called.

*(A dirty squalid man brings the goulash.)*

*Waiter* Enjoy your meal

*Lajos* Thank you. *(The waiter leaves.)*

*(studies the meal)* What do you call this?

*Elizabeth* You can't get anything better. Eat now.

*Lajos* You have to die sooner or later anyway. *(They eat.)*

*Elizabeth* How are you doing, Lajos?

*Lajos* I am alive. That is bad enough.

*Elizabeth* Do you believe in a life after this one?

*Lajos (stops eating, sighs)* Do you mean a life after death? Or a life after the war?

*Elizabeth* Start with after the war.

*Lajos* The answer is no.

*Elizabeth* Well, what about after death?

*Lajos* I couldn't care less if we are immortal or not, for whatever we are we just have to accept it.

*Elizabeth* You have turned into a philosopher.

Lajos I always was.

Elizabeth Well, what about love?

Lajos (*studies her*) What about love?

Elizabeth Do you believe in it?

Lajos In this new world of only ruins, where all Europe has been deprived of all beauty and all decent and human environment? Europe has lost its identity, Elizabeth. No one has any identity any longer. You can't love without an identity.

Elizabeth The communists have their identity.

Lajos Don't mention them. They have it least of all. They are a grey mass of lack of identity, and in joining that greyness they imagine they get an identity. But it's just fake and lies and deceit like everything else.

Elizabeth And they have the initiative.

Lajos Yes, Stalin has the initiative to imprison all eastern Europe.

Elizabeth So you don't believe in love?

Lajos (*takes her hands on the table*) I loved you once, Elizabeth. You must never doubt that.

Elizabeth I never doubted it. But not any more?

Lajos I am an invalid, Elizabeth. One of my legs is out of order. I can masturbate. That is all.

Elizabeth (*pulls back her hands*) You are bitter.

Lajos Have I not reason to be? If you have reasons for it you should be and can't deny it or repress it. Lying to yourself will only make it worse.

Elizabeth But what's worse indeed is that you have given up.

Lajos No, Elizabeth, I haven't given up.

Elizabeth You have given me up.

Lajos (*takes hold of her hands again*) Elizabeth, I don't wish to torture you with the burden of my failed life. I will never be able to dance again. The only thing I still am capable of to some degree is to join the organization against communism. But it is doomed. It stands no chance against Stalin. It will be extirpated to the last man. They didn't even hesitate to dispose of the neutral Swede Raoul Wallenberg.

Elizabeth Have they shot him?

Lajos They have brought him to Moscow. There he will disappear in the drains like everyone else.

Elizabeth Why?

Lajos Because he persistently continued to buy the lives and freedom of Jews although his diplomatic passport had expired. He stayed in Budapest too long.

Elizabeth So he was arrested for a formality. For that they just let him vanish. The buggers!

Lajos Elizabeth, we had better not see each other any more. I don't wish to include you in the inescapable abyss of perdition that my life is turning into. Leave Hungary while you can. That's the best thing you could do.

Elizabeth And you?



*Lajos* I will remain. I will go under with Budapest. (*rising*) I am leaving now. If you see me in the street, don't recognize me. That would compromise you. The communists are stationing spies and guards and engaging informers everywhere. I only wish the best for you. Forget me. (*lays his hand gently on her shoulder and leaves.*)

*Elizabeth* (*lights another cigarette, tries to hide that she is crying, but can't stop it.*)

Lajos. Miklos. Ferenc. Istvan. Sandor. You are all there. You never give up your freedom. You withstood the Germans in vain, and now you resist the Russians in vain, but you will still stand there even if you all die, for you will never give up. And our tears, mine own and those of other widows and mothers and abandoned sweethearts, will always help you and support you by inexhaustibly flowing on forever. You didn't dance for Hungary in vain, Lajos, and I will never cry in vain for you.

(*manages to pull herself together and dry her tears, and finally:*)

Imre! The bill, please!



Scene 3. Another shabby café.

*The entire mood is synonymous with decay.*

*There are all sorts of clients but subdued, depressed or in decline.*

*Enter Miklos.*

*Miklos* (*turns to the waiter*) I have heard that Lajos comes here at times.

*Waiter* Which Lajos? There are many called Lajos.

*Miklos* The dancer.

Waiter        Oh, the invalid. He is sitting in the corner at the furthest end.  
*(Miklos goes to the furthest end and finds a discreet corner where Lajos sits by a table beneath an old poster advertising himself. He sits quite alone writing.)*

Miklos        Have you started writing your autobiography?  
Lajos         How did you find me here?  
Miklos        I have learned to look for you in the darkest corners of the shabbiest bars.  
Lajos         I am not supposed to be found.  
Miklos        You are only burying yourself alive, Lajos. Come back to us.  
Lajos         Back to whom? Aren't all of you already dead or taken away or waiting for that final service?  
Miklos        They can't take care of all of us, and the smartest will survive.  
Lajos         I have not survived by being smart. I have rather survived against my own will.  
Miklos        Is that choreography you are working on?  
Lajos         Yes. That's the only constructive thing left for me to do in life.  
Miklos        Under the old advertisement of yourself. How can you bear it?  
Lajos         I can't bear it.  
Miklos        Lajos, without company you die. Don't forget your old friends. They are all the same still and active at that and will neither give up nor go under. All those of us who used to be against the Nazis are now against the communists.  
Lajos         Do you want to transform me into a political activist?  
Miklos        No, just return all your old friends to you.  
Lajos         None of us has anything left to live for, Miklos. If I join your underground organization against the communists it will only mean that I will see you all one after the other be taken away and vanish into nothing in an unknown death until I will myself be brought away by the same bottomless road to nothingness.  
Miklos        What else do you have, Lajos, than your wine, your morbidity, your loneliness and your unendurable melancholic dreams of yesterday?  
Lajos         Do you suggest that death among you is better?  
Miklos        Come on once, give us a chance. Show yourself alive and that you are alive. So we may prove to you that *we* are alive.  
Lajos         You are right, Miklos. I have nothing to lose anyway.  
Miklos        That's just what I mean. Even if we die we never give up. It's better than to give up.  
Lajos         Well, Miklos, I will give you a chance, even if it leads to death.  
Miklos        You will not regret it.  
*(Lajos collects his papers, and they move towards the exit together.)*

waiter        A new proselyte and member, Miklos?  
Miklos        The real fight will start now! *(exeunt Miklos and Lajos.)*

Scene 4.

A very shabby place, primitive and provisional.

*Sandor* We are still alive.

*Istvan* But not much more.

*Sandor* But we are many who are still alive. We must not give up!

*Istvan* Most of us have given up.

*Sandor* The more important then that we don't.

*Istvan* You are naïve and unrealistic, Sandor. No one is helping us.

*Sandor* Churchill wanted to help us. Patton wanted to help the Czechs. Churchill helped Tito.

*Istvan* The English voted Churchill out of office as soon as he had won the war for them.

*Sandor* And elected a socialist, who allowed Truman to turn over all Eastern Europe to Stalin.

*Istvan* But is Stalin actually that abominable?

*Sandor* No, Istvan. There is nothing bad about him at all. He is the tender father to the whole world. He takes care of us. By constant surveillance he makes sure that we have everything we need, if we just work for him and are loyal to his only beneficial dictatorship. He did after all save all eastern Europe from capitalism and the decadent democracy. He is our redeemer. He has saved the world. For that we must be grateful. If we fail to be constantly grateful to him and his dictatorship we will be reported by our surveyors and collected in black vans at midnight to be brought to Moscow like Raoul Wallenberg to vanish without a trace in some anonymous concentration camp in some place where no one knows where it is somewhere, where we then will have to be grateful if we may die.

*Istvan* Lucky for you that no one can hear you.

*Sandor* Everyone is welcome to hear me. Don't you realize how important it is that we don't give up to the mortal victory of the total autocracy?

*Ferenc (enters)* Still eagerly debating although the war is over.

*Sandor* The war is not over. It starts now.

*Istvan* Will you fight it alone against the whole Red Army?

*Sandor* What do *you* intend to do, Ferenc?

*Ferenc* Leave the country. There is nothing we can do in Hungary any longer. It is lost to the communists. But we can organize the resistance in the west.

*Istvan* The Russians have Vienna and Berlin.

*Ferenc* But not Paris and London.

*Sandor* When will you leave us?

*Ferenc* As soon as possible. Have you seen Miklos?

*Istvan* He will not abandon us.

*Ferenc* I am not abandoning you. But I am a realist and a strategist. I have accepted that our best possibilities are in London. From there you can do something.

*Miklos (enters)* It will take time, Ferenc. If you give up Hungary as lost and start a new struggle from abroad it might take twenty years for it to succeed. I prefer to stay on here, risk everything and stop communism now, before it has taken all the power.

*Ferenc* You have no chance, Miklos.

*Miklos* And you are a coward.

*Ferenc* No, wise. You want to sacrifice your life for something that cannot succeed. I intend to keep alive and succeed.

*Miklos* You are sacrificing our people!

*Ferenc* No, I will save them in the long run.

*Miklos* It's just an excuse for your cowardice.

*Ferenc* And you are running amuck in your folly.

*Miklos (wants to attack him when Lajos' steps with his cane are heard. All quieten. He enters.)*

*Lajos (tired)* Haven't you grown tired of the war yet?

*Miklos* Lajos! At last!

*Sandor* What are you doing here?

*Lajos* I have nowhere else to go.

*Sandor* You can go abroad like Ferenc.

*Lajos* I will stay here.

*Ferenc* Will you follow Miklos down to his grave?

*Lajos* I will gladly follow Hungary down to her grave, if that's the direction. I understand that you want to fight the communists, Miklos. I agree with you.

*Miklos* So you place yourself at our disposal?

*Sandor* You have communists in the family, Lajos. How do we know that you are not serving the communists as a spy?

*Lajos* I will gladly spy on the communists in my own family on your account.

*Ferenc* Then you risk your life, Lajos, and you can't escape.

*Lajos* I know.

*Istvan (to all)* Friends, Lajos has come back. He is one of us again. *(All agree and express their approval.)*

*Sandor* You know that we are outlaws?

*Lajos* I take that for granted.

*Ferenc* But what can you do, Lajos?

*Lajos* Nothing. I can only show my solidarity with you. I have nothing else to be solidary with.

*Ferenc* Elizabeth?

*Lajos* I have given her up. She must earn her livelihood. I don't want to disturb her new life.

*Sandor* Does she work for the communists?

*Lajos* She is a teacher. She must educate the children as she is instructed.

*Ferenc* Lajos, leave the country with your family. You belong to the aristocracy. That's the best thing for you to do.

*Lajos* That's precisely what I told my family, Ferenc.

*Ferenc* Follow them.

*Lajos* Neither I nor Bela will follow them. But I hope the others will do as you say.

*Sandor (sides with Lajos)* As Bela's brother he could be very useful to us. Don't you see?

*Istvan* Yes, we understand that. But you have to be careful, Lajos. Take no risks.

*Lajos* I know my brother. He will not sacrifice me.

*Sandor* But you might have to sacrifice him.

*Lajos (indifferently)* I already sacrificed Elizabeth.

*Miklos* Good, Lajos, you are one of us, unto death.

*Lajos* Politically I couldn't be more indifferent. But you happy few who still are challenging communism are the only living people in this country. Everyone else is dead.

*Ferenc* No, just enslaved.

*Lajos* It's the same thing, if you don't do anything about it.

*Istvan* Let us be satisfied with this for the time being. Let's now disperse in different directions, one at a time. Our organization is still being built. Caution and stealth is all, until we are ready to strike.

*Ferenc* I will stay in touch with you from abroad.

*Sandor* Good, Ferenc. We rely on that. Don't forget us.

*Ferenc* Never.

*Miklos* Your hand, Ferenc.

*(Miklos and Ferenc shake hands.)*

*Ferenc* It could take twenty, thirty or forty years, but we cannot lose.

*Miklos* There are always shortcuts.

*Ferenc* Unfortunately sensibility is always slow.

*Miklos (pats him kindly)* The main thing is that we have the same goal.

*(The mood is cheerful and cordial when they all break up. Lajos is the last one to rise with some difficulty.)*

## Scene 5.

*Lajos' flat. Everything tells of deep negligence and decay.*

*Lajos* My flat is like an old forgotten and infected garret. I haven't cleaned it for a year, and there are dead rats in the pantry that I haven't bothered to throw out yet. Each day my apartment is getting more depressing, stuffy, dreary, dark and grey, and I will never do anything about it. For we are now living in the brave new world of the atomic bomb, where whole cities with hundreds of thousands of people are annihilated in a moment, where no noble British Empire can shine any longer with human values, beauty and good taste, and where plutonium has become the most precious and expensive metal in the world, which kills anyone who touches it. To manufacture it has become a greater obsession than it ever was for the alchemists to make gold, but while the alchemists failed, the plutonists are successful. And this brave new atomic age of the bomb is a point of no return which no one can do

anything about. It is here to poison the human world forever. (*a knock on the door*)

I hope it is the secret police that has come to carry me away. But it can't be, for it's daytime. (*opens. His father shows up.*)

*Father* My son, have you forgotten us?

*Lajos* Come in, father.

*Father* Why don't you never come home?

*Lajos* What have I to come home to, father? I have no life any more.

*Father* Are you constantly just sitting here in this, hem, rat's nest?

*Lajos* No. In the evenings I sometimes go to a café where I sit and write choreography.

*Father* Don't you see anyone any more?

*Lajos* It sometimes happens there that I meet with some acquaintance. In that case I leave it to him to start a conversation, because I don't like intruding into someone else's area unless he invites me to. Rather soon the acquaintances I meet with cease to accost me. They know after all who I am. They still have a poster there on the wall from my days of success.

*Father* This is no life, Lajos.

*Lajos* I know.

*Father* Come home.

*Lajos* No, father. It is very kind of you to visit me, but there is nothing you can do for me. Leave me alone. Take care of yourselves and let me take care of myself.

*Father* But your life is no life.

*Lajos* That's exactly why you must leave me alone.

*Father* But you must do something!

*Lajos* Do something yourselves! The best thing you could do is to abandon the sinking ship of this country. Get out of here and go to Austria, while it is still possible! But I am staying here.

*Father* Why?

*Lajos* That has got nothing to do with you. Forget your son, denounce him as the doomed failure with a wooden leg he so hopelessly has turned into. Think of the living and forget the dead. From now on I shall be dead to you. If you come back here again I shall keep away or pretend not to be at home. You are crying. You shouldn't have come here. As long as I live I will only give you pain and sorrow. Keep away from me for your own sake.

*Father (cries)* That I should find you here in this condition!

*Lajos* You had better leave, father.

*Father* Your mother is dying.

*Lajos* She will get well at once if she only leaves for Austria.

*Father* We are on our way. Come with us, Lajos.

*Lajos* No, father.

*Father* Are you then seeking your own destruction?

*Lajos* I went down with the old Hungary. I don't want to survive it. They may come any moment from the secret police to collect me. They know I am in touch

with the resistance movement.

*Father* You have no chance!

*Lajos* I know.

*Father (calmer)* I understand how you think and feel, my son, but I shall leave now. Even if we leave everything your brother will remain. He can help you.

*Lajos* He can help himself but not me.

*Father* Do you know what the worst shock was for me in coming here?

*Lajos* No.

*Father* That your flat is a clearer evidence of your decay than you yourself. Don't you never wash?

*Lajos* I sleep with my clothes on and have placed myself outside time. Everything is indifferent to me.

*Father* Even Hungary?

*Lajos* Everything except that.

*Father* We'll stay in touch, my son. We will never abandon you.

*Lajos* Farewell, father. (*His father leaves.*)

There was a car this night that stopped outside my house to collect Dr. Merschner and his wife. They have not come back. Other people collected in the same way in the middle of the night have never come back. Why does such a black can never arrive to collect me?

#### Scene 6.

*Police 1* Bring in the damned prisoner.

(*Miklos is brought in, pinioned, gagged hard with a black gag hard tied between his teeth, tortured almost to irrerecognizability, hardly capable of standing on his feet, but still with unbroken resistance.*) What is this supposed to mean?

*Police 2* The prisoner, comrade major.

*Police 1* But you can hardly interrogate him if he is gagged.

*1* We had to gag him, comrade major. He was so impertinent.

*Police 1 (approaches him and removes the gag)* There. Now at least he will be able to answer a few questions.

*Miklos (at once releases a bloody sputum in his face)*

*2* You see for yourself, comrade major.

*1* I see that the interrogation has a bad start. We had better keep him pinioned. What do you have to gain by that, Miklos?

*Miklos* My freedom by death.

*1* Still stubbornly fanatical? In your youth you were an ardent Catholic. You hated the Nazis more than anything else before and during the war, and since then you have had the bad judgement to direct you collected hatred against the new order.

*Miklos* The new order is worse than Hitler's. Stalin plans to replace all people in eastern Europe with Russians. That's why all free Hungarians, Poles, Czechs and east Germans are being deported to unknown camps of extermination.

1 (*strikes him hard*) I am the one who is speaking here! You are only to answer questions!

*Miklos* You asked me if I was still stubbornly fanatical. The answer is that I am still as democratic as I have always been. That's why I spit in your face because you represent a dictatorship. I wish I could have released such spittles in the face of Stalin.

1 Miklos, you are just being stupid. You don't see what's best for you or for your country. Cooperate, become a party member, expose the resistance movement, and you will have Russian caviar for the rest of your life.

*Miklos* I can't expose a resistance movement which I know nothing about.

1 (*strikes him hard*) You are lying! You are a member yourself and one of its leaders! You know the escaped leader Ferenc since many years! You have collaborated during the entire war! And you know that invalid Lajos, whose family also escaped abroad!

*Miklos* He is just an artist and handicapped at that.

1 That makes him only the more dangerous! His father has fled the country! That compromises the entire family!

*Miklos* You are absurd.

1 Admit that you and Ferenc and Lajos have worked together since the 30s!

*Miklos* We were classmates already as children. That needs no admittance or confession. We have been together as friends all our lives. But none of us knows anything about any resistance movement.

1 (*strikes him hard*) You are lying!

*Miklos* If you hit me again like that my jaws will break, and I won't be able to talk any more.

1 Very well, there are other soft spots. (*knees him in the groin. Miklos doubles up in acute pain.*) Get him up! You can't guess, Miklos, what we can do about your genitals! In that field the Nazis taught us many things.

*Miklos* You are worse than the Nazis, for they had the decency to lose the war, while you stand as victors.

1 Good for you that you realize it. Then you must also realize that victors can do whatever they want. They can rewrite history, for example, and adjust it according to their values. Above all they can get their will with the vanquished. Do you know who lost this war? It's the class society, the nobility, the established gentry, the rich, the educated and privileged. Now it's the dictatorship of the proletariat that is in command. The Hungarian nobility that owned the country we have swept under the carpet where we have stamped them to less than dust. Lajos' father's fine family is swept away with their entire class. We are in command now. And we demand that you tell what you know about the resistance movement.

*Miklos (releases another bloody sputum in the major's face)*



1           Apparently it's safest not to get too close to you. The beast has had his teeth pulled out but still tries to bite. Put him in that chair! Tie his hands to the back! (*Miklos is tied in the chair. The police takes a position on the table above him in front of him.*) Now you shall hear what's expecting you. We can easily break your body, but that won't help, unless your soul follows it down in its ruin. Therefore we have developed a new technique to break down the soul. You are placed in front of a white wall lit up by blinding lights. There you will be kept standing for hours and for days without rest while you will be interminably questioned by policemen who will work by relays. You will at the same time be treated with drugs. You will never be allowed to sleep or rest until you are completely broken. Finally your entire brain will be just pulp and less coherent than a diarrhoea. You will not be able to think nor sleep any more. You will be more apathetic than a zombie. Then you will have no soul any more, we have taken it away from you, and you will only be good for dying. But then you will be forced to live on, and that will be worse than death.

*Miklos*       Was that what you did to Cardinal Mindszenty?

1           I reckoned you were going to mention him. You will actually be able to see him. Bring him in!

(*Two policemen bring an old man, completely apathetic and broken down, with glassy eyes.*)

*Miklos (struck by terror)* Your holiness!

1           He doesn't hear you. He is an idiot.

*Miklos*       What have you done to him?

1           The same that we intend to do with you, if you don't cooperate. Watch him closely! (*goes behind the cardinal like as if to exhibit him*) He was the most brilliant brain in the country, the leader of the opposition, that no one could silence, the most persistent critic in the country, and look at him now.

*Cardinal (completely absent)* I am innocent.

1           That's the only thing he is capable of saying. That's the only thing he can remember. For the rest he has a completely empty mind. Take him away! (*The cardinal is brought out.*)

His crime was to protest and make resistance when we forbade the schools to give lessons in Christianity and wanted to replace it with lectures in Marxism, leninism and communist ideology. But your crimes are worse. You are a damned counter revolutionary!

*Miklos*       No, I am a democrat.

1           Do you want to see your friends like this cardinal? We can bring in your disabled ballet dancer tomorrow and break him down in a few hours! He will be quite unrecognizable! He will not even be able to remember that he once could dance!

*Miklos*       You and all communists are just a bunch of monsters and sadists.

1           No, Miklos, we are the governing order! And in the capacity of governing order it is our duty to maintain order! That means we have to dispose of all the enemies of the governing order! To which bunch belong all critics of the new order and such weak cocksuckers as you and the disfigured ballet dancer!

*Miklos* You use words that only fit yourselves. Only sadistic bullies use such words.

1 So? Then tell me what you know about that SS captain Schönfeld! What did he do to Lajos to make him dance for the Nazis?

*Miklos* I know nothing.

1 (*hits him hard*) You are lying!

*Miklos (tired)* This is meaningless. I am tied up and unarmed, and you just keep on beating me all the time. Shorten the pain instead and shoot me.

1 Not until we have got all out of you that you can tell.

*Miklos* I know nothing.

1 (*hits him hard*) You are lying!

*Miklos (more tired, blurry)* This is inhuman.

1 He is obviously losing his touch. Cast water in his face, so that he doesn't pass out. (*The other one acts accordingly. Miklos wakes a little.*)

You must talk or die, Miklos.

*Miklos* Your governing order, you bloody cocksucker, is just lies and criminality, corruption and inhumanity. You have betrayed our country to its enemies the communists. You have ruined half the world. You are just rot and destruction and incompetence, your entire accursed Russian mafia. All you can do is to lose and perish, all of you.

1 (*takes his pistol and approaches*) Say that again, if you dare.

*Miklos (releases his third bloody sputum)*

1 Gag him, by hell!

2 That's what I told you, major.

1 Listen now, Miklos. We are not just the governing order. We are the order of society. We are the police and government, that guard this country and every man in it. We are the rulers. We have no use of those who don't cooperate. They must be got rid of. They may themselves decide how. If they are careful they will only be placed in labour camps and have perhaps some chance of survival. But if they speak their minds it's their own fault. They will then be taken to court and stand a legal trial which will sentence them to a fair punishment. They may defend themselves as well as they can, but usually there is no defence for their crimes. One of the most unacceptable crimes is to speak denigratingly of Marxism or of anyone in the party. The worst of all crimes is to say anything denigratory of our highest ruling master, our father Stalin. Our society cannot accept denigratory remarks of those who run it. Those who do have only themselves to blame. Do you understand, Miklos! You have only yourself to blame! (*shoots him twice in his genitals. Miklos starts but can't scream. Blood is gushing forth.*)

Release him and let him bleed to death.

2 Shall we remove the gag?

1 No, let him keep it. Let him bleed to death in the most painful imaginable death in silence.

(*Miklos still alive but gagged and pinioned is released from the chair and is carried out copiously bleeding.*)



*Lajos* It's my oldest and best friend. We were childhood friends and classmates. We have followed each other all our lives. It is Miklos.

*Police* He was part of the resistance!

*Lajos* I know nothing about that.

*Police* You are in it yourself!

*Lajos* No.

*Police* You know others in it!

*Lajos* No. They excluded me during the war, when it was still only a resistance movement against the Nazis, because I danced for the Nazis.

*Police* You became a member again after the war!

*Lajos* No.

*Police* You knew their leader Ferenc, who has fled the country!

*Lajos* Yes. He is just as old a friend of mine as Miklos. And it is true that he longer is in the country. You can't murder him like Miklos.

*Police* He had himself to blame! He refused to cooperate!

*Lajos (calmly)* I think he just refused to become an informer. I also refuse to be an informer. You are welcome to kill me for that.

*Police (calms down)* We wish you no harm, Lajos. You have suffered enough. We only want you to cooperate.

*Lajos* I regret to say that I am not much to cooperate with. I live totally alone as a discarded parasite. I can't understand how I could be of any use at all.

*Police* Tell us who are in the resistance and where they meet!

*Lajos* I know nothing about that.

*Police (roars)* You are lying!

*Lajos (calmly)* Kill me then.

*Police (calmer)* We have orders not to harm you.

*Lajos* That was some surprising news. Who would possibly want to protect me?

*Police* Don't you know?

*Lajos* No.

*Police* That's why you were brought here today. He wants to see you.

*Lajos* Who?

*(enter Bela as the consummate communist commissar.)*

*Bela!*

*Bela* Leave us alone, Zoltan.

*Police* Yes, comrade commissar. *(leaves)*

*Lajos* Bela! Have you become one of them?

*Bela* I had no choice. I had to consider the future.

*Lajos* But a communist! You! A commissar!

*Bela* Yes, I have reached high up in the party.

*Lajos* Have all arrow-crossers now turned stalinists?

*Bela* No, but many. And like me they have never been any arrow-crossers before.

*Lajos* So it's you who are stopping them from making short work with me.

*Bela* You are my brother. I regard it my duty to protect you.

*Lajos* What do our parents say?

*Bela* They say nothing any more. They are in safety in Austria. They have lost everything, and mother is dying. If father says anything at all, I fear it will be that he never will forgive me, but I don't care. Necessity obeys no laws.

*Lajos* So you turned communist to survive?

*Bela* And to help up my country to its feet. Unfortunately Stalin is the great victor of the war. We must follow him or perish.

*Lajos* Then you are a worse opportunist than I thought.

*Bela* Come to your senses, Lajos. You have no choice. You must cooperate or perish. Join the party, and you can be employed in the opera again.

*Lajos (laughs bitterly)* As what? Curtain shutter? Watchman behind the scenes?

*Bela* You can have a post in the board, be a teacher and be able to influence the repertoire.

*Lajos (bitterly scornful)* Unfortunately, Bela, I never had any great hopes about your career, but I never expected you to end up such an arse-hole.

*Bela* Take care, Lajos!

*Lajos* I have nothing to lose. That's the difference between us. You have everything to lose.

*Bela* I have everything to win! And I will win it!

*Lajos* By betraying your own country? By plundering your countrymen? By helping and supporting the Russian occupation and Stalin? By being accessory in your own people being liquidated?

*Bela* I warn you, Lajos! I represent and fight for the future!

*Lajos* You said that already in the 30s, when you believed in the good intentions of Hitler.

*Bela* That was back then.

*Lajos* Stalin's intentions are worse than Hitler's. Can't you see?

*Bela* You speak high treason. Comrade Stalin is the best friend and liberator of Hungary. He alone represents freedom in this world, Lajos.

*Lajos* In that case I have nothing more to say to you, Bela, in this life.

*Bela* Not even for Elizabeth?

*Lajos* Elizabeth?

*Bela* Yes. She has also joined the right side.

*Lajos* What do you mean?

*Bela* You ditched her. I saved her. We are to be married. She has joined the party. She is now helping us implementing the party program in the Hungarian school system.

*Lajos* You have poisoned her. You have brainwashed her, like you brainwashed cardinal Mindszenty. You have ravished her soul.

*Bela* Lajos, you don't know what you are saying. She just realizes what's best for her, and so should you, but apparently you don't.

*Lajos (rises)* I never want to see you again, Bela. You know where to find me. (*wants to leave*)

*Bela* You can still save yourself.

*Lajos* I refuse!

*Bela* You must give us the names of the leaders of the resistance!

*Lajos* You know them already. You have already murdered Miklos, and Ferenc will defeat you from abroad.

*Bela* Help us find his contacts in Hungary, and you will forever be left in peace, brother.

*Lajos* How can such a poisonous lethal toad like you be allowed to live, Bela, who has betrayed our free country to both Hitler and Stalin and who acts as your own people's hangman, and who even wants to ruin the future of your country? It's such as you, Bela, that makes the rise of such monsters as Hitler and Stalin possible. Go and lick your own arse until you die, Bela, for no one else will at length be willing to. (*leaves*)

*Bela* Zoltan! (*enter the police*) Issue an order of arrest of the man who just left.

*Police* But he is your brother! You wanted to protect him!

*Bela* No. He is an enemy of the freedom of the people, and nothing can save him.

*Police (cautiously)* But he is just a disabled ballet dancer!

*Bela (bawls)* Do as I say! (*leaves in anger*)

*Police* Yes, comrade commissar. (*sits down and starts writing with a sigh*)

Scene 8. At home, (like act IV scene 2,) with traces of the war.

*Elizabeth* Everything is ruined, and still we are alive. All opposition is smothered, and still it continues. All my love has been torn away from me, and still it lives on. What are we really doing here among the ruins more than haunting them like forlorn ghosts without even being able to express our supreme despair? I don't understand why I am still living, and yet I still have to go on living. (*the doorbell*) Now he comes home. Or is it someone else? Why would *he* ring the doorbell to his own home? Who could it be? (*goes to open. Lets in Sandor.*) Sandor!

*Sandor* There is no danger, Elizabeth. I know he isn't here.

*Elizabeth* But what are you doing here?

*Sandor* I have met Lajos today.

*Elizabeth* Any greetings for me?

*Sandor* Just the usual thing. You should leave the country.

*Elizabeth* I know. But I can't do that as long as Lajos stays on.

*Sandor* So you still feel bound to him, not to Bela.

*Elizabeth* Lajos doesn't want to see me. My only possibility of any contact with Lajos is by Bela, who protects him.

*Sandor* Not any longer.

*Elizabeth* What has happened?

*Sandor* Lajos and Bela have had a settlement. They can never be reconciled.

*Elizabeth* Have they broken with each other?

*Sandor (sighs)* Bela offered Lajos all the gold and riches of Hungary including a position at the opera on the board. Lajos answered by puking him down and calling him by his right names.

*Elizabeth* I always wondered what Bela's right name could be.

*Sandor* It's not a name to mention in the presence of a lady.

*Elizabeth* Could it be 'arse-hole'?

*Sandor (surprised)* Wherever did you get that from?

*Elizabeth* I was always good at reading Lajos' thoughts even at a distance.

*Sandor (sighs)* You don't call a fresh commissar with vast authorities an arse-hole even if you are his brother and have good reasons for it without inevitable consequences like the communists taking care of you, and that's all that Lajos is waiting for.

*Elizabeth* But he is still at large. Bela has not denounced him and might still be protecting him.

*Sandor* Elizabeth, we can't be naïve any longer. If you are stuck in an ideology like communism you could betray your own mother and sell her to a sadistic dungeon hoodlum with a perfectly clear conscience. They have taken away our Swedish friend the diplomat Wallenberg to Lyubyanka without any reason. They have brainwashed our cardinal Mindszenty into a zombie. They have killed Miklos.

*Elizabeth* Is Miklos dead?

*Sandor* They tortured him to death. Bela showed the pictures to Lajos.

*Elizabeth* What will you do?

*Sandor (takes out an army pistol)* Most of all I would like to shoot down Bela as soon as he enters this house.

*Elizabeth* You cannot do that.

*Sandor* At least not before he has arrested Lajos.

*Elizabeth* I don't think he will ever do that. The concord of that family was always above politics.

*Sandor* But Bela believes to be able to survive by absolute loyalty to the party. It's safer to take for granted that he actually is that arsehole that Lajos called him.

*Elizabeth* In that case we are all lost.

*Sandor* Not you. Not I. Elizabeth, I intend to leave country as soon as I hear that Lajos has been arrested. That will be the signal for me. Come with me.

*Elizabeth* I can't abandon Bela until he has abandoned Lajos.

*Sandor* But then?

*Elizabeth* Yes, if he does. Yes, Sandor, then I will come with you. *(The steps of a man in boots are heard outside.)* He is coming, Sandor. Hide. *(Elizabeth opens a cupboard and shuts Sandor in.)*

*Sandor (indicates his gun)* I will keep it ready. *(disappears into the cupboard. Enter Bela.)*

*Elizabeth* Any news, Bela?

*Bela* A difficult day, Elizabeth. (*tosses his gloves and the commissar cap on the table*)

*Elizabeth* Anything new about Lajos?

*Bela* He is lost, Elizabeth. I can't protect him any more.

*Elizabeth* Have you given him up?

*Bela* He refuses to cooperate. I tried to do everything for him. I could even offer him a very advantageous situation. He answered by insulting the entire establishment and making himself its sworn enemy forever.

*Elizabeth* You mean of the party.

*Bela* Elizabeth, we are in the party nowadays. That's why we are surviving.

*Elizabeth* But he is not.

*Bela* No. And he has declared himself never to become one. Thereby he is lost, since everyone knows about his contacts.

*Elizabeth* They are vanishing one by one.

*Bela* Do you know that Miklos is dead?

*Elizabeth* I guessed as much, since he is lost.

*Bela* I can't save stubborn resistance men who refuse to compromise. And Lajos is nowadays one of them.

*Elizabeth* A disabled ballet dancer stamped as a terrorist?

*Bela* It sounds intolerable, but he has taken sides with their party, and he is dangerous by his contacts.

*Elizabeth* Freedom fighters are no terrorists.

*Bela* Don't start that again, Elizabeth. You know that it leads nowhere. No terrorism is sacred, not even if it justifies itself by calling itself freedom.

*Elizabeth* Lajos is no terrorist.

*Bela* Elizabeth, all who are not for the party are against it and fallen as enemies of the state to treason. The war has never ended. It goes on but under colder, crueller and more ruthless circumstances underground. Churchill himself has recommenced it by his open declarations and accusations against the Soviet Union.

*Elizabeth* Have you sacrificed Lajos?

*Bela* I had to.

*Elizabeth* You have already done it?

*Bela* His order of arrest is issued. I could not stop it.

*Elizabeth* And you intend to go on living as usual after having forced your entire family into exile and refused to rescue your own brother?

*Bela* Elizabeth, the family has to survive. I can't fail the family tradition. We have been in the front rank for ages in the dominating establishment of Hungary. You and I can maintain the tradition. It might even become easier when Lajos is gone.

*Elizabeth* No, Bela, it will only become more difficult.

*Bela* The future, Elizabeth! We have to think of the future and forget all ghosts! We must leave the war behind!



*Sandor (climbs out of the cupboard with his gun aimed at Bela)* Get out of the way, Elizabeth, so that I may dismantle this dud.

*Bela (sees no chance of escape)* You stand no chance, Sandor.

*Sandor* I don't care. I will gladly give my life to remove such social tumours as you from Hungary with everything you stand for.

*Bela* You are mistaken, Sandor. I am constructive.

*Sandor* No, you are misguided. You have allowed yourself to be duped by the dictator of the greatest terrorist state in the world. You have been brainwashed by manipulative publicity. And what's worse: you have allowed yourself to be bought.

*Bela* We have to survive, Sandor.

*Sandor* Wrong way, Bela. *(shoots him down)*

*Elizabeth* You murdered him...

*Sandor* ...in the same cold blood that he would have murdered me in and sent thousands of others to their death, among them his own brother and your betrothed. You heard, Elizabeth. "He couldn't stop Lajos' order of arrest." That means he signed it himself. He had the jurisdiction. We must disappear at once. We leave the country tonight.

*Elizabeth* And this lovely home, the safe fortress of the most solid pillars of support for Hungary, a family who served and helped in maintaining Hungary for five centuries?

*Sandor* One rotten egg was enough to make it all go to hell. Come! *(wants to take her hand. She follows him. They hurry out. Bela is left lying dead.)*

#### Scene 9.

Lajos' flat. Night. Dim light.

*Lajos* I love my country, and I will always love my beloved home country. No one can take my love away from me, for it is moulded in my soul, and my soul is the only thing of any value that I am still in possession of.

And whatever the hoodlums of the dictator might do with me, my wonderful homeland will always be alive, if nowhere else, then within my own soul. Let my countrymen betray and deny and even forget their country and abandon it to foreign powers if they like, but I myself will never do so. Germans and Russians may have ruined my life and my Budapest, but in my soul it lives on unchanged in sweeter beauty than ever, and I will always be safekeeping it in my heart.

The Russians are making a big thing out of the horrors of the German concentration camps and all the innocent millions which have been sacrificed therein, but where are they taking their own opponents? Where are all those people sent who every night are being secretly arrested and taken away never to return?

If someone is pointing out the dirt with someone else, he is only the dirtier himself.



Hungary was a peaceful country inhabited by wonderful unpretentious people who didn't in any way challenge or interfere with the world order. They had the most beautiful city in the world for their capital, and they all loved life above all and next to it each other. In spite of all this total innocence, a tyrant vanquished their country, foreign soldiers fought about and destroyed their capital, and all these violent strangers by unmotivated force ruined the lives of uncountable innocent Hungarian people and their future. Why? What did Hungary do to deserve all this?

But quiet! I think it's time. I hear a car of greater size stop outside my apartment house. Are they coming for me, or will they visit my neighbour? My neighbour is probably wondering the same thing. He is hoping desperately that they are coming for me, and so am I. Listen to those secret policemen coming a-clumping up the stairs! (*This is heard.*) They sound exactly like the Germans. They pass my neighbour by. Now they stop just outside my door. Now! (*some hard knocking on the door. Lajos gives a sigh of relief.*) At last it has become my turn. (*opens the door to them.*) (*politely*) Please come in. What can I do for you? (*enter five policemen*)

*police 1*      You have to come with us.

*Lajos*        With pleasure. I have been waiting for you. Are you taking me directly to Lyubyanka, Moscow or Stalin?

*Police 2*      He is limping. He uses a cane.

Police 3        Then we have to carry him.

Lajos            Is it to prevent me from hitting you or escape?

Police 4        No, it's to make it quicker.

Lajos            May I bring anything with me?

Police 5        It's no idea. You are not coming back.

Police 1        Just get dressed and follow with us.

Lajos            I am already dressed.

Police 1        What are we waiting for then? The others are waiting in the van.

Lajos            What others?

Police 1        Others like you. Dangerous students and academicians, teachers and doctors who think for themselves, free-thinkers and other perpetrators of counter espionage.

Lajos            Enemies to the freedom of the people?

Police 2        Exactly.

Lajos            I am sorry, gentlemen, but the only enemy of the people is the power. And the power is just a vain fool consisting only of paranoia.

Police 4        You are a philosopher then.

Lajos            No, ballet dancer.

Police 4 (*indicates the cane*) Was it the war?

Lajos            No, it was the first communist bomb against Budapest.

Police 3        Enough of this nonsense! Get him down!

(*They help him out.*  
*Blackout.*)

*The voice of Lajos* Thus the servants of the autocracy are taking us away who think for ourselves towards what I hope to be a quick death without much pain. But our last hopes are in vain. Like the Jews in Hitler's Germany we are going to be used for slave labour in which we automatically, gradually and insufferably slowly will die from overwork and starvation, like all those prisoners who died in the construction of Stalin's canal to the White Sea. No one admires and learns more from a tyrant than a tyrant.

Here I interrupt the story of my life. There will probably not be much to add, since I most probably will be taken care of more efficiently than all the other prisoners of this black car, most of them being young and fresh students, academicians, doctors, apothecaries, surgeons and former aristocrats, while my good luck has made me an invalid and of no use in hard labour as a good collaborating slave with orders to be happy in my work. But on closer examination most of us are anyway just as incapacitated as myself, for I can't think that anyone of us any longer can find any reason why he should stay alive.

Still I know that we will all be back, like Leslie Howard said in his last film. We will all be back. It's only the dictatorship, evil and stupidity that die forever, since there is nothing else for them to do in their pathetic futility.

*Epilogue.*

*(Ferenc many years later appear in front of the curtain.)*

*Ferenc* It's not enough to just remind of the holocaust and the sufferings of the Jews during the Second World War all the time. What we never must forget is the sufferings of all people during this time, which was only caused by the autocracies and their meaningless capriciousness. And we must also never forget, that these dictatorships rose to power by the fact that ordinary people supported them and willingly gave them the opportunity to totalitarianism, in the case of Germany actually by democratic elections. This risk will always remain, and that's the greatest risk of democracy, that if it is not on its guard against itself it can by voting produce an autocracy again in any state. The only guarantee against the danger of dictatorship is the individual resistance, which is always there, never gives up, which has to be listened to and which in the long run always has proved right and prevailed. *(bows and retires.)*

*The End.*

(10.1.1997,  
translated in November 2020.)