**A DECISION PURE AND SIMPLE**

(a 50 minute drama)

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*" A man who is good for anything ought not to calculate*

*the chance of living or dying; he ought only to consider*

*whether he is doing right or wrong." Socrates*

**CHARACTERS**

Private Otto Schutz A young Austrian, newly conscripted to the German army.

Private Max Schwannbeck A young soldier a few years older than Otto.

Standartenführer Winkler A middle aged S.S. officer.

Sergeant Bielek A hardened platoon leader (30-40s).

Fräulein Inge Gluck The Colonel's secretary (30s)

Nadia A Russian woman partisan (20-40s)

**SET**

The action largely takes place in the Colonel's office and Otto's cell. An area of stage may be left bare for outdoor action.

**Scene One**

A winter's day, March 1943. Sergeant Bielek, in full combat gear, paces up and down trying to keep warm. Private Schwannbeck, machine gun in hand, rushes towards Bielek, stops and salutes.

Bielek Well?

Max We've rounded them up, sir.

Bielek What took you so long, for Christ's sake?

Max Some of the women tried to hide their children, sir.

Bielek Crafty bitches.

Max (breathing heavily) We had to . . . we had to . . . shoot them, sir.

Bielek How many?

Max We just shot, sir. I didn't look.

Bielek How can you shoot people if you don't look, Schwannbeck?

Max They just came at me. They rushed us. I emptied my magazine into them. (close to

 hysteria) I . . . I . . .

Bielek Pull yourself together, Schwannbeck. You're a soldier, not a flaming choir boy.

Max I just kept firing, sir.

Bielek What a waste of ammo. One Russian, one bullet. Remember that. They don't deserve more. (starts counting heads) Is that the lot then? (surveys the scene for a while longer, then stops front stage and addresses the audience)

O.k. you scum. You've got it coming to you. Are you listening? (pause) Some bastard tied cheese wire across the Bryansk-Zukovka road last night. (to audience) Keep those bloody kids quiet! Tied it at neck level. Sliced one of our despatch rider's head clean off his shoulders. (shouts) It was down your road, so I'm holding you responsible. (stands to attention and recites) Directive number 384. The death penalty for fifty to one hundred communists should generally be regarded as suitable atonement for one German soldier's life. (resumes normal tone) However. Today is your lucky day. My orders is to settle for seven. (holds up sheet of paper) Here’s the list. You know who you are, so let's be having you. (no response) No? No volunteers? (shouts) Kaltenberg! Kleist! Schwannbeck! (two soldiers come running onto the stage) (to the audience) I’m giving you a last chance, for Christ’s sake. (pause as he surveys the audience) Ivan bloody cretins . . . stick together like cackie to a blanket. (to the soldiers) Squad formation! (the two soldiers aim their sub-machine guns at the audience. Women and children are heard to scream)

Max But the children, sir?

Bielek I said squad formation! (Max reluctantly takes aim) Take aim. Fire!

(A rattle of machine gun fire, a flash of light, screams. Black Out.)

**Scene Two**

The sound of a mouth accordion playing 'Deutschland Uber Alles' fades up in the darkness. The lights rise on Sergeant Bielek and Max Schwannbeck who are on guard duty outside battalion headquarters. It is early afternoon. Nadia walks on carrying a heavy load of washing in a basket.

Bielek (stops playing the mouth organ. He sniffs the air appreciatively) Mmm, the sweet perfume of a female animal. (notices Max is still rigidly on guard) Oh, for crying out loud, Schwannbeck. Stand at ease, won't you. You're making me nervous. (Nadia starts to hang the washing on a make-shift line)

Max But in the event of a sudden attack, sir . . .

Bielek Ivan doesn't like daylight; you know that as well as I do. (lights up a cigarette)

Max What about the ambush yesterday? That happened in full daylight. (Bielek snorts with derision. After a silence Max speaks) I could do with a fag.

Bielek Piss off.

Max I didn't ask for one.

Bielek You've got a nerve.

Max I didn't ask.

Bielek And now he's going to sulk. (turns his attention to Nadia) Got a good rump on her,

 that one. Knocks spots off 'two fag' Annie.

Max Who?

Bielek Don’t give me ‘who?’ Used to be 'four fag' Annie 'til she got the clap. (Max shakes his head) No? Guarding our precious health, are we? Keeping our dick clean for some bird back home? (Bielek moves across to Nadia) Hello my lovely. And who might you be? (slowly) What is your name? (eventually in Russian) Kak tibia zavout?

Nadia Nadia Petrovna Terishkova.

Bielek Nadia. (encircles her from behind) Nadia.

Nadia Shto?

Bielek (mimics) Shto.

Nadia (trying to wriggle away) Prostitia, poshalsta . . .

Bielek (laughingly to Max) First encircle the enemy then ram home your advantage. (makes an obscene gesture with his hips. Nadia desperately tries to escape) Look, look. She's egging me on, the hot little bitch.

Max Sexual relations are forbidden with enemy women, sir. Manual X-12, Deportment in Occupied Territories.

Bielek Don't try and teach your granny to suck eggs, Schwannbeck.

Otto (walks up to Bielek, stops and salutes) Private Schutz, sir, reporting for duty.

Bielek What the . . . can’t you see, I'm busy? (Otto continues to stand to attention) Jesus! How many puritans are there in this battalion? (lets go of Nadia, who makes good her escape) Dosvidania, my lovely. (noticing Otto's black eye) Been in a fight, Schutz?

Otto No sir.

Bielek (mimics) No sir. (pause) Tripped over your willy, did you?

Otto No sir.

Bielek Don't tell me you like your women to play rough.

Otto No sir.

Bielek Stop saying 'no sir'.

Otto Yes sir.

Bielek Are you taking the piss?

Otto Captain Mulhaus lost his temper, sir.

Bielek Did he now? Might one enquire why?

Otto (deeply shamed) For unsoldierly behaviour.

Bielek (assuming sexual indiscretion) Oh? Who’d have thought it – (ironic) Wolfgang

 bleeding Amadeus Mozart?

Otto An old woman in Seredina, sir. She'd taken quite a beating when the S.S. . . . (searches for the right word) . . . passed through the village.

Bielek An old woman? Are you a bit of a perv?

Otto I helped her get onto her feet, sir, that's all. She was terrified. I couldn't just walk past.

Bielek Couldn't you?

Otto No.

Bielek (sighs) Let me tell you a story, Schutz. About a little old biddy just like yours. A

real sweetheart. She used to sing us the Horst Wessel song, just to make us feel at home. Personally that song makes me want to puke, but what the hell, we were a long way from Blighty. What we didn't know was that we'd hanged two of her sons that very year. Do you know how many officers she managed to kill before we rumbled her? Seven. With that long silver hat pin of hers. Woosh, straight through the ear and into the brain. (pause) Don't go helping little old ladies cross the road, Schutz. We're not in the boy scouts now.

 (Black out)

**Scene Three**

Out of the darkness comes the sound of Brahms' German Requiem. The lights rise slowly on a giant swastika which hangs on the wall. Winkler is seated at his desk beating time to the music. A few moments pass and Inge enters carrying an attaché case and files. She pauses then closes the door quietly behind her. Winkler continues conducting to himself, oblivious of her presence. She walks up behind him and switches off the music.

Winkler (jumping) Jesus! Oh, it's you.

Inge (saluting) Heil Hitler.

Winkler (a cursory salute) Heil Hitler. (trying to recover his composure) Why didn't you knock? I could have shot you.

Inge (picking up a pistol from his desk) Hardly. You should keep it on you, Hans. That's where it belongs.

Winkler A pistol and Brahms don't mix. Don't you understand anything? (work mode) Have you finished the list?

Inge (hanging up her coat) It's terribly long. I had to work right through the . . .

Winkler No list which catalogues enemy dead is too long for a good German.

Inge I worked all last night; late into the night.

Winkler We must keep records of everything. Everything must be listed, filed, ready for inspection.

Inge The same date, the same disease. Only the names ever changed. There's over a thousand of them. That's an awful lot of names.

Winkler Let me see.

Inge (hands him the file) My eyes are aching.

Winkler (reading) Silberman, Silver, Simonovitch, Sacherman . . . (sighs with pleasure) All taken care of. Doesn't it look neat? Yes, you've done a good job. (reads further then stops suddenly) Is that how you spell tuberculosis?

Inge Isn’t it?

Winkler I hope so. For your sake. I wouldn't envy you having to type the whole lot out again. (watching her closely) Didn't you think it somehow odd they all died of tuberculosis on the same afternoon?

Inge No. It's a jolly contagious disease.

Winkler Yes. It is. Jolly contagious.

Inge A pity more of them couldn't die of it, really.

Winkler (handing back list) Don't worry. They will.

Inge I've finished the Zukovka file. I've done extra copies for Reich Security Head Office. It is triple classified, isn't it? (she hands him one of her files)

Winkler Yes. (reading a document from a file) Damn it! You tell them the quota's seven, and what do they do? Liquidate thirty seven. It's a mess. The numbers don’t add up. (drums his pen up and down on the desk as he thinks. Finally, he alters something in the file) Re-type this sheet. Make it . . . seven hostages and thirty partisans.

Inge But no weapons were found. And most of them were children.

Winkler (pauses) True. You have a point, Inge. (thinks some more) We'll make it seven hostages, twelve suspected partisans and eighteen juveniles . . . for refusing to reveal the location of weapons, as yet unfound. (pause) It may not be quite the truth, but it's as near as damn it. A Bolshevik child is born with a grenade in its hand. At six they’re wielding machine guns. I can't understand why the Reichsführer doesn't step up the sterilisation programme in the Eastern Territories. It would save bullets in the long run. (notices Inge has stopped taking dictation) Inge? (Inge bursts into tears) What the blazes?

Inge I don’t feel well.

Winkler (sighs) One of those women's things, is it? (Inge continues to cry) You know I care about you. But Inge, there are limits.

Inge Anna-Maria died yesterday.

Winkler So?

Inge Partisans blew up her train outside Dubrovka. Bryansk isn't safe anymore.

Winkler It never has been safe. That’s why we’re here.

Inge They've set fire to whole streets.

Winkler (correcting) Houses. One or two houses.

Inge What else is a street, if not houses?

Winkler That's defeatist language. I'm sick to death of it.

Inge I'm frightened, Hans. I'm scared of dying before I've done my duty - my woman's duty. Every year, every woman, a child for the Führer. (sobs) I'm thirty four. Time's running out.

Winkler Nonsense. You've got a fine constitution.

Inge So did Anna-Maria.

Winkler She shouldn't have used the Dubrovka line. It's crawling with Reds.

Inge Everywhere's crawling with Reds. Oh, Hansie, hold me, please.

Winkler (looks towards door to check it's safe, then holds her) I hate it when you cry.

Inge I want to help strengthen the German race, but I can't do it alone, Hans. All around us, Slavs, Slav children, Jews. My Aryan blood is going to waste. (pause) I know we've always made sure to be careful, but this isn't a time for caution. It's a time for action. Let's get married and have a baby.

Winkler (moves away from her) You forget my wife.

Inge So do you when it's convenient.

Winkler And Ursula. She needs a father.

Inge I need a husband.

Winkler This is no time for divorce. Look around you, woman.

Inge But you don't love her. Isn't that what you’ve always told me?

Winkler Love, love, love. (kisses her forehead) There is only one love. (looks towards Hitler's portrait on the wall) Our Führer. (pause) All the rest is . . . tinsel. Even my little Ursula. Even she . . . (pauses, then removes a photo from his wallet, looks at it and laugh) Half her teeth are missing now, the little imp. She's getting more and more like me, don't you think?

Inge I'll never have a child. By the time the war ends it'll be too late.

Winkler “National Socialism is not a doctrine of happiness or good luck. It's a doctrine of work, a doctrine of struggle and thus also a doctrine of sacrifice” (he rips the photo methodically in four pieces and lets them drop into the bin)

Inge (calmed a little) The Führer's words.

Winkler And we must trust him, Inge. We must take comfort in discipline. Discipline in a time of chaos, like a stern granite rock in a tumultuous sea. (after consideration) A granite-faced rock in a tumultuous sea. (smiles) It needs tinkering with, but it's a promising line.

Inge Poetry? How can you think of poetry when thousands of men are dying at the Front? Poetry won't replace them. Oh God, I can't bear it. Carrying this factory in my belly and letting it go to waste. Hans, give me a child! If you won't marry me, at least give me a child, or I'll go with one of your soldiers, I'll go with anyone who's a decent healthy Aryan - I don't care what he looks like.

Winkler (seizes her) You slut. You . . .

Inge Give me a son, Hans. A son for the Führer.

Winkler Don’t you think I dream of it?

Inge You’re a warrior, Hans. A warrior deserves sons.

Winkler You know my wife . . .

Inge She can’t give you any more children, Hans. But I can.

Winkler (pause) A son.

Inge A boy soldier from my body. (she kisses him) I'll leave of course. Before anything shows.

Winkler We can’t risk scandal.

Inge I’ll go back to Freiburg. I still have family there.

Winkler No. You’ll go to Munich. My brother and his wife will adopt the baby.

Inge Anything, Hans. Just give me a child.

Winkler Yes. (strokes her face gently) Something important will remain . . . when we’re no longer together. (he kisses her)

Inge Now, darling. Right here. Right now.

Winkler Yes. It’s fitting. Here, at the very hub. Under the eyes of our Führer. (he starts to unbuckle his belt)

 (Black out)

**Scene Four**

Early morning. Max is sitting on a stool peeling potatoes. Otto is helping him. Max hurls a newly peeled potato into a large metal bucket at his feet.

Max One hundred and thirty two. (picks up the next potato) It's alright for you. You've wrapped him right round your little finger. I mean, you answer him back and all he gives you is a belly laugh. I take my gear off for half a minute because I'm exhausted, and what do I get? Five hundred bloody potatoes. (observes Otto peeling) Don't worry about leaving bits of skin on. This isn't the Cafe Royale.

Otto (laughs) I was working at the Hotel Sacher before call up. In the kitchens. It must show.

Max Were you training to be a chef then?

Otto No such luck. Washing and drying, a bit of sweeping, that's what I do. But if I work hard . . . who knows? Me and my brother, we might start up our own place.

Max This is your first week, isn't it?

Otto Yes.

Max I've been out here two months.

Otto What's it like?

Max Bloody awful.

Otto I can imagine.

Max (bitter laugh) Can you? (pause) Wait 'til you're sent on a liquidation sortie. That'll give you a taste of what bloody awful really means.

Otto It scares me. Thinking about what I've got to do.

Max Don't think. Just shoot. (pause) They say it comes naturally in the end. Christ knows how.

Otto I should have told them back in Vienna, right at the beginning. I should have told them I can't.

Max Can't what?

Otto (pause) Kill people.

Max (drops his voice) Are you mad? Don’t go round saying things like that. Don’t even

 think them.

Otto I hoped it'd all be over before I got to the Front. I suppose I was hoping for some sort of miracle.

Max It'll need more than a miracle to put an end to this shit. It'll go on 'til the last man drops.

Otto Maybe they’ll turn a blind eye.

Max (amazed at his naivety) You are joking?

Otto I can be useful. I’m more useful alive than dead, surely?

Max (grabs him by the lapels) No. Dead is useful. Dead puts the fear of God up the rest of us. Otherwise we’d all go home.

Otto I just can’t kill another human being.

Max You'll have to. We’ve all had to. There's no way out. (throws peeled potatoe into bucket) One hundred and thirty three. (long pause) Do you ever think about sex?

Otto Sometimes.

Max I can't stop thinking about it. (pause) Have you actually, you know . . .?

Otto Not yet. Have you?

Max Three times. It's bloody fantastic.

Otto (pause) I heard my Aunt and Uncle once. Through the wall. She cried at the end.

Max That's when they've really enjoyed it.

Otto To think you can do that for someone. Make them cry, and they're happy. Something as simple as that. I'd be so proud.

Max I tell you, it's fantastic. It’s the best thing ever. (seizes Otto by lapels) I've got to survive this bloody war. I've got to live, Otto. Three times isn't enough. I haven't had my proper turn.

Otto (soothing him) You'll live. Of course you'll live.

Max You a chef, me a doctor, eh? I can't see it.

Otto (impressed) You’re a doctor?

Max Would have been. I had another two years training to go. I was going to be a paediatrician.

Otto You must know an awful lot.

Max You think so?

Otto To be a doctor.

Max There's plenty I don't know. How to shoot a child, for example, without unpleasant side effects like guilt, nightmares . . . self-disgust. They don't teach you that at medical school. (he holds up the potato he's just peeled and observes it) White and pure like a corpse. One hundred and . . . (has lost count) Ach, who's counting? (he flings it into the bucket)

**Scene Five**

A few weeks later in Winkler's office. Otto stands bare headed in front of Winkler. Fräulein Gluck is busy filing.

Winkler You shot above their heads? You have the temerity to stand there and tell me you shot above their heads! What sort of degenerate animal are you?

Otto I'm not . . .

Winkler Don't answer back. (pause) Well?

Otto I'm a soldier, sir. Fighting soldiers. I don't shoot innocent civilians.

Winkler Innocent? In this cesspit of a country, there are no innocents. There is only them and us. Do you understand that? Them and us.

Otto Two hundred women and children, sir?

Winkler Terror is the only way to smash resistance. That’s why we use it. (pause) Unfortunately, over time, people become immune to small doses. Yes. We shoot women - and children too. Would you let those children grow up to avenge their parents?

Otto I've asked to be an orderly, sir? I'd be very good in the kitchens.

Winkler What you wish, or do not wish, is of supreme irrelevance, Schutz. Damn it, man; there are Jewish Bolshevist commisars in every dacha, and you have the affrontery to shoot above their heads. Fräulein Gluck.

Inge (rising from desk) Yes, Standartenführer.

Winkler Read out the document received from B Platoon this morning.

Inge Yes, Standartenführer. (she extracts a page from her out-tray)

Winkler (to Otto) Listen carefully, Schutz. It was found yesterday on a dead partisan - a girl, barely fifteen years old.

Inge (reads) “Hunting a German is similar to hunting partridges. One creeps up to a partridge whilst it is singing, and hides when it looks around. The same applies to a German sentry. Armed with a hatchet, one creeps up to him in the dark . . . “

Winkler (to Inge) Enough. How does it feel to be a partridge, Schutz? It certainly ruffles my feathers.

Otto I still think . . .

Winkler It’s not your place to think. You have no right to think. (picks up another piece of paper and hands it to him) Read this. (Otto does so) All deserters or cowards in the face of the enemy. All shot. It's not a long list, Schutz. General Wengler would like to keep it that way. (pause) Well? What have you to say for yourself now?

Otto (pause) Nothing.

Winkler Nothing?

Otto Nothing you would understand.

Winkler You've got a nerve. (pause) You hardly excelled at school, did you, Schutz? Couldn't even pass your first grades, according to the records. I'd be humbler if I were you.

Otto I don't pretend to be clever, sir.

Winkler Look at me. (Otto is too nervous to obey) Look at me, Schutz. (Otto looks up at him) What do you see? (no reply) Well?

Otto A man, sir.

Winkler (explodes) A man? Stand to attention, you miserable pile of dog excrement! And cage your eyes when you address rank. (Otto does so) I am Standartenführer Winkler of the 4th S.S. Panzer Grenadier Division 'Polizei'. My word is law. I issue orders, they are obeyed. I receive orders, I obey them. The chain of command, Schutz. Without it there is chaos. Understood? (shouts) Face down on the floor! (he kicks Otto, who drops onto the floor) Fräulein Gluck.

Inge Yes, Standartenführer.

Winkler My stopwatch. (Winkler puts his foot onto Otto's back) We’ll see what sort of stuff you're made of. (Fräulein Gluck brings the stopwatch to Winkler) Good. (smelling her appreciatively) Hmm.

Inge A consignment from France. Gerde got it for me.

Winkler (smelling with his eyes closed) Mimosa from Provence. It's almost summer there now. Outdoor cafes at Cannes. Exquisite wines. The people are almost civilised.

Otto Sir, I . . .

Winkler Silence, animal! Listen to me! You'll do thirty press ups in one minute. Fräulein Gluck. I want you to count them. (sets the stop watch then gives it to Inge) Let’s see how badly you want to live, Schutz. If you manage thirty, I won't have you shot. I'll give you a damn good thrashing on your bare buttocks instead.

Otto Sir . . .

Winkler Silence! Onto your hands, Schutz. Up onto your hands! (Otto gets into position) (to Inge) Set the watch to zero?

Inge Yes, Standartenführer.

Winkler Three, two, one, go! (Otto starts vigorous press ups) That's more like it. A bit of hard graft. A bit of pain. A bit of discipline. We'll sweat those ideas out of you. How does it feel, Schutz, to be fighting for your life? You're within inches of your execrable little life. Keep those arms rigid! No bending at the knees or you'll feel my boot in your bollocks. Discipline. There's no reasoning. You do it. And you do it at the double. No action, no pastime, no existence is beyond discipline.

Inge Twenty seconds left.

Winkler Twenty seconds and we'll know whether you live or die, Schutz. Look at you. Just like the rest of us. Pumping away for dear life.

Inge (counting down) Ten, nine, eight, seven . . .

Winkler (to Otto) So close to life, you can smell it.

Inge . . . three, two, one.

Winkler Stop! (Otto collapses. To Inge) Well? (Otto rolls onto his back and looks up at Inge) How did our young Tyrolean hero do?

Inge (looks at Otto, then replies) Thirty, Standartenführer.

Winkler (ironic) Really? (grabs Otto by the hair) Did you hear what Fräulein Gluck said?

Otto (scarcely able to breathe) Yes, sir.

Winkler Did you count thirty? (Otto hesitates) Did you?

Otto Yes, sir. I counted thirty, sir.

Winkler (triumphant) Ha! You’re a liar, Schutz. You’re lying to save your own miserable hide. (to Otto) Now do you understand the power of terror? (sniffs the air) The little saint has shat his pants. (pause) It was twenty five press ups, Schutz. (to Inge) Oh, I don’t blame you, Fräulein Gluck. In the heat of the moment, numbers can get quite confusing. (to Otto) Stand to attention!

Otto (does so) Yes, sir.

Winkler (pause) What shall we do with him, Fräulein? You decide. An early birthday present.

Inge (She looks at Otto) If I say yes, you'll have him shot?

Winkler Tomorrow at dawn.

Inge He should die, of course. There's no doubt about that. (stops for a second and looks into Otto's eyes) But there's something about him. His physique. It's so clean, so . . .

Winkler Yes. It's a fine young body.

Inge (aside to Winkler) Hans, I can imagine our son with eyes like that, and his face, his shoulders . . . Let's celebrate with an act of mercy.

Winkler (laughs) Thank God this war isn't run by women.

Inge It's what I want.

Winkler I'm giving you a second chance, Schutz. You can thank Fräulein Gluck for that.

Otto God bless you, Fraülein. Thank you.

Inge (to Otto) You won’t disappoint me, will you?

Otto No, no, I won't.

Inge Be true to your uniform. And if death comes, may it be heroic.

Winkler Six days in the cooler and my belt across your buttocks, Schutz.

Otto Thank you, sir.

Winkler (laughs) Don't mention it. The pleasure will be all mine. (turning serious) Don't think I've forgotten your crime, Schutz. When the next consignment of hostages are due for liquidation, you'll be there. And I can guarantee you won't be shooting above their heads. Understood? (no reply. Winkler shouts) Understood?

 (Black out)

**Scene six**

Late afternoon on open ground. Sargeant Bielek and Private Schwannbeck stand guard as a file of Jews are taken to their execution.

Bielek (shouting and gesturing) Hey, you over there! Keep moving. Keep up with the others. Oh, for crying out loud; don't worry about your kid's bleeding shoelace. (to Max) They won't be needing shoes where they're going. (more gesturing) That's it. Keep the line moving.

Max That one over there – he doesn’t look Jewish.

Bielek Well, maybe his mother fancied a bit of how's your father with one of us. And who could blame her?

Max You wouldn't sleep with a Jewess, would you?

Bielek Why not? They're real goers.

Max But the Führer's racial policies . . .

Bielek Sod the Führer's racial policies. He can stick them up his arse, for all I care. (pause) God, this is a cushy number. They're so bloody obliging. Give them a rifle and they'd do the job for us. (shouts) That's right, madam; follow the pied piper!

Max Half of them have got scurvy. They're in appalling condition. (notices someone in the crowd) Thyrotoxicosis.

Bielek What?

Max Her. The one in the red headscarf. She's got an over-active thyroid.

Bielek You don't say?

Max There's a cure for that now, you know.

Bielek Yes. A bullet through the head. (Max goes silent. Mockingly) Cheer up, Herr Dr Schwannbeck. When the war's over you'll be coining it. (pause) Look, we're doing them a favour. We’re giving nature a helping hand, that’s all. (shouts) Kaltenberg! Carry on down the line. We'll bring up the rear. (to Max) Just in case some of the buggers try to make a run for it. It hits them at the end, when they see the pit and the machine guns. (pause) Pity Schutz isn't here.

Max He's on the firing squad, isn't he?

Bielek Schutz? No. He's playing the saint and martyr.

Max You mean he refused?

Bielek I did all I could to persuade him.

Max Jesus.

Bielek Stubborn little bleeder. Could have been a good soldier, too. Eager as hell. Not afraid of hard work. Quite liked him.

Max He's going to die. He must know that.

Bielek Good Catholic boy. Reward in heaven. That sort of thing. (takes out a cigarette, offers one to Max who accepts)

Max Thanks, sir.

Bielek (lighting both cigarettes) Principles, Schwannbeck. They don't come cheap these days. Since this pile of shit started, the price of principles has shot sky high. Moral inflation, that's what I call it. (pause) They say there's tarts in heaven who can do things with bananas that would make your wings drop off.

Max I haven't eaten a banana since . . . (tries to remember)

Bielek They don't eat them, Schwannbeck. (Screaming followed by a sudden burst of machine gun fire. Both men are silent)

Max (pause) It must be peaceful in heaven. No more struggle. No more fear. No more death. Do you really think it’s possible to escape all this?

Bielek Get on the wrong side of a mine, my son. You'll soon find out.

 (Black out)

**Scene Seven**

Otto sits alone in a room devoid of furniture except for a camp bed and stool. There are bars on the window. A bucket stands at the side of the bed. It is early afternoon. He holds a Rosary and is praying.

Winkler (flings open the door and enters. Otto stands to attention) Saluting won't save you now, Schutz.

Otto Sir.

Winkler Your appeal has failed. The papers are all in order. Procedure has been followed to the letter. (silence) Do you understand what I'm saying? Sentence will be carried out by firing squad tomorrow at dawn. (he stops, expecting some reaction from Otto) You're to be shot, Private Schutz. By members of your own platoon. It'll be a salutary lesson to them. Well? (Otto is still silent) You've always been very vocal up to now.

Otto Are you really going to shoot me?

Winkler Good God, man, not me. Your platoon. Didn't you hear what I said? (pause) If it were up to me I'd have you hanged. You're a waste of bullets. (pause) However, Wehrmacht regulations are Wehrmacht regulations. (no response. He removes a letter from his pocket and opens it) Your mother wrote a most touching letter on your behalf.

Otto (shaking with emotion) Poor mother.

Winkler Poor mother indeed.

Otto (looking towards the letter) Is . . . that the letter?

Winkler She suggested we transfer you to Divisional Services. You'd make a first class cook apparently. By all accounts, your potato pancakes are unsurpassed.

Otto May I see the letter?

Winkler (correcting) Sir.

Otto May I see the letter, sir.

Winkler (Winkler folds the letter carefully and puts it back in his pocket) All documents pertaining to your appeal are the property of the Third Reich - an insignificant, but integral part of the war archive.

Otto Please, sir. As one human being to another.

Winkler (bitter) Human? You really haven’t grasped the enormity of your despicable

 actions, have you, Schutz?

Otto They're the last words she'll ever say to me.

Winkler You’re charged with cowardice in the face of the enemy. I have no favours to give cowards and traitors.

Otto I'm not a coward.

Winkler Three signatures on your death warrant say you are.

Otto I'm being shot because I can't live under your terms. Is that cowardice?

Winkler (false sweetness) Oh, you’d like a separate charge, would you? All of your own?

Otto I don't want people to think of me like that. It's not fair.

Winkler (shouts) Fair? This is war, Schutz! (controls himself) You wouldn't shoot women and children, would you? Innocent civilians, you claim? Try telling that to Fräulein Gluck. Try telling her how innocent they are. That is, if you can find the pieces; if you can put her back together into some sort of recognisable shape. (increasingly emotional) One of those 'innocent' women you've decided to throw your life away for planted a bomb under my desk. A bomb, Schutz. It was only by sheer fluke I was out of the room at the time. Otherwise I wouldn't be standing here now talking to you. (pause) But Fräulein Gluck . . . (turns away to hide his emotions) . . . She was a good woman. A good loyal German. It was her dearest ambition to be a mother . . . (mustering his strength) She was innocent. But that doesn't worry you, does it? You'd spare those monstrous Bolshevik hags, but a good, dutiful German woman - no, you'd let her die. Because that's what it amounts to, Schutz. That's the logical consequence of your cowardly beliefs.

Otto It's not that simple. (struggles for the right words) I . . . hope and trust Fräulein Gluck is with God.

Winkler It's not God she wanted to be with. (pause) It's against your religion, isn't it, to commit suicide?

Otto I'm not committing suicide.

Winkler As near as damn it. You had every chance.

Otto I had no choice. What right do I have to destroy a life? A life as precious to God as mine, as yours, as all of ours?

Winkler You're out on a limb, Schutz. You should have listened more carefully to the Padre.

Otto No. He should have listened more carefully to God and his conscience.

Winkler Those hostages were shot anyway. And we'll keep on shooting. You've achieved nothing.

Otto Nothing you can measure.

Winkler If you can't measure it, it's not worth having.

Otto (pause) It's so simple when you listen to your own heart. When you really listen, the choice is made for you. I know what I simply can't do. I can't pick up a gun and shoot a child, or a woman . . . or even a man. Whatever happens after that shouldn't be my concern.

Winkler A very pretty little sermon, Schutz. You should have been a priest, not a soldier.

Otto I wouldn't have made a very good priest.

Winkler Well, you certainly didn't make much of a soldier. (walks towards the door) Incidentally, your body will be buried in sacred soil. It was your mother's request. You can thank the Padre for that - conscience, or no conscience. It's a pretty little cemetery - what there is left of it. (opening the door) I quite envy you a young death. (pause) It avoids the disappointment of middle age. (exit)

**Scene eight**

Sunset the same day. Otto is sitting on the stool writing a letter on his knees. Nadia, badly bruised and unconscious, lies on the bed. The door is unbolted and Max enters, armed and in full uniform.

Otto (rising) Max.

Max Sh! I'm not supposed to be here. It's o.k. Kaltenberg's on duty. I've slipped him some fags.

Otto (after an embarrassed pause) Come in. Sit down. Make yourself at home.

Max (looking around) Thanks. (pulls out small bottle) I thought you might need it. Schnapps. (takes a swig to hide his awkwardness) Ach, it’s rough. (hands him the bottle)

Otto Thanks. (Otto takes a swig)

Max Dutch courage, you know . . . (laughs nervously) . . . for tomorrow. Sorry . . . I’m no good at funerals. (realises his gaffe) Not that . . .

Otto Max, really. I'm glad you're here. (Otto hands him back the schnapps)

Max Thanks. (indicates Nadia) They gave her the works. We could hear her screaming from Olenkaya. (takes another swig) She made an awful mess of Fräulein Gluck. Pieces everywhere. Like she'd hit a bloody mincing machine. (increasingly distressed, swigs more schnapps) A jawbone, a gold tooth, half a tongue, like something out of a tin, like something you could have eaten . . . (he starts to retch)

Otto Poor Max. (Otto wipes Max's mouth with a handkerchief) Try not to think about it.

Max The bodies explode, you see. It's the gases breaking out. (pause) You've not been there. You've not smelt what you can do to another human being. You’ve not looked inside the pit. Like white sardines packed in so tight only their heads show, some of them still moving, lifting their arms to show they're still alive. And we have to pick them off, the one's still moving, like target practice. Bang! Bang! More and more white bodies walking down into the pit, sliding across the heads, falling down beside them, and . . . Bang! Bang! The more you shoot the more it goes on. (pauses and looks at Otto) I thought you were mad - to throw away your life, even in a hell hole like this. I thought you were mad. But you're not, are you?

Otto I'm frightened, though.

Max (seizing him) Well so am I. All the time. I can do things to other human beings I couldn't even have dreamt of a year ago. I hate myself.

Otto There's a reason for all this, Max. There's a reason, if only we knew.

Max Sod reasons! I want it all to end.

Otto We'll all be free of this soon. You’ve got to believe that.

Max Listen to me, talking about death, when . . .

Otto (Nadia groans) Can't we make her more comfortable?

Max What's the point. They're going to hang her tomorrow.

Otto They, Max. They're going to hang her. Not us. We can still do something, now.

 (Max goes over to Nadia, lifts up her skirt and examines her leg) What do you think?

Max Badly bruised. A possible fracture. (he hands Otto a handkerchief) Here. Dip that in water. We can try and bring down the swelling. Have you got any iodine?

Otto No.

Max Pity. (Otto dips the handkerchief in his bucket of water, comes over and starts to wash down Nadia's leg) There’s always a risk of septicaemia.

Otto (washing her legs) At least she'll feel cleaner. That's something.

Max We could try a solution of schnapps and water to disinfect the . . . (stops abruptly) Listen to me. (ironic) With a bit of luck, she'll die in the night.

Otto Why are you trying to fight it, Max?

Max Fight what?

Otto Your need to help people?

Max (pause) That's the waste of it, Otto.

Otto (Otto leans forward and touches Nadia’s upper thigh with his hand) It's soft. (he rests his face against her thigh)

Max Tomorrow she’ll be stiff and hard as corrugated iron. As if she'd never walked, or danced or spread her thighs for a man.

Otto (lowers Nadia’s skirt) We've got to hold onto what's good in us, Max. It's the only way to live. (he covers Nadia with his coat) I'm trying to remember all the good things, all the happy moments in my life. (pause) Trams. The number 37 from Schottentor. The doors shut, the tram shudders forward, and we're off, in the tracks rocketing along the grooves, the bell clanging away. On a wet summer’s day you can smell their hair steaming, like wet earth, the children's little bodies, all bony, pushing up against yours. And an old granny, (laughs) there's always one – complaining. And you mould into them, and they mould into you, 'til there really is no difference. (pause) How close we are to one another, Max. There's so much hope in that. (he picks up a sheet of paper, folds it, and hands it to Max) Please, make sure my mother gets this letter. I've written my address on it. There's no-one else I can ask. (Max takes it) I’d like you to have my watch.

Max No.

Otto I don't need it any more. Please.

Max (Max takes the watch) I'll send it on to your mother. I promise.

Otto If you think it'll get through.

Max I'll send her something. (pause) I can’t stay.

Otto (puts his arms out to Max for an embrace. Max looks awkward) Please, Max. Be my brother. Just this once. (they embrace)

Max (still holding Otto) The bastards.

Otto I wish tomorrow wasn't coming. I'd like a night light, Max. One that keeps the dragons from under the bed. (Max moves away) Don't go.

Max I have to. (pulls himself away)

Otto (pause) It's really beginning now.

Max What is?

Otto The end of my life.

**Scene nine**

Night-time. The cell is lit only by moonlight which floods in through the window. Nadia stands propped up against the wall. She looks out of the window. Otto is sitting on the stool.

Nadia The sky, it is big at night.

Otto You can speak German?

Nadia Yes.

Otto But we've been sitting here in silence for hours.

Nadia It is fate that I spend my last time inside a room with a . . . (too angry to speak for a while) . . . with a man in that uniform. So I speak. For my heart it is necessary. For my soul. (pause) How long before they come?

Otto I don't know. I don’t have a watch anymore.

Nadia (she continues looking at the sky) Tomorrow the night will come, the wolf's sun will be in the sky. But I will not see it. I will not see it again. (Otto goes towards her and shyly places his hand on her shoulders. At his touch she screams and shakes him off) Ne nada! Nelzia!

Otto I only want to help.

Nadia German help? (she spits on the ground)

Otto I hate this war.

Nadia Because you are losing it. Ha, but when you first come, I see your faces. I see you, how happy you are. Eh, German soldier? You shout and beat us, like we are animals.

Otto I hate this uniform. I hate it as much as you do. (he starts to rip off his clothes) I won't wear it anymore.

Nadia If you rape me, I bite you, I scratch . . .

Otto (stops undressing) No, no, I don't want to hurt you. Please believe me. I don’t want to hurt you.

Nadia (long pause) They shoot you tomorrow?

Otto Yes.

Nadia Why?

Otto (bitter) They said I was a coward.

Nadia Ha! You rape women, you kill children, but when you see our men with guns you run.

Otto No!

Nadia I understand.

Otto I haven't killed anyone. I swear it. (Nadia laughs insultingly) It's so unfair. (Nadia has turned her back on him. He stops trying to persuade her and takes out his rosary. Quietly to himself) How vain I am, even now. I want people to applaud my sacrifice. (he bows his head in prayer)

Nadia You are praying?

Otto There's so much to forgive and so little time.

Nadia Tell me, does your God enjoy this war? Does he think heaven is too empty?

Otto Don't laugh at God. He's all we have.

Nadia Then I pity you.

Otto Don't harden you heart against God. Even now, it's not too late to turn to him. If you open your heart . . . (Nadia snorts) . . . No, I wouldn't have made a very good priest. It's hard to explain things you really believe.

Nadia Already I am dead. The struggle goes on but I am dead. I am not use anymore to no-one. What can I do here? Nothing. What can I change? Nothing.

Otto We still have an hour . . . or more.

Nadia And what can you do with only one hour?

Otto (pause) Everything.

Nadia Everything? Then tell me, why do we live so long, eh? (she goes to the window again)

Otto (hugs himself from cold) Don't you feel bad about Fräulein Gluck?

Nadia Who?

Otto The woman you killed.

Nadia She deserved to die.

Otto The hostages, then? They'll shoot at least seven innocent people - your people. The ones on the list.

Nadia We are all on the list. Unless we fight, we all die. Do not cry for them, soldier. They will not be forgotten. (pause) Come here. (he approaches and stops beside her. She looks at his eyes, then turns away) We must meet blood with blood.

Otto No.

Nadia And I say, yes. With blood. There is no other way.

Otto Do you think a human life is so unimportant?

Nadia Borje moi! I am a mother . . . I have a daughter. She is only small. Katya. I do not know even if she lives now. (struggles with tears) I hope she lives. She wants to live. She will live. She will grow into a woman, a mother, a grandmother. And still she is precious. (pause) It will not be my hands who rebuild. I will not see my country free and beautiful. But my daughter, she will. Yes. Or if she is dead, there will be some other little girl, someone else's little girl, to put flowers on our memorial; to celebrate May Day with ribbons tied on her lovely little head . . . (she breaks down and weeps)

Otto (not daring to touch her) Katya will live.

Nadia Gospadi . . .

Otto You must have faith.

Nadia Everything I do has been necessary.

Otto I can see her. Katya. I can see her growing up. With the ribbons in her hair. She's laughing. Like we used to laugh. (pause) Oh, a child. How much hope there is in a child.

Nadia Yes. There is hope.

Otto Let's talk. Please, let's talk to each other. While there's still time. Every second we're alive, we have hearts and minds. All the things I've wanted to say, everything I've felt, the things I never will feel . . . I'm so young, and they're taking that away from me. Just when I was becoming me, they're taking it away. (to Nadia) In an hour there'll be no more Otto Schutz. Look at me. Tell me I made some difference. Tell me I was worthwhile.

Nadia (looks at him more gently) In another world, perhaps, little soldier, we might have

 . . . sat at a cafe, drunken black coffee, fallen in love. But now we are dead. The world is not ours anymore. Don't make yourself suffer. (she goes to the window and looks out) They will do what they do. I am ready.

Otto May I stand with you?

Nadia (pause) Yes. (he joins her) Look there, behind the trees. Do you see?

Otto No.

Nadia Is it dawn?

Otto So soon?

Nadia I think it is dawn. (they look at each other) Yes. I think it is dawn.

**Scene ten**

Dawn. Max stands fully dressed, with rifle slung across his shoulder. He is reading Otto’s letter. Bielek enters, carrying a rifle.

Bielek The firing squad's one short, Schwannbeck.

Max How many bullets does it take to kill a man, for Christ's sake?

Bielek Regulations, soldier. I don't write them.

Max You're not seriously asking me to . . .

Bielek Not asking, Schwannbeck. Ordering.

Max What about Brenner or Hoffmann?

Bielek If I say it's you, then you it flaming is.

Max You can't make me do that. I'd be like shooting my own brother.

Bielek I can make you do anything I like. (points to his stripes) These say I can.

Max I'll hang the girl. Let me hang the girl.

Bielek No deal.

Max (shouting) You bastard, Bielek!

Bielek I'm going to make a bloody soldier out of you, if it’s the last thing I do.

Max I don’t want to be a soldier!

Bielek (grabs him by the neck and half throttles him) Tough! (hurls him aside) I've been watching you softening up, quivering like a jelly every time we see action. One conscie I can get away with. But two? I've got my own skin to think about, Schwannbeck. You toe the line, or else. (hears marching feet) Right. Let’s get this show on the road. (Bielek exits. Off stage) Squad, stand at ease! (Max takes out Otto's letter and reads it again)

Max (quoting from the letter) “What have we to lose but this worthless life of ours? I go happy.”

Bielek (boots stamp in unison) Squad, mark time! One, two, one two, one two . . . (Bielek re-enters)(sarcastic) Ready when you are, Schwannbeck.

Max (pause) No.

Bielek What do you mean, no?

Max I mean I won't do it.

Bielek Stand to attention when you address rank! (no response) I said, stand to attention when you address rank! (Max does so) You miserable pile of dog turd. You will get out there on the double!

Max I won’t shoot Otto. I can’t.

Bielek There's no such word as can't, Schwannbeck. If I had to, I’d shoot my own mother.

Chain of command, remember? You obey my orders, I obey Mulhaus, he obeys the Colonel, he, God bless him, obeys that prick Winkler, who obeys the pricks above him, 'til you get right up to the biggest frigging prick of them all. It's a pile of shit. But it works, Schwannbeck.

Max Yes. It's a pile of shit. And I'm having no more to do with it. (throws down his gun)

Bielek (pause) Kick off's in five minutes at the parade ground. If you're not there, I'm nailing you for desertion. (at the door) Spare a thought for your own precious hide, Schwannbeck. It's the only thing between you and oblivion. (exits) (off stage) Squad, escort prisoners. Quick march. Hup two, hup two, hup two . . .

Max (shouting out through the window) Otto! “What have we to lose but this worthless life of ours?” (he looks at the letter) Worthless life. Life. (as if understanding the meaning of the word for the first time) Life! (Max grabs the rifle and makes for the door, then hesitates as he looks at the letter still held in his hand)

(Fade to Black Out)

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