

MIRRORS

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The idea for *Mirrors* is based upon a chapter from the book *Born Guilty: Children of Nazi Families*. Peter Sichrovsky's book explores the emotional legacy left upon families today by Nazi deeds nearly a half century ago.

CAST

Herbert

Katrina

Mother

Father

Pastor

Narrator (voice only)

PROLOGUE

NARATOR: Recently our president, Richard von Weizacker, addressed the nation. “There are some historians,” he said, “who want to claim that there is nothing about our history which is distinctive. And there are some historians who want to explain away what is distinctive about our history by blaming it on external forces. This is a lie. We have a unique history in our nation and it is one for which we ourselves are responsible.

“We cannot hide from it nor should we. The fact is that Auschwitz remains unique. It was perpetrated by Germans in the name of Germany. The truth is immutable and will not be forgotten.

“Some of our historians have recently raised comparisons to other modern tragedies. Ours was no worse, they say. By this they want the dark chapter of our own history to disappear, to be reduced to a mere episode.

“But the German nation cannot make others responsible for what it and its neighbors endured under National Socialism. It was led by criminals and to find himself tempted to look away and to condemn the mirror as a distorting mirror where it reflects the emergence of National Socialism and its unspeakable crimes? Looking into the mirror causes deep distress, and what else can be expected?

“We cannot simply accept anyone wanting to look away or forget. But neither can be condemn anybody who withdraws in his distress. Instead he must be given the courage to face the truth.”

That is what the president said. But what is truth? Jesus asked. If we cannot answer this question, then what is it that we remember? What is forgotten is just as truthful as what we think we remember.

Even two children raised in the same household have different family histories and therefore have different truths. So we need courage to forget as well as to remember. Remembering too much imprisons us in a past that continues to wound and warp.

We need a fresh start by looking in the mirror and not staring at our own face but by looking straight ahead so we can better see the past.

ACT I

SCENE I

1962

MOTHER and KATRINA stand near one another. HERBERT stands alone, facing audience. He never looks at MOTHER or KATRINA.

PASTOR. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.

Death this year has taken men whose kind we shall not see again.

[PASTOR continues to speak under the interruptions.]

KATRINA places her arm around MOTHER'S shoulder.

HERBERT. Thank God!

MOTHER [gently to her son]. Not now, Herbert.

PASTOR. We ask the Holy Spirit to offer His forgiveness so that his soul may rest in peace.

HERBERT. Even if there is a God, some sins are too great to be forgiven. Even God cannot be that great.

KATRINA [forcefully,]. Stop it, Herbert. Think about Mother. Shut up.

PASTOR. Now upon the hearts of those who have been stricken, and upon all those who suffer and grieve...

HERBERT. I have to get out of here.

MOTHER. Show some respect, Herbert. He was your father.

MOTHER wipes her eyes and reaches for her son. He backs away.

MOTHER. Just for a short while longer. For me, stay here.

PASTOR. May there be rest and comfort in this benediction, for grief none shall escape.

HERBERT. What about the murdered? What comfort do they have?

KATRINA. Can't you have pity for your mother? Stop being a spoiled child.

PASTOR. And when our time comes, may it be that we go forth without fear or remorse but comforted in the memory that whatever mistakes we have made help us and others . . .

HERBERT. Who the hell are you talking about?

MOTHER. Forget the past.

PASTOR. In the bosom of God, they shall be forgiven.

KATRINA. Herbert, come here and stand with us.

KATRINA takes her mother by her elbow. MOTHER begins to cry.

KATRINA. Take her hand. She needs both of us.

HERBERT begins to move forward but stops.

PASTOR. Know ye now the warmth of God's spirit and the joys of His love. And now we return his body to the earth and let us pray, Earth to earth, dust to dust...

HERBERT. And smoke from the crematorium. Not love. Only the iron fist of discipline.

KATRINA. Good-bye, dear father.

KATRINA and MOTHER place flowers on the ground.

NARRATOR. When is a war over? When are the weapons laid down? When are the weapons put away? Peace isn't just the absence of war.

The scars of war are written in the lives of people. Children don't ask for it. They agree to nothing.

Twenty years ago Richard Holst died. A mother and two children stood in the cemetery on a cloudless and warm day. Flowers were laid on his grave, in the countryside that he had always loved.

SCENE II

1982

In a modest home. A portrait of FATHERt hangs in the living room. A photograph of Herbert is next to it. FATHER is seated in the living room opposite his portrait. He remains there until Act II, Scene III. MOTHER is seated at the kitchen table. KATRINA walks into the room and places a shawl on her mother's shoulders. She makes coffee on the stove and returns to the table.

KATRINA. Are you comfortable, Mother?

MOTHER. Herbert will be arriving soon, won't he? I hope he feels welcome, like he's home again

KATRINA. Let's be realistic. Even before prison he hadn't been living at home for years. I don't think he'll want to stay here now. This isn't his home any longer.

MOTHER. As long as we wants to stay here this is his home. I've thought about him every day since he went away.

KATRINA. But I wonder if he ever gave a thought about you or anyone else. If he cared about any of us, he would have allowed us to visit. But he wouldn't, not once. Not a letter, nothing from him.

MOTHER. Why else would he call to say that he was coming? I don't think he just wants to visit. He wants to live with us. We're his family, despite everything. I wish the two of you will be along better now.

KATRINA. He never made it easy, you know. He's always be spoiled by both you and father. I don't understand how you put up with him. He was always so self-righteous.

MOTHER. In a family you love, no matter what.

KATRINA. Yes, yes. You've always said that. But he made it hard.

MOTHER. Now you'll have to try harder. What time did you say he'd be here? What time is it now?

KATRINA. He didn't say. Just some time today. Some time. I have to get some more things before he gets her. I'll be back later.

KATRINA gets her sweater and exits.

MOTHER [to herself]. What time is it now? It's so hard to keep track of things since you've gone. You helped keep everything in order. You were so good at that. Without you I'm sore unsure. The walks we took in the woods, Richard. There wasn't a sound. Is that you?

HERBERT. Mother.

MOTHER walks to HERBERT to hug him. He doesn't return her hug.

MOTHER. Herbert, I didn't hear you come in. Is it really you standing there?

HERBERT. Well, I think it's still me.

MOTHER. I can't believe it. After all these years.

HERBERT. A lot has changed since I saw you last. It's been a long time. I just wanted to stop by. You might say I was in the neighborhood. I wasn't sure you'd still be here.

MOTHER. Where should I be? Oh. I see. If I'm alive, you mean. Here I am. And you stranding right here. There' some coffee on the stove. Katrina put it on. She just went out. Do you want a cup? She's not here yet, is she?

HERBERT. You've gotten older.

MOTHER. It's been a long time. And just look at you. My son is now a grown man. You're right. I am an old lady. Only Katrina's living here keeps me together. I don't know if I could survive without her. There is no one else.

HERBERT. I figured she'd still be here.

MOTHER. Didn't you read the letters we sent?

HERBERT. Letters? Oh, yes. No, I never read them. I never opened them. They went right into the trash.

MOTHER. When you were little, Herbert, you were so good . . .

HERBERT. The good German.

MOTHER. . . .you loved us all. I don't know what happened to you. I'll never understand it, I suppose. So many of you — your friends — it's as though you all went wild. All of you turned your backs on everything.

HERBERT. I didn't come here to drag that up. I don't want to talk about me.

MOTHER. I understand.

HERBERT. I just wanted to see the house. It has a certain charm, despite everything.

HERBERT looks out the window.

HERBERT. So you still keep up the flower garden?

MOTHER. Katrina and I wanted to visit you. The first year we went many times but the warden told us you refused visitors.

HERBERT. Not all visitors.

MOTHER. Us. You even returned our packages unopened. But I thought about you. And everyday I looked at your picture there.

HERBERT turns to look across the room.

HERBERT. Right there next to father's? I guess you never will understand. I should have known better than to hope for something different from you.

MOTHER. Come sit here next to me, Herbert. I want to look at you. You look so different, even your hair is beginning to gray. Did they treat you all right?

HERBERT. It was what I expected. Father's stay was better than mine. War criminals . . .

MOTHER. Don't call him that again. I've . . .

HERBERT [speaking over MOTHER]. But I am only a common criminal.

MOTHER. You're still bitter.

HERBERT. Of course I am. And it will never be different if you refuse to see him for what he was. You and Katrina want to forget.

MOTHER. I've forgotten nothing. I know better than you what kind of man he was. I know that in my heart. Our lives were like one. But what about you now, Herbert? Can't you accept my love?

KATRINA enters with a loaf of bread under her arm.

KATRINA. Mother, I have some bread here for us. Oh, Herbert. What? I mean, you must have just gotten here.

HERBERT. Hello, Katrina. How are you? Mother and I were talking a little - about us, about father.

MOTHER. Doesn't he look great? All that could have happened. Aren't you glad to see him, Katrina?

KATRINA. Certainly I am. You do look great Herbert.

HERBERT. You could look better.

KATRINA. Sure. I'm glad you're out. I can't imagine what it was like for you. With all those criminals.

HERBERT. What do you think I am? That's what they called me, at least. There's nothing more than you can expect from the bourgeois courts.

MOTHER. Well, Herbert. I had Katrina make your room for you. The bed is done. There are clean sheets and we even had it painted fresh just last month. We straightened it up, your sister and me. Got rid of some of the old things that cluttered the room. Such a mess.

HERBERT. At night I would sometimes think about the room. Sometimes I dreamed I was asleep in my own bed. It gave me comfort just picturing it as I left it. So you straightened it up? Did you throw out the posters? And all the pamphlets?

MOTHER. When we painted, of course, we did. They were faded and tattered. I didn't think you wanted them any more.

HERBERT. No. I guess not

MOTHER. They just gathered dust.

HERBERT. Cleanliness is important after all, isn't it?

MOTHER. It's ready for you any time.

KATRINA. Mother thinks you're staying with us now.

MOTHER. Yes? Are you?

HERBERT. I hadn't thought of it. But with such an invitation from you, Katrina, how can I refuse. Besides, the price is right, isn't it? I'm not being charged, am I? Until there's some place better. Where else do you expect me to go?

KATRINA. Don't your friends love you any more? What happened to all the comrades?

HERBERT. Maybe they're all in Moscow. What do you think?

MOTHER. I told you, Katrina. This is his home.

KATRINA. Well, maybe.

SCENE III

In the kitchen. KATRINA places the bread on the table and begins to slice it.

HERBERT. Was that your idea or Mother's, getting rid of those things in my room?

KATRINA. I don't think of it as your room. Not for a long time. I don't know what your room has been like in prison.

HERBERT. Nice enough.

KATRINA. But it isn't yours any more.

HERBERT. No? Have I been disinherited, then?

KATRINA. If Mother reads you out of her will you deserve it.

HERBERT. Has she?

KATRINA. What do you care about property anyway? So bourgeois.

HERBERT. Everyone has to live somewhere.

KATRINA. You can make your home elsewhere.

HERBERT. You can't stand me, can you?

KATRINA. It is Mother who wants you here. You're right. It's your politics that I can't stand.

HERBERT. I thought maybe you'd grown up.

KATRINA. Those ridiculous pictures of Mao and that black man wearing army fatigues.

HERBERT. That should at least meet with your approval. You've always liked uniforms. The shine on father's boots were stars in your eyes.

KATRINA. And the bust of Marx.

HERBERT. I thought you'd at least approve of him. A German.

KATRINA. A cosmopolitan. A self-hating Jew who couldn't even love his own people.

HERBERT. You can't love people without hating injustice.

KATRINA. It's still the same, isn't it? So you still talk in slogans? Way up there. We live here, right here. In this house, this kitchen. We have to live with dirt and dishes, not rhetoric and marches. Not where that has taken you.

All right. Maybe Mother's right. Maybe it can be different. We're both older. I'm not angry with you any longer. I'm willing to begin from here. Do you remember when we were little? We'd play together. Those were good time, weren't they?

HERBERT. Good times? You still think of the war as a good time? Have you forgotten what it was like? What's it's like to be a Nazi family?

KATRINA [her voice rising in anger]. I haven't forgotten anything. But at least let's get the terminology straight. We weren't Nazis.

HERBERT. Of course not. We were only children. How could we be Nazis? But father. He wasn't a child. What do you call him?

KATRINA. A soldier, an officer, not a Nazi. He fought for the homeland. We're children of a military family.

HERBERT. Katrina. You haven't changed, have you? You still live in a dream world. What do you think Father went to prison? An officer who scheduled the freight trains full of Jews to the gas chambers. Of yes, excuse me. A noble soldier who loved his country. And his Aryan blood.

KATRINA. He loved us, Herbert.

HERBERT. So you still insist.

KATRINA. Do you really think he collaborated with SS murderers? You're ridiculous, Herbert. He acted honorably throughout the war. He never profited from it. We could have lived better. Another house. But he never took Jewish property.

HERBERT. Only their lives.

KATRINA. Not like of our neighbors. He paid for this everything in this house. He never talked out against the Jews or said a bad word about them. When they marched the Jews down the street, when they kicked them in the gutters, he kept us inside. Did you ever see him take delight in others' suffering? He had nothing to do with the camps.

HERBERT. He was only the delivery man. Your blindness is amazing to me. Our father, s Nazi saint.

KATRINA. Not a Nazi!

HERBERT. A war criminal. A war criminal, Katrina.

KATRINA. What a hypocrite. You just got out of prison today. I thought maybe you would learn something. They should have kept you longer. Fifteen years for bombing school children. Children, Herbert. They were just children. What were you thinking?

HERBERT. Now how's that for a forgiving sister? And don't you think I feel guilty about what happened? We never

KATRINA. Not we, Herbert. You.

HERBERT. We didn't intended for children to be hurt. The bomb was meant for the pigs.

KATRINA. Police.

HERBERT. Not the school bus.

KATRINA. And that brings back a limb? Does that give them back their sight?

HERBERT. It wasn't supposed to happen like that.

But at least I was trying to make a better world. What have *you* done? I may have been careless, but at least I tried to do something. You have done nothing but stay in here, with her, as though nothing has happened, as though you know nothing.

Father was guilty. Say it.

KATRINA. Father loved you. You loved him, too. You sat right there, waiting for him every evening. He tired when he came home from work . . .

HERBERT. Work?

KATRINA. The walks the two of you took in the garden, the soccer games he played with you when he ached for a Saturday nap? All for you and you loved it. I wanted that from him. But that doesn't matter now. He gave to me what he could. But don't deny that the two of you loved each other.

HERBERT. What I remember is that he did what he thought a father was supposed to do. He did his duty, like a good father. Like a good soldier.

KATRINA. At least you got that much from him.

HERBERT. He was a cold man, Katrina. He calculated his time with me in the same way he calculated the number of box cars needed for the next train to the camp.

KATRINA. You make yourself sound so noble, Herbert. But what do you know about other people? You just pit yourself. It has nothing to do with anyone else.

All these years you would have nothing to do with Mother. You are ice, Herbert. You're colder than the man you think Father was. At least he cared about his family. You care about no one except yourself.

I'm glad you failed, Herbert. You and your comrades would break us all for this dream of yours. There would be even bigger concentration camps. This time Mother and I would be inmates.

HERBERT. Listen to you, Katrina. You say that I'm self-pitying. You, your far worse. You say that it's love that kept you here, to take care of Mother. But that isn't it at all, is it? It's worse than duty and self-sacrifice. It's fear that keeps you here, isn't it?

KATRINA. I'm afraid of those who can't love their families. *You* scare me, Herbert.

HERBERT. You're right about my not loving. I can't love what's hateful. But you love just because you belong to the same family. It's not real people that you love but the idea that you

should love just because we're family. It would be anyone who happens to be here, to have been born here.

KATRINA. Yes.

HERBERT. It's blood you believe in, just like father.

KATRINA. Yes. But you choose principles above family.

HERBERT. Justice above indifference.

KATRINA. I love Mother and I loved father, even though it's you that he loved more. That's what makes me human. But you love ideas and abstractions. You love theories, not people and that makes you something less than human.

I never hurt anyone but you have and you continue to hurt mother every day. Do you still believe that the Wall was built to protect them on the other side? If you want a life like that so badly, there's nothing to keep you from taking the subway and staying in East Berlin. You'll be the hero of the People. The Party will love you.

HERBERT. That's just like you, to change the subject when it comes to Father. You could never be objective about him. You're still the little girl in love with our father who wore a uniform. Every woman loves a fascist, they say. I think you and mother loved him for the same reasons I detested him.

KATRINA. I'm proud that I loved my father. But don't kid yourself, Herbert. You are more tied to him than I am. He's still alive in you, Herbert. I at least know what love is. But you only know bitterness.

HERBERT. You talk as though you were never troubled by this, as if the Nazis had nothing to do with us. But we can't disown our inheritance.

KATRINA. I claim him and accept him. You're the one who disowns your inheritance, not me.

HERBERT. No. I claim everything about him. I want to remember everything that he was. And he was a criminal, tried and convicted. You want to erase that. And when he came home from prison, Mother ordered us never to mention Nazis or the war or his prison sentence.

KATRINA. No she didn't.

HERBERT. We had to protect him, as though he was the victim.

MOTHER [from off stage]. Leave father alone. We've all had enough of this. What he has gone through is enough suffering for all of us. I don't want to hear another word, do you understand me, Herbert? Can't you see how upset you're making father? He's not a strong man.

HERBERT. So there was silence in our house. Father would just sit there. What did he think? Did he ever express remorse? I wanted him to talk to me. I wanted him to tell me about himself.

KATRINA. When father came home you would run to him and jump upon his lap.

FATHER [from off stage]. Come here, Herbert. Kiss your father on your cheek. How was school today, Herbert? I see you brought home your report card today. I'm proud of you.

KATRINA. You enjoy being a victim, Herbert. You like being hurt. You're afraid of being his son, of being a real man. It's better to hate him than to face yourself. As long as you're the victim, you don't have to grow up.

FATHER. We'll go to the park this weekend to play. We'll kick the ball together.

KATRINA. I think you wanted to go the prison. You enjoying feeling guilty. You want to be punished. You think that will make you into a man? You think it's better to be on the side of the weak than have to face the responsibility of being strong.

FATHER. That's good. Where did you find that old army hat? It's too big for you, Herbert. But don't worry, someday it will fit you. Let's go to the field now. Take my hand.

HERBERT. I can't stand your weakness, Katrina. Still at home with Mother. You are a housemaid because you're afraid. It's you who are afraid of the world, afraid of what it is really like. Afraid that you'll never meet anyone like father.

MOTHER. I'm afraid, Katrina. I don't want to be alone.

PASTOR (from offstage). I've talked to your mother, Katrina. Now that your father has passed on, you're the only one she can rely upon. You know how much she needs you.

KATRINA. Why are you doing this? Why have you really come home?

FATHER. I thought I'd die in prison.

HERBERT. I thought I'd die in prison.

FATHER. Not to be with my children, not to hold your hand, Herbert. I thought, how can I make this up to you?

MOTHER. Stay here.

KATRINA. Why are you doing this?

PASTOR. You know how much you're needed.

FATHER. Put on your hat, Herbert. Comes outside. Come on, Katrina. Come watch us.

MOTHER. Stay.

ACT II

SCENE I

PASTOR. I'm glad to see that your spirits have perked up since Herbert has returned. It's good to have our children nearby.

MOTHER. I thank God for that. And I thank Him that Herbert hasn't been harmed. I worried each day when he was in prison. I know what a prison can do to a man. And he was so young, not like his father. I didn't know if he would even survive.

PASTOR. There's no need to worry now, is there Gerta? I always knew that he was good at heart. After all, look at the family he comes from.

MOTHER. You're too kind. If I weren't so old, I would think you were flirting with me.

PASTOR. I'm the one who is flattered. Well, good-bye, Gerta.

MOTHER. Katrina can make supper for us, if you'd like.

PASTOR. If you don't mind, that would be a pleasure.

MOTHER leaves, calling KATRINA.. PASTOR looks around room. HERBERT enters.

PASTOR. Herbert., you man. Why, hello. Your mother told me that you had come back.

HERBERT. Pastor Feig. You haven't changed too much. A little balder but I'd know your voice anywhere. All those years at church on Sunday leaves an impression, after all.

PASTOR. A good one, I hope.

HERBERT. To be truthful with you...

PASTOR. I hope it wouldn't be otherwise.

HERBERT. ...all I remember are the hard seats that kept me awake during the sermons and the drone of your voice.

PASTOR. Without the hard seats, everyone would have fallen asleep. You were there everyday Sunday. Perhaps you will consider returning to the church.

HERBERT. You're ever hopeful, aren't you? It did no good before. It didn't keep me out of the atheist fold. But it must have done father some good.

PASTOR. I think so.

HERBERT. He went content, without a worry. And whatever soul saving that was still left to do, you took care of at the cemetery. If a Nazi can make it through the gates of heaven, there must be a chance even for the likes of me.

PASTOR. God is good and merciful. We must trust our souls to Him.

HERBERT. Katrina accused me of sloganeering. I have nothing on you. You have this pap handy for every occasion. God was dead before the first broken window. There is no mercy.

PASTOR. Perhaps so. Perhaps there was no God in Germany then. Nevertheless, Herbert, do you believe that we are eternally damned for the mistakes we make?

HERBERT. I don't believe in eternity, only heaven and hell on hearth. And mistake? I wouldn't call it a mistake. You make it sound like making a wrong turn on the autobahn.

PASTOR. Yes, you're right. Yet life is full of turnings and crossroads. We must have faith for if we didn't we wouldn't have anything. It's the hope for redemption in this sinful world.

HERBERT. What I see is that what you have to offer is salve for the guilty so they won't have to face themselves.

PASTOR. It's what's in the heart that matters. Who can know another's heart? Only God. And if there is no God, Herbert. Still. What we're called upon to do is help one another.

HERBERT. I'll give you that much. But there's something more than the heart. There's also the truth. That would help, too.

PASTOR. It would.

HERBERT. I want to know what my father was really like. I want to know how after the war you could remain his friend. And how my mother could have worshipped him.

PASTOR. You know that there are things I'm not free to tell anyone. Your father and I were good friends and I was also his pastor.

HERBERT. So I'm to suffer because of you, because you have this code of silence? I guess it makes no difference. Your God will forgive you over and over, won't He? That will clean your conscience but it won't help me.

PASTOR. My conscience is my own and I'll have to live with it. But how can I help, Herbert?

HERBERT. Tell me what I want to know. How could all of you be so willfully blind, how could my mother deny everything that right there is the public record?

PASTOR. There's enough blindness to go around for all of us. I was the closest friend he had, Herbert. After the war he suffered a great deal.

HERBERT. Poor bastard.

PASTOR. Aside from your family, he had no one in the village. No one wanted any part of him. His friends deserted him.

HERBERT. Some were smart.

PASTOR. His friends deserted him. He was isolated. And there was the problem with you when you were a teenager.

HERBERT. I was the problem?

PASTOR. He never understood why you turned against him. I don't know why either but I can tell you why the others did. It was because of his integrity.

HERBERT. My God, pastor. Cut the crap.

PASTOR. No, listen. It was because he was an honest man. He never denied his part in the horror. But he was the only one here who was convicted.

HERBERT. And so? There wasn't enough room in the courts for everyone.

PASTOR. Yes, that's true. But the others kept silent, neither defending him nor admitting their own guilt. They acted as though they had nothing to do with the terror but they were the ones who cheered from their balconies, not him. People don't like honest men.

HERBERT. You and mother and Katrina have a way of turning everything upside down, don't you?

PASTOR. His honesty made them look at themselves. But he never blamed them, either. He didn't judge anyone but himself. I never knew another man like him. I could always count on him.

HERBERT. You and the Jews.

PASTOR. Maybe it's something you're too young to know yet but the trust that one person has in another that over a lifetime is never betrayed - well, Herbert, it is only the lucky few who know such friendships. That's what I had with him. But it wasn't that he was like this with only me. He was a rare man who had the courage to be steadfast. I'll use an old fashioned word to describe him. He was virtuous.

HERBERT. Are you serious with me? You and mother and Katrina have created a fantasy. It's not real. This is a conspiracy of amnesia. How can you make a war criminal sound benign? The well-mannered butcher.

PASTOR. It's true that sometimes we want to make our dead into saints. But we're all human and all sinful.

HERBERT. This was no small sin now, was it? I mean, the Holocaust wasn't petty burglary.

PASTOR. No. And he paid for his part. It broke his spirit. But he was a man of decency.

HERBERT. Poor father!

PASTOR. He never complained or thought that it was unfair that he was sentenced for his part in the tragedy. It was right, he said to me. He deserved as much. And he was never resentful that others didn't have to pay the price, that they benefited from the war and that he, who served honorably, was separated from his family and that their family never recovered financially because of the ordeal.

HERBERT. Aren't you putting your tears in the wrong place? Nazis weren't the victims. As for the money, we weren't poor. We still we had more when he came out of prison than the foreign

workers do today. There's this house, for instance. We were deprived but not materially. It was morality that was missing.

PASTOR. And do you have it now, Herbert?

HERBERT. You don't think so.

PASTOR. You're wrong. I think you do. And I know that you get it from your father. Underneath your differences, you are like him. Both of you have the courage of your convictions and both of you made your mistakes and paid the price.

KATRINA. Supper's ready.

HERBERT. This is just the beginning, pastor. There's more I want to hear.

PASTOR. I'm glad for that. I've accepted an invitation for dinner. Perhaps after dinner, then. It's strange, but as you get older and there's not much more time anything, there's more time for those things that are truly important.

SCENE II

PASTOR. That was a lovely supper Mrs. Holst. Thank you.

MOTHER. We can thank Katrina for it. She is such a darling, always a great help.

PASTOR. Before supper Herbert and I were reminiscing about your family and your father. I thought that you and Katrina would join us.

HERBERT. No, not them.

PASTOR. And why not?

KATRINA. Why not, Herbert? Don't you want to hear from us? I think Herbert wants his prejudices undisturbed. He takes comfort in his self-righteousness.

MOTHER. Ever since Herbert has been home you have been petulant, Katrina. Now stop. I think it would be good for us to talk. It's good for families to talk.

HERBERT. I've always wanted that but you don't want to hear what I have to say.

MOTHER. I always want to listen to you. What I don't want to hear is those lies about father.

PASTOR. Maybe all that can be set aside.

HERBERT. Sure. Set it aside. We don't need a mediator but a truth squad.

PASTOR. What truth do you mean, Herbert? We each have only a piece, so none of us is completely truthful. To that extent, we are all lying.

HERBERT. Some things are immutable. Such as father being a Nazi war criminal.

MOTHER. No! Herbert!

KATRINA. Shut up.

HERBERT. That's what I mean.

PASTOR. Before supper you accused us of creating a fantasy dream about your father. All right then. Let's get rid of these fantasies. I will tell you what I know, Herbert. But you, in your turn, have to listen with an open heart. Truth isn't just in the telling. It's also in the listening.

HERBERT. And in the seeing.

PASTOR. So we'll all say what we saw. But grant us, Herbert, each the right to his own seeing.

HERBERT. What I can't grant is to choose not to see. To refuse to see what right before you.

PASTOR. That, too, can be a sin.

KATRINA. You've refused to see, Herbert.

HERBERT. But you, mother, you took away our ability to talk.

MOTHER. All I wanted is for you to be considerate of your father.

HERBERT. Considerate of a Nazi?

MOTHER. Of your father.

PASTOR. The truth is your father never joined the Nazis.

HERBERT. I know that. That's just a quibble, a technicality.

PASTOR. He detested them.

HERBERT. Come off it. If he so loathed them he would have joined other officers in the assassination plot. But he stayed in his office. So if he wasn't a Nazi, then he was a coward.

PASTOR. What I know is that he made a choice. Maybe looking back on it from this vantage point we can say maybe it wasn't the right choice. But he knew what was going on. And who can say about courage? I don't have the right. I didn't speak out. Not publicly. I know that this was wrong.

MOTHER. You've always been good, pastor. A friend.

PASTOR. So you say, Gerta. But I judge myself differently. By the time I saw what was happening, I couldn't speak out any longer. The simple truth is that I was afraid. I could rationalize and explain but that would explain it away. And I can't do that. I don't deserve any credit. None. I ministered and served my flock. I chose to save souls instead of people. I'm not proud of that.

MOTHER. Don't say those things, Pastor Feig. You have always served God.

PASTOR. Have I? What is that? The service of God must mean service to man. And I let my fellowman down and so God, too.

HERBERT. And my father? Was he guilty, too?

PASTOR. In a different way.

MOTHER coughs fitfully.

PASTOR. Perhaps you don't want to hear this, Mrs. Holst.

KATRINA. I do.

MOTHER. Get me some water, Katrina.

KATRINA. I want to hear this.

PASTOR. I'll wait.

KATRINA leaves, returns with water.

HERBERT. What about my father's guilt?

PASTOR. He compromised. But by the end of the war we both knew that there can be no compromise with evil. My guilt was in deceiving myself in order to save my own skin. Your father deluded himself by thinking that as long as he stayed within the ranks of the military he could prevent the murderers from running everything. He had no concern for his own life. We two talked many hours. I think I knew him as well as any man.

HERBERT. His guilt?

PASTOR. Not as a Nazi.

KATRINA. Thank you, Pastor Feig.

PASTOR. Your father didn't believe in the Third Reich. He believed it was a fraud, something that couldn't last. He thought that the Nazis would be gone in a few years. As sure as he was of anything, it was that the regime would crumble and when the war was over and the Nazis were finished there needed to be some honorable men to bring Germany back from disaster. He thought that he could best serve the nation by being one of those people.

HERBERT. A coward like you, then?

PASTOR. I think this took as much courage as anything. As the war dragged on he tortured himself. I hid behind my rationalizations. But he didn't rationalize. His mistake was in underestimating the strength of the National Socialists and the support they had from the people. At the end he knew that all he had done only made the extermination easier. He had done nothing to stop it and as a soldier he had become complicit in murder, a facilitator of genocide.

KATRINA. What are you saying?

PASTOR. He believed that he had become as corrupt as the Nazis.

MOTHER. That's enough, Pastor Feig. Don't you slander him now. I think you better leave.

KATRINA. Go on.

HERBERT. Say he was guilty.

MOTHER. All these years I thought of you as his good friend.

PASTOR. I was. And am.

MOTHER. But all you are doing is maligning him. Katrina, show him to the door.

PASTOR. I'll leave, if you want me to. But let me finish.

KATRINA. Yes.

PASTOR. I think this is the best way we can honor his memory. He was a decent person. But he failed in his duty. He couldn't protect the state from its own enemies, the hoodlums who pretended to be our saviors. He was a good man. But his very goodness allowed him to participate in the evil. He failed in his duty as a human being. He thought he had done the worst possible thing, but really

I had. He told me that the sentence he received. He saw himself as a failure and that failure was his guilt. And he never stopped punishing himself for it.

MOTHER. Get out of here, Pastor.

PASTOR. I have to say this. For him and for me. Finally, he couldn't live with it. It was too much for him.

HERBERT. We were never allowed to talk about.

MOTHER. He suffered enough. We all did. We don't need this.

PASTOR. But it didn't protect him. Maybe it would have been better if you had, if you - if I had encouraged him not to hide it from you. He thought he was protecting you.

MOTHER. Get out.

PASTOR. And you, too, Gerta. We thought the silence would be better. We were wrong the first time and we were wrong again. It has stained us all. But his feelings of guilt were too great. What was left but suicide?

KATRINA. What?

KATRINA breaks into tears. HERBERT stares.

PASTOR. I'm sorry, Gerta. I can't bear it any longer — the silence and secrets.

MOTHER. Get out, you liar!

SCENE III

MOTHER walks to FATHER'S empty chair and stands behind it. KATRINA stands with suitcase beside her.

KATRINA. Are you sure this is what you want to do?

HERBERT. I'm certain of it.

KATRINA. It won't be easy. You've never taken care of anyone before, no less someone as strong-willed as Mother.

HERBERT. I know that. And you? You're certain about leaving?

KATRINA. It has taken a long time, hasn't it? You were barely more than a teenager when you left home and here I am middle aged and I don't know if I'll be able to take care of myself. It will be strange not having to watch over someone.

HERBERT. You can stay here if you'd like.

KATRINA. Not now. Not any more. It isn't what I thought it was. The whole thing was a sham. I need to get away. I might even like you one day, Herbert, if you wouldn't hide behind your rhetoric - if I could know myself better. But I don't think I could live with you. I can't stay here anymore.

HERBERT. And if I weren't staying? Would you still leave?

KATRINA. I think so. You make it easier for me but not much. I'm abandoning her, I know. You won't be able to take care of her the way I did.

HERBERT. Always the martyr.

KATRINA. Will you ever stop being angry?

HERBERT. I hope to die angry. Without it I'd be guilty too. Can't you see that?

KATRINA. You can't save the world that way. But that's your business. For me, it's all I can do to save my own life. So you stay here. I'll take responsibility for myself now. I feel sorry for Mother but I can't let that keep me here any longer. You were right about one thing, Herbert. I refused to face facts. I can't believe that I never saw it before. But I can't deny it any longer. If you want this house, it's yours. You wanted to claim it all. Now you can. I won't stand in your way. You want your past. I want my future. Maybe one day you can even forgive father for being less of a father than you or I wanted

HERBERT. But I can never forgive him for his part in the evil. I'm still not satisfied. There's still more I want to know. It's mother who is the key.

KATRINA. To what?

HERBERT. My life. Our past. Germany. How you and mother made father possible.

KATRINA. That's gone. It's long past. Mother still lives in that time. And I'm afraid you're trapped there.

HERBERT. Maybe you are right about one thing, Katrina. Maybe I can't live without feeling guilty. It gives weight to my life.

KATRINA. So you'll use her as a way of providing that guilt. You're going to stay here and use her. Stop trying so hard. There's no meaning here other than a wife who loved her husband. Can't you see that you're still driven my resentment.

HERBERT. That's true. If I stay here, maybe that resentment will dissipate with understanding. And if I stay right here, maybe I can start to rebuild our nation. If I can't organize here it's hopeless. [Laughing] Mother can be my first convert.

KATRINA. She'll die loving father.

HERBERT. You mean I won't get her to love Marx? Or me?

KATRINA. I didn't know her love mattered to you.

HERBERT. It doesn't. Love doesn't change anything. It only makes you forget. Only understanding matters. And action.

KATRINA. Try to understand her.

HERBERT. I can try.

KATRINA. And maybe someday we can understand each other and both grow up.

HERBERT. You know, in prison I thought how different it would be when I came home. But it isn't. You and me and mother - it's the same thing. We seem determined - the historical materialism of family life.

KATRINA. Sure. If you say so. Well, Herbert. Good luck. I have to go now.

HERBERT. Good-bye, Katrina. Maybe one day this won't mean so much to either of us.

KATRINA reaches out her hand to HERBERT. He stands with his behind his back. KATRINA laves stage.

NARRATOR. Mother didn't live much longer. By the end of the year she died. Herbert and Pastor Feig took her body to the cemetery where they buried her next to father. Flowers were laid upon the grave.

Katrina wasn't present. Herbert didn't know where to find her. He tried but not very hard.

Herbert still lives in the house. All traces of Father are gone. Today all the neighbors are new. No one is left, except Herbert, who remembers him. Herbert allows no one to visit.

Herbert heard the crowds on the street the day the Berlin Wall came down He watched it on the television.

The real war is written in the lives of people. Children don't ask for it. They agree to nothing.