

Title

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Characters:

JAMES: James is Marie's loving foster father, her Papa. He is man who walks upright, loves to play the ukulele, and has a creative way of looking at the world. He has a quiet, gentle nature and is a painter who doesn't agree with the acts of Hitler. He is a well-liked man in small town of Dresden, Germany. Except for those who call him a Jew lover. He is a talented ukulele player and often plays in the local coffee shops. Marie associates his ukulele playing with safety. In the absence of Marie's mother, James becomes Marie's main source of security.

MARIE: A little girl. Her mother was taken away from her by Hitler's people because she was Jewish. Later adopted to live with James Hans. Marie is traumatized by the situation with her mother, but James proves to be a good foster father, and with his help, she finds comfort in the arts. Which sparks the deeply buried childlike curiosity. Ultimately, Marie learns the power of words/art has to influence others to act both good and evil as she experiences the beauty and the cruelty of humanity.

MATTHEW: A twenty-ish-year-old Jew who hides from the Nazis in James's basement. His friendship with Marie grows very deep, they become like brother and sister. He has this wise and experienced kind of personality but youthful at the same time. He teaches Marie power of words/art has to influence others to act both good and evil.

Setting:

In the time period of World War II and the Holocaust. In the home of James.

Scene 1

At rise, there is a door and staircase leading down to a basement scene on stage left. A lone light bulb hangs from the middle of stage. There is also a shelf filled with glass jars and suitcases. Behind the shelf is a blanket, pillow, candle, and a small worn book. The is also a red trunk in stage right.

MARIE enters through door. MARIE turns on a lone light bulb. MARIE opens trunk. MARIE takes out a small stack of books and closes trunk. MARIE hears a glass jar

shatter from shelves behind her and turns around, dropping books. MARIE looks around only to see broken jar by shelf. Behind the shelf is dark. MARIE walks toward jar.

MARIE

Who's there?

MARIE peers behind shelves and sees MATTHEW. Scared, pinned up against wall MATTHEW brings single finger making "Shhhh" motion. MARIE screams. MATTHEW makes "shhh" sound as he makes clapping motions with hands. As doing this MATTHEW looks around paranoid. JAMES HANS races down stairs to see what's happening. JAMES hugs frantic MARIE.

MARIE

Who is he, James?

JAMES

I have something very important to tell you, Marie. You must listen darling. Those are not my books.

JAMES points to books on floor.

JAMES

The man who owns them is this boy's father.

JAMES motions to MATTHEW. Also, at this point gently lets go of MARIE.

MARIE

You stole them?

JAMES

No no no. I've been looking after it.

MARIE

Did...did he die?

JAMES

Yes. *(beat)* Many years ago. *(beat)* Before you were born. I saw him die. In a war.

MARIE

You were in a war papa?

JAMES kneels down to MARIE.

JAMES

Yes. His father gave up his life...for me. And I made a promise to the family... if ever I could help them, I would. I gave them my word. Now, I need you to promise me. I need you to give me your word that you will not tell about our visitor. Nobody. Not a soul. I mean it, if word was to spread about Matthew then they will take us away. Like they did with your mother. And we would never see the light of another day. Understand?

MARIE looks at MATTHEW then back to JAMES pauses then speaks.

MARIE

Yes papa.

JAMES

Right, then. Now that were all calmed down. Matthew this is Marie. Marie this is Matthew.

JAMES gestures with one arm to both actors.

MATTHEW

Hello, Marie. I am very sorry I frightened you. I didn't mean to. **No one other James here** come down to the basement....And with the recent home checks Hitler has put into action lately has made me...well, a bit nervous.

MARIE

I don't understand? Why would Hitler....

MATTHEW

For some reason he is after people like me. I guess a creative soul is a plague to his systematic dictatorship. *(beat)*

MARIE

oh...

MATTHEW

Believe it or not. I thought you young lady

MATTHEW bends down and touches MARIE'S nose with a finger

MATTHEW (*cont.*)

Were a big, ugly Notzi soldier.

MATTHEW stands at attention. Makes a funny face. Then marches in a circle.

Marie

Hahaha. You look silly! Look Matthew papa.

Everyone is laughing light heartedly. MATTHEW coughs really bad and grabs shelf to support himself.

MARIE

Matthew? Are you ok Matthew?

MATTHEW'S coughing calms down a bit.

MATTHEW

Yes. Yes. Don't worry about me Marie. Just caught a little cold is all. Nothing to fret about.

As MATTHEW says line, JAMES goes over to help MATTHEW to makeshift bed on ground. MATTHEW grabs chest as still coughing.

JAMES

I'm sorry, there's no bed. If anyone saw, you know?

MATTHEW nods head and is laying on bed.

JAMES

I think *its* best if we leave Matthew to rest.

MARIE and JAMES are fiddling with pillow and blanket to try to make MATTHEW as comfortable as possible. MARIE has look of concern. MATTHEW notices her concern.

MARIE

Oh, papa. Do we have to?

MATTHEW

I'm just downstairs. I'm not going anywhere. Promise.

MATTHEW smiles towards MARIE. Gives her a reassuring look. MARIE gives JAMES a worried gaze.

JAMES

Don't give me that look! Come then, I believe it time to leave our old chap here.

*They both move away from MATTHEW. MARIE picks up books she drooped on floor. MARIE walks to JAMES who is already half way up stairs. MATTHEW pulls a worn, little book by his bed toward himself and tries to rest. MARIE notices this as she hurries to catch up with JAMES. MARIE and JAMES walk through door and exit *stage left. Stage goes black.**

Scene 2:

At rise, MARIE enters stage left, down stairs and turns on the light bulb. MATTHEW is sleeping on makeshift bed with the little worn book still clung in his arms-unawakened by MARIE. MARIE goes over to MATTHEW. MARIE lays soup bowl by him and kneels down beside him. MARIE curiously and cautiously reaches out for the book. MATTHEW wakes up, scared, and seizes MARIE'S hand. MARIE jumps back and gasps. MATTHEW recognizes MARIE and lets go of her hand- lightly laughing and shaking head.

MATTHEW

You're a curious girl.

MARIE

I didn't mean to....

MATTHEW

It's quite all right.

MARIE

What is it about?

MARIE'S eyes are fixed on book when this verse is said.

MATTHEW

(beat) It was about Hitler.

MARIE

Are you hiding from Hitler?

MARIE'S gaze shifts to MATTHEW.

MATTHEW

Yes.

MARIE

Are you a communist?

MATTHEW

I'm a Jew.

MARIE

Did he take away your mother too?

MATTHEW

(heavy hearted sigh) Probably.

MATTHEW sits up, back against the wall, body still covered by blanket. MATTHEW tilts head back and closes his eyes. MATTHEW makes a sigh smile.

MARIE

Don't worry. Um...

MARIE looks arounds and finds tray. Picks up soup and hands it to MATTHEW. MATTHEW takes it and takes one spoonful. Spits it immediately back out.

MARIE

The soup is terrible, isn't it?

While laughing MATTHEW shakes head and looks back and forth from MARIE to soup

MATTHEW

You may find this hard to believe, but...it's the best thing I've ever thrown up.

Chuckles from both of them. MATTHEW puts down bowl and starts speaking into air. While rubbing fingers over brick pattern on wall .

MATTHEW

Memory is the scribe of the soul. Do you know who said that? A man(*beat*) A man called Aristotle.

MATTHEW looks at MARIE

MATTHEW

Can you do me a favor? (*Beat*) Can you describe the day for me? What's it like outside?

MARIE

It's cloudy.

MATTHEW

No, no, no. Make the words yours. If your eyes could speak...what would they say?

MARIE

It's a pale day.

MATTHEW

Pale. Good. Go on.

MARIE

Everything's stuck behind a cloud. And the sun...doesn't look like the sun.

MATTHEW

What does it look like?

MARIE

Like a silver oyster?

(Chuckles)

MATTHEW

Thank you..... I saw that.

MARIE

You're welcome?

MATTHEW

Here,

MATTHEW gets up struggling. MATTHEW walks to trunk and opens it. MATTHEW takes out vintage painting supplies and closes lid. MATTHEW walks over to wall by bed. MATTHEW kneels down to MARIE'S level.

MATTHEW

Now let us see if we can paint this beautiful day you told me about. Hum?

MATTHEW smiles at MARIE. MARIE smiles back and picks up paint brush. They both start painting on wall. Little ways into it MATTHEW puts down paint brush and goes over to his bed and bends down to pick up the book. MATTHEW takes out a piece of brown paper and string from under bed. MATTHEW starts to then wrap book like gift. MARIE doesn't notice any of this-is painting . Once done, MATTHEW goes back over to MARIE.

MATTHEW

I've made you a gift.....It's all I had.

MATTHEW hands package to MARIE.

MARIE

But...

MATTHEW

Open it.

MARIE opens gift. MARIE runs hands over worn book, adoring it.

MARIE

Its beautiful!

MARIE opens book to first pages.

MARIE

For Marie...from Matthew.

MARIE runs fingers over written lettering.

MARIE

What, *(beat)* What does it say?

MATTHEW

לכתוב *(Speaking Hebrew)*

MATTHEW

Write. In my religion... we're taught that every living thing... every leaf, every bird... is only alive because it contains the secret word for life. That's, *(beat)* that's the only difference between us and a lump of clay. A word. *(Beat)* Words are life, Marie. I painted all those pages blank for,....All those blank pages...they're for you to fill.

MATTHEW and MARIE smile at each other. Bitter sweet moment goes here. MATTHEW starts coughing badly and falls back in bed. MATTHEW acts really sick, then is very still, breathing shallowly. MARIE tries to aid him but is frantic. MARIE tears up when MATTHEW isn't responding and his breathing is shallowing.

MARIE

(above a whisper) You said you weren't going anywhere, Matthew. You promised.

Still sad but like having an idea, MARIE runs over to trunk and takes out a book and goes straight back to MATTHEW. MARIE sits down by him and opens book to first pages.

MARIE

The Invisible Man...by H.G. Wells. *(beat)* Matthew?...

MARIE looks over book at MATTHEW. MATTHEW is laying still, eyes closed looking sickly.

MARIE

Chapter One. The eyes in the faces as he passed on the street seemed to look inside him and finger his guilt. But things were out of his control. He had thought he had cut himself loose and was drifting faster and faster towards his fate. And the sudden realization that this would all be for nothing filled his heart with dread.

MATTHEW smiles with closed mouth and eyes shut. MARIE'S voice as it trails off and stage goes back.

Scene 3:

At Rise, in a study scene. All actors on stage right. MATTHEW is getting ready to leave, fiddling with old leather backpack. MARIE is sadly watching standing close to JAMES. At night, so lighting of stage is dark. Sounds of military checks and occasional car passing going on in background along with rain.

MARIE

I don't understand! What did he do so wrong!?

JAMES

He reminded people of their humanity.

MARIE

Can't he apologize?

JAMES says line sad but sarcastically.

JAMES HANS

To who? Hitler?

MARIE

Will they *(beat)* take him away?

JAMES

I...I don't know.

MATTHEW

But if they come and find me here...they'll take all of you away.

MARIE

No, *(beat)* Matthew.

MARIE takes a couple steps towards MATTHEW.

MATTHEW

I have to, Marie. I'm sorry.

MATTHEW is finished fiddling with backpack and swings backpack over shoulder.

MARIE

But you promised.

MATTHEW

It's for your own good...*(beat)* For your family.

MARIE hangs head and whispers verse.

MATTHEW

But you're my family.

MATTHEW walks over to MARIE. Kneels down and picks up her chin to MARIE looks at his face.

MATTHEW

You've kept me alive, Marie. Don't ever forget that.

MARIE

I can't lose someone else!

MATTHEW

(tenderly) I'm not lost to you, Marie. You'll always be able to find me.... in your art,...in your words,...in your creativity. That's where I'll live on.

MARIE

Matthew...please.

MARIE tears up and hugs MATTHEW. MATTHEW hugs back. Brother and sister bitter sweet moment goes here. They both let go and MATTHEW gets up.

MATTHEW

Thank you.

MATTHEW takes steps backwards towards door. JAMES walks up to him.

JAMES

Here.

JAMES hands MATTHEW a leather wrapped pouch.

JAMES

If I could have only given you as much as you have given us.

MATTHEW opens pouch and pulls out the paint brushes and paint.

MATTHEW

They're perfect. Thank you James. <----grateful and humble

JAMES

Our home is always here for you and if there's anything I can do for you, just let me know. You like a son to me Matthew and thank you for teaching Marie what you have and being big like a brother to her.

JAMES pats MATTHEW heartedly with one arm on shoulder. MATTHEW does the same to JAMES HANS. They both have a moment. MATTHEW puts leather pouch in backpack swings it on and heads for the door. MATTHEW grabs handle and opens door a crack then turns back to JAMES and MARIE.

MATTHEW

I guess this is farewell then..Wish me luck

MATTHEW walks through door and exits stage. MARIE cries on JAMES HANS. JAMES HANS ,surprised, lets her and strokes MARIE'S hair trying to comfort her. Stage goes black.