

What Opa Did

BY
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WHAT OPA DID

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WHAT OPA DID

To Rita Franciosa and Hedy Kohl
with love and more gratitude than you will ever know

WHAT OPA DID

What Opa Did was first presented in Beverly Hills, CA by Theatre 40 (David Hunt Stafford, Producer), opening on January 15, 2026. It was directed by James Paradise; the set design was by Jeff G. Rack; the lighting design was by Derrick McDaniel; the sound design was by Nick Foran; the costume design was by Michael Mullen; the hair/makeup design was by Judi Lewin; accent coach was Joy Ellison; the production stage manager was Bill Froggatt. The cast was as follows:

OPA.....	Allan Wasserman
KATE.....	Meghan Lewis
ELISABETH.....	Lilli Passero
MAX.....	Jeremy Schaye
KARL BRAUN.....	Victor Montez

WHAT OPA DID

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

This play is dedicated to the memory of my grandparents Werner and Lucia Thiel. Before they died, in the early 2000's, I tried to get stories from them about their experiences during World War II. I was only partly successful.

They were both half Jews and met at a Berlin social club during the Weimar Republic time specifically set up for young people of partial Jewish background. Oma lost many members of her family in the Holocaust and Opa didn't want to talk about those "terrible times."

Although they were reluctant, I did get some sketchy details such as the fact that he left his family for three years during the war, had an affair, and was arrested and placed in a concentration camp. She was all alone with her two daughters, in the country outside of Leipzig, a place where she had never been, trying to survive without her husband. There were more, but after they died I kicked myself for not digging deeper. But, it is because of my sketchy knowledge that this play came to fruition. Some of *What Opa Did* is based on the true facts of their lives but the majority is made up out of whole cloth. I tried connecting the few dots I had, not with the truth, for I am never to know that, but with a play that wrote itself. My memory of my Oma and Opa is of two loving older people that loved their grandson. It is difficult for me to imagine them when they were young and vibrant and faced with the very real specter of death during World War II but I have and hope you enjoy it.

I would also like to dedicate this play to a woman my mother knew only as Frau Döbler. She allowed my family to live at the agricultural school to which she was caretaker throughout much of the war. I am sure Minna Döbler knew my grandparents were half Jews and this knowledge put her and her family in mortal danger. Nevertheless, she gave them a safe haven and for that, I owe her my own life.

WHAT OPA DID

CHARACTERS

Kate – a 20-something American woman who lives in Brooklyn.

Opa – Kate's 70-something gruff German half-Jewish grandfather.

Elisabeth – Kate's grandmother. A German half-Jewish woman in her late 20's or early 30's.

Max – the young Opa in his early 30's.

Unterscharführer Karl Braun – a young SS soldier.

What Opa Did can be performed by 3 or 5 actors. Individual theaters can configure the cast in the way that fits their needs best.

1. Kate and Elisabeth – one actor
Opa and Max – one actor
Braun – one actor
2. Five actors playing the five roles.

Setting

Opa's living/dining room in a small southern German town. It is small and quite cluttered with knick knacks from his extensive travels. There is an older woman's touch to the furnishings (doilies on the couch arms for example) but things are messy and dusty enough to assume a woman hasn't straightened up in quite a while. There is also a small 1940's or earlier era radio somewhere in the room.

The setting during World War II changes to an apartment in Leipzig as well as Opa and Oma's small house in the country but because the action should flow seamlessly from one scene to another, the furnishings do not need to be altered.

Time

1990 and 1939-1941

WHAT OPA DID

WHAT OPA DID

ACT I
SCENE ONE

A young man, MAX, appears on the bare stage in tattered and filthy clothes. An unseen man, BRAUN, addresses him.

BRAUN. Why didn't you tell them?

MAX. Who?

BRAUN. The people you had contacted in Munich.

MAX. I told you...

BRAUN. ...that you knew no one in Munich. How am I supposed to believe that?! No one?! Where did you buy your bread?

MAX. My bread? I...

BRAUN. Did you know the baker?

MAX. Of course I...

BRAUN. So you did know people.

MAX. Yes but...

BRAUN. That's the last time you lie to me Herr Vogel.

MAX. I didn't know anyone at the University. *(Beat.)*

BRAUN. Position.

MAX. Please.

BRAUN. POSITION!

MAX. I didn't...

BRAUN. POSITION!! *(A beaten Max gingerly gets down into a kneeling position with his arms straight out in front of him. He holds the painful position for quite a few seconds before his eyes start to dart back and forth looking for his interrogator. After another long pause...)*

MAX. Unterscharführer? *(no response)* Unterscharführer? *(Nothing. Lights slowly fade to blackness.)*

WHAT OPA DID

SCENE TWO

KATE is sitting at the table eating pickles out of a jar in her grandfather's small apartment. OPA, wearing thick glasses, is standing and looking out the front windows that presumably look out onto the lake.

KATE. Why don't you tell them?

OPA. What?

KATE. What you are.

OPA. *(laughs gruffly)* What I am?

KATE. They don't know.

OPA. What are you talking about?

KATE. You've been living in this little German town for fifteen years and they don't know you.

OPA. Of course they do.

KATE. No. They don't.

OPA. I know them.

KATE. Do you?

OPA. Yes. There's Wolfgang at the Post, Marianne at the café, Franz at the bank. I know them.

KATE. Do you know their last names?

OPA. *(laughs again)* What are you talking about?

KATE. Their last names? What are they? *(silence)* Marianne, Wolfgang, Fritz...

OPA. Franz.

KATE. Whatever.

OPA. "Whatever". You don't know their first names.

KATE. I don't live here.

OPA. When you walk out of your walking up apartment in your Brooklyn do you go to the bank?

KATE. Yeah, the ATM is right down the block.

OPA. Do you ever go into the bank?

KATE. Yes.

OPA. What's his name?

KATE. Who?

WHAT OPA DID

OPA. The man at the bank.

KATE. What man at the bank?

OPA. When you go to the bank, do you see a man there?

KATE. I see a lot of men there.

OPA. Working there. Behind the...I don't know...

KATE. Yeah, the thick plastic...yeah...I don't know.

OPA. You don't know?

KATE. I don't think it's the same guy every time.

OPA. You don't even know.

KATE. No.

OPA. I know Franz. *(long pause.)*

KATE. Point well taken.

OPA. Tea?

KATE. Green?

OPA. Black. *(He strides off into the kitchen.)*

KATE. I guess I'll have black. *(long pause, then to the unseen Opa)* Are you afraid? *(no response)* to tell them? *(still nothing)* I think they would think it was very interesting. *(Opa comes back into the room laughing.)*

OPA. "Interesting"?

KATE. Well, yeah, I mean...

OPA. What do you mean?

KATE. You know...

OPA. No, I don't know.

KATE. Interesting. Like...

OPA. Like, interesting. "Interesting" means nothing. I asked a woman last week if she enjoyed the latest film at the cinema and she said it was "interesting". "Interesting" good?, "interesting bad?", "interesting" what?

KATE. What woman?

OPA. What?

KATE. Woman. What woman?

OPA. That's not what...

KATE. Frankly, I'm more interested in the fact that you were talking to a woman than whether you like the word "interesting".

OPA. That's neither...

KATE. So, what woman?

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OPA. *(pause and then he shakes his head)*

KATE. No?

OPA. No.

KATE. There was no woman?

OPA. No. I was just illustrating a point.

KATE. Ah.

OPA. Yes. Ah. *(Kate picks up a framed photograph of her grandmother with her arms around her brunette mother and her blonde Aunt when they were young.)*

KATE. Have you spoken to a woman in the last five months?

OPA. Of course I have. Marianne...

KATE. Yeah, besides the lady at the bakery or the bookstore? Have you been able to talk to anyone since...Oma. Anyone at all? Any friends?

OPA. You.

KATE. Grandkids don't count.

OPA. Kids?

KATE. *(incredulously pointing out the photograph)* You've talked to Mom or Tante Lilli?

OPA. *(pause)* No.

KATE. I didn't think so. *(pause)* They look so different but both have the same stubborn streak.

OPA. Imagine them as teenagers.

KATE. Ugh, no thanks. *(beat)* Why don't you come back to New York with me Opa?

OPA. *(laughs)* What would I do in New York?

KATE. What wouldn't you do in New York? There are museums, theater, film, cafes, you wouldn't have to drive that old VW bus, you can walk or take the subway, you could meet people like you, you could...

OPA. Whoa, whoa Katie. New York is not the place for me.

KATE. Why not?

OPA. I don't think I have the strength for a big city.

KATE. Of course you do. You're a Berliner.

OPA. Was. Was a Berliner. Many years ago. Before the war my dear.

KATE. But you loved it there. Oma used to tell me...

WHAT OPA DID

OPA. About dancing all night, about the amazing nightclubs and theater and cafes that would serve martinis and espresso until the sun came up.

KATE. Yes! It sounds so amazing!

OPA. I hate dancing.

KATE. Opa.

OPA. Always have.

KATE. But Oma...

OPA. Yes, your Oma loved it. She could stay up for days. One party after another. One jazz show after a theater performance after a 2:00am supper. Your Oma was...she was...

KATE. Indefatigable.

OPA. *(beat)* I have no idea what that means but your Oma was that.

KATE. And you must have done all of that with her.

OPA. She dragged me along. I would much rather be reading a book. *(They hear the tea kettle start to whistle)* Tea. *(He quickly escapes to the kitchen.)*

KATE. *(quietly to herself)* Shit. *(Kate starts to wander around the room, picking up knick knacks and framed photographs. When she gets to one particular small photo she picks it up to get a closer look and smiles. As she puts it down, she sees a small object hidden among all the clutter. It is a silver Star of David. Lights fade.)*

SCENE THREE

Lights rise on Max who is in the same stress position as before. He's been in it for a very, very long time. He's half asleep and half in excruciating pain. After a full minute, Max's arms start to minutely drop down. We hear Braun's voice as if chastising a child.

BRAUN. Ah, ah, ah. *(Max pops fully awake with terror. He raises his arms parallel to the ground again no matter how painful. Lights fade.)*

WHAT OPA DID

SCENE FOUR

Lights rise on Kate holding the Star of David. Opa comes into the room with the tea.

OPA. Milk.

KATE. No thanks.

OPA. Too late.

KATE. Milk it is. *(She holds up the Star of David.)* Why won't you tell them?

OPA. Because it's none of their business.

KATE. Are you afraid of anti-Semitism?

OPA. *(no response)*

KATE. Why did you move back here if you thought you wouldn't be accepted?

OPA. I am accepted. We were accepted. We haven't had any problems.

KATE. But you won't tell them you're Jewish.

OPA. Am I?

KATE. What?

OPA. Am I?

KATE. What, Jewish?

OPA. Yes. Jewish.

KATE. Of course you're Jewish.

OPA. I don't go to Temple.

KATE. Yeah, well neither do I but...

OPA. Do you call yourself Jewish?

KATE. Yeah. Of course.

OPA. But you don't worship?

KATE. No but...

OPA. Keep kosher?

KATE. No. But...

OPA. So how are you Jewish?

KATE. I...I just am.

OPA. Hmm...

WHAT OPA DID

KATE. Are you judging me? *(He looks at her and gives a wry smile.)*
What is that?

OPA. What?

KATE. That. That smile?

OPA. Nothing.

KATE. I don't believe that.

OPA. Believe what you want. You obviously don't believe in following Jewish law. *(There is a long pause as Kate looks at her grandfather. She is steaming and trying to keep a lid on it.)*

KATE. You moved to a town in the former 3rd Reich whose closest synagogue is more than 60 miles away, in a different country. *(Now it is Opa's turn to look at his granddaughter. He takes a chair, sets it right in front of Kate and sits two feet away from her.)*

OPA. When you travel and people ask you what you are, what do you answer?

KATE. What I am?

OPA. Yes. You're walking along the *Rambla* in Barcelona and a handsome Spanish man comes up to you and says, "Senorita, you are so beautiful it makes my heart ache. I want to be a part of your life forever. What are you?"

KATE. *(giggles)* That's a terrible Spanish accent.

OPA. "Senorita, the sun looks like a flickering candle next to the radiance that comes from you."

KATE. That's not bad.

OPA. Gracias.

KATE. Use that on Oma?

OPA. None of your business. So, what do you say?

KATE. "What I am"? This is silly.

OPA. "Senorita, I must know. There can't be others as stunning as you. What are you?"

KATE. Uh...I'm a woman. An American woman.

OPA. American?

KATE. Yeah, American.

OPA. Not Jewish?

KATE. Well, no...I...

WHAT OPA DID

OPA. Not Jewish-American?

KATE. No, I...

OPA. So why would I tell them I'm Jewish?

KATE. It's different.

OPA. How?

KATE. You've been here for fifteen years.

OPA. It doesn't just come up in conversation.

KATE. Why not?

OPA. *(laughs)* "Why not".

KATE. No, I'm serious. Why doesn't it come up in conversation?

OPA. Does being Jewish "just come up in conversation" with you?

KATE. *(beat)* Yes.

OPA. *(laughs)*

KATE. I'm serious. It does. Eventually it does.

OPA. Is it something you finally admit to after a few drinks? *(Kate stops and looks at her grandfather.)*

KATE. No Opa. I don't "admit" to it. It comes out in conversation. It's not something I'm ashamed of. It's who I am. Jesus, it's who half my friends are.

OPA. Ah...well...all right. *(An uncomfortable Opa stands and makes his way back into the kitchen. After a bit, Kate makes a decision and reaches into her bag. She takes out a legal pad with scrawled notes all over it. Lights fade.)*

SCENE FIVE

Lights rise on ELISABETH who is in shadows and can barely be seen. She is standing facing the audience with an unknown man behind her. The man's hand appears on her stomach and slowly begins to inch its way up her body until it is on her breast. The entire time this is happening, Elisabeth's face betrays no emotion. As the man's hand reaches her breast, she closes her eyes but we can't tell if it's pleasure or pain she is feeling.

WHAT OPA DID

SCENE SIX

Lights rise on Opa reemerging from the kitchen with two plates. He places them on the table.

KATE. The last time I spoke to Oma I asked her some questions. (*Opa visibly stiffens but says nothing.*) Like about her family.

OPA. What about them?

KATE. Did you get along with them?

OPA. Your Oma had a big family.

KATE. A lot were killed in the Holocaust right? (*A painful beat.*)

OPA. Yes.

KATE. What about her sister, Tante Rosa?

OPA. Oy.

KATE. So...no?

OPA. No, she was fine.

KATE. “Fine”?

OPA. Yes. Fine. What do you want me to say?

KATE. A little more than just “fine”.

OPA. She took us in after we left Germany. She was fine.

KATE. “Fine” is as descriptive as “interesting”.

OPA. Kateylein, it was after the war, Germany was destroyed. There wasn’t any work. I tried to get a job.

KATE. Where?

OPA. Anywhere.

KATE. America?

OPA. No visa.

KATE. Why not?

OPA. (*shrugs*) Ask them.

KATE. So you went to Israel?

OPA. Palestine.

KATE. Palestine?

OPA. It was ’47. Israel wasn’t Israel until the next year.

KATE. So you went to Palestine to be with Tante Rosa.

WHAT OPA DID

OPA. She had moved there in the early 30's. She was a kid...met a boy who wanted to farm. Eh.

KATE. So you went to Palestine and didn't you...I mean Mom told me...didn't you sink the ship that brought you or something?

OPA. *(laughs)* Yeah. In the Haifa harbor.

KATE. But why? *(also laughs)* That's insane.

OPA. Palestine was run by the British. They weren't letting in any more refugees.

KATE. So how'd you get in?

OPA. They weren't letting anyone in but we knew that they also wouldn't let us die. So, we scuttled the ship. Took the fire axes and hacked and hacked at the hull until water started pouring in. We then put out an SOS and they rescued us.

KATE. The Brits?

OPA. Yes.

KATE. And they took you to land?

OPA. Yes. Sort of.

KATE. Sort of?

OPA. They took us to land but not to the closest land.

KATE. Being Israel...Palestine.

OPA. They took us all to Cyprus.

KATE. Mom never told me that.

OPA. She probably doesn't remember.

KATE. So how long were you there?

OPA. A year and a half.

KATE. Jesus.

OPA. Interesting expletive for a Jew.

KATE. *(ignores him)* When did you get to Tante Rosa?

OPA. May 15th, 1948.

KATE. That was the day Israel was created, right?

OPA. The day after.

KATE. That must have been amazing!

OPA. It was horrible. The day before we arrived, a new war started.

KATE. Yeah, but it was for the creation of a Jewish state.

WHAT OPA DID

OPA. *(long beat)* War is war. We had our nine and six-year-old daughters with us. Did you know that your mother peed on herself every time there was a loud noise in the street? She would shake. Shake. Like this. For years. Did you know that?

KATE. *(quietly)* No.

OPA. War is war. War is war.

KATE. Is that why you didn't stay?

OPA. Amongst other things.

KATE. You finally got out of Germany, suffered in a refugee camp in Cyprus for a year and a half but only stayed in Israel for a short time. Why?

OPA. It's complicated.

KATE. What does that mean?

OPA. Just what I said.

KATE. Even though there was fighting it must have been a very exciting time.

OPA. I wasn't looking for excitement.

KATE. But Israel had just been created! After 5000 years we finally had a homeland.

OPA. "We"?

KATE. Yeah! At Passover we'd been saying "next year in Israel" for generations and now that ridiculously unattainable wish had become a real possibility. I've often thought about how amazing that must have been.

OPA. Remember your answer?

KATE. Huh?

OPA. About what you are?

KATE. Wait, what?

OPA. *(in a bad Spanish accent)* When I came up to you on the *Rambla*, what you said?

KATE. I'm an American woman.

OPA. Look at me.

KATE. Okay.

OPA. What do you see?

KATE. What are you talking about?

WHAT OPA DID

OPA. If I was walking on the *Rambla* and you didn't know me, what would you see?

KATE. I don't know, a man.

OPA. An old man.

KATE. An elderly distinguished man.

OPA. You're too kind but I think you're also being disingenuous. You see an old German man.

KATE. Well, yeah but...

OPA. I was born in Kreuzberg, my parents were Berliners, my grandparents were farmers in Saxony. I was and am a German. Sure, some considered me Jewish, but I am German. Just like you are American. American first, Jewish second. I am German. I was in the new country of Israel created out of the ashes of the Holocaust. I was German. In Israel.

KATE. But Israel was founded by German-Jews. Millions of German-Jews had been killed by the Nazis. How is it possible you could feel like you didn't belong.

OPA. *(long beat)* Like I said, it's complicated. *(Opa exits to the kitchen. An exasperated Kate throws her hands into the air. Blackout.)*

SCENE SEVEN

In blackness we hear the deafening sound of a huge explosion.

Dim lights come up on the same apartment but the lights are focused in a way that makes it seem much smaller and more claustrophobic. One of the only set differences is that a china tea cup is now broken on the floor. It is 1939. Elisabeth is hunched over and huddled under the dining room table to avoid any falling debris. Max, a much younger Opa, rushes into the room.

MAX. Elisabeth! *(nothing)* Else!! *(Elisabeth rocks back and forth and slowly comes up out of her bent over stance. She is holding a swaddled infant and cooing over her baby in order to calm her.)* Oh, thank God.

WHAT OPA DID

(Max kneels next to the table and reaches out. Elisabeth gingerly hands him their baby and crawls out herself.) She alright?

ELISABETH. Yes. I think.

MAX. That was too close.

ELISABETH. Who is it?

MAX. British.

ELISABETH. Why would they be bombing here?

MAX. We have to leave.

ELISABETH. No.

MAX. This is no time for discussion.

ELISABETH. We are not leaving.

MAX. Have you looked across the street?

ELISABETH. I haven't opened the curtains in two weeks. You told me not to.

MAX. Antenna.

ELISABETH. Across the street?

MAX. Some sort of command post. We can't stay.

ELISABETH. We can't leave.

MAX. We have to. *(long beat.)*

ELISABETH. I'm worried about her.

MAX. She's fine.

ELISABETH. No. She's not.

MAX. What are you talking about? She looks perfect to me.

ELISABETH. What kind of baby doesn't cry after...that?

MAX. Our baby. Our courageous girl.

ELISABETH. She should cry. She should scream. *(beat)* It's all I want to do.

MAX. She knows we can't draw attention to ourselves.

ELISABETH. You're giving an infant more credit than me.

MAX. You went out yesterday.

ELISABETH. We needed bread.

MAX. We didn't need bread. *(beat)*

ELISABETH. You just had a sandwich.

MAX. Hm?

ELISABETH. A sandwich.

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MAX. I heard you.

ELISABETH. And what would the main ingredient of a sandwich be?

MAX. Chicken. *(pause)* Tomatoes.

ELISABETH. No.

MAX. No?

ELISABETH. No.

MAX. Well, that's not really the point.

ELISABETH. What is the point?

MAX. That you need to...

ELISABETH. I need to what?

MAX. Uh...it's not important.

ELISABETH. Bread.

MAX. What?

ELISABETH. Bread.

MAX. Bread?

ELISABETH. If I didn't go out yesterday, you couldn't have had a sandwich today.

MAX. I realize that.

ELISABETH. Then what are you talking about?

MAX. I just think it's not worth taking unnecessary risks.

ELISABETH. Eating is not an unnecessary risk.

MAX. Of course...

ELISABETH. ...and if I hadn't gone out then you wouldn't have eaten.
(long beat)

MAX. Yes, but...

ELISABETH. You're still talking? *(There is a long uncomfortable silence between the two. Elisabeth finally takes the baby from Max and exits into the kitchen. Max audibly exhales. He looks around for a few moments and then makes his way upstage. He bends down and picks up a broken china cup from the floor. He takes the pieces of the cup back to the table and tries to fit them together. It seems hopeless. There are too many pieces. Elisabeth reenters holding a bottle of milk for the baby.)*

MAX. I went to the factory today.

ELISABETH. And?

MAX. They're suspicious.

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ELISABETH. Of what?!

MAX. Don't worry. It's not that.

ELISABETH. What is it?

MAX. They look at me and wonder why I'm not on the front.

ELISABETH. Do you tell them why you're not?

MAX. Of course. But a man who's excluded from the army because of his eyesight isn't the greatest asset to a company that makes watches.

ELISABETH. Well, what now?

MAX. There's a small architectural firm downtown. I thought...

ELISABETH. No one wants an architect.

MAX. The bombs are dropping every day. There must be rebuilding.

ELISABETH. We're in the middle of a war. Whatever rebuilding is happening isn't going to involve Doric columns.

MAX. *(chuckles)* I prefer Ionic. *(Elisabeth laughs too. After the laughter peters out...)* I really don't like that command post across the street.

ELISABETH. Me neither.

MAX. It's one of the first things the Brits are going to see.

ELISABETH. I hope they bomb it! I hope they destroy the whole thing!

MAX. But we're here. *(beat)*

ELISABETH. We have to leave.

MAX. That's what I... *(She shoots him a look. He immediately stops his train of thought and looks at his daughter.)* We can't go far.

ELISABETH. Out of the city.

MAX. Berlin wasn't safe.

ELISABETH. Leipzig isn't safe.

MAX. I'll find out where. *(Max goes to put on his coat but before he does...)* It's getting worse.

ELISABETH. That's why we have to get out of here.

MAX. That's not what I mean. *(Elisabeth looks at him but doesn't say anything.)* There are rumors.

ELISABETH. What about?

MAX. That the reported number of people killed on Kristallnacht was too few.

ELISABETH. Does that surprise you?

MAX. No. *(beat)* The French have reported that it was 91.

WHAT OPA DID

ELISABETH. I'm sure it was at least a few hundred. It didn't just happen in Berlin you know.

MAX. No, I know. *(long pause)* The rumors say that they're killing some that they arrested.

ELISABETH. What are you talking about?

MAX. Who knows how many Jews were arrested that day? Thousands? Tens of thousands? They're putting them in these prisons. These camps.

ELISABETH. Enemies of the people.

MAX. Yes.

ELISABETH. It's horrible but we won't let them starve.

MAX. That's not what I'm afraid of.

ELISABETH. What are you talking about?

MAX. The rumors...

ELISABETH. I'm sick of "the rumors"! "The rumors" are just that. Rumors!

MAX. They say that some are being killed. In the prison camps.

ELISABETH. Who is saying this? *(Max shrugs)* Bah! *(She goes to the table and starts to clean up the dishes that were left from the previous scene.)*

MAX. I need to find out what's happened to Onkel Georg.

ELISABETH. Onkel Georg?!

MAX. I must.

ELISABETH. What are you talking about?

MAX. We haven't seen him since the week before the pogrom.

ELISABETH. He was arrested.

MAX. We don't know that.

ELISABETH. Well then, where did he go?

MAX. I don't know. That's why I have to find him.

ELISABETH. And when are you proposing to do this finding?

MAX. ...soon.

ELISABETH. Soon?

MAX. Yes, soon! I'll make sure you and Lilli are safe and then...

ELISABETH. You'll go where?

MAX. I have no idea.

ELISABETH. That's rather a general area don't you think?

WHAT OPA DID

MAX. He's my uncle. I have to know what's happened to him.

ELISABETH. He's not your uncle. *(beat)*

MAX. No. No, he's not.

ELISABETH. You've been calling him Onkel Georg for so long you've forgotten.

MAX. I haven't forgotten.

ELISABETH. He invites you to lunch once a month ever since you were five years old and you feel obligated to him?

MAX. It was more than that.

ELISABETH. What more?

MAX. He paid for my schooling.

ELISABETH. Because he felt so guilty having you grow up in that orphanage.

MAX. It wasn't an orphanage.

ELISABETH. There were nineteen orphans and you. That's an orphanage.

MAX. My mother was out of town a lot.

ELISABETH. Your mother was out of her skull a lot.

MAX. This is all besides the point. I have to find out where he is.

ELISABETH. What about us?

MAX. I told you I'll make sure you're safe.

ELISABETH. A man that never admits he's the father of a little boy and then has him call him "uncle" as he passes out a few *Deutschmarks*! You don't owe him anything.

MAX. I owe him my life! *(beat)* My mother was going from town to town from country to country with the circus dancing with her snakes. It was because of him that I survived let alone went to school and made something of myself. I owe this to him. *(long beat)*

ELISABETH. Do what you have to do.

MAX. I thought you, of all people, would understand.

ELISABETH. What makes me so special?

MAX. Half your family is Jewish.

ELISABETH. What does that have to do with anything?

MAX. Onkel Georg wa...is Jewish.

ELISABETH. You've lost me.

WHAT OPA DID

MAX. Don't you feel a sort-of kinship towards him?

ELISABETH. Because he's Jewish?

MAX. Yes.

ELISABETH. He's your father!

MAX. I know but...

ELISABETH. I have absolutely nothing in common with him. I never understood how he could have let you live like that and I've never had any sympathy for him. Besides, the clothes he sells are hideous.

MAX. The store was destroyed. *(beat)*

ELISABETH. I know.

MAX. Elisabeth, I know he never treated me like a son. He never kicked a ball with me, he never took me in his arms, he never even let me meet my half-sisters but he is my father and he deserves to not be...alone out there.
(long pause)

ELISABETH. Where will you start looking?

MAX. Most Berliners were taken to Dachau. That's where I'll start.

ELISABETH. That's near Munich, isn't it? *(beat)*

MAX. Yes. *(She looks at him for a split-second and takes her baby into the kitchen. Blackout.)*

SCENE EIGHT

Kate speaks from the kitchen and Opa has transformed from his younger into his older self.

KATE *(O.S.)* So you left the family? *(Opa doesn't say anything as he picks up the picture of his young family and gazes at it.)* This photograph above the sink is beautiful. *(Opa traces the faces of his wife and daughters while his granddaughter speaks from the other room.)* Is that a rose behind Oma's ear? Looks like a white rose but it's hard to tell because Mom's little baby hand is covering half of it. *(Kate's words seem to have a physical effect on Opa as he looks almost stricken with pain.)* Opa? *(No response.)* Opa? *(Opa slowly puts the photograph down and closes his eyes. Kate reenters with the photo she was talking about in her hand.)* She was such a little fatty when...Opa? Are you okay? *(She drops the photo,*

WHAT OPA DID

rushes to him and takes his arm. He lets her and also lets her guide him to his chair. Kate runs out of the room and almost immediately, runs back in holding a jar of aspirin.) Here. Take one of these. I'm not sure if...just take one...Here... Okay. (She puts an aspirin in her grandfather's mouth and gives him a sip of water so he can swallow it. She then sits opposite him, completely worried. He is just sitting there with his eyes closed not saying anything.) Oh God, 911. (She rushes to the telephone, starts to dial and...) 911. Crap. It's not 911 in Germany. It's...Fuck. I don't know. Oh, God! (As she's panicking, Opa opens his eyes and watches her. As she reaches her crescendo, he purses his lips and spits the aspirin at her head. Kate drops the phone and stares at him.)

OPA. It's not a heart attack.

KATE. What?

OPA. I'm not having a heart attack.

KATE. But...

OPA. Aspirin's not what I need.

KATE. Opa...

OPA. Schnapps. Cabinet. Top shelf. *(Kate still stares at him) Schnell!* *(She jumps up, rushes to the cabinet, takes out the liquor bottle and pours him a shot. He downs it. He looks at her. She looks at him.)* Well?

KATE. What?

OPA. Another.

KATE. Are you...

OPA. Another.

KATE. Another. Okay. *(She pours him another shot which he immediately downs. There are a few seconds of silence between the two.)* Better?

OPA. Mm.

KATE. Did you go to Dachau?

OPA. Mm.

KATE. What's "Mm"?

OPA. Yes.

KATE. What did you find out?

OPA. Nothing. You?

KATE. What?

WHAT OPA DID

OPA. Shot?

KATE. No, I...

OPA. Come on. Drink with your Opa.

KATE. No, I really...

OPA. You're making me talk about this...*Scheisse*...and you're not going to join me?

KATE. Uh...okay...I guess. *(She pours herself half a shot and downs it.)*
Wow.

OPA. Nice, huh?

KATE. Uh...no.

OPA. *(Laughs.)*

KATE. *(beat)* So you didn't find anything?

OPA. At first.

KATE. Oh.

OPA. When I got there I started asking around. I talked to townsfolk that worked in the camp. I couldn't get any information.

KATE. Were they too scared to talk?

OPA. I didn't have anything to bribe them with. So I left.

KATE. You left?

OPA. It wasn't doing any good. Nobody was talking to me.

KATE. Did you go back to Oma and Tante Lilli?

OPA. Munich.

KATE. Oh.

OPA. I needed to find my uncle.

KATE. Yes. I know. Finding your...it was very important.

OPA. It was. I needed a way to get information about who was in the camp.

KATE. Who did you ask?

OPA. Ach! *(Opa tries to pour himself another shot but realizes the Schnapps bottle is empty. He gets up and makes his aggravated way over to a kitschy gift box on the coffee table.)*

KATE. Did you have friends in Munich?

OPA. Didn't know a soul.

KATE. So, who did you talk to? *(Opa has opened the box, taken out a bunch of knick-knacks and fished out a small pint bottle of Schnapps from*

WHAT OPA DID

the bottom.) Whoa. Easy Opa. *(He glares at her before he takes a swig from the bottle. He then offers it to his granddaughter. She hesitates for a second before taking the bottle from him and downing an even greater portion than he did. He gives a little smile.)*

OPA. University.

KATE. You went there?

OPA. I wasn't much older than the students. Thought it would be a good place to get information.

KATE. And was it?

OPA. A good place. Yes. A good place. *(Opa starts to cough which progressively gets worse and worse until Kate is again worried.)*

KATE. Are you sure you're okay Opa?

OPA. Ach, Katey, stop treating me like I'm...that *(points)*.

KATE. What, this? *(She holds up the broken china cup.)*

OPA. I'm not that fragile.

KATE. No. You're not. *(She retrieves the photograph that she had dropped earlier.)* When was this taken?

OPA. Tuesday, May 8th, 1945.

KATE. How specific.

OPA. That one's easy.

KATE. May 8th? Should I know that?

OPA. Yes.

KATE. *(beat)* Well?

OPA. What?

KATE. May 8th.

OPA. What of it?

KATE. I'm sorry I don't know the date. What was it?

OPA. End of the war.

KATE. I thought that was in August.

OPA. That's when the Japanese finally surrendered. End of the war for us was May 8th, 1945. I had planted a rose bush the year before. *(points to photograph)* That was its first bloom.

KATE. You must have been so thrilled.

OPA. That the roses were in bloom?

KATE. No, that the war was finally over.

WHAT OPA DID

OPA. I'm not sure "thrilled" would be how I would put it.

KATE. How would you put it?

OPA. *(long beat)* We could finally exhale. It felt as if we had taken a breath in 1938 and hadn't let it out for seven years. The oxygen had rotted in our lungs.

KATE. *(long pause)* Wow.

OPA. Yes. Wow.

KATE. So where were you when the war ended?

OPA. We thought we could lay low in Leipzig but it got too dangerous.

KATE. So where did you go?

OPA. Oma had gone to dressmaking school with a young girl from a little town called Oberholz in the country outside of Leipzig. We contacted her.

KATE. Is that where Oma and Tante Lilli went when you went to find your uncle?

OPA. That's right. I made sure they were safe with the Döbler family and then I went off to Bavaria. It's where your mother was born.

KATE. Why didn't you stay after the war?

OPA. Oh, we were pretty sure that once East Germany was created it would have offered us papers but we weren't sure we wanted to trade Fascism for Communism.

KATE. I can understand that.

OPA. So we thought we'd take our chances with Palestine. *(laughs)* Our choices were limited.

KATE. Okay, so Oma went to the country outside of Leipzig with Tante Lilli and you went to Munich. How long were you apart?

OPA. Three years.

KATE. Three years?!

OPA. Yes.

KATE. But Mom was born there, wasn't she.

OPA. *(smiles)* I did visit once.

KATE. Gross. *(laughs)* How did she do it?

OPA. Oma?

KATE. Yeah, Oma. You left her with a baby for three years in the middle of World War II.

OPA. She was fine.

WHAT OPA DID

KATE. Fine?!

OPA. Yes. We lived in a small outbuilding of a closed agricultural school. Milda Döbler's parents were the caretakers.

KATE. Did they know you were Jewish?

OPA. Now that's a question.

KATE. Well?

OPA. I never told them.

KATE. Sounds familiar. *(Opa shoots to his feet and addresses Kate at the top of his lungs.)*

OPA. ALLOWING A GERMAN TO KNOW YOU WERE HALF JEWISH WAS A DEATH WISH! DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND YOU STUPID GIRL?! *(There is absolute silence. Kate is shocked by her grandfather's outburst.)* I'm sorry. *(He buries his face in his hands.)* I'm so sorry. *(Opa seems to crawl into himself as he begins to sob. Kate stares at him. She's never seen him raise his voice let alone cry. She then slowly kneels on the floor next to his chair, drapes her arms around him, and buries her face into his neck. Blackout.)*

SCENE NINE

As they eventually come out of their embrace, Opa has once again transformed into his younger self and Kate is now Elisabeth. They are in their small house in Oberholz. Because they've been apart for so long, they speak a bit formally with each other.

ELISABETH. I wasn't sure I would ever see you again.

MAX. I told you I would come back to visit.

ELISABETH. Visit?

MAX. I can't stay long. *(long pause)*

ELISABETH. I missed you.

MAX. And I you. Lillilein sleeping?

ELISABETH. Yes. Finally. *(Max rises and starts to make his way to the other room.)* Where are you going?

MAX. I have to see her.

ELISABETH. You'll wake her.

WHAT OPA DID

MAX. I'll be quiet. I promise. *(He exits into the other room. Elisabeth looks after him and then holds her hand out flat in front of her. She is shaking. Max returns and she quickly drops her hand so he doesn't see.)* She's so big.

ELISABETH. It's been over a year.

MAX. One year, five months, one week, and three days.

ELISABETH. Yes. *(beat)* Wait until you see her running. She seems to have gone from crawling to running with nothing in between.

MAX. *(long beat)* How have you been? Really?

ELISABETH. I'm not sure you really want to know.

MAX. Has it been that horrible? *(There is a long pause as the two of them look at each other. Elisabeth almost speaks but then chooses not to.)* Did you get the *Deutschmarks* I sent with Tristan in August?

ELISABETH. Yes. It was nice to see him. Thank you.

MAX. You don't need to thank me. Whatever little I make is ours – together.

ELISABETH. Yes, but...

MAX. What?

ELISABETH. Seventeen months.

MAX. I had to find work.

ELISABETH. You were going to Dachau to find your father.

MAX. But I realized that we'd have little to live on and even more meager prospects out here in the country so...

ELISABETH. I heard from you three times in seventeen months. A letter in the Fall, a package in the Winter, and Tristan's visit three months ago.

MAX. I sent as much as I could. *(Throughout the following, Elisabeth tries to keep her volume down to not wake Lilli but sometimes fails).*

ELISABETH. I don't give a damn about the money! *(points to the other room)* She's talking now. Did you know that?! She asks where her daddy is and I had to lie and tell her fairytales about you being out slaying dragons because I didn't know. I DIDN'T KNOW!

MAX. It's wartime. I couldn't just send a letter every time I...

ELISABETH. Frau Döbler receives letters three times a week from her children. We're German. Do you think a little thing like the War is going to stop the post from working?

WHAT OPA DID

MAX. *(beat)* Frau Döbler doesn't have to worry about being sent to a concentration camp.

ELISABETH. Yes she does.

MAX. What are you talking about? There's not a milliliter of Jewish blood in that woman.

ELISABETH. No but she's giving us a place to stay.

MAX. She's not giving us anything. I'm paying rent for this hovel. And too much at that.

ELISABETH. If they came here tonight and arrested us, do you think the Döbler's would be safe?

MAX. They'd be questioned and released when the Nazi's found that they didn't know a thing. *(Elisabeth is silent.)* Right? *(Still nothing.)* Elisabeth? Elisabeth!

ELISABETH. What is it?

MAX. Have you compromised our safety?

ELISABETH. *(laughs)* "Compromised our safety."

MAX. Well, have you?

ELISABETH. You sound like a spy.

MAX. Have you told them anything you shouldn't have?

ELISABETH. You have no idea what it's like here.

MAX. Have you spoken out of turn?

ELISABETH. "Spoken out of turn". "Compromised our safety". Why can't you say it?

MAX. What?

ELISABETH. Why can't you speak the words?

MAX. What are you talking about?

ELISABETH. We are Jewish. *(Max turns his back to her.)* We are Jewish! My mother was Bat Mitzvah'd in The Neue Synagoge on Oranienburgerstrasse. Your father was last seen on Kristallnacht because he was a prominent Jewish businessman on The Kurfurstendamm. Our daughter has two out of four Jewish grandparents which makes her...Jesus, I don't know what it makes her...but it makes her Jewish enough to be slaughtered in the street. We are all Jewish and you...

MAX. I'm not going to apologize for trying to keep my family safe.
(There is a long silence between them.)

WHAT OPA DID

ELISABETH. Where have you been?

MAX. Munich.

ELISABETH. Have you heard from Onkel Georg?

MAX. No.

ELISABETH. Did you ever get to Dachau?

MAX. Yes.

ELISABETH. And that's all you're going to say?

MAX. 30,000.

ELISABETH. 30,000 what?

MAX. Jews were arrested in the week after Kristallnacht. 10,000 were sent to Dachau. I couldn't find him.

ELISABETH. That's understandable.

MAX. *(laughs bitterly)*

ELISABETH. And the rest of the time?

MAX. I went to Munich to look for work. Found some here and there. Also...

ELISABETH. Also?

MAX. Also.

ELISABETH. Are you going to go on or am I going to have to start screaming again?

MAX. I met someone.

ELISABETH. *(beat)* I see.

MAX. No. It's not what you think.

ELISABETH. What do I think?

MAX. His name is Hans.

ELISABETH. *His?*

MAX. No, Elisabeth. Please. I've been working with him.

ELISABETH. He obviously hasn't been paying you well.

MAX. He's paying me nothing.

ELISABETH. You do know you have a wife and a daughter stuck out here in the country! In Berlin, I was always able to support myself before you came along and now I'm not able to do a damn thing!

MAX. Your dresses were beautiful.

ELISABETH. Always *a la mode*. Society came to me to dress them and I was invited along. I was accepted as one of them. Now I'm here with the

WHAT OPA DID

goats and the sheep and the...goat and sheep shit. (*Max tries to stop himself but starts to laugh. Elisabeth puts on an even more valiant effort but finally succumbs to the giggles. Through their laughing Elisabeth manages to ask a question*). What are you and this Hans doing?

MAX. Trying to subvert the Nazis. (*Elisabeth's laughing stops dead. Max continues for a bit but soon peters out.*)

ELISABETH. Are you insane?

MAX. (*shrugs*)

ELISABETH. You shrug at that question?!

MAX. An absurd question deserves an absurd answer.

ELISABETH. They do not brook dissent. They do not allow it.

MAX. But without it how can this ever end?

ELISABETH. How many are you?

MAX. In Munich?

ELISABETH. Hans, you, and how many others?

MAX. (*beat*) Sixteen. (*Elisabeth barks out a bitter laugh.*) It has to begin somewhere.

ELISABETH. Sixteen out of 70 million.

MAX. All great changes begin with one person.

ELISABETH. All great changes begin with one side finally getting more people and more guns on their side and killing the other side. Sixteen people. Talk about an absurd answer.

MAX. We call ourselves The White Rose.

ELISABETH. And the absurdity continues. (*There is a loud noise outside. Elisabeth and Max turn to each other with a hint of panic. Just then, the baby starts to cry in the other room. Elisabeth rushes off to comfort her while Max makes his way to the front door and warily goes out to investigate the noise. Blackout.*)

SCENE TEN

From out of the bedroom emerges Kate looking around to see if her grandfather is in the room. When she sees that he is not, she goes to the phone and dials an international number. We hear ringing and the other side of the call through speakers.

WHAT OPA DID

ANSWERING SERVICE. You have reached the Simon Wiesenthal Center. If you know your party's three digit extension please dial it now, if not...*(Kate punches in three numbers. We hear another ringing tone and then an accented man answers. When Kate speaks, she tries to keep her volume down.)*

DR. HIRSCH. Hello?

KATE. Dr. Hirsch, it's Kate Goldstone.

DR. HIRSCH. Hello Kate.

KATE. I'm calling from Germany. From my grandfather's.

DR. HIRSCH. Did you have a good trip?

KATE. Yes. Uh...just fine...

DR. HIRSCH. So, have you been able to find out any information?

KATE. No, well, not really. It seems like he went to Munich in '39 and was there for the next three years.

DR. HIRSCH. Three years? Are you sure?

KATE. He left his wife and baby to go find his father who had been arrested during Kristallnacht.

DR. HIRSCH. And it took him three years to search?

KATE. No. I don't know.

DR. HIRSCH. We have found evidence that his father, your great grandfather, was executed a week after the Night of Broken Glass. He never even made it to Dachau.

KATE. So why the hell would Opa...

DR. HIRSCH. Why was he gone for three years?

KATE. I don't know. He did go back. Once. My mom was conceived during that visit.

DR. HIRSCH. She was born October 20, 1941. Yes, we know.

KATE. *(beat)* I'm really starting to feel uncomfortable...

DR. HIRSCH. Miss Goldstone, you came to work for us here at the Wiesenthal Center because you were passionate in your search for justice for victims of the Holocaust.

KATE. Yes. I was. I am.

DR. HIRSCH. And when we found that your grandfather may be implicated in atrocities, you suggested a trip to Germany to delve deeper.

KATE. I know I did but...

WHAT OPA DID

DR. HIRSCH. Do you have access to a fax machine?

KATE. Um...no not here but I guess I could go into town and...

DR. HIRSCH. Call me with the number and I'll fax you the translation of a transcript from an interrogation that took place in the Flossenburg concentration camp in July, 1940.

KATE. Concentration camp?

DR. HIRSCH. Yes. I think you'll find the transcript enlightening. Kate, someone turned in Stephan Kopatnik to the SS who, shortly after, executed him. We have sworn testimony by an eyewitness that it was your grandfather. We need independent confirmation. That is why you were sent there. You volunteered for this. We expect results. *(There is a long pause as Kate formulates what she is going to ask.)*

KATE. Dr. Hirsch?

DR. HIRSCH. Yes?

KATE. I know he could get arrested but...what could happen to him?

DR. HIRSCH. You mean if we find out that your grandfather assisted the Nazis in the murder of Stephan Kopatnik?

KATE. *(pause)* Yes.

DR. HIRSCH. We will contact the German police who will immediately arrest him. He will be extradited to Israel and tried using The Nazis and Nazi Collaborators Law. If he is found guilty under Article 1: 'Crimes Against the Jewish People' and there are proven extenuating circumstances the minimum sentence is ten years. If there are none, it is a mandatory death sentence. Does this answer your question Kate? *(Kate looks out at the beautiful lake in front of her.)*

KATE. It does.

END OF ACT I

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