

## **Magda Schaloum**

### PIECE 4: Slave labor

First, I was for ten days in Auschwitz. And then they decided to take us someplace else. So they put us in the cattle wagons – but nothing packed in like from home, And we arrived to Kracow – and Kracow- a terrible, terrible concentration camp. And uh they gave us work that just – unbelievable....

For instance, every morning, they were taking groups with the foreman to work. The foremen were mostly uh prisoners – hard-core prisoners. They let them out from the jails.

So one morning we had to go to a hill. And they said we have to level the hill. And they gave us shovel, picks and wheelbarrow and we had to loosen the dirt –shovel it into the wheelbarrows and take it down the bottom of the hill and empty it – then push again up the wheelbarrow and then fill it up again and bring down the dirt. One day, the foreman said ‘I know it’s very very hard work. When you go down and up and you look around and there is no SS around, try to just stop’ and I usually was together with three other girls. And – looked around – everything was fine. So we stopped. And suddenly on the opposite side of the fence, we noticed there was a SS officer. And of course, we got scared and we grabbed our wheelbarrow to go but he started to yell something.

And – the other girls – they knew the German language perfect...Because they had German nannies back home. I knew enough German language what I learned in high school. So they pointed at themselves and the officer said no. And finally I point at myself and so he says ‘come over to the fence.’ So I went to the fence and he had couple of words I did not know what is he saying. And I try to say ‘I am sorry, I do not understand German. I will be diligent. I will work hard’ and I repeated my words and he repeated his words. Then I understood that he wanted to know the name of our foreman. And I didn’t want to give up the name. Because I didn’t want him to get in trouble.

So he called over another foreman – which was one of those prisoners and told him to take me to the gate. So we walked to the gate and he was already waiting there and he had his German shepherd next to him. And the very first thing we faced him, he gave a small slap on the man’s face. And then he looked at me and again he started to say the same words and again I had to tell ‘I am sorry’. And he started to beat me and kick me. I tried to protect my face. He kicked me with his boot in my stomach and then my – it was to the point that my eyes were so blurred already and my mouth started to bleed. And I didn’t know... I still .. I think that I was hoping that he wouldn’t give the dog the word to attack me.

So one of the Hungarians who was working on the side couldn’t take it anymore. And he walked up to him and said ‘Officer, please! That girl does not understand German. Can I help her?’ And at that point he said “Ask her why did she smile’ And

he said "Look at that face. She's smiling again.' And of course you can believe that I didn't have a reason to smile and I don't know what he saw on my face. And finally he let me go and this guy who got the little slap on the face said 'I'm gonna make your life hell'. And every single morning, he would take me out from other groups and put me in his group. And I can't even tell you the hard work what he gave me. But I thought, as long as I can do it, fine. If not, if I die, I die. I couldn't do anything about it.