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Der kleine Löwe und die Großen oder Die Patriarchen und die Diplomatie

By Ula Stöckl

From all German stations,
including those of
the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia,
the General Government,
the Brussels Two
and Luxemburg stations,
and the Paris station.

In the Night Concerts series,
the Deutsche Rundfunk presents
the Seventh Symphony
by Ludwig van Beethoven,
conducted by Wilhelm Furtwngler.
Warsaw, early August 1944

DIPLOMACY:

Europe was consumed by war.
We were all going to die.
After the Landings,
the Allies marched on Paris.
The Germans planned to destroy,
to raze everything.
Especially Paris.
Nothing was to be left standing.
The Fhrer's orders.
Paris,
the night of August 24-25, 1944
Here's your coffee.
You haven't slept all night again.
Morning, Maryse.
Tell Mayer to bring me
my uniform and boots, please.
But it's 4 a.m.
Do as I ask.
Morning, sir.
Morning, Mayer.
General,
you're standing against the light.
Not even a child would miss you.
Children are asleep at this time.
Come inside.
Please.
What's that, Mayer?
Looks like a man
taking his dog for a walk.

Such arrogance!
The Parisians think we're finished.
Mayer, pills!
Quickly!
- Should I call Dr. Fischer?
- No.
Take long, deep breaths, sir.
Are you ready?
Yes, sir.
Alfred has the car ready.
But, General...
It's not a favor I'm asking you,
it's an order.
Take that letter to my wife.
Tell her
I was only doing my duty.
Chocolates. For the children.
General, your telegrams.
Okay, fine.
The enemy broke through
our defenses last night.
Reinforcements?
That's fine, thank you very much.
Mr. Lanvin?
This way, please.
Why that way?
The General's orders.
They're near Soissons, 3 hours away.
The roads are minefields.
They'll be here at noon,
if there's no more sabotage.
The enemy's only 2 hours away.
Gentlemen...
If Paris falls, all of France falls.
And the Americans march on Germany.
There's no other choice left to me.
The explosion will be heard in Berlin.
And 50 years from now, too, I bet.
Well, sir?
What are you going to do?
My duty.
You can rely on me.
I know.
I have faith in you.

Thank you, Mayer.
But as the French say,
you only die once,
but you stay dead a long time.
Don't delay, get out of the city.
Rest assured.
I'll be in Baden-Baden tonight.
Drop by Caf Karl.
Eat a pretzel for me.
Alfred!
For the General's wife.
Have a good trip.
What is it?
- You must leave.
- I know. Just a moment.
It's pointless. The fun is over.
I can't go out without my eyes.
Mr. Lanvin.
Good morning.
Major Ebernach
and the French engineer are here.
Have them wait a moment.
The General's orders are to dig in
in Paris.
We'll give the enemy hell.
We'll fight street by street
to the last bullet.
That way, we'll hold them up a while.
They won't be in Germany anytime soon.
- I'll take that.
- Fine.
What took 40 minutes in Kowel
will take longer in Paris,
but afterwards
there won't be a stone left standing.
Sorry for making you use
the backstairs.
I'd rather not alarm the staff
or our troops.
Suits me.
I won't boast about this.
Your expertise
will be very useful to us.
You know, I regret...

Spare me your qualms.
I have my own.
Of course,
he didn't help us voluntarily.
But, as he's the expert,
I suggest he explains personally.
Lanvin, you have
the General's attention.
All right, then.
The bridges...
33 of them, in all.
And a dozen more on the outskirts.
All rigged with explosives.
Except the Pont Neuf, right here.
It's the oldest.
It will allow you
to cross between both banks
and to use the island
as a stronghold.
Blowing up the bridges
will cause the Seine to burst its banks,
like in the flood of 1910.
Rubble will dam the river.
All of south-eastern Paris
will soon be under water.
Le Marais, first.
Then, the flooding
will spread to Nation and Bastille.
Probably 3-4 meters deep in places.
That means no electricity,
no sewerage, nothing.
Buildings and streets will collapse.
We don't need explosives in this area.
The Seine will do the job for us.
Go on, Mr. Lanvin.
Five minutes after the bridges,
Notre-Dame cathedral...
the Louvre...
and the Opera
will in turn explode.
Taking the city center with them.
Nothing will be left.
And the stations?
Of course, the stations...

Debris from Orsay Station
will help block the Seine.
Likewise, the destruction
of the other stations,
Austerlitz, Lyon,
Gare du Nord, Gare de l'Est
and St. Lazare,
will paralyze the right bank.
If I'd been told
as an Architecture student
that one day I'd blow up Paris...
Humanity is resilient, Ebernach.
Outside Sevastopol,
to prepare your attack,
I had no hesitation
in blowing up the old fort.
Ebernach, in Sevastopol,
I had to carry out
the hardest order of my career,
the liquidation
of the Jewish population.
I obeyed that order
and accepted all the consequences.
I know.
We dug the mass graves.
And we filled them in.
Today, it's Paris!
Three tons of cheddite
around Place de la Concorde.
Four tons in parliament
and the basement of Les Invalides.
And 4 submarine torpedoes
on each leg of the Eiffel Tower.
The Arc de Triomphe
will blow with Place de La Concorde
to clear a line of fire
along the Champs-Élysées.
That will take 20 minutes.
And then, believe me,
Paris will be unrecognizable.
Good work.
The Parisians will remember you.
If there are any left.
What's your estimation of casualties?

It's hard to escape from hell.
The current population's
around 1.5 million.
That's not too bad.
Tell your men to be ready.
They are.
One of my platoons
is checking the time-switches.
It'll take 15-20 minutes.
Then the platoon leader will call you.
His name?
1st Lieutenant Hegger.
Where is he?
I'd rather tell you that in private.
Bressensdorf...
Keep an eye on Mr. Lanvin.
Don't let him go anywhere.
Yes, sir.
Where is he?
At the parliament building,
the Assemble nationale.
General, my task is complete.
I request permission
to leave Paris with my unit.
What?
You want to go?
With your permission.
1st Lieutenant Hegger
will lead the operation.
I've known him since Ukraine.
I fully vouch for him.
We are needed elsewhere.
Immediately after France fell,
the Fhrer visited Paris,
to show his architect, Speer,
the city he admired most,
especially the Opera,
his favorite monument.
They went around it twice.
So why destroy it?
Hitler wanted Berlin
to be as beautiful as Paris,
and bigger.
Now, four years later,

Berlin is in ruins,
while Paris
is as glorious as ever. See?
It's unbearable for him.
Even if it serves no strategic purpose,
Paris must be flattened,
especially the Opera.
Choltitz.
Berlin?
I'll hold.
I was cut off.
Put me through to Berlin, will you?
Morning, General.
Consul?
I'm not interrupting, I hope.
I didn't hear you come in.
To be honest, I didn't knock.
May I?
The stairs are pretty steep.
I thought you'd left Paris.
How did you get in here?
Your hotel
is admirably located
in the heart of the capital but...
You have no idea of its history.
Of this suite, in particular.
What are you trying to say?
I didn't come through the lobby.
Nor through that door.
I know, very rude,
and not a habit of mine.
I needed to see you unseen.
Explain, Mr. Nordling!
I hate riddles.
In Paris, every hotel has its secrets.
The Crillon, Ritz, and the Meurice.
When you moved in,
you had 200 rooms to choose from.
You took the only one
with a false bottom.
A false bottom?
Have you ever heard of Elisabeth Aryet?
- Who?
- Elisabeth Aryet.

And Miss Howard?
Never mind.
They are one and the same person.
Miss Howard was her stage name.
It's an old story but still very juicy.
Around 1860, she took
numerous minor parts in plays,
and some evenings,
lovers to her bed.
One of her lovers
lived not very far from here,
over the road in the Tuileries Palace.
He was Napoleon III.
In France, power
and affairs of the heart don't mix,
especially involving an actress.
But he was fond of her,
so he moved her in here.
And to ensure greater discretion,
he issued orders
to build this staircase.
A bit steep, I grant you.
It leads not to the entrance
guarded by your men on Rue de Rivoli,
but Rue du Mont-Thabor.
The Emperor
merely had to cross the Tuileries,
walk up the stairs
and into the arms of...
Miss Howard.
France was none the worse for it.
Hans!
You two,
go down to Rue du Mont-Thabor.
- What number?
- There is no number.
Where is it?
Is this necessary?
I doubt Napoleon III will drop in.
Where is it?
The steel door
on the corner of Rue de Castiglione.
The corner of Rue de Castiglione.
You, follow me.

Check this staircase is secure.
There are 2-3,000 terrorists out there,
who'd happily spit on my corpse.
Did I not release
all political prisoners?
The last were freed yesterday.
So, what now?
I came to suggest
you put an end to all this.
Your so-called terrorists are patriots.
I respect enemy combatants,
but they are Bolshevik criminals,
and I will crush
every last one of them!
Kill one
and you create two more.
That depends
on the resources we deploy.
I was sent to Paris to restore order.
I shall do much more.
What will you do exactly?
Nothing special.
The stairs lead down to the street.
I was cut off.
It's urgent, take care of it.
- What's going on?
- No time.
Choltitz isn't finished yet.
If you saw him at Kharkov...
I was there.
You too?
To think that barely two weeks ago,
Paris was the dream posting
for a German soldier.
The most docile, disciplined territory
in the whole of Nazi Europe.
An officer posted here
knew he had left the war behind
and would want for nothing.
The only battles to be fought here
were to obtain the best table
in a restaurant.
The Parisians are cowards,
Mr. Nordling.

They skulked
in their homes for four years.
The enemy's Normandy landings
brought some out,
and now they start to attack us,
to defy us,
killing dozens of my men.
I shall make them pay.
With no distinction
between terrorists and the others.
I advise you to leave the city
forthwith. It's not your war.
Leave Paris no less?
And go where?
I have no idea.
Back home, I suppose.
Back home?
This is my home.
You can't say the same.
Pardon me?
We're foreigners.
I'm Swedish, you're German,
but I was born
and lived all my life in Paris.
You've been here barely two weeks.
So what?
I know these men and women.
They won't leave you in peace.
They've sacrificed their jobs,
comfort and families.
They'll die for their cause.
Same here, Mr. Nordling.
This is war, not a pleasure cruise.
Indeed. But you have 2,000 men.
And on the other side? 3 million.
One day very soon,
they'll make short work of you.
Who? The French?
Short work of us?
You claim to know them?
You're a diplomat, I'm a soldier.
Spare me your advice.
3 million civilians, what's that?
Nothing!

It's bluster!
I'll swat them aside like flies.
Governor, two armored divisions
strike for Paris, as we speak.
Two Allied divisions. We both know it.
You must face facts.
Two divisions, that's 30-40,000 soldiers
you cannot hope to beat,
who will enter the city shortly
to fight alongside its population.
What will you do then?
You think the enemy
is alone on the road to Paris?
Fear not, reinforcements are coming.
Four SS Panzer divisions
left Denmark six days ago.
You mean the 4 divisions
stuck since yesterday near Soissons?
Surely not.
You're expecting others.
My time is precious.
Come to the point.
As you wish.
My embassy was contacted last night
by the French general
whose divisions are headed your way.
He told me, or rather asked me,
to give you this letter.
A letter? From a French general?
Interesting.
You know this general, then.
I've heard of him. Everybody has.
- You've never met him?
- Not yet.
So, why your embassy?
I suppose he was told
that we'd met frequently
in the last few days,
that I'd been the go-between
for the political prisoners,
and that we are on good terms,
you and I.
On good terms?
We are, aren't we?

Perhaps he simply thought
that representing a neutral nation
would make my task easier.
That's why you're here?
To deliver that letter?
Who are you working for, Mr. Nordling?
I beg your pardon?
Who are you working for?
A general you hardly know
wakes you one night,
and you come running?
If I can help create a climate...
Naturally.
Well, give me the letter.
I am not in the habit
of corresponding with an enemy general
before hostilities have ended.
You can take that back.
That's exactly what I told him.
If I were you, I'd have read it first,
if only out of curiosity.
Pointless.
Tell this jester
I do not accept ultimatums.
It is exactly that. You're very sharp.
No, it's simply usual practice
in the circumstances.
It's usual practice? I'd no idea.
And your duty is to reject it?
That's usual practice?
No, I have my orders,
and I never question an order.
Of course.
Otherwise, you wouldn't be a general.
What if an order is absurd?
I have never received such an order.
Never?
Never.
You can't defend Paris with 2,000 men.
It's impossible, as you know.
General Leclerc guarantees
honorable surrender for you and Germany,
with only two conditions.
One, you surrender without a fight.

Two, you return Paris as you found it.
In other words, intact. That's all.
Think about it, General.
Have you finished, Consul?
I beg your pardon?
Hans!
Get me Bressensdorf.
I'd ask you to leave now.
Don't argue. Leave!
What do I tell General Leclerc?
Tell him he'll remember today.
Ensure Mr. Nordling
reaches his embassy safely.
Yes, sir.
Choltitz.
What is it, Lieutenant?
What?
Hold on.
I asked you to leave, Mr. Nordling.
Follow me.
That's Lt. Hegger, I suppose.
Pardon me?
I fear he doesn't have
good news for you.
Here, I'll leave you this, just in case.
It's a copy of the letter you ripped up.
Wait, Bressensdorf.
Yes, Lieutenant, go ahead.
The detonator mechanisms
have been sabotaged.
Sorry?
How much damage?
I can't say yet.
Out, Bressensdorf!
Consul Nordling stays with me.
Very good, sir.
How much time do you need?
Do what it takes.
You have ten minutes.
Not a second longer.
What about the Resistance men?
Yes, sir.
I'll keep you informed.
Load.

Take aim.
Fire!
It appears I was letting you go
too soon, Consul.
There was more. How did you know?
Pardon me?
That Lt. Hegger would call.
I'm a diplomat.
I love listening at doors.
By the way, Caf Karl ran out of...
pretzels long ago, you know.
Rationing.
Corporal Mayer won't be happy.
How long were you at that door?
Impressive, these chess pieces.
They add a dimension to your map.
Look at me when I talk to you.
What do you know?
Who tipped off the terrorists?
What terrorists?
Don't play dumb now.
Lt. Hegger's work was sabotaged.
How unfortunate. I haven't a clue.
How did you know he'd be delayed?
His unit's location was known
only to myself and Ebernach.
I had no idea.
I'd advise you to stop this.
In your own best interest, answer me.
I thought I was answering you.
How long have you spied on me
for France?
I don't work for France.
Who then? Britain? America?
You accord me too much importance.
My initiative is strictly personal.
You think I'm stupid?
If I may, I'd rather not answer that.
Turn around. I haven't finished.
Just a moment,
while I bring this up to date.
Stand clear of that map!
I'll tell you what happened.
You did come up those stairs,

but not alone.
You had an accomplice,
one of the terrorists.
You both hid behind the door,
until you had
the information you came for.
Then, the other man
went to inform your friends.
And you entered
in order to buy some time.
You knew
I wouldn't be easily dissuaded,
that a minor French general's letter
wouldn't change my mind.
Unless my operation was sabotaged,
leaving me no alternative
but to negotiate.
Well? Is that it?
Admit it.
Do you know
what we do to men like you?
Give them a medal?
Yes, on occasion.
Posthumously.
You forget one thing, Governor.
One small detail.
Supposing I were
in collusion with the Resistance,
and with my knowledge
of the staircase's existence,
do you think
you would still be alive?
In two weeks,
if I'd wanted to bring in armed men,
I'd have had no lack of opportunity.
Especially, tonight.
Sweden is a neutral country, Governor.
It has maintained its neutrality
throughout two world wars.
I have no wish
to change that state of affairs.
In that case,
what are you doing here?
I came here for that.

So your children
see that, too, one day.
Dawn over Paris.
- Stand back from the balcony.
- Sorry?
You could signal to your men.
- Please!
- Stand back.
How can I prove to you...
Don't argue. Stand back!
How old are your children?
Leave my children out of this.
You can answer
without fear of betraying a secret.
My girls are 14 and 8,
and my boy's 4 months old.
Four months?
Congratulations!
When I was 8,
like your younger daughter,
I often wondered
how a name as simple as Paris
could represent all the things
visible from your balcony.
All these streets, houses, plazas...
All the squares, too.
I couldn't see how so many things
and so many people
could fit in a city
whose name was so short.
Why do you insist
on destroying the city?
It's none of your business.
Wrong.
If I hadn't been asked to contact you,
I'd be asleep, oblivious,
like all these people you'll soon kill.
Can you stop your histrionics?
They are civilians,
caught up in an absurd war,
innocent of any action against you.
What does a life mean to you?
What is a life?
Of those about to perish,

how many children like yours?
Be quiet!
You sneak in like a thief
and lecture me in morality?
Allow me to remind you of something.
One year ago, from July-August '43,
to be precise,
your friends dropped
over 10,000 tons of bombs on Hamburg.
10,000 tons!
Most were phosphorus bombs.
You know what that means?
Anybody who wasn't shredded
or incinerated
died of suffocation
with their throat and lungs on fire.
They were civilians.
Women, children, old folks.
None of them had fought in battle.
How curious that you never protest
when the civilians being killed
are ours?
You are misinformed, General.
My embassy and I have always
denounced such actions from all sides.
Not with the ardor you display today.
Definitely not!
By that logic,
the Allies destroying a city
gives you the right to destroy one, too.
Correct?
Unless, of course,
you are merely looking for excuses.
Excuses?
I won't believe
you have no misgivings?
Believe what you want, Mr. Nordling.
My conscience is clear.
Paris will suffer the same fate
as Mannheim, Hamburg and Berlin.
We'll all have our martyrs.
Now you know.
It makes you a criminal.
- A criminal?

- Absolutely.
The pilots who bombed Hamburg,
we'll never know their names.
But you give the orders.
You'll be remembered
as the man who destroyed Paris.
How does that make me a criminal?
The annihilation of a city
outside a combat zone is a criminal act.
Yes, we agree there.
Paris, as far as I know,
is not in any combat zone.
That's correct.
Or it was, until last night.

At 03:

your general
breached our outer line of defense.
By attacking our bases,
he broke his city's neutrality.
He is a direct threat to it.
As Governor of Paris,
I am sole in charge of our response.
You see a crime, Consul?
I see only an act of war.
The Allied advance
allows you to raze the city?
It's clearly the best riposte
I can give them.
With no concern for relations
between France and Germany?
What relations?
The bond between neighboring peoples.
Don't delude yourself.
By destroying Paris,
you demolish
any future bilateral relationship.
We're not at that stage yet.
Of course we are.
It's your duty to consider the future.
My duty?
As a German and human being.
You're quite wrong!
My duty is to lead my men to victory,

by all means possible.
Everything else
is absolutely irrelevant.
Frankly, I don't understand you.
You can't let this happen.
Paris doesn't belong to you.
When will you stop
seeing Paris as a French city?
If the Parisians had defended it,
or even burned it!
As the Russians burned Moscow
to stop Napoleon. But no!
They gave it to us,
legs wide open, like a whore.
The city is ours.
We do with it as we please.
Paris belongs to no one.
Are you here as Swedish consul
or mayor of the city?
Neither.
Tonight, I am simply Raoul Nordling.
Fine.
Now listen to me very carefully,
Mr. Raoul Nordling.
I'll be very clear with you.
You won't make me change my mind.
I have received orders,
I will obey them.
- At the cost of thousands of lives?
- Absolutely.
- And an irreplaceable city?
- Yes.
Meanwhile, I'll keep you here.
Then, I advise you to leave this city
as fast as possible.
There. I have nothing more to say.
I was wrong.
I was wrong about you, General.
And about myself.
I was sure I could dissuade you
from doing something so crazy but...
I clearly overestimated my capabilities.
So, we'll never see that dome again.
No more Louvre,

no more Place de la Concorde.
No more children playing in the parks.
No more towers of Notre-Dame.
Everything must go. Forever.
And you have no remorse?
No.
What kind of man are you?
All for what?
You know destroying Paris is pointless.
It's gratuitous. Purely gratuitous.
Germany has lost the war.
You've lost too.
What are you talking about now?
Don't pretend otherwise.
You fought in Russia, Italy, Normandy...
You're looking down the barrel.
On all fronts.
Sooner or later, the Allies
will reach Germany and then what?
The Red Army is in Poland,
headed for Romania and Hungary.
You'll be surrounded
and it will be all over.
Look out there,
look at the city,
and tell me if it's worth it.
It's out of the question.
You'd rather not look
reality in the eye?
Whose reality? Yours or mine?
The reality
that destroying Paris is absurd.
Yours then.
Not mine alone.
The world is watching you.
In the end, you,
General Dietrich von Choltitz,
will be held responsible.
All for what?
To delay the Allied attack on Germany
for a few weeks?
It makes no sense.
I understand that you have your orders
and must obey them.

But surely, at some point,
obedience ceases to be a duty.
In your whole career,
have you never had a doubt or even...
a hesitation
over the legality of an order?
Even if that were the case,
I have no right to incite uncertainty
among my men
through my own insubordination.
A general at the front
must be a model for his troops.
Hans...
Wire this to HQ.
What about my call to Berlin?
The blast should blow the bridge away,
like a cyclone.
As it's steel,
we need to add 30 kg of explosives.
Right there and there,
where they intersect, okay?
- Is the damage fixed?
- Changed and checked.
Line, please!
Communications still down.
Shit!
I'll try from the roof.
You remind me of Abraham.
Who?
Abraham, in the bible.
When God orders him to kill his son,
Abraham obeys.
He sharpens his knife,
builds an altar,
raises his arm to stab Isaac,
never expecting
God to intervene at the last.
How can one justify doing that?
By claiming he was doing God's will
or feared His wrath?
But that misses the point, which is,
what child
would want a father like that?
If not for its beauty or people,

save Paris for you, your soldiers
and Germany!
For Germany?
Believe me,
if you destroy Paris,
it will be a disaster for Germany.
The repercussions of such a crime
go beyond the war.
Germany will be made an outcast.
Your children
and those of the survivors
will wear the swastika in their flesh.
Just as others
currently wear yellow stars.
You certainly are a fine talker.
Abraham...
A Jew.
It's an interesting analogy.
I no longer believe in God,
but I remember the bible well.
In fact, you're asking me
to betray the oath I took
to serve my country.
You're asking me
to betray my whole upbringing.
My father was a soldier.
My grandfather was also a soldier.
My ancestors fought Napoleon
in his Russian campaign.
And I have been in two wars.
Let me finish.
I saw everything in those wars.
The intoxication of victory
and the humiliation of defeat.
I, too, want this one to end,
the sooner the better.
But I will never capitulate.
If Hitler told you
to kill your little boy,
you wouldn't hesitate?
Like Abraham, 4,000 years ago?
You're becoming insolent.
You hardly leave me any choice.
- We're here to see the General.

- Follow me.
We bring a message
from Heinrich Himmler.
Very well. I'll inform the General.
Where's the...
Kitchen? Eat?
Nothing left, can't help you.
Show us anyway.
Your boys, all gone.
Show me!
What's the plonk?
It's the last bottle we have. Cider.
Open it up!
It's from Normandy.
Get it open, I said!
Give it here.
Gentlemen.
We've come from Berlin.
Crossed through the lines.
An absolute miracle!
On an important mission
from Himmler.
Concerning?
The destruction of Paris.
You must assign to us
a reconnaissance unit.
That's the Louvre, is it?
Across the street?
Himmler wants a few artworks
for safekeeping.
You came all this way from Berlin?
Where'd you get the fuel?
What do you care?
We commandeered it.
From fighting units?
From chickens fleeing the enemy.
Men you allowed
to leave the city,
cowards incapable of defending it.
The Bayeux Tapestry,
some paintings by Rubens,
two Caravaggios,
rolled up, without frames,
so they fit in the trunk.

And the Mona Lisa?
Himmler only wants those.
Gentlemen,
I think you have arrived too late.
You refuse to obey Himmler.
Stpnagel, your predecessor,
will be hanged today in Berlin,
from a meat hook.
His wife and children
will pay for his crimes also.
I bet Paris is full of conspirators
like him.
The blue blood club.
- Any news from Hegger?
- No, sir.
It must be working now.
And get those guys off my back.
Lieutenant...
Thank you.
Gentlemen,
Paris is one huge time-bomb.
In a few minutes, it will explode.
All the bridges, Notre-Dame,
Invalides, the Eiffel Tower...
My wife wanted a postcard of it.
That's all that will be left.
May I?
Of course.
Do you like it in Paris?
It's better than Russia.
Where were you?
In the Kharkov cauldron
with General von Choltitz.
Do you know what Sippenhaft is?
What?
Sippenhaft.
Do you know what it is?
No.
It's a law, decreed
just before I arrived in Paris.
I'm overjoyed.
Shall I tell you
what the law says?
Since two weeks ago,

all German officers' families
are considered hostages.
They answer for our actions.
If Paris doesn't blow up,
my wife and children will be arrested,
incarcerated and executed.
You find it hard to believe?
Here...
The decree
signed in person by Adolf Hitler.
Germany is scared, Consul.
To fight back, it resorts
to the worst medieval practices.
Blind, unconditional obedience.
Enter!
Gentlemen...
The owner's private stock,
from the cellar.
Very good.
Would you care for a bite to eat?
Or a cigarette?
We also have a camembert.
Thank you.
Miss...
Gentlemen.
I have destroyed
a dozen towns in this war,
mostly out of strategic objectives.
I did so
with absolutely no qualms,
because it was necessary.
I am aware that the destruction of Paris
won't win us the war,
but I love my children.
My surrender sentences them to death
and I doubt God will intervene
to save them.
By obeying orders,
I save their lives.
Were I to disobey,
what child
would want a father like me?
Allow me to return the question.
What would you do in my shoes?

Pardon me?
What would you do in my shoes?
In your shoes?
- Well...
- Go ahead.
Hundreds of thousands of lives
are at stake,
including women and children.
It's a simple question.
What would you do in my shoes?
You'd sacrifice
your wife and loved ones
for a city you hardly know?
Well?
Hold on...
I need an answer.
I need one now.
What would you do in my shoes?
Answer me, will you?
Answer me!
I don't know.
Just as I thought.
Enter!
I've been sent by Colonel Jay.
General, listen...
Get out. Stand ready.
We'll find a way...
I told you, I won't surrender.
Think of the consequences.
The Americans
are on the outskirts of Paris.
Your wife can surely be...
Put me through to Hegger.
Yes, Hegger.
At the parliament building.
We'll find a way
to get your family out.
Baden-Baden is on the border.
They could reach Switzerland via France.
I know a group
that will be able to help them.
Corporal Mayer
can drive them to Strasbourg
and to the group I know.

Tomorrow, they'll be safe.
I can't get through to Hegger.
The field telephone's dead.
With the French engineer
to guide you.
It's just across the Seine.
The parliament building.
The parliament building, yes.
I must speak with him personally.
Take a radio with you.
Yes, sir. I'm on my way.
Watch out! Sniper!
I can get them across the border,
at no risk.
One word from you
and tomorrow they'll be in Switzerland.
Why do you think
Sippenhaft was decreed
the day before I was posted here?
A pure coincidence? No.
It's a law aimed at me personally.
My family can't leave Baden-Baden
without the Gestapo after them.
They'll be arrested,
incarcerated and executed.
It could be worse, couldn't it?
They could be sent to the camps.
Ravensbrck.
Are you familiar with that name?
Believe me,
in some cases, death is preferable.
You did your duty
by coming this far.
Now, let me do mine.
If you'd be so kind...
The pill bottle...
Sorry?
The bottle in my desk.
In the drawer.
- Which one?
- Near the phone.
Hurry!
- How many?
- Two. Two pills.

Here.
Breathe deeply.
Long, deep breaths.
Come with me.
Drink this.
Thank you.
This is grotesque. I'm sorry.
No, not at all.
It's this damn asthma that...
I've had it for years
and with the heat, it...
You should keep your pills on you.
Thanks.
How do you feel?
Exhausted.
Move!
- Which way now?
- This way.
Can we trust him?
You have a better idea?
Forget the war a moment.
Picture yourself in five years
on this balcony.
It's one day in the week,
just another day...
You hear the horns of tugboats
coming up the Seine,
glaziers and clothes merchants
hawking their wares,
a newspaper vendor
shouting out headlines...
You hear the swish
of the broom bristles,
scraping the sidewalk
with a noise like an ocean tide.
It's in the bold light of March,
or misty November.
It is Paris
as you've never seen it,
nothing like occupied Paris
5 years earlier.
You come from Baden-Baden
with wife and children
and you think,

I, General Dietrich von Choltitz,
one day in August '44,
might have put an end to this.
But I didn't.
What will you feel, do you think,
at that precise moment?
Generals often
have the power to destroy,
rarely the power to edify.
Paris would owe its existence
to you alone.
Is that not worth
all the glory due a conqueror?
You are a fine advocate,
but if I ever return
and your capital is still standing,
I'll be traveling alone.
My wife and children won't be with me
to admire your city.
Why get me back on my feet?
Pardon me?
You came to my aid.
I'd like to understand why.
What's to understand?
You could've let me choke to death.
I am a diplomat, not a soldier,
as you said.
Death is not my business.
Paris has only one ace in its hand
to save it from destruction.
You.
The Nazis here would blow it up
in a flash,
but you're not like them.
How would you know?
You asked me what I'd do
in your shoes. I'll tell you.
For nothing in the world
would I want to be in your shoes.
It's not the destruction of a city
but of millions of people.
Until now, you have managed
to keep intact your self-respect.
If you carry out

the orders of that tyrant,
believe me,
you'll lose it forever.
General, should we get in position?
What?
The enemy's at the city gates.
And Bressensdorf?
He hasn't reported back yet.
Thank you. Leave us now.
Sir, there's only 20 of us here.
And so?
Should we set up defenses downstairs,
on the roof or on this floor?
How old are you?
Eighteen.
All men under 20
must leave the city.
We're all under 20,
except 3 or 4 of us.
They stay with me
and you others go.
Yes, sir.
Thank you.
My men are scared.
They're kids. It's not their war.
It's no longer yours, either.
It's that of a man alone,
aging, fading,
fooling himself and fooling others.
A man reduced to blackmail,
demanding inhuman obedience
of his generals to commit crimes.
Hitler.
The man had a gift, you know.
He had a gift for captivating you,
giving you confidence
and making you believe
in Germany's historic destiny.
And today?
Today...
Your superiors tried to assassinate him.
Why?
I can't imagine
they attempted it for no reason.

I played no part in their plot.
You must have an idea.
You knew them all.
They weren't revolutionaries
or fanatics.
So why try to kill him?
They were a step ahead.
Sorry?
They were in contact with Hitler.
I wasn't.
Two weeks
after the assassination attempt,
I was summoned to Rastenburg,
Hitler's headquarters.
I was ready to renew my trust,
to continue to believe
we had a chance.
But the man I saw
was absolutely not
the man I once knew.
He was slobbering at the mouth.
His face was wracked
with spasms and...
The eyes...
Those eyes.
When I left Rastenburg,
I had made up my mind
not to obey his orders to the letter,
to avoid unnecessary bloodshed.
But since then, there is this ax
over my children's heads.
Today,
I have no other way of saving them.
Just one question.
If you surrender Paris
without resistance,
what exactly will happen?
Sorry, I wasn't listening.
If you don't destroy Paris,
what will be the consequences?
A debacle?
Something like that, yes.
The frontline north of the Seine
will be shattered,

with the Allies
free to strike at the Reich.
And the immediate repercussions?
What happens next?
If Paris falls,
how will Germany and the army react
when they find out?
With astonishment, at first.
But soon it will be total panic.
Panic?
So, risk sending your family
to Switzerland.
The impact of your capitulation
means your wife and children
won't be Hitler's priority.
That will give us a few days to act.
If I capitulate,
I'll be arrested immediately.
How can I do anything then?
Leave it all to me.
To you?
What guarantees do I have?
You have two.
First, Caporal Mayer.
He drives your family
from Baden-Baden to Strasbourg,
on to Mulhouse, around the Jura,
to Annemasse, in Haute-Savoie.
Driving all night,
they'll be there tomorrow morning.
Why not go straight to Basle?
It's closer, true,
but the border's tightly guarded.
From Annemasse,
it's quicker and safer.
No mountains to climb,
the border's a formality...
Your family
will be in Geneva in no time.
And that's where Chantecler is based.
That group
is your second guarantee.
How far is Annemasse from the border?
Under a kilometer.

Altitude?

400 meters, at most.

- No mountains to climb?

- None.

Your family won't be the first.

It's not a difficult route.

You'll go with them?

Up to the border. I'll wait
for confirmation they're in Switzerland.

Chantecler?

Never heard of that group.

Thank God!

Or your family wouldn't stand a chance.

There's no risk, I promise you.

I need to be sure.

I require solid proof.

I've already
used their services twice before.

You?

To what ends?

To help a French family,
some time ago.

And more recently...

My wife.

Your wife? I don't understand.

My wife is Jewish, Mr. Choltitz.

She lives in Lausanne now.

In safety.

I'd like to help you further but...

I cannot put myself in your shoes.

Lieutenant Bressensdorf!

First Lieutenant Hegger?

That's me.

Are you ready?

Sure. We just need the order.

That's why I'm here.

Guys, Paris gets
its firework display!

I need to confirm I'm here.

Confirm?

It only works up on the roof.

To the roof, then.

The General too.

Fine. The General too.

Who's he?
My guide.
Clear out!
Listen carefully.
Just a moment.
That's my final order.
Operation canceled.
Paris won't explode.
Shit! Dammit!
We worked our asses off!
3 days and nights,
without eating, shitting or sleeping!
All for nothing? Not a chance.
3, 6 and 9, in position.
Hegger!
Yes, 2nd Lieutenant?
Can it!
In Annemasse, give her this.
Engraved with our wedding date.
She'll believe you.
My loved ones are in your hands.
Nothing will happen to them.
I give you my word.
Well...
My career ends here.
Everything will be fine.
Being the man who didn't destroy Paris
is a real credit to you.
Let's have a drink, shall we?
You have an excellent whisky
tucked away in this cabinet.
How do you know?
Rest assured, I won't tell the Brits.
You like it straight, don't you?
You're a funny fellow, Mr. Nordling.
Is there anything you don't know?
About what, General?
About me.
You?
I must make a confession.
The mirror over the fireplace
is a two-way mirror.
Miss Howard was a flirt
and Napoleon III

was either as jealous as a tiger
or a terrible voyeur, right?
I'd say he was a terrible voyeur.
And I'd agree with you.
To the courtesan
who led me to you.
You're leaving?
I think it's time.
Wait!
You need a safe-conduct
or you'll never reach Annemasse.
The German army
still holds half of France.
Excuse me.
Hotel Meurice, yes.
The French!
A problem?
No, it's Parisian humor,
I suppose.
A man asking to book a room tonight.
You think
they'll all take turns to call?
Another reservation?
No, that one wanted to see me dead.
I fear he's in the majority.
Hurry, you've no time to waste.
Thank you, General.
Church bells?
Who are they burying at this time?
I guess Paris is burying
the Occupation.
The bells announce
the Allies' entry into Paris.
So, they're tolling for me.
Farewell, General.
General...
Mayer?
We were stopped 20 km from here.
I'm sorry.
An enemy roadblock,
impossible to get past.
They opened fire on us.
You have to get to Baden-Baden!
You don't understand.

They weren't there by chance.
They were French
and they were all over us.
Without Alfred at the wheel,
we'd be dead.
The Resistance?
Men...
One last time, we must fight together.
As a soldier among soldiers,
I shall be at your side.
My compliments.
De Gaulle will speak at city hall.
He wants you at his side.
What's that?
Shall we take the car?
On a day like this? You're kidding?
Let's walk!
General Choltitz was taken prisoner
by the Allies and released in 1947.
Thanks to the German debacle,
his family was not arrested.
Nordling and Choltitz met one more time.
In Paris, in 1955.
The diplomat gave the general
the medal awarded to him after the war.
Specially minted,
this unique medal shows...
Paris breaking its chains.
Adapted from the play
Diplomacy by Cyril Gely
To the memory of my friend,
Richard Holbrooke,
whose diplomacy
ended another war.