

THE LAST TRAIN

By R. James Scott

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STORY OF THE PLAY

World War II lingers on. The unspeakable operations in the death camps are slated for closure, but there is still time for one last train to deliver prisoners before the Americans arrive. Two young German soldiers, Hans and Eric, are sick at heart and know their country is in ruin. They are assigned to assist the loading of the last car. Eric is shocked when he hears Anna, a childhood friend, call out to him for help. But Anna doesn't have her papers, and no matter what Eric says to his superiors, he cannot convince them it is wrong for her to be there. Hans cautions Eric to "forget that you ever saw her, or you will never live another day!"

But Eric persists. That night he sneaks into the boxcar to reassure Anna, who has learned from the other prisoners what happens at the death camps: the two lines of who will live and who will not, the hissing of the gas into the chambers, the smells, the utter horror of it all.

Moments later, as the Allied forces are almost upon them, Herr Mueller orders his soldiers to fire on the crowded boxcar. Eric fights Mueller, to no avail. The conflict between them ends in tragedy just as the Americans arrive.

A haunting, unsettling, and profoundly moving drama. About 45 minutes.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(6 m, 5 w, additional flexible roles)

ERIC: A German soldier, knew Anna before the war.

HANS: A German soldier, on duty with Eric. Serves as narrator.

COLONEL: Follows orders initially, but helps in the end.

MUELLER: Cold-hearted, violent Gestapo agent.

AIDE: Handles paperwork for loading.

SERGEANT: Assists Mueller.

ANNA: Scared young woman, confused why she is a prisoner.

HELGA: Prisoner on train, kind, faithful, still holds out hope.

FRAU LIPSTEIN: Another prisoner, bitter, cruelly honest.

OLD WOMAN: Prisoner who tells of the gas chambers.

GRETTA: Another woman on the train.

Extras as Soldiers, Women and Children

SCENE LIST

Scene 1: A German train station at dawn, October 1944.

Scene 2: Inside the cattle car, that evening.

Scene 3: The train station that same evening.

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Scene 1

(MUSIC underscores the opening. The setting is a German railway station in October, 1944. As the scene opens, we see in silhouette against the dawning sky a cattle car on a section of rail. The door to the car is open, and a loading ramp has been positioned in front of it. In the distance we hear the muffled sound of artillery, and subtle flashes from the explosions illuminate the cyclorama. DR a soldier. ERIC, warms his hands at a burn barrel. Several SOLDIERS in the subdued light of dawn bring on a small table and chair which is placed DR of the ramp, then stand idle waiting. A soft SPOTLIGHT comes on DC where another soldier, HANS, stands. He speaks.)

HANS: *(Monologue.)* October 14, 1944. The end of the war in Europe was only months away, but people were still dying. The Americans and British had driven through France, and were also in the Netherlands. Russian troops were advancing on the eastern front, and it was not a question of if, but when and by whom the city of Berlin would be taken. In the face of certain defeat the Nazis' tenacious grip was loosening. Morale among the troops was worsening, and the war lingered on. The horrid operations in the death camps were slated for closure, but there was still time for one last train.

(Train WHISTLE. The SPOTLIGHT dims, and HANS crosses to ERIC. The distant RUMBLING and faint flashes of ARTILLERY continue in the background. Lights come up SR to illuminate the two soldiers.)

ERIC: How far away do you think they are?

HANS: Thirty, maybe forty kilometers. It started a little after midnight. I don't remember October ever being so cold.

ERIC: War is cold.

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HANS: That is true. (*More distant ARTILLERY.*) The guns sound closer.

ERIC: It won't be long now.

HANS: I hear the Fuehrer is in hiding.

ERIC: Our brave and fearless leader.

HANS: Like a rabbit as the hunters approach. Into the burrow he goes.

ERIC: Someone should give him a rifle, and send him to the front. If those who started the wars had to fight in them, they would never begin.

HANS: It will be over soon.

ERIC: We could be home by summer.

HANS: How many times have we said that?

ERIC: This time it could be true. We could be home.

HANS: If there is a home to go back to. Most of our country is in ruin.

ERIC: Germany will never be the same. The Nazis have destroyed our homeland.

HANS: Be careful what you speak.

ERIC: You will report me?

HANS: I think sometimes even the trees have ears.

ERIC: When we were young, the fields were green, our homes were warm, and the frauleins were beautiful. Now the world is gray, our homes are rubble, and the frauleins wear rags.

HANS: We should have been married by now, with sons of our own.

ERIC: I feel like an old man. What fraulein would want an old man?

HANS: You will see, the frauleins will be waiting. When the bombing stops, they will pop from their burrows like furry rodents at the end of winter, and we will be there.

ERIC: If we are not dead, and only if the Americans, or the British, or the Russians do not arrive ahead of us.

HANS: Or the French.

ERIC: The French have women of their own.

HANS: Have you ever known a Frenchman who would refuse a free meal? Ah my friend, the spoils of war ...

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ERIC: Go to the winners, Hans. We are the losers. The losers get only crumbs, or they get nothing.

HANS: Crumbs may keep us alive.

ERIC: To be alive is not to live. I fear that our generation will never see the green return to our homeland. In five years, we have lost a century!

HANS: Has it been only that long?

ERIC: It has been too long. The green of Germany has been turned to gray. If I have a son ... some day ... I will name him for you.

HANS: I would think you would wish to forget.

ERIC: We should never forget. When my son asks about his name, I will tell him of you, and of the war that never should have been.

HANS: My father tried to tell me. He fought in the first war, in France. When I enlisted he was very angry. "Another lost generation," he said. I fear he was right ...

ERIC: The history books will tell of this one.

HANS: But will they tell the truth? History is written by men who see what they wish to see. Perhaps I shall write a history book.

ERIC: Perhaps you should ... our history anyway.

HANS: And I will read it to my son when he enlists for his war ... Colonel ...

(The COLONEL has entered SR and crosses to the men. OTHER SOLDIERS and GUARDS begin to arrive. The LIGHTING shifts to main stage.)

COLONEL: This will be the last car. The train will arrive sometime in the night to hook up. Separate the luggage from the prisoners and get them on the car.

HANS: *(Crossing with ERIC to the Colonel.)* Colonel, the Americans ... they are not so far away. Can we wait that long?

COLONEL: Load the car. Herr Mueller will arrive to assist.

HANS: Herr Mueller. He is a pathetic rodent.

COLONEL: When the train departs this evening, we will be transferred.

End of Freeview

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