

By Don Zolidis

ELISE, 17, a Jewish refugee

About the play: In 1939, the S.S. St. Louis set sail from Hamburg with 937 Jewish refugees aboard, heading for Cuba. When they arrive, they discover that the Cubans will not allow them to land, and they are forced to return to Germany.

About the Scene: Elise is speaking to a friend about Bach. Aboard the ship. They are still on their way to Cuba.

Time: 1939.

ELISE

He's a German. Just think, if he were alive today, he'd be one of them. A Nazi. All that beauty in his mind like a second skin over the hatred underneath. You'd almost think they had souls that could feel, consciences that could be roused, hearts that could beat like anyone else's – I played for Goebbels once. My father thought it would be a good strategy. I was fourteen, things were already disintegrating, we thought – see we'll go play for them, we'll play their music, look at us, we're capable of beauty... we're human.

When I play sometimes I try to picture myself in a field. All alone. The sun on my skin, the breeze through the grass, the trees overhead – I just kept trying to keep that image alive when I was in that room with him, they ate dinner while I played – sucking on cigars and gobbling up meat. Their eyes like knives.

They own that field. They would uproot us, as if we're the contagion, we're the blight on their happiness, as if it is somehow our fault that we dare to exist and breathe and think and dream. My father was arrested two months later. I haven't heard from him since.

So I keep playing their music. Now I imagine that I'll go back to that room with that man and kill him with my bare hands. Wrap my fingers around his neck when he's old and weak and on his deathbed. I will never be done hating them. That's what they made me.

(short pause)

Thank you for standing up to them the other day.

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