

The Wages of Hell
(After the War)
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The Wages of Hell

PROLOGUE

SCENE Dormitory in the Convent of the Holy Mother

BERYL RAPHAEL: School girl of 16.
SISTER MARIE: Nun of the French Order.
ADOLPH HOFFMANN: Officer of the Prussian Guard.

SCENE 1 (17 years later.) Tronville

BERYL LABIN-BEZAN A Widow?
DAVID RAPHAEL Her Brother.
ADELE LABIN-BEZAN Her daughter.
VAN RELT A Dutchman.
SMITH The Butler.

SCENE: A Dormitory in the Church of the Holy Mother near Brussels in the year 1915. A plain room, white walls with brown dado, small bed L. and small bed R., Long window 5ft by 2ft about 4ft from the ground; the walls are covered with emblems of the Catholic Faith; flooring is polished, two rugs, one chair and a wardrobe, a gas in the well covered with fire protector, door L. which when open shows landing with stairs and a handrail disappearing above the height of the door as if there was another floor above. At intervals the sky thro' the window is seen to be illuminated. As the curtain raises Beryl Raphael, a girl of 16, is seen sitting on the bed in abject terror; there is a small portmanteau, open but packed, she has a light coat and hat, she looks at the door then turns her head towards the window, then in despair cries; there is a noise outside of soldiers marching, then a noise of somebody coming upstairs. Enter Sister Marie, a Nun of the French order.

BERYL (Still sitting on bed in terror). My brethren my brother - has he arrived?

SISTER (Who has closed the door, speaking calmly). The streets are so crowded with German soldiers.

BERYL Sister, this was the day my brother was to have come to take as away - you saw the cable?

SISTER Worldly affairs interest me not.

BERYL The American Consul promised safety for the school and the Sisters.

SISTER God has willed other wise.

BERYL (anxiously) Where are all the girls - my companions - Leah, Adele, Elsie? (Sister bows her head) are they safe?

SISTER (Solemnly) Yes Beryl they are safe.

BERYL When my brother arrives from London you will return with me to my home?

SISTER No my place is here to alleviate the sufferings of those who may fall.

BERYL Belgium has no quarrel with the Germans, why do they occupy the country?

(a noise is heard and Beryl goes to the window, a pane of glass breaks, Beryl screams, and crouches near the window)

SISTER (pitifully). MY POOR GIRL.

BERYL (in terror). Please Sister see, if you can find my brother at the American Consul's.

SISTER Yes child - oh war is dreadful. (she exits the door is closed, a noise of going down stairs. Beryl looks thro' window with the effects of flickering on the bed-room wall) Beryl cries, then runs to the door and opens it and calls.

BERYL Sister, they are burning the shops opposite - oh she cannot hear (she closes the door) Oh what will become of us all, (sits down on bed L. in terror), a shot is heard, and a thud as if someone had fallen downstairs, the door commences to shake, and it is opened. Enter Capt Hoffmann who is intoxicated, he has an army revolver in his hand which is still smoking, he has his over coat, sword, and entire equipment, which shows dust and wear, he holds the door with his left hand, his thumb is cut and bleeding.

HOFFMANN Serve you right speaking off. I'm afraid I shall lose my thumb.

BERYL (turning round) Is that you sister? (Then realising that it is a German officer falls on pillow in fear.)

HOFFMANN Sister? No; I Captain Hoffmann of the Prussian Guards.

BERYL (looking up) You have cut your thumb.

HOFFMANN A Belgian attacked my hand with an axe - I shot him.

BERYL (innocently) If he tried to kill you, it was in self defense.

HOFFMANN Yah (looking at his thumb)

BERYL Your thumb is nearly cut off - oh! Let me bind it. (looks round and then tears off a little linen from the sheet)

HOFFMANN Yours is the face I saw thro' the window - all the other little girls of the school have been taken care of by my brother officers.

ALTERATION COMMANDED BY LORD CHAMBERLAIN

HOFFMANN Yours is the face I saw at the window. All the school girls from your school are being taken care of by my brother officers.

BERYL I wish I had stopped at the school when your troops entered the city

the sister was so kind, I am so glad that my little companions are safe, you will look after me won't you Sir?

HOFFMANN Yes little Catholic

BERYL I am not a Catholic, I am a Jewess. Did you see the good sister?

HOFFMANN You mean the Nun? - She's on her way to Heaven. I shot her, she would not let me upstairs. (Beryl is crying).

HOFFMANN Don't cry you will come with me because I like you (Beryl picking up her trunk, Hoffmann fires at the trunk, Beryl drops the trunk and runs towards the window Hoffmann tries to prevent her calling out of the window, Hoffmann's hand is cut by the broken glass, Beryl runs away into the corner.

HOFFMANN You have hurt me and insulted a Prussian gentleman - I'll teach you now what it means to insult an Officer of the Kaiser.

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BERYL (Not understanding) Then they are safe?

HOFFMANN Yes Safe

BERYL Is that blood?

HOFFMANN No - wine - glorious wine, the streets are running with wine; we have had a glorious time, I've shot four Belgians myself - we must teach them allegiance to the Kaiser.

BERYL (Who does not hear the last words, she is packing trunk and has her face towards R.) If my companions are safe, please look after me.

HOFFMANN Have you any wine in this house of God? (seeing Beryl's boots touches her boot with his foot), she

turns round then looks at him) And your face is as pretty. (staggers behind the bed, tries to turn Beryl round, she looks at him in a frenzy of fear and runs to the door, Hoffmann who is nearest the door closes it, Beryl looks at him, and then runs back towards bed).

HOFFMANN I'll look after you. (goes to the door and bars it.) You are going to be my little bride. (takes his hat and coat off).

BERYL (misunderstanding). You need not stay; the Holy Sister has gone to find my brother.

HOFFMANN (Same as) You mean the Nun?

HOFFMANN Don't cry Rose of Sharon. I like your boots - let me take them off. (Beryl looks at the man who is coming towards her, then runs to the window; Hoffmann runs after her, Beryl is calling "Help", when Hoffmann, who is very drunk struggles with her, Beryl hurts his hand with the cut thumb he releases her. She runs around her bed right to left corner and stands in terror; Hoffmann is now centre)

HOFFMANN You have hurt me (referring to his thumb) Nevermind - the pleasure of your pretty little self shall make me forget the pain (he looks at her, then pulls the blind down; the stage is dark, except for the re glow from the sky which can be seen thro' the blind). A glorious night.

BLACK OUT

TROUVILLE. TIME 1933 (17 years later)

SCENE A ROOM IN TROUVILLE looking to open country. It is neatly furnished the furniture is showing signs of wear. A screen is in front of the door L. which sits in front to hide the folding doors. The room is full of flowers. As the scene opens the Marseillaise is

being played, Smith is discovered setting the tea things he walks lame having been a wounded soldier in the War. Enter Adele Labin-Bezan who is carrying flowers in a small covered basket; the girl is covered with confetti.

ADELE And to think Smith of those splendid warriors who were in the trenches 17 years ago (and so were you Smith). This is really Entente Cordiale - here you are - an English Tommy, serving as a Butler in a French Chateau - that's the spirit; I often wish I had been born 17 years ago to have been one of the brave Allies who beat those horrid Germans (another cheer), she looks out of the window). There are some of the Indians what brave fellows those Ghurka's were (to Smith). Did you ever see them use the knife; they used to throw them like that.

SMITH And off went their nappers.

ADELE (brings knife down from wall among other weapons) I've got one here, I bought it as a curio. (music grows fainter, Adele continues). It has done some work; see - there is blood on it.

SMITH (going L.) I hope it is German.

ADELE Let me know when my uncle arrives. (Enter Madame Labin-Bezan from R. (exit Smith) Madame is a Lady of about 34, costume advanced for the period, she looks older than she is, and at times is absentminded; she sees Adele, both embrace).

MADAME My dear daughter.

ADELE MY MOTHER.
(Madame sits R. of the table and looks at flowers)

MADAME You are a good girl to bring me these flowers.

ADELE (looking thro' window C) Its Peace Day, the ANNIVERSARY OF PEACE. Do you know Mother, I am fearfully anxious to see my Uncle David, he is the only relative I have known; I thought he would have been here earlier. The English mail is late, there is a crush the trains are dashing in from Paris, and the wonderful refrains of Rule Britannia, The

Marseillaise the Russian, Italian and Flemish Anthems; oh Mother, what a LARGE family, and how happy everyone seems to be. (she picks up the Ghurka's knife, and is about to hang it up.)

MADAME Smith will do that Tea Adele?

SMITH No I have had tea.

MADAME Then play to me (Adele sits down-and plays)

ADELE How did Uncle escape from Brussels? How dreadful that you missed each other.

MADAME The town was besieged that night. He was picked up by the French Guards. I shall never forget that night in the war.

ADELE That night?

MADAME Yes that one night (hides her face). Oh if my brother had only come in time.

ADELE (playing thoughtfully) My Father was he brave? How sad to be killed - and yet he died for his country.

MADAME Oh yes child HE WAS VERY BRAVE. (tragedy is depicted on her face).

ADELE I often wish I had been born a man and able to defend the right (rises and looks thro' window)

MADAME Are you looking for your Uncle David?

ADELE No Mother, I was looking for Paul Van Relt; you know Mother, the boy I told you about whom I met at the Academy 5 weeks ago, (takes Madame's hand). Next to you, I love him best in the world - he is divine - ; he wants to marry me mother. He promised to take me to meet his Father.

MADAME If it will make you happy you shall. When are you going to introduce me to him and his Father.

ADELE Van Relt - Van Relt (thoughtfully)
(enter Smith L. with portmanteau)

SMITH Mr David (enter David). As David enters there is the sound of the Marseillaise being played outside, forte. He is a man of about 40 years of age, David kisses his sister and the girl then sits down to tea.)

(Exits Smith with portmanteau)

DAVID She grows Beryl. (Speaking to Adele and measuring a few from the ground). You are so high, ten years of age when I saw you last; do you remember me Adele? (sits L.)

ADELE (at back of table, pouring out tea). I remember when you caught me eating chocolates, and instead of giving me a lecture, you gave me two more boxes, and oh! I was so sick; - I never want to see chocolates again.

DAVID It was my method the punishment to fit the crime.

ADELE I know you want to speak to Mother; I think I will go to the station to see the sights.

DAVID (Laughing). You are SURE you are not going to meet a young gentleman? - I saw one looking at this window as I can in.
(Adele runs to the window)

ADELE (hesitating). Yes; MY young gentleman; the gentleman who wants to marry me, eh Mother? (exits and returns) Mother may I carry Father's sword to-day - I should look like a French vivandiere.

DAVID (grasping situation). Yes; take it Adele (taking sword down from wall and handing it to the girl). Let them know your Father was a brave Officer. (exit Adele L.)

MADAME (tragic voice) David, I cannot lead this life of deceit; the girl must be told.

DAVID What can be gained by giving facts - you were very young - let that night be forgotten; you must marry.

MADAME I cannot love any man; David I can never forget that night 17 years ago.

DAVID I know sister. The horrors of seeing you in the bed room of that school is ever before me. (Madame screams)

MADAME DAVE! DAVE!

DAVID I wish I had met the scoundrel

MADAME He was shot by one of the Belgians. OH! I was terrified; I shall NEVER forget. (buries her face in her hands)

DAVID But you must forget. Suppose Adele does marry the boy she speaks about, you must, for the girls sake keep to the story that your husband fell in the early part of the war. Do you know the boy?

MADAME Someone Adele met at the Academy - He is Paul Van Relt - they are Dutch.

DAVID (Thoughtfully) Van Relt

MADAME His father lived in a Canton in Switzerland

DAVID I know some Americans (my friend(s), who lived in a Canton, they are here today for the Peace Celebrations; they may know the Van Relts; I've promised to go back to America with them; I am calling on them.

MADAME Are you going back to America?

DAVID No, the air is poisoned by so many Germans, some of whom I have heard still gloat over their atrocities; I cannot understand any country tolerating, or giving shelter or work to any German when they think of their frightfulness, they are not human, they are the dregs of the earth.

MADAME (In chair crying) David, David, that night!

DAVID Come Beryl, that was 17 years ago, I want you to see the March past of the carnival.

MADAME For 7 hours I was prey of German frightfulness, No Dave; any echo of that War freezes me.

DAVID (to himself). Thoughtfully) MY POOR sister
(Enter Adele alone from L.)

DAVID (looking round and speaking in fun) where is the gentleman the ONLY boy on earth.

ADELE (Sadly) His father has gone to the Hotel, and taken Paul with him; he said I was too young to be out without a chaperone - I wanted to make him a present of the Allies Flag of Liberty (pin) - do you like it Uncle (shows pin to David)

DAVID It is very pretty. (thoughtfully); what is the matter with your thumb?

ADELE Oh that is a birthmark uncle.

DAVID It looks bad.

ADELE Then there is going to be rain; it always goes like that - it is only a birthmark. (looking at her left hand thumb). It is a disfigurement.

DAVID YES

ADELE I am going to ask my Mother to see Paul's Father, Van Relt to-day; I want him to visit us, as Van Relt has promised that if my Mother will see him he will introduce Paul.

DAVID What Hotel is Van Relt staying at?

ADELE The Hotel Petrograd in the Rue Le Bois; will you call upon him.

DAVID (Puling on his coat) Yes

ADELE (Calling gently). Mother, Mother. (Re-enters Madame R.)

MADAME (Seeing David going). Where are going David?

ADELE He is going to bring Van Relt here, mother if you like Paul will you give your consent that I can see him often, and then we can get married; I will always have a chaperone until we do.

MADAME Not Catherine - She is discharged.

ADELE (Sadly). I think you are unkind Mother to get rid of her because her father was German - the war was 17 years ago, I think we ought to forgive and forgive, don't you Uncle David?

DAVID (with emphasis) I witnessed their devilries; I saw women and children outraged; Old men and women murdered, Church blown to ruin; our synagogue destroyed. TO-DAY the ruins in France and Belgium stand as a living witness against the German race. FORGET! FORGIVE! I WOULD CUT THIS HAND OFF RATHER THAN IT SHOULD BE STAINED BY SHACKING HANDS WITH A GERMAN.

ADELE But God Forgives.

DAVID Listen to this ADELE, how our prophet spoke about the enemy in time of old. "LET THEIR EYES BE BLINDED THAT THEY SHALL NOT SEE; POUR OUT THINE INDIGNITIES, UPON THEM; LET THEIR HABITATIONS BE VOID, AND NO MAN DWELL IN THEIR TENTS; LET THEM BE WIPED OUT OF THE BOOK OF THE LIVING.
(Exits David L.)

ADELE Mother why are you always so sad and cry on Peace Day?

MADAME I could tell you my child what my eyes have seen until I have no tears left to cry with, what happened 9 months before you were born. (Bell rings, re-enters David L.)

DAVID I met Van Relt and his son; they are in the reception room; I wanted to see your sister before they are introduced, (speaking to Adele) I should like you to go to your room until this matter of Paul has been more fully discussed.

ADELE (nervously) Do you like him Uncle?

DAVID I think I like his father.

ADELE I think he is like his mother

DAVID I did not see his mother - she was dressing.

ADELE You won't persuade Mother not to let me marry Paul?

DAVID Your Mother shall speak for herself. (Adele looks at her Mother kisses her and exits R. David turns key on her).

DAVID I should advise you to do so.

MADAME Why?

DAVID (Lightly) The boy gave me a photo of himself taken with his Father and Mother; would you like to see it?

MADAME (Unconcerned) It would not interest me.

DAVID (Lightly) Not the young gentleman who wishes to marry your daughter.

MADAME Yes - show it to me.) David shows the portrait; Madame screams).

MADAME THAT'S THE MAN!

DAVID (in horror) The father Adele?

MADAME (tragically) THE DEVIL'S FACE IS BURNT INTO MY SOUL AS WITH A HOT IRON - I COULD PICK THE DEVIL OUT FROM 10,000 IF HE WERE IN HELL.

DAVID Was his left hand disfigured - the thumb severed?

MADAME Yes - Adele has the same birthmark.

DAVID (pause then thoughtfully). Yes. The little conversation I had with Van Relt, altho' he says he is Dutch - he speaks French - but with a German accent.

MADAME (anxious) I'll see the man.

DAVID If this is the devil, VENGEANCE SHALL BE YOURS.

MADAME (thoughtfully) - I could not, in cold blood, avenge my honour.

DAVID An eye for an eye a tooth for a tooth.

MADAME You maybe mistaken (putting her arms on David, David takes her hand gently down from her shoulder and looks at watch that is on her wrist - left arm).

DAVID It is ten minutes to three. (looks thro' window, then closes window. Sees Ghurka's knife and puts it near Madame who shudders).

DAVID If it is Captain Hoffmann and you will not defend your honour, your brother SHALL; the remembrance of what I saw of the German atrocities against our womanhood makes me adamant (exits L.)
(Madame sits at the table hiding the photograph, there is the noise of a man coming up the stairs, a pause, and then Van Relt entres R. It is Adolph Hoffmann of the Prologue, older with a beard - he wears a glove).

VAN RELT Have I the honour of addressing Madame Labin-Bezan? (holds out hand gloved): Madame draws back). Madame I apologise for my glove; I hurt my hand in Paris.

 (Madame nods for him to be seated)

VAN RELT Will not Madame sit?

MADAME No (points at the sofa - ; Van Relt shrugs his shoulders and sits). You were at La Bar 17 years ago.

VAN RELT (unconcerned) Madame, I did not leave Holland until 10 years ago: you are mistaken

MADAME You are German

VAN RELT (rises, is annoyed speaks coolly) Madame, it is a serious thing to call a man a German - true, I have lived much with Germans in Switzerland, and I admit that I speak French with a German accent. (Madame goes to drawer and takes out portrait which was taken when she was a school girl, Van Relt makes as tho' to leave).

MADAME STOP!! Do you know that face? (handing him the portrait)

VAN RELT (without looking at the portrait) It is a portrait of your daughter? (He looks at the portrait, and everything of 17 years ago comes before him - he is deadly pale, and trembles)

MADAME I was 16 then, when you outraged me at the school of Holy Mother - I have a daughter.

VAN RELT MY daughter! - And my Son she loves. (forgetting the presence of Madame and thinking aloud).

MADAME YOU are THAT Prussian devil.

VAN RELT (coolly) it is not true I am Dutch (Van Relt looks at Madame, then turns L. to exit. He is behind the screen when the door is closed in his face. Madame picks up the Ghurka's knife as if to strike behind the screen, she drops the knife).

VAN RELT (angrily) Why is the door closed? (the Church clock is heard to strike 1 in the distance) You shall suffer for calling me a German - would you insult a gentleman? (clock strikes 2)

MADAME You are a German.

VAN RELT Yes I AM the Prussian gentleman - NOW tell your daughter I am her war father, (sneering). YOU and all you English women are only pleasures for cultured Germans (clock strikes 3 - he looks at her with a sneer, goes centre off Stage to exit around the screen R to the door; he is out of sight behind the screen, Madame is deadly pale, holds her hands, looking at vacancy, she is half collapsing, there is a subdued moan - a pause - the screen falls - and Van Relt is seen with his throat and face covered with blood, he falls across the sofa, and rolls L. He has been killed by David.)

DAVID VENGEANCE IS MINE!