

ABOUT A RING

SCENE 1

We see an old man (Thomas) sitting in an armchair. A girl, his granddaughter (Jane), comes up from behind him and sits down at the edge of the chair.

GRANDDAUGHTER I'm bored. Tell me a story.

OLD MAN Have I told you of my trip to Australia in the 40s?

GRANDDAUGHTER Many times.

OLD MAN What about the war?

GRANDDAUGHTER You told me you fought against the Germans.

OLD MAN I did. But... that's not exactly what happened. Let me tell you a story.

Two soldiers appear on stage. Light switches to them.

OLD MAN [narrating]: It was midnight. Most of our company was asleep in their tents. We snuck out as quietly as possible and headed to our secret place in the forest.

Soldier 1 is carrying a blanket. Soldier 2 a basket filled with food and other stuff. Finding a perfect spot, soldier 1 puts down the blanket. Soldier 2 begins unloading goods from the basket: there's some wine, a couple of cans, a lamp, and a game of cards.

OLD MAN [narrating] What we were doing was completely forbidden. But we were young, and like all young people in the world, we wanted to have some fun.

THOMAS Is it time? Do you think he'll come, Peter? I hate waiting. [impatient]

PETER If he has come all the other times, he will come now. Besides, he probably wants to win back [reaches into his pocket and brings out a watch] this.

THOMAS [shakes his head, laughing] And you probably want to win back the ring that you lost.

They hear a rustle in the bushes. They tense, looking with big eyes at the place the noise is coming from. A soldier wearing a different uniform suddenly steps out from amidst the bushes. He is holding a helm filled with food. THOMAS and PETER are relieved - it's obvious they know this soldier.

JOHANN My friends!

END OF SCENE 1

SCENE 2

THOMAS Johann! We've been waiting... Well, it feels like forever!

JOHANN Sorry, fellas. But... you do understand that there is a war going on?

They all laugh.

PETER Pfft... has that ever stopped you from coming here?

JOHANN Not really. So, tell me... Are you ready to give me back my watch?

PETER You'll get it back if you win it back.

THOMAS Friends, stop behaving like children. Why won't you trade? He can give you your ring for his watch!

PETER AND JOHANN (simultaneously) And miss out on a good game. No way!

THOMAS Why not? He has what you want and the other way round.

PETER Because! Thomas, you truly seem stupid at times. You have to win back things, not just... I don't know, trade them or give them away.

JOHANN Yes! Like in this we are fighting instead of trading.

PETER Haha, true... Wait, what?!

THOMAS Fellas... stop! We only have one rule! Which is it?

PETER Not to talk about war. You sure know how to spoil things... No, I'm joking... Sorry.

JOHANN Tut mir Leid... as we say in my country... But that doesn't mean that I'm not going to win my watch back!

PETER Pfft... you can try!

Peter and Johann laugh, Thomas smiles. Peter takes out pack of playing cards.

END OF SCENE 2

A few hours later...

PETER [sleepy] Guys, never again... **[sighs]**

JOHANN [worried] Shhh! Wake Thomas up and lets remove all traces of us from this place as swiftly as possible. **[There's a noise!]** We need to hide! I think someone is heading our way. They'll be here any moment!

PETER [jokingly] Is it someone from my camp or yours?

JOHANN [worried] What does it matter? If they see us here together we'd be executed as deserters or spies. And there is nothing to joke about here. I need your help to clean this place.

They wake Thomas up and start to tidy the place. The soldier is closing in on them. While Peter is cleaning the ring falls out of his pocket. They hide; Thomas hides on one side and Johann and Peter on the other.

GERMAN SOLDIER [The german soldier looks around and pulls out a cigarette to smoke. Suddenly, he sees the ring on the ground. While he is picking it up he sees a pair of British boots sticking out from the bush. The boots belong to Thomas. He unslings his rifle and points it at the bush] Hände hoch!

Thomas comes out of the bushes, hands over his head. He does not look at the others to not to reveal their position.]

GERMAN SOLDIER Ist hier noch jemand?

Thomas doesn't understand. His hands are shaking.

THOMAS What?

Johann shoots the german soldier from the bushes. He comes out with the rifle still smoking in his hands. Peter and Thomas start running away, Johann grabs the ring the german soldier picked up and then joins them.

GRANDDAUGHTER [quietly] He really did that? He killed his own fellow soldiers to save you?

OLD MAN [very sad] Yes, he did. He was a very strange man, my friend. Sometimes angry, sometimes calm. But he always made the right decisions in the end. He was my friend. And he was brave enough to act against his own side to save our lives.

GRANDDAUGHTER [shakes her head] It was still murder. Why are you defending him?

OLD MAN [sighs] By that logic of yours, I too am a murderer. You see... killing is very difficult thing. But in battle, killing becomes as natural as breathing and you don't think about it too much. Of course it doesn't change the fact that life is still a precious thing. And however you take it, it takes away a bit of you, too. He did a very difficult thing. But he did not do it for fun or his own amusement. He did it to save our lives. I'm sure Johann didn't just forget about it either. Just as I remember all the lives I had to take, so did he.

GRANDDAUGHTER [frightened] It's awful what war does to humanity.

OLD MAN [holds her hand] I pray that you'll never have to experience it. [Wipes his tears]

GRANDDAUGHTER And then what?

Thomas, Peter and Johann enter a glade wherein there is a small unit of English soldiers and their captain. Thomas and Peter immediately pretend that Johann is their prisoner. The English soldiers barely notice because they are celebrating. Thomas and Peter go up to the captain.

THOMAS Sir, we captured a German soldier.

CAPTAIN [sarcastic] Great for you. I guess you haven't heard.

PETER Heard what?

CAPTAIN The war is over.

Thomas, Peter and Johann are shocked but slowly realize what this actually means.

THOMAS What should we do with our prisoner, sir.

CAPTAIN We'll wait for higher orders but I think he'll be able to go home soon. [**The captain turns round to talk with his shoulders.**]

Thomas, Peter and Johann smile at each other.

CAPTAIN You two get over here for some drinks. If I'm in a good mood I'll even give a drink to the prisoner.

GRANDDAUGHTER What about the ring?

GRANDFATHER [**mumbling, confused**] I picked it up from the German soldier and gave it back to Peter.

GRANDDAUGHTER You didn't mention that, Grandpa.

GRANDFATHER I didn't. Oh dear, look at the time! I'm getting tired, you know how old people are.

GRANDDAUGHTER Where is Johann now?

GRANDFATHER He was very lucky and made it home.

GRANDDAUGHTER Thanks for telling me this story. Good night! [**The granddaughter leaves.**]

JOHANN [**Johann appears next to the grandfather.**] You almost told her the truth. Why did you change the ending?

GRANDFATHER You gave me hope and faith in people and I wanted give her the same thing. I wanted to show her that even in war there was good done.

JOHANN I understand. But I hope you didn't forget what really happened.

GRANDFATHER How could I? I'll never his angry eyes when he saw you...

Thomas, Peter, Johann, the British Captain and his soldiers appear again. The captain's soldiers are pointing their guns at Johann.

THOMAS But sir, you can't do that! He's a prisoner of war. You can't just kill him.

CAPTAIN We can't bring him with us and if he flees, he will eventually fight us again.

JOHANN Wait! Let me just put my wedding ring on!

CAPTAIN 3... 2... 1.... FIRE!

The soldiers fire. Johann falls down.

CAPTAIN Check his pulse!

Thomas goes to Johann, who is dead and leans down over Johann's body.

THOMAS He's dead.

The captain and the soldiers leave. Only Thomas and Peter stay behind. Thomas notices the ring and takes it off and gives to Peter.

PETER No, I can't. I want to forget this.

THOMAS I understand. [He puts it in his pocket and then he closes Johann's eyes.

We see the grandfather rising from his chair. From his pocket he brings out the ring and gives it to Johann.

JOHANN No, I won't take it back. I'll *win* it back.

They sit down and Johann takes out a game of cards. The lights slowly fade.

THE END