Chloe Roddy

GERM 499

May 4, 2015

Assignment 3 – *Fear and Misery* Scene (Revised)

*Berlin, 1935. A Jehovah’s Witness returns from work to his modest flat with a solemn expression on his face. His wife notices his unusual demeanor. Natural-looking lighting shines on the entire stage. A metronome ticks at varying volumes and tempos, from calm to frenetic.*

THE JEHOVAH’S WITNESS: We might be getting a visit some time this week.

THE WIFE: A visit? What do you mean?

THE JEHOVAH’S WITNESS: It’s Schröder. A couple of us went to a Bible study meeting yesterday after work. We noticed him acting a bit fidgety after we said our goodbyes, but didn’t think much of it at the time. We’ve always been wary of him – rumor has it that he reported us several times for not saluting and saying “Heil, Hitler!” – but we’d never thought his patriotism would lead him to do things outside of the office, anything that would require extra effort on his part.

THE WIFE: Extra effort?

THE JEHOVAH’S WITNESS: He followed us to the meeting, apparently. Eberhardt tipped us off this morning. Eberhardt lives in Lichtenberg, takes the same train route to and from work every day. Not once in the fifteen years he’s worked at the department has he seen Schröder take a train on that line. He doesn’t think it’s a coincidence that Schröder was on that train with us, on a day when we also weren’t going our normal ways home.

THE WIFE: That’s far from proof. I’ve met Schröder, he seems like a perfectly fine fellow, if a bit nationalistic. I can’t see him embarking on a mission to catch you and your fellow martyrs…er, like-minded colleagues, I mean, in the act of congregating.

THE JEHOVAH’S WITNESS *sighs*: We’ve been over this, dear. You know the strength of my convictions, my reasons for continuing to attend secret meetings, even if it is illegal now. And anyway, we’re pretty convinced that was indeed his intention – Eberhardt says he got off at the same stop we did, his hat masking much of his face, and started trailing us as we left the station.

THE WIFE *agitatedly*: You should have been more careful. After you’ve already had to justify not giving the salute, oh, how many, fifteen times…you know they’re looking for any reason to deport you to a concentration camp. Why give them a reason to take you away?

THE JEHOVAH’S WITNESS: Give them a reason? That’s not how it works these days. I’m not a Watch Tower leader. I simply want to practice my religion with my fellow members. After the ban, I haven’t tried to convert anybody. We’re operating rather quietly, actually. But that might not mean anything in the end – I’m certainly on their list of people to watch out for. Frankly, I’m surprised they haven’t taken me away yet.

THE WIFE: So you’ve resigned yourself to this fate. Like I said, you’re a martyr.

THE JEHOVAH’S WITNESS: I haven’t died just yet.

*Pause (including sound of the metronome).*

THE WIFE: I just don’t understand. You do know we could put this all behind us, right? *(lighting suddenly intensifies, becoming harsher; metronome resumes ticking)*

THE JEHOVAH’S WITNESS: Is that so?

THE WIFE: I hear the Gestapo is offering your types the chance to sign a document renouncing your beliefs. You’ll have to agree to dissociate yourself from Bible Student activities…but in return, you’ll be given a second chance. A clean slate, they’re saying. *(steps out of character, addresses audience)* In reality, Jehovah’s Witnesses were not offered a clean slate; there were various strings attached, such as agreeing to report members that they observed participating in religious activities.

THE JEHOVAH’S WITNESS *chuckles knowingly at her last in-character remark*: I could do that. But what is there to gain? I’ve come to terms with my suffering in this world, knowing that it’s ultimately for the benefit of God. All I require to keep my priorities straight is the support of my fellow believers, and my family. *(walks toward audience, with footsteps echoing loudly, and addresses them: Does this attitude hold true for persecuted minorities today, for instance the Turkmens and Shabaks currently targeted by ISIS?)*

*The couple’s young son walks into the room.*

THE SON: We’re out of milk. Do you want me to run down to the store?

THE WIFE: That would be lovely, Nikolas. Here’s some money.

*The son exits the flat. The Jehovah’s Witness suddenly looks noticeably uncomfortable.*

THE WIFE *softly*: That poor boy. Did he tell you how he got those bruises on his arms and neck? Those terrible, mean-hearted kids at his school…I used to think that schools would be the last bastion of hope in circumstances like these. *(lighting shifts to audience; addresses audience)* Seeing children turn on each other like rabid dogs, just like the adults, it all makes me sick.

*Pause. Cheerful, upbeat song plays for several seconds.*

THE JEHOVAH’S WITNESS *tentatively*: Sometimes I do wonder if it was best for him to follow my beliefs at such a young age, in this environment. But he understands – he recognizes which is the true God. He might only be a young child, but he has a wise, guided soul. While it wounds me to see my child experience physical pain, I cannot deny that I take great joy in the spiritual journey he has commenced.

THE WIFE: Even if I were a believer, Hans, I don’t know if that rationale would help me sleep at night. At the end of the day, he’s our son, and I don’t know if I’ll be able to forgive you if you throw away this chance to start over, and are taken away at our expense. I think you sometimes forget that what you choose to do doesn’t only affect you.

THE JEHOVAH’S WITNESS *now failing to contain his distress*: There’s no winning here. I’ve reached a juncture where the two causes I’m most passionate about in life, my religion and my family, can no longer be furthered at the same time. *(laughs hysterically)* I could choose to keep our family intact, but that would require shattering the integrity and convictions I’ve had my entire life. Alternatively, I could hold true to my beliefs and refuse to submit to the Gestapo’s shameful tactics. Of course, I have to choose this option. But then I would be forced to leave you and Nikolas behind. How could I live with myself if I did that? The sufferings endured in this world are necessary sacrifices we make for God, but even though I accept that, I can’t simply be apathetic when I think of your and Nikolas’ future without me.

THE WIFE: *(turns to audience)* I think that no matter what you decide, you’ll be unable to live, either with yourself or just generally speaking. *(turns back to Jehovah’s Witness)* Like I said, you’re a martyr.