

GHOSTLY TRINKETS

By Charron Contival

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CHARACTERS

OLD MAN - Ex-Nazi

FEMALE VOICE—Ghost of Holocaust Victim

MALE VOICE—Ghost of Holocaust Victim

YOUNG MAN—Thief

PROPS

Walking cane

Tchotches (trinkets)

Sound effect of breaking glass

Toy gun (optional)

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SCENE: *A room, rectangular, with bookshelves lining one wall, spotlighted. A comfortable leather chair sits in the middle of the room, with a hassock, and a reading light. Unseen in the darkness, on the opposite wall, is a display of a Nazi flag, various miscellaneous photos, and other WWII memorabilia. An OLD MAN, hunched and arthritic, wearing an old jacket, is puttering near a desk littered with papers. HE is the only person in the room. VOICES may be done with mikes off-stage, or the actors could be onstage, stationed in upstage right and left corners, obviously unseen by the OLD MAN. A current of air sifts through the room, rustling the papers on the desk.*

MALE VOICE: *(Male, acerbic, mocking)* You know, of course, that you're going to hell. *(optional wording "You're going straight to the devil.")*

OLD MAN: *(head swinging around to look for the source of the voice HE speaks with a German accent)* What? What did you say?

MALE VOICE: You heard me.

OLD MAN: *(Shuffles toward an old strongbox at the other end of the room, thinking the VOICE is coming from there. HE moves with the aid of a cane. Upon reaching the strongbox, HE finds it empty.)* I didn't understand what you said.

MALE VOICE: You understand me perfectly. Don't pretend. It won't work with me.

FEMALE VOICE: *(querulous)* Is he senile, as well as hard of hearing?

OLD MAN: I should have said: Why did you say what you said?

(HE looks behind different objects for the VOICES, but they aren't there.)

MALE VOICE: Because it's true. And you need to hear the truth before you die.

OLD MAN: *(blustering)* You think you can scare an old man like me? You can't, you know. I've already seen hell. It doesn't scare me. Neither does death.

MALE VOICE: *(amused)* I'm not trying to scare you.

OLD MAN: What, then?

MALE VOICE: I'm merely trying to prepare you for the inevitable.

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FEMALE VOICE: That's what he told his victims. They probably didn't believe him, either.

OLD MAN: What victims?

MALE VOICE: **(now clearly irritated)** I told you, don't pretend. You may lie to anyone else, but you can't lie to us. We won't allow it.

OLD MAN: Allow it? Allow it? Who are you to allow anything?

(HE raises his cane, but can't find anyone to strike with it)

(A current of air flows through the room, fluttering the papers on the desk, the source as mysterious as the VOICES. The OLD MAN grabs his chest, as if having a heart attack, then relaxes as the spasm passes. HE fumbles his way in his leather chair.)

OLD MAN: Ach, I think you try to frighten this old man, after all.

MALE VOICE: No, that's not our purpose.

OLD MAN: What then? I am an old man. I don't have the patience for these kinds of games. Get to your point.

MALE VOICE: **(good humor restored)** Why? Are you going somewhere?

OLD MAN: **(grunting)** I'm going to hell, according to you.

(HE thrusts himself out of his chair, and moves toward the bookshelves against the wall. They contain a collection of fine art: small oil portraits, silver candelabums, a fancy sword, and a miniature strongbox filled to overflowing with small gold ingots. The OLD MAN adjusts some of the items on the shelves, the VOICES forgotten.)

MALE VOICE: Your pride and joy, aren't they?

OLD MAN: My *tchotchkes*? My trinkets? They are the only things I will regret leaving behind when I die.

FEMALE VOICE: A thief and his spoils. Sickening.

MALE VOICE: Regard for their history? That's rich. Precious mementos ripped from the arms of their owners, sobbing and crying for their return?

FEMALE VOICE: Just as the owners were then torn from the arms of their loved ones. What kind of history is that? History of the condemned, I'd call it.

OLD MAN: **(Whining)** These trinkets were collected at great risk to myself. I had them removed from Germany and sent to safety on my brother's U-Boat. I rescued them. Besides, the owners were all going to die, anyway. What could I do?

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MALE VOICE: (*Repeating, mocking*) What could I do? What could I do?

FEMALE VOICE: The eternal cry of the loser. Then, as now.

OLD MAN: Loser, is it? I was successful, before the war, you know. I had my own business. Employees. I made lots of money.

MALE VOICE: Squandered it, I expect. On things, probably. Possessions. Or a lavish lifestyle.

OLD MAN: *I was young, foolish!* What would you think?

MALE VOICE: Wine, women and song. An age-old temptation.

OLD MAN: What if I did? So did many others.

FEMALE VOICE: Many others used it to help those less fortunate. Those singled out for hatred, or oppression.

OLD MAN: Bah! That's a lie. Show me a rich man, and I'll show you someone only out for himself. That's why they're rich in the first place.

FEMALE VOICE: And of course, you've been living hand-to-mouth since the war.

OLD MAN: I do all right.

MALE VOICE: Besides, once the war started, all that was over with, wasn't it? No more parties. No more lavish meals.

OLD MAN: Yes. We had little time for parties and such nonsense once we came to power. Too much else to do.

FEMALE VOICE: Wholesale murder of a people, for one.

OLD MAN: Well, that was a lot of it.

MALE VOICE: Look. He's still proud of it.

OLD MAN: Proud? I don't know if that's the right word. It was...an accomplishment.

FEMALE VOICE: He thinks it was an achievement. Something to be counted among his life's best works.

OLD MAN: No, no, you don't understand. The country was in complete disarray after the first great war. The economy was shattered-unemployment was high. The people were demoralized. They needed a unifying symbol. A banner to rally under.

MALE VOICE: A tool, then? A political expediency?

OLD MAN: (*satisfied*) Exactly. A common enemy. Or enemies, I should say, since it wasn't only the Jews. Poles, Gypsies, Russians, Homosexuals, even. Anyone different. It's the same today.

MALE VOICE: So, we've learned nothing? Humans have made no progress from those days?

OLD MAN: What progress? Look at Rwanda. Or Croatia. Slaughter of one's enemies still goes on today. Minorities are targets for brutal murder. What's changed? If you remember nothing else, remember this: man is a predator. Always was, always will be. Killing is as natural to man as it is to a wolf, or a bear or any other creature of the wild.

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MALE VOICE: Civilization counts for nothing?

OLD MAN: Civilization is a veneer that comes peeling off when man is confronted by hard choices. Survival. Hunger. Violence. It's not very deep. We did experiments, you know. Mothers forced to choose between children and spouses. Fathers between sons and mothers. You'd be amazed.

FEMALE VOICE: We know. We were there.

OLD MAN: Well, so was I. It doesn't mean we learned the same lessons.

MALE VOICE: What lessons did you learn?

OLD MAN: Too many to list. I wouldn't want to bore you.

MALE VOICE: The last thing you are is boring.

FEMALE VOICE: True evil seldom is.

OLD MAN: I'm not evil. I only lived in an evil time. Evil deeds were required. If you didn't do your part, you'd find yourself in trouble. Or dead.

FEMALE VOICE: Better you than them.

OLD MAN: No, not quite. Man is a selfish creature, as you probably know. Better that they died, than me.

MALE VOICE: Why?

OLD MAN: What do you mean, why? Because it was better.

FEMALE VOICE: Better for you?

OLD MAN: **(Defensively)** Better for everyone. They had no chance, no hope.

FEMALE VOICE: You saw to that.

OLD MAN: No, they saw to that when they surrendered without a fight. Cattle, going to the slaughter. What good are people like that? Darwin had it right. Survival of the fittest.

MALE VOICE: Survival of the strongest, you mean.

OLD MAN: Whatever. Nature rewards the strong. Lesser breeds, weaker breeds, soon die out. And rightly so.

MALE VOICE: So anything weaker, anything different, deserves to be annihilated?

OLD MAN: Well, if they can't adapt, if they can't learn from past mistakes, why not?

FEMALE VOICE: And who decides?

OLD MAN: Who decides what? Who's to go and who's to stay? The stronger, of course. Only the toughest can prevail. Life goes on for the strong.

MALE VOICE: Life is too precious to waste on the weak?

OLD MAN: **(Hesitating)** Well, I don't know if I'd say it like that. Let's just say that life is a battle that goes to the best soldier.

MALE VOICE: Interesting analogy from someone who lost the war.

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OLD MAN: Ah, but we were winning until the American's got involved. Them and their cursed technology. Tanks, bombs, planes, by the gross. We were inundated.

MALE VOICE: They were only stronger because of the weapons?

OLD MAN: Well, mostly. Of course, Hitler made a fatal error in opening up a war on two fronts. Between the Russians and the American's, we didn't stand a chance.

MALE VOICE: Hitler was weak, then?

OLD MAN: Hitler was crazy, at the end. And weak, yes. He thought we were invincible.

FEMALE VOICE: But before that, he was right? Justified, in trying to build an empire based on racial hatred and genocide?

OLD MAN: If Hitler had accomplished all his goals, he *would* have begun a thousand year Reich. Look at Rome. Look at Alexander. Look at Genghis Khan. You don't establish empires or dominate the world by worrying about human rights. You do it by killing off all who oppose you.

MALE VOICE: Extraordinary.

OLD MAN: It would have been. Truly.

MALE VOICE: No, I meant your capacity for self-rationalization.

OLD MAN: What?

FEMALE VOICE: He doesn't see it.

OLD MAN: See what?

MALE VOICE: I agree. Total lack of remorse.

OLD MAN: Remorse for what? Killing in wartime?

MALE VOICE: You feel no distress at the tens of thousands you sent to die, because they were weak and defenseless, yet you can spout excuse after excuse for why your beloved leader was justified in sending an entire country down the path to destruction.

OLD MAN: Listen. You have to understand. Death was unavoidable in those days.

FEMALE VOICE: It still is, as far as I know.

OLD MAN: No, I mean, it was either them or me. I said that before. If I hadn't gone along with what they wanted me to do, I would have been killed.

MALE VOICE: Another old excuse, heard too often: I was just following orders.

OLD MAN: I was! If I hadn't, they would have shot me, and another would have taken my place. What would the point have been? I couldn't stop it.

MALE VOICE: True change starts with only one voice.

FEMALE VOICE: What could you have done if your voice had been joined by others?

OLD MAN: But no one was protesting. We all went along.

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MALE VOICE: Our point exactly.

FEMALE VOICE: Talk about expediency! He boasts of belonging to the stronger species, then whines because he wasn't able to stand up and protest what he knew was wrong.

OLD MAN: I didn't whine! Believe what you like. You had to be there to understand.

MALE VOICE: But we were, we already told you that.

OLD MAN: If you were there, prove it. Tell me something only someone who was there would know.

MALE VOICE: We could tell you what you were thinking at almost any given moment.

OLD MAN: How? Were you inside my mind?

MALE VOICE: What do you think? Look inside, you'll find us there.

OLD MAN: I think you still try to scare me, eh? Put the fear of God in me?

FEMALE VOICE: To fear God, you have to believe in him in the first place. Otherwise, there's nothing to fear.

OLD MAN: I believe.

MALE VOICE: Do you? Or is it just another bargain you made? "I'll believe in you, God, if you don't send me to hell."

OLD MAN: God doesn't bargain like that.

FEMALE VOICE: You should know.

OLD MAN: What do you mean?

FEMALE VOICE: All those people you sent to their deaths, crying and beseeching their God to save them. He didn't, did he?

OLD MAN: No. You're right about that.

MALE VOICE: Do you think God cares about death?

OLD MAN: He must. It's as plentiful as rain. He must like it.

MALE VOICE: Are you defining God? Or the Nazis? Didn't you act like gods?

OLD MAN: Hmmm. Yes, I take your point. We did, didn't we? We had the power of life and death over our enemies.

FEMALE VOICE: You reveled in it. You enjoyed it.

OLD MAN: What human doesn't? We all like power of one sort or another.

FEMALE VOICE: Not all. Some are content to stand back, let others wield the power, as you call it.

OLD MAN: **(Derisively)** Who? Show me such a person. They don't exist.

MALE VOICE: They do. Dreamers. Artists. Poets.

OLD MAN: Fools. Weaklings. Soft-headed idiots, one and all.

MALE VOICE: They have no place in society?

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OLD MAN: Of course they have a place in society. Just not in the upper crust. They don't belong with the strong, the brave who carve out a civilization from the raw world.

MALE VOICE: Don't the strong, the brave, have a duty to defend the weaker members, the sculptors, the painters, the writers who record the history?

OLD MAN: A duty? No. The strong have a duty to hold their civilization against those who would take it.

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