

BLOODLANDS**Story outline of a Feature Film****Based on a book “Underground” by A. Sileika****A CHILLING LOVE STORY OF A WAR UNTOLD****Prologue****1961 Autumn**

An early autumn morning in 1961, a train lurches into the Valkininkai train station. The passengers spill out onto the platform and quickly disappear, leaving one weary man with a small suitcase in his hand.

In the dusty station square, he stops a truck driver and asks for a ride to the Jewish pine forest. Even without payment, the driver agrees.

“Fifteen years I haven’t been there,” says the man, already seated in the cab.

“I understand,” answered the driver, as he spits out the window.

Entering the forest, he kneels and begins to weep, and appears to be praying. He is haunted by visions of people walking by; injured partisans, two Jewish families with their children and baggage, and Russian and German soldiers, all who played major roles in the life of this forest.

“Have mercy on me, brothers. Forgive me! It was I who betrayed you. I am Ignatius”- the man, alternately talking and wailing in anguish.

“I cannot die in peace until I receive your forgiveness. I survived the horrors of Siberia so that I would return to seek your forgiveness. Forgive me, I pray, my brothers.”

Two teen-agers, apparently mushroom hunting, carefully approach the weeping man.

“Who are you looking for?”-asked the elder of the two.

“The partisan forest brothers, maybe you know where to find them?”-Ignatius asks hopefully.

“O, the partisans, they all left. No one is here.”

“When did they leave? How can that be? Where?”

“I don’t know... Somewhere. When? Day before yesterday.”

Ignatius still cannot believe what he had just heard. “I was late... two days late.” He does not notice the pent-up laughter brimming in the boys’ faces as they leave.

FILM TITLE: BLOODLANDS

1940. Spring

Petronas Manor, Marijampole district, 40 acres of land, bordering the railroad track with the forest beyond. A father with two elder sons, Luke and Vincent, go hunting, leaving the youngest at home with his sisters and mother.

There was only one rifle-probably the reason that there were so many rabbits. Vincent was the first to shoot, but purposely shot into the air, and with a wry smile on his face, handed the rifle to Luke. Luke shot two rabbits, and his father, one. Returning, they were delayed by a passing train with a portrait of Stalin-the steam engine laboring to pull carloads of soldiers with canons and munitions draped with red flags.

“That’s it kids, Lithuania will no longer be as we knew It.” sighed their father.

All three stood at the rail, confused and disoriented to time and history, when suddenly another train came barreling down from the other direction. Frightened faces stared out of the small barred windows of the animal wagons. The train came to a screeching halt nearby. A few wagon doors opened, and five corpses were thrown out onto the wayside. Two men in NKVD uniforms fired shots into the corpses’ heads to insure no possibility of survival.

No sooner had the train trudged on with its victims to Siberia, when another train appeared, German, with canons, and soldiers singing “Lieber Augustin,” merrily.

The next day, carts with elaborate furniture and a large clock with pendulum rolled into Petronas Manor. Gotlieb said to the astonished Petronas, “We will be taken somewhere. If we return, I know that you will return it, as you are a good neighbor, Joseph. If we don’t return, then it will be a keepsake in our memory.” The clock was very stylish.

A column of Jews marched along the dusty road, led by armed men, one of whom was freckled and missing two front teeth. There were many Jews, exactly 201; men and women, children and grandparents walked with their luggage and a few other possessions, sensing, but not yet knowing their fate. The Germans were already waiting for the Jewish column in front of the excavated pit adjacent to the forest. The men were the first to be stood by the edge of the pit. Gotlieb’s wife, Leja, understanding what was about to happen, let out a curdling scream in the face of the toothless guard, “I curse you.” The rifle butt brutally struck her in the face, but she did not feel the pain.

Albinas was a solidly built man from the large Lauras family, but since early childhood, had a few loose screws in his head. He was harmless, and if he was bizarre or crazy, one could not immediately tell. Sometimes he would work hard, and at times, just lay on the grass with a smirk on his face, talking to himself:

-O, God wouldn’t let me work today.

And, what can you do about him? When he brought a meal to the Zimmerman family, who were hiding in the barn, he would always pat twelve year old Rina on her head and say:

-Albinas loves Rina. Albinas will protect Rina from anyone.

Then, he would have to play with Idzelis’ “peyos,” and laughed like a child.

For three years, Idzelis didn’t mind Albinas playing with his “peyos.” But when the Russians came, and hiding was no longer necessary, Rina was already fifteen. Albinas suddenly had an urge to marry her. Oh, how he cried with childlike tears when it was explained that he cannot marry her, only love her from afar.

1944 Summer

Once more, the war wreaked havoc in Lithuania. Again, trains draped in red flags, lumbered in from the east filled with Russian soldiers, and canons.

Violet quietly grazed near the giant elm, and mused gently upon recognizing her approaching friend. Albinas carried a broom ready to work, but his thoughts were somewhere else. He started to sweep the walk, worn down because of the traffic between the barn and the river. As he swept the leaves, he murmured under his breath:

-Little leaves of mine, little fallen soldiers. As the autumn comes, there will be many little leaves, many little soldiers...have to sweep...not their place on the walk.

The senior Petronas, watching from his yard, sighed despondently and said:

-There will be trouble, my children, big trouble. Look what Albinas is up to.

Albinas may not have been all there mentally, but he knew what was coming.

When the NKVD, with their collaborators, came to confiscate Violet, Albinas clung to her neck, and tearfully proclaimed:

-Albinas loves Violet, Albinas will not let her go.

The NKVD officer did not understand Lithuanian, and shot Albinas in the forehead. Thus, Violet was liberated from being exploited.

In September, Luke and Vincent returned to Kaunas; Luke to the philology faculty of the university, and Vincent to the seminary. Both had received exemptions from conscription into the army. A few of the students had gathered in the university dorm room to share what was sent them by their parents: bacon, sausages, homemade bread, and even some homemade brew.

Elena, and her sister Anna, who had just arrived for a visit, shared their stories, and fears with Ignatius, Rimantas, Lazarus, Luke, and Vincent. All wanted to believe that the Russians will remain here only temporarily, and that America and England will come to Lithuania's aid as soon as they dispense with the Germans.

That evening, all went to the Romuva movie theater to watch the chiseled "Tarzan." Prior to watching the movie, a chronicle was shown of party activists from Marijampole, and the ideological importance of their activities. Two young men on the screen enthusiastically shake hands. A surprised Anna exclaimed, "I know both of them. That Giedrius, he was always trying to make a pass at me."

The next day, having just returned from a lecture, Luke finds Lazarus and Vincent lying on his bed in the dorm. Both were beat up and bruised, and Vincent's glasses mangled on his face.

"Where have you been for the last three days?" shouted Luke.

"In jail, the Cheka," Vincent answered calmly.

"Looks like they beat you pretty good?"

"They beat us, but not too badly. Some got it much worse. They tried to force us to sign that we would work for them," Vincent stated matter-of-factly.

"Did you sign?" Luke asked anxiously.

"I did not, but he did," quietly uttered Vincent, as he shot a look at Lazarus.

Lazarus jumped off the bed and began to feverishly pack his belongings into his backpack.

"Yeah, I signed, and you would have too in my place. We must go into the forest. I know a man there. Here, we will have no life"

"I also cannot return to the seminary. Who is going to believe that I was let go without signing anything or betraying anybody?" Vincent stated logically.

"And what will you do there in the forest, in the winter?" smiled Luke.

"The same as everybody else, freeze and fight for truth," Vincent says with resolve.

"I have already seen how you fight," Luke smiled sarcastically.

A guide was leading two students and a seminarian through the dark forest on paths known only to him. Lucky for them, the heavy snowfall quickly hid their footprints. The guide stopped suddenly, and spoke in a low voice into the darkness. "Ashes."

"Dust," a voice from the dark answered. They continued to walk further.

As the sun began to peak over the horizon, the partisan camp looked impressive. More accurately, there were several camps, one next to the other. Campfire flames were blazing from deeply dug holes; on the other side of the fence four cows were grazing; the aroma of barley stew, wafting across the camp from the boiling kettle. A few hundred men were engaged in morning preparations.

The platoon commander, Flint, a bearded officer in his forties, smoking a pipe, quickly welcomed them. After warmly greeting Lazarus, he turned his attention to the two brothers.

“What can you do, and what do you want?”

“We don’t want to be slaves. Isn’t that enough?”

“It’s not enough,” laughed Flint.

Vincent was appointed platoon chaplain, and Luke was entrusted to write newsletters, coordinate the printing of materials, and listen to foreign radio news. They were now partisans.

Having been invited to breakfast, everyone sat down at long, unadorned tables, when, to his surprise, he recognized Elena. She was serving the food to the men, and was equally surprised to see him.

“Meet my brother, Eel,” she said as her face surged red with embarrassment.

1944 Winter

As there was little time for training, their “baptism by fire” arrived suddenly. Early in the morning, the brothers were assigned a mission. Led by Eel and Nightingale, they headed towards the city. They trudged through the knee-deep snow until they reached the main road leading into the city. Luke and Vincent attached newsletters to three posts, while Eel and Flint hid explosives under the third post.

Hiding behind the bushes next to the road, they waited in the bitter cold. Soon, a “Studebaker” appeared and stopped at the first post. Out jumped three “collaborators” and began tearing down the newsletters. The explosion had such force that it tore two of the collaborators to shreds. The third, wounded, with a bloody face, turned screaming while covering his face to hide the empty sockets that had been his eyes. The officer in the Studebaker fled in fear to the city, leaving his screaming comrade to his fate.

“Shoot him,” Nightingale ordered Vincent.

“I will not,” he answered firmly.

“That’s an order! Shoot” added Eel.

Luke quickly picked up the gun, and without hesitation, shot him cleanly in the chest.

On the way back to the camp, Luke did not utter a word.

After a few days, the platoon separated into three groups. Led by Flint, they attacked Merkine. Their objective was to destroy the collaborators' center and reclaim the bodies of recently killed friends that were thrown and exhibited in the city square. However, they were unaware that someone betrayed them. A sniper, hidden in the church belfry...and the partisans were met in Merkine with a torrent of bullets.

After one failed attempt, they managed to reach a thick brick house where the armed collaborators were clustered. Being careful of the sniper, the partisans shot out the windows. Eel carried an anti-tank weapon and was able to fire it through the window... none survived. However, Eel was standing too close to the wall, and the back-fire from the weapon, caught his clothes on fire. As he rolled on the ground to put out the fire, a sniper bullet found him. On the ground, dead, his body kept burning.

Vincent had to reach the market square. He wandered around town, and for some reason, stopped at the school. Seeing the students huddled on the floor in fear of the gun battle, he managed to preach to them about love for the motherland, and family. All the while, he didn't notice the young teacher trying to cover the Komsomol badge on her chest.

He was close to reaching his objective when he saw two silhouettes through the mist. Thinking that they were friendly, he raised his hand...mistakenly, and was unable to release the safety on his rifle.

Flint's men picked up the tortured and desecrated bodies from the square's pavement, along with one more sniper victim's remains, and pulled out of Merkine back into the woods.

Next to a newly dug grave in the Merkines cemetery, a toothless, freckled man had started butchering Vincent, who was tied to a tree with ropes and wires. A Russian officer was calmly smoking, allowing the Lithuanian to do his work. The butchering had already done much damage: eyes gouged out, tongue cut out, blood splattered groin. Vincent was half dead. Going in and out of consciousness, he tried to say, "Ashes." But without a tongue, it was impossible.

The toothless butcher then cut into Vincent's arm below the elbow, and peeled the skin off, like a glove.

"Now the bastard won't be able to make the sign of the cross," the butcher, poorly attempting to speak in the officer's language.

"That's enough now. You've done a good job. Let's get something to eat," smiled the NKVD officer.

Untying him from the tree, they threw him into the pit that he had earlier begun digging for himself. They covered him with a few shovels of dirt and were about to go eat dinner when Vincent suddenly moved. The butcher placed a heavy headstone on top of him so there would be no chance of him climbing out.

1945. Spring

At last, spring arrived. The men crawled out of their bunkers into the fresh air. Finally, they were able to wash up in the river and to do their laundry.

When Elena appeared in the camp with news for Flint, Luke was drying out his printed material in the warm sun, and was listening to BBC news. The news broadcast echoed throughout.

"The war is over!" shouted Luke, so that everyone would hear. "The Germans have surrendered!"

The news spread quickly through the camps. The men rejoiced that the fascists had met their end, and now, America and Europe will annihilate the Soviets. Someone started a song, and soon there were campfires and dancing. Elena danced with everyone, until it came to Luke's turn.

"Who will accompany you to the station today," Luke asked cautiously.

"You," she answered confidently, looking him in the eyes, and then her face turning red from embarrassment.

As they walked in the forest, Elena took hold of Luke's hand. "Who said that it was the men who choose the women? The women only create the illusion that allows the men to think that they choose them. We are the ones who choose, always."

They kissed long and passionately, like two people who play hide-and-seek with death on a daily basis.

The next time Elena came for a visit, they embraced quickly, so no one would become suspicious of their close relationship. But Flint saw clearly through their charade.

“Come here my little doves. I have some thoughts.”

Luke’s and Elena’s engagement party took place in Marijanpole, in the second floor apartment of a wooden house, where Elena lived with her sister Anna and another tenant, who was known by all to be promiscuous. She proudly wore her KOMSOMOL badge on her sweater. Also joining the festivities were Giedrius and Peter, the same two characters who warmly greeted each other in the chronicle that was shown in Kaunas several months earlier. Three other party workers with their secretaries...more likely, their mistresses, joined the festive crowd. With the goose already eaten, and vodka bottles half empty, the merriment began...dancing and games. The accordionist put his heart and soul into the playing of the tunes.

A gun in both hands, Luke began shooting first, with Elena joining him immediately. The hysterical accordionist fled, but Luke only managed to shatter the accordion with a bullet, as the accordionist continued to flee. Then came Anna’s turn... She fearfully looked at the gun barrel pointed at her. Luke shot her in the arm, so as not to cast suspicion on her with the collaborators.

Giedrius, lying in a pool of blood, moved. Luke finished him off with a shot in the head.

Nightingale waited for them outside with a horse-drawn cart.

The next day, Nightingale went to the farmer by the river to get some food and to hand over newsletters for distribution. Approaching the yard, he saw the landlady gesturing that there was an armed collaborator in the house. Nightingale quietly opened the door. Eating and drinking at the table was the freckled, toothless collaborator. But now, he had a new set of golden teeth in his mouth. He quickly realized Nightingale was standing next to him with a German Schmeisser in his hand.

“So, this is it“ mumbled the collaborator, not being able to reach for his rifle.

„This is it, let’s go,“ Nightingale wasn’t very talkative.

He took the toothless one behind the bushes near the river. Two shots echoed, and after a while, a dead body floated down the river.

Lukas and Elena were mushrooming as if there was no war.. It was an autumn ripe with mushrooms. Elena was a few steps away from Luke, when she unexpectedly and nonchalantly blurted out:

- Hey, Petronas, marry me, yes? Is that hard for you? You would still love me passionately, no?

Undeterred, Lukas answered:

-I'll marry you, and then what?

Elena suddenly got serious, and in barely a whisper:

-I'll bear your children.

They hauled full baskets of mushrooms back towards the camp. That was the extent of their courtship.

The life of a partisan was difficult for Ignatius. He was forever hungry even though he ate more than anyone else, and always trembling in the cold. He asked for Luke's advice about the amnesty announcement from the collaborators. In a few sharp sentences, Luke tore apart his illusions about the Soviet government's humanism. „At best, you'll end up in Siberia. They are not stupid, and not easily fooled.“ Ignatius knew to trust Luke.

Deep in the night, in a wooden church next to the forest, Luke and Elena were married. A real wedding, with a priest. Flint agreed to be the best man. The first night the newlyweds spent in a bunker prepared especially for them. Fellow partisans brought an assortment of gifts. Someone even brought a gift, a bottle of cognac shaped like the Eifel Tower.

The next morning they both stood in formation, as always.

1945 Autumn

At dusk, Luke and Elena cautiously approached Luke's cottage. Out in the yard, Angela gasped seeing Luke, and while weeping told Luke of her harrowing experience yesterday. Four collaborators machine gunned their brother, Algis, cutting him in half. Her father's hair turned white overnight.

Two of the four collaborators were local, a father and son.

Now, they were both digging three pits. The father was forced to bring back Algis' remains from the market square, along with another partisan's body.

The collaborator swore that it wasn't he or his son that did the shooting. Luke thought about letting the younger collaborator go, but Elena suddenly shot them both.

„Yes, I'm cruel and heartless, and you helped me become that way.“ She said as she walked into the forest.

That night, they made passionate love.

From the morning on, the entire camp was roiling with astonishment as the BBC announced that an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, and hundreds of thousands perished. The partisans could not figure out how such a big bomb could fit into an airplane, but nevertheless were happy that Americans now had a weapon to defeat the Soviets.

In the forest, Luke was preparing the newsletter's content. Putting on his glasses, he closely checked the fonts to be used. Elena came up in front of him, slightly bent over, and let out a breath onto his glasses, fogging them up. Luke smiled, took off his glasses, stood up from the tree stump, and gently embraced and kissed her.

-I luv you Luke...

-You should say, love.

-Well, it's not important how you have to say it. I luv you...-and she ran back into the kitchen to her boiling pots.

1945 Christmas

Christmas was approaching. Luke took every opportunity, when no one was looking, to kiss Elena, not only on her lips, but on her slightly rounded belly. Luke's playfulness drove Elena to embarrassment. However, when he quietly whispered into the life inside, it brought a smile to her face. Christmas Eve was celebrated modestly, but correctly. There was even red wine on the partisans' table, supplied by the priest. Then, after midnight, the Redeemer having already been born, and all living creatures about to speak in human tongues, Elena returned to the bunker to a waiting Luke, trembling, frightened, and white as a sheet of paper.

-I'm bleeding heavily Luke. What should we do!

Luke ran to the commander. There was only one solution-hurry to see doctor Urbonas in Merkine. Nightingale led them, hiding a machine gun under his poncho. Luke grabbed a Walther and a couple of grenades. The entire trip, Elena cried silently.

The doctor did not need much explanation. He awakened the nurse, who lived in his home, and took Elena into the operating room behind his office.

-Nurse, just please don't lose my earrings. They were a gift from Luke. Please,-the only words she would say before being knocked out by the chloroform.

Nightingale, with his machine gun, hid in the shadows of the house, and Luke sat stoically by the traditional Christmas table, still uncleared so lost souls could feast. Tears, one after another, rolled down his cheeks. With a heavy heart, he turned to God, "You let your son be killed for all our sins, but for what sins did you kill my child?"

He didn't hear an answer. The doctor was in the doorway.

-She will live, and God will let you have more children. I'm giving you some bandages and penicillin. She is not quite awake, but hurry, those heathens don't celebrate Christmas.

Seeing Luke's tear stained face, he added:

-I can only console you by saying that, he who has not been born, has not died. And besides, who would want to be born in these terrible times.

On the way back, Elena kept murmuring something about the earrings, all the while firmly clinging to Luke.

The next two days, Luke nursed Elena every which way he knew how. They could not speak, only embraced and sighed deeply. Words were irrelevant. The hurt was so deep that no words could describe.

1946 Spring

Flint missed Ignatius at the morning formation, and instructed everyone to move into the reserve bunkers.

The bunker was occupied by nine partisans, not counting Luke, Elena, and Flint. They were surrounded by a company of the Russian Army. The hundred man force was led by a NKVD major.

Ignatius, fearfully looking around in all directions, did not know the exact location of the bunker, but all the while, loudly urging the partisans to surrender, promising amnesty and riches. Almost breaking out into tears, he swore that he was speaking the truth.

Ignatius was walking uncomfortably, waddling. Only by looking closer could you see a wire protruding from his pants leading to the NKVD major's wrist. The unseen wire under his clothes was tightly wrapped around his manhood. If he had tried to run, he may have had a chance to live, but not a chance to survive as a man.

Suddenly, he stepped on one of the entrances to the bunker, hidden by branches and leaves, totally by accident. He gestured to the major that he had found the bunker.

„If we can last till dark, we have a chance to slip out of here.“ uttered Flint quietly.

Wolf places the gun barrel in his mouth and fires. Having heard the shot, the Russian soldiers hoped that, if alive, they would all give themselves up.

The partisans finished burning all the documents. Just before night fall, they slid a stick with a white cloth up one of the air vents.

Suddenly the partisans opened the bunker vents and threw out a torrent of grenades at the Russians. As the grenades exploded, the partisans tried to aggressively shoot their way out against the superior forces of their enemy.

Retreating while firing back, Elena fell to the ground. Next to her a grenade exploded, and everything was enveloped by smoke.

Flint struggled to drag Luke deeper into the forest. Later, they were joined by Nightingale. There were no other survivors.

Heading towards Poland, Luke was accompanied by Nightingale and four other men. Slowly and laboriously, they trudged through knee deep snow across deserted East Prussia. Upon reaching the Polish border, they embraced and wished Luke success on his mission.

Lazarus was waiting for Luke at the Carmelite Seminary. The next day, unnoticed by anyone, they climbed into a Swedish boat, and within 24 hours reached Swedish shores.

After some brief formalities, Zoly appeared, earlier known as Žolynas, and a former embassy worker.

Thanks to Zoly's contacts, Luke was invited as a dinner guest by Sweden's deputy director of counter intelligence, Ramel.

Luke showed him film footage, photos, and even a letter to the Pope, describing the desperate situation in Lithuania. Luke needed support for the partisans, and Sweden only needed spys. British intelligence agent Dunlop echoed the same sentiments as the Swedes. Luke felt betrayed by the West.

The partisans were doomed. The West had no intention of going to war with Russia.

And Luke was daydreaming of Elena.

1947 Spring

Luke met Monika and her sister in a DP camp in Germany, where he was speaking about the partisan struggle. Monika was accompanied by her uncle, a competent, former diplomat in Paris. At the DP camp, Monika's uncle sat next to her and listened to Luke's impassioned speech about Lithuania's struggle. Suddenly, he placed his palm on Monika's thigh. This unexpected contact was unsettling to Monika. Her uncle, the diplomat, was known to have a lascivious side. After

Luke's speech, Monika's uncle congratulated him, and invited him to Paris if he should come to town. Upon arriving in Paris, Monika's uncle rented an apartment for both girls in the 15th district.

Monika's uncle began supporting her just prior to the war ending. However, being a lascivious sort, he demanded repayment with sexual favors. Monika strictly refused. Having been rebuffed of his demand, her uncle did not pursue the matter any further. However, he warned her that, if she required assistance in the future, she now knew what will be needed to be done.

Luke arrived in Paris. He met Monika and soon realized he did not want to part from her. Monika knocks on her uncle's office door. She enters and locks the door behind her. She slowly begins to disrobe... Luke will never find out about the price Monika had to pay to keep him in Paris.

"They lived happily together, like all other happy couples," according to Leo Tolstoy. Luke began writing a book, cooked borscht, and drank red wine.

Lukas and Monika, bodies glistening with sweat, lay on the bed in the small room, and both lit up a cigarette.

-Will you marry me?-Lukas said quietly

-For what? Everything is good now for us, isn't it? And, what would it change?

-There has to be order, Monika, order. I'm not the one who made that up. Will you be my wife?

-Of course Luke, I've already been like a wife to you for the past 6 months.

French intelligence paid him a salary, and again became interested in Luke's espionage skills after the Russians blockaded West Berlin.

In their Paris apartment, Lukas was heavily focused on writing his book. Monika quietly came up to him, slightly bent over and sent a breath, fogging up his glasses. Lukas nervously stood up and admonishingly asked:

-Please don't do that again. You should know that I love you.

He lied, and he was ashamed.

Elena's vision haunted Luke everywhere. She stood there behind his back when he was writing, but at least, he did not see her reflection in the mirror. He felt her, her breath. He heard her resonant laugh among the cacophony of people in the street. When he saw her silhouette, he chased it with all the energy he had, and when he turned the corner, she was gone.

He dreamt of her in his Paris room, standing by the window, breathing heavily. When awakened, he could still hear her sigh, although she wasn't there.

One evening at the bar, where Luke usually drank his Calvados brandy with beer, in walked Zoly.

As they conversed while walking down the street, Zoly mentioned that Lazarus requested Luke's assistance back in Lithuania...and that Elena was alive. This also could be set up as a trap.

Luke felt a pressing need to return to Lithuania, if not for Lazarus, then certainly for Elena.

Monika was determined to go with him, but he refused to further discuss the matter with her.

"Sometimes you must be cruel to be kind," he told her bluntly.

1950 Spring

After the rain and under the cover of night, Dunlop's speedboat brought Luke and two other "immigrants" to the Palanga shore. They headed from the shore to Kretinga. Before dawn, they met with two partisan liaisons. After setting up camp, Luke waited until the liaisons fell asleep, and disappeared into the forest thicket, leaving them a water drenched note.

Luke approached the edge of the freight train station. A young soldier was standing guard by the last wagon, looking bored and uninterested. Frightened by the approaching Luke, the soldier nervously pointed his rifle at him. Luke, very calmly said, "relax..." and showed him an NKVD identification, masterly forged by Dunlop in Sweden. "A secret mission for the Kaunas Garrison," he added as he made himself comfortable in preparation for his journey.

As he was riding on the train with a young soldier, Lukas asked to see his rifle. After a close inspection of the weapon, Lukas threw it off the train. The frightened soldier nervously asked:

-Are you going to shoot me now?

-I won't shoot you. The Russians themselves will shoot you for losing your weapon.

Now, you couldn't shoot me even if you wanted to,-answered Lukas, and then fell silent.

Early in the morning, the two, still sleeping partisan liaisons that Luke had left behind earlier, were surrounded by a collaborator squad. Unbeknownst to Luke, one of the sleeping partisans was recruited into the Cheka while still in Sweden, while the second became a collaborator on the spot. The Russians knew of Luke's return, and worse, now they waited for him.

Luke jumped from the slowly moving train near his parents' farm. When he got there, it was deserted. The trees were the same. However, there was no sign of the cottage or the barn where they previously stood.

Luke walked up to the cemetery, when Nightingale appeared dressed as a shepherd.

"Why did you return, you idiot?" angrily asked Nightingale.

"I missed you," answered Luke as they embraced warmly like brothers.

Settling down in the bunker, Luke found out that the situation was worse than he had thought.

Only a few partisans were left, and there was no help from anywhere worth waiting. The war had been in vain, but the only choice they had was to fight.

Nightingale pulls a rumpled newspaper from his pocket, "Truth." Luke just scanned the headlines.

"Do they really believe this?" asked Luke.

"Some believe. Some only pretend to believe," Nightingale answered him glumly.

After a time, Lazarus showed up. Yes, Elena was alive, living in Merkinė with forged identity documents. However he desperately needed Luke's help to return to the West.

Nightingale suggested that Luke shoot Lazarus, because his conduct was tantamount to betrayal.

Luke, Nightingale, and Lazarus were listening to, "America's Voice," from Lazarus' radio.

"Don't give up hope, brother Lithuanians. We will come to liberate you before Christmas,"-said the soothing Lithuanian voice from far away Washington.

Nightingale sarcastically says, -They promised us the same thing last Easter.

The next day, Luke met with Rimantas, the same gangly poet with whom he shared a dorm at the university, and together burned files.

He was eager to become a partisan and edit the underground press. They even gave him a typewriter and paper, and placed him in an unused bunker so the tapping of his typewriter would not be heard.

One morning, he arrived at Luke's bunker with a bundle of his poems.

Nightingale accompanied Luke to the outskirts of Merkinė, and took a letter from him in case something should happen. He embraced Luke warmly, and quickly disappeared into the forest. When Rimantas opened Luke's bunker cover, he didn't expect to see Lazarus snoring on a cot with an empty bottle of whisky next to him. Rimantas contemplated for a moment, then pulled out a grenade from his satchel, tossed it into the bunker, closed the cover, and moved aside. The explosion tore the cover from the bunker. To Rimantas' horror, out crawled Lazarus, bloodied and shredded, but alive. He was hell bent on chasing Rimantas, shooting at him wildly.

Rimantas ran through a plowed, muddy field towards his waiting squad of collaborators. With his shoes getting stuck in the mud, he had fallen face first into the muddy quagmire, and fearfully waited to be shot. Lazarus came running onto the field, and seeing the waiting collaborators, stopped. Realizing it was all over, he screamed, "Nobody can kill me, only me." He put the gun barrel in his mouth, and pulled the trigger.

Nightingale heard the explosion and the gunshots, but did not realize their significance.

When Luke, escorted by Nightingale to the outskirts of Merkinė, got closer to Elena's house, he saw an old woman with a black head scarf, sweeping leaves from a walk. She swept relentlessly, as there were many leaves, beautifully colored and dirty. Suddenly, the woman turned towards Luke, looked at him with wild eyes, parted her lips in a toothless grin, and gave out an ominous laugh. Luke was taken aback, but suddenly realized, it was... Death.

After dark, Luke knocked on a basement apartment door. Elena, whose head was enveloped with a scarf to hide her scars, would not acknowledge Luke until she turned the radio on, then, quietly asked, "Why did you come back?"

"To take you away from here," answered Luke with a puzzled look on his face.

"Fool, it is impossible!" whispered Elena as she made some tea.

They spoke all night. He could not remove his gaze from Elena and his son, a small boy whom she was holding in her arms. Until this moment, he had no idea of his existence.

Just before dawn, Elena told him, "If you want to help us, don't come out of here shooting.

Surrender. You will be tortured, but we will have the hope of remaining alive."

Already standing in the doorway, he turned to look at Elena for the last time. “I always loved you,” and slowly closed the door.

Luke saw the approaching silhouettes. He raised his arms in silence.

Epilogue

1972 Summer

A luxurious “Ikarus” bus with large blue lettering on its side, “Intourist,” stopped at the Kapsukas Center. Foreigners were allowed to admire a monument to the liberating Soviet soldiers, the new Communist Party Headquarters, and library.

Inside the library, Monika asked those present if anyone heard anything about her husband, Luke Petronas. All were mournfully silent. As Monika was leaving, a young woman caught up with her and quickly told her that she heard her parents talk of Luke’s fate; tortured to death and his body thrown onto the market square. However, at night, his body disappeared. People say that he did not die, and is still living among them.

All the way back to Vilnius, Monika alternately smiled and wept.

T. Donela 2014.

