

## PLOT 9: BACK TO THE ROOTS (aka Fish Tank)

### CHARACTER LIST:

Frank (MAN)  
Anna (WOMAN 1)  
Gregor (GRANDPA, SOLDIER 2)  
Luisa (WOMAN 3)  
Gretel (WOMAN 2)  
Phillip (SOLDIER 4)  
Fritz (GRETEL'S SON)  
Marie (GIRL, GRANDDAUGHTER, CHILD 1)  
Captain  
Artois (FRENCH SOLDIER)  
Mr. Clement (ELDER MAN)

### SCENE 1

***T: 1948. A little girl comes skipping to the middle of a clearing, an old man slowly limping after her with the help of his walking stick.***

MARIE: It's so pretty here. I've never been to this part of the park before.

GRANDPA: Few people come here now, my dear. This used to be a wide open field, and now? Factories and red brick. How the world changes, and we with it. I have something to do here.

***GRANDPA sits down, out of breath.***

MARIE: Grandpa, you cannot be tired, surely!

GRANDPA: I need to keep a promise to someone I knew very well. Take a look around, but don't wander too far, and let your old man rest for a while.

***GRANDPA sits on a tree stump by the edge of the clearing and breathes deeply. GIRL runs around the meadow, picking flowers and colourful stones.***

MARIE: Grandpa, look! I've never seen a rock like this before.

GRANDPA (*adjusts his glasses and chuckles*): That's not a rock. It's an acorn.

MARIE: Oh. I knew that. (*Pause.*) What does it do?

GRANDPA: Do they not teach you anything these days? Inside is a little seed, from which a large tree will grow. Just like how little girls grow into beautiful women, an acorn turns into an oak tree. (*GRANDPA pats GIRL's head.*)

MARIE: So it will grow like me?

GRANDPA (*nodding*): If you take care of it, nurture it, watch over it, someday a proud tree will stand in this place.

MARIE (*pouting*): But Grandpa, what does an oak tree do? Does it bring something good?

GRANDPA: Sweetheart, a tree is a wonder in itself. It looks as if it does nothing, yet we know the seasons change by watching the trees. They blossom, bloom, wither, and die, and then do it all over again. If only humans could do the same.

MARIE: But that's not very good. That's just the same thing over and over again.

GRANDPA: OK then, listen to this. There was once a bear who lived in this forest.

MARIE: Like the ones who tip over our bins?

GRANDPA: No, those are foxes.

MARIE: Oh.

GRANDPA: The bear was wandering the forest when he found a peach.

MARIE: A peach? In a clearing like this? Mama moans about how the bugs get the tomatoes. And a bear?

GRANDPA: Would you like to tell the story or shall I? He took the peach to his friends, shared it with them, but kept the seed. Later on, he dug a hole with his big paws and buried it nice and deep. The other animals thought he was wasting his time, and he forgot all about it until one winter some years later, when food was scarce.

MARIE: So what happened when the food was gone?

GRANDPA: Well, the bear remembered the seed he planted all those years ago, and picked a tasty peach from the tree. His hungry friends, the same ones who mocked him in the past, saw him eating a tasty fruit and begged him for a peach or two. The good-natured bear happily shared his peaches with his starving friends, never forgetting the lesson he learned.

MARIE: What did he learn?

GRANDPA: That in time, even the smallest of things become important. Now, let's plant this little acorn of yours. You never know what will happen.

***GIRL plants the acorn in the ground in the middle of a forest meadow with GRANDPA's help. GIRL waters it.***

MARIE: Grow well, little tree.

***GIRL moves to GRANDPA, takes his hand.***

MARIE: Grandpa, this really has been lovely you know. I can't wait to come back tomorrow to see my tree!

GRANDPA (*kindly smiling*): I'm glad you have had a good day my dear, but I'm afraid you'll have to give it some time to grow. The miracles of nature don't happen overnight.

MARIE: How long do I have to wait?

GRANDPA: Perhaps many years.

MARIE: But that's forever!

GRANDPA: Forever has a habit of catching up on you my dear.

MARIE: Grandpa?

GRANDPA: Mhm?

MARIE: Who did you make the promise to? The one you said you were keeping?

GRANDPA: Ah. Yes. Well that is forever finally catching up with me.

MARIE: What do you mean?

GRANDPA: It all began with one last goodbye, when I last saw my brother...

*Stage fades to black. GIRL and GRANDPA exit.*

## SCENE 2

*1914. Instead of the tree stump now a large oak with a big canopy grows on the meadow. A young man with a prosthetic left arm is sitting under the tree. Another young man in uniform walks a way, which leads to the tree.*

GREGOR: *(enthusiastically)* Hey, where have you been? It would have been fun for you. Mom made one of her cakes, but I guess there's none left for you now. After we had finished eating, Dad started to play his old violin again. It was quite impressive, given he hasn't played it in...

FRANK: *(shows no emotion)* So, you are leaving us now?

GREGOR: *(continues telling, without caring about the question)* Even grandfather came all the way down from his village just to say goodbye to me. He gave me his favourite pipe, you know, the one he smoked when we used to visit him as a child...

FRANK: *(somehow sad)* So, you are leaving us now?

GREGOR: *(stops talking for a moment and looks like he would think, then reply)* You're still angry, aren't you? It isn't your fault you know. It could have happened to anyone. But you have to see that you can't become a soldier with just one arm!

FRANK: *(shakes his head)* No, I'm not really angry about that anymore. Just disappointed I suppose. And I'm worried about losing my only brother.

GREGOR: *(again enthusiastically)* No way! That won't happen. I'm telling you now, the war will be over in a few months, and I'll be a good soldier. You'll see, I'll make the whole family proud.

FRANK: *(even more sad)* They are already proud of you. They are sure that you will return. For everyone else it seems totally clear. But I can't help still being afraid.

GREGOR: *(seriously)* I promise you, I'll come back. And until then you have to learn to laugh again!

FRANK: *(seems content)* OK then, I'll take you at your word. Send me a letter. And... try to stay

alive.

### SCENE 3

*1914. ANNA and FRANK are sitting under the tree. It is late summer, dusk. They are intimate, comfortable in each other's company, but not obviously a couple. MAN sneezes*

ANNA: Bless you!

*FRANK wipes his nose awkwardly with the sleeve of his left (prosthetic) arm*

FRANK: Bloody hay fever. Makes my eyes run like nothing else.

ANNA: It won't be for much longer. Another month and they'll be bringing in the harvest.

FRANK: That's if there is any man left here to do it.

*ANNA moves away from FRANK*

FRANK: What?

ANNA: You know very well what.

FRANK: Then you tell me, who will reap what we have sown?

ANNA: There you go again! Pontificating.

FRANK: Pontifi-what?

ANNA: Talking like you know so much more than everyone else.

FRANK: I do not.

ANNA: Yes you do! Like you know better than the Kaiser and his generals! As if all these boys are off to fight a delusion.

FRANK: *(sighs)* I know that's not true. They fight for a better world and a stronger Germany. Of course they do. That doesn't mean I have to like seeing my brother marched off to face the British war machine.

ANNA: With you left here.

*FRANK shifts, disturbed.*

FRANK: What's that supposed to mean?

ANNA: Nothing. You can help us with the harvest. We'll manage.

FRANK: But the real work is done by the real men, while I sit here whinging like a woman, is that

it?

***Pause.***

FRANK: I don't have to deal with this.

***FRANK acts as if to leave. ANNA places hand on his left arm, tries to restrain him. Quickly switches to right arm.***

ANNA: Stay, please. I didn't mean it like that.

FRANK: Yes, you're right. I could have just lied about my arm at the recruiting office. "Oh yes, Sergeant Major, my arm's just a little stiff this morning. It'll be right as rain when I get out on the front line."

ANNA: Now you're being ridiculous.

FRANK: No more ridiculous than anyone else.

ANNA: Oh let's just stop this. Stop this now.

***ANNA begins to cry.***

FRANK: Have you heard anything from Gregor?

ANNA: No. *(Pause)* He's in training.

FRANK: That's normal.

ANNA: No, it's not, there's nothing normal about any of this.

FRANK: He's becoming a new man. This will make him.

ANNA: Into what?

FRANK: Not a coward at least. You know what the papers say the Tommy women give their men who don't fight?

***ANNA doesn't answer. She is looking at FRANK***

FRANK: A white feather. It means you're soft,

weak...

ANNA: Ticklish? Gentle?

***FRANK smiles.***

FRANK: Give me your hands.

***ANNA stiffens. FRANK takes her hands, holds them.***

FRANK: They're cold.

ANNA: It's the time of year. Yours is too.

FRANK: He will come back you know.

ANNA: You know everything.

FRANK: No, I mean it. He promised me he would come back. He will be here again.

ANNA: Bullets don't honor promises. Not even those made to friends.

FRANK: What about those made to lovers?

*ANNA turns away and takes her hands from his.*

FRANK: Gregor will come home. He will run up the path, embrace Mama, grip Papa's hand like a soldier should, and see you, and...

*FRANK begins to weep. ANNA begins to move towards him, then decides against it. She looks away from him, in the opposite direction.*

FRANK: And he might even find me here, under this tree.

ANNA: The harvest will be soon. Then it won't irritate so.

FRANK: Bloody hay fever.

#### SCENE 4

*1918. The tree remains on the hill. It's leaves flutter as the wind blows. A peasant passes by carrying a bundle of wood. Then Anna comes, walking slowly, and whispers something we can hardly hear, while looking beyond the horizon. Now we see a group of children playing near the tree.*

*Two women (ANNA and GRETEL) sit underneath the tree, watching the kids playing nearby*

ANNA: The kids all look so happy... They have no idea of what's just happened.

GRETEL: I know... But it's better this way, they are still young. Our lives are about to change quite quickly. I know my husband was always worried about what kind of world we would face if the French won. We are German for God's sake, not French!

ANNA: That we are. Then again, who can say what we will be in another year's time? Just last month we were all citizens of the so called Independent Republic of the Revolutionary Insurgents, and look what happened to them. Now the French troops are right here. And let's not forget the small fact of the war we have just finished fighting! Wasn't that enough?

GRETEL (*thoughtful*): We used to be just like them (*looking at the kids*)... Free spirits. Free minds. Dreamers. Now it's all lost. Our fate is no longer in our hands.

ANNA: Oh really Gretel, don't be so defeatist. Nothing is lost. We can't give up, we can still make our own destiny, if not for Germany than at least for ourselves. I've heard that some men are planning a strategy to overwhelm the French.

GRETEL: Really?! But what do you know about that?

ANNA: Very little, I have to admit. What I do know, though, is that this same tree will witness something quite drastic. In fact, this place, this whole region is absolutely vital to all their games with frontiers, you see? Where we are, where these children are playing. This will all be different before we know it.

***ANNA and GRETEL are distracted by a FRENCH SOLDIER, who walks past them without acknowledging their presence. He then posts a notice on the tree in French. He then tips his hat to the ladies.***

ARTOIS: Madame.

GRETEL: Excuse me, Sir.

ARTOIS: Huh?

GRETEL: You speak French, ask him what will happen to us!

ANNA: Excuse me, Sir?

ARTOIS: Aha, someone I can understand! You are rather young to be speaking French in these parts, if I may say so?

ANNA: We spoke it at home when I was younger. My father always missed the French. Said they cooked far better, even if they could not fight as well.

ARTOIS: Ho ho! We certainly showed him, didn't we!

GRETEL: Why is he laughing? What is he saying?

ANNA: I'm coming to it.

ARTOIS: Your friend looks nervous.

ANNA: She is. She wants to know what you will do to us.

ARTOIS: That is not for me to say. I am just the messenger. But she can rest assured that –

GRETEL: You smile, French swine!

***ARTOIS is now less friendly, recoils from GRETEL***

ARTOIS: Tell your friend to calm down!

ANNA: Be quiet! He's trying to be nice. He says he doesn't know what's going on.

GRETEL: I don't trust him.

ARTOIS: You can tell your friend that whatever happens, she should learn French very soon. Very soon indeed. Good day.



***FRENCH SOLDIER leaves.***

GRETEL: Nasty piece of work. Laughing at our suffering like that, as if he won the war all by himself!

ANNA: He wasn't so bad. Besides, are you saying our government has been any better?

GRETEL: I'd rather Germans betray me than dirty French.

ANNA: Shush, I'm trying to read.

*ANNA reads the notice. GRETEL is agitated, moves around her.*

GRETEL: What does it say? Tell me!

ANNA: (*reading*) Notice of French occupation of Alsace Lorraine ... all weapons to be handed in to relevant authorities... Prisoners of war to be held in locality -

GRETEL: Prisoners of War? Here? Why, that could mean our boys!

ANNA: It says to stay away from the camps.

GRETEL: If my Peter's in there

ANNA: It doesn't say anything about our men. Do you really think they would keep the men close to their families?

GRETEL: I guess you're right. Still, I'm sure we could do something to support them.

***FRITZ runs up to ANNA and GRETEL***

FRITZ: Bonjour, Bonjour, Bonjour (*repeats over and over like a chant or nursery rhyme*)

***GRETEL grabs child by the wrist, pulls him toward her***

GRETEL: Where did you hear such language?

FRITZ: The nice man, Mama. He was giving us sweets, and he kept saying 'Bonjour', and he was really nice and -

GRETEL: You must never say those words! That man tried to kill Papa! They are bad men and you are not to go near them, do you understand?

ANNA: Go easy on the child, Gretel.

GRETEL: They have to learn!

ANNA: Learn what? Our hatred? Our anger? No, Gretel, they do not. This new world will be hard enough for them as it is, so why make it any harder?

GRETEL: Oh yes. Yes indeed. "All this will be different." You will adapt, won't you. You'll adapt for French chocolates too, just like the children. Maybe even you'll adapt for some nice Paris fashion

ANNA: What are you trying to say?

GRETEL: Oh I'm sure you'll adapt well, adapt nicely into silk stockings too if that's what the soldiers like. Adapt for whatever those men want, let them whisper it into your ear in that language you know so well.

***ANNA is shocked into silence. FRITZ is still here, now silent and staring at ANNA***

GRETEL: You don't even try to deny it. Well I can tell you now my children will have nothing to do with those murderers and perverts.

ANNA: I thought you knew me. I thought I knew you.

GRETEL: Well clearly we have different priorities.

ANNA: Clearly.

***GRETEL and FRITZ begin to walk away.***

FRITZ: Did I do something wrong?

GRETEL: No sweetheart. You didn't know what you were doing. Just stay away from Anna from now on, OK? She is not a friend of true Germans.

***FRITZ and GRETEL exit. ANNA is left by the tree. She lifts up the French notice and we see for the first time a heart etched into the wood of the tree. It should not be clear who made the heart or what it should represent. She fingers this for a while.***

ANNA: "He promised me he would come back. He will be here again." Oh damn you, Frank. How can he return? He can't, and he won't, because he has no place to come back to. That place no longer exists. Yes, this is the same tree, but it doesn't stand in that same place. We change, and we take our places with us. What do we have left? Where do we have left to go? What would Gregor find if he did come back? Whispers and shadows. Nothing of use to the present.

***ANNA exits.***

## SCENE 5

***1939. The group of children is still playing near the tree. In the background the seasons change from spring to the beginning of autumn (the leaves on the tree change colour). A CHILD separates from the group of children and runs towards the tree. He hides behind the tree and secretly listens to the conversation between FRANK and CAPTAIN. FRANK is sitting on the roots of the tree and holds a letter in his hands.***

FRANK (*sighs*): Every scrap of information we receive is worse than that which came before. Everything has been going downhill since the assassination in Sarajevo. Do you really have no idea where Gregor is?

CAPTAIN (*standing straight, with his hands behind his back, looking into the distance*): For the umpteenth time, I do not know Frank. God Frank, I wish I could tell you more, but all they said was that he was doing well on the front.

FRANK (*with trembling hands tries to straighten the crumpled paper in his hands*): But since then nothing?

CAPTAIN (*lays his hand on the MAN's shoulder, squeezes it and lowers his head in sympathy*): Not a word.

*FRANK and CAPTAIN stand quietly together for a moment, then FRANK stands up and starts pacing in front of the tree.*

FRANK: Perhaps it's for the better. Not knowing, I mean.

CAPTAIN (*watching the pacing MAN in front of him*): It's bothersome either way. I'm just sorry he wasn't put in my regiment. I would have kept an eye on him then.

FRANK: Even if he were under your command, he would have found a way into the heat of the battle. He's always been eager to prove himself to the family. If only I weren't as much of a cripple.

***FRANK shakes his prosthetic arm in disgust and turns away from the CAPTAIN.***

CAPTAIN: One man can't save the world. But one man can change it. Perhaps that is what you should try to do. Everyone is preparing for the war. People are tense and prepared for the worst to come. (*pauses for a few seconds*) It's a wonder how the children can't be bothered by what's about to happen. Seeing them playing games is by far the most normal thing I've seen in months.

FRANK (*steps closer to the CAPTAIN, looking straight into his eyes*): If only I could have gone in his place. He deserved a longer childhood. With this war above our heads, he became a man long before his time. He'll see things, hear things, do things I can hardly imagine, and you know what scares me more than all of that? He will do them, and he'll become a great man. With this arm, all I can do is watch.

CAPTAIN: Christ, Frank, you really think you need to be a soldier to go to war. The war was here, there, all around us. Can't you feel it in the wind? As it brushes through the leaves of this tree? I wonder if, after this war is finally over and the world has changed, this tree will still be standing here.

FRANK: The world will change for sure. But will it change for the better or for worse? We will see. That doesn't matter to me much. (*puts both hands on CAPTAIN's shoulder, pleadingly*) Keep an eye out for Gregor, won't you? When you're next in Berlin, or Paris?

CAPTAIN: You can count on me, my friend. I can't promise you I'll be stationed near your brother, but I'll look out for him. I'll send you news, if there is any.

***FRANK and CAPTAIN stand side by side looking into the distance.***

CAPTAIN: It's getting dark. We march tomorrow morning.

FRANK (*whispering*): Thank you. For at least trying. And good luck, for as long as you need it.

***CAPTAIN leaves, while FRANK stays under the tree. He watches the CAPTAIN walking away.***

FRANK: Farewell, my friend.

*FRANK is leaning against the tree with a thoughtful expression on his face. He leaves only when the moon appears from behind the clouds and shines upon the tree.*

## SCENE 6

*1940. Two French Soldiers are sitting around a campfire near the tree. The body of a French soldier caught trying to desert the army hangs from the tree.*

PHILLIP (*spits*): Coward!

*Pause.*

SOLDIER 2: How old are you?

PHILLIP: Old enough to be much more of a man than him. (*points at the tree*)

SOLDIER 2: About 25 I reckon. Maybe younger.

PHILLIP: I'm 23 if you have to know. What's wrong with that?

SOLDIER 2: Do you have any idea what war actually looks like? Some of us actually fought „the last time“.

PHILLIP: And that makes you the expert? It's all different now. These days we fight against tanks and planes. How is that like the Great War?

*They are silent again.*

PHILLIP: Anyway, we won the last one, so we'll win this one, too. The Germans will have to break through our defence line with their tanks first. Impossible!

SOLDIER 2 (*shaking his head*): You got no idea. The last time they said that, the Germans marched almost to Paris itself. Those who said they were wrong didn't have time to gloat; they were killed in the bloodiest battle this century has seen. So far. You want to fight for France? Then you'd better go about a hundred miles west, because thirty years ago this place wasn't even French.

PHILLIP: Only after they stole it. Before that, it had been France for more than 300 years! Until the Germans stole it! But they won't do it again, because this time our soldiers won't let them. We will stop them, we will keep on fighting, while your old, pessimistic generation is talking about the past.

SOLDIER 2: Sometimes I wish I could be just like this tree. Despite all the changes, battles and peace treaties, it still stands high and mighty. How many ups and downs he witnessed. How many deaths and births? How many wars? (Pause.) All that's needed to destroy all those years of experience one simple grenade.

PHILLIP: You really want to be a tree? Just standing in one place and doing nothing all your life?

JACQUES (*excited*): Something's coming. Can't you hear the engines?

## SCENE 7

IN THE BACKGROUND:

*It's dusk, the middle of a battle. PHILLIP crawls on the ground and positions himself between the roots of the tree. He sits with his back leaning against the tree, blood oozing from a wound on his thigh. With his hands trembling, he tries (and fails multiple times) to rip his shirt apart to use the strips as a makeshift bandage.*

*He pulls at the shirt and rips it into two uneven pieces. He's shaking from the effort.*

*SOLDIER2 enters the scene. He kneels by PHILLIP and holds the ripped fabric. He begins to wrap the fabric around PHILLIP's thigh with steady hands and finishes the wrapping with a firm knot.*

*PHILLIP groans and coughs some blood up. An explosion is heard - now closer to the tree. SOLDIER2 jumps to his feet and tries to drag PHILLIP away from the battle. PHILLIP turns to the side, a large laceration running down the left side of his back.*

*PHILLIP hands SOLDIER2 a small leather pouch.*

*PHILLIP groans and grips SOLDIER2's hand on his shoulder.*

*Another explosion is heard - even closer now.*

*SOLDIER2 squeezes PHILLIP's hands for the last time and runs in the opposite direction from which he came. PHILLIP's body is shivering violently. His body stiffens before he relaxes against the tree.*

*A bomb explodes near the tree. It's branches catch on fire and one large branch falls down from the tree. Everything goes black.*

1944. STAGE CENTER:

*LUISA is crying next to the tree. She is holding a piece of paper in her hand. She looks desperate, lost. Nearby her child is becoming aware that something has happened. She was playing in the field, but suddenly she heard her mother leaving their house and running towards the tree.*

LUISA (*desperately screaming to the skies*): Oh, Phillip! HOW?! Why did he have to die. He never even knew his daughter.

MARIE (*approaching his mother carefully*): Momma, what's wrong?

LUISA (*trying to recompose herself*): Something terrible has happened, but we have to stay strong.

MARIE (*starting to cry*): But momma... What?

LUISA: Every war takes a man from our family. My father, your father. (*pauses*) Now more than ever we have to stay strong. We have to hold each other tight. (*hugs MARIE*) I know you never got to meet Papa. He had to leave before you were born, but I want you to know he was an outstanding man, a brave soldier, a caring and loving man fighting for a bigger cause. And I know he loved you more than anything else in the world.

*They are hugging next to tree when it starts raining. The child is very young,*

*4 years old, but it's beautiful how she is trying to comfort her mother. One hour passed and they are still simply sharing feelings.*

### SCENE 8

*Anna, Frank and Luisa are sitting in the living room. Everybody is excited, about to open a letter from Gregor*

LUISA: When did Papa last write to us? He has been so busy in Paris, hasn't he!

ANNA: He spent four years at war without seeing his family once, then he disappears again?

FRANK: You know him as well as me. Sometimes I think he just loves being the martyr.

ANNA: That's not true...

*While FRANK and ANNA are discussing, LUISA starts to read the letter. She looks disappointed.*

LUISA: He cannot come to see us this summer.

FRANK & ANNA: What?

LUISA: Important government stuff, creating the future of our country, revolution imminent... maybe he will be back at Christmas.

FRANK: This is heartless. Selfish even by Gregor's standards.

ANNA: Don't be too disappointed, Luisa. Your dad just has a very difficult job, that's all. I'm sure he'd love to be here to see you, but...

LUISA: Don't worry, mum. I'm kind of used to him not being here. (Silence) I need to get the dinner ready.

ANNA: See you tomorrow. Bye.

*LUISA is leaving. Silence again. ANNA and FRANK looking at each other.*

FRANK: Don't be like that, Anna.

ANNA: What do you expect from Gregor. Although we weren't just twiddling our thumbs and waiting for him to come home during the war. Were we.

FRANK (*laughing*): This old story. Maybe it was for the best. It showed us it would never have worked between us.

ANNA: I thought a lot about it the last time he did this. All these war-years you were like father for Luisa. Did it ever cross your mind that...well...

FRANK: Anna, I am a wonderful uncle to Luisa, and nothing is going to change that.

ANNA: Really? Well I guess we'll never really know for certain?

FRANK: No! Gregor is Luisa's father and nothing will change that.

ANNA: Hopefully also the best for Luisa. Though I can't help wondering sometimes...

## SCENE 9

***1946. Tree stands in the middle. In the background a French flag is waving, a few children are playing on a meadow somewhere behind the tree, even further behind a farmer is working on his field near a lively town . A group of people passes under the tree.***

ELDERLY MAN (*from the group*): Now that I come to think of it, the French have done us good. Life under France took a turn for the better.

GRETEL (*now aged*): Yes, they're not half as bad as I thought they would be.

ANNA (*laughs*): And somehow I still remember a time when you were of a somewhat different opinion. Quite the opposite in fact.

GRETEL (*chuckles, embarrassed*): Yes, I was quite against them then. But I...

ANNA (*interrupts slyly, her eyes twinkling with mischief, emphasizing the last word*): Learned to adapt?

GRETEL (*laughs nervously*): Ho ho, of course! And you know, this reminds me of a beautiful old tale that I heard one day. One that teaches us that from the smallest thing, perhaps the most unexpected, something good can always come up.

ANNA: What are you talking about?!

GRETEL: My point is: none of us expected that some good could turn out from all this troubled past. The French planted a seed, they regained control over our region after many years, and we were very against it

***ANNA stares at GRETEL***

GRETEL: OK, I was very against it. I didn't expect that we could ever live in such peaceful times again. All this time has passed, this seed has grown and almost without our noticing, I think I can say we are all happier now. After all these storms, losses, and battles, we are finally enjoying the peaches.

ANNA: It's quite beautiful how you have put everything in perspective.

***ANNA and GRETEL hold each other's arms under their elbows, and continue walking and laughing together. The group they were with gradually leaves.***

GRETEL (*apologetically*): I'm really sorry though, for what I have said back then. I was just, you know....afraid.

ANNA (*nodds solemnly then smiles brightly*): Come now, those were difficult times for us all. But as you said, we got ourselves together and we managed to move forward. That's what really matters. Also, you really don't have to apologize to me again. I forgave you about two hundred "I'm sorry"s ago.

***ANNA gently pulls GRETEL to the side.***

ANNA: Although I do love standing in the shade of this tree, duty calls. Come on, let's go feed our children dinner! No matter how big and old they are now, us, Moms always cook best.

*The scene turns dark as the women leave.*

#### SCENE 10

*1945. Autumn, daytime undefined. GREGOR is returning home and finds an ELDERLY MAN sitting on a tree stump, where I had once stood. He is possibly drunk.*

ELDERLY MAN: It can't be... Well I never! If it isn't the devil himself.

*ELDERLY MAN is half serious.*

GREGOR: The very same, but don't you think the devil would look younger?

EM : Hmm, probably more handsome, stronger, many things, but after this war I think the devil himself would be exhausted.

GREGOR: I'll take that as a compliment. *(pauses)* Ah, Frank's old tree. Did the devil take that old tree from us too? *(GREGOR is looking at the tree stump)*

EM: No, that was the Germans.

GREGOR: Hey. You were a German too, once upon a time. *(pause)* Where is she?

EM: Where she's been the wars long, waiting for you.

GREGOR: Alone for so long.

EM: I wouldn't say that exactly. Your brother took his responsibilities very seriously.

GREGOR: Frank was always like that. He was good to her during the last war.

*EM smirks. Gregor's tone changes*

GREGOR: War is a terrible thing, and we do what we have to do. I won't tell her about my battles, and she doesn't need to tell me about hers. Can you understand that?

*EM coughs, does not answer.*

GREGOR: So I'm going to meet my wife.

*GREGOR goes to the door, knocks, ANNA opens the door. She does not react at first. They embrace awkwardly, not sure who is supposed to make the first move. They laugh.*

ANNA: I'm cooking dinner.

GREGOR: Yes, it smells delicious.

ANNA: No it doesn't.

GREGOR: I'm sure it will taste better.



ANNA: We don't have much

GREGOR: It will have to be enough. Where is she?

ANNA: Luisa? At the school house, probably.

GREGOR: They have school?

ANNA: Something like that. She's teaching the children French. Again. They'll be glad to see you. All we had were letters. Nice ones, very detailed, but saying absolutely nothing. Nothing nothing nothing nothing...

GREGOR: Please –

ANNA: No Gregor! You will listen.

***ANNA is silent, staring at GREGOR.***

ANNA: Do you hear that?

***GREGOR is still silent***

ANNA: It's silence. We haven't had much of it these last few years. First it was shells, then it was cries for revolution, then it was bullets, then it was young men being dragged off to build German bombs, then it was Allied tanks, and then...

GREGOR: Then what?

ANNA: Then there was silence again. And you know something Gregor? That was the most painful sound of all. Because silence is an absence of...noise. An absence of anything to stop you asking yourself why...

***ANNA breaks down.***

GREGOR: You don't understand. We were going to make a new world, led by the workers, the ones who died in their millions.

ANNA: Was I worth it, Gregor? Really? (pause) Why now, Gregor? Why not go and build your new world again? Why come back?

GREGOR: I made a promise.

ANNA: And why has that suddenly become so important to you now?

GREGOR: Because when the dreams are gone, all that is left is family.

***ANNA is quiet. She goes to the kitchen.***

ANNA: It's not much. Potato soup.

GREGOR: It will have to do.

ANNA: Yes, it will have to do.

## SCENE 11

***1948. Takes place a few months after Scene 1.***

***Grandfather and granddaughter are walking through the forest, towards me again.***

MARIE: Grandpa, I want to see my tree again. Do you think it has grown?

GRANDPA: I'm sure it did, sweetheart. Let's go take a look.

***A sprout (slim stem with a couple of baby leaves) grows in the place MARIE planted the seed a few months before. MARIE grabs GRANDPA's hand and drags him toward the little tree.***

MARIE (*jumps around the tree excitedly*): Look, Grandpa! Look!

GRANDPA (*chuckles while looking fondly at Marie*): Now, would you look at that. A little tree for a little girl.

MARIE (*pouts and crosses her arms*): I'm not little.

GRANDPA (*winks at her in mischief*): Sure you're not.

MARIE (*glares at him playfully*): I. Am. Not. Little. (*she pauses and adds sheepishly*) Anymore.

GRANDPA (*deep in thoughts*): No, you're right. You're not so little anymore. There is something I have for you.

MARIE (*delighted*): A present? For me?

GRANDPA: Not exactly a present, it's more like a bit of my memory. (*muttering while searching his pockets*) Now, where did I put it?

***After a while.***

GRANDPA (*victoriously*): Ah-ha! Here you go, sweetie. (*he hands the leather pouch to Marie*)

***MARIE opens the little pouch curiously and takes out a medallion. She opens the locket and looks at the little pictures inside.***

MARIE (*confused*): Grandpa, this looks like the picture Momma has. A picture of Papa and her.

GRANDPA: This medallion belonged to your father. He wanted you to have it, so he left it to me to give to his family. Back then I didn't know that his family was also my family. So look after it like a grown up, eh?

MARIE (*looking affectionately at the locket*): I would never lose this, Grandpa. Here! (*she hangs the locket around her neck and smiles*) Now, I'll have Momma's and Papa's picture with me all the time. But, what should I do with this?

***She shows Grandpa the old pouch.***

GRANDPA: We could leave it with your father. Perhaps he needs a pouch. Even in heaven, a good

old leather pouch is hard to find.

MARIE (*laughs*): How would you know that Grandpa? It's not like you've ever been there.

GRANDPA: Oh, but I have. I visit your Papa every night in my dreams. He says hi. Now, what about that pouch?

MARIE (*squats down beside the tree*): I'll give it to Papa.

***She buries the pouch underneath the little tree. She then stands up and listens to something in the distance.***

MARIE: Grandpa, I think they're calling for us.

GRANDPA: You're right. We should head back now. We wouldn't want them to worry, now would we?

MARIE: Nope!

***They head back to the village. The door of a house near the forest opens and ANNA looks at them.***

ANNA: Hurry up Gregor! Dinner won't cook itself. It's your turn today, so don't you go and try to get out of it.

GREGOR/GRANDPA (*shakes his head and chuckles*): And there I was thinking I'd never have to cook another meal after the army ever again. So much for being a war hero.

MARIE (*runs towards Anna*): Grandma!

***ANNA hugs MARIE and they disappear into the house. GREGOR looks towards the forest, where the sun is setting over the mountains in the distance.***

GREGOR: I told Frank I wouldn't die in the wars. I delivered the pouch. Promises of the wars fulfilled. At last.