

"The Garden"

by

14-DE07-31

A grandfather remembers a dear friend from the past while
teaching his grandson a valuable life lesson.

EXT. HERMAN'S HOUSE - GARDEN - DAY

Rows of Cabbage, Carrots, and Cucumbers. Bushes of berries: Black Berries, Raspberries, and Red Currents.

A Boy, MAX(8), skips in-between the rows of Currents and stops.

SUPER: *"Weimar, Germany" "Summer 2005"*

MAX

Opa. What are you doing?

HERMAN(80), kneels in the the dirt, pulling weeds. His brown pants are filthy. His once white shirt is stained with sweat and dirt. A tweed cap shades his face.

HERMAN

Don't be silly Maxi. You know what I am doing.

MAX

You work so hard at something that will amount to nothing.

Herman continues to tear out the weeds.

HERMAN

Because I have a responsibility to my garden.

He holds up a freshly pulled weed, turns to Max, explains.

HERMAN

The weeds steal the water and food that the plant needs in order to grow. As the weed grows taller...

He wraps the weed around Max's wrist.

HERMAN

It begins to choke the plant, pulling it down to its death.

MAX

Now I remember. They kill it.

Herman returns to his work. Max pulls the weed from his arm, examines it. He rocks on his heels. Herman chuckles.

HERMAN

Go ahead child. I can tell you want to ask me something else.

MAX

Opa, you picked five cabbages on Tuesday. On Thursday they were all gone. Oma used two for stew. You don't like cabbage Opa. What happened to the other three?

HERMAN

I gave them away.

MAX

To who?

HERMAN

People who need them more than I.

MAX

Did you also give them the berries we didn't use in the Rote Grütze?

Herman begins to stand. He struggles. Max helps.

HERMAN

Thank you, Maxi.

He takes the basket of weeds, discards them in a homemade compost in the corner.

MAX

Well?

Herman takes a different basket, begins to pick Currents.

HERMAN

Do you remember what happened when I was younger?

MAX

You were in prison. I mean in a camp. You were a prisoner.

Herman reaches up for a Current. His shirt sleeve falls. A concentration camp tattoo can be seen on his left wrist.

Max's face grows sad.

MAX

I remember Opa. It was just you and Jakob.

HERMAN

Help me pick, Max.

Max starts to help his grandfather fill the basket.

Herman stares ahead as if remembering a dream. Pained eyes.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BUCHENWALD BARRACKS - NIGHT (FLASHBACK).

Two Jewish men, YOUNG HERMAN(20) and JAKOB(20), are huddled in a dark damp corner. They try to keep each other warm.

HERMAN (V.O.)
We only had each other.

Nearly dead, slow vapors from their mouths indicate life.

HERMAN (V.O.)
April Tenth, Nineteen Forty-five,
although I didn't know the date at
the time. We were so cold we
couldn't sleep.

JAKOB
Herman? Herman...

A long moment. A barely audible whisper.

YOUNG HERMAN
Jakob.

JAKOB
Thank God. I thought you had died.

Herman tries to chuckle. Coughs.

YOUNG HERMAN
Me? Never.

JAKOB
Don't laugh. I'd be lost without
you.

YOUNG HERMAN
Well, I'm still here. So, now you
know where you are.

JAKOB
In a filthy barracks.

A breath. They try to get comfortable. They slowly blink.

YOUNG HERMAN
When we get out of here...

JAKOB
If we get out of here...

YOUNG HERMAN
I will find a nice Jewish girl...

JAKOB
I will find all the Nazis who did
this to us...

YOUNG HERMAN
...Open a bakery. Grow a garden.

JAKOB
...and kill them.

YOUNG HERMAN
You? The son of a tailor? What
will you do, stab them with
needles?

Jakob's tone changes to bitter anger. A weak, cold anger.

JAKOB
They killed my family.

YOUNG HERMAN
They killed mine too. But I am
just a baker.

Jakob slumps.

JAKOB
It doesn't matter. We should have
died long ago.

YOUNG HERMAN
God has saved us for a reason

JAKOB
If there is anything I have
learned from being a Jew...It's
that if God exists he only chose
us as his people so the world
could see how angry and unloving
he really is.

YOUNG HERMAN
Jakob. You take that back.

JAKOB
Herman. I stopped believing in God
long ago. Save what little breath
you have left.

Jakob turns away from Young Herman. Young Herman turns to the blackness, staring into the bitter night.

HERMAN (V.O.)
That is when I knew; Jakob was
lost. I just didn't know how lost.

BACK TO:

EXT. HERMAN'S HOUSE - GARDEN - DAY

Herman, lost in thought, mechanically places a handful of berries into the basket.

MAX
So that's why you have a garden.
But you got out Opa.

Stirring from his memory, he starts toward the house.

HERMAN
The very next day in fact. April
Eleventh, Nineteen Forty-five. I
was so overjoyed, but I could
hardly move. I experienced
something that day that I never
thought I would experience.

They reach the house, enter the back door to the kitchen.

MAX (O.S.)
What was that Opa?

INT. HERMAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Herman places the basket on the kitchen table. He pauses, staring around his kitchen, recalling that day.

HERMAN
Freedom.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BUCHENWALD FENCELINE - EARLY MORNING (FLASHBACK)

YOUNG HERMAN walks, barely able, towards the fence. American Soldiers watch, nearly sick at the sight of him.

HERMAN (V.O.)
I couldn't stop crying; or
laughing. My mind was busy with

HERMAN (V.O.)
all the things I could do with
this gift of new life.

Jakob staggers out of the barracks, stops, stares at the sky. He works his eyes down to the bodies of Jews who had collapsed dead outside. Suddenly he sees the body of a fallen German soldier. He takes a few agonizing steps towards it.

He smiles.

MAX (V.O.)
And Jakob? What of him?

HERMAN (V.O.)
I remember looking at him, staring
at those dead German Soldiers in
the camp. The way he smiled...

BACK TO:

INT. HERMAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Max's voice jerks Herman out of his recollection.

MAX
But did he kill any Nazis?

HERMAN
Pick up that basket of bread and
vegetables over there.

MAX
Opa.

HERMAN
I will tell you Maxi. Pick up that
basket.

MAX
Where are we going?

Herman grabs a basket of berries.

HERMAN
Someplace you are now old enough
to see.

Max grabs the basket.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT (FLASHBACK).**SUPER:** "1947"

A MAN leaves a bar and staggers into an alley. He stumbles along his way, using the wall as a guide. He steps into the light of a streetlamp.

HERMAN (V.O.)

When the war was over there were trials to prosecute the Nazi officials who had committed war crimes.

Jakob appears from the shadows of the alley, eyes crazed, breathing heavy.

HERMAN (V.O.)

But for Jakob, it didn't matter if they were officers, or guards at the camps. He hated them all.

Jakob's silhouette comes up behind the drunk MAN and lunges into his back. The MAN's silhouette collapses. Jakob stands, glaring coldly down at his work, gripping a knife.

MAX (V.O.)

Good. He deserved to die.

HERMAN (V.O.)

Maybe he did Maxi. But was that really Jakob's decision?

EXT. HERMAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK).**SUPER:** "1955"

HERMAN (V.O.)

Late one night, your father was just a boy, your aunty was a baby. I had just put her down to sleep.

A hand knocks on the door. The door opens. Young Herman stands in the doorway and whispers joyfully.

YOUNG HERMAN

Jakob.

Jakob doesn't take the hint to be quiet.

JAKOB

Herman! I need your help!

YOUNG HERMAN
SHHH. The baby.

Jakob corrects his tone.

JAKOB
You have a baby?

YOUNG HERMAN
Yes. A young boy and a baby girl.

JAKOB
A family.

A pause.

JAKOB
Herman. Please. I need your help.

YOUNG HERMAN
Anything. What do you need?

JAKOB
The Police are after me.

YOUNG HERMAN
Jakob. What have you done?

JAKOB
I killed the men responsible for
all of our pain and suffering.

YOUNG HERMAN
Soldiers from Buchenwald?

Silence.

HERMAN
Jakob. Who were the men you
killed?

JAKOB
I don't know. Nazis. What does it
matter?

YOUNG HERMAN
You are just going around
murdering Nazis? Jakob, this is
not right!

JAKOB
Have you forgotten what they did
to us?

Young Herman pushes him outside to talk and shuts the door.

YOUNG HERMAN

Of course not. How could I? But the men you killed...they are not responsible for the deaths of our families. They are not the ones...

Jakob spits his bitter venom at YOUNG HERMAN.

JAKOB

Everyone is responsible. Everyone who is a Nazi. They are all the same.

YOUNG HERMAN

What are you doing Jakob? Seeking revenge? Have you forgotten who you are?

JAKOB

I am a man of justice.

YOUNG HERMAN

You are a Jew.

Pause

YOUNG HERMAN

A man of God.

JAKOB

I told you in the camp. I don't believe in God anymore.

Young Herman stares deeper into Jakob eyes, searching.

YOUNG HERMAN

Why? Why are you wasting your gift?

JAKOB

Gift. What Gift? We were held prisoner for being Jews, the very thing you are so proud of. Is that a gift?

YOUNG HERMAN

Why do you insist on living in Buchenwald?

JAKOB

I am not.

YOUNG HERMAN

You are free Jakob! Free! You were given a second chance. But you're wasting it. You are wasting your freedom by dwelling inside the walls that held you!

JAKOB

You want me to forget? Simply give up, let go of the past, forgive them?

Young Herman is silent. Jakob grabs him by the shirt.

JAKOB

Have you forgiven them? Forgiven them for killing your sister? Your parents? Have you forgiven them for that?

In a sudden whirl of furious tears, Young Herman breaks Jakob's hold, turns from him.

YOUNG HERMAN

No! No Jakob. I hate them. I hate them for everything. But God tells me not to hate. I hate myself for hating. I...I can't forgive them.

JAKOB

Then you understand why I must do the things I do.

YOUNG HERMAN

No Jakob. You are no better than them...You can't stay here.

JAKOB

I thought you were my friend.

YOUNG HERMAN

I am.

He turns and walks into his house. He holds the door open.

YOUNG HERMAN

But I can't let your hatred destroy my family. It's hard enough with my own. I'm sorry.

The door shuts.

Black.

BACK TO:

EXT. NURSING HOME - DAY

Herman pulls up in the parking lot, turns off the car.
Gazes ahead.

MAX

Opa. I'm sorry. I was wrong. I
shouldn't have been glad he killed
that Nazi.

HERMAN

It is alright my little Maxi. You
were angry. So was I. So was
Jakob. It's human to be angry. But
God wants us to be above anger.

Max gets out holding his basket. Slowly Herman gets out,
adjusts his hat, picks up his basket, and starts toward the
nursing home. Max walks along next to him.

MAX

What happened to Jakob?

HERMAN

They arrested him. Executed him.

INT. NURSING HOME - DAY

Herman takes the basket of vegetables and bread and sets it
on the nurse's counter. No one is there.

MAX

Did you ever forgive the Nazis?

HERMAN

No...but I am trying to.

Herman takes Max's hand and walks a short ways down the
hallway. They enter a room.

INT. PATIENT'S ROOM

The room is stark white. On the bedside table, a photo of a
man in Nazi Uniform. Next to it, an empty basket.

Max looks at the photo, then at the frail OLD MAN(89)
sleeping in bed.

Herman picks up the empty basket and sets the filled one in

its place. He turns to leave. The old man stirs, awakened.

OLD MAN
Thank you. I love these berries.

Herman turns back. The old man reaches for a berry.

HERMAN
You're welcome. I am glad you like
them. They are from my garden.

Herman hands the old basket to Max at the end of the bed.
His sleeve pulls from his wrist. The old man sees.

OLD MAN
You...are a Jew?

Herman freezes. He slowly lowers his arm to his side,
hiding it.

OLD MAN
No...let me see.

Herman hesitates, then presents his arm. The old man runs
his fingers over the faded, blurred numbers. He stops,
begins to sob; drops Herman's arm. His head falls, heavy.

Max stares at the old man, unable to move.

OLD MAN
I'm sorry. I am so, so sorry.

Herman swells with tears, places his hand on the man's
quivering shoulder.

HERMAN
I...forgive you.

The old man lifts his head, looks up at Herman.

OLD MAN
You...for--

HERMAN
I forgive you.

The two men smile through tears and embrace. Max, taking in
the scene, begins to weep. Herman hears Max, and turns his
head towards his grandson.

MAX
Opa. You are free.

FADE TO BLACK.

