

## **What can you see? The night!**

Country: AUSTRIA

Category: Drama

**Title: Was siehst du? Die Nacht!**

Company: ORF Austrian Radio & Television

Author: Ludwig Fels

Producer: Kurt Reissnegger

Director/Sound engineer: Stefan Weber

Other key staff: Naïma von Barga, Markus Meyer, Klaus Höring, Katrin Thurm

Language: German

Length: 50:17 min

## SUMMARY

WHAT CAN YOU SEE? THE NIGHT! The poet Ludwig Fels wrote a story that happened, but no one could tell about it anymore. Spring 1944: little Mirka and her father in the cattle wagon of a deportation train on the way from the Łódź ghetto to Auschwitz. Mirka full of life, but with doubts because the Nazi dog bit her doll while boarding. The father, drowned in despair, tries to reassure. Children's fantasy against fainting white lies of the adored dad. Hastily concocted fairy tales as a replica to unanswerable questions. Some remaining hours, two hearts in commanded final lifetime, one soul. The radio drama director Stefan Weber writes to the author Ludwig Fels after reading the manuscript: "Every word, every sentence, every sequence hopelessly chiseled into 'the ruin of memory'. Your fabric of childhood worlds, hopes, despair, resignation, love, eternità, woven in the wagon of the wheelwork of a 'drunken machine man in uniform' condenses breathtakingly to the last word. Your writing gives so much strength and comfort because you give certainty that Mirka will 'live to the age of one thousand years', that she and her father will be able to reach out to us." The author and the director will meet in the spring of 2020 and agree on the concept for the production. Due to the pandemic, the production of the radio drama is postponed. On January 11, 2021, Ludwig Fels died unexpectedly in Vienna in the midst of preparations.

Cast of Characters:

Mirka

Mirka's father

Narrator

Chorus

Aunty

Time and Place:

In the ghetto and in a cattle truck travelling from Radegast Station near Lodz to

Auschwitz-Birkenau, 1944

*Nature, piano music in the background, chattering storks; cut: steam, coal being shovelled, sliding doors, shouted orders, people, small children screaming, a train getting under way.*

**Title:**

What can you see? The night!

Radio drama by Ludwig Fels

**IN THE CATTLE TRUCK**

MIRKA: Are we there yet?

MIRKA's FATHER: Stop asking! MIRKA:

But it's taking forever.

MIRKA's FATHER: The longer it takes, the sooner it'll be over.

MIRKA: And what happens then?

*sound/music*

**NARRATION**

NARRATOR:

The world's no movie theatre, life's no movie, and still we face a constant stream of images, in the news, in dreams, in the street, in the reflection of others, in rapid succession, unknown, unrecognised, born, forgotten. Animals are dying on the moon, that's what the fairy tales say. Images fade and so do

the memories of the past. Graves filled with faces and instances of the darkest night. The horror of the present hovers at the edges of our vision. And then? Then, you leaf through a book describing a different age and catch a little girl looking at you: Mirka. Mirka from Lodz. All that is left of her is this photograph. Mirka has been dead for about seventy years now, gone from the gas into the smoke. To claim that even a single word might be true, or that things happened this way, would be an abject delusion. The story, the ruin of remembrance...

### **IN THE CATTLE TRUCK**

*The train rolls along*

MIRKA: Did mummy also come this way?

MIRKA's FATHER: I think so!

MIRKA: Poor mummy! I'm sure she cried.

### **CHORUS**

CHORUS:

Our native land, a fount of happiness and pride, even in death you long to return to the place where you first gazed the sky and the stars of the night, like fairies' hair, even though you had been eating snow, drinking tears, dreaming of sleeping with beasts, sickened by life.

*sound*

## **SOMEPLACE**

My name is Mirka.

I am a child.

I am a dead child.

I was a girl.

I have been dead so long.

Please, do not count the years!

I do not live upon a cloud.

I exist no more.

I died too soon.

I was four.

Or maybe five.

No older than that.

I'm sure you've seen me before.

With another child's face.

Someplace.

On one of those photographs, one of the thousands of photographs.

*music/tango*

I am reflected in your eyes. Even when you're dreaming, I am reflected in your eyes and my image is impossible to forget: this is the moment I live for, this is the moment in which I continue to live on.

We have been going for a whole day and night. How much longer?

We are going to meet mummy, dad said.

The train is going so slow.

Sometimes it stops and nobody knows why or where we are.

Sometimes it stops for a very long time and everybody cries.

And when they lift someone up to look out the hatch past the barbed wire, sometimes there's a knock that startles us all.

Sometimes the train the train even moves backwards – or do you say in reverse? – and everybody is glad. We are going home.

When we got on the train, I dropped my doll and it was bitten by a German shepherd. That must have hurt.

### **IN THE CATTLE TRUCK**

*The train rolls along*

Dad, did it hurt?

MIRKA's FATHER: It was a doll, Mirka.

MIRKA: But it was my doll.

MIRKA's FATHER: We should have put it in the backpack.

MIRKA: Then it would have eaten our bread.

MIRKA's FATHER: Dolls don't eat bread.

MIRKA: Mummy said, that dolls get up at night to eat and drink and ... and dance.

MIRKA's FATHER: I never owned a doll.

MIRKA: Why?

MIRKA's FATHER: Because I was a boy. And boys don't play with dolls.

MIRKA: Not even when the parents are asleep?

MIRKA's FATHER: The dog did not know it was biting a doll.

MIRKA: Does a dog know how old I am?

MIRKA's FATHER: I can't imagine.

MIRKA: Does a dog know why I'm scared?

MIRKA's FATHER: Dogs do as they are told.

MIRKA: Did someone tell the dog to bite my doll?

MIRKA's FATHER: Your doll looked like a baby, so it wasn't afraid to bite.

MIRKA: If it hadn't been for you, it would have bitten me too.

MIRKA's FATHER: Sounds like we got lucky, hm?

MIRKA: Unlike the doll. We could not leave it behind, it would have been all by itself. Being alone is scary. You and mummy it knows, we were together day and night. Why did the men shout so much?

MIRKA's FATHER: Because the loudspeaker was broken.

MIRKA: And why did they shout 'swine'? Where did the swine go?

MIRKA's FATHER: Probably in another waggon.

MIRKA: So you can't smell their stink, right? And what are Jew swine, dad?

MIRKA's FATHER: Hush!

MIRKA: But that's what everybody shouted out loud.

MIRKA's FATHER: It's a word we don't use.



MIRKA: The Jew swine are probably in another waggon as well, like the other swine. Why do we wear this star?

MIRKA's FATHER: Because God has created so many stars he does not know what to do with them.

MIRKA: I'm thirsty, dad!

*Sound*

MIRKA's FATHER: It's not going to be long now before we get something to eat and drink. They say, just another day, we're almost there, just one more night! If you want fresh straw, let us know! You shall want for nothing. Gentlemen, one of your dogs bit my daughter Mirka's doll. Thank you for telling us, it'll get a proper seeing-to! Let Mirka know, problem solved, we'll put her doll on the next train and at the final stop we'll all wait until Mirka is reunited with her doll. It'll travel first class and have a good laugh at our expense.

MIRKA: What's first class?

MIRKA's FATHER: Usually, it's a carriage where people get to sit on benches during their trip. There's no straw on the floor and when the train pulls into a station you can get off and have a lemonade. And the dogs are not allowed to touch you.

MIRKA: Why do the men have dogs?

MIRKA's FATHER: Maybe because they're afraid of wolves and bears. There are bound to be wild animals out there that are really bad!

MIRKA: Lions too?

MIRKA's FATHER: And lions!

MIRKA: And tigers?

MIRKA's FATHER: Where there're lions there're tigers, too.

MIRKA: What about elephants?

MIRKA's FATHER: Elephants? Probably not. They are too big and there's no place for them to hide.

MIRKA: And... and giraffes? You know, a giraffe could look out the hatch and tell us where we are. And we could ask if it had seen mummy. They have a really long neck and can see a long way.

MIRKA's FATHER: God loves clever children.

*birds flying off*

#### NARRATION

NARRATOR:

On a kids' stage you would now see a giraffe gnawing through the barbwire nailed across the hatch. Finally, it manages to stick its head through the hatch. „What can you see? The night!“

#### GHETTO

*Background noise from a street in the ghetto of Lodz.*

MIRKA:

I sold cigarettes in the street. Mummy rolled them and dad came up with a box. And I went out into the street. I had no fixed spot but went different places and

in winter I kept walking, stopping outside shops, calling: Cigarettes! Cigarettes, dear gentlemen! Every day, there were more people in the streets, begging and dying. Some got shot dead by soldiers. But people kept buying cigarettes, some just bought only half a cigarette, some had no money and paid with bread or a vial of liquor. Usually I went barefoot. And there were more people every day, more and more.

*tango music in the background*

Seventeen people lived in our apartment, and it wasn't a big apartment. Then some packed their bundles and disappeared. O such handsome papierosy! Great tobacco! Finely cut! My dad taught me to say that. Once I grow up, I'll smoke, too. I was earning money. There were other children, so small and skinny, who cried all the time, and they danced in the street and then slept, until they stopped moving. I let them smell the cigarettes, and the bread, if I had bread, but they didn't move again.

Once a soldier came with a dog and the soldier laughed and barked, and then he smelled the cigarettes and threw them in the gutter. Then he picked me up and let me drop. I didn't tell anybody. Nobody would have believed me.

*sound*

When mummy's name appeared on the list we went to the terminal, where the lorries were waiting. She didn't say anything and dad tried to hold on to her, but somebody hit him and he let go. That was our goodbye. That day, I didn't sell any cigarettes.

## IN THE CATTLE TRUCK

*The train rolls along*

MIRKA: I want my toys, I want to play. I want to sleep in my own bed. I don't want to go on the bucket. I don't want to be scared of the dog. Dad, why are we here?

MIRKA's FATHER: Hush...God only knows, and no one else. You know he made us. He made the angels and the first men. He also made the animals. But making us is what he liked most. He led us from captivity and empowered us to slay giants. He will work miracles, why not! Yes, why shouldn't he? We are here and God is bound to know why. All of us are in the world for a short while, time enough to take a look.

MIRKA: Do you know how long our train is?

MIRKA's FATHER: Why do you want to know?

MIRKA: Perhaps there is another waggon with a girl called Mirka. Maybe there's a Mirka in each waggon?

MIRKA's FATHER: Maybe there's even a second Mirka in this waggon?

MIRKA *calls*: Mirka! *no reaction*

MIRKA's FATHER: Don't cry!

MIRKA: But I can't help it!

MIRKA's FATHER: Can you wait a little while?

MIRKA: Alright, fine.

MIRKA's FATHER: You are a good, a brave girl. Actually, you are already as tall as an angel.

MIRKA: How tall are angels?

MIRKA's FATHER: They can touch the clouds without having to stretch.

MIRKA: How heavy are the clouds?

MIRKA's FATHER: They aren't heavy, or they couldn't stay up in the air.

MIRKA: And where do they go?

MIRKA's FATHER: Once around the world.

MIRKA: Does that take long?

MIRKA's FATHER: A day and a night, maybe.

MIRKA: Then I'd much rather travel on a cloud.

MIRKA's FATHER: We'll do that on the way back.

MIRKA: Then we'll be way up high where no dog can bite us.

*sound cloud*

MIRKA's FATHER: I need to tell you something.

MIRKA: What do you need to tell me?

MIRKA's FATHER: You always have to remember and you can never forget, and I don't say this lightly: I ... I love you. I don't know if you are already familiar with that word?

MIRKA: Don't cry, dad!

MIRKA's FATHER: Love is when you like someone very very much, more than you can say!

MIRKA: Hm!

MIRKA's FATHER: I love mummy and I love you!

MIRKA: Mummy and me?

MIRKA's FATHER: Love is an old word and you don't use it a lot, you know. The rabbi's beard in the synagogue stopped growing, that's how hard he entreated

God. In the Church of the Holy Virgin the Germans rang the bells when we buried our dead, and they were ringing day and night. We had a nice apartment in the third courtyard, where you would play. The rooms were always dimly lit because they were on the ground floor and, at first, we were still permitted to cross the wooden bridge at Hohensteiner Street to go to a small park. But then suddenly we were no longer allowed to do anything. We were only allowed to die. *pause* Did I hear somebody cry?

MIRKA *laughs*.

MIRKA's FATHER: My head is full of images. *pause*. My old head is full of old images...

MIRKA: I'm no longer a little kid, dad. You have to tell me everything.

MIRKA's FATHER: Everything? I don't know everything!

MIRKA: Why?

MIRKA's FATHER: Nobody knows everything!

MIRKA: Mummy does! When we get there, I'll sleep in mummy's bed. But you shouldn't be sad! *waits*. Will we go back soon?

MIRKA's FATHER: We'll have to stay for a little while, we can't just get off and then go back right away. Also, we'll have to find mummy first.

MIRKA: I saw you throw away the key...

MIRKA's FATHER: You do that when you go away for some time. You throw away the key so you don't lose the key.

**Interlude, mechanical noise, loud singing**

**IN THE CATTLE TRUCK**

*The train rolls along*

MIRKA *loudly* Make them stop. They're praying so loudly, and they are crying in front of strangers. Make them stop! Have them be quiet!

MIRKA's FATHER: They are not feeling well, Mirka.

MIRKA: Are you feeling well, dad?

MIRKA'S FATHER: The one thing I don't like is that we don't have enough room. But once we're there, it will all be forgotten. Tomorrow you won't remember a thing.

MIRKA: I'd rather be alone. All alone, just you and me. Nobody plays with me.

MIRKA's FATHER: There's no room to play.

MIRKA: Not even a little bit?

MIRKA's FATHER: I could tell you a fairy tale.

MIRKA: Fairy tales aren't true.

MIRKA's FATHER: That's why they're called fairy tales. You want to believe in them, as if that would make you less afraid of the real world. I've never been a good story teller, but I'll try.

MIRKA: You have to speak up, dad!

MIRKA's FATHER *tries speaking*: Once upon a time...*coughs, continuing into the narration.*

## **NARRATION**

NARRATOR:

Once upon a time, and not just once, for everything happens again and again, the lie, the treason, the cement between love and hate, fear and despair. "My friend", says death. He seems surprised that nobody is laughing. But there is so much death: The Jewish kind. The Bolshevik kind. The woman kind. The man kind. The child kind. The ghetto kind. The camp kind. "My friends", says death. Says it in every tongue. Even says it in German, in the language of the lords and masters. "I love you", says death, "love all of you, there can't be too many of you, that's how inexhaustible my love is. Come to me! is a phrase from the past, nobody uses it anymore. Silence, like grass, grows over everything.

## **IN THE CATTLE TRUCK AND IN THE DOG'S FOREST**

### *Fairy-tale Forest*

MIRKA's FATHER: Once upon a time. Once there was a dog. It was a large dog that lived in the forest and when it was hungry it ate bears, three at a time if it was really hungry. If it was thirsty it could drink an entire stream and the water could not be cold enough. One day, it encountered a little girl that was lost. The little girl was very scared but the dog said that it did not eat people, and that she should not be sad, that she should stop crying. Then the dog brought her a bear to eat but the girl said a bear was much too big for her belly, and it picked a few berries. The dog was pleased by the girl's modesty and humility. If the girl can do this, so can I, it thought, and also tried a few berries – however, it did



not know berries very well

and ate some poisonous berries. The girl took it to a farmer's cottage where the people gave it milk until it was well again. The dog was so grateful that it promised the girl it would never bite a child. --- You know, you shouldn't tell stories when you are scared. You just confuse things, most of all yourself.

*The train rolls along again*

MIRKA: Was the dog a Nazi?

MIRKA's FATHER: It was a dog.

MIRKA: Did it wear a star?

MIRKA's FATHER: Mirka, it was just a dog, a big, dumb dog. Why does my child have so many questions?

MIRKA: Why can't we go home? Is it far?

MIRKA's FATHER: I was told, I would have work and we'd be comfortable. I'll earn money, and we'll be able to buy clothes and food, chocolate, liquorice, whatever you want, there'll be shop at every corner selling sweets, milk, and bread. Chocolate, imagine! And candy!

*sound*

MIRKA: Is mummy going to cry again?

MIRKA's FATHER: Of course not! Mummy is in a place where crying is forbidden!

MIRKA: How strict?

MIRKA's FATHER: How strict what?

MIRKA: How strictly is it forbidden?

MIRKA's FATHER: Oh, it doesn't cross your mind. You just don't do it.

*Sound*

MIRKA:

My name is Mirka.

I have a mummy and a dad.

But my mummy has left.

Dad says, we are going to meet her.

But maybe he's telling a story?

I have no doll and nothing to play with.

And I'm not scared, because I shouldn't be, dad says.

When dad's asleep, I can see he's sad.

If I had cigarettes, I'd sell them to people. So they stop being noisy!

*Sound*

## NARRATION

NARRATOR:

And then, for a few long seconds night comes. The moon does not answer prayers. The cold clinks like a proud giant in full armour, the heat saturates clothes and the skin drips like a wet sponge. Spring and autumn, like a suicidal couple whose good fortune has run out, have sworn to be faithful forever in the cemetery of seasons. It is unbearable! If you rape a Jew, make sure you shoot

her afterwards. However, it's not necessary to shoot babies, for instance, you pick them up by their legs and hit their head against something hard, ammunition is needed for the war; some of our comrades have found it useful to cut their tongues out. No sound. Never mind the spurt of blood! Ridiculous!

## IN THE CATTLE TRUCK

*The train rolls along*

MIRKA: I'm thirsty, dad! I want to eat snow!

MIRKA's FATHER: When winter comes, we'll build a snowman.

MIRKA: Does it have to wear a star?

MIRKA's FATHER: I don't know that! Our snowman has no beard and no ID stating it's of Jewish descent. Our snowman stays with us. It likes it here. We won't stick a carrot into its face for a nose, because we'd rather eat it. The dogs will be afraid of it because we'll make it really big. A giant made of snow. With teeth and claws of ice, and a black, torn tongue. You don't ask it, what's your address, show your ID! Shut it, swine!

MIRKA: Shut it, swine!

MIRKA's FATHER: Let them come and say: Orders! Tomorrow morning, 4 am, report to the terminal ready for travel. Clothes and food for eight days, no fork, no knife. No scissors, no needle! Personal jewellery and valuables allowed.

MIRKA: Am I allowed?

MIRKA's FATHER: What do you mean allowed? You're ordered to!

MIRKA: Dad, what was the name of the station we left from?

MIRKA's FATHER: Why do you want to know?

MIRKA: So I can find my way back.

*In the emptiness of Radegast Station, orders etc.*

MIRKA's FATHER:

We set out from Radegast Station.

It took hours before we had all got on the train.

Us and our baggage.

Checks, beatings, body searches.

Off with your cap!

Up with your skirt!

Children to be taken by the hand.

Entering the station strictly prohibited.

Shitting to be done on the train!

Like the others before you!

Let's go!

*Shouted commands, the train rolls along*

MIRKA: Why are people being so noisy?

MIRKA's FATHER: Because they have so little room.

MIRKA: I want to be able to jump. High, higher. High enough to look out the hatch.

MIRKA's FATHER: It is already too dark to see.

MIRKA: I can see a house.

MIRKA's FATHER: Really?

MIRKA: It has a garden, full of snowmen. They are wearing top hats and pisspots on their heads, and holding black candles.

MIRKA's FATHER: You can see that?

MIRKA: Yes, dad, that's what I see!

MIRKA's FATHER: What else can you see?

MIRKA: That they have eaten their carrots.

MIRKA's FATHER: Hm, they could have left one for you, no? Greedy bunch!

MIRKA *laughs*: Why are my eyes black? Why is my hair black?

MIRKA's FATHER: Because you are our child! Our Mirka!

MIRKA: Am I Jewish?

MIRKA's FATHER: You are a girl!

MIRKA: A Jew girl?

MIRKA's FATHER: You are Mirka and nothing else.

MIRKA: Why don't you tell people that I'm a little girl?

MIRKA's FATHER: What people?

MIRKA: The people with the dogs. Why am I not allowed to get off?

MIRKA's FATHER: So we don't lose each other.

MIRKA: Dad?

MIRKA's FATHER: Hm?

MIRKA: I think, I've started to smell.

MIRKA's FATHER: You are imagining things. Nobody smells all that great if they can't wash.

MIRKA: You remember you said we're going to a nice place. We'll have a new house with a garden, and everything. You'll have work, is what you said. That's what you said! It's what you said, it's what you said!

MIRKA's FATHER: It's what all of us were told.

MIRKA: Who told us that and why? Why? Why? Why?

MIRKA's FATHER: You won't yet understand.

MIRKA: I understand everything.

MIRKA's FATHER: I know you understand everything, but there're a few things you're still too little to understand completely.

MIRKA: Why do you say that?

*Birds taking wing, sound/music*

MIRKA's FATHER:

My own head is in two minds.

At night, it's dreams are full of fear.

During the day there are images I don't recognise.

They appear like paintings, painted in blood and tears.

Soon, every night lasts 24 hours.

The sun only reappears on the last breath.

My own head doesn't understand me.

I have no other explanation.

*The train rolls along*

MIRKA: You said we'd go on a trip. *pause*. A trip to see mummy. But what are we doing? We are sitting on straw, starting to stink.

MIRKA's FATHER: You smell nice.

MIRKA: Mummy has to wash me. My hair and everything. Also my eyes. Then everything will look cleaner.

MIRKA's FATHER: I'd rather cry than wash my eyes.

MIRKA: I'm just sad, but I don't have to cry.

MIRKA's FATHER: It can't be much longer.

You keep saying that. Do you even believe yourself? I can see the birds up on that roof, large, white birds, really large, you know the ones that bring the babies, the ones that eat frogs and snails.

MIRKA's FATHER: You mean storks?

MIRKA: If I don't like the place we are going, I'll say: Come on, stork, take me away from here!

MIRKA's FATHER: You won't need a stork! I'll do that! Promise!

*sound*

MIRKA: How far would you fly?

MIRKA's FATHER: As far as you like.

MIRKA: How far is far?

MIRKA's FATHER: America is far.

MIRKA: And what is farther than that?

MIRKA's FATHER: Paradise.

MIRKA: And Lodz?

MIRKA's FATHER: You'd have to ask a stork.

MIRKA: Stork! Can you hear me?

MIRKA's FATHER *with a disguised voice*: Yes, I can hear you!

MIRKA: Are you strong stork?

MIRKA's FATHER: Sure!

MIRKA: Can you carry me?

MIRKA's FATHER: Like a baby.

MIRKA: And my dad and my mummy, too?

MIRKA's FATHER: How far?

MIRKA: Back home?

MIRKA's FATHER: Other people live there now.

MIRKA: And play with my things?

MIRKA's FATHER: That I don't know.

MIRKA: Do they sleep in my bed?

MIRKA's FATHER: Stop with those questions!

MIRKA *cries*.

MIRKA's FATHER: We'll buy a new bed where you'll sleep like an angel.

MIRKA: And when I sleep, you'll fly away.

MIRKA's FATHER: Not even in a dream.

MIRKA: But first we'll buy chocolate. I can sleep better if I had chocolate.

MIRKA's FATHER: Let's do that!

MIRKA: A lot of chocolate! And then I'll sleep MIRKA's

FATHER: And when you wake up... ..I'll have more  
chocolate.

MIRKA's FATHER: Why not!

MIRKA: And then I'll dream of a snowman with chocolate eyes. And of a stork  
bringing me chocolate.

MIRKA's FATHER: You do that, darling!

MIRKA: I'll just close my eyes, you know? And I'll be somewhere else!



*birds taking wing*

## **MIRKA's NIGHTMARE**

### **Ghetto Collage**

MIRKA: Good people, smoke! Smoke chocolate cigarettes! Suck on candies filled with gunpowder. O such handsome papierosy! Stork feathers bring you luck! Candies filled with gunpowder. Don't go home without buying some. O such handsome papierosy! You'll like Baluty, as long as you have smokes. Don't just go home.

Don't forget: Passing cars with German plates have to be saluted. I have matches, too. Please, just half a cigarette! I have matches, too. A piece of bread! A little crumb. Buy my cigarettes!

## **IN THE CATTLE TRUCK**

*The train has stopped. Loud steam/mechanical sounds, the waggon's sliding doors opening*

MIRKA's FATHER: Do you have your things? Take my hand! And don't let go? Promise me! You are a big girl! Don't be afraid. Whatever happens, you stay by my side and you don't move until I say! Mummy is waiting for us.

MIRKA *calls out*: Mummy!

MIRKA's FATHER: Louder, so she can hear!

MIRKA *stays silent.*

*cut*

## THE FAREWELL

MIRKA:

My name is Mirka and I'm from Lodz.

Mirka from Lodz.

No lice.

No fever.

No toys.

No snowman.

And no stork.

No chocolate.

I don't smoke.

I just sell cigarettes.

I can cut it in half, if you like.

Then you don't have to smoke it in one go, but you'll need two matches.

Matches I can let you have cheap.

My dad works all day, and my mother lines up for food stamps.

Careful now, or they'll expire!

Please buy a cigarette from me!

But don't just take them without paying.

If you want more than one, I can wrap them up.

But they only want one.

Or just a half.

Or none.

Some squatted down next to me, resting their back against the wall.

Then they tucked in their legs and just fell back.

I moved away a few feet. So that the cigarettes kept their fresh smell.

Then mummy left.

Was ordered to.

It was still night when we set out, and dad carried me.

In the end, mummy got on her knees and held me tight and shook me.

Then she went to register.

She didn't come back and then the lorries left.

I didn't greet the dead lying in the street.

## **RAMP SELECTION**

*atmo ramp, lorries, trains, people, dogs etc.*

Orders: Put out the dead!

MIRKA: Home!

MIRKA's FATHER: Give me your hand!

MIRKA: Home!

MIRKA's FATHER: Mummy will be here soon!

MIRKA: Home!

MIRKA's FATHER: Come!

MIRKA: Are we dead?

MIRKA's FATHER: Do you have everything?

MIRKA: Yes. No bread.

MIRKA's FATHER: Doesn't matter now. Mummy will bring some. Mirka, is the first thing she'll say, here, have a piece of bread!

MIRKA: Just a little piece, mummy! Dad?

MIRKA's FATHER: Be quiet now!

MIRKA:

They look like storks.

Though storks have no stripes.

And snowmen don't have dogs.

What do the dogs say, Dad?

Dad?

What do the dogs say? Dad, I don't want to be here!

CAMP DOCTOR: *The old, women and children to the right!*

MIRKA: I'm to the right?

MIRKA's FATHER: You go to the right.

MIRKA: And you?

MIRKA's FATHER: Say hello to mummy!

MIRKA: I don't want to go there!

WOMAN: Come along, my dear!

MIRKA's FATHER: Go with her. The woman will take you to mummy. Mummy has bought you a new doll. I'll come to visit. Don't be scared of the dogs. The angels will put them down.

## CHORUS

CHORUS:

Good day, good day, good day,  
German SS-Soldier Sir, I have no  
call to whine, just 'cause I'd  
rather live than die, that is no  
need to cry.

## IN AUNTY'S REALM

WOMAN: So what's your name?

MIRKA: Mirka. Aunty?

WOMAN: Yes?

MIRKA: Where are we going?

WOMAN: We're going to take a bath!

MIRKA: Aunty?

WOMAN: Hm?

MIRKA: Can snowmen take a bath?

WOMAN: Only if the water is really cold.

MIRKA: Aunty, have you seen a real stork?

WOMAN: Just the babies. So they must be real, don't you think?

MIRKA: Do you know my mummy?

WOMAN: What's your mummy's name?

MIRKA: Mummy!

WOMAN: Then we shall find her.

MIRKA: Has mummy already taken a bath?

WOMAN: If she arrived before you, she'll have bathed.

MIRKA: You know, I don't smell good.

WOMAN: After the bath, we'll smell really nice!

MIRKA: Thanks, Aunty!

WOMAN: What do you thank me for?

MIRKA: That I don't have to be afraid!

### **CHORUS**

CHORUS:

At your command, Sir *Kapo*, Sir,  
feel hunger, thirst, and sorrow, but  
tell me why the sky's as smoke, and  
I'll sleep until the morrow.

### **IN AUNTY'S REALM**

MIRKA: Aunty, I was dreaming. On the train, I was dreaming all the time.

WOMAN: What did you dream?

MIRKA: Of dogs biting off the snowmen's noses.

WOMAN: Dogs don't eat carrots.

MIRKA: But it was just a dream, Aunty!

WOMAN: Why don't you go on dreaming? Dream that you're asleep! A deep and heavy sleep! Just a thousand hours to the morning! Then there'll be bread and milk for breakfast.

MIRKA: I was selling cigarettes on Aleja Róż.

WOMAN: In that case, you've already seen a lot.

MIRKA: My dad is looking for my mummy.

WOMAN: They'll find one another, my angel!

MIRKA: Why do you call me an angel?

WOMAN: What else should I call you?

MIRKA: How far to go?

WOMAN: I think we'll soon be there!

MIRKA:

We walked very fast.

And we walked in great confusion.

We ran and we fell.

They beat you if you stopped.

I didn't stop.

I held on to the woman

And the woman held on to me.

And then there was a hole in the ground.

With steps leading down...

To a large open gate.

Naked people.

Night in their eyes.

I shall live a thousand years.

## NARRATION

NARRATOR:

At this point, hardly surprising, the Lord's ways come to an end, and so does the story that wasn't a story and isn't a story – and the images one associates with it become blurred, randomly attributable. Somebody else takes over the direction in the age of historical perplexity, fate perhaps or doom, German Death, the drunken machine of uniformed man, a skull emblem on his cap, polished bright and shining, the last and single light before vision fails and eyes grow dim.

Mirka was one of many, one of thousands upon thousands, who lived through the horrors of deportation, who died of cold, who died of thirst. Many of the children were orphans, alone and with nobody to turn to. Some were torn from their mother's breast and clubbed to death like vermin. For the inhabitants of the Lodz ghetto, the trains left from Radegast Station, their cargo the fate of entire peoples, individual on individual, their few possessions tied in a bundle, the little that was left after losing house and home. Humans are unable to remember their death, that much is certain, nor how they died. And perhaps their earthly existence has no greater blessing to offer than that it leads back to a place preceding their birth where there is neither memory nor oblivion.

*tango song: "Mach die Äuglein zu" by Dovid Beyglman*