

BERNARD FRIPIAT

English translation

Carol MADJER and Nicky WARD

WINSTON CHURCHILL

The decision which saved the world

Durée : 90 minutes

Historical play

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If you are interested in publishing this English version of the play, please contact the French publishers.

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This play was first staged in its French version on
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at the

PANDORA THEATRE OF PARIS

Stage director : René CARTON

Make-up Artist : Patsy AMIOT

Lighting : Ludovicq FERNAUD

Actors

WINSTON CHURCHILL : Bernard FRIPIAT

RUDOLF HESS : Laurent GUY

Mac Lean : Carole DECAUDIN

We are in May 1941 ...

Mac Lean, daughter of a British officer and lieutenant in His Majesty's army, is on duty at the Tower of London.

Winston Churchill, 67 years old, has been directing the war effort in Great Britain for one year. Later, in his memoirs, referring back to his appointment, he declares : "When the King asked me to form the Government ... I was conscious of a profound sense of relief. At last I had the authority to give directions over the whole scene. I felt as if I were walking with destiny, and that all my past life had been but a preparation for this hour and for this trial... My warnings over the last six years had been so numerous, so detailed, and were now so terribly vindicated, that no one could gainsay me ... I thought I knew a good deal about it all, and I was sure I should not fail... I slept soundly and had no need for cheering dreams. Facts are better than dreams".

Rudolf Hess, 45 years old, number 3 in the Nazi regime (even though he likes to be considered in second place), minister without portfolio and member of the Reich's Defence Council. In 1924, when at Landsberg prison, he was the cellmate of Adolf Hitler with whom he is now on familiar terms. On 27 December 1945, the SS general confides to the psychologist Gilbert in his Nuremberg prison cell that, at that time, he was « absolutely sure of a Nazi victory».

After Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Denmark, Norway, Holland and Belgium, the Nazi shadow has now fallen over France. With Italy as an active ally, Spain as a passive supporter, Russia and the USA waiting in a cautious neutrality, the Nazi ogre is now attempting to bring an isolated England to its knees.

10 May : 500 bombers set London ablaze.

The same day, Rudolf Hess flies to Scotland. He is immediately arrested and taken to the Tower of London.

We are in a converted cell at the Tower of London. The furniture is simple : a wooden table, 3 chairs and 2 armchairs, one which is turned away from the others. On the mantelpiece, two candlesticks, each with 3 unlit candles. One window looks onto the street. Lieutenant Mac Lean unceremoniously leads in her prisoner Rudolf Hess, who is wearing the uniform of an SS officer. His ankle is visibly hurt. She makes him sit down on a chair. Hess's tone of voice testifies to his habit of giving orders.

RUDOLF HESS. Has the Duke of Hamilton been informed that I wish to see him?

Mac Lean remains silent.

I have asked you a question !

Despite the pain in his ankle, Rudolf Hess makes an effort to get up. Mac Lean pushes him roughly back onto his chair and clamps handcuffs around his wrists.

Believe me, I will remember this. Do you hear me ? I will remember you.

She stands guard near the entrance, in silence. Churchill enters without being seen by Hess. He has an unlit cigar in his mouth.

For the last time, I order you to inform the Duke of Hamilton that Rudolf Hess, (*stressing the number 2*) number 2 in the Nazi regime and appointed successor of Adolf Hitler, wishes to speak to him urgently.

He tries in vain to be a little more polite.

Miss, you represent England and, as an officer, you should know how to treat VIPs.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Were you invited ?

Hess is taken aback.

Introductions are unnecessary, I presume ?

RUDOLF HESS. What are you doing here ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. I should be the one to ask you that.

RUDOLF HESS. (*Curtly*). I have nothing to say to you.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Glaring at him*). A long and risky journey only to remain silent ... (*In a conciliatory tone*). Come on, speak up, you must want to confide in someone.

Ignoring Churchill, Rudolf Hess speaks to Mac Lean in a military tone of voice.

RUDOLF HESS. Inform the Duke of Hamilton that I wish to see him !

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Getting angry*). I'm afraid she will not obey your orders.

RUDOLF HESS. (*Calmly*). I am number 2 of the world's greatest military power.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Placing his cigar in an ashtray*) Yes, but a number 2 sitting in the Tower of London. That makes all the difference ! Here, I am the Führer !

RUDOLF HESS. (*Aloof*). Are you so afraid of me that I have to remain handcuffed ?

Winston Churchill gestures to Mac Lean to take the handcuffs off.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Will you bring us two whiskies, Lieutenant ?

RUDOLF HESS. (*To Mac Lean who is removing the handcuffs*). I'll have a glass of milk. My responsibilities forbid me to be a slave...

He looks at Mac Lean with an air of superiority, then stares at Churchill.

to alcohol.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Unimpressed*). Alcohol is more my slave than the opposite. It has served me for so long.

MAC LEAN. I doubt if we can find milk at this time of the day, sir !

WINSTON CHURCHILL. In that case, will you bring him a glass of water, since he doesn't care for alcohol ?

Mac Lean goes out. Churchill, conciliatory, sits down near Hess.

So ? Why do you want to see Hamilton ?

RUDOLF HESS. (*Without looking at Churchill*). I wish to address myself to him.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Joking*). You'll find dukes tend to change address frequently in these turbulent times.

RUDOLF HESS. (*Ignoring the joke*). We met at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin. (*Nostalgically*). A magnificent event !

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Ironically*). Your meeting ?

RUDOLF HESS. (*With a little cynical snort*). The games ! (*Reliving the grandiose event*). Such monumental structures ! Such perfect organization and timing ! A nation united behind its athletes ... (*Pause*). The greatest event of the century...

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Interrupting him*). Let the end of the century be judge of that. Now, what about Hamilton ?

RUDOLF HESS. (*Calming down*). An intelligent man with whom it is possible to have a ...

He hesitates, looking for the right word

rational conversation.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Nettled*). And not me ?

RUDOLF HESS. (*Seriously*). I have my doubts.

Mac Lean knocks.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Come in, lieutenant !

She brings in a tray, hands the glass of whisky to Churchill and puts the glass of water on the table.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Thank you, lieutenant !

Vexed, Hess takes his glass.

RUDOLF HESS. I detest women in uniform.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Smugly*). I'm afraid you'll just have to get used to it. You won't see any others for a long time.

RUDOLF HESS. (*Vexed*). Couldn't someone see to my ankle ? It is swelling.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*To Mac Lean standing near the door*). Will you go to the infirmary and see if something can be done ?

MAC LEAN. Yes, sir !

She goes out with the tray.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. I'm listening to you.

RUDOLF HESS. You are not the person I wanted to speak to, Prime Minister.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Getting up*). Yes, Prime Minister and a Prime Minister on active duty ... which means I have no time to waste. So, if you have anything to say, either speak now or else remain silent until the end of the war.

He walks determinedly towards the door.

RUDOLF HESS. (*Stopping him*). All right ! I agree to speak to you.

He gets up and starts pacing up and down despite the pain in his ankle.

First of all, you should know that my actions are my personal initiative and have no official sanction. Even if I know that in his heart of hearts, the Führer approves of me 100 %.

He looks at Churchill who motions him to continue.

The situation of England is so critical that only a royal intervention can save the British Empire. I would like you to act as my ambassador to His Majesty.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. That is within the scope of my duties.

RUDOLF HESS. (*Gaining confidence*). You will inform him, in the name of Rudolf Hess, that our U-boats, our very best submarines ...

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Yes, I have heard of them.

RUDOLF HESS. (*Continuing*). ... will soon destroy all your maritime communications. Not a single boat will be able to approach or leave your coasts. While our navy is starving you, our air force will be completing the destruction of your industries and your towns. If once

you have resigned, His Majesty should request an armistice, the Führer would readily agree to it, unconditionally. His Majesty has my word.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Half-surprised, half-amused*). You have crossed the North Sea, taken all those risks, to suggest I should resign.

RUDOLF HESS. (*Coldly*). The Führer gave you your chance when he offered you peace on 17 July 1940. To my regret you failed to seize that opportunity. (*Pause*). Do you know of many victors who, having won the war, propose peace ? Most of them just destroy the vanquished or hold them at their mercy. The Führer, he is sparing you ! Anyone else in your position would have jumped at the opportunity. You didn't even bother to answer him.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*In the same tone of voice as Hess*). I didn't answer because we're not really on speaking terms.

RUDOLF HESS. It must be for the same reason that he proposes you should finish your days in Canada ! (*Scornfully*). If I were you, I would accept. Amateurs should be able to leave the scene while the magnanimity of the victor lets them do so.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Despite my great respect for the Canadians, I have no intention of going there for the moment.

RUDOLF HESS. (*Condescendingly*). The Führer will refuse to deal with you. He considers you to be a devourer of Germans.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Sarcastically*). And yet, I have killed fewer than he has.

RUDOLF HESS. Let us consider the situation ! You are a war-loving man, which we can fully understand. Unfortunately, the majority of the English population is pacifist ; in which case, you have no place here as their leader.

He walks behind him.

Face reality and see in me a messenger of peace offering an opportunity to seize, perhaps the last.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Angrily*). How will I explain to the British population that the messenger of peace arrived on the same day that his nation's incendiary bombs killed or injured three thousand Londoners, started two thousand fires, hit one hundred and fifty water mains, five docks, seventy one key points and all but one of the main railway stations ?

RUDOLF HESS. (*In a domineering tone*). "Moderation in war is folly. If you strike, strike hard and wherever you can". Words spoken by Lord Fisher. Do you know him ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Indifferently*). We worked together in 1914.

RUDOLF HESS. (*Same tone*). We are implementing his advice. At Dunkirk, we could have captured the entire English army. But we didn't ! We deliberately let you re-embark. You interpreted our humanity as a weakness, our benevolence as your heroic victory. Face the facts : an evacuation is not a victory. We were magnanimous in the hope that you would sue for peace. We are still waiting. You prefer to die on the battlefield. (*Pause*). The Romans were full of joy when they destroyed Carthage. But our hearts are full of sadness at the idea of destroying England. (*Threateningly*). But persist in your obstinacy and we will do it. (*Conciliatory*). I am very close to the Führer. We were even in prison together at a time when you were a minister. He has never considered England as an enemy. This fight makes no sense and delays the realization of our mission. You can't imagine to what extent the Führer suffers each time London is bombed.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Poor chap !

RUDOLF HESS. (*Ignoring his remark*). Adolf Hitler loves England.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Incredulous*). You want me to say that to the King?

RUDOLF HESS. (*Sincerely*). ... Yes, at the same time as handing in your resignation which he will accept. When the survival of a nation is at stake, its leader has to take its destiny into his own hands Thus, the English will thank him, future generations will bless him. I will even let you into a secret : the Führer, in person, will be grateful.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Ironical*). He will be touched by that. (*Looking coldly at Hess, straight in the eyes*). Hess, do you have the faintest idea of how our institutions work?

RUDOLF HESS. (*Disdainfully*). Your what ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Coldly, half to himself*). Our institutions. (*Looking at Hess who is a little perplexed*). The powers of the Government, its control by Parliament, the influence of the Press ... those small things which have nurtured the functioning of Great Britain for several centuries. For example, in this country, the Sovereign reigns but he does not govern. The King acts on the advice of ministers. We call this a constitutional monarchy. Here, no one can be kept in prison without judgement. We call this : "habeas corpus" - you should think about this noble principle. Thanks to its rules, we have been nurtured in freedom and individual responsibility and are the products, not of totalitarian uniformity but of tolerance and variety. And we are very attached to it.

RUDOLF HESS. (*Contemptuously*). Words ! Systems are made to be changed ! We've done it ! And in far less favourable conditions. We weren't residing at Buckingham.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Calmly)*. I am not sure His Majesty would use you as a model.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Very calmly, expressing his gut feelings)*. Where there's a will, there's a way. *(Pause)*. I believe your House of Commons was destroyed during the last bombings. *(Churchill nods his head)*. A wonderful opportunity for your King !

WINSTON CHURCHILL. It's not a British tradition and His Majesty is very respectful of British traditions.

Jazz music is heard, coming from the street.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Going to the window)*. What's that ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Have you never heard Jazz music ? *(Pause)*. Here, you see a group of young Americans. They go round playing in the streets to keep up the morale of their old Mother Country in these difficult times..

RUDOLF HESS. Promising youth !

WINSTON CHURCHILL. I prefer their future to your past. To your future too, for that matter.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Annoyed by this digression)*. Are they going to play for long ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. As long as they wish to.

RUDOLF HESS. It's sad, Prime Minister, such decadence. Look where it is leading you.

He bursts out into a nervous laugh trying to restrain his anger.

When I think that you scorned us when we came to power. Aren't we just as legitimate as you are ? We were also elected !

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Democracy is not only when a nation can choose its leaders but when it can also remove them from office.

RUDOLF HESS. *(A long pause. As if he was revealing a state secret)*. Hitler has decided on a total blockade of the British Isles.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(As if he wanted to convince himself)*. Like the Kaiser and Napoleon.

RUDOLF HESS. Times change and technical progress makes possible what seemed unthinkable yesterday. *(Pause)*. Come on, be brave, Prime Minister. Granted, you like war and as I said before, I can understand you. However, this love of combat has made you an obstacle to my mission.

He smiles smugly : the satisfaction of a man who has found a solution.

Unless you should become a pacifist. In which case, we could perhaps come to an understanding. In your situation, wouldn't it be sensible to embrace peace ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(In a cold and ironical tone).* Do you think you are well-placed, as Hitler's deputy, to give lessons on pacifism ?

RUDOLF HESS. I'm just trying to tell you that, if I intervene on your behalf, you can save your job. Of course, you're not very popular back home. However, I have a certain influence and can intercede for you with the Führer. *(Churchill smiles incredulously).* He wants this peace so much that he might renounce his insistence on your dismissal. After all, anyone can change their mind. Moreover, as an astute politician, he will soon realize that if a man such as you requests an armistice, no one in England will dare support the war party. Especially if I confirm him in his opinion.

Pause. He flashes a victorious smile to a thoughtful Churchill.

That glass of water was very refreshing. Would it be possible to have another ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(In a grouchy tone).* No ! You are a prisoner of war, not a guest.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Surprised).* I'm here of my own free will.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Curtly).* So what !

RUDOLF HESS. Nevertheless, you must admit I am a prisoner of some distinction ! The most important you have ever had and that you will probably ever have.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Fatigued).* A prisoner of war is a man who tries to kill you and fails, and then asks you not to kill him.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Shouting).* And above all not to torture him ... My ankle is killing me and it's ages since your so-called officer went away in search of a doctor.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Of late, we've had a few air raids over London. Finding a doctor is something of a task.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Smugly).* I wasn't really expecting anything better. I knew how you would welcome me. That's why I wanted to address the King in person. He would have been able to see me as a man of peace.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Annoyed).* While you were playing the pacifist in Scotland, your bombs were destroying half of London.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Impassive).* Personally, I disapprove of these bombings.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Mocking).* Then go and declare your opposition to your Chancellor - during a session of Parliament, for example.

RUDOLF HESS. I'm serious ! Those bombs are striking a nation which is not our enemy ... Its only crime, (*pointing at Churchill*) is to be governed by a clique of adventurers who want war at any price..

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Sarcastically*). It's true that Great Britain has invaded so many countries recently ...

RUDOLF HESS. Drop the sarcasm and listen to what I'm saying ! I have come to put an end to the bombings for which you blame me. We are not at war and England is not one of our enemies.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Looking upwards*). I daren't imagine what fate you have in store for them.

RUDOLF HESS. (*Icily*). You should dare and then you might lead the English with more prudence.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Violently*). Prudence ! You speak of prudence ! It is because of our prudence that you reoccupied the Ruhr, invaded Austria, triumphed in Munich, devoured Czechoslovakia ... You have worn our prudence out ... You have gorged yourselves and you have taken all we have. We have none left in stock.

Someone knocks. Churchill shouts angrily.

Yes !

Mac Lean enters.

MAC LEAN. We haven't found a doctor, sir.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Then, I'm sure you are capable of putting on a bandage.

Mac Lean gives a little approving smile which makes Rudolf Hess shudder.

RUDOLF HESS. You're not going to let her see to me ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Smiling*). A lieutenant as nurse ... in the middle of a war. You're not going to be difficult, are you ? (*To Mac Lean*). Lieutenant, see to the gentleman's ankle !

To Hess so that Mac Lean remains unaware of the real subject of their conversation.

You haven't told me where you were born !

RUDOLF HESS. Pardon ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*In a natural tone of voice*). We've been chatting for about half an hour and I still don't know where you were born.

RUDOLF HESS. (*Puzzled*). Alexandria !

WINSTON CHURCHILL. I've been told it's a very beautiful city !

RUDOLF HESS. They weren't lying.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Friendly)*. In Great Britain, only the Prime Minister has the right to lie. Isn't that so, Lieutenant ?

MAC LEAN. Unquestionably, sir !

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(To Mac Lean)*. You will bring me a glass of whisky as soon as you have finished with our prisoner. *(To Hess)*. What are the people of Alexandria like ? The women are very beautiful, they say.

Hess seems more preoccupied with the actions of Mac Lean than with the conversation.

RUDOLF HESS. I don't know. My father was a foreign merchant. We didn't have much contact with the locals.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Did you visit the lighthouse ?

RUDOLF HESS. Pardon ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. In Alexandria ! You must have visited the lighthouse.

RUDOLF HESS. I don't remember ! I was very young.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Have no regrets ! It was destroyed many centuries ago.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Feeling attacked)*. Why are you talking about all this? It has nothing to do with us.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Yes, I can testify to that. You are not responsible ... For once !

RUDOLF HESS. *(Wincing in pain)*. Couldn't you ask your torturer to make the bandage less tight ? She's hurting me.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Perhaps she is hurting you but she is certainly not my torturer. She may become yours one day, but under no circumstances mine.

RUDOLF HESS. *(To Mac Lean, in a tone of haughty anger)*. Miss, why are you pulling so tightly ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Amused)*. Maybe she doesn't like Alexandria ?

RUDOLF HESS. *(Resignedly)*. In any case, I will be able to testify to the way England treats prisoners before the very eyes of her Prime Minister.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Softly)*. Well, as Prime Minister, I intervene as little as possible in military operations. This is, you might say, a very minor operation ... but it's a principle ...

RUDOLF HESS. *(Dramatizing)*. Believe me, if my foot has to be amputated, the whole world will know about it.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(To Hess).* I find you rather feeble for a member of a superior race. *(To Mac Lean).* Lieutenant, with my whisky, bring him a glass of water, will you?

Mac Lean goes out taking with her the tray and the glasses.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Sincere).* Thank you very much.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Feigning compassion).* Thus you won't be able to say that Great Britain mistreats one-legged men !

RUDOLF HESS. *(Bitterly).* You joke at a time when the fate of the world is being decided by our deliberations.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Sincere).* Modesty will be your downfall.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Half to himself).* How can I convince you that Adolf Hitler desires peace ... ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Cutting in).* It's difficult, indeed.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Continuing his sentence)* ... with England.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Thoughtful).* Peace !

RUDOLF HESS. A word you use too rarely Prime Minister.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Difficult to say the same for you. *(Pause).* Do you know, some of our sociologists believe it is possible that the character of a writer can be revealed just by calculating the frequency of the words they use ? Using this method, your chancellor would be the greatest pacifist the world has ever known. *(Heatedly).* Remember after the reoccupation of the Rhineland, *(he cites Hitler):* « All Nazi territorial ambitions have now been satisfied ». On 21 May 1936 « We neither intend nor wish to interfere in the internal affairs of Austria, nor to annex Austria, nor to conclude an Anschluss ». In 1938, after the Anschluss, « We have no evil intentions towards Czechoslovakia ». Then, on the subject of Sudetenland : « This is the last territorial claim I intend to make in Europe » and « I am no longer interested in the Czech State. I can guarantee we won't demand any more from the Czechs ». After the destruction of Czechoslovakia, « Who is willing to die for Danzig ? » ...

Shouting.

Peace !

He seems to be on the point of hitting Hess. He controls himself.

Seven years during which you deluded us with the word "peace" ... My predecessor who made the mistake of believing you will go down in History as the man whose naivety and weakness will have been the cause of the very massacres he was trying to avoid. He even went to Munich to sign your peace. Tell me, Hess ! How many times will they broadcast that picture of him on his return, holding up the document with Hitler's signature, and his words "I believe this is peace

for our time " ? *(Annoyed)* In colleges, to students laughing at his naivety. He who was probably the most humane Prime Minister that Great Britain has ever had.

Someone knocks at the door. He shouts

Come in !

Mac Lean enters with a tray, gives the whisky to Churchill and puts the glass of water on the table.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Regaining control of himself).* Thank you, lieutenant.

She goes out.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Conciliatory).* We have always had great respect for Mr Chamberlain. Why don't we call him ? He might be able to advise you.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Icily).* Because he's dead.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Worried that this death should prove an obstacle to his mission).* In an air raid ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. No !

RUDOLF HESS. *(Relieved).* That's a relief ! Responsibility for his death would have weighed heavily on us.

He breathes in deeply and in a solemn voice.

Please accept my condolences. They come from an enemy, but are sincere.

Churchill remains totally indifferent.

I am extremely saddened by this news. He would have been of great help to his country in the present situation. *(Looking at Churchill).* Destiny is sometimes unjust. *(Pretending to be friendly).* Are you afraid of death, Mr Churchill ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Calmly).* I'm ready to meet my maker. Whether my maker is prepared for the great ordeal of meeting me is another matter.

RUDOLF HESS. But are you afraid ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. No ! *(Pause).* And you ?

RUDOLF HESS. Not one day passes but my stomach cramps remind me that death is there. *(Pause. Then in a professorial tone).* You would speak differently if you had crossed its path.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Without wanting to disappoint you, you're not the only one to have lived... I have also risked my life.

RUDOLF HESS. During the Boer war, I know !

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Notably !

RUDOLF HESS. You were young then ! Now, you are old. And the years left in front of you are, of course, becoming more precious.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. It happened on 13th December 1931. I was crossing Fifth Avenue in New York. Without bearing in mind the opposite rule of the road which prevails in America. (*Interrupting his story*). By the way, if you escape, be careful crossing the road. In Great Britain, we drive on the left. Because I neglected this slight difference, I was knocked over by a car driven by Mario Constatino. Do you know him ?

Naively, Hess shakes his head. Churchill smiles.

An Italian, (*looking at Hess*), an omen. Fortunately, he wasn't driving that fast. I was a wreck for two months, but I pulled through. Do you realize ? (*Ironically*). We might not have had the pleasure of chatting together.

RUDOLF HESS. (*Conciliatory*). I must admit, we would rather have negotiated with Mr Chamberlain. It's a pity we were forced to take him for a ride. Those are, alas, the cruel necessities of diplomacy. Having said that, I don't think he was really fooled. Subconsciously, he knew we meant no harm to his empire as long as he left us a free hand in the east. His death is extremely regrettable. In my presence today, he would have seen proof of his sound intuition. Let's hope we don't disappoint him too much !

WINSTON CHURCHILL. His misfortune is that events have contradicted him, his hopes have been shattered, and he has been betrayed by a monster.

RUDOLF HESS. History will be a better judge.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Gravely*). I doubt it, but it will certainly grant him mitigating circumstances. I'll make sure of that.

He controls his anger with increasing difficulty.

What was this faith that was abused ? What were these wishes in which he was frustrated ? What were these hopes in which he was disappointed ? They were surely among the most noble and benevolent instincts of the human heart – the love of peace, the toil for peace, the strife for peace, the pursuit of peace, even at great peril, and certainly to the utter disdain of popularity or clamour.

RUDOLF HESS. (*Lifting his glass to his mouth*). How did Mr Chamberlain die ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*With a sudden sharp blow, sending Hess's glass to the other side of the room*). Through guilt ! ... Difficult to imagine, isn't it ! To feel guilty because one is responsible for the death of thousands of human beings ! For you, this is impossible to understand : it's in your programme. That's why you were elected. (*Pause*). Do you know what can take place in the mind of a humanist

who believes he is responsible for such a massacre ? A man whose all-pervading hope is to go down in History as the great Peacemaker and who discovers a force with which he cannot cope. He meets the demon-genius sprung from the abyss of poverty, inflamed by defeat, devoured by hatred and revenge, and convulsed by his design to make the Nazis masters of Europe and then the world. Do you know what he told me, one day, about your Hitler ? "Here is a man who can be relied upon when he has given his word ".

RUDOLF HESS. (*In a state of shock after Churchill's violent outburst*). I'm sure he would have taken my offer of peace into consideration.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Him being an expert ! He examined so many.

RUDOLF HESS. (*In an effort to calm the situation*). Perhaps he would have realized that this one was different ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Exploding*). In what way ?

RUDOLF HESS. (*Shouting*). In that we are the victors and that the second-in-command of the Reich is putting himself at your mercy to propose it to you in person.

Hess looks at Churchill who doesn't react. Then, in extreme anger.

Mein Gott ! We could demand anything in exchange for an armistice. (*Pause. Calming down*). We could even pay you back in your own coin : claim back what France and England took at the end of the last war. But no ! You took our colonies, we are leaving you yours. You subdued part of our territory, we are leaving you your island in its entirety. You claimed war damages, we have no need for your money. You demilitarized us, we ask you nothing. Any single one of these demands would have justified the sacrifices which you are imposing on your population. But we are prepared to leave England and its territories as they were before the war. Obsessed by your fanaticism, you haven't even asked yourself why I came, why the number 2 of the Nazi regime has put himself under your axe to offer you this peace. (*Calmly*) Have you ever visited a site after an air raid ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Yes !

RUDOLF HESS. Have you seen the horrendous sight, Prime Minister ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. ...

RUDOLF HESS. (*Calmly*). Have you seen those human remains scattered amongst the stones ? Have you seen that couple who were united for 30 years and which a single bomb has just separated for ever. Have you seen, Prime Minister, that young soldier who will soon learn that not even a photo of his fiancée is left ? Have you seen, Prime Minister, that grandmother who doesn't know whether to cry over the bloodsplattered pushchair or for her daughter who has just

died in her arms ? Have you seen, Prime Minister, that breast of a half-naked woman whose face lies three metres away ? Have you seen, Prime Minister, that child's hand alone on a wall ? Prime Minister, have you looked at the atrocities we are inflicting on you simply because we want you to leave us (*screaming*) in peace ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Shaken*). Leave you in peace !

RUDOLF HESS. That's all we ask of you. (*Pause*). Imagine yourself in my situation and England in a similar military position to ours. Imagine, Prime Minister, your troops have reached the Rhine, ours have abandoned all their equipment in Poland. Italy is neutral and your planes are bombing Berlin day and night. Your intelligence services are positive. Cross the Rhine and you will outnumber the enemy ten to one. Would you doubt victory, Prime Minister ? Honestly?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Honestly ? (*Pause. In a defeated attitude*). No !

RUDOLF HESS. I think we're beginning to understand each other ! You like History, I believe ? Can you name one country which, in a military situation as favourable as ours, has made an offer of peace ? Name just one !

Churchill remains silent.

If you know one, tell me !

WINSTON CHURCHILL. There isn't one. (*Suspiciously*). That's precisely the point.

RUDOLF HESS. (*Smiling, sensing victory*). Of course, I must admit, we're not angels. But in our present position we have no need for ruse. What's more, where is the ruse ? I am here at your mercy ! (*Pause*). Frankly, am I a minor figure in the Nazi regime ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. No.

RUDOLF HESS. And someone as important as myself, certain of victory, puts himself at risk in order to offer you peace. Doesn't that seem strange to you ?

Churchill remains silent.

Didn't my coming surprise you ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Yes.

RUDOLF HESS. In politics, the heart has no place. We duped Chamberlain because he followed his heart which was pacifist and not his head. That's why students will laugh at him. Your heart pushes you to war, Prime Minister. You are not only a warmonger but also a bad loser. Listen to reason ! We are offering you peace because we have no wish to go to war with you. If you follow your fighting instinct, London will be destroyed, the English people will be reduced to slavery and the British Empire will become a colony ruled by a

Government under our orders. Later, when students learn of the existence of my peace offer, you will be a laughing stock.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Finishing Hess' thoughts*). ... and they will admire the mercy of your benevolent leader !

RUDOLF HESS. (*Pleased with this complicity*). I understand that such an idea wounds your pride. But what does this wound represent compared with thousands of lives sacrificed, hundreds of towns destroyed and, who knows, maybe a whole nation wiped off the map ! (*Pause*). It won't be me who decides ... but, believe me, the question will come up. And our Führer is not softhearted, you know that as well as I do. (*Pause*). Civilizations are mortal, Mr Churchill. After the Pharaohs of Egypt, the Roman Empire, the Inca civilization, the Austro-Hungarian Empire... Who knows ? The last hour has perhaps come for the British Empire, and all due to the pride of her Prime Minister.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Obviously shaken*). So, you want peace ?

RUDOLF HESS. (*Drily*). I have risked my life to come and offer it to you.

Winston Churchill remains silent for a moment. He looks at Hess who hasn't moved. Then slowly...

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Well, all right, I accept ! (*40 seconds of silence and it seems he's going to give in*). The Nazis will abandon all occupied territories including Germany, liberate opponents, give the Jews back their property and their rights, organize free elections and then I will be delighted to negotiate a peace treaty with a power reinforced by its victory at the elections.

RUDOLF HESS. (*Annoyed*). I came to prevent English blood being spilt ... but it doesn't seem to bother you as much as it does me.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*With restrained anger*). You are right to be worried about British blood ... It will choke you.

He opens the door and shouts.

Lieutenant, (*then more quietly*), bring me a glass of water and a whisky !

RUDOLF HESS. Will you let me drink it this time ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. I grant you, I have my whims ... but deep down, I'm a decent chap.

Mac Lean enters and hands the whisky to Churchill.

RUDOLF HESS. (*Deliberately in front of Mac Lean so that she hears*). Prime Minister : accept my offer of peace.

Mac Lean, surprised, slams down the glass of water on the table. Then, a little worried at her action, she looks at Churchill.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(To Mac Lean, reassuringly).* Don't worry, I understand you. Earlier on, I couldn't resist doing the same.

He smiles and motions her to go out. She goes out.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Questioning Churchill).* Pardon ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. I was talking to the lieutenant. She felt like throwing the water in your face.

RUDOLF HESS. ...

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Your peace offer doesn't seem to impress her.

RUDOLF HESS. Ask her parents what they think.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Sadly).* They were killed during your first night raid ! She was the one who had to identify the bodies. They were clasped in each other's arms.

He thinks for a few seconds.

Rest assured, you can drink your water in all peace of mind. Cyanide poisoning isn't one of the traditions at the Tower of London. And lieutenant Mac Lean is almost as respectful of traditions as her King.

RUDOLF HESS. In that case, let's drink to traditions !

Rudolf Hess lifts his glass and puts it down without having drunk anything.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Staring blankly).* Here, it's the axe ! *(Finishing off his whisky in a gulp).* What's more, I'm sure she has already chosen one, should I abandon you in her hands.

RUDOLF HESS. My death would be difficult to keep quiet.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. I am ready to admit that, as far as murders and disappearances are concerned, we lack your expertise. *(Threateningly).* Nevertheless, it would be unreasonable to consider us as imbeciles. The discretion of your arrival would make it easy to organize your disappearance just as discreetly. You could well have decided to commit suicide whilst accomplishing a valiant mission.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Worried).* Do you think the Nazi authorities would believe such a story easily ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Even more so, because your death would be convenient for them. However, rest assured, that sort of deception is not part of British tradition either. You probably don't realize but I am a free and just man and as long as I am alive, you have nothing of the sort to fear. I will protect you.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Simulating amusement).* Aren't you mixing things up ? Indeed, I am your prisoner and you can do what you please with me. However, our position fails to reflect that of our respective nations. England is as alone as I am at this very moment.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. I'm sure you'll manage to find us some allies in the not too distant future.

Someone knocks.

Come in !

Mac Lean hands a message to Winston Churchill who reads it and then motions her to leave.

Do the names Leitgen and Pietsch mean anything to you ?

RUDOLF HESS. They are the two officers I entrusted with the mission of handing to the Führer a letter explaining my intentions.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Hadn't he been previously informed ?

RUDOLF HESS. In his heart of hearts, I know he agrees with me.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Staring at Hess*). From his heart of hearts, he has sent your two adjutants to a concentration camp. According to our secret services, this has staggered everyone and, from the look on your face, I can see it's true.

Pause. Churchill puts the document away.

By chance, did you let a few generals such as Rommel or Guderian into the secret?

RUDOLF HESS. (*Naively after a few seconds of reflection*). No !

WINSTON CHURCHILL. What a pity ! We would have been rid of them.

RUDOLF HESS. Leitgen and Pietsch, two martyrs for peace or two heroes ... It's up to you.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. You just can't imagine how preoccupied I am about what happens to your two SS.

RUDOLF HESS. (*Upset by the news from Germany*). Not only them ... The destiny of the world depends on our discussion.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Sure of himself*). We're beginning to speak the same language ! With a slight difference : the destiny of the world does not depend on our discussion but on my decision.

RUDOLF HESS. (*Conciliatory*). Let's say it depends on my capacity to convince you to stop fighting.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. What a vast undertaking for one man !

RUDOLF HESS. England will not lose face. (*Looking hard at Churchill*). We renounce all colonial claims. In exchange, you leave us a free hand on the continent.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Free ! What a word for you to use !

RUDOLF HESS. Would you prefer to see England wiped off the map ?

The fate of his two adjutants awakens his fanaticism. From furious he becomes sadistic.

I warn you, such a disappearance will be slow, very slow. I wish you a long life, in your Canadian retreat, to observe this in detail. Our bombings were but a starter. Next, we will invade you. If we decide to destroy you, which is very likely, we will starve you. Stalin did it in Ukraine, we can do it on an island. Do I need to remind you of our sense of organization ? Prime Minister, do you realize what the consequences of a famine are on the soul of a population ? *(Icily)*. Where will your institutions be when your privileged classes leave for the USA, fleeing a reality too hard to bear ? Where will your principles be when epidemics devour the rounded bellies of your children dying of hunger ? Where will your freedom be when a mother kills a neighbour's child in order to feed her own ? These horrors, you will see them but you will only see them from a distance, as you will already be in Canada ! *(Pause. Nearly in despair)*. I was expecting anything but such a surrealistic discussion. If future generations could see us, they wouldn't believe their eyes. A victor who attempts to save the vanquished against their will.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Ironic)*. And who fails !

RUDOLF HESS. *(In a sudden outburst)*. And you're proud of this ! *(Pause. Scornful)*. You make me think of a gladiator on his knees trying to prevent the emperor from giving the necessary sign to save his life. *(He gives the thumb up sign)*. You must admit, it is to our credit that we persist in wanting to save you.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Who do you mean by "we" ? As far as I know, you have no say in anything. And considering the fate of your two adjutants, your actions don't seem that popular either.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Very calmly to catch Churchill's attention)*. Just one letter...

Staking his chances.

Just a letter offering us freedom in Europe in exchange for the entire British Empire ... Starting with expressions of regret for the misunderstanding between our two countries and finishing with a few words on the mutual admiration which unites our two nations. Just a letter, peace will not cost you very much. Look, I've even prepared a draft for you.

He hands over a letter to Churchill.

Believe me, when it comes to searches, you lack experience. But you will learn..

A siren sounds.

What's that ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. An air raid ! The sort of thing we experience every night. You will now see what life is like on the other side.

Mac Lean enters without knocking, closes the curtains, lights the candles and switches off the light..

Thank you lieutenant !

Pause. Mac Lean stands to attention near the door and awaits orders.

(To Mac Lean). Go down to the shelter. Great Britain still needs your services.

She hesitates. Churchill speaks to her firmly.

It's an order, lieutenant !

She goes out reluctantly.

RUDOLF HESS. What about us ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Flegmatic).* Usually, they spare the Tower of London. We should survive.

RUDOLF HESS. If we are not in danger, why did you tell the girl to go down ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. She is young and pretty, I'd feel bad if something happened to her. Rest assured, your friends don't know you're here. We should be spared.

Hess realizes that this represents a challenge and tries to appear stoical. Churchill begins to read the letter as bombs explode around them.

Dear Führer, the English government has wrongly persisted in defending a lost cause. I have therefore decided to put an end to the fight ...

RUDOLF HESS. *(Interrupting him).* Of course, a few things need to be changed. I was going to submit it to His Majesty.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Continuing to read).* ... so that our two nations can live in peace and renew the friendly relations to which they have always been destined and which a policy of adventurism has shattered. Of course, knowing that you yourself are particularly concerned about the integrity of the territory in your care, I am convinced that you will understand that keeping my Empire, in its entirety, is dear to my heart. In exchange, we promise never to oppose Nazi interests nor the accomplishment of your mission for which we wish you, dear Führer, a prompt success.

RUDOLF HESS. If you want, we can miss out that last point.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. May we at last understand each other and, who knows, my dear Führer, one day work together... *(Stops reading).* You really want me to write that ?

RUDOLF HESS. (*Thinking that Churchill's question refers to the title Führer*). If you call him Mr Chancellor, he might interpret it as an allusion to the ephemeral side of his power. He would hate that.

A bomb explodes in the distance.

A politician of your experience must be able to make concessions from time to time. Call him "Führer", he's particularly fond of the title. (*Pause*). Write this letter and I'll get him to accept. In fact, just between us, it won't be necessary ... Just reading your proposition, he'll dance with joy.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Ironic*). What a charming spectacle that would be ! (*Pause. Serious*). Do you intend to hand it to him personally ?

RUDOLF HESS. Yes !

WINSTON CHURCHILL. How ?

RUDOLF HESS. (*Jubilant at the idea of his proposed exploit*). By spitfire ! It can't be more difficult to pilot than a Messerschmitt. I am an excellent pilot. Coming here, I had to take off with split second timing and cross the North Sea skimming the surface. Well, not only did I succeed, but I also managed to stay below an altitude of 200 metres and I had no visibility. The return flight will be easier, I'll be able to announce my arrival. And I won't have to use a parachute as I'll be landing on friendly territory. (*Trying to be funny*). You can hurt yourself doing that !

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Sarcastically*). You're sure you won't get lost ?

RUDOLF HESS. The distance will be shorter. I just have to cross the Channel. Do I need to remind you that we occupy Normandy : cradle of your civilization ? Wasn't it the Normans who invaded you ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. That's just a bad memory. But we will get our revenge. (*To himself*). I will remember Normandy.

RUDOLF HESS. (*Ignoring Churchill's words*). Do you know how I managed to come over ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Irritated*). By flying at a low altitude, you've just told me !

RUDOLF HESS. (*Vainly*). Before that, I had to find a plane that could reach Scotland.

Churchill looks interested, making Hess jubilant.

I went to Augsburg where the Messerschmitt factories are situated. I asked Messerschmitt in person to let me try out his latest fighter. To start off with, he refused ... I had to push a little. Finally, he lent me a Messerschmitt 110. The machine wasn't bad, but all the same I found a few defects and I instructed the engineers to deal with them. I hope these instructions will be followed ...

The siren sounds.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. It wasn't very serious.

RUDOLF HESS. ... In the end, I made a bet with Messerschmitt that if he put extra supply tanks on the wings and installed a long-range radio, the aircraft would lose its manoeuvrability. You know how susceptible engineers can be. The next day, he had prepared the plane for me. You must admit, I played a good joke on him.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Indeed, he must be splitting his sides now ! Especially if he has been informed of the fate of the two officers who did but convey the message. The accomplice who made the journey possible by modifying the plane must be feeling his heart throb ! *(Pause. Pensive).* If your exploit could rid us of Messerschmitt ...

Mac Lean comes back, switches the light back on, tidies the room and puts new candles in the candlesticks.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. What is the situation, lieutenant ?

MAC LEAN. There has been an air strike on Manchester. They reckon that a plane got lost on its return flight and dropped its bombs to lighten itself, probably without realizing that it was over London.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. And nearly killing the Führer's oldest companion.

Mac Lean smiles.

Lieutenant, you will consider our non-use of the shelter as a military secret. I hate fuss. You may leave.

MAC LEAN. Yes, sir !

She goes out.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Very surprised).* Propaganda isn't your strong point !

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Our strong point is that it's not necessary.

RUDOLF HESS. I will of course respect your discretion.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. I am much obliged.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Changing the subject).* Write this letter and all my associates will become heroes.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. The letter is no problem ! However, do you realize how much a spitfire costs the British taxpayer ? These days, such a machine is priceless.

RUDOLF HESS. I'll send it back to you.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(With a ghost of a smile).* Yes, but in what condition !

RUDOLF HESS. *(Thinking that Churchill wants to leave him out of his plans).* Oh, no ! You're not going to do that to me. Let's be clear

about this : this peace is my work, it's mine. I have sacrificed my family, my reputation, my career for it ... I have even risked my life. It's for me to hand over this letter and no one else..

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(With a big smile).* It is indeed hard to be number 2 to Adolf Hitler.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Getting angrier and angrier).* Attend to your king, your press and the palavers between fitted coats and top hats and let me attend to the Führer !

A scream of terror and crying are heard coming from the street.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Looking out of the window).* I'll leave him to you with pleasure. *(Pause).* The very idea that one of the most civilised nations in Europe could blindly obey a degenerate, incapable of dressing himself properly makes me optimistic. In the long term, I admit ... but optimistic.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Getting up angrily).* Don't change the subject ... I want your word, as a gentleman, that the honour of being the messenger of peace will fall to no one but me. Such renown is due to me as a right. I have risked my life for it.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Calm down ! Who else could act as go-between ?

RUDOLF HESS. I don't know ? The Americans ? The ambassador loves showing off.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Calmly).* An ex-colony, surely you're not serious !

RUDOLF HESS. All the more so because Mr Joseph Kennedy, the ambassador of the United States, has affirmed that you are past your prime.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Turning round and putting his hands on his waistcoat).* You know, the management of a gigantic ambition, a huge family, an intense sexual life and dubious relationships, does not leave Mr Kennedy much time to keep abreast of the situation.

RUDOLF HESS. Switzerland ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Making a quick retort).* Tongues would wag.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Rapidly).* Japan ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Quickly).* We're not on speaking terms.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Without waiting).* The Vatican ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Henry VIII would turn in his grave.

Rudolf Hess is about to speak. Churchill interrupts good-naturedly.

You're not going to cite all the countries you haven't invaded yet. I know they are less and less numerous, but even so.

RUDOLF HESS. Certain individuals could offer their services.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Amused)*. For example ?

RUDOLF HESS. I don't know ... *(Pause)*. Artists, singers, actors *(scornfully)* from Hollywood...

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Why not Coco Chanel while you're at it ? *(Pause. Sincere)*. Don't worry, if I had intended to commit such a folly, I would have chosen you. For a folly, you have the ideal profile.

RUDOLF HESS. *(In a scandalised tone)*. Here I am treated as a madman by someone who is totally irresponsible !

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Charming)*. Perhaps, it is better to be irresponsible and right than to be responsible and wrong.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Same tone as Churchill)*. History will judge.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Same tone)*. I do not fear its verdict.

Someone knocks.

Come in !

Mac Lean enters with a dispatch.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Thank you, lieutenant ! *(Benevolently)*. Another round, please.

Mac Lean picks up the tray and glasses and goes out.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Looking at Mac Lean leaving the room)*. If you could see our youth, you would realize that you didn't have the slightest chance.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. One day, at Oxford University, during a conference, a student asked me if I considered Germany to be responsible for the last war. I answered in the affirmative. One young man got up and said that after such an insult to his country he could stay no longer. He stalked out amid applause.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Wondering what point Churchill is trying to make)*. That boy demonstrated an excellent spirit of patriotism. I'm sure he's one of our best soldiers now.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Two years later, he had to emigrate. He was found to have a Jewish grandfather. That was the end of his career as a patriot. In part that is, because he has just joined the R.A.F.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Stressing his words)*. Whether you like it or not, my mission will succeed. I am certain.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(In an affirmative tone)*. That's what your astrologer told you, isn't it ?

RUDOLF HESS. *(Surprised)*. What a stupid thing to say !

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Amused)*. I'm not the only one. Nazi party press communiqué : *(reading)* "... Having suffered from a serious and

painful illness for many years, Hess has been consulting healers, astrologers and other charlatans more and more. It has to be determined in what measure these individuals have contributed towards the strange behaviour that has led him to such an act". On reading that, *(sarcastically)* even your baker will be scared stiff.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Banging his fist on the table).* The bastards ! *(Clenching his fists).* They all consult clairvoyants in secret. *(Pause).* Now, they're using it against me.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Do you still want to go back ?

RUDOLF HESS. *(Bursting into a nervous laugh).* With your letter ! And I will present my astrologer from Munich who will join me in my triumph.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Calmly).* If she is still alive.

RUDOLF HESS. *(To himself).* She assured me that if I left on 10 May, my life would not be in danger.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. And I thought you wanted to celebrate the first anniversary of my becoming Prime Minister.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Sarcastically).* No, the bombers did that.

Pause. Churchill looks as if he is going to lose his temper. Someone knocks.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Yes !

Churchill goes to a corner, with his back to the stage. Mac Lean comes in, hands a glass of whisky to Churchill, and puts the glass for Hess on the table. She goes out.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. You sound bitter, Hess. Is it because an entire nation is laughing at you or because your associates are peeing in their pants ?

RUDOLF HESS. *(Getting more and more worked up).* I have risked everything for this peace ! Once I'd landed in Scotland, I thought the hardest part was over. How could I have foreseen this ? Here you are, sipping your whisky while I'm offering you an unhoped-for opportunity to come through unscathed. It is in the interest of our two nations and what's more, of our ambitions. *(Pause. Then calmly).* Why don't you accept a meeting between us both and the King ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Well, talking about the King, now that you have found your Kaiser again, do you intend to give power back to him ?

RUDOLF HESS. *(Surprised at the question. Pause. Calmly).* In his Dutch retreat, he can savour our victory.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Thoughtful).* The poor Dutch ! What a reward for their hospitality.

Mac Lean knocks and comes in without waiting for a reply. She hands a file to Churchill who consults it.

Thank you, lieutenant ! *(Pause)*. Have you contacted MI6 ?

MAC LEAN. Yes, sir !

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Call them back and insist ! As soon as you receive the file, bring it to me immediately.

MAC LEAN. Right, sir !

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Mac Lean ! *(Pause)*. Thank you !

She goes out. Pause. Churchill shows Hess a file with his name (Hess) on it.

Look ! The Foreign Office accords you all the recognition due to your rank. *(Pause)*. Right ! We can at last get down to business. *(Coldly)*. When is your pacifist going to attack Russia ?

RUDOLF HESS. *(Surprised)*. You're joking !

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Firmly)*. When ?

RUDOLF HESS. *(Exasperated)*. You dare to question me ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Firmly)*. Affirmative ! *(Pause)*. So, when ?

RUDOLF HESS. *(Calming down)*. Who told you that he was going to attack ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. A book called "Mein Kampf". You should have a look at it. I admit, it's badly written. But the information it contains is extremely clear.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Nostalgically)*. It was I who typed it in a prison where we were sharing the same cell. What a long way we've come since then ! At that time, there was only him and me.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. You really were the number 2.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Cut to the quick)*. I still am !

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Showing him the file)*. No, to my great surprise for that matter, according to this file, you are only number 3. Having said that, I admit it's not up to date.

Hess smiles. Churchill is more explicit.

Today, for the Nazi regime, you no longer exist.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Snobbing him)*. Are there any streets named after you, Mr Churchill ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. I'm not dead yet.

RUDOLF HESS. *(Firmly)*. Nor am I ! *(Vainly)*. However, there are dozens of roads named after me. Nearly every town has paid homage to me in this way. Including a hospital.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Indifferent to Hess*). Believe me, as soon as we hear that they've renamed it, you will be the first to know.. (*Pause. In a military tone*). So, when ?

RUDOLF HESS. Ask the number 2 !

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Remaining firm*). A man of your importance should know.

RUDOLF HESS. (*Solemnly*). I was wounded twice during the Great War, so you can torture me. Even if I knew, I wouldn't say anything.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Very calmly. Looking hard and long at Hess*). It doesn't matter ! It will be soon.

RUDOLF HESS. (*Sitting down again*). You are indulging in wishful thinking, Prime Minister.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. A fortune-teller told dear Adolf that he wouldn't live to a ripe old age. So, he's afraid he won't see his Grand Project accomplished. Although his geography is poor, he is aware that Russia is slightly bigger than Belgium. So, time's running out (*Pause*). Caesar demonstrated how important it is to protect one's rear and Napoleon, the danger of fighting on two fronts at the same time. Now, you have just proposed an armistice to me. (*Ironically*). You'll tell me that your leader loves peace, but seeing that he hates excess ...

Becoming serious again, he shows the letter which Hess has written.

I conclude that once he has this letter in his hands, he will attack Russia. (*Pause*). Tell me Hess, if I don't sign, how long will he resist this temptation ? You know him well. What is your opinion ?

RUDOLF HESS. (*Laughing*). What a scenario ! You've missed your vocation as a scriptwriter. (*Pulling himself together*). Well, let's imagine the scene as we have nothing better to do ! (*In a clear voice*). Supposing it's true ! We attack the USSR The world will then be able to admire Winston Churchill, apostle of freedom and free enterprise, going on a crusade to defend communism. He who said "of all tyrannies in history, the Bolshevik tyranny is the worst, the most destructive and the most degrading".

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Apologetically*). But since then, you've broken their record.

RUDOLF HESS. But, now to take their side !

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Such is life ! Allies are like mothers-in-law, you don't choose them. We have to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime. We have no choice.

RUDOLF HESS. My knowledge of your institutions is perhaps limited, but when it comes down to power politics, my dear Duke, you're

hopeless. *(Pause)*. OK. Let's imagine that we do attack the USSR How lucky she is to be able to count on you ! Nearly as lucky as Poland, France, Norway ... All those countries you supported so efficiently that even Alexander the Great would pale with jealousy. Tell me, Prime Minister, what will you do to help your "mother-in-law" ? Alright, you will protest firmly, as usual. Don't deny yourself that pleasure. Like every good democracy, protesting is something you do very well. And after that ? You can't declare war on us – it's already done. *(Ironically)*. A declaration of war that really helped Poland. Without it, her army wouldn't have held out two weeks, but only one. However, that's in the past !

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Listening attentively)*. Not quite !

RUDOLF HESS. Leaving the liberation of Poland aside, if we attack the USSR and Stalin asks you for help, what will you say ? "Hold out Joseph, we're behind you !" *(Pause)*. Why don't you arrange for a Changing of the Guard in front of the Soviet Embassy ? What a splendid tourist attraction ! You have a lot of refugees to entertain at the moment.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. War on the eastern front will put an end to your bombings.

RUDOLF HESS. You will gain a little time, I agree. You'll have ringside seats to witness the end of Communism and – to everyone's surprise – you will be showing immense regret. Poor fool, look where your obstinacy is leading you. Communism enters the war and you fear its defeat. It yields and you fret. It disappears and you are on the edge of despair. Imagine yourself addressing the Conservative Party *(Imitating him)* "Gentlemen, I have some very painful news to announce : communism is dead". What a paradox ! And yet, you will be right to despair because when it has conquered its necessary living space, the Nazi power is likely to make you pay a high price for your pride. On the cinema news, when you see the Führer visiting Moscow as he visited Paris, the time will have come for you to start trembling. What will you say then to the people who ask you about my peace offer ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Phlegmatically)*. That Napoleon also visited Moscow and they must not give up hope. *(Pause)*. Hitler knows he will have to break us in this island or lose the war. If we can stand up to him, all Europe may be free again and the world will escape the dark destiny you reserve for it. Besides, your presence here proves that the possibility of your defeat has occurred to you.

RUDOLF HESS. Would it be in your interest ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Without wishing to disappoint you, the prospect of putting you to rout does not displease me.

RUDOLF HESS. If we are to lose, the Soviet military power will have to surpass ours.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Icily*). Your perspicacity amazes me. The Nazi regime has lost a great strategist.

RUDOLF HESS. For 20 years, we have been fighting a war to the death against the Communists. There will be no offer of peace and nobody will be spared. The fighting will end with the disappearance of one of the two ideologies. If he wishes to defeat us, Stalin will have to take Berlin. No one has managed that since 1808.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Comforted by his statement*). For London, you have to go back to 1066.

RUDOLF HESS. (*Scornfully*). Maybe, but you must admit that the fall of Berlin is highly improbable !

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Wistfully*). But nonetheless pleasant to imagine !

RUDOLF HESS. Have you ever taken an interest in Communist prose ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Just a minimum !

RUDOLF HESS. Do you think they will be satisfied with Berlin ? How will you stop them ? What about the English Communists that you will have congratulated following the victories of their Soviet brother. Do you think you'll be able to get rid of them as easily as that poor Mosley who you're keeping in prison ? His only crime being that he espoused our ideas. From the depths of his prison cell, he calls for liberty in the name of your principles.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. In order to suppress it in the name of yours !

RUDOLF HESS. Admit that this is a blow to your habeas corpus.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Do you think you are well placed to speak of habeas corpus ?

RUDOLF HESS. (*In a neutral tone*). If as a prisoner I can make no mention of it, when will I be able to ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Firmly*). The day that those you imprison have the possibility to do so.

RUDOLF HESS. (*Putting emotion into his narrative, at times ironic, at times fanatic*). The tragedy for England is to have put at its helm a man of the 19th century incapable of understanding the direction of our time. In your opinion, what will the Communists do with your laudable principles once they have arrived in London ? You won't even have time to realize what's happening ! Machine-gunned, like the Tsar ... If you're lucky that is, for they might also torture you until you admit

your betrayal. You will see your friends give in to blackmail and testify against you. Then, it will be the turn of your daughter, then your wife and finally the judge (*acting the role*) "Comrade Churchill, the party political bureau considers you as an enemy of the working class and condemns you to death". (*Pause, gently*). Once tied to the execution post, perhaps you will think of that dear Hess who came over in a small plane to propose peace to you.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Phlegmatically*). I have no idea when or where I will draw my last breath, but it would surprise me very much if my last thoughts were of you. (*Very seriously*). Well ! Now we know you will attack Russia, we just need to know when.

RUDOLF HESS. (*Rapidly*). I don't know ! The quicker the better. (*Pause. Then getting more and more excited*). We have something in common – you, the jailer and I, the prisoner – we're both waiting impatiently for this invasion. You to gain time and thus to believe in your fantasy world a little longer and me, because I will have the pleasure, from my prison cell, of witnessing your humiliation. You refuse to face up to reality : the 20th century sees the world divided by the confrontation of two destinies : Communism and us. Rest assured, the moment of the final confrontation will come sooner or later. It will be the moment of truth.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Looking heavenwards*). Poor truth ! To be surrounded by such great liars.

RUDOLF HESS. In this struggle between titans, your old decadent democracies have no place. They will look on as spectators until the vanquisher finishes them off. Out of the goodness of our hearts, today (*with stress*) and only today, we offer to spare England. You have in front of you the only chance to escape this destruction which, whoever the vanquisher is, will be your lot.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. To sum up, if the Communists win, they destroy us. If you win, you spare us.

RUDOLF HESS. I admire your sense of concision ! (*Pause. Then in a paternalistic tone*). Don't worry, our chances of success are better than those of the Communists.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Little by little, we'll get used to the idea of your victory and we'll end up wanting it. We will become de facto allies and it will be the beginning of collaboration..

RUDOLF HESS. It's possible. You've read "Mein Kampf", and you know that the Führer considers England and Italy as the only two possible allies ... Having said that, we haven't needed collaborators to win up to now.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Taking his time*). That will come with time !

RUDOLF HESS. Isn't it in England's interest to support the strongest ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Convinced, lyrical and happy to express his inner thoughts*). For 400 years, the foreign policy of Great Britain has been to oppose the strongest, most aggressive, most dominating power on the Continent in order to prevent small nations falling into the hands of such a power. During these four centuries, amid so many changes of names and facts, of circumstances and conditions, British policy has remained consistent. Moreover, on all occasions, Britain has taken the more difficult course. Faced by Philip II of Spain, against Louis XIV, against Napoleon, against William II of Germany, it would have been easier and must have been very tempting to join with the stronger and share the fruits of his conquest. However, we always took the harder course, joined with the less strong powers, made a combination among them, and thus defeated and frustrated the continental military tyrant, whoever he was, whatever nation he led. This is the wonderful unconscious tradition of British foreign policy.

RUDOLF HESS. (*Clapping contemptuously*). Bravo ! What a speech ! You should go into politics. (*Stopping abruptly, then staring at him*). Isn't Your Excellency confusing unconscious tradition and reckless instinct ? Where are those small nations which you support ? Among the examples you have just given to me, you have never vanquished alone. Each time you had allies, smaller than you, but they were there. Where are they today ? You can make History say what you want. However, to refuse peace in your situation is sheer fanaticism.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. I agree.

RUDOLF HESS. Why refuse ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Because I am a fanatic, probably more than you are. In your struggle against the Communists, you bury democracy rather hastily. I think, personally, that it hasn't said its last word. Granted, we're off to a bad start, but we aren't even halfway through the century yet and in a conflict which opposes racial determinism, class determinism and individual freedom, no combatant has definitively lost.

RUDOLF HESS. (*Hitting the table with his fist*). Stop persisting in your obstinacy ! You are defeated and you know it.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. You forget that a fanatic never admits defeat. That's how we recognize him.

RUDOLF HESS. (*Angrily*). A fanatic must be ready to die for his cause ! No one yet has been ready to die for Parliamentarianism.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Speaking in short bursts. Imposing silence*). Yes, they have ! Me ! Today !

RUDOLF HESS. (*Incredulously*). Really?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Firmly*). Really !

He calms down, then in a sincere tone of voice, expresses his inner thoughts.

Because after 3000 years of searching, man has never found a better system to coexist. You're right, Hess, our century is going through a mortal combat, but there are three combatants. I have no idea who will win, but I can assure you that I personally refuse to live anywhere other than under the shelter of a Parliament.

RUDOLF HESS. (*In a burst*). Parliamentarianism !

WINSTON CHURCHILL. The worst form of Government, barring all others. (*Pause*). Have you ever heard of the Horaces and the Curiaces ? Three brothers whose fighting was to determine the result of a war. The destiny of Rome was in the hands of the three Horaces, that of Albe was in the hands of the three Curiaces. Very quickly, two Horaces are killed and the fate of Rome vacillates. The third brother flees. Sure of victory, the three Curiaces chase after him, separate, and the surviving Horace kills them (*articulating each syllable*) one by one.

RUDOLF HESS. (*Falsely*). How fascinating !

WINSTON CHURCHILL. I learnt three lessons. First of all, never to attack two enemies at the same time. That's why we didn't move when the USSR, in her turn, invaded Poland. Next, never to admit defeat and on this point, you can count on us. Lastly, the more confident your enemy is, the greater your chances of victory are. You see, Hess, what makes me optimistic is your certainty of winning. You, with your so-called racial superiority, who will consider the slightest strategic retreat as an unacceptable humiliation. And the Communists, so sure of triumph, that their ideas of world domination have become for them an exact science. The only truth spoken by Lenin is that facts are stubborn. He will be proved right.

(Pause. Then, as if to persuade himself). My main hope lies there, Hess – your certainty. It will be your downfall.

RUDOLF HESS. Poor fool, you delude yourself with fine words.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Getting angry*). Never, never believe any war will be smooth and easy ! Never consider yourself as an easy vanquisher ! Always remember, however sure you are that you can easily win, that there would not be a war if the other man did not think he also had a chance.

RUDOLF HESS. The Horaces and Curiaces as advisers to the Prime Minister of the British Empire. I who thought you were a dunce at school !

WINSTON CHURCHILL. (*Getting hold of himself*). That's all I can remember.

RUDOLF HESS. Schoolboy memories responsible for the greatest political error in the history of England. You fill me with wonder. After a year of defeats, you govern an isolated and devastated country and you philosophize as if you were at an old boys reunion. *(Pause. Then, condescendingly)*. But apart from Roman mythology, what else can you count on ?

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(In a natural tone)*. On ourselves ! *(Pause)*. The Roman example is a modal of courage and we shall follow it. We shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender and even if, which I do not for a moment believe, this island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British fleet, would carry on the struggle until, in God's good time, the New World, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old.

RUDOLF HESS. Don't expect anything from the Americans. They only like winners.

Winston Churchill calms down.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. Are you aware of what happened in Norway ?

RUDOLF HESS. *(Proudly)*. Sufficiently aware to know that the defeat was blamed on Chamberlain although you were wholly responsible.

WINSTON CHURCHILL. *(Pauses and smiles)*. Do you remember the fort of Oscarsborg ?

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Books of B. FRIPIAT

Le Juge et le Ministre suivi des **Killers** (théâtre). Paris 2005. Éditions GUNTEN.

Les Killers « *Je ne connais rien de plus jubilatoire que d'interpréter un personnage qui assouvit une légitime vengeance. Il suffit de voir le nombre de vedettes qui ont joué le Comte de Monte-Cristo. Malheureusement, de tels rôles au féminin sont rares. Il faut dire que la vengeance nécessite une vive intelligence et que la plupart des auteurs sont des hommes... Lorsque s'est présentée l'occasion de jouer Sylvie qui, pendant plus d'une heure, se venge patiemment d'un mufle qui s'est cru killer, je ne l'ai pas laissée passer. On devrait conseiller la lecture de cette pièce à toute femme victime d'une goujaterie.* » (Nadia Moreau, Comédienne)

Le Juge et le Ministre « *Deux êtres forts, durs, insensibles (en tout cas en apparence) qui s'affrontent droit dans les yeux est toujours un spectacle original. En jouant ce rôle du Juge, je me remémore les westerns de Sergio Leone qui ont bercé mon enfance. Avec un plaisir extrême, j'y retrouve la même force, la même tension et, surtout, le même humour.* » (Jean-François Warmoes, Comédien).

Les Monstres ordinaires (recueil de nouvelles). Paris 2003. Éditions GUNTEN.

22 textes inspirés de la fable « le loup et l'agneau » qui racontent l'histoire tragique de la violence face à l'innocence, du pouvoir de la méchanceté sur la gentillesse. Parfois la gentillesse prend le dessus, mais n'utilise-t-elle pas une autre forme de méchanceté ? « *Si ces innocents récits pouvaient apporter un réconfort aux agneaux et dépouiller les loups de leur carapace de faux prétextes, ils n'auraient pas été complètement inutiles. En tout cas, il faudrait les conseiller à toute personne qui possède une ombre de pouvoir*» (Aimé Stelling)

Winston Churchill. La décision qui sauva le monde (théâtre). Paris 2001. Éditions de l'Harmattan.

La pièce décrit l'hypothétique rencontre entre Churchill et Hess, le 10 mai 1941. Hess veut que l'Angleterre cesse le combat, Churchill voudrait savoir quand l'Allemagne attaque la Russie. Chacun essaye de soutirer à l'autre ce qu'il désire. N'hésitant pas à puiser dans des documents historiques et dans les discours de Churchill, elle permet de comprendre comment et pourquoi ce dernier prit la décision de poursuivre la lutte. Décision qui sauva le monde.

Le Siècle des Pardase (roman). Paris. 2000. Éditions GUNTEN

Nous sommes le 21 novembre. Bertrand Pèlerin déposé voilà 27 ans dans un orphelinat par sa mère soucieuse de le protéger a reçu une lettre bizarre l'invitant à retrouver ses origines. Il va découvrir les branches survivantes de cette famille de fous, son histoire et vivre un week-end que les vieux auraient voulu pacifique, mais qui sera meurtrier car la vengeance de Théophile Pardase ne s'arrête que le lundi 23 novembre.

Se Réconcilier avec l'Orthographe. Paris. 1997. Éditions DEMOS

Cette méthode, évitant les règles grammaticales, offre une multitude de moyens mnémotechniques empreints d'humour afin d'écrire sans faute.

Comment réussir ses examens ? Paris. 2007. Éditions DEMOS.

Partant du principe que l'intelligence ne vous dispense pas d'être malin, ce livre vous offre une série d'astuces afin de mettre toutes les chances de votre côté.

Pièces de théâtre accessibles gratuitement sur Internet :

<http://pascal.rabier.free.fr>

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