

**ALAIN
SAINT-SAËNS**

THE WAGON

**ON THE WAY TO
AUSCHWITZ**

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E-mails: unprsouth@aol.com ; universitypresssouth@gmail.com

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THE WAGON

**ON THE WAY TO
AUSCHWITZ**



*To Simone Veil
and Jorge Semprún,
death camps' survivors.*

*To the sixth million Jews
who did not come back.*

*To Peleg Levi,
Ambassador of Israël in Paraguay,
who blessed my unborn son.*

Act I,
Scene 1

(A German Nazi train, made of an almost indefinite line of ten meter long cattle freight wagons, is slowly running thru the night. Each wagon has been filled up with standing people, men and women, adults and children alike. On the stage is represented one of these moving wagons the walls of which the audience can see thru. A white light coming from the theater's ceiling illuminates the inside of the wagon. The first two rows of people are visible).

Man close to the sealed door lock *(To his nearest neighbor):*

- You understand Yiddish, don't you? Any idea for how long we have been moving? It seems to me like an eternity already. My legs are so stiff. Who knows when we ever stop *(Holding out his right hand)* by the way, my name is Jorge, I am from Spain. What about you? Where are you from?

Man close to Jorge (*Shaking his hand*):

- Nice to meet you, Jorge. I am Rabbi Sholem. My family was originally from the part of Poland Soviet Union invaded in 1939. Our mistake was to flee to Prague, Czechoslovakia, in anticipation of any possible pogrom, instead of trying to emigrate directly to the United States of America, when it was still time to do it. So, here I am today on this train with my wife Esther at my side and our grown-up son David, on our way back to Poland again thru Hungary, for what I could catch from the guards' conversation when they yelled at us in at Berlin Railway Station.

Jorge (*Laughing*):

- Talk about bad luck, man! I shouldn't laugh too much, though, since I'm afraid we're sharing the same bed tonight. My parents were humble Jews from Catalonia. We used to attend services at the main synagogue in Barcelona. At age 20, I joined the Communist Party and two years later the ranks of the Republican Army against General Franco's military coup of July 1936. When our

cause appeared all but lost in 1939, I crossed the French border and then rallied the Resistance to Nazi Occupation. Denounced and arrested in Paris last year in August 1942, I was tortured for weeks before being sent to a labor camp in Germany. It was tough, no doubt about it, but I am still alive. I will make it thru, I swear to God! Stalin will win the war against Hitler. It's just a matter of time. If we can manage somehow to survive wherever they have scheduled to abuse us, we shall be freed by Soviet troops, Sholem.

☞Rabbi Sholem (*With a mischievous smile on his face*):

- Jorge, you do remember the Third Commandment, *Exodus 20:7*: 'Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain', don't you? To tell the truth, I have seen Soviet troops 'liberating' cities and villages. They weren't better than their Nazi counterpart. Brutality, cruelty, inhumanity were exactly the same, just spat in a different language.

☐Jorge (*Putting his hand on Sholem's shoulder*):

- ☐Sholem, you are bearing three millenaries of Jewish people's humiliation and abasement on your shoulders. Shake it off, my friend! Times have changed. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, almost a century ago in their 1848 pamphlet, *The Communist Manifesto*, clearly demonstrated that the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. People should not be exploited because of their religions or absence thereof. Within the Bolshevik Party, as a matter of fact, Jews have reached political influence based on their merits only, and anti-Semitism was outlawed by Stalin in 1931 as 'an extreme form of racial chauvinism.'☐

Rabbi Sholem (*Taking Jorge's hand off his shoulder*):

- I was under the impression, Jorge, that Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Trotsky, all Jews and Stalin's opponents, had been purged out of power within the Soviet Union Communist

Party. Frankly, if we were not piled up like cattle in a freight wagon taking us probably to our last destination, I might have been inclined to listen to your pleasant hare-brained ideas. Nevertheless allow me to tell you something, Jorge, for I believe you are indeed a good man: set aside your indoctrination speech and open up your eyes. The world around us is not Jews friendly. Family members of mine, relatives, neighbors, all died, victims of Soviet or Nazi ideologies (*Starting turning toward his wife Esther who is pulling his arm*) Now you will excuse me if I cut short our philosophical debate, but I must try to put some order and decency within our inner society for these poor people's ordeal to be alleviated as much as possible.

Rabbi Sholem (*Talking to Esther*):

- Esther, my dear, pass the word to everyone that we are going to pray together and establish some fundamental rules of cohabitation. From now on nobody without authorization shall drink water out of the

unique tank our torturers so generously provided us with. Gather all the food our brothers and sisters have brought with them. It will be shared equally three times a day. Unless we organize ourselves during our nightmarish trip, many of us will die. Meanwhile I shall pray our Lord asking Him to give me Moses' strength at the time he guided the valiant people of Israel out of Egypt. May God help me to understand and explain His anger burning against His people (*Exodus*, 32:11)!²