

LIVE AND DIE

AS

EVA BRAUN

Hitler's Mistress,
In the Berlin Bunker
And Beyond

An Illustrated Proposal for a Virtual-Reality Scenario

Not to Be Realized

Roe Rosen

Scene 1 – The Wait

Dear customer. As soon as you put on the state-of-the-art head gear, body-suit, and electronic sensors, you find yourself in the bunker's living room. Late April, 1945. The subterranean quarters are comfortable and luxurious, if somewhat austere. The noise of bombshells exploding is dimmed by soundproof walls, but you sense the blasts by the shudders sent through the rooms and up your body. Your lover is about to arrive. You head to the bathroom to tidy yourself up.

You look in the mirror, leaning forward, and your own image is revealed to you for the first time. You are blond, your face is still young, your complexion pinkish-pure, your bosom ample. You seem truly good-natured. Anyone would have been thrilled to be you, but for you it should merely be a given – you *are* you.

He doesn't care for make-up. No perfume. Light bodily odors should be hinted at through a scentless cleanliness. You have been indoctrinated thoroughly, and so this naturalness comes almost naturally to you. The operations of your body are smooth. Never a clue of rusty joints or restless bowels. You could look at your reflection forever, but you find yourself turning, and going back to the main room.

You sit on the black leather armchair in front of the door, and wait. Your gaze shifts from a picture magazine, spread on your thighs, to the entrance corridor. On the pages, pictures of handsome, wounded soldiers and happy farm girls; at the end of the corridor is the heavy iron door. Why, you read German! In fact, you read it even if you don't understand a word – after all, it's your mother's tongue – since you are Eva Braun.

Scene 2 – The Arrival

Excitement jolts through your body when you hear the steps outside. When he opens the door you gasp at the sight of his small mustache. Because you are not only Eva it seems menacing, almost monstrous. But everything around the mustache is so congenial. He comes towards you with such warmth, his smile tired, his arms open to embrace you. Remember – you *are* Eva. When Hitler closes his arms around you, the view darkens and you are surrounded by his presence. You are almost overwhelmed with titillation when you feel the whiskers of that famous little facial tuft tickle your ear and the back of your neck. You relish the sour smell of an old man's sweat contained within the manly uniforms. You ought to remember that only a while back the smell of his sweat was very sweet, all his secretions had the proud marks of vegetarian nutrition. Never a hint of decay. The new, sharp sourness, the flabby waist, the recently formed, sagging male breasts – those are the bitter fruits of the global defeat. Relishing the tickle of the whiskers you realize with some pride that you are the special sanctuary of this special man, your lover.

Scene 3 – Control

He shouts at other people over the phone. Something to do with supply of arms, the age of prospective soldiers, newly enlisted to fight the advance of the enemy, very young soldiers, sure to die.

Even though, surely, you speak German, the words seem incomprehensible. But never mind the words. Clearly they are secondary to his power, his might, his conviction and anger. The world outside the bunker, slavishly listening to your lover, is meekly shrinking. His power is perturbing, petrifying – and nothing is a better emblem of that power than the magisterial veins along his neck.

The swelling of these blood vessels is an awe-inspiring sign. Those magnificent purple snakes wiggle and pound in the wrinkled looseness of the white-grey skin, contracting and expanding as he bellows and spits into the handset. Those bloody pipes know their miraculous power, yet you behold those regal tubes, those animals within an animal with a special intimacy. You can, if you so choose, extend your finger and stroke them. And they'll submit and purr like kittens.

Scene 4 – The Bed

The tremors of the bombing do not cease at night. Their impact on you shifts time and again. For long spells horror haunts your body, contracts your bladder, pounds in your temples till your verbal capacities and muscular control fail. But then, just as regularly you are lifted into a hypnotic, anesthetic calm, like the lull of infants at the rocking of the cradle.

You lie on your side, your eyes open. Adolf's back is heaving in front of you. The bluish-white, bespeckled skin is covered with thick, black hairs, stemming and streaming with haunting regularity, like trees in an artificial forest. In between the trees the ground bears pink crannies, brown mushrooms, bushes and pores, and all of this magnificent turf is rising and falling rhythmically, slowly. You gaze at the back, completely thoughtless. Suddenly he turns around, in his sleep, towards you. His arm is rising to enfold you. Your gaze follows the arm as it grows near, as it grows, as it looms above you like a gigantic, darkened slab of meat, as it closes on you from above, as the faint, fleshy aroma infiltrates your nostrils. Your pupils shift and follow this colossal, slow-motion move until you feel the heavy pressure of that sleepy limb on your neck, and your breathing becomes harder.

Do you enjoy this suffocation, this weight, this virtual fragrance, this sleepy, lovely burden which overpowers the explosions, and makes your consciousness center around its corporeal factuality, this intimate strain on your body, somewhat like a toothache?

Scene 5 – The Dream

The image that now flickers in front of you, you realize, is a dream. Eva is asleep and you dream her dream. But whence this perverse scene, so powerful you realize it must be a recurring dream, even though this is the first time you sleep as Eva? As the question is raised, another image appears – a genuine Eva memory, produced, it seems, as an explanation. It is that glorious night in 1939, when he jokingly asked to watch you pee, as if to mark the easy invasion to Poland with a nonchalant gesture of omnipotence, the glee of measured naughtiness. You took off all your clothes, proudly displaying your lovely pink nipples, always erect like two vigilant tentacles, your ivory-smooth belly, your golden Venus-mound, perfectly symmetrical, never in need of a trim. He sat on a small stool in front of the open door, legs crossed, boots on, bemused smile on his lips. But you knew how excited he was, because the expression was frozen stiff on his face, save for a tiny tick that made his left eyelid flicker.

Yet is this really the source of the image in the dream? After all, that night in '39 he kept his uniform on, he averted his gaze when he saw the transparent drop gleaming on a little curl between your thighs, whereas the image in the dream has no marks of reservation, shame, restraint or irony.

In the dream he is below you, his mouth open wide, and his eyes stare with devotion at your sex. You see his face from high above as your pudenda slowly descends to kiss his gaping orifice. You look at the visage of the dictator, almost childish in its intent, flanked and cropped by your heavy thighs. You glue the chubby resplendence of your nether-lips to his thin upper ones. You are about to deposit your yellow liquid refuse as if it were a divine gift.

Scene 6 – Tears

How odd it is, really, that you do not expect to die. You always trusted his power to decide on deadly matters – it has been infallible – as if by casting death around, assigning and sowing it so generously, he had created a bubble of health and immortality for you two. He has been resourceful and creative with death, and creativity is the ammunition of life. It's a fact: you haven't been to the doctor in years. Your clean skin. The skin is the paper on which the body writes its complaints, and yours is spotless. And the coming of suicide left no impression on your skin either. Your suicide has been planned meticulously, festively, like a ceremony; those preparations did not seem to spell anything terminal. Only now you are unable to ignore the sight of the gun's black nozzle. Only now, realizing that the scheme of your life is destined to go unplanned and unfinished, you feel the warm tears crawling down your face like trails left by two big snails. Tears have never felt that real.

The side of you that is not Eva is even less prepared to die. How can death be simulated? And what of you is supposed to die in the name of such pretense? Would life really be the same once the Eva in you dies? What would life after death, life after life after death be like? And why the glum, the despair where the thrill of spectacle ought to be peaking at its acme?

The side of you that isn't Eva is so affected that it weeps as well. And so two kinds of tears, two different trails of sorrow, intermingle on your cheeks.

Scene 7 – The shot

Before he shoots you he presses his lips to yours with the vengeance of despair, his hand clasp your scalp forcefully from behind. His lips are so dry they seem to sip and suck and drain the liquids of your whole body. There's an unpleasant smell in the air, probably urine – but you would rather not know. He points the barrel to your forehead.

You want to shut your eyes tight, but your eyelids disobey. You stare at him, transfixed. What is it that you see? How much love can a womb deemed to remain barren retain?

The shot blasts your eardrums, leaving behind an eerie silence, more than silence – soundlessness. You reckon the red screen which envelopes your field of vision stands for your own blood. There is something left of you, you realize, but it is somewhere else: there are both the you that has been terminated, and an impish something else. It is a shred of consciousness quivering with sub-human thoughts somewhere nearby – a travesty of a mind, a nasty, invalid, mechanical caricature of a mind, still claiming your identity. But even that pathetic machine is beyond you, superior to you, which means there is a third you, even more puny and dismal.

Did he shoot himself? History says he did – but history suffocates in places like this, whereas betrayal and suspicion seem adept. Is he going through this humiliating rite as well?

Scene 8 – Angel’s wings

Would you believe it? You are actually flying! The childish renditions of the dead person leaving its body were almost true! Ascendance, chariots of cherubs, flight. Only the sensation of being lighter, of twirling through the air on an angelic path, is extremely unpleasant. Becoming weightless and formless does not mean being airy, glowing, flexible. Rather, you feel as if your consistency is so diluted that the lightest gas applies tremendous pressure on you. Mere friction turns every object the size of a pinhead into a demonic torture machine. True, you may no longer possess a body in the living sense, but all the constraints, pangs and throes inflict themselves on that wasted, tiny entity you have become.

You are being swiftly led through the air like a dog on a leash. It is suffocation beyond suffocation. Suffering outdoing suffering. You fly in the air at a nauseating speed, realizing all the while that your skin-rash exists even though you have no skin, that your self-pity is real although you possess no self, that even your genitalia, non-existent, is burning with pain and thirst for sex. You wish for the angels to console you, to speak to you, to introduce themselves – after all, you are only a child, all alone, no mother, no friend, no lover. Over the rooftops you go and go, until you dive suddenly – into the train station in Milan.

Scene 9 – Wax

Why would the heavenly powers ordain that you visit a ragged wax museum in a train station on your way to the afterlife? The display windows, like those of sex shops, are covered with gigantic posters entirely concealing the space within while proclaiming its promised pleasures. Some of the superlatives seem designed to mock you. Was it Satan who inscribed the dusty fun house with phrases like *Once in a Lifetime Experience*, knowing that your life is over? And should calling those dead dolls *Lifelike* be taken as a personal offense?

Once inside, swept through the dimly lit display cases and rooms you realize that this is probably the worst wax museum in the world. Scum and filth cover everything about the narrow, dark corridor and the pathetic tableaux. The artisans must have been cynical! There must have been a vicious intent behind these cruel, defective depictions! A group of American presidents stand crammed together smiling, seemingly in horror, all shrouded in suits you recognize as old-fashioned, from the seventies. Jimmy Carter's straw-hair extends well over his ears, he is as thin as a victim, and his pale smile looks tubercular in spite of the thick layer of crimson lipstick. Ronald Reagan looks like Rock Hudson, dying. Nothing but a gigantic mustache and a little red star on his lapel identify the stout, grotesque lump of dirty matter, endowed with flaking black glass eyes and two coarse cavities for nostrils as, of all men, Stalin. Next to filthy Neil Armstrong there's an extraordinarily big crowd of popes and bishops, all clad in frayed faux velvets, mostly distinguished from one another by body bulk and the distribution of synthetic facial hair.

And then you face the *tableau vivant* you were brought here for. It is a depiction of you and Adolf, committing suicide. The bunker looks like a deserted

depot, its only decoration a red swastika flag made of shiny acrylic. The craftsman cunningly solved the problem of creating your likeness: you languish on the floor, on your stomach, limbs stretched, your hair covering your face entirely, save for one carefully exposed temple with rubbery blood patched on. Your breasts, stiff as stone, meet the floor without surrendering their cone shape, a fact that makes the rest of your corpse look like it hovers slightly above the surface. Adolf himself is still holding the gun. His face is hidden as well, sunk between his arms on the desk on which he collapsed, and there is an indication of identity as well – for the mustache and the tip of his nose protrude above his elbow like a relic cradled in a cushion. The scene is animated by a little red light that goes on and off on the plastic phone next to Adolf's head, as if an alarm has been set.

Your first reaction is bewilderment. Of the entire majestic career of the man stamped in the consciousness of his enemies (and everyone is his enemy) as the most heartless of the heartless, as an inhuman monster, they chose just this moment, which must leave even the cruelest victims saddened.

Then comes your wild anger. You understand that anyone in his right mind would burst out in laughter at the freakish sight, that a pornographic desire is satiated through the comic quality of your disaster; you understand that your tableau crowns the museum, that those awful dolls do indeed possess life, and that they are being raped and jeered at simultaneously.

Then comes your deep trepidation. It must be sweat that is pouring over the something that you are.

Scene 10 – The Wait

There's no question, you are being led to hell – but why?

As you wait for your tortures to be set, you view some of the other sinners. Particularly arresting is a group of two-dimensional people hanged by their sinning members – hair, genitalia, breasts, tongues.

You realize with some dismay that hell, as it were, is based on a famous painting.

How will you be hanged? What of you will be minced, sliced, burnt? What, in your eager perfection, in your life dedicated to willful servitude, in your quiet harmony, is eternally punishable and damned?

A door opens. It's Hirrohisho, the huge Korean masseur. Lie back, close your eyes, enjoy his wonderful fingers on your back, empty your mind, feel the pleasant sensations, relax. Hell is fake, Hirrohisho is real. No harm was meant. You are you. Please come again.