

Hana Szenes

By Aharon Meged

Play no. 158

Opening show: 31/05/1958

Directed : Abraham Asseo

Decor by: Arie Navon

Music by: Joseph Kaminsky

The Cast

Rozsa, an officer in charge of Investigations: Israel Becker

An Officer: Shlomo Bruk

Avraham Krakower: Refael Klatzkin

Hana Szenes: Miriam Zohar

Katharina Szenes: Hanna Rovina

Professor Molnar, Hanna's former teacher: Haim Amitai

A Detective: Misha Asherov

Eliahu, Haganah Commander: Aharon Meskin

Geri, A Parachutist: Joseph Banai

Stephan, A Yugoslav Partisan: Itzhak Bareket

Hilda, A German Prison-Guard: Elisheva Michaeli

Janos, A Hungarian Prison-Guard: Yehoshua Bertonov

Dvatcheri, A Hungarian Lawyer: Avner Hizkiyahu / Yehuda Efroni

The Judge: Itzhak Bareket

Policemen : Israel Rubinchik, Jehuda Efroni

Hana Szenes, a 23 years old girl and member of Kibbutz Sedot-Yam near Cesaria, volunteered in 1944 to go to Nazi-occupied Hungary, in order to save Jews from imminent complete annihilation. Bearing the uniform and rank of a British officer, she was parachuted into a part of Jugoslavia held by Tito's Partisans. She spent three months there, in the company of another Parachutist from Palestine – Reuven Dafni (renamed Geri in the play). She took part in fighting against the Germans and made a strong impression on the Partisans. Yet she was growing impatient to cross the border into Hungary in order to fulfill her real mission. On the 9th of June 1944 she finally went over the border together with three men, one of them a French Partisan (Pierre in the play). Unfortunately they were caught the next day, Hana carrying a radio transmitter.

As the play opens, Rozsa, a Hungarian officer and one of his Assistants, discuss Hanna's case. The Assistant reports details of how Hana was captured, adding that she was assuming a false name, that Mary Ardi; that she was put to severe torture, but still refused to divulge her real name, and the secret of her Radio Code. Rozsa asks that Hana be brought before him and tries, in vain, to extract from her both the Code and who she was. Finally, he orders her comrade Pierre to be brought in and threatens that unless she shows more cooperation, Pierre will be tortured. Hana tells her real name.

Rozsa immediately recognizes that name. Hana's father, Bela Szenes had been a well known author, and her mother, Katharina, was still living in Budapest. Rozsa now holds a trump card against this girl-Prisoner: the fate of the Mother is in his hands. Hana begs him not to say a word to her mother, who had not the slightest idea that her daughter was in Budapest, but Rozsa agrees to keep the shock from Mrs. Szenes only if her daughter discloses the secret of the Radio transmission Code. This Hana will not do – and Rosza tells her to expect her mother, who could be called to prison to use her influence upon her daughter. Hana is alone. She remembers scenes of her childhood in this Hungary. She wins a prize, for a poem she has composed Professor Molnar, her teacher, comes to congratulate her. Mrs. Szenes informs the teacher that Hana decided to immigrate to Palestine. The Professor is stunned by such strange news. The mother tries to argue with her daughter that she should stay and pursue her literary ambitions. Hana remains steadfast in her resolution to favour of a pioneering life in the new land of the Jews and Mother gives way.

Mother is brought before Rosza, who cross examines her daughter. Mrs. Szenes, who knows nothing of her daughter's mission cannot understand why on earth this officer should ask so many questions about a daughter who was in another country, thousands of miles away. Suddenly Hana is pushed in, hearing evident marks of torture. Rozsa declares that unless Hana discloses the Code – her mother will be put to death. Hana still refuses to talk.

Hana remembers how she volunteered to go on this mission. She met Eliahu, the Haganah Commander, who tries to tell her that she is too young and inexperienced for such a mission and warns of the terrible dangers involved. But she insists.

Later she argues even more impatiently with Geri, her comrade-in-arms from the Haganah serving with the Yugoslav Partisans, to hurry and bring her to the border. Kardos, a refugee from Hungary, who turns up and tells of the Nazi Concentration Camps being set up, strengthens her arguments. Geri said they had to wait for the right opportunity. Then one of the Partisans arrives to say that the way is clear. In her imagination she asks approval from her mother for the act of sacrifice and gets it.

Rozsa's reappearance cuts through her thoughts. He orders her into solitary confinement.

An order arrive from the Gestapo to transfer Hana into their hands. Rosza dislikes such an order, for he had intended to keep Hana with him. This would serve him well in case the Allies won the war.

Hana in her prison cell. Yanos, her Guard, impressed by the girl's personality, tries to help her as best he can. She tells him of the Holy Land.

Rozsa arrives for a last attempt to make her talk, threatening to hand her over to the Germans if she remains stubborn. Again he fails. Hana remembers her

teacher, Professor Moinar and his teachings about the great heroes in History, who refused to yield to force.

In another cell, in the same prison, Hana's mother and Fruma, a Jewish refugee from Poland, share a cell. Fruma tells of her recent sufferings and the murder of her little daughter by the Nazis. Hana makes contact with her mother, by various signs through the windows, and gives courage to the older women by her pride and unaffected optimism. Klari, a third woman-Prisoner, returns from an inquiry-session and reports that even the Gestapo talk with admiration about Hana. Hildah, a woman-guard is a go between mother and daughter. A Hungarian Policeman arrives to fetch Fruma, who is on the list of the condemned for Auswitch.

Hana is still telling Yanos about Palestine and her Kibbutz, when a lawyer by the name of Dvacheri enters. He was asked by Hana's mother, meanwhile released from prison, to take the case. The Lawyer tries to persuade Hana to show some cooperation with her inquisitors in order to improve her chance. He also argues that by doing so she would help the general position of the Jews in Budapest. Hana rejects his suggestions. He is impressed by her and promises to do what he can anyway.

Mrs. Szenes is allowed a visit to her daughter. She reports some news of the outside world, discuss Hana's imminent trial and presents her with a few objects from home.

Hana stands trial. In a grand speech she rejects any suggestion that she was a traitor to her motherland. Such an accusation, she claims, would fit perfectly those were accusing her. She boldly declares that the Day of Judgment is near for her Judges. Indeed, fearful of the Allied advance in Europe, the Judges delay giving verdict. Hana's comrades come to her, in her imagination, to congratulate her upon her brave stand.

The very last days of Nazi rule in Hungary. Following the delay in pronouncing her verdict by her court, Hana awaits the future with confidence.

Mrs. Szenes goes from one official to the other, asking permission to visit Hana. She cannot get any clear answer. Finally the Military Judge tells her that Hana's death sentence has been pronounced.

Military Judge Simon enters Hana's cell and informs her of the death sentence, to be carried out in one hour. He suggests that she appeals for clemency, but Hana will not hear of it. Her only request is to see her mother once more, but her last wish is not raganted. She turns in her mind to Eliahu, who relates to her the continuous growth of her Kibbutz and speaks of the historic value of her death.