

## Notes on "In the Attic" by Władysław Szpilman (Kerala 10th English Textbook, Unit 1, Chapter 2)

### Summary (Student Perspective)

"In the Attic" is a true story from Władysław Szpilman's memoir, *The Pianist*. Szpilman, a Polish Jewish pianist, struggles to survive during World War II while hiding in a ruined attic in Warsaw. A kind German officer, Wilm Hosenfeld, discovers him but chooses to help instead of harming him. The officer asks Szpilman to play the piano, provides food, and suggests a safer hiding place. Despite the dangers of war, the officer's kindness and Szpilman's determination help him survive. Eventually, Warsaw is liberated, but Szpilman is almost mistaken for a German due to wearing a German coat. He reveals he is Polish and survives, later resuming his work at Polish Radio. The story shows themes of survival, human kindness, and hope amidst the horrors of war.

### Important Points

1. **Setting:** Warsaw, Poland, during World War II. Szpilman hides in an attic to escape Nazi persecution of Jews.
2. **Main Characters:**
  - **Władysław Szpilman:** A Jewish pianist hiding from Nazis, showing courage and hope.
  - **Wilm Hosenfeld:** A German officer who helps Szpilman with food and advice, showing compassion.
3. **Key Events:**
  - Szpilman is discovered by the officer but is not harmed.
  - The officer asks Szpilman to play Chopin's Nocturne, proving his identity as a pianist.
  - The officer provides food (bread, jam) and a blanket, and suggests hiding in a loft.
  - Szpilman survives until Warsaw's liberation in January 1945.
  - Szpilman is almost shot by Polish soldiers who mistake him for a German due to his coat.
4. **Themes:**
  - **Survival:** Szpilman's determination to live despite extreme hardship.
  - **Humanity:** The officer's kindness shows that compassion can exist even in war.
  - **Hope:** Szpilman and the officer believe the war will end, giving them strength.
5. **Historical Context:** Jews faced persecution in ghettos and concentration camps during WWII. Szpilman's memoir is a *survivor testimony*, showing real experiences of war.

### Answers to "While We Read" Questions

- a. **Officer's attitude to Szpilman:** Kind and compassionate, not harmful. b. **Why officer asked Szpilman to play piano:** To confirm Szpilman's identity as a pianist and possibly to connect with him humanely. c. **Why Szpilman hesitated to play:** His fingers were stiff, dirty, and unpracticed for years; he was also scared. d. **How officer helps Szpilman:** Gives food (bread, jam), a blanket, and suggests a

safer hiding spot (loft). e. **Officer's shame**: Ashamed of being German due to Nazi atrocities. f. **Surprising statement**: The officer's confidence that the war will end soon, despite ongoing dangers. g. **Bond between officer and Szpilman**: Trust and mutual respect; the officer risks helping Szpilman, and Szpilman offers help in return. h. **Less artillery fire**: Indicates the war is nearing its end as Germans retreat. i. **Well-chosen hiding place**: The loft is hidden and unnoticed by others. j. **Szpilman's advice to officer**: Offers his name and future help at Polish Radio, showing gratitude and hope. k. **Sounds in the attic**: Rats, mice, wind, and later, artillery and soldiers. l. **Why Szpilman had to be alone**: To avoid detection and survive Nazi persecution. m. **Radio announcements**: Declared Germany's defeat and Warsaw's liberation. n. **Surviving the cold**: Uses the German officer's coat and eiderdown (blanket). o. **Information Szpilman hoped to gather**: Whether it was safe to leave after hearing women and children. p. **Woman's cry**: She mistakes Szpilman for a German due to his coat. q. **Absurd situation**: Szpilman is nearly killed by Polish soldiers (his own people) who think he's German.

### Meanings of Important Words/Phrases

1. **Ghetto**: A restricted area where Jews were forced to live during WWII (e.g., Warsaw Ghetto).
2. **Concentration camps**: Places where Jews and others were imprisoned, tortured, or killed by Nazis.
3. **Gas chambers**: Rooms where Nazis killed people using poisonous gas.
4. **Larder**: A small room or cupboard for storing food.
5. **Nocturne**: A calm, dreamy piece of music, often for piano (e.g., Chopin's Nocturne in C sharp minor).
6. **Eiderdown**: A warm quilt or blanket filled with soft feathers.
7. **Attic**: A space under the roof of a building, often used for storage or hiding.
8. **Loft**: A small, hidden space above a room, used here for hiding.
9. **En masse**: All together, in a group (e.g., Jews were sent to camps *en masse*).
10. **Liberation**: Being freed from oppression or control (e.g., Warsaw's liberation from Nazis).
11. **Persecution**: Cruel treatment of a group because of their identity (e.g., Jews during WWII).
12. **Memoir**: A written account of one's personal experiences.
13. **Racking my brains**: Thinking very hard to find a solution.
14. **Dejected**: Feeling very sad or hopeless.
15. **Feverishly**: With urgency or excitement.

### Pronunciation Guide (from Page 6)

- **Lieutenant**: lef-ten-ant
- **Colonel**: kur-nl

- **General:** jen-uh-rul
- **Sergeant:** sar-juhnt
- **Commander:** kuh-man-der
- **Captain:** kap-tin

#### Key Takeaways for Students

- **Survival and Hope:** Szpilman's story teaches us to stay strong and hopeful even in tough times.
- **Kindness in War:** The German officer's actions show that humanity can shine through cruelty.
- **War's Impact:** The story highlights the suffering of Jews and the destruction caused by war.
- **Survivor Testimony:** Szpilman's memoir helps us understand history through real-life experiences.

#### Tips for Students

- Focus on the bond between Szpilman and the officer to understand the theme of humanity.
- Note how Szpilman's music (piano) connects him to life and hope.
- Use the word meanings to improve vocabulary and answer questions clearly.
- Think about how war affects people (displacement, fear, loss) for activities like the "Wall of Hope" or anti-war poster.

This story is a powerful reminder of resilience and kindness, making it relatable and inspiring for students learning about history and human values.