The Shoe-Horn Sonata

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN MISTO

John Misto is a playwright, novelist, and television writer from Sydney, Australia. Born in 1952, he graduated from the University of New South Wales and pursued a career as a lawyer. Eventually, though, he decided to devote his time to writing. Since then, he has written nine plays, including *The Shoe-Horn Sonata*, which won both the 1995 Australia Remembers Play Competition and New South Wales Premier's Literary Award for Best Play. Misto has also written extensively for the screen, penning numerous television episodes and several movies.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Shoe-Horn Sonata references the Fall of Singapore, a battle that was fought between February 8th and February 15th of 1942, just over a year after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and other locations controlled by the United States and Great Britain. During this time, Japanese forces invaded Singapore, which was at that point a colony of Great Britain. In fact, Singapore was an important geographical location, as the British used it as their main militaristic base in Southeast Asia. After a week of fighting, British troops eventually surrendered to the Japanese in what remains the most significant British surrender in history. In the aftermath of this event, 80,000 soldiers—including British, Australian, and Indian fighters—were taken as prisoners of war by the Japanese. This, of course, is what happens to Bridie and Sheila in *The Shoe-Horn Sonata*. And although the play itself only focuses on the experience of Australian and British prisoners, it's worth noting that the United States itself created internment camps during the same time period—camps that detained Japanese people living in America, though these people were not prisoners of war and weren't subjected to as much violence or abuse.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Although it is about World War I instead of World War II, R.C. Sherriff's play *Journey's End* is similar to *The Shoe-Horn Sonata*, as it brings to light what it was like to live through one of humanity's worst and most violent tragedies. Similarly, Anthony Doerr's novel *All The Light We Cannot See* has certain overlaps with *The Shoe-Horn Sonata*, as it too explores World War II from a slightly different perspective than normal, ultimately looking not just at the lives of soldiers, but at the experiences of people whose entire existences were profoundly affected by the bleak conditions of that period. Pearl S. Buck's "The Enemy" is also set during World War II and deals with prisoners and patriotism, but it follows a Japanese doctor as he decides what to do with an escaped American prisoner who has washed up on the beach near his house. What's more, because of its unflinching look at the German concentration camps during World War II, *Schindler's List* is also related to *The Shoe-Horn Sonata*, as both books consider the inhumane detainment of innocent people during the war.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Shoe-Horn Sonata*
- **When Published:** August 3, 1995
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Contemporary Drama, Historical Fiction, Comedy
- **Setting:** A television studio and a hotel in Melbourne, Australia
- **Climax:** After decades of keeping it a secret, Sheila tells Bridie that she had sex with a group of Japanese guards in exchange for the antimalarial medication that ultimately saved Bridie's life.
- **Antagonist:** Lipstick Larry, the other Japanese guards in Bridie and Sheila's prison camp, and the devastating effects of personal trauma

EXTRA CREDIT

As Seen on TV. John Misto has written many episodes for an assortment of television shows, but he was the series creator of *The Damnation of Harvey McHugh*, an Australian drama that aired in 1994.

PLOT SUMMARY

It is 1995, fifty years after Bridie and Sheila were released from a Japanese prison camp during World War II. They are now coming together for the first time since then, reuniting to appear on a television documentary about their wartime experiences. Bridie is an Australian who signed up to be a military nurse, traveling as a young woman to an area just north of Singapore. In the play's opening scene, Bridie tells Rick—the interviewer—that her father was proud she joined the Australian Army, telling her, "There are three things every young soldier should know. Always use a **shoe-horn**—it'll make your boots last longer. Don't sit on a toilet till you've lined the seat with paper. And never kiss a Pommie on the lips." Saying this, he gave her a shoe-horn, and she set off for war. Talking about what it was like in the initial days of the war, Bridie explains to Rick that rumors circulated about a Japanese

invasion, and though no one believed these stories at first, Australian and British forces eventually moved to Singapore, where Bridie treated wounded soldiers in a chaotic hospital as bombs fell overhead. Before long, she boarded a ship with 300 other women and children and made haste out of the region.

When Bridie's interview with Rick ends, she meets Sheila at the hotel. An exceedingly proper British woman, Sheila is hesitant to share her stories on television, finding it "[un]dignified." As she unpacks her **suitcase**, Bridie guilt-trips Sheila for never coming to see her in the five decades since the war ended. Although Sheila said she was going to return to England after she was set free, she ended up spending the rest of her life in Australia without even telling Bridie. As the two friends talk, it's evident that there is tension lurking beneath the surface of their relationship.

The next day, Sheila and Bridie sit down for a joint interview with Rick, who asks why Sheila—who was living with her family in Singapore—didn't leave before the Japanese invasion in 1942. "We were patriotic," she replies. "We didn't want to leave. I remember mother saying, 'Sheila, you and I are English women. We do not run away from a few Orientals…" Nevertheless, her mother soon decided to send her to Australia, though she herself stayed behind to "stop the Japs looting her silver." Unfortunately, though, Sheila's ship was—like Bridie's—caught and bombed by Japanese forces, sending Sheila into the frigid water with nothing to cling to but a piece of floating wood. This, the two women tell Rick, is when they met, as Bridie heard Sheila singing over the crashing waves. Unlike Sheila, Bridie had a lifejacket, but she couldn't hold Sheila afloat. Worse, the water was so cold that Sheila kept slipping off her piece of wood. Because of this, Bridie started talking to this stranger and hitting her on the head with her shoe-horn to keep her awake. And although this kept her alive, the two women were later picked up by a Japanese boat and brought to a prison camp.

In Sheila's hotel room, the two friends talk about the interview, bickering about how they each presented the story. Sheila, for her part, doesn't like how Bridie spoke disparagingly at one point about the British forces, but Bridie ignores her, making fun of her unflinching patriotism. "You can snicker all you like," Sheila replies, "but at the very worst times in the camp—I'd remind myself I was part of an Empire—and if others could endure it, so could I."

The next day, Rick asks whether or not the Japanese guards tried to sexually harass the prisoners. Bridie tells him that the guards did indeed set up a "glorified brothel," which they brought her to one night with several other nurses. At the end of the evening, one of the nurses coughed into a handkerchief she'd stolen from the hospital supplies. This handkerchief was already stained with blood, but she acted like she had just coughed up the red droplets, terrifying the guards, who feared tuberculosis. Seeing this, Bridie and the other nurses began to cough, and the guards sent them away. Chiming in, Sheila tells Rick that an Australian male prisoner gave the officers the idea to set up this "brothel." When Bridie hears her say this, though, she accuses a number of British women of making it hard for other prisoners to refuse the guards, saying that they sold themselves to the Japanese. In response, Sheila reminds Bridie that these women "had children to feed," adding that she didn't blame them for doing what they needed to. Bridie, on the other hand, doesn't agree with what they did, saying, "To go with a Jap—to give him pleasure—how could you ever live with yourself?" When Rick asks how Bridie and Sheila maintained hope, they tell him that a fellow prisoner named Miss Dryburgh organized a choir in which they both participated. Sheila sang, and Bridie tapped out the beat with her shoe-horn, and through this they found relief.

Back at the hotel, Bridie and Sheila argue about whether or not it was acceptable to sleep with the Japanese guards, and Bridie reiterates that she'd "never have done that" for "anyone." The next day, Bridie is alone at the interview. Emphasizing how common it was for prisoners to die in the camp, she tells Rick that she made a will saying that if she were to die, all of her possessions should go to Sheila, including her shoe-horn and her share of a piece of **caramel**. When Rick asks about the caramel, she says that Sheila managed to obtain the candy by selling a brooch. Throughout their time in the camps, then, Bridie and Sheila sucked on the caramel once a week for "one minute each," always staving off temptation so the candy would last until the end of the war. One day, though, a collection of Australian men—all of whom had "broken away from a working party"—appeared at the prison fence and began to sing. As this happened, one of the men waved at Bridie, and this made her day. Later, when the men were gone, Sheila and Bridie finished the caramel as a Christmas treat. Lying in bed that night, Bridie wondered if she'd ever see the man who waved at her, and when Rick asks if she did, she says, "Yes. As a matter of fact I did. After the war I married him."

After her solo interview, Bridie goes to Sheila's hotel room. Sheila is hungover from the night before, having drunk so much that she said cruel things to Bridie, telling her to go away. Bridie now suggests that Sheila has a drinking problem, but what truly bothers her is the idea that drunk people always tell the truth. Because of this, she can't ignore the hateful things Sheila said. Hurt, she asks why Sheila neglected her for so many years, and Sheila says, "All we had in common was the camp. I didn't want to keep talking about it—I couldn't, Bridie—it hurt too much. And when something hurts you run away…or you dig a hole and bury it." She then cruelly asks, "What did you expect—we'd all settle down in Chatswood—you, me and Benny?" Hearing this mention of her dead husband's name, Bridie slaps Sheila and says, "You're alive today because of me. And don't you ever forget it." In turn, Sheila opens a drawer and takes out Bridie's shoe-horn, saying that she has "spent fifty years" trying to

forget the fact that they depended upon one another during the war.

Bridie is baffled to see the shoe-horn. After all, she thought it was gone forever. Indeed, Sheila told her she traded it for antimalarial medication when Bridie contracted malaria in the final months of their internment. In truth, though, Sheila went to a guard named Lipstick Larry and agreed to have sex with him in exchange for quinine tablets. Listening to this story, Bridie tries to get Sheila to stop, saying she doesn't want to hear it. Still, Sheila pushes on, and when she's finished, she asks if Bridie was telling the truth when she said she would never have done such a thing for anyone in the world, and though Bridie doesn't reply, it's clear she meant what she said.

During the next interview, Sheila tells Rick that the majority of their choir was dead by 1945. Although the war was drawing to a close, the prisoners had no idea. In order to hide them, the guards transported all of the detainees to Belalau, where they thought no one would find them. Apparently, "an order had been issued" by the Japanese government saying that "every prisoner of war" should "die by October 1945." Oddly enough, though, the guards didn't have to do much to carry out this order, since so many prisoners died of malaria in Belalau. Telling this to Rick, Sheila lies and says that she saved Bridie's life by trading the shoe-horn for antimalarial tablets.

After this interview, Bridie asks why Sheila never told her the truth about how she saved her life, and Sheila explains that she was worried the story might "shock" Bridie too much. After all, when they were released from the camps, Bridie had to have several medical procedures, and Sheila didn't want to add to her struggle by revealing the truth. As such, she snuck away while Bridie was still sleeping, knowing she wouldn't be able to bear staying, since that would mean lying to her best friend. As they talk about this, Bridie still finds herself resenting Sheila for making such a sacrifice, saying, "You should have let me die." In response, Sheila says, "Yes. Perhaps I should have."

Sheila and Bridie tell Rick in the next interview that the choir ended in April of 1945 because too many of its members had died. As such, Sheila arranged sonatas that she and Bridie could sing together, since they wanted everyone to know that "there was still music left." Later, in Sheila's hotel room, Bridie tells her friend that she was arrested once for running out of a store without paying. She did this because a group of Japanese tourists had entered, and she was overcome with a visceral fear while listening to them speak in Japanese. Too embarrassed to explain what happened, she went to court and accepted a fine. And though Sheila tries to tell her this is nothing to be ashamed of, Bridie says she never intended to tell anyone. "Keeping a secret wears you down," Sheila says. "Believe me—I know." Having said this, Sheila considers telling the story of her rape on television during the final interview the next day. Bridie tries to stop her from doing this, saying that people will call her a "whore," but Sheila doesn't listen, saying, "The war hasn't ended. Not for me. For me it goes on. And now I want peace."

The next day, Sheila and Bridie tell Rick about their last days in the camp, when they were marched up a hill and serenaded by a military band because the Japanese were told that the Geneva Convention required all prisoners to be exposed to "culture." As the music played, Bridie and Sheila realized they might make it through the war alive, and so they made a pact to go dancing when they gained their freedom. Not long after that, an Australian journalist found the prison camp in Belalau, and the Japanese fled, leaving the gates open. At this point in the interview, Rick tells Sheila and Bridie that they can take a break, but Bridie—who has started holding Sheila's hand while speaking emotionally about the end of the war—tells him that they have to keep going because they've "left out something." Going on, she tells the story of Sheila's rape, and then Sheila tells the story of Bridie's arrest. Having aired their secrets, the two women finish the interview and return to the hotel room, where they finally fulfill their promise to dance in celebration of their freedom.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Bridie – One of the protagonists of the play, Bridie is a funny, tough Australian woman, and one of the subjects of a television documentary about Japanese prison camps during World War II. It has now been over five decades since Bridie first set off for the war as a military nurse, leaving her family in order to serve the British Empire in Malaysia. Before she departs, her father gives her his **shoe-horn** and tells her that all good soldiers use such tools to keep their boots in good condition. When the Japanese overtake Malaysia in 1942, Bridie and thousands of others flee Singapore in boats, and her shoe-horn comes in handy, since she uses it while floating in the water after her ship has been bombed. While floating away from the sinking vessel, Bridie encounters Sheila, a British woman clinging to a piece of wood. Glad to have found someone, Bridie helps Sheila stay awake by hitting her on the head with the shoe-horn, talking all the while so that her new friend doesn't nod off and drown. Unfortunately, though, Bridie and Sheila are picked up shortly thereafter by a Japanese boat, which brings them to a prison camp, where they are treated terribly and practically starved. Despite these horrid conditions, though, Bridie maintains her sense of hope, devoting herself to her friendship with Sheila as a way of coping with her terrible circumstances. While in the camp, she eventually becomes gravely ill with malaria, and Sheila saves her life by having sex with the guards in exchange for antimalarial medication. However, Sheila tells her that she traded the shoe-horn for the medicine, so Bridie is shocked when she learns the truth fifty years later. At first, she is judgmental and cruel, shaming Sheila for making such a sacrifice. By the end of the play, though, she manages to

emotionally support her friend.

Sheila – One of the protagonists of the play, Sheila is a prim and proper British woman, and one of the subjects of a television documentary about Japanese prison camps during World War II. As a young woman, Sheila lives with her family in Singapore. As rumors circulate about a Japanese invasion, Sheila's mother refuses to leave because the family is too "patriotic" to "run away from a few Orientals." When the Japanese start dropping bombs, though, Sheila boards a boat for Australia—a boat that is bombed shortly after departure. As Sheila clutches a floating piece of wood, she finds Bridie, who is also adrift in the water. Once they unite, Bridie makes sure Sheila doesn't drown by hitting her on the head with her **shoe-horn** to keep her awake. Unfortunately, a Japanese boat later picks them up and brings them to a prison camp, where they endure terrible treatment and malnutrition. At one point, Bridie becomes gravely ill with malaria, so Sheila has sex with the guards in exchange for antimalarial medication that ultimately saves Bridie's life. However, she doesn't want Bridie to feel indebted to her for this sacrifice, so Sheila lies and says she traded the shoe-horn for the medicine. In fact, she doesn't tell Bridie the truth for many years, and even though she's been living nearby in Australia for five decades, she refuses to reach out to Bridie. Now, though, she finally reveals the truth, and Bridie is aghast. Indeed, her friend's harsh reaction enrages her, but Sheila still decides to tell the story on television. Bridie, for her part, tries to dissuade Sheila from doing this, saying everyone will think of her as a "whore," but Sheila remains determined. However, during the last interview, she shies away from talking about the entire ordeal. Seeing this, Bridie tells the story for her. Afterwards, Bridie and Sheila celebrate in the hotel, and Sheila decides to visit her friend the following Christmas.

Miss Dryburgh – One of Sheila and Bridie's fellow detainees in the Japanese prison camps. Miss Dryburgh forms a choir with a group of women, enlisting Sheila as a singer and asking Bridie to mark the beat with her **shoe-horn**. When Miss Dryburgh and the majority of the choir die of malaria, Sheila arranges sonatas so that she and Bridie can continue to bring music to the prison camp.

Lipstick Larry – One of the Japanese guards at the prison camp where Sheila and Bridie are held captive during World War II. The prisoners call this guard "Lipstick Larry" because he punches women in the face if he catches them with lipstick on. When Bridie contracts malaria, Sheila visits Lipstick Larry and pleads for quinine tablets, but he shows complete indifference. As such, Sheila agrees to have sex with him and his friends in exchange for the medication. Decades after this incident, Sheila tells Bridie that Lipstick Larry still haunts her every night.

Captain Siki – A military captain at the prison camp where Sheila and Bridie are held captive during World War II. When the Australian Prime Minister sends word to the prisoners and tells them to "keep smiling," Captain Siki relays the message, prompting the women to laugh so much that he eventually tells them "never to smile again."

Sheila's Mother – A proper and somewhat conceited woman who tells Sheila—her daughter—that it's dishonorable to run "from a few Orientals," despite the obvious fact that the Japanese are about to invade Malaysia. A deeply patriotic woman who cares about politeness above all else, Sheila's mother actively silences her daughter when she tries to tell her about her rape-related trauma after World War II.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Rick ("M. Voice") – An Australian television interviewer who asks Bridie and Sheila questions as part of a documentary about the Japanese prison camps of World War II.

Ivy – One of Bridie and Sheila's fellow detainees in the Japanese prison camps during World War II.

THEMES

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SURVIVAL, RESILIENCE, AND CATHARSIS

John Misto's *The Shoe-Horn Sonata* is a play about what it takes for a person to endure extreme emotional hardship. Survivors of Japanese prison camps during World War II, Bridie and Sheila try to articulate what it was like to live as prisoners of war and how, exactly, they sustained themselves during their internment. Rehashing their experiences for a television documentary about the many military nurses who were captured by the Japanese government, they tell a tale that centers around the concept of emotional resilience. As prisoners, Bridie and Sheila buoy their spirits with moments of brief but meaningful catharsis, ultimately seeking refuge in small worldly pleasures such as music and humor. These fleeting but significant pleasures sometimes get them into trouble, inviting fury from the Japanese guards, but this doesn't stop them from seeking them out. After all, these brief instances of happiness are the only things left that make Bridie and Sheila's lives worth living. By highlighting this dynamic, then, Misto suggests that finding various forms of joyful indulgence—however small—is the only way to withstand intense hardship, especially when the alternative is to succumb to hopelessness and despair.

In 1942, the Japanese—Hitler's allies—drove the British Empire out of Singapore, forcing English and Australian Army nurses like Bridie and Sheila to retreat. Unfortunately, though,

Bridie and Sheila don't escape successfully, eventually winding up in a prison camp, where guards rape many of the women and deprive them of proper sustenance. Given these dismal circumstances, Bridie and Sheila find it difficult to remain hopeful, so they invest themselves in whatever kind of happiness they can find. This often manifests itself in small ways, as the two women covet even the most fleeting shred of joy. Decades later, when discussing the importance of such minute but meaningful pleasures, they tell the television interviewer not to underestimate how much a simple piece of **caramel** meant to them. "Don't laugh," Bridie says. "It was important. Caramel was our only luxury. Sheila sold her brooch to buy some […]. Every week—on Sunday night—we'd pop that caramel into our mouths—for one minute each—one minute of bliss—then we'd store it away till the next week." In most contexts, a mere sixty seconds of pleasure doesn't buoy a person's spirits, but in the prison camps, Bridie and Sheila discover that "one minute of bliss" is capable of emotionally sustaining them for an entire week. Indeed, they're able to resist their temptation to eat the entire piece of candy because they want to have something to look forward to, something they know they'll enjoy. This makes sense, considering that there's almost nothing else in their lives during this period that gives them true satisfaction. As such, the caramel becomes a source of immense gratification, one that helps them maintain good spirits as they survive the abysmal conditions of the camps.

Although Bridie and Sheila worship the caramel, it doesn't give them long-lasting relief. After all, in order to enjoy it, they have to consume it, which means they eventually finish it. Thankfully, though, this candy isn't their only form of joy, as they're cognizant that the best kind of emotional sustenance is immaterial. To that end, they use humor to cut the tension hanging around them, making dark jokes and finding levity even in the most humorless moments. Their fellow prisoners also adopt this method, finding ways to laugh at the twisted absurdity of their situation. For instance, a Japanese military captain tells them one day that the Australian Prime Minister has sent a message that the prisoners should "keep smiling." Remembering the effect of this message, Sheila says, "At first there was…absolute silence. And then the nurses—well I thought they must be crying—because they started to wipe their eyes. But it was from laugher. They were laughing." Going on, Sheila says, "They were skin and bone and covered in boils—and they'd just been told to 'keep smiling'! Well they smiled all right. Then they laughed so much they couldn't control it." She also adds that the prisoners laughed throughout the day and into the night. Strangely enough, the Prime Minister's callous message actually had the intended effect, though not in the way he imagined it would. Still, though, Sheila explains that "instead of the usual sobbing and quarrels" that night, the prisoners chuckled to themselves, thereby managing to seize a rare sense of cheerfulness. This, in turn, is a cathartic moment, one in which the women were able to release the tension and grief that had no doubt accumulated throughout their stay in the prison camps.

Humor is an effective coping mechanism because it's hard to fully deprive a person of laughter. After they hear the Prime Minister's message, for instance, the prisoners laugh so much that the Japanese captain commands them to "never to smile again"—a harsh demand that is ultimately difficult to enforce, since humor is a small form of joy that is hard to kill. Unlike the piece of caramel, it's always available to Bridie and Sheila, even in the worst moments. Similarly, the prisoners also cling to music, forming a choir and thus distracting themselves from the travesties playing out around them. Toward the end of their stay in the prison camp, Bridie and Sheila are the only surviving members of the choir, but instead of succumbing to hopelessness, they continue to find solace in music, as Sheila arranges sonatas for them to sing. "A lot of times we barely got through it—we were so weak from hunger. But we sang our sonata whenever we could—so the camp would know there was still music left," Sheila says, underlining the importance of proving to others that even the worst enemy can never fully rob someone of her capacity for joy. "It probably sounded bloody awful," Bridie adds. "But not to us. To us we still had harmony…and the Japs could never ever take that away." In this way, Misto suggests that cathartic experiences like laughing and singing are extremely resilient, giving people the strength they need to emotionally withstand otherwise hopeless, tragic situations.

PRIDE AND PATRIOTISM

In *The Shoe-Horn Sonata*, John Misto scrutinizes the effect pride has on people in times of distress. On the one hand, Sheila's unflinching patriotism helps her get through the war, since her feelings of British superiority actually enable her to embody a stubborn kind of wherewithal, one linked to her ego. On the other hand, though, her conceited nationalism also becomes a point of tension in her relationship with Bridie, who bristles at her tireless patriotism. Sheila's patriotic pride also sometimes gives her too much confidence, as is the case when she refuses to flee Singapore before the Japanese invasion—as Sheila's mother haughtily proclaims, it would be dishonorable for an English woman to "run away from a few Orientals." This, of course, is a tragically arrogant (and rather racist) way of thinking, one that leads to great misfortune and suffering. In turn, Misto shows both the benefits and dangers of pride and patriotism, implying that such forms of confidence and self-worth are only beneficial if they don't also lead to excessive self-importance and scorn for others.

As early as the play's third scene, it's clear that Sheila is proud to be from England. In fact, this pride helps her confront adversity and hardship, as she calls upon her patriotism to get

her through otherwise frightening events. For instance, when she's floating in the freezing sea after her ship has just been bombed, she sings "a very moving and stirring hymn about the greatness of England—God's chosen Empire." This, in turn, helps her stay awake and, thus, alive. Shortly thereafter, she and Bridie are picked up by a Japanese ship, and though Sheila feels a sense of despair, she again looks to her patriotic pride as a source of strength. "I wanted to cry," she explains. "But I reminded myself I was a Woman of the Empire. And it just wasn't done to show fear to the natives." Of course, it's worth noting that Sheila's pride in this moment also encompasses a rather racist mentality, as she thinks of herself as superior to the Japanese, whom she disparagingly refers to as "the natives." As such, Misto shows the audience that Sheila's pride is capable of comforting her in even the most frightening situations, though it also bears some uncomfortable implications about the way she looks down on other people.

Because Sheila tends to disparage others as a result of her patriotism, her relationship with Bridie—an Australian—sometimes suffers as a result of her unwavering national pride. When, for instance, Bridie suggests on-camera that the British were "thick" for letting their ships sail "straight into the Japanese fleet," Sheila takes great offense, returning to the subject once they're alone and going out of her way to insult the Australian Prime Minister. "That's a side of you I'd forgotten," Bridie replies. "Sheila the Patriot. It must have been hard to live out here [in Australia]—when your heart was so firmly entrenched in England." Failing to pick up on her friend's sarcasm, Sheila answers by saying, "One never stops being British. Nor does one want to." This sentiment encapsulates Sheila's commitment to her British identity, something she's willing to defend even if it irks the people closest to her.

Interpersonal tensions aren't the only drawbacks of Sheila's patriotic ego. After all, it is exactly this kind of arrogance that leads her into trouble in the first place, as she refuses to flee Singapore when news first spreads that the Japanese are going to overtake the city. "We were patriotic," she explains. "We didn't want to leave. I remember mother saying, 'Sheila, you and I are English women. We do not run away from a few Orientals…'" In this case, then, Sheila and her mother's feelings of superiority lead them into trouble, since they're too conceited to recognize a very real threat. Thinking of themselves as inherently better than the Japanese, they stubbornly ignore the frightening possibility that their precious British Empire will topple in Singapore, leaving them vulnerable and unprotected.

Although Sheila's patriotism interferes with her and Bridie's friendship *and* actively puts her life at risk, it's worth acknowledging that it does give her something to live for after she's captured by the Japanese. "You can snicker all you like," she tells Bridie, "but at the very worst times in the camp—I'd remind myself I was part of an Empire—and if others could endure it, so could I." While this may seem rather silly at first, there's no denying that Sheila uses her faith in her country as a coping mechanism. Indeed, she takes comfort in the idea that she belongs to something larger and more important than herself—a notion that gives her the strength to "endure" hardship. In turn, readers see that there are certain aspects of patriotic pride that could be worth adopting. Although self-importance often invites trouble, Misto suggests that developing pride in moderation can create a sense of assurance and self-worth that just might save a person in their darkest hour.

FRIENDSHIP, SACRIFICE, AND RESENTMENT

In *The Shoe-Horn Sonata*, Misto examines the complicated nature of friendship, proving that even the closest relationships are often full of tension. Bridie and Sheila's bond demonstrates this, as they form a close relationship in a Japanese prison camp, an environment that only emphasizes the many ways in which friendship sometimes demands personal sacrifice. They each go out of their way to keep one another alive, and though they do this because they care about each other, they also do it for selfish reasons. After all, neither woman wants to face the horrors of the prison camp on her own. As such, sacrifice becomes a somewhat selfish act, though Misto implies that this doesn't necessarily negate the value of such gestures. What's more, self-sacrifice also leads—at one point—to resentment between the two friends, as Bridie doesn't want to feel disproportionately indebted to Sheila. Despite this underlying tension, Bridie and Sheila are able to work through their problems, or at least put them aside to focus on their friendship. In turn, Misto intimates that resentment is often a natural part of friendship, something that can be overcome if both parties are willing to let go of their bitterness.

Bridie and Sheila's friendship begins with an act of kindness. While floating next to one another in the sea after their respective boats sink, Bridie asks Sheila questions in order to keep her from falling asleep and drowning. Although they're strangers, Bridie takes it upon herself to make sure Sheila stays awake, periodically tapping her on the head with her **shoe-horn**. Although this might not seem like an extraordinary act of bravery, it's worth remembering that these two women have never met. They're not from the same country, either, so they don't even share a patriotic sense of camaraderie. This shows that Bridie's determination to help Sheila is simply a manifestation of her kindness. At the same time, though, she seems surprisingly invested in the life of this stranger, as evidenced by her immense relief when Sheila—after having drifted away for a moment—comes floating back, singing aloud as she bobs on the waves. "And there Sheila was—still clutching her wood…I was so darn relieved I even joined in," Bridie says,

explaining that she sang with Sheila out of pure happiness. In this moment, it's obvious that Bridie isn't only interested in keeping Sheila alive for Sheila's sake, but also for her own, since her relief suggests that she doesn't want to be alone in the freezing ocean. In turn, readers see that it's perfectly possible to perform a good deed for another person while also personally benefitting from that deed.

When considering the effect that acts of kindness can have on relationships, it's worth noting that there are certain situations in which self-sacrifice can infuse a friendship with very complicated emotions. This is what happens when Bridie learns that Sheila saved her life not by trading her shoe-horn for quinine tablets, but by having sex with a group of Japanese guards. When Sheila tells this to Bridie decades after the fact, Bridie says, "You didn't. Tell me you didn't." This simple statement emphasizes the fact that Bridie doesn't *want* to know the truth about how Sheila saved her, perhaps because she thinks she'll never be able to repay Sheila for what she's done. Indeed, this horrific experience will stay with Sheila forever, the memory of it haunting her for her entire life. In contrast, Bridie's determination to keep Sheila from drowning was a simpler act of kindness, one that didn't traumatize her or negatively influence her future. It is precisely because of this imbalance that Bridie begins to resent Sheila for having sacrificed herself, eventually telling her in a moment of anger that she "should have let [her] die." In response, Sheila says, "Yes. Perhaps I should have." During this conversation, the audience sees the division and antipathy that has crept into Bridie and Sheila's relationship as a result of Sheila's bold act of self-sacrifice.

Above all, *The Shoe-Horn Sonata* is a play about the lengths people will go to for their friends. Having established that even self-interested acts of compassion are still valuable forms of kindness, Misto also shows his audience that certain good deeds actually complicate friendships because they imbue the interpersonal dynamic with a sense of indebtedness. Thankfully, Bridie manages at the end of the play to move past this, eventually leaving behind her resentment and helping Sheila tell her story on television, thereby coming to her friend's side to make it easier for her to cope with her traumatic past. As such, Misto intimates that, although certain forms of self-sacrifice can lead to tension in a friendship, such relational obstacles aren't insurmountable, especially when each friend is willing to let go of any lingering resentment.

TRAUMA AND REPRESSION

The Shoe-Horn Sonata brings to light the toxic effects of holding onto trauma. After five decades of trying to forget about the terrible violence of the Japanese prison camps, Sheila is averse to the mere idea of talking about what she went through. Believing that "when something hurts you run away," she has spent the last fifty years avoiding Bridie because she knows her friend will only remind her of the terrible experiences she was forced to endure. This, Misto implies, has kept her from working through her trauma, as she refuses to tell anyone that she was taken advantage of by a group of Japanese guards. However, she eventually tells Bridie about this harrowing memory, and though the conversation doesn't go well because of Bridie's harsh reaction, Sheila's decision to rid herself of this harmful secret gives her the idea to tell the story on national television. The fact that she's inspired to broadcast her story in such a major way after telling it to her friend suggests that finally talking about her pain is a liberating experience, one that helps her cope with the lasting effects of her embattled past. As such, Misto underlines the therapeutic and restorative qualities of emotional expression, implying that acknowledging trauma can help a person manage their various psychological burdens.

At first, Sheila is wary of talking about her time in the prison camps on national television. This is because she has been holding onto a secret about her experience for five decades and isn't ready to break her silence. But since she doesn't want to admit this, she frames her skepticism as something else entirely, talking about it as if it's a simple matter of decency. "Well you've got to admit it's not very 'dignified,'" she tells Bridie, referring to the act of telling emotional stories on television. By calling into question whether or not it's "dignified" to discuss her feelings in such a public manner, Sheila obscures her true reasons for not wanting to talk about her past. Rather than admitting that she isn't comfortable speaking about her trauma, she avoids the matter altogether by acting as if the television show is beneath her. Of course, this avoidance aligns with the fact that she has stayed away from Bridie—her best friend—for five decades in order to put off having to reckon with her emotional past.

Unfortunately, Sheila's inability to speak about her trauma has isolated her from Bridie, leaving her to struggle with her pain alone. As she tries to keep her secret, Bridie senses that something is amiss, saying, "Why do you push me away?" Still not ready to divulge that she was forced to have sex with the Japanese guards, Sheila says, "Can't we just forget it?" but Bridie pushes on, pointing out that they "never had secrets in camp." "I hardly know anything about you now," she continues. "I don't even know what your home is like or…how you've spent your life." In this moment, the audience sees that Sheila has effectively estranged herself from her best friend, who is perhaps the only person in the world who might be able to help her process her trauma, since she too was in the camps and might understand the horror enshrouding her memories. But Sheila insists that staying in touch with Bridie would only have made things worse, saying, "All we had in common was the camp. I didn't want to keep talking about it—I couldn't, Bridie—it hurt too much. And when something hurts you run away…or you dig a hole and bury it." Sheila commits to

repressing her trauma, upholding that it's best to "bury" painful memories, an idea that helps her justify her decision not to confide in Bridie.

When Sheila finally tells Bridie she was taken advantage of, Bridie is aghast, since she feels guilty for putting her friend in such a position. Tragically, this guilt turns into resentment, so that the entire conversation becomes accusatory and hurtful. However, Bridie eventually manages to empathize with her friend, saying, "Let me try and help." In response, though, Sheila talks about the haunting memory of Lipstick Larry, the ringleader of the guards who raped her. "Every night when I fall asleep, Lipstick Larry's waiting," she says. "He calls to me and I go to him—and no one can change that. Not even you." When Sheila says this, she points out that nothing anyone can do or say will ever "change" the past. In fact, she admits that she once tried to tell her mother about what happened, but her mother simply told her to "pull up [her] socks and get on with it," dismissing the matter before Sheila even had a chance to tell the story. Because of this, Sheila has resigned herself to silence, clearly believing that confiding in loved ones is futile. Indeed, the only reason she ends up telling Bridie is because Bridie draws it out of her.

Even though Bridie doesn't respond well when Sheila reveals her secret, it's obvious that Sheila comes to see the experience as liberating, since she soon decides to tell the story of her rape on national television. Pointing out that "keeping a secret wears you down," she frames going "public" as a way of "escap[ing]" trauma. What's more, she says that there are "probably thousands of survivors" who are "still trapped in the war" because they're "too ashamed to tell anyone" what happened to them. Unlike these survivors, Sheila now knows it's possible to lighten her burden by expressing her pain. "The war hasn't ended," she says. "Not for me. For me it goes on. And now I want peace." Saying this, she pinpoints the fact that trauma cycles on when a person remains silent about disturbing memories. By venting her pain, Sheila tries to find "peace," and though Bridie remains hesitant, she later urges her friend to go through with the idea, ultimately helping her narrate the story on camera. In turn, the audience sees that Sheila's decision to share her traumatic past has opened the door for Bridie to help her shoulder her burdensome grief. As a result, Misto accentuates the benefits of addressing trauma, suggesting that it's possible to alleviate suffering (to a certain extent) by speaking openly about it.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE SHOE-HORN

Given that the shoe-horn passes from Bridie to Sheila and then back again, the strange little tool comes to embody the complexities of their relationship and the various ways in which they carry the burden of trauma. Indeed, Sheila tells Bridie that she traded the shoe-horn in order to obtain antimalarial tablets, which Bridie needs in order to survive. In reality, though, Sheila secures the medication by having sex with the guards. As such, she keeps the shoe-horn. This, in turn, symbolizes the fact that Sheila has taken on the burden of saving Bridie's life. In keeping with this, when she returns the shoe-horn to Bridie, Bridie is overcome by guilt and resentment, ultimately lashing out at Sheila because she isn't yet capable of helping her friend deal with the pain of having been raped. In this way, the shoe-horn stands for the pair's difficult struggle to support one another.

THE CARAMEL

When Bridie and Sheila are prisoners in the Japanese camps during World War II, they obtain a piece of caramel that they suck on for one minute each week. This small piece of candy symbolizes the human capacity to eke out joy in even the most devastating environments. Bridie and Sheila are committed to making this small semblance of joy last as long as possible—because they refuse to eat the entire piece of candy, and instead create a schedule in which to savor it, the caramel itself also becomes an expression of their willpower. Indeed, the two women know that they must be diligent in making the caramel last because it's one of their only forms of joy in the midst of a grave situation, and though it's a small and fleeting kind of happiness, they understand that they're in no position to ignore any manifestation of pleasure.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Currency Press edition of *The Shoe-Horn Sonata* published in 1996.

Act One, Scene One Quotes

❝ Towards the end—as the Japs got closer—some British officers held a meeting—to discuss the merits of shooting us. They promised we'd be buried with full military honours.

[...]

They'd heard that the Japs had been raping army nurses and they thought they'd be doing us a favour. They're very considerate like that—the British. But since bullets were scarce, they decided to evacuate us.

Related Characters: Bridie (speaker), Rick ("M. Voice")

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

Bridie says this to Rick during her first interview, explaining what it was like to be in Singapore just before the Japanese took Malaya from the British Empire. Interestingly enough, Bridie finds herself at odds with not only the Japanese (who are her country's true enemies), but with the British officers who are supposedly protecting people like her. Indeed, when the British consider "the merits of shooting" Australian army nurses, they do so because they think this would be an honorable way to die. This provides insight into a certain kind of irrational and patriotic pride that Sheila—a Brit herself—adopts later in the play. Of course, it's true that being shot would perhaps be better than getting raped and *then* killed, but it's absurd to think that being executed by an ally would be something to be proud of. Nevertheless, this investment in pride demonstrates the extent to which people cling to ideas of dignity and honor. Furthermore, the fact that the British only decided not to do this because "bullets were scarce" underscores how little they care about their Australian allies—a tension the audience will later see surface between Bridie and Sheila.

Act One, Scene Two Quotes

SHEILA: I'll always remember that voice of hers. [*Mimics*] 'They can starve me till my bones poke out—'

BRIDIE: [*joining in*] 'But I'll die without a fag, love.' Now that's a good story for Rick. Ivy and her smokes—those dried banana leaves she puffed on—God they had a terrible stink.

SHEILA: She pulled pages of her Bible out for cigarette papers. When it was over I heard her telling a minister that she'd survived the war because of the Good Book.

Related Characters: Bridie, Sheila (speaker), Rick ("M. Voice"), Ivy

Related Themes:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sheila and Bridie recall one of their fellow prisoners, a woman named Ivy who cares more about smoking than receiving enough food. As the two women remember their friend's fondness of cigarettes, the audience sees how the prisoners use dark humor to cope with their abysmal circumstances. Indeed, it might be true that Ivy loves smoking, but it's unlikely that she truly needs a cigarette more than she needs proper nourishment. And yet, when she says, "I'll die without a fag, love," she offers her fellow prisoners a funny anecdote, giving them a dark but humorous line that stays with them for five whole decades. In this way, Misto shows the audience that prisoners of war are capable of retaining their sense of humor, even when their lives are bleak and hopeless. Deprived of the most basic sustenance, Ivy embellishes her yearning not for food, but for the luxury of a cigarette, thereby trivializing the dire situation she's in by focusing on an unnecessary item instead.

BRIDIE: She was sure you'd consider it—'unrefined'—going on television—airing your feelings.

SHEILA: [*starting to unpack*] Well you've got to admit it's not very 'dignified'.

BRIDIE: So why did you come [*Casually, trying to make light of it*] And don't say you did it for the chance of seeing me. Not after fifty years of hiding—

Related Characters: Sheila, Bridie (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

During this conversation, Bridie tells Sheila that she's been talking about her with their other friends, all of whom have—like them—survived the Japanese prison camps of World War II. In doing so, she admits that one of their acquaintances thought Sheila wouldn't come to the taping of this television documentary because she would think it "unrefined" to speak publicly about her emotions. Sheila, for her part, can't help but validate this rather disparaging sentiment by saying that she *does* think it's "not very 'dignified.'" Saying this, she makes it clear that she's uncomfortable with the idea of sharing her traumatic memories with people. This is rather unsurprising, given that she has spent the last fifty years avoiding Bridie, who is supposedly her best friend. When Bridie points this out, the audience sees that Sheila is actively avoiding anything that will force her to confront her past. Indeed, it is because of this impulse that she frames "airing [her] feelings" as

something that lacks "digni[ty]," since this prim and proper attitude enables her to sidestep the real reason she doesn't want to go on television, which is that she doesn't want to dredge up painful memories.

SHEILA *looks at* BRIDIE *with surprising intensity—but not with affection*. BRIDIE *looks back at* SHEILA, *desperately wanting her to say that she did come to see* BRIDIE. *A few seconds of silence. It is clear that something is still going on between these two women—even after fifty years' separation*. SHEILA *quickly turns to lift her suitcase onto the bed.*

BRIDIE: [*tersely*] You'll wreck your spine.

SHEILA: [*annoyed*] I know how to lift a suitcase thank you.

BRIDIE: [*taking charge—as usual*] We'll do it like we used to [...]

Related Characters: Bridie, Sheila (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the audience picks up on the palpable tension running between Sheila and Bridie. Having come together "after fifty years' separation," they discover that their relationship is rather strained, though Misto hasn't yet revealed why this is the case. Still, it's worth examining Misto's stage note, since he focuses closely on the interpersonal dynamics at play in Sheila and Bridie's friendship. "BRIDIE looks back at SHEILA, desperately wanting her to say that she did come to see BRIDIE," the playwright asserts, suggesting that part of the tension has to do with the fact that Bridie feels underappreciated. After all, it's obvious that there's a sense of imbalance between the two women, as neither feel at ease with one another, though they aren't necessarily capable of talking about what's causing this rift. Of course, the audience will later learn that Sheila has kept a secret from Bridie for the past fifty years, and that this secret is what drives them apart. For now, though, Misto turns his attention to the ways in which the two friends are still capable of connecting, as they work together to lift Sheila's suitcase, picking it up just like they used to pick up coffins in the prison camps. In turn, Misto implies that although Sheila and Bridie are at odds with one another, they still don't shy away from helping each other.

Act One, Scene Three Quotes

BRIDIE: [*not meaning to be rude*] The British were a bit thick sometimes.

SHEILA: [*slightly annoyed*] We were patriotic. We didn't want to leave. I remember mother saying, 'Sheila, you and I are English women. We do not run away from a few Orientals...'

Related Characters: Sheila, Bridie (speaker), Sheila's Mother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Bridie and Sheila tell Rick about their escape from Singapore. During this time, the British forces loaded women and children onto boats and accidentally sent them directly toward a Japanese fleet. This is why Bridie says, "The British were a bit thick sometimes," referencing the fact that many officers who were part of the British Empire were cocky, failing to take the threat of invasion seriously until the very last minute. Worse, when they finally decided to evacuate Singapore, they delivered their citizens into the hands of the enemy.

What's most interesting about this moment, though, isn't Bridie's scorn for the British, but Sheila's immediate defense of her country. "We were patriotic," she says, trying to justify why her fellow citizens didn't leave Singapore earlier. Rather humorously, Sheila only ends up proving Bridie's point about the British failure to recognize danger. Indeed, her mother's belief that British citizens "do not run away from a few Orientals" illustrates the ignorant pride that many patriotic Englanders adopted in that period, one that ultimately blinded them to the very real possibility of a Japanese invasion. In turn, the audience recognizes the harmful effects of adopting an unyielding and all-consuming kind of patriotism.

Before I left mother said to me, 'You'll be living with Colonials now, so set a good example. Always wear gloves—wherever you go. Don't socialize with Catholics—unless they're French or titled. And never kiss an Australian on the lips.'

Related Characters: Sheila (speaker), Sheila's Mother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

When Sheila's family finally decides to send her from Singapore to Australia to protect her from the Japanese invasion, her mother gives her advice that conveys a sense of superiority. When she talks to Sheila about "living with Colonials," she disparages Australians like Bridie, portraying them as naïve, impressionable, and—most of all—inferior to sophisticated Brits like Sheila herself. When Sheila relates this anecdote to Rick, then, the audience begins to understand why she has a pompous attitude when interacting with Bridie. Although she clearly cares very strongly for her friend—as evidenced by their history in the prison camps—it's evident that she has trouble getting over the fact that Bridie is what her mother would condescendingly call a "Colonial." Of course, it's also worth noting that Bridie's father gave her the opposite advice, insisting that she should never kiss a "Pommie" on the lips. As such, Misto showcases the odd patriotic tension that divides Bridie and Sheila, one based on nothing but arbitrary notions of national superiority.

SHEILA *instinctively reaches out to take* BRIDIE*'s hand. They hold hands. And once again they both look very vulnerable. We hear Japanese voices on the soundtrack.*

SHEILA: I wanted to cry. [*With resolution*] But I reminded myself I was a Woman of the Empire. And it just wasn't done to show fear to the natives. [*Wistful smile*] I could almost hear my mother saying: 'Chin up, gel! And where are your gloves?'

Related Characters: Sheila (speaker), Rick ("M. Voice"), Sheila's Mother, Bridie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

In this section, Sheila and Bridie tell Rick what it was like to be picked up—captured—by a Japanese boat after nearly drowning. What's most notable about this passage is that Sheila "instinctively" holds Bridie's hand, an act that suggests that the mere memory of this event is too much for her to bear on her own. Though the two friends certainly have their differences, in this moment they have no trouble coming together to help one another relive this traumatic experience. In turn, Misto foreshadows the intimacy and connection that arises when Sheila later decides to tell the story of her rape on television.

What's more, Sheila's patriotism is worth paying attention to, as she says that she was able to keep herself from dissolving into tears simply by reminding herself that she "was a Woman of the Empire." Of course, her statement that "it just wasn't done to show fear to the natives" is self-aggrandizing and racist, but it gives her the confidence and wherewithal to endure this otherwise traumatic experience. In this way, Misto demonstrates that unflinching patriotism—although often problematic—sometimes enables a person to face hardship, though it should be said that one need not adopt feelings of racist superiority in order to confront adversity.

Act One, Scene Four Quotes

SHEILA: You can snicker all you like— [*Struggling to explain*] but at the very worst times in the camp—I'd remind myself I was part of an Empire— and if others could endure it, so could I.

BRIDIE *snorts.*

SHEILA: [*defensively*] It got me through the war.

BRIDIE: I got you through the war. Your Empire didn't give a damn. They left you to the Japs.

SHEILA: [*very upset*] If you say that tomorrow, I'll go. I mean it.

Related Characters: Bridie, Sheila (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

This conversation takes place between Sheila and Bridie in Sheila's hotel room after their first joint interview. Whereas Bridie is happy with how the interview went, Sheila is still uncomfortable with the idea of "airing" her private feelings. As such, it makes sense that she has relied so heavily on her unflinching patriotism, since this helps her avoid talking about her actual trauma. However, Bridie makes fun of her for being so proud of her country, so Sheila insists that it is this pride that helped her "endure" the "very worst times in the camp." By telling herself that she was "part of an Empire," she managed to feel less alone. Unsurprisingly, Bridie dislikes this line of thought, since it suggests that Sheila's only source of camaraderie and support came from her overstated patriotism. In reality, Bridie believes that *she* is the one who "got [Sheila] through the war," not the British Empire, which she upholds "didn't give a damn" about her friend. Nevertheless, it's still important for Sheila to feel like

her nationalistic pride is important, which is why she threatens to leave if Bridie continues to speak disparagingly about England.

Act One, Scene Five Quotes

SHEILA: They got the idea from a prisoner—an Australian—he set it up.

BRIDIE: [*annoyed*] We don't know for sure he did.

SHEILA: [*to camera*] People blame the British for Singapore. There were Aussies too who were hardly saints.

BRIDIE: [*annoyed with* SHEILA] Have you forgotten how many of the British collaborated? [*To the camera*] The Japs wanted us because they knew they couldn't have us. But they could pick and choose from amongst the Poms. Those women who'd lorded it over everyone at Raffles were selling themselves for a hard-boiled egg.

SHEILA: They had no choice. They had children to feed. We didn't judge. We accepted it.

BRIDIE: [*disgusted*] I didn't! To go with a Jap—to give him pleasure—how could you ever live with yourself?

Related Characters: Bridie, Sheila (speaker), Rick ("M. Voice")

Related Themes:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Bridie and Sheila attempt to answer Rick's interview question about whether or not the Japanese guards ever tried to take advantage of the women in the prison camps. In response, the two women tell him that the guards set up an "officers' club," an idea they got from an Australian male prisoner. As soon as Sheila says this, Bridie interjects, adding that they "don't know for sure" that an Australian really did give them the idea. As the two women go back and forth about each other's countries—each one trying to insult the other's homeland—the audience sees that Sheila isn't the only one who has patriotic pride. Although she's certainly the one who flaunts this pride, Bridie also goes out of her way to portray her fellow Australians as upstanding people. Furthermore, she shames British women for sleeping with the Japanese guards, failing to see that "they had no choice." As such, it becomes clear that Bridie is rather judgmental when it comes to the topic of rape, thinking that it's unforgiveable to "give pleasure" to a Japanese guard. What this viewpoint fails to account for is the fact that the women who did this were only trying to survive. Indeed, Bridie blames the victims of rape when she speaks this way—a fact that is important to keep in mind as the play progresses, since Bridie later finds out that Sheila had sex with a group of guards in order to save Bridie's life.

Act One, Scene Six Quotes

SHEILA: They were people I grew up with. A lot of them were friends of mine.

BRIDIE: And the Japs were the enemy. Every woman who gave in made it harder for the rest.

SHEILA: It was the only way they could feed their kids.

BRIDIE: [*with disgust*] Sleeping with a Jap? I'd never have done that—not for anyone. How could you go on living with yourself—or look your family in the eye?

This is a shattering remark for SHEILA, *but she does her best to conceal any reaction.*

Related Characters: Bridie, Sheila (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

After having talked on-camera about the women who had sex with the Japanese guards, Sheila and Bridie continue the conversation in the hotel room, disagreeing about whether or not this behavior is justifiable. Sheila, for her part, reminds Bridie that many of the women who slept with the guards in exchange for food were her friends. By saying this, she implies that they were most likely very respectable women, since she surely "grew up with" people like her, who were sophisticated and "refined." However, this approach doesn't persuade Bridie, who still sees sleeping with the guards as an unforgiveable offense. "Every woman who gave in made it harder for the rest," Bridie says, failing to realize that "giving in" isn't a true form of consent. Indeed, the women who ended up having sex with the guards weren't actively inviting or seeking it out. Rather, their ability to safely refuse the guards eventually wore down—a fact that has nothing to do with their moral integrity. Unfortunately, though, Bridie appears unwilling to see the matter this way, ultimately going on to say that she would "never have done that—not for anyone." In turn, the audience sees how devastating it must be for Sheila to hear this, since she herself made this sacrifice for Bridie.

Act One, Scene Seven Quotes

BRIDIE: Don't laugh. It was important. Caramel was our only luxury. Sheila sold her brooch to buy some—from a native who used to smuggle it. Every week—on Sunday night—we'd pop that caramel into our mouths—for one minute each—one minute of bliss—then we'd store it away till the next week.

M. VOICE: You were never tempted to eat it all?

BRIDIE: No. We were very strict about that. It had to last till the end of the war.

Related Characters: Rick ("M. Voice"), Bridie (speaker), Sheila

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

In a one-on-one interview with Rick, Bridie talks about a piece of caramel that she and Sheila coveted when they were prisoners of war. Having mentioned how much they cared about this candy, she tells Rick not to treat her words lightly, insisting that this tiny object was supremely "important" because it was their "only luxury." In a life suddenly stripped of all happiness, tasting this candy became something to look forward to. Indeed, without this small luxury at the end of each week, Bridie and Sheila wouldn't have had anything to lend their lives a feeling of excitement or pleasure. This is why they refused to eat the whole thing, knowing that if they finished it, they wouldn't have anything to buoy their spirits. In this way, Misto accentuates how important it is for people in hopeless circumstances to find even the most fleeting and miniscule forms of joy.

Act One, Scene Eight Quotes

BRIDIE: [...] In 1945—when I was still in a Singapore hospital bed. I got a note from you saying you were going off to England—and you'd send me your new address. I'm still waiting, Sheila. [*Hurt*] Why did you leave me?

SHEILA: [*not telling the truth*] All we had in common was the camp. I didn't want to keep talking about it—I couldn't, Bridie—it hurt too much. And when something hurts you run away... or you dig a hole and bury it.

Related Characters: Sheila, Bridie (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

In this conversation, Bridie and Sheila discuss the fact that Sheila has barely tried to communicate with Bridie for the past fifty years. Trying to defend herself, Sheila reminds Bridie that she sent a letter, but Bridie points out that this was in 1945, right after they were set free. "I got a note from you saying you were going off to England—and you'd send me your new address," Bridie says. Despite this promise, though, Sheila never wrote her again. In fact, she didn't even go to England, instead staying in Australia, meaning that she's been living near Bridie for the past five decades—and *still* she never reached out. Knowing there's not much she can say to set this right, Sheila insists that the only reason she didn't contact Bridie is because she "didn't want to keep talking about" the prison camps.

Misto notes that Sheila isn't being entirely truthful in this moment, but this is something of an inaccurate stage note. While it's true that Sheila is purposefully avoiding any mention of the fact that she had sex with a group of Japanese guards in order to save Bridie's life (a secret Bridie hasn't yet learned), it seems likely that she genuinely wouldn't want to "keep talking about" the camps with Bridie. Indeed, it's obvious that it really *would* "hurt too much" for Sheila to see Bridie, since reuniting with her old friend would only remind her of the traumatic experience she underwent in order to save her life. As such, it's apparent that Sheila is speaking earnestly when she says, "When something hurts you run away..." After all, this is exactly what she has done for the past fifty years by refusing to see Bridie.

BRIDIE: You didn't. Tell me you didn't.

SHEILA: [*angrily*] You were the one who wanted to know. I told you to leave it alone.

BRIDIE: [*shocked*] You didn't sleep with a Jap. Not you.

SHEILA: You were screaming. And he went and got quinine. For you. And he showed the tablets to me—and he pointed to the barracks—where his mates were waiting.

BRIDIE: Don't! I don't want to hear this!

Related Characters: Sheila, Bridie (speaker), Lipstick Larry

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 34

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sheila finally tells Bridie the truth about how she saved her life. To do this, Sheila reveals that she didn't trade the shoe-horn for quinine tablets—as she originally claimed—but rather offered herself to Lipstick Larry and his cronies. And though this revelation is quite important to the play, what's most notable about this exchange is that Bridie doesn't want Sheila to continue telling her story. "Tell me you didn't," she says, trying manipulate the tale so that it's easier to bear. Sheila, for her part, reminds Bridie that she was the one who "wanted to know" what has been keeping them apart, but Bridie only continues her attempt to alter the truth, saying, "You didn't sleep with a Jap. Not you." Of course, she knows that nothing she says will change what happened, so she eventually pleads with Sheila to simply stop telling the story, saying, "Don't! I don't want to hear this." In this way, Bridie validates Sheila's earlier assertion that "when something hurts you run away" or "dig a hole and bury it," since her unwillingness to listen to the truth is, at its core, an attempt to avoid or repress what happened to her best friend.

Act Two, Scene Nine Quotes

SHEILA: […] Just after Bridie got back on her feet, Captain Siki called a line up. He said: 'I have good news for Australian womens. Your Emperor, Mr Curtin, sends his greetings. And orders you all to keep smiling.' At first there was... absolute silence. And then the nurses—[*Slightly puzzled*]—well I thought they must be crying—because they started to wipe their eyes. But it was from laughter. They were laughing.

M. VOICE: Why? What was so funny?

SHEILA: They were skin and bone and covered in boils—and they'd just been told to 'keep smiling'! Well they smiled all right. Then they laughed so much they couldn't control it.

Related Characters: Rick ("M. Voice"), Sheila (speaker), Bridie, Captain Siki

Related Themes:

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

This exchange occurs when Rick asks Sheila if she heard from her government while she was a prisoner of war. In response, she tells him that the British government never reached out, but that the Australian Prime Minister sent a message to the Australian women in the camps. Relaying this message, Captain Siki says that the Australian leader has "order[ed]" the prisoners to "keep smiling." The phrasing of this is worth considering, since Siki uses the word "order[ed]," as if the Prime Minister wants to force people like Bridie to embody happiness and resilience. What's most important about this passage, though, is that it highlights the prisoners' ability to maintain their sense of humor. Rather than getting depressed upon hearing this unsympathetic and callous message, the prisoners burst into laughter at its absurdity, ultimately suggesting that they're still capable of laughing at their abysmal circumstances. This, in turn serves as yet another example of the ways in which people can turn to small pleasures like humor in times of strife.

Siki slapped a few faces and they managed to stop. But all that day you could hear these giggles as the joke went right round the camp. There was even laughter after bed time—instead of the usual sobbing and quarrels. The guards would bark and shine their torches—and all would be quiet till some wit muttered 'Keep smiling, girls!'—and we'd all crack up. We paid dearly for our fun though. The next day Siki lined us up. He made us stand in the sun for hours—and ordered us never to smile again...

Related Characters: Sheila (speaker), Bridie, Rick ("M. Voice"), Captain Siki

Related Themes:

Page Number: 42

Explanation and Analysis

This is an explanation of what happens after the Australian Prime Minister sends a message to the female prisoners, saying that they must "keep smiling." Although Captain Siki tries to suppress the joy that suddenly comes burbling out of his prisoners as a result of this comment, he finds himself largely unable to stop them from laughing. Throughout the ensuing day, people start "crack[ing] up," even laughing after "bed time." What's more, this levity helps the women avoid the "sobbing and quarrels" that usually fill their nights, thus illustrating the restorative and healthy effects of humor. Indeed, it's clear that this opportunity to laugh provides the prisoners with a rare moment of catharsis, one that helps them to temporarily forget about—or at least

withstand—their terrible circumstances. And although they eventually pay "dearly" for their laughter, it's worth noting that Captain Siki's demand that the prisoners "never" "smile again" is impossible to enforce, thereby intimating that humor and joy are uncontainable signs of resilience and strength.

Act Two, Scene Ten Quotes

BRIDIE: [*upset*] Why did you have to go with that Jap?

SHEILA: Ssshh!

BRIDIE: You were only a girl—a child!

SHEILA: I had to do it. I couldn't let you die.

BRIDIE: If only I'd known—I would never have let you... Sheila—please—let me try and help.

SHEILA: [*haunted*] Every night when I fall asleep, Lipstick Larry's waiting. He calls to me and I go to him— and no one can change that. Not even you.

Related Characters: Sheila, Bridie (speaker), Lipstick Larry

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

In this exchange, Bridie and Sheila talk about the sacrifice Sheila made by having sex with Lipstick Larry and his fellow Japanese officers in order to save Bridie's life, trading sex for the antimalarial medicine. Although she should be thankful—and perhaps is, on some level—Bridie is distraught, wishing that her friend had never slept with the guards. "Why did you have to go with that Jap?" she asks, deeply troubled by the idea that Sheila did something so traumatizing just to save her. Unsurprisingly, Sheila simply reminds her that she would have died otherwise, though the way Sheila states this is worth examining. Indeed, Sheila says, "I had to do it. I couldn't let you die." When she says, "I had to do it," the audience sees that, although Sheila sacrificed herself for altruistic reasons, she also had personal reasons for keeping Bridie alive. Indeed, she couldn't let Bridie die because this would mean having to endure the terror of the prison camps on her own.

This is also a significant moment because Bridie finally expresses a willingness to help Sheila process her pain. "Let me try and help," she says, essentially trying to counteract the judgment and resentment she initially showed Sheila. Unfortunately, though, there is very little she can do, since Sheila has been forced to live with the haunting trauma of her rape for fifty years—something she believes "no one can change." And though it's true that "no one can change" what happened to her, it's not the case that she has to process her grief on her own.

I almost confided in mother once. [*Sadly*] Isn't that amusing? It was just before I sailed from Singapore. I took her hand and whispered that... there was something I needed to tell her—about the Japanese. Mother poured herself a drink and said: 'You know what the Bible says, my dear. "No cross, no crown." We must pull up our socks and get on with it.' Took more than a war to change Mother.

Related Characters: Sheila (speaker), Lipstick Larry, Bridie, Sheila's Mother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

This passage appears just after Bridie asks why Sheila didn't tell her about her traumatic experience sooner. When Sheila answers this question, Bridie asks if she's ever told anyone else, and Sheila says that she once tried to "confide" in her mother. Unfortunately, though, her mother was apparently unwilling to listen to her painful memory. Indeed, she cut her daughter off before she could even talk about the experience, primly saying, "No cross, no crown." This is an expression people often use to talk about the importance of experiencing hardship. Although the phrase itself doesn't actually appear in the Bible, it is frequently used to reference the trials and tribulations Jesus underwent before his Resurrection. As such, preachers use it as a way of helping people make sense of difficult experiences, suggesting that turmoil is simply a part of life. Unfortunately, though, this belittles Sheila's very serious and legitimate trauma, ultimately enabling her mother to dismiss the matter altogether without stopping to help her daughter process her grief.

Act Two, Scene Eleven Quotes

SHEILA: A lot of times we barely got through it—we were so weak from hunger. But we sang our sonata whenever we could—so the camp would know there was still music left.

BRIDIE: It probably sounded bloody awful. But not to us. To us we still had harmony... and the Japs could never ever take that away.

Related Characters: Bridie, Sheila (speaker), Rick ("M. Voice")

Related Themes:

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sheila and Bridie explain to Rick that they started singing two-person songs when the other members of their choir started dying of malaria. Although it was difficult, Sheila explains, they pushed on, arranging sonatas (musical pieces for two instruments or voices) in order to make sure that the rest of the camp knew "there was still music left." Indeed, Bridie and Sheila understood the importance of keeping their spirits high, since their lives were otherwise so bleak and hopeless. What's more, continuing to sing becomes an act of dissent and an assertion of agency, since bringing music to the prison camp reminds Bridie and Sheila—and whoever hears their sonatas—that the guards can "never ever take" away their love of music and their resilient spirits.

Act Two, Scene Twelve Quotes

SHEILA: I'm not just anyone, Bridie. [*Thinking of them both*] Keeping a secret wears you down. Believe me—I know. In the end you'll do anything just to escape it.

Related Characters: Sheila (speaker), Bridie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

Sheila says this shortly after Bridie tells her that she was arrested for stealing. Having been scared by a group of Japanese tourists, Bridie ran out of a store without purchasing the package of cookies she was holding. Too embarrassed to explain what had happened, she ended up going to court and paying a fine for theft. Now, she expresses her shame and admits that she vowed to herself that she'd never tell anyone about the incident. "I'm not just anyone, Bridie," Sheila says, emphasizing the strength of their bond. After all, these two women have shared terrible experiences with one another, experiences that have ultimately brought them closer because they form the basis of a shared history of trauma—though of course this isn't the case when it comes to Sheila's rape. Still, though, Sheila wants to help her friend see that "keeping a secret wears you down," a lesson she herself has learned as a result of repressing the trauma of her rape. In this way, Sheila stresses the importance of finding ways to share and express painful experiences.

SHEILA: I don't see why it... should have to be a secret. Not now.

BRIDIE: [*unnerved*] You mustn't discuss it beyond this room. You know how cruel other people can be. It's the only thing that hasn't changed in the last fifty years. What on earth has possessed you to—

SHEILA: [*haunted*] When I went back to Belalau—searching for the graves— I kept on thinking, why did they die? Was it all for nothing? All our friends? And that's when I realised I had to talk about it. There are probably thousands of survivors like us—still trapped in the war—too ashamed to tell anyone. Lots of people will be watching when Rick's programme goes to air. It mightn't be too late to—

Related Characters: Bridie, Sheila (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sheila tells Bridie that she wants to talk about her rape on national television. Unfortunately, though, Bridie insists that she "mustn't discuss it beyond" the hotel room, claiming that "other people" will be "cruel" when they hear that she had sex with Lipstick Larry and the other guards. This, of course, is simply a projection of her own initial reaction to the news, since Bridie herself was unable to empathize with her friend. In fact, she judged Sheila for what she did, which is why she assumes everyone else will do the same thing. What's more, her desire to silence Sheila also has to do with the guilt she feels as a result of Sheila's sacrifice. Indeed, Bridie has a hard time getting over the fact that her friend did such a difficult thing in order to save her life. As such, she finds the idea of broadcasting this story to strangers troubling, since it will only exacerbate her own guilt. Nevertheless, though, Sheila begins to feel as if she has a duty to speak the truth, knowing that she has a chance to help other survivors of sexual abuse finally see that they don't have to keep their trauma a secret. "There are probably thousands of survivors like us," Sheila says, noting that these people are "still

trapped in the war" because they haven't found a way to liberate themselves by talking about their painful experiences. In turn, she identifies the therapeutic effects of expressing trauma.

BRIDIE: [*upset and threatened*] To what? You think the armies of this planet will stop murdering each other because some old English woman disapproves of all the killing?

SHEILA *shakes her head sadly.*

Then what possible difference will it make?

SHEILA: [*haunted but gently*] Probably none. I know that, Bridie. But the war hasn't ended. Not for me. For me it goes on. And now I want peace. And if the only way to get it is to tell the truth then—

BRIDIE: You were always impulsive and you haven't changed since camp. [*Bitterly*] This is what Rick's been after all along, I'll bet. This is why the free booze and the room with ocean views. He's been softening us up. Can't you see that, Sheila?

SHEILA: And what if he has? It's still my decision.

BRIDIE: You know what they'll call you. They'll call you a whore.

Related Characters: Sheila, Bridie (speaker), Rick ("M. Voice")

Related Themes:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

When Sheila tells Bridie that she wants to talk about her rape on national television, she says, "It mightn't be too late to—" Before she can finish, Bridie cuts her off, saying, "To what?" She then goes on to ask if Sheila thinks talking about this terrible experience will make a "difference" in the world. Sheila, for her part, acknowledges that she won't necessarily end violence or bring about any kind of overarching change, but she doesn't care about this. After all, she believes that "the war hasn't ended," at least not for her. "For me it goes on," she says. "And now I want peace." By saying this, she suggests that keeping traumatic experiences secret only gets in the way of moving on with life. Unfortunately, though, Bridie remains "threatened" by this idea, since she isn't yet ready to confront the guilt she feels as a result of the sacrifice Sheila made on her behalf. As such, she tells Sheila that people will call her a "whore," ultimately lashing out because she doesn't know how else to process the complex feelings she has about the matter.

Act Two, Scene Thirteen Quotes

SHEILA: [*nervously*] My knees were shaking— I was— terribly frightened. I said 'What if the Japs come after us, Bridie?' [*Smiling sadly*] I remember her words so clearly. 'And what if they do?' she said. 'Since when have we ever been scared of the Japs?'

BRIDIE *reaches out and takes* SHEILA*'s hand.*

BRIDIE: So Sheila and I walked out of that camp. [*Gently, fondly, perhaps smiling sadly*] And on four wobbly legs we went down to the village. Sometimes I dragged Sheila. Sometimes Sheila dragged me. The main thing is we got there. And we could never have done that alone.

Related Characters: Bridie, Sheila (speaker), Rick ("M. Voice")

Related Themes:

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

This exchange takes place during Sheila and Bridie's final interview with Rick. As they tell him about their release from the prison camp, the two women are overcome by emotion. Although they've recently been fighting about whether or not Sheila should tell the story of her rape on national television, they now transcend this disagreement in order to support one another. When Bridie "reaches out and takes Sheila's hand," the audience might recall that Sheila made this very same gesture when talking about their initial capture. As such, Misto presents two instances in which it becomes clear that Sheila and Bridie's relationship is still quite strong, despite their differences and the fact that they've been apart for so long. "Sometimes I dragged Sheila. Sometimes Sheila dragged me," Bridie says, underlining the fact that both friends help one another when it's necessary. Even more importantly, she recognizes that they "could never have" made it out alive if they were "alone," thereby emphasizing how necessary their friendship was to their survival.

She went to... the Japs... to a Japanese guard—and... she sold herself to him for tablets. She was a beautiful, kind and brave young woman. [*Looking at* SHEILA.] She wasn't just my friend— she was— she is—the other half of my life. And she gave herself to him... so that I... could have quinine... And she never told me till two nights ago. For fifty years she never told anyone... They don't give medals for things like that. But they should.

Related Characters: Bridie (speaker), Rick ("M. Voice"), Lipstick Larry, Sheila

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

After Rick tells Bridie and Sheila in their final interview that they can take a break, Bridie insists they continue, adding that they've omitted something important from their answers to his questions. Going on, she tells the story of Sheila's rape. In doing so, she goes against her own hesitancy to talk about such matters on national television.

Although she recently told Sheila not to talk about what happened to her because people might call her a "whore," she now helps her friend unburden herself of her traumatic secret. Most importantly, she goes out of her way to express her appreciation for Sheila, saying that she is "the other half of [her] life" and that she "was a beautiful, kind and brave young woman." These sentiments are significant, since Bridie hasn't yet showed Sheila any gratitude for the sacrifice she made. Instead, Bridie has only resented Sheila and lamented the fact that she told her about the horrifying experience in the first place. Now, though, she says that Sheila deserves a "medal" for her bravery, a statement that at last acknowledges her friend's heroic kindness.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

Bridie's voice sounds out in total darkness as she explains how Japanese guards in World War II used to make their female prisoners bow to them. Saying that she had to stay bowed "for hours" at a time, she adds that she was never to look a guard in the eye. As such, she would "stare at the dirt" and wonder why she "ever left Chatswood in the first place." At this point, a spotlight shines on her, and an "On-Air" sign becomes visible behind her. "And why did you?" asks Rick (the television interviewer), wanting to know why Bridie ever left home to go to war. In response, Bridie admits that she wanted to be like her father, a soldier who fought in Egypt. "He didn't want me to enlist but I could tell that he was proud," she says.

In the very first moments of this initial scene, it is clear that The Shoe-Horn Sonata *is a play that examines the ways in which people talk about traumatic experiences. As Bridie sits down for what seems to be an interview about her experience as a prisoner of war, she tries to accurately convey what it was like to be forced into a position of inferiority and deference. As she does so, Misto subtly hints at the fact that talking about painful memories is an important part of the healing process—otherwise, why else would Bridie agree to rehash her traumatic experiences? On another note, the fact that Bridie goes out of her way to say that her father "was proud" of her is worth keeping in mind as the play progresses, as it suggests that people are often motivated by pride and patriotism to do dangerous things.*

Bridie tells Rick, the interviewer, that her father gave her a **shoe-horn** on the day she left Australia. "There are three things every young soldier should know," her father told her. "Always use a shoe-horn—it'll make your boots last longer. Don't sit on a toilet till you've lined the seat with paper. And never kiss a Pommie on the lips." Happily remembering this advice, Bridie adds that she had never left Australia before that day, though she wasn't "homesick" because she was immediately busy in Johore Bahru, a city near Singapore (in British Malaya) where the Australian military set up an army hospital. In those initial days of the war, she and her fellow nurses would often go dancing, and Bridie admits that it was "hard to believe [they] were on the brink of war."

When Bridie's father tells her to "never kiss a Pommie on the lips," Misto introduces the friendly but sometimes tense rivalry between Australians and Brits ("Pommie" is a term for a British person). In this way, the playwright alerts the audience members to the extent to which patriotism will factor into the play. Of course, as an Australian army nurse, Bridie will work alongside Brits, since Australia and England were allies during World War II. As such, her father's rather humorous jab at the Brits is harmless, though it underlines the fact that, even though Bridie will no doubt encounter fellow soldiers from England, there might still exist a certain amount of friction between her and her supposed allies.

Bridie's surroundings slowly become apparent to the audience, and it becomes clear that she's in a "television studio where she is being interviewed for a documentary." Continuing her recollection of the early days of World War II in Johore Bahru, Bridie says that nobody quite grasped the danger of the situation, ultimately underestimating the Japanese. In fact, the British even neglected to "fortify the shore-lines" because they didn't want to "spoil their beaches." When the Japanese planes finally started flying overhead, Bridie turned to a soldier she was taking care of in the hospital and said that she was certain the British and Australian planes would be "waiting to greet them," but the soldier only gave her a sad smile, saying, "But sister, don't' you know? We don't have a proper air-force." It was only then that Bridie understood that the Japanese could easily overtake them.

In this moment, the audience sees Bridie's unexamined faith in her country and the British Empire. Having a ignored the gradual escalation of wartime events, she fails to grasp that she's in danger. This is because she has invested herself in a prideful kind of patriotism, one that has blinded her to reality. As such, it comes as a horrifying shock when she realizes that the Japanese are perfectly capable of decimating the British and Australian forces.

When Rick asks how the British reacted to the Japanese bombing of Malaya, Bridie tells him that they saw it as a "personal insult." Before long, British and Australian troops alike retreated to Singapore, though this didn't help them escape Japanese bombs. Still, Bridie continued to work hard as a nurse, treating soldiers in the Singapore hospitals even though there were too many wounded people to help. As the situation became more and more dangerous, the nurses and soldiers in the hospitals wore helmets, and "if a soldier didn't' have one, [the nurses] made him wear a bedpan." Eventually, Bridie says, the British officers considered whether or not to shoot the army nurses. "They promised we'd be buried with full military honours," Bridie says, explaining that this might be better than getting raped by Japanese soldiers. "They're very considerate like that—the British," she says.

Once the British and Australian militaries realize they're in grave danger, their first consideration is how they might retain their pride. Indeed, the British officers who consider killing Bridie and her fellow nurses are fixated on the importance of being "buried with military honours," thinking that this formal token of respect is more important than a person's life. Of course, Bridie disagrees, going out of her way to snidely disparage the British—yet another indication of her low-level antipathy toward her own allies.

Telling Rick what it was like to finally flee from Singapore, Bridie says that she and the other military nurses boarded a ferry meant to hold 12 people, though in that moment there were 300 passengers. Even though she knew she had to leave for her safety, she was hesitant to leave behind her patients. "But we had no choice," she says. "I said goodbye to every one of them." As she looked back on Singapore and watched it "burn," she couldn't believe her eyes. "Singapore, Fortress of the Empire…" she says.

Despite her fear, Bridie doesn't want to leave her patients. This is a demonstration of her kindness, empathy, and willingness to put herself in dangerous situations for other people. However, she also knows that she'll die if she stays in Singapore, so she leaves. In turn, Misto suggests that, although Bridie is a compassionate person who's willing to sacrifice herself for others, there is a limit to what she'll do for someone else.

In total, 44 boats—each carrying 300 people—left Singapore that night. Bridie explains that the British "had refused to evacuate civilians" because they couldn't fathom the idea that their Empire in the "Far East" would be defeated. At the last minute, though, they piled everyone—women, children, soldiers—onto boats and sent them off, not knowing that they were headed straight for Japanese "destroyers." As Bridie narrates this tale, photographs are displayed on a screen behind her, showing pictures of Singapore in 1942, when it was "at the height of its prosperity—and on the brink of a terrible catastrophe." Then, just as the song "Rule Britannia" (a patriotic song about the strength of Britain) comes to an end, a photograph appears on the screen of a sign that says, "Don't listen to Rumour." "If only they had…" Misto writes in his stage note.

Once again, Misto shows the audience that an unyielding sense of patriotism can blind people to danger. Indeed, the British are so committed to the idea of their own infallibility that they fail to see that the Japanese are capable of destroying them in Malaya. Because of this excessive pride, they eventually find themselves at a severe disadvantage when they're forced to flee at the last minute.

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

Bridie helps Sheila with her luggage, opening the door to her friend's hotel room and telling her that "everything's paid for" by the television station. Sheila, for her part, is visibly nervous about having to appear on air, but Bridie ignores her worries, instead complaining to herself that Sheila hasn't even said it's good to see her—a comment that goes unnoticed because Sheila doesn't hear. When Sheila tells her to speak into her "good ear," Bridie says that she should tell Rick—the interviewer—that she's hard of hearing, and Sheila warily says, "What sort of questions is he asking?" Sensing Sheila's anxiety about the entire ordeal, Bridie assures her that Rick is "very tactful," and then she changes the subject, asking if Sheila recognized her in the "foyer." "Who could ever forget that big walk of yours?" she replies.

Sheila's anxiety surrounding the interview process reminds the audience how hard it is to examine one's own trauma. Although Bridie appears relatively unfazed by the idea of rehashing painful experiences, Sheila is clearly hesitant to talk about what happened in the Japanese prison camps. In this way, Misto demonstrates that people confront hardship and emotional turmoil in different ways, resorting to their own coping mechanisms.

Bridie pokes fun of Sheila for wearing "gloves," but Sheila says this is the "sign of a lady." As she says this, she notices Bridie's wedding ring and is taken aback, though Bridie says her husband has been dead for fifteen years. Sheila, for her part, has never married, though she quickly changes the subject by asking if any of the other women from their prison camp have come for the interview, and Bridie lists their old friends. "What about Ivy?" Sheila asks, and Bridie says, "Dead for years." Pausing to think about this dead friend, the two women remember that Ivy used to complain about not having cigarettes in the prison camps, saying, "They can starve me till my bones poke out—But I'll die without a fag, love." After the war, she apparently told a minister that "the Good Book" is what helped her "survive."

Ivy's remark about "dying without a [cigarette]" serves as one of the play's first examples of how people often use humor to deal with travesty and difficult circumstances. What's more, although Bridie and Sheila obviously have quite a bit of tension between them—as evidenced by the way they speak rather disparagingly about one another—they are still perfectly capable of connecting by talking about their wartime experiences, remembering old friends fondly and reliving the jokes that helped get them through the otherwise traumatizing experience.

As they talk about their old friends, Bridie says that one of the other women bet her five dollars that Sheila wouldn't actually "show up." "She was sure you'd consider it—'unrefined'—going on television—airing your feelings," she says, and Sheila confesses that she *does* think the idea isn't "very 'dignified.'" Hearing this Bridie asks why Sheila came in the first place, if she thinks it's such a bad idea. "And don't say you did it for the chance of seeing me," she adds. "Not after fifty years of hiding—" Cutting her off, Sheila insists she wasn't hiding, but Bridie reminds her that in 1945, Sheila claimed she was returning to England, but actually stayed in Australia. Indeed, for the past 50 years, Sheila has lived extremely close to Bridie without ever coming to see her.

Sheila's assertion that it isn't "dignified" to talk about her emotions on television shows the audience that she is rather averse to the idea of reliving her traumatic experiences before an audience. As such, she frames the entire ordeal as beneath her, using her pride as an excuse to avoid discussing her own trauma. In this way, she keeps herself from embracing the idea of opening up about her pain, ultimately insisting that her hesitance isn't a form of repression, but rather a "dignified" and proper way of comporting oneself. Given that she has actively avoided Bridie for 50 years, though, it's obvious that she's skeptical of the interview process because it will force her to stop running from her troubling memories.

After Bridie tells Sheila that she should have written to her, the two women stand in tense silence. Bridie casts her friend a look, wanting "desperately" for her to say that she came to see her. "It is clear that something is still going on between these two women—even after fifty years' separation," Misto notes. Then, breaking the tension, Sheila tries to haul her suitcase onto the bed. Seeing this, Bridie jumps to attention, telling her not to do it on her own because she'll hurt her back. And though Sheila insists she can do it alone, Bridie says, "We'll do it like we used to," and the two women pretend that they're lifting a coffin in the prison camps. "Ichi—Ni—San," they count, throwing the suitcase onto the bed and shouting, "Ya-ta!!!"

When Misto says that Sheila and Bridie are still dealing with interpersonal troubles "even after fifty years' separation," the audience sees that people who go through traumatic experiences together often have complicated relationships. Indeed, Bridie and Sheila's friendship is saddled with tension and resentment, although Misto hasn't yet made it clear why, exactly, this is the case. And yet, the two women have also maintained a certain closeness, despite all their years apart. When they lift the suitcase onto the bed, for example, they demonstrate their willingness to work together to manage their respective burdens.

ACT ONE, SCENE THREE

As the lights come up on the television studio, Rick asks how long Sheila and Bridie have known each other, and Sheila says they met the night their respective ships sank in February, 1942. Rick then asks why Sheila and her family hadn't already left Singapore by that point, and before Sheila can properly answer, Bridie says, "The British were a bit thick sometimes." Frustrated by this remark, Sheila cuts in, saying, "We were patriotic. We didn't want to leave. I remember mother saying, 'Sheila, you and I are English women. We do not run away from a few Orientals…'"

The remarks that Sheila's mother makes demonstrate once again the extent to which pride and patriotism can blind people to the reality of danger. Sheila's mother allows herself to believe wholeheartedly in her own superiority, thinking that the Japanese are somehow beneath her because she and her daughter are "English women." In turn, she ends up endangering her family by insisting that they stay in Singapore even when it's obvious the Japanese will stage a successful invasion.

Behind Sheila, photographs appear of the evacuation of Singapore on February 13, 1942. As these images of chaos are projected on the screen, Sheila explains that she boarded a boat for Australia while her mother stayed in order to "stop the Japs looting her silver." A Bridie's behest, Sheila hesitantly tells Rick what her mother said upon her departure. "You'll be living with Colonials now, so set a good example," she told her daughter. "Always wear gloves—wherever you go. Don't socialize with Catholics—unless they're French or titled. And never kiss an Australian on the lips."

The fact that Sheila's mother tells her not to "kiss an Australian on the lips" is humorous and worth noting, since Bridie's father told her the opposite, saying that she shouldn't kiss a "Pommie" (British person) on the lips. Through these twinned comments, the audience sees the light rivalry and resentment that passes between Australians and Brits during this time period. What's more, the nature of Bridie and Sheila's tense friendship becomes a bit clearer in this moment, as Misto intimates that their friction might have something to do with the fact that they both let their patriotic pride interfere with their connection.

Sheila tells Rick that she boarded the escape boat under the impression that she'd return to Singapore several weeks later. Because the boat was so crowded, everyone slept above deck, which is why Sheila awoke to the Japanese military's harsh spotlights when the ship was found at three in the morning. "For a while nothing happened," Sheila says, but then the Japanese began shooting at the ship and people started jumping overboard. When a man turned to Sheila and asked if she could swim, Sheila said, "A bit," and so he threw her into the water. Seconds later, the Japanese bombed the ship, which "rose up from the water" and then "crashed on its side." Luckily, Sheila found a piece of wood to help her stay afloat, and so she drifted along like that, shouting all the while for help.

Throughout The Shoe-Horn Sonata, *Misto examines the nature of survival, frequently considering the psychological angle of what it means to withstand hardship. In this moment, though, he looks at a much simpler form of survival, one that has to do with life and death in a very physical, immediate sense. As Sheila recalls jumping off a boat that explodes seconds after she's plunged into the water, the audience remembers that the entire backdrop of this play is one of violence and calamity. In turn, it becomes easier to understand why Sheila is so hesitant to talk about these memories.*

"You must have been scared," Rick says, to which Sheila proudly replies, "Not really," though Bridie chimes in to say that she was "petrified." As Sheila continues her story, the sound of waves plays over the speakers. Before long, Sheila explains, her body grew numb from the cold water, at which point she stopped caring whether or not she drowned. As such, she closed her eyes and sang a hymn. At this point in her narration, the voice of Young Sheila sounds over the speaker system as she sings "Jerusalem," "a very moving and stirring hymn about the greatness of England—God's chosen Empire."

Sheila's strong sense of pride surfaces once again, this time manifesting itself in her unwillingness to admit that she was "scared" to be floating in frigid water after her boat was bombed. When she sings "Jerusalem," though, the audience sees that her patriotism—which has until this point done nothing but blind her to danger—actually helps her maintain a sense of hope in an otherwise hopeless moment. Indeed, as she sings about "the greatness of England," she focuses on something she believes is worth living for, thereby lending her a sense of resilience she might not have if she wasn't such a proud patriot.

Telling her own story, Bridie says that her ship was also bombed by the Japanese. Just when she was about to jump overboard with a lifejacket, a fellow passenger stopped her and urged her to look at the others who had jumped, all of whom had been killed when they hit the water because their lifejackets had broken their necks. Because of this, Bridie climbed down a rope while "trying not to panic," since she didn't know how to swim. Once she got in the water, she says, she "tried to say a rosary" but ultimately "dozed off." It wasn't until she heard Sheila that she woke up again. "Weather's turned a bit chilly for this time of year," Sheila said, adding, "I don't believe we've been introduced."

The first thing Sheila says to Bridie is laced with a certain kind of gallows humor, as she makes a dark joke about the weather while the two women are in the midst of slowly freezing to death in frigid water. This remark ultimately foreshadows the fact that their friendship will later rely on their ability to laugh together in times of strife. Indeed, Sheila uses humor in this moment to maintain her spirits, ultimately demonstrating her resilient nature.

Telling Rick about her first conversation with Sheila, Bridie says that she found her new friend rather "stand-offish." "Cartwright is an Irish name," Sheila interjects. "Mother wouldn't have approved." Similarly, Bridie admits that she thought of Sheila as just "another stuck up Pom," though she had no choice but to talk to her. In fact, she spoke at length to her because Sheila kept falling asleep and slipping off of her piece of wood. As such, Bridie peppered her with questions about food and movies and music, discovering that she was an avid Frank Sinatra fan, though Bridie herself prefers Bing Crosby. Unfortunately, though, their disagreements aren't enough to keep Sheila awake, so Bridie starts hitting her on the forehead with her **shoe-horn** whenever she nods off. "Cut it out, you Catholic cow!" Sheila yelled after a while.

Right from the beginning of their friendship, Sheila and Bridie judge each other based on their respective nationalities. Bridie, for her part, thinks Sheila is "stuck up" because she's British, and Sheila herself is hesitant to embrace Bridie with kindness because she senses that her mother wouldn't "approve" of her befriending anyone who isn't also a sophisticated British woman. Despite these differences, though, the two women still come together in this moment of danger. In fact, Bridie even goes out of her way to make sure that Sheila doesn't fall asleep and drown, thereby proving that it's possible to transcend superficial differences in order to help a person.

Thinking about how she used her **shoe-horn** to keep Sheila awake, Bridie notes that she lost the handy tool "later in the war." Going back to the night their ships sank, though, she tells Rick that she was eventually too exhausted to hit Sheila. As such, Sheila was carried off by a large wave, and when Bridie yelled out for her, there was no response. Assuming Sheila had died, Bridie said a prayer "for her departed soul," but then she heard her voice sounding out over the waves. Singing "Jerusalem" once again, Sheila appeared, still clinging to her plank of wood. "I was so darn relieved I even joined in," Bridie says. "My Dad would have killed me—behaving like a Protestant."

Bridie's relief upon finding Sheila once more is worth noting, since it suggests that she's especially invested in Sheila's safety. Indeed, her happiness when Sheila returns indicates that she is afraid to be left alone in the sea. Although it was certainly kind of her to try to keep Sheila awake, this action was self-motivated, for Bridie wants a companion to help her face this dangerous situation. In this way, Misto shows the audience that acts of kindness are sometimes rather selfish, though this doesn't negate the fact that Bridie did *help Sheila stay alive.*

Rick asks how long it took for Sheila and Bridie to find shore, and Bridie says they never "washed up" on land, since a ship saw them and picked them up. Although Sheila was excited at first, the two women soon realized that the boat belonged to the Japanese. "I wanted to cry," Sheila says. "But I reminded myself I was a Woman of the Empire. And it just wasn't done to show fear to the natives." After she says this, the lights go out and the audience hears the end of "Jerusalem" as pictures of the invasion of Singapore appear overhead.

Once again, Sheila's patriotic pride helps her embody a sense of resilience. This time, she thinks about the fact that she is "a Woman of the Empire," an idea that accentuates her feelings of superiority. Furthermore, the capitalization of "Woman of the Empire" implies that it's is a proper noun, imbuing Sheila with all the more properness and prestige. By thinking of herself as better than her captors, then, Sheila avoids feeling sorry for herself, ultimately managing to face this difficult situation with bravado and resolve.

ACT ONE, SCENE FOUR

Back in the hotel, Bridie and Sheila discuss the interview. Whereas Bridie is satisfied with how it went, Sheila is upset, saying that it was unnecessary for Bridie "to call the British 'thick.'" Bridie, for her part, points out that it *was* rather stupid of the British forces to send boats of their own people "straight into the Japanese fleet." "You're just like your former Prime Minister—any excuse to bash the Poms," Sheila retaliates. "That's a side of you I'd forgotten," Bridie replies. "Shelia the Patriot. It must have been hard to live out here—when your heart was so firmly entrenched in England."

Bridie and Sheila's argument in this scene is based almost entirely on the fact that they're both from different countries. Because they can't put aside their patriotic pride, they end up ripping into one another, completely forgetting—or ignoring—that they both were forced to endure the same trauma. Rather than commiserating with one another, then, they bicker, ultimately letting this tension affect their relationship.

Sheila informs Bridie that "one never stops being British." Although Bridie continues to make fun of her, Sheila remains resolutely proud of her country. "You can snicker all you like," she says, "but at the very worst times in the camp—I'd remind myself I was part of an Empire—and if others could endure it, so could I." She then suggests that this patriotism is what helped her get through the war, though Bridie upholds that *she* was the one to get Sheila through the war. After all, she says, the British Empire didn't even care enough about Sheila to save her from the Japanese. Deeply offended, Sheila tells Bridie that if she says that the following day on television, she'll leave.

Again, Misto underlines just how invested Sheila is in her own patriotism. At this point in the play, the audience understands that Sheila often turns to thoughts of her country in times of distress, frequently "remind[ing]" herself that she's "part of an Empire." In turn, this helps her feel as if she belongs to something bigger than herself—a tough and respectable group of people—lending her the strength to persevere through difficult times.

Taunting Sheila, Bridie says she'll tell Rick that they both made "loin-cloths" for the Japanese guards. The two women then laugh about how they tormented a guard named Lipstick Larry by leaving a rusty pin in the inseam of his loincloth, so that when he went to bow, he suffered a sharp pain in his groin. As they chuckle, the audience hears a voice-over reenactment of Lipstick Larry yelling in pain and then beating Bridie. As this plays, the two women stop laughing, though they don't sink into total sadness. "The look on his face—God that was funny!" Sheila says, and they both agree that this was the "best moment of the war." Raising a nightcap to one another, they touch glasses and yell, "Ya-ta!!" As the lights cut out, the sounds of Lipstick Larry beating Bridie continue into blackness.

Although they've been arguing, Sheila and Bridie quickly transition back into easygoing camaraderie, speaking fondly about how they tormented their oppressor, Lipstick Larry. As such, the audience sees that these two women use humor not only to cope with hardship, but also to patch up their own relationship. However, there's no changing the fact that they still carry around the trauma of the prison camps. As the sounds of Bridie's beating play in the darkness, Misto demonstrates that although humor can help people deal with psychological stress, it can't completely erase painful memories.

ACT ONE, SCENE FIVE

Back in the television studio, Bridie tells Rick about the night of February 13, 1942, saying that 12 nurses drowned when her ship sank. And although 22 others somehow managed to make it to shore, they were shot by Japanese soldiers. For whatever reason, the Japanese spared Bridie and Sheila after picking them up, keeping them alive and taking them to Sumatra, where they were put in a camp with 800 other women and children. This camp was "really a few suburban streets hemmed in by barbed wire," and when Rick asks if it was like being in a "normal" jail, the two friends remind him that they've never *been* in a "normal" jail. After all, people in jail understand why they're there, whereas Bridie and Sheila knew they hadn't broken any laws, and they didn't know when or if they'd be set free.

Part of what makes Bridie and Sheila's survival story so remarkable is that they are able to endure such psychologically intense conditions. Needless to say, their time in the prison camps is difficult because they have to face all kinds of adversity, but perhaps the worst part is that they don't know whether or not they'll ever be set free. This is most likely one of the worst parts of being a prisoner of war, as detainees are completely isolated from their past lives, and their governments utterly powerless when it comes to helping them. Given these conditions, then, it's unsurprising that Bridie and Sheila form such a close bond. After all, friendship becomes one of the only things they can depend upon.

Bridie explains that she and her fellow prisoners had to go to the bathroom in an open "latrine" under the gaze of Japanese guards. Worse, they had to use leaves to clean themselves. Just as Bridie begins to tell Rick what happened when the women got their periods, Sheila tries to stop her. Nonetheless, Bridie pushes onward, saying, "Well it happened… But after a while we stopped. Thank goodness." Hearing this, Rick clarifies what she means, asking if the prisoners stopped "menstruating," and Sheila says, "Just the women." Bridie then tells him that their menstruation cycles didn't resume until after the war. "It was fear that did it," she says. "Fear and rotten food."

When Sheila tries to stop Bridie from talking about the prisoners' menstrual cycles, she once again demonstrates her hesitance about discussing the details of her wartime experiences. A woman who is proud to belong to the British Empire, she sees herself as too polite to talk about such matters, which she believes are undignified. However, if she must discuss such things, she quickly resorts to humor, joking that "only the women" stopped menstruating. In this way, the audience sees her eagerness to take attention away from the gravity of her situation, ultimately avoiding the issue so that she doesn't have to relive it. In turn, humor becomes both a positive coping mechanism and *an emotional crutch, one that Sheila uses to keep her painful memories at bay.*

Rick asks if the guards ever tried to "take advantage" of Bridie or Sheila. "Not really," Sheila replies, but Rick remains unconvinced. As such, Bridie tells him that they once tried to take advantage of her, explaining that the guards had an "officers' club" where they forced Australian nurses to be "hostesses." Sheila says this was an Australian prisoner's idea, but Bridie reminds her that they don't know that "for sure," pointing out that there was a group of British women in the camps who had sex with the guards. Going on, she bitterly accuses these women of "selling themselves," but Sheila insists that they did this out of necessity. "They had children to feed," she says. "We didn't judge. We accepted." Hearing this, Bridie speaks out, saying, "I didn't! To go with a Jap—to give him pleasure—how could you ever live with yourself?"

Despite Sheila's relative unwillingness to talk about whether or not the guards sexually abused the prisoners, she eventually expresses genuine empathy for the British women who had no choice but to have sex with the Japanese men in order to feed their children. This outspoken support stands in contrast to her desire to keep quiet about what happened in the camps. Indeed, Sheila obviously understands that these women shouldn't be shamed for what happened to them, since this would mean blaming victims who ultimately had no control over their fates. Bridie, on the other hand, faults these women, failing to empathize with their situation and refusing to consider that they were heroes to sacrifice themselves for the good of their children.

Bridie continues her story about the officers' club, explaining that a group of nurses "were ordered to attend the opening night" of the "glorified brothel." Unfortunately, she was one of those nurses. To prepare, she and her fellow inmates rubbed dirt under their fingernails and put grease in their hair. When they arrived, the officers courted them, but they politely declined their advances. Before long, their refusals agitated the guards, who sent everyone home except Bridie and three other women. When one guard gave Bridie a glass of saki, Bridie said, "Thank you, sir. May you always have syphilis." The guard, of course, didn't understand, so she continued to fill his glass, hoping he'd get too drunk to rape her.

Even in this frightening scenario—in which she faces the possibility of rape and violence—Bridie clings to her sense of humor. By saying, "May you always have syphilis" to the guard, she adds a certain amount of levity to the situation. And though this obviously doesn't do anything to improve what's about to happen, it allows her to enact a small kind of dissent—something that is important, since humor is one of the only ways she can embody a sense of agency in an otherwise powerless situation.

Still telling her story about the officers' club, Bridie says that she watched another nurse pull out a handkerchief and cough. The handkerchief was bloody. Apparently, this nurse had saved a soiled rag from the "hospital hut" so that she could pretend to have tuberculosis, knowing the Japanese guards were horribly afraid of catching the disease. After seeing this brilliant display, the other three nurses—including Bridie—started coughing loudly, and the guards immediately sent them away.

This nurse's ingenious decision to use the guards' fear against them is yet another example of the many different methods of survival that help people like Bridie and Sheila make it through World War II. Although The Shoe-Horn Sonata *is largely about the psychological coping mechanisms that enable a person to withstand hardship, this anecdote reminds readers that true resilience often requires quick thinking and clever manipulation.*

After this story, the lights go out and a picture appears on the screen behind Bridie and Sheila, showing an image of frail, malnourished children. When the lights come on again, Sheila talks about how hungry she and Bridie always felt before their stomachs shrank. She explains that they used to chew on an old "chop bone" each day, and as she says this, she pulls it out and shows the camera. Bridie, for her part, can't believe that Sheila still has the bone, but Sheila admits she couldn't bear to get rid of it. The two women then reminisce about how they used to chew on this bone and talk about lavish meals.

Once again, Misto provides the audience with yet another example of how Bridie and Sheila use their friendship as a means of survival, sharing even the smallest pleasures in order to sustain themselves. Indeed, even this insignificant "chop bone" becomes not only something they can covet, but something they can share, integrating it into their relationship and thus bolstering their sense of camaraderie, which in turn makes them feel less alone.

Rick asks why Bridie and Sheila didn't simply "give up" and "die." In response, they tell him that a group of British women formed a vocal orchestra, saying that this helped them maintain their spirits. At first, Bridie wasn't part of the orchestra, but she was so jealous of Sheila's involvement that she went simply to watch. And since Miss Dryburgh—the British missionary who organized the entire thing—needed someone to keep time, she ask Bridie to mark the beat with her **shoe-horn**, which she always wore on a necklace. In this way, their orchestral choir took shape, giving them something to focus on. "We forgot the Japs—we forgot our hunger—our boils—barbed-wire—everything…" Sheila says.

Like humor, music becomes something Bridie and Sheila use to distract themselves from their terrible living conditions. As such, audience members see the importance of seeking out ways to cathartically express anguish in times of hardship and emotional turmoil.

ACT ONE, SCENE SIX

Back in Sheila's hotel room, the two friends form a "two-person conga line" and sing an old song from the prison camps, practicing it so they can perform it on television with the rest of the women. However, Sheila expresses her uneasiness with the idea of doing something for "a few cheap laughs on Rick's show." In fact, she says, she doesn't even like Rick, who she thinks is trying too hard to pry into their pasts with indecent questions. Bridie, for her part, says Sheila doesn't *have* to answer his questions, adding that she didn't appreciate her "little dig" about the Australian man who "offered" the women to the Japanese guards. "It's not patriotic to attack our men," she adds, but Sheila only voices a similar complaint, lamenting the fact that Bridie talked about "the British women selling themselves for food."

Yet again, Bridie and Sheila find themselves at odds over their patriotic pride, since they're both so eager to disparage each other's home country. As such, the audience witnesses the tension, friction, and resentment that arises between two people when they allow themselves to let such trivial matters interfere with their friendship.

Bridie stands by her belief that it was "crass" and unforgiveable of the British women in the camps to "offer" themselves to the guards. She believes this because she thinks that "every woman who gave in made it harder for the rest" to say no to the enemy. When Sheila reminds her that these women were only trying to protect their children, Bridie says, "Sleeping with a Jap? I'd never have done that—not for anyone. How could you go on living with yourself—or look your family in the eye?"

Once more, Bridie refuses to empathize with the prison camp's rape victims, framing them as immoral and selfish instead of understanding that their sacrifices were noble and tragic. In turn, the audience intuits yet again that although Bridie is willing to perform acts of kindness for other people, there are certain things she's simply unwilling to do. Indeed, her assertion that she would "never have done that" for "anyone" is important to keep in mind as the play moves forward, since Misto is interested in exploring how far Sheila and Bridie are willing to go for one another.

After ranting about how much she abhors the idea of sleeping with a guard, Bridie sees a photograph of Sheila as a young woman, and Sheila tells her that Rick asked for pictures of her life before the war. Bridie then asks if she can have a copy, and when Sheila asks why, she says that she simply likes to have pictures of her friends. "People always get on when they're tossed in together. I'd hardly call that a friendship," Sheila says, but Bridie ignores this statement by handing her a "small tobacco tin." Apparently, Sheila filled this tin with her own dinner one night in the prison camps, giving it to Bridie when Bridie was sick with dengue fever. Bridie was immensely thankful for this, but Sheila downplays the significance of this gesture, saying, "A few spoons of rice. I didn't even miss them."

It's worth noting that Sheila has suddenly become harsher in her interactions with Bridie. She even belittles the strength of their friendship and goes out of her way to seem uninvested in their connection. This is significant, considering that Bridie has just said she wouldn't sleep with a guard to save "anyone" in the world. This, it's easy to see, means she wouldn't even make this sacrifice for Sheila. What's more, Sheila's sudden mood change indicates that she herself most likely would sacrifice herself in this way for Bridie, meaning that there is a significant imbalance in their friendship.

Seeing how determined Sheila is to act like she doesn't care about their friendship, Bridie says she misses the old Sheila. Having said this, she goes to dinner, leaving Sheila alone in the room. Moving to the dresser, Sheila opens a drawer and takes out a **shoe-horn**, staring at it as a voice-over plays. As she stands there looking at the shoe-horn, the audience hears her voice as a young woman—she is pleading with a group of Japanese guards, who tell her to sing for them. At first, the guards laugh and applaud as she sings, but soon they become silent, touched by the beauty of her song. As the melody draws to a close, Sheila continues to gaze at the shoe-horn, and the screen behind her shows a picture of two female prisoners looking at the camera in utter destitution.

Although the voice-over in this moment is vague, it's rather apparent that something happened to Sheila in the prison camps that continues to haunt her. What's more, it seems likely that she has kept this traumatic experience a secret from Bridie, since she only thinks about it once Bridie leaves. Lastly, the fact that this memory blossoms in her mind when she stares at a shoe-horn—an object associated with Bridie—indicates that whatever happened must have something to do with her friend. Given that the two women have just had an argument about self-sacrifice, this is an important moment, as astute audience members will surely intuit that Sheila has done something for Bridie that remains unspoken.

ACT ONE, SCENE SEVEN

Alone with Rick in the television studio the next day, Bridie says she and the other prisoners made wills in case they died. Her will, she explains, was made out to Sheila, giving her all of her possessions, including her **shoe-horn**, her tobacco tin, and her "half-share" of their **caramel**. "Your caramel?" Rick asks, clearly entertained. In response, Bridie tells him not to make fun, since she and Sheila coveted their single piece of caramel, which was their "only luxury." "Sheila sold her brooch to buy some—from a native who used to smuggle it," she says. "Every week—on Sunday night—we'd pop that caramel into our mouths—for one minute each—one minute of bliss—then we'd store it away till the next week."

Misto wants the audience to understand that people search for moments of pleasure when the rest of their lives are in turmoil. This is what Bridie and Sheila do when they suck on a piece of caramel for one minute each week. Indeed, just "one minute of bliss" is capable of sustaining them for seven days, suggesting that even the smallest forms of joy are capable of buoying a person's spirits and making life easier to bear.

Impressed by their willpower, Rick asks if Bridie and Sheila were ever "tempted to eat" the entire **caramel**, but Bridie says they were determined to make the candy last until the war ended. However, they succumbed to temptation on Christmas in 1943, when a group of Australian men who had "broken away from a working party" came to the fences of the prison camp and started singing Christmas carols. Hardly believing their ears, the women rushed to watch these men, and one even waved to Bridie. Once the men were forced to leave, the prisoners returned to their routines, but Sheila said, "To hell with this! Let's have a proper Christmas dinner." With this, she took out the caramel, and they alternated sucking it for one minute each until it was gone. Concluding her story about Christmas in 1943, Bridie tells Rick that she later married the man who had waved to her.

Although small forms of joy enable people like Bridie and Sheila to maintain their sense of hope, a single piece of caramel isn't enough to help them sustain happiness in times of true duress. Indeed, this is why they must turn to one another, relying upon their friendship to help them maintain their high spirits. As such, they eat the caramel together, turning it into a celebration and thus allowing it to become part of their friendship, which is based on their willingness to share with one another.

ACT ONE, SCENE EIGHT

In Sheila's hotel room, Bridie gives her friend a glass of Alka-Seltzer because she's horribly hungover, though she claims she simply has a headache. After Bridie urges her to drink, Sheila asks if Rick was mad that she missed the day's interview, and Bridie tells her Rick was simply surprised she was still *alive*. Indeed, although she doesn't remember it, Sheila was so drunk the night before that she stood on a table and sang "God Save the King," then re-enacted scenes from the prison camps. Worse, she said a number of disparaging things about Bridie.

It's important to remember that the last conversation Bridie and Sheila had ended with Sheila staring at the shoe-horn and plunging into a painful memory. Having been forced to reckon with this memory (whatever it is), she clearly felt like she needed to get drunk to escape it. This, of course, is yet another indication that she has some rather troublesome emotions—emotions she hasn't yet unpacked. Indeed, her decision to drink herself into oblivion rather than confront her past aligns with her tendency to avoid talking about the war.

Bridie tells Sheila that she doesn't want to be "judgmental," but says she thinks Sheila has a drinking problem. Wanting to change the subject after hearing about how she treated Bridie, Sheila asks what she and Rick covered that day during the interview, and Bridie tells her they talked about Christmas in 1943, then asks—rather randomly—why Sheila never tried to see her again after the war. "Are you upset because I married?" Sheila denies this, and so Bridie asks why she "push[es]" her away. "We never had secrets in the camp," she says, but Sheila only reminds her that they're no longer in camp. Still, Bridie sadly points out that she doesn't know the faintest thing about how Sheila has "spent [her] life."

It's evident that Bridie resents Sheila for disappearing after the war. What she fails to see, though, is that her own presence seems to evoke uncomfortable emotions for Sheila. Indeed, the audience understands that there is something in Sheila and Bridie's past that makes it difficult for Sheila to be around her former best friend. Unfortunately, though, Sheila is unwilling or unable to speak openly about whatever happened to her, and so she simply withdraws from their friendship. As a result, tension builds between the two women, estranging them from one another and making it almost impossible for them to merely sit in a hotel room without bickering.


Bridie notes that drunk people almost "always tell the truth." This is why she's so upset about what happened the night before, she tells Sheila: "You looked at me with hate and said: 'Don't come near me, Bridie.'" She then asks why Sheila has kept her out of her life for so long, and when Sheila defends herself by saying that she wrote a letter, Bridie reminds her that this only happened once, right after the war, when Sheila wrote to tell her that she was leaving for England and that she'd send along a new address. "All we had in common was the camp," Sheila insists. "I didn't want to keep talking about it—I couldn't, Bridie—it hurt too much. And when something hurts you run away…or you dig a hole and bury it."

In this conversation, Sheila articulates her tendency to "run away" from painful emotional experiences. By telling Bridie that it was too painful to keep rehashing their time in the Japanese prison camps, she confirms the notion that Bridie's presence only forces her to confront traumatic memories she isn't ready to confront. "When something hurts you run away…or you dig a hole and bury it," she says. Interestingly enough, Sheila seems to have both "run away" from her emotional pain and "bur[ied] it," since she has spent the past fifty years avoiding Bridie while simultaneously repressing her emotions.


Bridie asks if Sheila ever missed her, and Sheila says she did, but it's clear she's lying. When Bridie points this out, Sheila says, "What did you expect—we'd all settle down in Chatswood—you, me and [your husband] Benny?" Hurt, Bridie slaps her across the face and says, "You're alive today because of me. And don't you ever forget it." "I've spent fifty years trying to—if only I could!" Sheila says. "You want to know why I pushed you away. Here, Bridie—here's your answer." With this, she yanks open the dresser drawer and takes out **the shoe-horn**.

When Bridie reminds Sheila that she's "alive today" because of her, she tries to emphasize the extent to which they are bound to one another. However, this is an ineffective rhetorical move, since the mere fact that their lives are so intertwined is the exact reason Sheila wants to keep her distance in the first place. After all, she has clearly experienced something traumatic that Bridie doesn't even know about, something that has to do with Bridie herself. This, it seems, is why Sheila finds spending time with Bridie so difficult; when Sheila is with Bridie, she's forced to recall whatever it is that happened to her.

Bridie is shocked to see her own initials engraved on **the shoe-horn**. "But you swapped this," she says. "For quinine—when I came down with the fever." She then asks Sheila how she managed to retrieve the shoe-horn, and Sheila begins telling a story about the final camp they were sent to, a place called Belalau—"the camp nobody talks about." During their time here, many of the women became sick with malarial fever, and Bridie eventually contracted the disease. "I remember," Bridie says, but Sheila tells her that she doesn't actually know what happened while she was sick. "I took you to the hospital hut," she says. "But they said you wouldn't survive. Your skull was bursting from it. From cerebral malaria." Interrupting her story, Bridie asks again how Sheila got back the shoe-horn after trading it for medication, but Sheila doesn't give her an answer just yet.

It's obvious that Sheila is finally telling Bridie the secret, traumatizing thing that happened to her at Belalau. Indeed, even Bridie senses that her friend is about to reveal something troubling, so she tries to speed her along, urging her skip ahead by asking how she retrieved the shoe-horn. However, Sheila has been holding onto this traumatic story for five decades, so it's unlikely that she'll simply cut to the chase. Rather, she knows she must start from the beginning, making sure to tell Bridie all of the details, since she clearly doesn't want to hold onto this toxic secret any longer.

"Don't you see?" Sheila says. "I was scared." She tells Bridie that she didn't want to put her in a coffin and carry her away. "I couldn't let you die and leave me. I wouldn't have survived," she says. "So I went to the Japs—" As she continues, Bridie begins to whisper the word "no," not wanting to hear what comes next. Still, though, Sheila pushes on, saying that she went to Lipstick Larry because he was "always smiling at [her]." She offered him all of their belongings in exchange for quinine, but he only laughed. Knowing what she had to do, then, Sheila offered herself to him. "You didn't," Bridie says, horrified. "Tell me you didn't." When Sheila reminds her that *she* was the one who "wanted to know," Bridie adds, "You didn't sleep with a Jap. Not you."

Suddenly, Bridie doesn't want to know how Sheila retrieved the shoe-horn. Although she wants Sheila to cut to the chase at first, now she doesn't want to hear the rest of the story, as if this travesty won't have happened if she continues on in ignorance. Of course, this isn't the case, and so Bridie has to face the fact that Sheila made a painful sacrifice in order to save her. And though it can be argued that Bridie's unfriendly response has to do with the idea she'll never be able to repay Sheila, it's hard to deny that her resentment in this moment is fueled by her tendency to blame rape victims for their own abuse. Indeed, Bridie has trouble empathizing with the women in the prison camps who had sex with the guards in order to save their loved ones, and now she's forced to reckon with the fact that she wouldn't be alive if Sheila hadn't done this exact same thing.

Continuing her story, Sheila says that Lipstick Larry showed her the quinine tablets and then brought her to the barracks, where a group of officers were "waiting" for her. "Don't!" Bridie yells. "I don't want to hear this!" Nevertheless, Sheila goes on, saying that she kept her eyes fixed on the guards' feet. When they told her to sing, though, she obliged, singing so beautifully that they all began to cry. "They'll let me go," she thought at the time. "If men can cry, they'll let me go." Just as she went to leave, though, they "dragged" her back.

Bridie's desire to make Sheila stop telling the story of her rape is similar to Sheila's own decision to keep the story to herself for so many years. Indeed, this impulse to keep quiet about trauma is a common one, as many survivors hope that stuffing down their pain will enable them to avoid it altogether. However, Bridie wants Sheila to stop telling this story for slightly different reasons, since she herself wasn't the one that went through this particular hardship. As such, it becomes clear that she isn't willing or ready to take on the burden of Sheila's pain, possibly because she feels guilty that Sheila made this sacrifice to save her.

Bridie is distraught to learn that Sheila had sex with the guards in order to save her life. Sheila, for her part, admits that she has always told herself that Bridie would have "done the same" for her. "I was wrong, though, wasn't I?" she asks. "You said you'd let your family die before you'd give in to the Japs. Did you mean it? Is it true?" Once this question is in the air, Bridie is unable to speak, but her silence makes it clear that she would not have made the same sacrifice Sheila made for her. As the two women quietly face one another, the audience hears young Sheila's voice, saying, "Bridie, love—it's me. Look—I've got tablets. I sold your **shoe-horn**. I've got tablets. Come on now—try and swallow them… Don't leave me, Bridie. Please don't leave me…"

In this moment, the central question of The Shoe-Horn Sonata *comes to the forefront of the play: how far are Bridie and Sheila willing to go to save one another? Bridie, for her part, isn't willing to perform sexual favors to save Sheila. Sheila, on the other hand, is willing to do seemingly anything in order to keep Bridie alive. This, of course, is partially because losing Bridie would mean having to adjust to a solitary life in the prison camp, leaving her to endure the horrors of the environment on her own. This is why she begs Bridie not to "leave" her while giving her the quinine tablets. Unfortunately, though, the fact that Sheila is willing to sacrifice herself in ways that Bridie isn't becomes problematic, ultimately creating tension and resentment in their relationship.*

ACT TWO, SCENE NINE

In the studio once again, Sheila tells Rick that half of their choir died by April, 1945. This was when they moved to Belalau, and though they didn't know it, "all over Asia thousands of prisoners were on the move" because "an order had been issued" saying that "every prisoner of war" should "die by October 1945." This is why they were moved to Belalau, where the Japanese thought the prisoners would "never be found." Sheila then tells Rick an abbreviated version of the story about how Bridie contracted malaria and almost died. Indeed, she tells him that she went to Lipstick Larry and offered to swap **the shoe-horn** for antimalarial tablets, saying that he "took pity" on her and decided to accept the deal. "So that shoe-horn ended up saving you both. You in the sea—and Bridie in camp," Rick says.

Even though Sheila has finally told the truth about her rape to Bridie, she isn't ready to reveal this to Rick, especially since doing so would mean broadcasting her story on television. Of course, her decision to keep these details to herself are completely understandable—after all, she doesn't necessarily need to tell thousands of people that she was raped in order to properly process her trauma. At the same time, though, hiding the actual details of this tale must hurt her on some level, since she has already held onto this toxic secret for so long.

Rick asks if Sheila heard from the British government during her internment. "Not the English," she says, though the Australian prisoners heard from theirs. One day, Captain Siki announced that the Australian Prime Minister had instructed the prisoners to "keep smiling." "At first there was… absolute silence," Sheila says. However, she soon realized the Australians were laughing. When Rick admits he doesn't understand the joke, Sheila says, "They were skin and bone and covered in boils—and they'd just been told to 'keep smiling'! Well they smiled all right." For the rest of the day and night, the Australian prisoners broke out into bursts of laughter, unable to control themselves even when Siki forced them to stand in the sun "for hours" and commanded them "never to smile again." As the stage lights go out, Judy Garland's "When You're Smiling" plays while photographs of emaciated prisoners appear on the screen.

Once again, Misto underlines the importance of laughter—and, thus, catharsis—in times of intense hardship. What's most inspiring about this particular story is that the prisoners' laughter triumphs even under Captain Siki's harsh orders. Indeed, he commands them "never to smile again," but this is a ridiculous commandment, one that would be impossible to enforce. In turn, humor and laughter become forms of resilience and dissent, buoying the prisoners' spirits and empowering them even as the guards try to cut them down.

ACT TWO, SCENE TEN

Sheila knits by herself in the television studio until Bridie comes in and asks why she didn't tell her about Lipstick Larry earlier. Sheila says that she wanted to, but that right after the war—when they were both taken to a hospital in Singapore—Bridie underwent several medical procedures, and Sheila worried that the "shock" might kill Bridie if she knew the truth. However, she also knew that she couldn't stick around and continue to lie to her friend, so she snuck out while Bridie was asleep. And though she had intended to go to England, she only made it as far as Australia because she was so eager to get off the boat and start her life anew.

The fact that Sheila has been unable to tell Bridie what she did for her demonstrates how difficult it can be for survivors of trauma to voice their experiences. Indeed, Sheila decides to keep quiet about what happened because she fears it will upset Bridie—unfortunately, she is correct, considering that Bridie responds so terribly fifty years after the actual event. This, of course, is a failure of empathy, one that strains their friendship and validates Sheila's decision to hold onto her toxic secret.

"Why did you have to go with that Jap?" Bridie laments, and Sheila says, "I had to do it. I couldn't let you die." In response, Bridie says she wishes she'd known at the time, since she "would never have let" Sheila make such a sacrifice. After a brief pause, she adds, "Sheila—please—let me try and help." Unfortunately, though, Sheila knows that there's very little Bridie can do, a point she makes clear by telling her friend that she sees Lipstick Larry every night when she goes to bed. "He calls to me and I go to him," she says, "and no one can change that. Not even you."

Although Bridie's response to Sheila's traumatic experience lacks empathy, in this moment she finally tries to fulfill her duty as a friend, saying, "let me try and help." However, the damage is already done, since her harsh reaction has only caused Sheila to think that "no one can change" her situation. And while it's true that there's nothing anyone can do to erase what happened to Sheila, it's not necessarily the case that Bridie is completely incapable of helping in some other way. Indeed, Bridie's acceptance and love might help Sheila begin to process her rape rather than repress it, though she doesn't appear ready to do this, most likely because Bridie has been so judgmental.

Bridie asks if Sheila has ever told anyone else about what happened to her, and Sheila says she once tried to tell her mother. As soon as she began, though, her mother told her to "pull up [her] socks and get on with it." Hearing this, Bridie talks about how upset she is that she was unable to protect her friend, wanting badly to "get [her] out alive and untouched." "But I let you down, didn't I?" Sheila says, and Bridie snaps, saying, "Yes. You did! You ruined your life—for a Jap!" In turn, Sheila reminds Bridie that she did it for her because she was "stupid enough to think" that Bridie would have "done the same." In response, Bridie says she would have "starved" or "died" for Sheila, but would never have slept with a Japanese guard.

In this scene, the audience sees that Sheila doesn't have anyone willing to support her and help her process her trauma. Not even her mother manages to provide her with a proper outlet through which she might express her pain, and now Bridie—the very person for whom she made the sacrifice in the first place—actively resents her for what happened. Although Bridie's resentment in this moment might have to do with her unfortunate tendency to judge rape survivors, it's also obvious that she feels uncomfortable about the fact that Sheila "ruined [her] life" for Bridie's sake. Because she'll never be able to repay this, then, Bridie goes in the opposite direction, ultimately deciding to shame Sheila because this is the only way she can think to process her emotions.

After a tense silence, Sheila reminds Bridie that the documentary special is finishing the next day, so they'll be "out of each other's way." Bridie, for her part, says that Sheila should have let her die, and Sheila says, "Yes. Perhaps I should have."

Again, it's evident that Bridie can't come to terms with the sacrifice Sheila made for her. Feeling indebted to her friend, she says that Sheila shouldn't have made this sacrifice in the first place, ultimately allowing her guilt to manifest itself as anger and scorn.

ACT TWO, SCENE ELEVEN

In their next interview with Rick, Bridie and Sheila explain that their choir "disband[ed]" in April of 1945 because too many of the singers had died, including Miss Dryburgh. As such, both women felt depressed and hopeless, but Sheila decided to arrange sonatas, which are "piece[s] for two musical instruments." In this way, Sheila and Bridie continued singing, bringing music to the camp so that everyone "would know there was still music left." "It probably sounded bloody awful," Bridie says. "But not to us. To us we still had harmony… and the Japs could never ever take that away."

Once more, Misto frames an immaterial manifestation of joy as a form of resilience. Indeed, Bridie and Sheila know that the guards can "never ever take" away their capacity to sing, so they continue making music. In doing so, they assert their own agency and resist complete oppression.

Sheila tells Rick that she returned to the camp 30 years after the war. Although she'd spent so much time "trying to forget" what had happened, she wanted to find the cemetery where they'd buried all of their friends. Tragically, though, there were no headstones, so the bodies lie in unmarked graves. "Why did you go back?" Rick asks, and Sheila says, "Because I'd never really left."

When Sheila says that she'd "never really left" the prison camps, she sheds light on the effects of trauma. Having experienced something truly terrible, she now feels as if she can't escape its memory. Of course, it would perhaps be easier for her to process what happened if she could depend upon someone who was willing to speak openly and warmly about her past, but even Bridie refuses to do this, so she's forced to go on living with her pain in a very real, visceral way.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWELVE

Back in Sheila's hotel room, the two friends talk about spending a weekend together, but decide they'd "bicker" too much. They then talk about whether or not they hate Japanese people. Bridie, for her part, admits that she becomes frightened around Japanese people, going on to tell a story about finding herself surrounded by a group of Japanese tourists while shopping. Forgetting that she was holding a package of cookies, she ran out of the store and was promptly arrested for shoplifting. Because she didn't want "the whole nursing corps" to know this story, she decided not to explain herself, so she went to court and was fined for the theft. Seeing how upset her friend is, Sheila puts her arm around Bridie and tells her that this story isn't so bad, but Bridie insists that to her it's "the end of the world for," since she loses sleep because of the "shame."

Unlike Bridie, Sheila is ready and willing to comfort her friend. Whereas Bridie immediately shames Sheila for having slept with the guards, Sheila makes an earnest attempt to soothe Bridie when she hears this story about the accidental theft. This, it seems, is the supportive reaction that Sheila needs herself, which is perhaps why she's able to recognize the importance of lending a friend support when that friend is having trouble dealing with an upsetting memory.

Despite Sheila's insistence that Bridie's arrest is nothing to be ashamed of, Bridie says that she promised herself she'd "never tell anyone" about the incident. "I'm not just anyone, Bridie," Sheila says. "Keeping a secret wears you down. Believe me—I know." She then reveals her desire to tell the story of her rape on television, considering talking about it in the final interview. Hearing this, Bridie tells Sheila not to talk about the matter "beyond this room," but Sheila ignores this, talking about the "thousands of survivors" there must be in the world, people who are—like her—still "strapped in the war" and "too ashamed to tell anyone." "The war hasn't ended," Sheila tells Bridie. "Not for me. For me it goes on. And now I want peace."

At this point in The Shoe-Horn Sonata, *Sheila has come to understand that expressing troubling emotions is perhaps the best way to process trauma. Whereas she was determined at first to hold onto her secret about Lipstick Larry and the other guards, now she recognizes how therapeutic it would be to tell her story on national television. Bridie, on the other hand, is still judgmental about the entire matter, not wanting to speak openly about such things—after all, if Sheila tells this story, the guilt Bridie feels might become unbearable. In this way, Bridie selfishly thinks of herself instead of considering how cathartic it would be for Sheila to finally unburden herself of this toxic secret.*

Distraught that Sheila might talk about her trauma on television, Bridie warns, "You know what they'll call you. They'll call you a whore." Nevertheless, Sheila remains resolute, and so Bridie stands to leave, saying that if she'd known her friend would act like this, she would have "let [her] drown in the South China Sea."

Again, Bridie lashes out at Sheila because she doesn't know to process the guilt she feels about the fact that her friend sacrificed herself to save her life. Rather than trying to support Sheila, she angrily tries to keep her from speaking about the incident, clearly hoping that Sheila's continued silence will enable them to ignore the matter altogether.

ACT TWO, SCENE THIRTEEN

Bridie and Sheila begin their final interview with Rick by telling him about the final days in the prison camp. In April of 1945, they tell him, the guards started "raiding" the prisoners' huts and looking for diaries, since they didn't want anyone to know what these woman had been through. And though it was risky, the prisoners continued to keep journals, since this sort of emotional release was their "only hope," since if they were all murdered, at least their families could someday find out what happened to them. Unfortunately, when the war was over the British "borrow[ed]" the prisoners' diaries to "fumigate them," but they actually destroyed them because they too didn't want anyone to know about what really went on in the prison camps. After all, they would "have lost prestige if people found out how the women of their Empire had lived in the war."

Although it isn't one of the play's prominent themes, one of Misto's motivations for writing The Shoe-Horn Sonata *is to tell the little-known stories of people like Bridie and Sheila, since the Australian and British governments—in the years after the war—actively avoided acknowledging the travesty that so many women were forced to endure, as evidenced by the fact that the British underhandedly burned the prisoners' diaries. This terrible act of silencing brings to mind Bridie's desire to keep Sheila from telling the story of her rape on television. Like the government, Bridie wants to repress the worst elements of the war, hoping that burying her trauma will make it disappear altogether.*

Bridie and Sheila explain that, although the war was drawing to a close, the Japanese decided to keep their prisoners, wanting the camp to remain "a secret" "in case they were charged with war crimes." As such, the Japanese didn't tell the prisoners about the end of the war, publicly claiming that people like Bridie and Sheila had drowned in 1942. One day, though, the guards forced the prisoners to hike up to the top of a hill, and Bridie and Sheila were sure they were about to be killed. However, when they reached the top, they saw a band of soldiers, who began to play a waltz for them. "We're going to live," Bridie said to Sheila, promising that when the war ended, they would go dancing. When the music finished, Captain Siki said, "The Geneva Convention says: All prisoners must have culture. You womens have just had yours."

It's significant that Bridie and Sheila's first sign of the end of the war comes in the form of music. After all, music is one of the things they turn to in the prison camps, looking to it for solace and hope in an otherwise bleak, hopeless time. Once again, then, Misto suggests that even small, fleeting moments of joy are capable of sustaining people through difficult experiences, since this moment clearly gives Bridie and Sheila the strength to continue waiting for their freedom.

Rick asks Bridie and Sheila how they were found, and they tell him an Australian journalist came looking for them because he'd heard "rumours" about "a secret camp in the depths of the jungles." Shortly thereafter, the Japanese forces retreated, leaving "the gates of [the] camp" "wide open." At first, Sheila was hesitant to leave, finding it too difficult, but Bridie helped her along, saying, "We'll just take a few steps. If we don't like it out there, we can always come back." Still, though, Sheila was nervous the Japanese might reappear and chase them down, but Bridie said, "And what if they do? Since when have we ever been scared of the Japs?" As they tell this story, Bridie takes Sheila's hand and holds it.

It's important to note the intimacy that arises between Bridie and Sheila as they recall the moment of their release from Belalau. Although there are deep tensions between these two friends, they can't help but feel connected to one another when they tell the story of their last moments as prisoners. Indeed, Bridie's decision to hold Sheila's hand signals her newfound eagerness to make peace.

Rick tells Bridie and Sheila that they can take a break, but just as Sheila is about to get up, Bridie says, "I want to go on." She then turns to the camera and says. "We've left out something. Something important." Going on, she tells the story of how Sheila sacrificed herself in order to save her life, saying, "She wasn't just my friend—she was—she is—the other half of my life. And she gave herself to [Lipstick Larry]... so that I... could have quinine... And she never told me till two nights ago. For fifty years she never told anyone... They don't give medals for things like that. But they should." Hearing this, Sheila speaks up, saying that she too has something to say. She then tells the story of Bridie's arrest and adds that she would sacrifice herself again for her friend if she had to.

Apparently, telling Rick the story of their release from Belalau is so cathartic for Bridie that she suddenly understands why Sheila wants to—or needs *to—speak openly about her traumatic past. By venturing on and helping her friend unburden herself of her harmful secret, then, Bridie finally does what she should have done long ago: let go of her resentment and support Sheila, ultimately helping her to stop hiding from her emotional pain.*

ACT TWO, SCENE FOURTEEN

Back in Sheila's hotel room, the two friends talk about their travel plans. Bridie tells Sheila she found out the hotel is owned by Japanese people, so Sheila gathers extra amenities to pack away in her suitcase, which the two women work together to put on the floor. As Sheila repacks her things, Bridie gives her a piece of paper with her address and phone number, and Sheila says she wants to come visit for Christmas—a suggestion that makes Bridie very happy. At this point, Sheila hands Bridie **the shoe-horn**, saying, "I'm sorry I...kept it so long." Moved, the two women finally fulfill their pact to dance in celebration of the end of the war. As they do so, the lights dim and a spotlight falls on the shoe-horn, the music continuing and sounding like "joy and triumph and survival."

In this scene, the audience sees that Bridie and Sheila have finally released the tension from their relationship. No longer under the strain of resentment, they find themselves completely capable of existing in harmony once more. What's more, now that Sheila has unburdened herself of her toxic secret, she no longer feels the need to avoid Bridie, which is why she decides to visit her for Christmas. In turn, it becomes clear how therapeutic it was for Sheila to speak openly about her trauma. At the same time, it's worth noting that she will no doubt still struggle with the painful memory, but now she can—at the very least—spend time with her best friend without having to avoid talking about her past.

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