Hands Up

A short film
Screenplay by
Jenny Kagan

Based on stories
told by
Margaret Kagan

FADE IN

INT. DINING ROOM (KAUNAS JUNE 1941)
SOPHIE 63 years old, twice divorced, assertive to a fault, much admired (by those who don't have to live with her) is writing a letter at the table.

ZHENIA 40 years old, a fragile creature perpetually out of joint with her existence, sits across from her. She has just finished painting her nails bright scarlet and with studied care smokes a cigarette with her right hand, exhaling onto her left to dry the varnish.

SOPHIE - in Russian
(without glancing up from her letter)
I'm sure George will be greatly relieved when he gets back to find that his disappearance hasn't interfered with your manicure.

Tears well in ZHENIA's eyes. She stubs out her cigarette and covers her face. A sound, part sob, part sigh is only partially muffled by her newly painted hands.

MARA 16 years old, small framed, dark haired, a rather intense and serious young lady, sits on the floor with her legs tucked under her, lost in a book. At the sound of Zhenia's distress she puts the book down, comes to the table and drapes her arms around her mother.

MARA - in German
You look beautiful Mama. And I'm sure Papa will walk through the door any minute and tell you so himself.

The heat of the day is just fading and through the open window we hear the sudden sound of shouting in Lithuanian. ZHENIA leaps from her seat, SOPHIE's hand stills, MARA looks from one to the other.

INT. STAIRWELL
Three young men run up the stairs. They shout to each other and laugh — at first glance this may be a boisterous gang of lads on a night out together. Only the fact that they wear white armbands marks them out as partisans. That, and the fact that each one carries a gun.

They hammer on the door of the apartment and as soon as it is opened a crack they force their way inside.

INT. DINING ROOM
The three women are standing by the table, SOPHIE holding her pen aloft as if it were a wand with which she could magic them away, and MARA and her MOTHER hanging onto each other like lovers about to part.

PARTISAN 1 - in Lithuanian
You three — outside now. Move!

EXT. THE STREET BELOW. ŽEMAITĖS GATVĖ
A doorway onto a narrow street, 4 storey buildings either side. The afternoon sun is still high in the sky, window boxes are filled with flowers, laundry is drying, children's voices drift from an open window.

Three more men with guns surround the doorway. MARA appears first. She turns back to try to catch sight of her mother but is met by the muzzle of a gun waving her onwards. She spins round to find herself face to face with the youngest of the group. He can be no more than 18, only a couple of years older than MARA. A flicker of recognition and surprise crosses her face as she recognizes the brother of one of her school friends. He gestures with his gun to the wall on the other side of the road.

ANTANAS
Get over there - against the wall.
Put your hands up!

MARA reaches the wall and raises her hands above her head. Arms up, head back, back pressed into the wall, her gaze meets his head on. There is a moment here that could be from a very different story. But it is only seconds before her mother and grandmother are pushed out onto the street and now she flinches and fear transforms her face. SOPHIE and ZHENIA are pushed roughly against the wall either side of her. Unlike MARA they face the wall, faces turned into the stone, hands above their heads. ANTANAS glances at the 2 heavier men alongside him who have their guns trained on the two older women, realizes his mistake and gestures to MARA.

ANTANAS
Turn around. Face the wall.

She does so. The camera follows her gaze as she turns her head to the side, lays her cheek against the wall and turns to see her mother at her side. The camera dwells on ZHENIA'S right hand, complete with the freshly painted scarlet nails and sporting a huge pearl ring. We hear the sound of windows opening above.

MALE NEIGHBOUR
(from the window above)
Quickly, come quickly.

FEMALE NEIGHBOUR
(in a loud whisper)
I think they are going to shoot them.

CHILD'S VOICE
(from a different window)
Mama, do you think they will shoot them all at the same time?

CLOSE UP on the face of MARA.

FEMALE NEIGHBOUR
(from this second window)
Come away from the window Audra and sit down and finish your lunch like a good girl.

The camera holds on MARA's face. We hear a rifle cocked. She closes her eyes. Time passes. The scene plays out in real time. Seconds seem like minutes and the scene drags and becomes more and more tense as time passes and no word is spoken, no shot is fired.

Finally there is a sound from the doorway and the three partisans from upstairs emerge. They carry armfuls of possessions from the flat upstairs. A canteen of cutlery, some china, a radio, a jewelry box…

As they pass in front of the women the three guards drop their guns and re-join the gang. As they head down the street ANTANAS pulls a gold chain from the neck of one of the others and throws it in the air. The older man catches it, shakes his head at such youthful impudence and puts it in his pocket.

MARA and SOHPIE lower their hands and turn to look at ZHENIA who stands frozen in time, hands up against the wall. CLOSE UP on her hands with their scarlet painted nails and pearl rings.

FADE TO BLACK