Directed by Ján Kadár and Elmar Klos
Produced by Jordan Balurov, Milos Broz, Jaromír Lukás
Original Music by Zdenek Liska
Cinematography by Vladimír Novotný
Film Editing by Diana Heringova and Jaromír Janácek
Written by Ladislav Grosman (screenplay), Ladislav Grosman (story), Ján Kadár (writer) and Elmar Klos (writer)

Ida Kaminska...Rozalie Lautmann
Jozef Króner...Antonín Bříko
Hana Slivková...Evelyna Brtková
Martin Hollý...Imro Kuchar
Adám Matejka...Piti Báci
František Zvarík...Marcus Kolkots
tika/Ludovít Vavroušek
Hana Slivková...Evelyna Brtková
Martin Hollý...Imro Kuchar
Adám Matejka...Piti Báci
František Zvarík...Marcus Kolkots
Mikulas Ladizinsky...Marian Peter
Ján Kadár (April 1, 1918, Budapest, Austria-Hungary (now Hungary)—June 1, 1979, Los Angeles) has 19 directing credits, including: Freedom Road (1979), The Other Side of Hell (1978), The Blue Hotel (1977), Lies My Father Told Me (1975), The Angel Levine (1970), Touha zvan Anada/Adrift (1969), Obchod na korze/The Shop on Main Street (1965), Obzalovany/Accused (1964), Smrt si rika Engelchen/Because We Don’t Forget (1963), Tri prání/Three Wishes (1958), Tam na konecne/At the Terminal (1957), Únos (1953), Prazský hrad (1947), Dvakrát kaucuk (1946), Chvála révy (1941), Cyri lidé, jedna rec (1939), Andrej Hlinka o sobe (1938), Historie fíkového listu (1938), Silnice zpívá (1937), and V dome strasi duch (1937).

Elmar Klos (January 26, 1910, Brünn, Moravia, Austria-Hungary [now Brno, Czech Republic]—July 31, 1993, Prague, Czech Republic) has 22 Directing Credits, some of which are Bizon (1989), Touha zvan Anada/Adrift (1969), Obchod na korze/The Shop on Main Street (1965), Male divadlo/Accused (1964), Smrt si rika Engelchen/Because We Don’t Forget (1963), Tri prání/Three Wishes (1958), Tam na konecne/At the Terminal (1957), Únos (1953), Prazský hrad (1947), Dvakrát kaucuk (1946), Chvála révy (1941), Cyri lidé, jedna rec (1939), Andrej Hlinka o sobe (1938), Historie fíkového listu (1938), Silnice zpívá (1937), and V dome strasi duch (1937).
cene (1967), Obchod na korze/The Shop on Main Street (1965),
Jánosik (1963), Polnocná osma (1962), Posledná bosorka/The Last Witch (1957), and Katka/Cathy (1949).


Martin Hollý (June 8, 1904, Moravská Ostrava, Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia—October 1, 1965) has 19 directing and 6 acting credits. The acting credits are: Námeštie svätej Alžbety (1966), Obchod na korze/The Shop on Main Street (1965), Tri chlapi na cestách (1965), Velká samota/The Great Solitude (1960), Szent Péter esernyője/St. Peter’s Umbrella (1958), and Státny žložet (1958).

Adám Matejka (November 21, 1905—April 21, 1988) has 10 acting credits, some of which are Terezu bych kvůli zádné holce neopustil/I Wouldn’t Leave Tereza for Any Other Girl (1976), Zločin slecny Bacilipsky (1970), Noc nevesty/The Nun’s Night (1967), Obchod na korze/The Shop on Main Street (1965), Velká samota/The Great Solitude (1960), Szent Péter esernyője/St. Peter’s Umbrella (1958), and Státny žložet (1958).


Jan Kadár (April 1, 1918 - June 1, 1979), Czech director and scenarist, made his most notable films in collaboration with Elmar Klos (January 26, 1910 - July 19 or 31, 1993), Czech director, scenarist and administrator. Klos was born at Brno and studied law at Charles University in Prague. He started his movie career in the late 1920s, when he collaborated with his scriptwriter uncle on several pictures and took a few minor acting roles. Some accounts suggest that as a young man he was briefly in Hollywood. In the 1930s, when the Czech film industry was the liveliest and most prolific in Eastern Europe, he helped to organize and run the documentary studios established in Zlin (now Gottwaldov) by the Bata shoe company, which had its headquarters there.

During World War II and the German occupation Klos and Oscar Vávra led the group that prepared secret plans for the postwar nationalization of the Czech cinema, and in 1945 Klos became one of its chief administrators. In 1946-1947 he served as head of the short films studio at Bratislava in Slovakia before shifting to the famous Barrandov feature film studios in Prague as
head of the creative art staff. He himself wrote a number of scripts there, including the notable psychological drama *Dead Among the Living*, directed by Borivoj Zeman.

Jan Kadár was born in Budapest, Hungary, of Slovakian Jewish parents. He also studied law at Charles University, albeit some eight years later than Klos. However, though he came from a family of lawyers, he had already been infected by the film bug and left university without a degree to enter the movies. In 1938 he went to Karel Plicka’s film school in Bratislava; he was studying there when the war began. Being of Jewish birth, Kadár spent the years of the German occupation in labor camps. “For the first time in my life,” he said, “I acted as a Jew. I refused conversion and served in a work unit with a yellow arm band instead of a white one, which was then the privilege of those baptized.”

Kadár’s parents and sister died in Auschwitz, but he survived four years in the camps and in 1945 began his movie career at the short film studios in Bratislava. He directed his first film there, a documentary about the postwar reconstruction of Slovakia called *Life is Rising From the Ruins* (1945). A year or so later he moved on to Barrandov (where he met Klos) as an assistant director and scenarist, attracting attention with a witty script for a comedy called *Know of a Flat*?

The first feature Kadár directed was *Katka* (*Katya/Cathy*, 1950), made not at Barrandov but in Slovakia, at the feature film studios established in 1947 at Bratislava. It is a propagandist comedy written by the director with Vlatislav Blazek about a young peasant girl who goes to the city and gets a job in a factory, where the enthusiasm of her fellow-workers converts her into a devoted proponent of socialism. Josef Skvorecky remembers it as a “perfectly sweet film” which “for some reason survived in the memories of the audiences. It must have had some freshness, a flash of more than just propagandist truth, maybe a glimpse of art. The collaboration of Vlatislav Blazek on the scenario may have contributed to the success, or the presence of a charming new actress, Bozena Obravá. Anyway, the fact remains that the film was one of the few products of the early socialist-realist school which did not make one’s hands ache.”

Unfortunately, by the time *Katka* was released, the authorities had reversed an earlier policy—they now frowned on agricultural workers moving into the industrial cities, and consequently frowned on *Katka* as well. Kadár was recalled to Barrandov, where his next film was his first collaboration with Klos, *Únos (The Highjacking/Kidnap*, 1952), for which the two men are credited as joint directors and joint scenarists (with another writer). It tells the story of the highjacking of a Czechoslovak plane to West Germany, where its innocent passengers are offered inducements and even blackmailed by German and American officials to betray their country and stay in the West. Only one of the Czechs succumbs—a zoot-suited young man with a trumpet who is seduced by the sound of an American swing band playing in a nearby restaurant.

This cold-war movie is described by Skvorecky as “one of those shallow and malicious films where the authors pretend that everything in the world is either black or white, or that anyone who for any reason opposed anything that was going on in Czechoslovakia at that time...was a traitor.” Having tripped over the shifting party line with *Katka*, Kadár had presumably hoped to earn forgiveness with *Únos*; for some mysterious reason, however, his second feature was accused of “Bourgeois objectivism”—until it found a champion in the great Soviet director Vsevolod Pudovkin, whereupon the Czech authorities changed their tack and gave it a state prize.

The Kadár-Klos collaboration continued with *Hudba z Marsu (Music From Mars*, 1954), a musical comedy written with Vlatislav Blazek about the vicissitudes of a factory dance band. At the risk of being censured for Western-style decadence, it included some mildly syncopated swing tunes, but was condemned not on that account but apparently because it presented the hero, a factory director, in a slightly comic light. The premiere was nearly canceled, posters were torn down, but then the authorities relented and the movie was released to great popular success. *Tam na konecniš (The House at the Terminus*, 1957) very carefully avoided controversy. It interweaves five stories about an assortment of “ordinary people” living in the same apartment house, treating their loves, hopes, and problems with a pleasantly sentimental “poetic realism” that made it as popular as its predecessor. Then came *Tri pribni (Three Wishes*, 1958), which had the misfortune to fall afoul of President Novotny’s “battle against the remnants of bourgeois thought.”

*Three Wishes* is a comedy with music, based on a play by Blazek, who collaborated with Kadár and Klos on the adaptation. A young man living with his family in a hopelessly crowded apartment is kind to an old man and is rewarded with a little bell that will grant him three wishes. The hero is soon comfortably housed and on his way to the top in his career. But the more successful he becomes, the less inclined he is to rock the boat, and when his best friend is fired for speaking out against anti-revolutionary trends at work, he faces a dreadful dilemma: he has used up his three wishes, and when he appeals to the old man, he is told that he can be allowed a fourth wish to help his friend, but only at the cost of all that he himself has gained. He is still wrestling with this dilemma when the movie ends.
The film upset the authorities on at least two counts—it gives a very realistic picture of the desperate housing shortage of the period and it reveals the cynicism, hypocrisy, and corruption that were so rapidly replacing the idealism of the postwar years—conditions that the old man exploits in granting the hero’s three wishes. In February 1959, a special conference was called at Banka Bystrica for the express purpose of pillorying a group of films that Novotny and his advisors found unacceptably frank in their criticisms of the new Czechoslovakia. *Three Wishes* and another film were singled out above all others and “made an example of.” The movie was banned, mention of it in the media was forbidden, and it was removed from the annual list of Barrandov productions. Vlatislav Blazek was fired, as was the general director of the Barrandov studios, and Kandár and Klos were suspended for two years.

In 1960 Kadár made “Youth,” a segment of the experimental film *Polyúčran*, which requires nine screens for its projection. At about the same time he also contributed to *Spartakiade* (1960), a documentary record of the athletics festival, and to Alfred Radok’s mixed-media spectacle *Laterna Magika*, which often provided employment for novice filmmakers and those in disgrace. Whether or not Klos collaborated with him on all or any of these projects is not clear; in any case, it was not until 1963 that their next feature collaboration appeared. This was *Smrt si rikô Engelchen* (*Death is Called Engelchen*), based on the novel by Ladislav Mnacko and set in the last days of World War II. It centers on a young Slovak guerilla (Jan Kacer), seriously wounded, whose mind jumps from the present to feverish memories of the events that have brought him so close to death. Sharply observed and sometimes brutal in its almost documentary naturalism, the film avoids socialist-realist heroics and indeed raises questions about the value of heroism in a way that is more reminiscent of the so-called Polish school than of the postwar Czechoslovakian cinema. There has been much praise for the brilliant editing of the “leaps back and forth in time” in this picture, which took first prize at the Moscow film festival and also at the Los Alamos Peace Festival.

There was also a great deal of admiration for *Obzalovny* (*The Defendant/The Accused*, 1964), derive from a true story of the 1950s about a power station manager (played by Vlado Muller) who is accused of financial mismanagement. In the course of his trial, it becomes increasingly clear that the accused is a dedicated and able man who has been made the scapegoat for the errors of his superiors. He is given a token suspended sentence, but rejects this compromise and insists on returning to jail to await a new trial and complete exoneration. Like *Three Wishes*, this is an excellent example of what Kadár and Klos liked to call “film-discussions,” and it was a courageous project for them to undertake so soon after their reinstatement. However, presumably because it referred to events in the past, the film encountered no official hostility and indeed brought them a state prize as well as the Grand Prix at Karlovy Vary and an international critics’ award.

It was followed by the best-known of all the pictures they made together, *Obchod na korze* (*The Shop on Main Street/The Shop on High Street*, 1965), adapted by Kadár, Klos, and Ladislav Grosman from the latter’s novel. It is set in Slovakia in World War II, when that part of Czechoslovakia became an independent fascist state. The story centers on Tono (Josef Króner), a young carpenter in a little country town. Tono is not interested in politics or in much else except strolling about with his beloved dog, but one day his fascist brother-in-law appoints him “Aryan controller” of a button shop belonging to an old Jewish widow (Ida Kaminská).

He is expected to profit handsomely from this sinecure, but Tono being what he is, and the widow being half-deaf and completely unaware of the political situation, he winds up working for her as her assistant. He finds that the supposedly prosperous shop is virtually bankrupt, supported by the charity of the town’s Jewish merchants, who now also pay Tono to serve as the old lady’s “Aryan controller.” This ironic arrangement collapses when the fascists start to ship the town’s Jews off to the concentration camps. Tono, who has grown fond of the old woman but who knows what happens to people who aid Jews, is suddenly faced with a dilemma beyond his resources. As the Hlinka guards round up the Jews, he vacillates in an agony of fear and indecision that ends with him shoving the widow into a cupboard. When he opens the cupboard after the round-up, she is dead. He hangs himself. The film ends with a fantasy sequence—referring back to an earlier dream sequence—in which Tono and the old lady, in overexposed slow motion, waltz together in the sunlight.

*The Shop on Main Street* received an American Academy Award as best foreign-language film of the year—the first Czechoslovak film ever to receive an Oscar—and brought Kadár and Klos a David O. Selznick Award. Josef Skvorecky wrote that it was “a combination of an excellent...screenplay, outstanding actors, intimate knowledge of the environment, and a passionate involvement with the artistic questions submitted by the form. All of the elements are chiseled into a classical shape by the great experience of the authors, who managed...to revive the past.” Georges Sadoul praised it as “an engrossing study in guilt and the failure of a generation to fight anti-Semitism, but also an affectionate and often lyrical portrait of life in a small provincial town.” Several critics pointed out its resemblance to Menzel’s *Closely Watched Trains* and other Czechoslovak films of the period in the way it cuts so swiftly from lyricism to horror. For some, however, this memorable picture was seriously marred by passages—like the final fantasy sequence—of sentimental whimsey.

In 1968 Kadár and Klos began work on *Touha zvanô Anada* (*Adrift*), adapted from a novel by Lajos Ziláhy. This Czechoslovak-American co-production (the first), set in the 1920s in the Danube marshlands, tells the story of a young fisherman (Rade Markovic) with an ailing wife (Milena Dravic) who falls obsessively in love with the unknown and amnesiac woman (Paula Pritchett) he rescues from the water. Shooting was interrupted by the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, from which Kadár escaped across the border to Vienna. The
international success of The Shop on Main Street brought him an invitation to the United States. There he set up and filmed a sadly whimsical screen version of The Angel Levine (1970), Bernard Malamud’s fable about a Jew (Zero Mostel) whose only hope of salvation from his Job-like sufferings is to believe the impossible—that his black visitor Alexander Levine (Harry Belafonte) is in fact a Heaven-sent Jewish messenger. Shooting was finished by June 1969, when Kadár went back to Czechoslovakia for long enough to complete Adrift. The latter had an extremely mixed reception: it was extravagantly admired by a few critics (especially in the United States), dismissed by others as a tiresome confection, lacking in “ethnographic conviction,” pretentious and clumsy in its flashback narrative technique.

The end of their work on Adrift was also the end of the famous partnership. Kadár returned permanently to the United States and Klos stayed behind as a professor at FAMU, the film faculty of the Prague Academy of Arts and Music, and “a grand old man” of Czechoslovak cinema. According to Kadár, he had always been responsible for shooting their films and directing the actors, Klos working rather as a producer, administrator, and supervising editor: “He was never a director but he was an ideal producer. He is not a man of practice so much as a man of concept. In our twenty years of collaboration it was an ideal relationship of producer and director.”

Without Klos, Kadár made one more movie in North America, and five television films. Lies My Father Told Me (1973), with an original script by Ted Allan, is set during the 1920s in a Jewish immigrant quarter of Montreal. It centers on the six-year-old David Herman, whose father is an unsuccessful inventor, ambitious, opportunist, and fundamentally dishonest. David’s idol is his beloved grandfather (Yossi Yadin), an immigrant who retains the simple peasant virtues and supports his family (and his son’s useless inventions) by touring the streets of Montreal with a cart and an old horse, collecting scrap. Reviewers found the unfamiliar milieu of some interest, but generally agreed that the overall effect was “indulgently elegiac.”

Kadár’s television films included The Blue Hotel, from a story by Stephen Crane; Mandelstam’s Witness, a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation film about the great Russian poet Osip Mandelstam, martyred by Stalin; and Freedom Road, a dramatization of Howard Fast’s novel with a starry cast that includes Muhammad Ali and Kris Kristofferson. Kadár had completed only the first part of this adaptation when he died. The director, who was survived by his wife, was said to be “sentimental, jovial, temperamental,” always with a cigarette in his hand. He served as president of the American Film Institute from 1975 until his death.

Josef Skvorecky wrote that Kadár and Klos belonged “to the generation of artists who began directing in the early 1950s, were always highly above the average, and after the New Wave’s aesthetic revolution were stimulated towards the creation of their best works. Kadár and Klos are above all excellent craftsmen, who are careful to select material of topical and temporal significance….One could not describe them as formal experimenters; theirs is a more or less traditional narrative method, although they obviously like the modern camera approach. Also one would be hard pressed to find in their work traces of neo-realism, cinéma-vérité, or of expressionistic vision. Indeed, they do not rely on purely cinematic elements, but rather on a good story well told.”


Of all my films, The Shop on Main Street touches me most closely. Elmar Klos and I usually work as equal partners, but in this case he left me a free hand. He knows that I am not thinking of the fate of all the six million tortured Jews, but that my work is shaped by the fate of my father, my friends’ fathers, mothers of those near to me and by people whom I have known. I am not interested in the outer trappings—figures, statements, generalizations. I want to make emotive films. I believe their revival is coming and emotive films grow from the feeling of the director.

Ladislaw Grosman’s short novel The Trap, later called The Shop on Main Street, attracted Klos and myself by its special angle of truthfulness, the tragicomedy of the story and the author’s humanistic approach. He has created a tragedy around one couple, Rozalie Lautmann and Tono Brtko, and in so doing has seen fascism from within. Grosman wrote the screenplay himself; we merely adjusted some details for the purpose of filming. Such specific subject matter does not allow for the usual methods of co-authorship.

The plot actually turns on a misunderstanding. Humor is not lacking in even the most tragic situations, but the viewer or reader knows that life is in the balance. The author knows the people he writes about intimately, and he is also a master of style. The Shop on Main Street gives a picture of Slovak fascism with all the provincialism and familiarity peculiar to it and with its consequences all the more horrifying. While told through two characters, it touches wider issues so that it can be applied to any type of fascism. While presenting the fate of individuals, it is fact portrays a prototype. For the lot of the Jews one can substitute the lot of anyone in this world.

The Shop on Main Street, in short, is an episode of high tragedy, a concentration of the world’s absurdities, in which good, ignorant, and indecisive people like Brtko enable “force” to get a firm hold.

Ladislav Mnacko wrote in connection with the Eichmann trial that he found the key to understanding in the fate of the Jews he had known personally, not in the sum total of those indirectly killed by Eichmann. Numbers tell us nothing. In this I agree with
Mnacko. Armand Gatti in *L’enclose* said more about Communists during the war than would a sweeping epic or a powerful external film. The most perfect reconstruction of a situation—and this brings us to *The Shop on Main Street*—cannot outdo a picture of fascism concentrated in the tragedy of a single human being.

We laid the scene in Sabinov, a small Slovak town near the northeastern frontier. The author had not taken his story from there, but it is a town which has not changed in appearance since the days of the Slovak State. People helped us to reconstruct details. We found that the local citizens were wonderful as extras. They were uninhibited, they enjoyed working and playing. They were disciplined too, and honest in their daily work and in making a movie. It would have been out of the question to film all this with professional extras. But we did not use the system of cinémathéque, the people naturally and consciously acted out the screenplay.

As for the leading performers, Ida Kaminská and Josef Kroner, they so lived their parts that they gave content to Mnacko’s apt statement: “The die was cast with the passing of the Nuremberg laws. The rest was a matter of fantasy.”

The role of Tomo Brtko has been Kroner’s greatest opportunity. For the first time he has been able to pull out all the stops. I operated with Kroner, not with Brtko, I knew before shooting started that Kroner was the only candidate for the part. The first rushes proved I was right. They somehow merged and Kroner ranged from the level of a man’s terrible crisis at having killed, to moments of almost Chaplinesque quality. He helped in an amazing way to underline the farcical aspects of the story. His work defies classification—he is too strong as personality.

When I thought about casting the part of Heinrich Lautmann’s widow, who runs the shop that sells ribbons, lace, buttons, I was at a loss. Czechoslovakia has no actress of the older generation with the experience of life to create such a complex, exceptional character. But Polish colleagues drew our attention to Ida Kaminská. Over 60, she is manager, producer, and leading actress at the Jewish Theater in Warsaw. She is the daughter of Esther Rachel Kaminská, the famous Polish actress who founded the theater just 100 years ago. The Kaminská family represents something of a dynasty of actors for Ida. Her husband, daughter, and son-in-law are now acting at the theater. Ida Kaminská carries the widow Lautmann’s fate within herself, and she plays from actual experience.

We were fortunate to obtain Kroner and Kaminská as our protagonists in *The Shop on Main Street*. Their dramatic unity has swept me off my feet. And I am sure that audiences will find it difficult to forget the white-haired, hard-of-hearing, and bewildered old lady with the innocent face. She is the most powerful reminder I know of fascism and its victims.

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