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THE DEATH OF THE BEAUTIFUL ROEBUCKS

Smrt krásných srnců

Production: Filmové studio Barrandov, 1986, col, 91 min.

Story: Ota Pavel. **Script:** Karel Kachyňa. **Director:** Karel Kachyňa. **Director of photography:** Vladimír Smutný. **Music:** Luboš Fišer. **Set designer:** Karel Lier. **Cast:** Karel Heřmánek (father), Marta Vančurová (mother), Rudolf Hrušínský (Prošek), Jiří Krampol (Hejtmánek), Marek Valter (Prdelka), Jiří Strach (Jirka), Jan Jirásek (Hugo).

Ota Pavel (1930-1973) was a well-known sport reporter. Just before his premature death, his autobiographical short novels, describing his youth in a Jewish family, were published in book form. They were a revelation to every one. The most unforgettable in Pavel's stories is the character of the father with his insatiable zest for life. He never gives up, his ideas on how to get money are always brilliant, only quite often they get him into trouble. Around him is a colourful mixture of charming characters from the pre-war era. However, a great drama emerges from this idyllic life: defenceless little people are going to be devoured by the Nurenburg anti-Jewish laws.

Leo Popper is exactly such a father. He becomes a commercial traveller selling Elektrolux vacuum cleaners. He hopes to enter in the wealthy ranks of the Prague society and make some more money for his family. He indeed makes himself very

popular among rich ladies and becomes the most successful salesman of the company. His old dream, to buy a pond for carp, can come true now.

One day, in Leo's favourite pub, he hears about the Nazis establishing a 'Protectorate' of Bohemia and Moravia. This turns the new fortune of the Jewish family upside down. The director of the company is forced to fire Leo. He offers him a job in Rio de Janeiro instead but father Popper refuses. His home is here. In the meantime their pond has been confiscated by the army. However, before Christmas Leo with his youngest son make a hole in the ice and catch all the carps.

When the two elder boys obtain an order for transport to a concentration camp, the father decides to find some good food for them - they should get stronger before they leave. But the fish won't even bite in his favourite river Berounka. He begs the poacher Prošek to get him a roebuck, but he's no longer interested in his hobby. The death penalty applies for poaching, after all. In the end, contrary to all principles of nature-loving people, they get some roebuck meat. Just as the Nazis burn down the village of Lidice and massacre its population, the father returns with his contraband. Then a farewell begins.