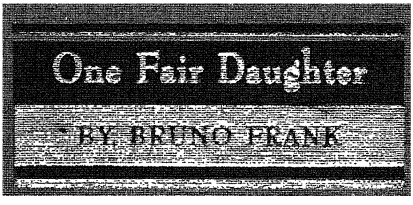
One Fair Daughter
BY BRUNO FRANK

One Fair Daughter

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ONE FAIR DAUGHTER

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN MANUSCRIPT
BY CLAIRE TRASK

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FIRST PART

Pattay and Recha

1

EVEN in the carefree and tolerant Vienna of 1913, which was most indulgent to members of the aristocracy, the day came when Count Franz von Pattay's affairs—cards, women, duels—reached the limit and could no longer be disregarded. He was transferred to one of the cavalry garrisons in the northeast of the Monarchy.

The commander of the distinguished regiment where Pattay served might have given him another chance, maybe two. He had a fatherly affection for the brilliant young man. Besides, Pattay's conduct had not really challenged the traditional army code of honor. This disciplinary transfer had not been the commander's idea; it came from the very top, from the most exalted of sources.

The young officer's only close relative was a widowed sister of his mother, a Princess Weikersthal, an exceedingly pious old lady, but a despot. She had asked for an audience at Schönbrunn and it was she who had brought back the irrevocable verdict direct from the eighty-year-old Imperial pedant. To be the harbinger of this message gave her a rather malicious pleasure.

Much to her annoyance, the culprit was neither surprised nor sorry.

"Nothing I'd like better, dear Aunt," he quickly replied. "Four years of playing around in Vienna is plenty. I do hope you will soon look me up in my desert so I can parade my platoon for you."

His manner of accepting the disconcerting change in his life left nothing to be desired. To refuse and leave the army rather than drill Ukrainian peasants at a dismal border-town, that thought never so much as occurred to him. His fellow officers, who hated to lose their pleasant companion, had their own explanation for it. Pattay might have defied the command of the Emperor, but the wish of his pious aunt was law. For she alone stood between him and his

family fortune. If he quarreled with her, he would in all likelihood not receive a farthing and the Church would derive the benefit.

So three weeks later all the younger members of his regiment turned out in the drafty hall of the North Station to see him off. Their humor was a little too raucous to be natural. They implored their parting friend to stay away from the flashy-eyed, tempting Jezebels that Galicia is noted for. They presented him with a beautifully bound book which turned out to be a Polish-Ukrainian-Yiddish dictionary, for without a knowledge of all those idioms a stranger would naturally be lost in that region. They handed him a bulky vessel, carefully tied up in pink satin, which was filled with insect powder.

The exile accepted it all in good humor, climbed into his coach, and with a farewell glance took in his colorful escort. He himself already wore the uniform of the Lancers to which he now belonged, the light-blue tunic with the silver cartridge pouch hanging from his shoulder, the bright-red breeches, and the high patent-leather boots. His lean, clean-cut face was crowned by the jaunty tschapka with the brush. He saluted once more and slightly clicked his heels, his spurs tinkling gaily. The door closed with a bang. He disappeared from view, a flash of sky-blue and silver.

2

During the many hours of his long journey to the east of the country, Pattay had ample leisure to adjust himself to the unforeseen change in his life.

His friends were wrong; he was not merely making the best of a bad bargain. Neither did the jeopardized inheritance have much to do with his ready acceptance of this change. Selfish scheming was completely foreign to his nature. His desire to turn over a new leaf was genuine.

Three or four months back he would have scoffed at the very thought. He was contented with his life. The money-

lenders permitted his debts to pile up and did not press him unduly. They knew he would pay off, and with big interest, the minute the family fortune came into his hands. His duels had never resulted in anything tragic. His superior fencing skill usually disarmed his opponent. The one stab in the shoulder, which paralyzed the left arm of an overbearing young diplomat, did not prey on his conscience. And about his adventures with women—up to that time none had crossed his path who would merit more than a half-amused, half-affectionate thought. That roster of ever-changing ladies, whether from his own or lesser circles, had hardly been of the type whose hearts are broken by a passing friendship.

Yet a short time back there had been one exception, and the serious finish of that episode continued to trouble him, much to his surprise.

There had really been no reason to consider himself more of a cad than usual. The girl succumbed to him as readily as others had before her, maybe more so. There had been no complications. As far as he knew, nothing had "happened." Gradually and without any apparent upset, he had passed out of the picture, adroitly and with his customary tact. For him the whole thing had been over and done with when, quite by accident, he learned that the girl had died two weeks before.

At first it did not affect him particularly, for he perceived no relation between the tragedy and himself. Then, bit by bit, he pieced their brief friendship together and soon there was little doubt left in his mind. But what in heaven's name did she expect? That a Pattay, the last of his lineage, related to half a dozen ruling houses, yes, even to the Hapsburgs themselves, would marry the daughter of Blau, the jeweler? His memory of the delightful creature with the jet-black tresses and the fair eyes, always a little frightened, held less remorse than resentment at such utterly thoughtless folly.

Then one September afternoon, while strolling along the Ringstrasse, he unexpectedly came upon her father, a somber figure walking in the clear autumn sun. Their acquaintance

being but a casual one, he hurriedly debated whether to stop for a few polite words of condolence. But Siegmund Blau had already recognized him from afar. Three steps before they passed each other, he lifted his tall silk hat and bowed, deferentially and low, while the other clanked by. Pattay could see by his face that he knew the truth.

That was all that took place. It was over in less than a minute. But strangely enough, it meant more to Pattay than the whole tragic event that preceded it. He was unable to forget the man's humble glance and gesture, his deep bow, his meek acceptance of a crushing fact. This father's endurance had been taxed to the breaking point. Something monstrous had happened to him and he knew, or suspected, who was to blame. But he did not rebel. He stifled his grief and, with a servile flourish, lifted his black hat to the man who had ruined his happiness and his hope.

For the first time Pattay sensed that something was amiss in his life. He was not practiced in the art of self-analysis and too unschooled to arrive at some general conclusion. But his hitherto solid outlook on life became doubtful. He instinctively shrank from yielding to this doubt, for giving credence to it opened up an abyss before which those hallowed and settled concepts tottered and faltered—hereditary nobility, the military code, nay the very concept of Austria!

Why think about such things? He tried to forget, tried to expel the thought, but Mr. Blau's black hat kept dangling there in the balance and blocked the hitherto cloudless panorama, his past life. A strange annoyance took hold of him, ill-suited to his years and position. There was only one thing to do, "get away from it all." He had arrived at precisely that point when Princess Weikersthal called and handed him the order for his exile with such evident satisfaction.

3

The railway station, painted yellow, stood by itself among the already harvested oat and corn fields. Two officers from

his new regiment, an ensign and the youngest lieutenant, met Pattay, took charge of his luggage, and climbed after him into the light buggy which was drawn by two dark brown horses, very shaggy and very small. The driver was a pale-faced young Jew. He saluted with his braided whip.

"The town is a good distance off," said the lieutenant. "Our railway station is nearly halfway to Vienna."

Pattay gathered this to be a joke, the kind that is handed down from one officer's generation to another, a tired, threadbare, wishful little joke by men in exile. He smiled politely.

The road ran straight ahead through mowed fields, until abruptly and at once it curved, dipped, and there was the river, wide, yellowish-gray, flowing silently past. The trot of the horses made a hollow sound on the wooden bridge.

"The Dniester," the ensign introduced. The name had a Russian, an Asiatic flavor.

Reaching the other side, they drove on through the town, over bumpy, narrow streets that smelled musty. The houses suddenly stopped and across a barren tract of land, which boasted neither tree nor brush, they rolled toward a sprawling, low building, the barracks.

It displayed that same odd yellow as the railway station, a color that was sober as well as friendly and familiar to all who were at home in the far-flung lands of the Empire. From the Adriatic to Bohemia and from the Russian border to Salzburg, every official building was painted like that. The color originated with the imperial castle at Schönbrunn, seat of the eighty-year-old ruler, whose verdict had condemned Pattay to this place.

"We had to quarter you in the barracks, sir." It was the older of the two who spoke. "The few lodgings in the town are all taken."

"That suits me perfectly," was Pattay's rejoinder. The two were slightly surprised at this.

They entered a large room, low-ceilinged, without a carpet on the wooden floor. The place looked very bare and very clean. An exquisitely carved crucifix, dating back to baroque

times, looked down from above the spartan-like bed. The wall opposite was decorated with an atrocious oleograph of the Emperor as commander-in-chief.

The two windows faced the courtyard and the stables. As Pattay stepped up, his eye, fell directly on a row of horses' rumps, their shiny buttocks reflecting the late afternoon sun. His mind flashed back to his Vienna bachelor rooms in the Herrengasse, to the family heirlooms of four centuries, to the Charles VI furniture, to the view across the gaily carved gables toward the Hofburg.

He turned as his new orderly stepped into the room with the luggage. He was a Ukrainian peasant boy, broad-shouldered and firmly knit, with striking eyebrows arching high over his kind blue eyes. His hair was sandy.

Gravely he looked at his new master, this unknown godhead that had come into his life. With h' help, Pattay now began putting away his belongings. Piotr reverently balanced the silk shirts on outstretched arms. But soon, his unknown godhead began to chat with him in that kindly, casual manner in which the Austrian gentleman of blood was wont to converse with his inferiors. Piotr only half understood Pattay's German. But before the last valise had been stowed away, he was heart and soul for his new master, who had descended as from the clouds. He was his with a passion that would shine on, down to his children and his children's children, when Piotr was old perhaps, and with time on his hands to reminisce.

Pattay now strapped on his belt, took his gloves, put on his tschapka, and went off to report to his new commander.

4

Eighteen thousand people lived in the town. Not quite half of them were Jews, but they definitely prevailed. The Ukrainian inhabitants receded into the background despite their colorful rustic costumes. The Jews owned nearly all the shops, such as they were, dingy, flat stalls, fastened

by sturdy doors with heavy iron fittings. The Jews traded in every commodity, in cloth and linen, in yarn and buttons and ribbon and braid, in shoes and caps, in bread, beer, oil and butter. They were tailors and furriers but also locksmiths and tinkers. They thatched roofs, cleaned chimneys, drove horses. They were in evidence everywhere. Most of them were wretchedly poor. The few who were not, such as the proprietor of the only general store, two or three landlords, the owner of the sugar-works across the river, outwardly lived much like their less fortunate brothers and tried to avoid reproach and envy by a thoughtful practice of philanthropy. Fear gripped them all. And yet for many years there had been no reason for fear. The natives accepted them as part of their daily life.

They were really natives themselves. They had lived here for six centuries. But in their eyes was forever the look of the haunted, of the game that is started up from its sleep and forced to run for life, through forest and river.

They had come from Germany, where they had settled along the Rhine since their forefathers had followed the Roman legions across the Alps until, after a thousand years, the smoldering distrust flared up into hatred and persecution. That was in the year of the "Black Death." In Germany millions succumbed to that plague whose origin was never disclosed. Those accursed aliens, it was their doing. They, who had nailed Christ to the cross, had poisoned Germany's wells, had polluted all that sweet, clear, healthy water from which the nation was now drinking its doom. They were slain by the thousands, while other thousands desperately searched for a refuge.

A sovereign opened his lands to them, lands that had been ravaged and depopulated by war. This sovereign was Casimir, called "the Great" by the people of Poland. He was a maker of peace, protector of the peasant, generous and a man of vision.

The Jews brought with them their fears, their meager chattel, their alert talents. And they brought their German. They held on to it. Back there it changed, the rivers of time

polished it. But the Jew kept it as it was spoken when Germany had murderously expelled him. Some few words of his own sacred language crept into it, a few Slavic idioms. To the unattuned ear of later generations it sounded corrupted, the way the Jews spoke it with their harsh cadences and their profuse gestures. But it was the German of the minnesingers and of their emperors of old. The blood of the Jews did not forget the hills and the rivers which, for a thousand years, they had loved as their own.

Many of them, the older ones in particular, wore the long black caftan. Their Christian neighbors thought it some sort of Asiatic heirloom—if they thought about it at all. But it was never that. It was the good old frock of the German burgher, as their forefathers had worn it on the banks of the Rhine. It did not look very imposing on the Jews, this Gothic frock. The strain and stress of centuries had left it threadbare and spotted, strangely befitting a pallid face.

And pallid was the face, even of those among them whose muscles and chest were toughened by physical labor. Too long had their ancestors been cooped up in meeting houses and divinity schools bent over Emara and Mischnah, those spiritual treasures gathered by their rabbis. There they sat confidently enjoying the superiority of him who is at one with the truth. Dozens of these places could still be found in this small town, low, dark, stuffy rooms all of them, with not an ornament, not a picture to relieve the gloom. And just as unhealthy, too, was life in their dank houses and basement shops, in the unpaved, evil-smelling alleyways which at one point abruptly opened on the light, prodigiously wide square, called the "Ring."

In the center of it rose the town hall, a new and ugly edifice erected in pseudo Gothic style. Bordering the square were other official buildings, the Court and Revenue Offices under one roof decorated with statues, the County and City Council in a dignified two-story house painted yellow. And there was also the Greek-Catholic church, standing at an angle, a wooden, rambling structure with its three incongru-

ous cupolas. It had stood there long before anything else came.

The Jewish synagogue was not in that neighborhood. It had tucked itself away, somewhere back in the alleys. But the department store of Gelbfisch and Son was there, and so was the "Archduke Rainer," the hotel owned by Salomon Loew.

This was a Jewish town; the officers of the Lancers took that for granted. Now and then some astounded newcomer would clumsily try to ape that singsong of the Jews and mimic their peculiar gestures. The old-timers would pass over such performances with a bored smile. They knew that the novelty would soon wear off.

To be anti-Semitic was considered poor taste among these gentlemen. To them it reeked of the stuffy middleclass. They knew, of course, that certain political factions capitalized on anti-Semitism—to inflate the small man's ego and so catch his vote. Their own station was much too unassailable to permit of such ill will of these palefaced aliens. Some of the officers who were not quite so hidebound rather respected the tenacious Jewish adherence to absurd laws, customs, and idioms. They sensed something vaguely akin—a distant and somewhat declined aristocracy.

But the novelty never wore off with the boys in the one-year class, the sons of well-to-do families. Money bought them the privilege to serve a shorter term than the average have-not. For these sons of Vienna bankers and Prague industrialists it was a daily agony to hear Yiddish sounds and endure the sight of those dark figures in caftans. Their main ambition in life was to look and talk exactly like their titled superiors and, if luck was with them, to be admitted to their ranks. It was positively mortifying to think that any of the officers might link them, in any way, with the tradespeople. Icy and trembling inside, they would look past those sallow-skinned relatives who spoke the medieval German of the troubadours, punctuating it by flashy gestures brought from Mediterranean shores.

5

The officers had looked forward to Pattay's arrival as to an enlivening event. His devil-may-care reputation had preceded him. But it took them only a few days to discover how mistaken they had been. The hero of untold piquant tales did nothing to make himself conspicuous, to put spark into their drab garrison life. Without any pretense whatsoever he quietly took up his duties.

After dinner, the officers would stay on at the casino for a glass of wine and for stories, mainly of the spicier sort. Pattay would laugh good-naturedly even at the less successful efforts. But he himself contributed little. When the moment arrived, and it arrived with clock-like regularity, to go on to something more substantial, such as a game of baccarat, he usually excused himself. As soon as the cards were spread fan-shaped on the table, he would rise and retire to his room. In the beginning some thought him arrogant. Their modest little game, they ventured, did not sufficiently tickle his jaded palate, for it certainly could not compete with the thrilling experiences of his Viennese club life.

As it was, this nightly pastime could hardly be considered modest or innocent. Quite the contrary. These utterly bored gentlemen, rusticating here at the frontier, went wild when it came to gambling. To see them sitting around the dinner table, it would have been difficult to imagine a more congenial crowd. Not for an instant would one suspect how heavily they were indebted to each other. For they never discussed these debts nor did they press them. The lucky ones—almost always the same ones—permitted the chain to drag nonchalantly. They knew it could not be broken. To look at the calm, pre-Raphaelite features of the young Baron Seldnitzky, for example, no one would guess that he owed his neighbor a sum which would enable that officer to buy back his lost family estate in Southern Austria, and that outright.

In spite of their hybrid social status, those wealthy young-

sters who were serving only one year were more than welcome at the gaming table. Certain big businessmen in Vienna and Prague had not the remotest suspicion what ruinous sums were being chalked up against them, what staggering I.O.U.s were going to be presented some day. A few years before, a suicide had been the outcome of this pastime. As a result gambling was stopped—but only for a time. Soon the order was forgotten and the present commander was inclined to let his officers have their way as long as they were correct and reliable when on duty.

Here, too, the new arrival created some astonishment. With his less bright recruits Pattay was patience itself, if exacting. Not a slip escaped him in seat or posture, trot or canter. He would return to the barracks grimy with dust or soaked to the skin but always in excellent spirits. Whoever saw him on such occasions was justified in concluding that the scion of the ancient house of Pattay and Schlern, kin of the reigning dynasty, had here found his life's work.

It was rumored that he cherished ambitions, dreamed of a great military career—something unheard of in an Austrian cavalry officer of high descent. And this rumor grew when various shipments of books began to arrive from Vienna and when it became a habit with Pattay to spend his off hours in his room, studying.

That was positively bizarre. In his aristocratic circles it was the fashion to look down upon education and knowledge, to view such accomplishments with contempt and pretend to be even less interested in them than was actually the case. It was considered chic to pose as an illiterate.

Not that Pattay felt any special vocation for tactics and strategy. On the contrary, he found it very hard to concentrate on the subjects. It always remained an effort to reach down one of those tomes, whether it be Clausewitz or Willisen, Puysegur or Gilbert, He had ordered a *History of the Austrian Cavalry* hoping that it might make the approach easier. But the book proved such dull reading that, with each page, the distinguished Austrian cavalry lost more and more of its glamour. Yet he did not give up.

The commander of the Lancers had been ordered to report on Pattay's conduct direct to the Emperor. Any expectation to the contrary notwithstanding, his first quarterly report turned out to be highly favorable. The pedantic ruler at Schönbrunn had a duplicate sent to Princess Weikersthal. When she had read it and lowered her lorgnette, the prospects of the Church, as far as the Pattay family fortune was concerned, had completely caved in.

Anyone else would have made himself rather unpopular with these virtuous kinks, as the regiment called them. But not Pattay. He was a comrade who was always ready to help out, never ill-tempered, excellent company yet not enviably brilliant, in short, a most satisfactory acquisition.

Only Captain Schaller did not seem to see it in that light. From the outset he had been cold and formal with Pattay—a most evident physical aversion.

Ferdinand Schaller came from a family of government officials. Father and grandfather had been finance and judicial functionaries, aspiring people but never very high up. The son had the suspicious nature of the inferior. He detested everything about Pattay, his tall, loose-limbed figure, the sensitive face and fastidious mouth. It was that mouth he hated most. He himself, while still a cadet at the military academy, had been branded "the Prussian" on account of his thick-set frame and rigid bearing. And specifically Prussian was the angular cut of his yellowish hair which rose like a brush above the leathery, low forehead.

Captain Schaller was married and the father of four exceptionally unattractive brats. To his subordinates he was a martinet without an atom of relieving humor. In private he was known for his stinginess and for his poisonous hatred of the Jews, which broke forth at the most uncalled-for occasions and slightly disgusted his fellow officers.

6

If the distant Vienna was looked upon by the Lancers as the faraway goal of their fondest hopes, within their

reach Lemberg bore the nearest resemblance to a big town. So they went there as often as possible. Every Saturday afternoon saw its contingent of officers start on their three-hour ride to the "ersatz" metropolis.

The reserved hotel rooms were occupied with much slamming of doors and loud laughter. Before the variety show started, there was just time enough for a quick bite; they always made it a point to be on hand for the curtain raiser. An enterprising and worldly-wise showman had named the theater Vauxhall—pronounced freely by no one.

The officers were in mufti. But everybody knew them. Each Saturday night they occupied the two large boxes to the right, the upper box level with the balcony, the lower one with the stage. They drank champagne while the show went on and kept up a free and unconcerned exchange up and down. One day they even stopped the show, if only for a few moments. That was when a particularly playful member decided to climb down the slippery figure of a gilded caryatid.

The program always consisted of a so-called revue, a succession of loosely connected burlesque and sentimental skits, acrobatic acts and dance scenes. A lenient police permitted the always obliging ballet girls to wear only the briefest of costumes. The girls knew every one of the officers and called them by their first names. On the Saturday night performance, their smiles and kicks were almost entirely focused on the visitors in the two boxes. And the clerk at the hotel could count on double the tips for that one night than trickled in from a whole week of civilians.

Pattay had never joined any of these jolly excursions. Nor had he ever shown the slightest interest in them. But in the second half of the season an unusual temptation came up. The famous Recha Doktor had arrived on her annual guest tour. His friends insisted that he must not, that he could not afford, to miss her. They went out of their way to be enthusiastic. She was the greatest, indeed, the only artistic treat this Godforsaken province had to offer. Even Vienna had nothing to compare with her. Though when he

tried to pin them down and wanted to know exactly what made Recha Doktor such a superb artist, no one could give a precise answer. Analyzing their impressions was not a strong point with the Lancers.

Saturday had come around again and with it the usual crowd getting ready to leave for Lemberg. More in fun and not really expecting to succeed, they again urged Pattay to join them. This would be his last or almost last chance, they argued, for Recha Doktor's guest performances were nearly over.

On that particular day Captain Schaller had lunched at the casino, something unusual and probably due to housecleaning at home. He was just buckling his belt.

"Recha Doktor," his voice boomed into the conversation. "You will oblige me not to mention the name of that filthy Jewish slut again." There was a dead silence.

Pattay's face turned purple.

"I'll join you then today," he heard himself saying. It was a direct answer to Schaller, no mistaking that.

Schaller whirled around and stared at him. But the situation did not present a clear enough provocation. With a curt salute he turned and clanked out.

Pattay was vexed with himself. A moment ago he had not had the faintest notion of going with them. What business was it of his to defend a vaudeville singer he did not even know? The whole thing would probably never have happened had there not been a foolish girl in his past who had dissolved twenty veronal tablets one night, had there not been that tall, black hat of jeweler Blau coming off with such a humble flourish. But that was not all.

During the whole trip he sat in his corner gloomy and silent.

It was only too evident to Pattay that he hated Schaller as much as Schaller hated him, perhaps even more. For his own hatred was mixed with a substantial amount of disgust. Up to now he had carefully avoided the man. This was not too difficult, as Schaller was not his direct superior. But whenever they met and were forced to shake hands, Pattay

invariably felt a strong urge to tuck up his sleeves and give himself a thorough scrubbing.

To hate with so much loathing was something entirely new for him. To feel angry, to let off healthy steam, nothing was wrong with that. He saw himself back in his Vienna days, facing an opponent in the early dawn by which time he often had barely recalled what the whole fight was about and already regretted it.

But this was something very different. In the cold, mean, poisonous character of the other he discerned a natural enemy. Pattay leaned back in the corner, his eyes closed; he was only half awake. He saw himself standing on the dewy grass in the gray dawn, facing Schaller, both stripped to the waist. He heard the count of the umpire, he fiercely gripped the hilt of his sword, lunged forward, and with one hissing slash split that vicious, leathery brow.

Someone touched his arm. The train had pulled into the station.

7

In emptiness and silliness this year's revue at the Vauxhall topped even those of preceding years. Mr. Dienstel, of Lemberg, was the male lead and main comedy prop. He is suspected by his enraged wife of philandering with his secretary. Mr. Dienstel flees, his wife pursues him and round the globe they go.

Their hectic trip takes them through Turkey, India, Japan, the South Sea Isles, to Peru, and everywhere temptation besets Mr. Dienstel in the attractive shape of exotic beauties galore. And everywhere he finds just time enough to succumb, while his pursuing spouse arrives by that much too late. Until, finally, breathless and exhausted from so much success and ready to come to terms, he arrives at his native Lemberg again. Follows now the denouement. He had never philandered with his secretary. In this one instance his wife's suspicions has been wholly unfounded, and with a lump in

her throat she draws the dissolute sinner into her penitent embrace.

The gentleman from Lemberg sometimes also came from Cracow, from Beuthen, or from Lodz—depending on whatever town the company happened to be playing. A string of vaudeville acts, jugglers, magicians, acrobats fitted smoothly into his erotic flight. But by far the most important feature was the exotic ballet. Here the comely chorus girls got their chance of amply displaying their charms, now in a hula-hula, now in a geisha dance, again in a fandango. Seven times they rushed through lightning costume changes. Only before and after the hula-hula came a breathing space, for here they wore practically nothing.

During those changes, and while the next strange land was being set up, Recha Doktor stepped in front of the curtain and sang.

As a rule the audience paid little attention to interludes of this sort. The moment the curtain came down they laughed and chatted freely, waiting for the real story to continue. But here it was different. Here one could not afford to miss a note. The curtain had barely dropped when an expectant hush fell over the crowd while Recha Doktor walked on from the side, a small figure in a close-fitting black gown.

She was a brunette, a frail-looking woman with large, dark, revealing eyes and graceful hands and feet. She gestured sparingly, using an economy of motions. But the slightest stir in her sensitive, delicate face carried across. She half closed those heavy, vaulted eyelids of hers, and through a mist of desire a lovelier world opened up before the enchanted spectator. An almost imperceptible flicker of her eyelash to enhance a point, and the promise of exquisite pleasures would galvanize the coolest listener.

Her voice was not big. It had a covered, slightly sharp sweetness. But Recha Doktor was complete master of her medium. It was this power, this controlled toying with effects that made her such a consummate artist. Her inimitable use of a pause was famed. At appropriate times she would

stretch a silence until the listener's suspense was near the breaking point and the first note from her throat was like a welcome release from tantalizing ecstasy. Something mysteriously wonderful, a precious, unstilled desire radiated from her personality and remained with the audience as roaring applause filled the house, and the orchestra struck up for the next big scene.

Very few artists had poorer material with which to work than Recha Doktor. The rhymesters responsible for her ditties felt little compunction when it came to taste and discretion. Their lines were crammed with tawdry vulgarities. And yet nothing that fell from her lips ever sounded coarse. There was, for instance, that song which prepared the audience for Mr. Dienstel's erotic adventures in Japan. "In Europe everything is so big, and in Japan everything is so small," was its recurring refrain. Aided by the rest of the three stanzas, it left little to the imagination. But on this Saturday night, only the most primitive of the audience grinned at the crude effort of these penny-a-liners. The greater part closed their eyes and smiled, strangely moved. For here was Japan, a make-believe and fairy land; Japan in all its daintiness, with toy houses, miniature gardens, and with gentle, gracious people, threatened by an uncouth and clumsy race—in Europe everything is so big, and in Japan everything is so small. It was enchanting, and nothing in the thunderous applause could be taken by anyone as an acknowledgment of an improper jest.

But while this applause still echoed through the house and the curtain parted on the entrance of twenty geishas in elaborate hairdress, one of the officers nervously left the box, snatched his coat and hat from the rack and raced through the empty vestibule. Once outside, he pulled up his coat collar and started off through the wet, windy February night. He walked around the Rynek, past the City Hall and the cathedral, he crossed the park, reached the suburbs, and returned in a wide circle along the fence of the ancient Jewish cemetery through which the slowly subsiding headstones gleamed in the rain.

He must have walked miles. But it was still a long way off till midnight. And the express train on which Pattay could return to his garrison did not pass through until two o'clock.

8

But the following Monday, as soon as he came off duty, he boarded the evening train and arrived just in time to hear her last two songs. The moment she opened her lips, he was overwhelmed with that selfsame agony born of fascination, indignation, distress and helpless longing which once before had driven him from the theater. This time he stayed to the finish. When it was over, he skirted the building and went to the stage entrance.

He looked through the glass door. Behind his window sat the doorman, an elderly, kindly Jew in skull cap with a thin, rounded beard. Pattay watched him as he nodded to the chorus girls who came down the stone steps, by ones and twos. Today, a weekday, there would be hardly any admirers waiting for them. Each one as she came through the door looked inquisitively at Pattay. Then came the brisk Mr. Dienstel in a shabby fur coat with fur cap to match. He was holding a handkerchief to his mouth, coughing morosely.

Pattay's hand already touched the shiny red doorknob. But he could not make up his mind. He had stepped back into the shadow to think it over when two women left the building and headed for the parkway. Too late he noticed that one of them was the figure of the woman he had come to see. He did not follow them. It was a relief to put off the decision. Actually he was waiting the moment when he would wake up, slap his forehead, and laugh at himself. But that moment never came.

He went to a coffeehouse on Halicki Square, sat down in an already dark corner, and did not stir until the cashier locked the drawer and the waiters piled the chairs on the

table. In the train he dozed off a few times. He was back at the barracks only an hour before it was time to report.

He went back on Tuesday, on Wednesday, without getting one step closer; and each morning he mounted his horse, exhausted and weary-eyed. On Thursday, at last, he turned the red knob and quickly walked past the old doorman. He had no trouble finding her dressing room upstairs. It was a partitioned-off cubicle. Her name, that curious family name, was written on a piece of cardboard.

His courage left him. His throat felt dry, he had to clear it. A narrow crack in the door opened and someone looked out. A tall, gaunt woman emerged and asked what he wanted. The door closed behind her.

Pattay guessed, no, he knew, that this was the same woman who had walked with the singer into the darkness that other night. She had a care-worn, rather austere face of a woman around fifty. The open gas jet near the door sharply lit up her dull-black head on which every artificial hair lay neatly separated from the other.

"Would you please give my card to Miss Doktor?"

"She receives no callers in her dressing room."

"Then I will wait down below."

"She meets nobody."

He smiled ironically and instantly felt ashamed. That smile belonged to the days gone by.

"Perhaps you would persuade Miss Doktor to make an exception," and his hand reached for his pocketbook.

"Don't bother. I am her aunt."

"I am glad," he stuttered.

The door now opened and Recha Doktor appeared, dressed in a tight black coat and a trim three-cornered hat. The light added warmth to the amber color of her face. Her wide eyes looked past Pattay.

"You really shouldn't make a scene here," said her sweet, slightly sharp voice. "It's absolutely useless."

Pattay stood there, hat in hand.

"This does call for an explanation," he said. "But I just didn't know how I could manage to speak to you."

"You shouldn't have managed it at all," she said very decidedly. "I hope I make myself clear."

Her aunt had gone back to the dressing room where the light was still burning. Pattay saw her put on her coat, bind a scarf over her hair, and turn off the gas jet over the make-up table. She no longer bothered to notice him; she seemed assured that her niece was well able to take care of the situation. She came out and waited quietly.

"Now please go," said the singer. "And forgive me, for being so frank. But I wanted you to understand right off."

"Oh, I do. I understand perfectly. I do not mistake you for anybody or anything else. Though I couldn't prove it."

"No, you couldn't, could you?" she said with scorn in her voice.

"But perhaps it is proof, small proof I admit, that I spend my nights traveling on a train and no longer sleep, just to hear you sing." And he named the town from where he came.

"It's one of those Lancers, child," said the aunt. She walked slowly ahead toward the staircase, thinking the whole matter settled. Recha turned to follow. Quickly he spoke again.

"I always arrive just in time for your last song. You do it magnificently. But it is agony for me, every time."

"You should stop that."

"It isn't anything one can stop."

She smiled for the first time. She gave him an appraising glance and quickly looked away again; she was blushing.

"You will soon be able to catch up with your sleep. In ten days I shall be far away from here, in Warsaw. And what will you do then?"

"Then I shall resign from the army and follow you."

Now she looked straight at him. Her eyes were hostile.

"Say that again."

"I shall resign from the army and leave for Warsaw."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, talking such nonsense. What do you expect to gain by it? You probably heard

I was hard to get. So you come running backstage and start shooting your biggest artillery. Of course, you will resign from the army! Of course, you will leave for Warsaw! It can't be as difficult as all that to come to an understanding with a Jewish music hall singer. Perhaps you even had a bet on! It's sickening and downright stupid."

She must have been hurt to the quick; tears welled up in her eyes. They stood there, silent. The gas flame hissed into that sudden stillness. Now her aunt's voice rose from down below. Impatiently she called Recha's name.

"I love you," Pattay said. "You know that I am speaking the truth. It's all that matters to me."

9

That singular family name came from far back. Centuries ago there had lived in the town of Lublin a Doctor Schalom Schachna, head rabbi and chief justice of the Jews, a man renowned as Talmud scholar and benefactor, esteemed by the King of Poland, recorded in the annals of the time by the title of "Doctor Judaeorum Lubliniensium."

His descendants being justly proud of their famed ancestor, had retained this learned designation in various shapes and forms. And as the years wore on, only the title remained. By that time, the name of Schalom Schachna no longer meant anything to his progeny.

Physicians, lawyers, and many rabbis had been among them. But that, too, was a long time ago. Later generations became shopkeepers, tailors, cobblers, junk dealers, peddlers. Now they stood with their handcarts in front of the house where once that great rabbi had dwelled, and plaintively called out their shabby wares.

What was left of them no longer lived in the city but in Vieniava, a Jewish settlement reached by a path that wound its way through desolate swampland.

The village had no streets, only loamy mounds dotted

with an untidy array of decaying houses. A weird contrast was the synagogue with its beautiful, simple silhouette crowning a hillock. Once upon a time it had been a pride and consolation amidst this abject poverty. But not any more. Age and rainstorms had destroyed its roof. Torah scrolls and silver vessels had to be removed from the rain-soaked building. In a bare room close by, the community now met for their service. The Jewry of Vieniava was too poor to mend its temple.

The Doktor family lived in a slanting cabin with a small mill in the rear that clattered day and night. Two stout ash trees grew between the mill and the backyard, sprouting reddish blossoms in the spring and casting a wide shade in the summer. They were the only trees in Vieniava.

Every weekday, early in the morning, the peddler Abram Doktor strapped the leather harness across his chest and set out for town, pushing his cart filled with notions, with tape and ribbon, threads and patches, needles and buttons. His three children had no mother; she had died when little Efraim was born. That was ten years ago. The mother's sister, Chana, was taking care of them.

The eldest son, Jozef, had started out for himself when he was seventeen. In a tiny shop near the Cracow Gate, really only a hole in the wall, he sat hunched up in the damp twilight and through his thick eyeglasses studied the Hebraic and Yiddish documents few cared to buy.

The girl Recha, the second born, rarely came to town. Her aunt Chana guarded her like the apple of her eye. In summertime they would pull a bench under one of the trees and work there to the sound of the mill beyond. They would cut ribbons and tape, do basting and mending.

Recha was a fragile, sensitive child, and abnormally shy, as a result of her aunt's domineering anxiety. Chana's own marriage had been a brief one. She was a capable, rather stern woman who gave what affection she had to her small foster daughter. To her she also imparted that deep mistrust, that unreasoning, almost frantic fear of everything that was not Jewish. The father warned her with good-natured alarm·

"Not all Christians are devils, Chana. Look how that child trembles when she catches sight of the mailman."

But his sister-in-law made no reply. And her ingrained distrust was to be horribly justified.

In those years leading up to the war with Japan, Russia was writhing in convulsions, which foreshadowed a revolution. And once again that age-old formula took effect. The czar's government diverted the people's wrath toward those aliens who lived so ominously apart, who were downtrodden and yet so proud. The old blood sagas reared their ugly heads. The press wrote to order. The soldiers in their barracks came in for an extra ration of vodka. There came a day in November when the shopkeepers and craftsmen of Lublin cowered behind closed shutters, their prayer shawls slung over their shoulders, aghast. Then the fury broke loose over the town.

The Jews in the suburbs remained in their hovels. Out there they lived by themselves with no Christians about who might be aroused. But they underrated the whipped up zeal of the soldiers themselves.

A detachment of Cossacks came galloping over the winding footpath through the swamps. At the first house they dismounted.

The place of the Doktor family was somewhat hidden. But they found it. By this time they were in a red-hot rage because there had been nothing to sack in those other wretched abodes. There the inmates got off with whipping and booting. But here on this last one they took their full revenge. Perhaps it was the tall, leafless trees that invited the tragedy; it was so simple to string father and son on those straight limbs up there. And they did it, with great howling and laughter.

Little Efraim ran screaming out into the field. Nobody bothered. They locked Chana into her room, and started to busy themselves with the fourteen-year-old girl, back in the yard and in sight of those two black figures swaying from the trees.

The girl was little developed for her age. The soldiers

took their time. Sluggishly they wrangled over their immature booty. Finally they drew lots and, with more laughter, the winner got himself ready.

She was saved by a voice that shouted some Russian words from across the village. In the prayer room over there, they had discovered the ritual silver vessels. That was a bigger lure than this scrawny distraction here. Soon the yard was empty. But Recha did not open her eyes, she did not move.

Aunt Chana nursed her through a long illness. One paralytic symptom gave way to another. For three whole weeks it looked as if the girl had lost the power of speech. When her condition finally improved, she weighed so little that Chana carried her on one arm, like an infant.

Later the pogrom was called off. The government even feigned a legal case against a few culprits. It had been a modest pogrom. Barely fifty lives were lost. Abram Doktor and his book-loving son were lying in the unkempt cemetery at Vieniava, covered with brick dust and sickly grass. The boy Efraim had not come back. In the confusion of those first days no one had properly searched for him. He was never found.

10

The Gruenbaum family lived in Berlin near the Spittelmarkt. Their house was a three-story building with a two-window front which looked somewhat pinched, but otherwise held its own. The fur shop took in the front part of the ground floor; the back rooms were dark. But the two upper stories had more space than was needed by this family of four.

Nearly all the Jews who migrated from Poland to Berlin stopped at the eastern fringe of the capital as if they were too exhausted from their journey to move another step. It had been so with the Gruenbaums when they first arrived, about a generation ago. For two decades they had lived among their poorer brethren here, in much the same way

as in the Polish hamlet from which they had come. But with increasing affluence they felt a growing sense of security. So they had moved nearer to the center of the city. Now they had an eye out toward the west where those of their people who had reached the goal lived in mansions with spacious gardens, welcomed army officers and state dignitaries at their tables, and were patrons of the arts. The Gruenbaums considered themselves full-fledged citizens of the country, now and always. Rarely did they go to the synagogue. Certain customs and food rituals they still observed, but for the rest they had almost completely forgotten whence they had come.

They were brutally reminded of it the day the woman and girl from Lublin appeared in their home, fugitives who did not know which way to turn. Only half convinced at first, they listened to Chana's sober account of the harrowing tale. They barely remembered these relatives. Suddenly from that darkness out there a hand seemed to claw at their electrically illumined, emancipated existence. This woman, this distant cousin, manifestly spoke the truth. The traditional family feeling asserted itself and the frail loveliness of Recha, who sat quietly by, did the rest. A room was prepared for them, and from that moment on no word was ever dropped about their ever leaving.

The two were not utterly destitute. Chana had sold the little house in Vieniava, that place of horror to which they could return no more. Chana wanted to go far away. And she knew only the Gruenbaums. But it had never occurred to her that these relatives in Berlin could live otherwise than in the familiar seclusion among their own people. Now she was appalled by the un-Jewish way of their life. Every venture into that monster city, into the midst of millions of Christians, was a nightmare. If Recha dared to go out and mingle with this foreign multitude, Chana would wait for her return, tremulous, with despair in her heart. Living in ease and comfort, the Gruenbaums could never quite keep from disparaging such worries. What danger could possibly threaten a Jewish girl in this big city of Berlin where

everything showed enlightenment and progress, where the names of titled Israelites filled the society columns, where the Emperor himself invited Jewish bankers and industrialists to his table?

But Chana—Hanna, as they called her here—did not believe in all this glory. Poor Abram had talked much the same way. Deep inside herself she knew better.

Of the two sons in the Gruenbaum family, Benno, the younger, was a shrewd and ambitious businessman who went to the big fur auctions at Leipzig and London. He was an up-to-date young man, one of the first to own an automobile. Impatiently he looked forward to the day when the firm would leave its modest quarters and move into a more presentable place in the Leipzigerstrasse or Kurfuerstendamm.

Arnold, the older son, was the artist of the family. It was almost a rule among people in their walk of life that, together with security and means, there would be someone who leaned toward the Fine Arts. Arnold started to compose when he was twelve years old. Now he was twenty-six and was with a comic opera company. He spoke of his job rather deprecatingly, but, disliking idleness, held on to it. Above all he feared the caustic remarks of his practical brother. And wasn't it true that the great Spinoza had toiled as a glass-grinder to keep himself going?

But in more honest moments he did not deceive himself about his talents. He knew that nature meant him to be exactly what he was, chorus master at an operetta theater.

The impressionable young man was hard hit the very first time he looked at his grave young cousin who had so unexpectedly come into their life. This frail creature with the eloquent eyes which still seemed to reflect the agony of death, with the finely drawn mouth and the slender hands—she was like a pale jewel brought to him from out of the remote past of his people.

So very reserved was his manner toward her that a whole year passed before he discovered that she loved music and had a voice. It was not a big voice, but a pleasing one with

its covered, slightly sharp sweetness. Carefully he proceeded to train it. And one day the girl stood beside him at the grand piano and sang for the assembled family two songs by Robert Franz. It was a red letter day for the Gruenbaums. They felt a just pride in the treasure that had been brought to light in their midst. Tears streaked down Aunt Chana's cheeks, and even smart Benno nodded his head in approval.

Not a word had been said, but after this day the young musician considered the not yet seventeen-year-old girl his betrothed. How very much of an illusion this was he discovered when, one day at the lesson, he lost control and tried to kiss her.

He was dumfounded by her reaction. This could not be childish fear only, or youthful modesty. This ghastly terror, this instinctive and fierce recoil sprang from the very core of her being. Her slim body became rigid, turned to granite in his awkward embrace. He saw the horror of death in her eyes. With a strength, startling in so elfin a body, she pulled away from him.

He drew back and dropped his arms as if he had been struck. Without a word he left.

He went into his own room and looked searchingly in the mirror. What was there in his appearance that could arouse such revulsion? His weak, receding chin had always been a worry to him, but he could discover nothing else. He was considered a rather good-looking young man. Then, in a flash, he knew that it had nothing to do with him. Recha's soul was ill, had been injured to its roots in that Polish hole, as she lay at the mercy of the Cossacks there. A death-like cramp had locked her emotions as in iron clutches. Yes, that was it. He saw it clearly now, with the sensitiveness of the artist he was by nature, if not in ability.

He returned to the music room. Recha had not moved. She was standing by the piano just as he had left her. He walked up to her: "I should have known better, Recha. Believe me, I am sorry."

She said nothing, only rested her pallid face against his

shoulder. His kind words released the tension and a flood of tears washed her anguish away.

11

One day Arnold hurried home from the theater as though walking on air. A new show was in preparation and they were having difficulty casting the right person for the ingénue part. Recha suddenly had come to his mind. He had mentioned her to the director who agreed to have her sing for him.

Arnold's excitement spread over the whole household. Only Aunt Chana was unhappy. She had always known the child would be lost to her.

Chana's idea of the stage was very vague. Two or three times she had been to the theater and had sat there, frightened and breathless, amidst this crowd of people whom she looked upon as enemies. Up there in the limelight the child was to stand, in front of the dense mob and at its mercy.

But she knew she would have to keep still. They were in no position to decline the chance of a livelihood. Not that the Gruenbaums had ever made her feel the poor relative, not even the money-minded Benno. But it could not go on forever. With slightly drawn lips she had forced herself to say a few words of thanks to Arnold.

He had not been too optimistic. Recha's voice was judged adequate, and what really clinched the matter was her youthful loveliness, that almost childlike and winsome charm, which was exactly what the part called for. Besides, the director felt he was not taking too much of a risk. It would not seriously affect the success of the show if the girl did not make good in her minor part.

It was the hackneyed story of a demure young lass from the country who comes to visit her brilliantly successful sister in the big city. She steps right into a whirlpool of society and love intrigues. And the girl from the backwoods, who had been snubbed by everyone, straightens out the

tangles of this smart world about her with touching naïveté and sound common sense.

Recha attracted notice. They liked her. Into the feeble humor of her part she injected a grave, precocious quality, mysterious and arresting. While she sang her ditties, she seemed to say that she knew only too well what it was all about; that for the sake of convention she was here playing the ingénue, but that she had been around. It was a touch she herself would have been unable to explain. But it had its origin in those days long ago that had shattered her happiness and her faith in life. Oh yes, she had been around, perhaps not seeing with the eyes of mature understanding but with cruelly sharpened ones. What on the next day the critics called her personal touch had its tragic origin.

Not that she had taken the city by storm. The part was hardly important enough for that. But people in the profession were taking notice. And when after a fair run the show closed, a new role was already waiting. This time it was not to be a flashy musical, but rather an intimate revue with the accent on clever and witty dialogue. The songs that were written for Recha could hardly be called innocent; they were frankly suggestive. The management counted on the piquant contrast between her youth and the lush, knowing lyrics.

This time her acceptance of the part did not come off without a struggle, only it was Arnold who objected. Better than anyone else he knew how vulnerable she was. But to his amazement the questionable stuff did not seem to embarrass her. She appeared not to grasp what he was driving at. And Hanna baffled him even more. After all, she had the final word. But she voiced no disapproval.

The reason was simple enough. It was the salary. Recha would make a lot of money. And she should, as quickly as possible. For then they could leave.

That thought had been daily in Hanna's mind. To quit Berlin before anything happened to her little girl, another irreparable harm. They must leave, go back to where they belonged.

Chana had fled from there in terror and anguish and never

would she have thought it possible to want to return to where the monstrous had been perpetrated.

And yet, it was like that. She had begun to correspond with friends and the return letters with their Russian stamps confirmed what she wanted to hear. Atrocities had not recurred. The people of her race were living there now, poverty-stricken as of old and little respected, yet unmolested and among their own. She longed to get back to that drab, close intimacy. She wanted to go home, settle in one of those Jewish towns, perhaps buy a small shop. And on a not too distant day, Recha would marry an honest, God-fearing man. In her mind's eye Chana saw him clearly, a serious and somber figure, standing by the spotless table with the seven candles, breaking the festival bread, blessing it and sharing it with Recha and with her. And soon children would stand at the table beside them.

The first time she cautiously broached the plan, Recha barely answered. It was always as if the girl were drifting, without any thought of the future, but also without any special joy in her present success. They had not changed their mode of life, although for some time now they had ample means to furnish a place of their own. But the Gruenbaums refused to let them go. It was not only generosity on their part, they also were proud of the actress in their midst.

Every night, exactly half an hour after the show, Recha's cab stopped in front of the house. Hanna had a light meal ready, stayed around while she undressed, and put out the lights.

One night the cab was twenty minutes late. In that short time Recha had an experience which, then and there, decided the future.

The incident in itself wasn't anything much. At the performance that night three unusually noisy guests were sitting at a table close to the stage. Apparently they were from out of town, celebrating after a business deal. To them a revue meant undressed girls and champagne, and landing in this more refined place of amusement had been an error. They popped one bottle after another, clinked glasses and

raised them in toasts up to the stage. They were middle-aged, two of them big, lumbering hulks, while the third was the nimbler of the lot, the wise-cracker. His head was bald and shiny, whereas the pates of his cronies were covered with short, brush-like hair. Whenever Recha appeared on the stage, they became particularly boisterous.

As she left the theater after the show, these three waylaid her. Around the corners of two blocks to the cabstand, she was unable to shake them off. And the theater crowd had taken all the cabs. She had to wait.

In that short time Recha suffered unreasonably and to a degree out of keeping with the incident. The three topers were probably quite harmless. But she could not endure these boorish, pushing males. She felt nauseated. It all came back again, that cold, deathlike terror and the sickening stench of the Cossack bending over her—although he had reeked of vodka and filth, while these here smelled of hair tonic and synthetic champagne. At last a cab pulled up. Faint and sickened, Recha dropped into the worn-out leather seat. It, too, gave off stale and evil smells.

Oddly enough this encounter made her much more amenable to Hanna's plan. She never mentioned it to anyone. When her contract was up, she did not renew it. And two months later, on a June day, she and Hanna stepped off the train at Warsaw. It was the morning of her twentieth birthday.

Hanna's modest dream of a small shop in a Jewish town was not to come true. It collapsed the very first day in their hotel on the Marszalkowska. One of the first people they ran across was an agent who knew Recha from the stage. He was overjoyed. This certainly was a stroke of luck. For days she had been on his mind, and not only that. His telegrams must be waiting for her at the theater in Berlin. Recha spoke Polish—but, of course, he was sure of that. And nowhere in Poland was to be found the actress they so badly needed at this moment. The agent told her about the part, the theater, the salary—and with that he considered the contract signed!

He met with only half-hearted resistance. To be back

home was the only thing that mattered. As the two women strolled along the streets, they met legions of their own people, not a few dressed in the familiar garb. And that man standing over there in the corner of the lobby, talking with two others in modern dress—he must be a rabbi with his gray, patriarchal beard and his long silk caftan. Yes, they were home again. The shop in the country could wait. Hanna agreed.

That had been several years ago. By now Recha was known in every town and hamlet of this Polish land that was torn into three pieces but underneath had always remained a whole—from Posen to Vilna, from Pinsk to Cracow, from Lemberg to Lodz. The only city the two avoided was Lublin. Everywhere else the Jews talked about their famous daughter while they gave a shake of the head in sheer delight.

Agents arrived from Berlin and Vienna offering her contracts. How could she be so stubborn and waste her gifts on this dreary provincial public, when she could be a second Yvette Guilbert or a Massary? All right then; fame in that big world out there might not hold any attraction. But what about the money she could make? Did not that mean something?

Evidently not. She did not even have a home of her own. Together with Hanna—who now was Chana again—she lived in modest hotels where the food was prepared according to the ancient rituals. They observed the festivals of their faith. And each summer they spent two holiday months among the meadows of a village in the Carpathian Mountains. Nearly all the summer guests were Jewish. Occasionally they would strike up an acquaintance. But Chana did not encourage it. In her deep-rooted mistrust she kept the girl she loved shut off from friendship and amusement. Not that Recha minded. Her road led from one theater to another. To her public she was the embodiment of facile charm and sophisticated poise, a woman of the world. Actually her private life was that of a timorous girl traveling with an ever-watchful chaperon.

12

Not two days had passed before she yielded to Pattay. All her pent-up desire, her repressed power to love, rose against that armor around her breast and shattered it. There it was, lying in pieces, the terror she had experienced, her dread of anything alien, her pride and her fear. Outer barriers that only yesterday seemed insurmountable crumbled like chalk under iron wheels. She was aflame with happiness.

Chana's word, which had ever been law to her—she no longer heard it. And Chana knew that nothing would avail. After one short outcry of unbelief, she had the strength and wisdom to remain silent. But the future loomed dark.

Recha herself never gave it a thought. For the first time she had a here and now. It was Pattay who spoke. After an intoxicating night in the hotel room—the fourth since they met—he spoke a few simple words about their marriage and their future together. She suddenly broke into tears and for a long time wept softly, gently. He held her close and breathed the faint scent of her dark hair. It always thrilled him strangely, like a fragrance from a distant world.

But while her tears flowed on, native common sense came to the fore. She wiped her eyes and sat up. He must be dreaming, she told him. Marriage with a woman of her race and profession would be the finish of his career and would result in a break with his family. He just laughed and kissed her.

But it was too much. It could not be. Just this once doubt assailed her. Her hand trembled as she turned on the lamp and its light mingled with the light of the dawn breaking in through the shutters. She held Pattay's head between her hands and in his eyes tried to fathom his innermost thoughts and, beyond that, the thoughts he himself did not yet know. Again he laughed at her. Then his face became grave. And now she saw the truth, the absolute, the whole truth in his eyes.

She sighed, delivered, for ever convinced. "We'll talk

about that when there is time for it," she said, and relegated marriage, career, family, future with a winged gesture into the infinite.

In the days that followed everything moved quickly and smoothly, the way it sometimes does in a happy dream. Pattay himself had been secretly worried, had feared trouble. Not on his part, of course, but Recha might differ with him. How could a joined life be combined with her career? After all she was a great success, and did it not mean a great deal to her? Pattay did not have the heart to tackle the question at once.

As a matter of fact all this had already assumed a minor part in Recha's life. It was with a feeling of aversion, even, that for some time past she had looked on this traveling about from one drab theater to the other; on the hotel rooms with their invariably wobbly washstands and rattling doors; on waiting around at rehearsals; on the petty professional gossip and envy; on the smell of gas, make-up grease, and repainted props; on her stage fright at opening nights; on the din of the applause and on the crowd of young girls waiting for her at the stage door. Ambition played such a small part in her life. What was there yet to come?

Still, there were such things as contracts, Chana pointed out. The agreements signed with Warsaw, Vilna, Lodz stipulated fines, tidy little sums at that. "We can afford to pay them," said Recha and sat down to write the letters.

But Pattay had already anticipated her. Quite casually he had managed to draw her out and so gathered all the necessary information. Recha was free. And when she protested, he dismissed it lightly and as if such a settlement were a mere trifle to him.

As a matter of fact, he did not own a penny. But there were ways.

Whenever they found themselves in a tight spot, the Lancers would approach Daniel Zweifuss, the owner of the sugar-works across the river.

Zweifuss was well known for the shrewd discrimination

with which he lent his money. His knowledge of family conditions and inheritance prospects in the illustrious houses of the Monarchy was very considerable. Rarely did he commit an error of judgment. He was wealthy and waiting did not bother him in the least. He could wait five, even ten years. Some of these loans might not be paid back until his sons took over. In the meantime the capital drew interest. And it was a continuous source of delight to be so surreptitiously connected with half of the nobility of the land. All the historic names like Khevenhueller, Kinsky, Collalto, Lobkowitz figured in his secret ledger. It read backward, and on its last page, really the first, there was a blessing written in Hebrew square letters.

Zweifuss received Pattay in his spacious office in one of the factory wings. Its front windows looked out on a long, narrow lawn, hedged in by willows, which ran down to the river's edge. Beyond it was the town, its far-off houses huddling together like toys. A pretty sight.

"Twenty thousand crowns, Count Pattay," he repeated slowly. "Quite a sum." His left eye twitched. It was noticeably smaller than the right one. His ugly hand closed around a gray, well-groomed beard. "Who won the money from you, if I may be permitted to ask?"

"It's not a gambling debt. In fact, it's not a debt at all. Please just answer yes or no."

The small eye twitched faster.

"Katzmann in Vienna had trouble with you once. But finally your aunt, the Princess, settled the account." He knew everything and relished his knowledge. It did not annoy Pattay.

"This twenty thousand would have to be a long-term loan," he said.

"Until the inheritance comes in, you mean? Is it absolutely sure that you are going to get it?"

"Not at all."

The answer seemed to please Zweifuss. His eye twitched approvingly.

"Three months ago I wouldn't have been either. But your commander's New Year's report was worth a fortune. All right, then. But it will cost you a pretty penny."

"In return you take the risk. I might die."

The manufacturer was shocked. Odd people, these others, to speak so calmly of their own death.

"Your check will be ready tomorrow. Check on Lemberg. The branch office here would talk too much."

Pattay nodded. "By the way," he said near the door. "You know this town well. I am looking for a house, to buy or rent. A small villa, if such a thing can be found. Four, five rooms would do. But it must be attractive."

Zweifuss walked over to the side window which was curtained. His ugly hand gathered the heavy drapes. He pointed down the river. There stood a whitewashed house, not more than a thousand feet away from the sugar-works.

"Bachmann, my brother-in-law, lived there. But he got bored with us here and moved on to Cracow. There he promptly went bankrupt."

"Is it furnished?"

"Elegantly furnished. With silver and linen. Only it'll be a bit far to the barracks."

"That would make no difference."

"Oh no?" said Zweifuss and looked up at Pattay.

13

With the April rainstorms the Dniester rose fiercely and overflowed the broad sandy banks. Its yellowish-gray waters washed against the garden of the white villa. Spring was late this year. In the house all the anthracite stoves were still going full blast. It was cozy inside. During the few days before Recha moved in, Pattay had added a number of cheerful odds and ends which softened the stiff lines of the "modern" furniture that was there. And every other day fresh flowers came to the house, in itself a feat in this primitive place.

The Ukrainian peasant boy who brought them was the only person ever to ring the doorbell. Chana did all the shopping. Dressed in her heavy laced boots, a woollen scarf tied over her wig, she stumped across the bridge where the waters knocked against the planks, and returned with her bag full to the brim. They kept no servant. Chana was unwilling to admit a stranger into a situation that she herself could neither comprehend nor accept.

The silence between the two women continued. True, Recha mentioned Pattay's offer of marriage; his uprightness, his honorable intentions, at least, her aunt must not question. But there was no response. Impossible to tell what was really in Chana's mind. Perhaps she herself did not know. On the one hand this relationship, the way it now stood, was to her a sin and an outrage. On the other, she would not have wished this union to become legalized and be made public. The unbearable thought of a baptism hovered dangerously close.

In her room at night, which she hated because of its comforts, she often thought of going away and leaving this wayward child to her fate. But where would she go? Lublin was barred to her and everywhere else there were strangers. Besides, she felt duty-bound to stay. On the day of the break and collapse that was sure to come, someone would have to stand by the abandoned girl. Chana looked upon this as part of her life's burden, put upon her by her God, who was a severe, an inscrutable God. Lying in her bed, she would hear the voices of the other two coming faintly from across the house. She would fall asleep and after hours wake up again in the dark. But still those voices carried on, they had so much to say to each other.

Rarely did they talk of practical plans for the future. Recha shunned the subject. She was afraid to close her hand on this unreal dream and hold naught but empty air. Her faith in him had no part in this. It was her nerves. Every evening, as soon as the time neared for Pattay to be off duty, a dark fear gripped her that he would not come, not today not ever again.

But the minute he stepped into the house, all that was forgotten. Everything seemed so radiant, natural, preordained from the beginning. The twisted pattern of her life, the poverty and horror of her childhood, the secluded years in Germany and her tedious round of triumphs, all had been merely a detour to this perfect bliss.

One day she hinted at this, timidly as though it were something foolish.

He nodded. "It's the same with me. I had to bungle and make all those blunders just so that I might land right here and in your arms." Coming from him, it sounded so simple.

No wonder Chana heard the two until the small hours. They could never finish talking. Their lives had been so far apart that every detail, every incident, every person met was new to the other and had to be explained. This absorbing, thrilling curiosity in each other derived from further back than they realized. Here was more than just the talk of two people in love. From out of the depth of time, across deserts of separation, voices poured forth and mingled that for each other had never sounded before.

It was unavoidable that their relationship became known. Neither Chana's vigilance nor their strict seclusion was of any use. Recha Doktor's disappearance from the Polish stage was a public matter. And turbulent was the sensation created among the Lancers, when they discovered the true state of affairs. On the surface there was no indication that they knew. None of them ever breathed a word to Pattay. He was not the man to take kindly to innuendos.

It was different with Captain Schaller. More darkly than ever he viewed his adversary from afar. The two no longer exchanged salutes. Carefully they avoided each other, as if the slightest contact must bring about a clash, an eruption.

"Now I have two mortal enemies," said Pattay one day. "Schaller and Chana. But I would probably find it easier to conciliate the Captain than Chana."

Chana had just left the room after bringing in the evening meal. Never could she be persuaded to sit at the table with them.

Recha laid her frail hand with the brownish knuckles on his firm and broad one. "She has to put up with a great deal. For her, all this means destruction and ruin. And besides she is jealous. She has always had me to herself."

"Too bad," said Pattay. But it sounded too callous to him. "I'm really sorry," he added.

One evening on entering the living room, he noticed on the right side of the door a small metal case, fastened on a slant, and level with the eye. It had not been there the day before.

"Aunt Chana insisted on it," said Recha. "Every orthodox Jewish house has such a *mezuzah.*"

"What is in it?"

"A piece of parchment with God's Commandments. Whoever enters, touches it and then kisses his hand."

"A beautiful custom," said Pattay.

The next day he did as she had said. His face was intent. He lifted his right hand to the holy sign and then to his lips. In his left he held the tschapka.

"That's not the way to do it," said Recha, and embraced him. "Don't take off your cap until after you have touched it."

Neither of them had noticed Chana who had entered the room from the far side. She stood there and looked at them.

"That is not for you, Count," she said.

14

The violent and grotesque clash between Pattay and Captain Schaller, which occurred on a summer night in the year 1914, would surely have been the talk of every officers' mess in the Austro-Hungarian army, had not events of far greater significance covered it with a dark and bloody mantle.

A farewell party had been arranged for Major von Stoettner who was leaving the following day for a Bohemian garrison. In his honor a large amount of alcohol had been consumed at the casino. It was a sultry July night and too

stuffy to remain indoors. So, several lively groups moved on to the Archduke Rainer, the hotel on the market place.

Trim yew-tree hedges, flanking the main entrance, enclosed just enough space on either side to hold a large table lit up by Chinese lanterns. One of the tables was already occupied. With much clanking of sabers and spurs, the officers settled down at the other.

Pattay had been unable to break away from this sequel to the party. Major Stoettner, who liked him, would not hear of it. Reluctantly Pattay went along. Not only would he have to leave Recha alone for a whole evening, in itself a deprivation, but he would have to endure Captain Schaller's company. Schaller's distasteful presence at the casino had already irritated him to such a degree that he drank more than was his habit. And at the hotel things went from bad to worse. As a result Pattay drank still more. He imbibed considerable quantities of the superior Gumpoldskirchner from Salomon Loew's wine cellar.

The trouble started when Schaller, after a glimpse at the other table, shouted, "Fine company here! Let's go somewhere else."

Nobody paid any attention. It was just another of his tactless remarks and besides there really was no where else to go. These two tables in front of the Archduke Rainer offered the only place in the whole town where one could drink out of doors.

Six or seven Jewish townsmen were sitting at the other table. They had lowered their voices the minute they saw the officers crossing the Ring. All of them were respectable citizens and well off. There was Doctor Krasna, the solicitor; Mr. Gelbfisch, the head of the general store; and the two sons of Daniel Zweifuss, the sugar-man.

Schaller had seated himself with his back to the Ring, so that the other table was in his line of vision. Before five minutes had gone by he was heard again.

"They might take their hats off. This isn't the synagogue, you know."

Practically all of them at the other table were wearing hats,

in spite of the stifling heat. They instantly obeyed, except Krasna, a white-bearded and bald man. He did not remove his hat. It was an odd, old-fashioned Jewish hat, quite out of keeping with his western clothes—a flat broad-brimmed affair of brown velours trimmed with fur.

All talk at the officers' table had suddenly stopped. Pattay poured himself a glass, gulped it down, filled it once more and drank again. Clearly something was brewing. The untanned part of his forehead, usually covered by the tschapka, turned crimson, and the upper part of his cheeks near the eyes showed signs of a peculiar kind of activity, a twitching, bulging vibration.

His voice cut the silence. "I would appreciate it, Captain, if you were to leave those people alone. The way you put things is repulsive to me."

The Lancers did not believe their ears.

Before Schaller could answer back, Major Stoettner intervened, trying to save the situation. He did manage to produce a cheerful, fatherly tone.

"Come now, Pattay, you didn't really mean that. Forget it and don't ruin the evening just when Loew is uncorking his choicest Tokay."

The rare vintage was being carried out at that moment. One waiter carefully balanced three slender, dust-covered bottles, while another followed with a trayful of small glasses. Salomon Loew personally escorted them, his eyes glued to the bottles, the last of his stock of a famous year.

Pretending not to have heard a thing, Loew started to pour. In the soft light of the lanterns the topaz-colored wine took on a velvety sheen. It was wholly accidental that Loew started to fill the glasses to the right of Schaller and made the round away from him.

The waiters being about, nobody said a word. The table across was also silent. Every so often the bottle in Mr. Loew's hand could be heard tinkling against a glass; his hand was shaking.

When he reached Schaller and tilted his bottle to pour for him last, the captain pushed him away.

"First bring me a glass," he barked.

"A glass? But you have one."

"I want a glass from which no Jew ever had a drink. Do you understand? Not a single, lousy Jew!"

He stared at Pattay, seized his glass and hurled it across the hedge. It crashed on the stone floor beyond.

Pattay was already on his feet. That most disgraceful of all scandals was going to happen—a fight in public between two officers of His Majesty's army. But what followed was much more stupefying.

Pattay turned and with two leaps disappeared inside the hotel. Loew and his two waiters, Jews also, stared after him. And so did the rest.

The occupants of the other table had been quietly getting ready to leave. Now they were just starting to cross the Ring. They all saw what happened when, after a surprisingly short lapse, Pattay appeared again. They could not believe their eyes; neither could the others.

The white, bulbous receptacle that Pattay carried in his hand came from one of the guest chambers. Pattay swung it high through the air and brought it down on the table with a crash, directly in front of Schaller. Bottles and glasses toppled over and spilled their contents.

"There, Captain Schaller. There is a glass for you from which no Jew ever had a drink!"

Schaller's chair fell over backward. It looked as if he were about to attack Pattay with his bare fists. But he pulled himself together and looked around for his saber. It leaned, with the others, against the yew hedge. Before he could reach it the officers intervened. "For heaven's sake," one could hear Stoettner say. "For heaven's sake, gentlemen—people!"

But there were no more people around. Mr. Loew, his waiters, and the Jewish gentlemen, all had disappeared from a scene to which they must, under no condition, be witness.

The adversaries were led off in opposite directions. The consequences were clear enough. This could but result in a life and death duel. Major Stoettner and two officers next in

rank started off to report to their commander. It was two o'clock in the morning but there was no way out, they would have to waken him.

As they approached his house, they found it lit up from top to bottom. Every door was wide open and orderlies were waiting on the stairs. They found the commander in his office trying to get a phone call through to Vienna.

He did not seem in the least surprised to see them. He nodded to them with a twitching chin, his eyes were red.

"Isn't it frightful, gentlemen?" was all that he said.

They stared at one another, they could not understand.

Then for a moment it seemed that the connection with Vienna was being made. Another false alarm.

At last they learned what had happened. That very day, in Sarajevo, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, Heir Apparent to the throne, had been killed, together with his wife, by the bullets of a Serbian patriot.

15

The commander was a sensible and resolute man. This duel must be prevented, of that he was certain. The whole country in an uproar, the future of the Empire hanging in the balance, storms darkening the horizon—this definitely was not the time to settle a scurrilous scandal and discredit the army's prestige.

That same night he ordered the two quarrelers to appear before him.

"I ascribe your conduct to the fact that both of you were intoxicated. Nothing else could explain your utterances, Captain Schaller, nor your inexcusable reaction, Pattay."

The last words came out somewhat weak. The colonel turned away abruptly, his shoulders shaking. For a moment the humor of Pattay's "reaction" made him forget the night of horror. When he had composed his face he continued.

"The incident is to have no consequences. I order that you make up."

"May I be permitted to point out, sir," said Schaller, "that a hushing up is impossible? There have been witnesses."

"I'll attend to that. Shake hands! I command it!"

There was a short hesitation. Then two hands shot out, met and instantly were drawn back as if they had touched fire.

"That is all," said the colonel. "Good morning, gentlemen."

Schaller was the first to hurry out. He could be heard clattering down the stairs. Pattay saluted from the door, but the colonel stopped him.

"Close the door, Pattay. You picked yourself a fine night to kick up a row. Were you out of your mind?"

And he looked at his First Lieutenant with smiling approval.

Pattay did not smile back. It was difficult to yield. He had looked forward to this encounter. Within a few hours he would at last face that galling brute, hear the count of the umpire, grip the hilt of his sword, lunge forward and with one swishing blow split that low, low-down forehead.

He straightened up and said, "I do realize, sir, that under the circumstances this was the only possible decision."

"Well, then, that settles it, you blithering idiot, you," said the commander and at last let himself go. The laughter suppressed so long rushed from his healthy body like a mountain freshet. Tears rolled down his cheeks.

"You have to go on leave." he had finally calmed down. "It wouldn't do for you two to rub elbows every day. I'll give you six weeks."

"Yes, sir. But after six weeks, sir, do you think it will be possible for us to serve in the same regiment?"

At once the colonel's face grew grave. He put his hand on Pattay's shoulder.

"My dear Pattay, I have a feeling that the events of the coming six weeks will take care of this. Good-by and have a good time."

It was nearly daylight. The colonel took his bath, had breakfast, and ordered his carriage. He had an almost im-

possible job ahead of him—to enjoin silence on eight or ten people, in a matter that itched to be told. Well, he would have to make the effort.

The town clock had not yet struck six when he drew up before the Archduke Rainer. A very sleepy Salomon Loew appeared in his dressing gown.

"I know I can rely on you, Loew," said the commander. "This wouldn't be the first time you've kept a secret. But your two waiters—they must have lapped it up."

"They are trustworthy, Colonel, family men and religious. I have told them that in the end it would only fall back on us Jews. They gave me their word. But," he said and looked worriedly at the officer, "this report, is it really true? How could such a thing happen? What is this terrible curse on our reigning house? First the tragedy of the Crown Prince, then the murder of the Empress, and now this. It looks almost like the end of our Hapsburg Reich."

The colonel saw that the man had tears in his eyes.

"It is to your credit," he said with a slight feeling of embarrassment, "that you so deeply sympathize with the nation's calamity."

"Sympathize, Colonel! Who should if not we Jews? I know that the late Archduke never cared much for us. But, I ask you, when have my people ever lived as securely as here in Austria? People joke about the Emperor's titles including that of King of Jerusalem. But there is something to it, it makes sense. Do you think, sir, that we are going to have a war?"

"Nobody can say," was the colonel's reserved answer. "And now tell me exactly who were the gentlemen that witnessed the whole affair."

He nodded at every name and then stepped back into his carriage. He was in his dress uniform with two medals pinned to his breast. His appearance in these Jewish houses could not be impressive enough. He looked at his watch. It was absolutely essential to see the witnesses before any of them could speak to their wives over the breakfast table.

By the time the commander returned to the barracks,

around eight, he felt convinced that in the midst of this cataclysm he had done his modest part to uphold the world of reason and order.

16

The little guest house perched high up on the mountainside, a good fifteen minutes' walk from the village. It was still early summer and only the beginning of the season. So Recha and Pattay were given the two best rooms upstairs. They looked out on a wide balcony, overhung by a jutting gable. The house was new, barely finished. The larchwood, used in building it, crackled and creaked as if the boards were yet alive and breathing in the woods that covered the wide slope down to the right. A mountain brook glistened and gurgled through the tall timber. Meadows and furrowed fields spread to the left and curved down gently before they reached the village. It was the same simple resort, nestling against the southern slopes of the Carpathians, where Recha and Chana had spent their two summer months each year.

Those of the village people who remembered Recha were somewhat surprised to see her in the company of a man who, even in mufti, bore the unmistakable mark of the soldierly aristocrat. But the two were rarely seen. Once a day they came down to the inn, where a table was reserved for them in a little arbor at the end of the small garden, and it remained theirs even after school vacation filled the lodge with families and their numerous offspring. Now and then a snow-white Wyandotte rooster would flutter up to their table, as if to pay his personal respects, or a huge tomcat with dark-gray fur and yellow eyes would stalk gracefully among their glasses and plates. The food was simple but good. Trout fresh from the brook, ham that melted in the mouth—it came from the Bohemian side of the mountains —and a particularly hearty kind of rye bread with a golden-brown crust. From their arbor they looked out on the open meadows.

Their days went by calmly. Everything, their climb up the hill into the thick woods at the foot of the high mountains, their coming home to the two frugally friendly rooms that already bore the stamp of their life together, their noonday walk down to their meal, and later the hours on their balcony with the view into the valley taking on the deepening colors of the afternoon and slowly fading into the evening—everything was perfect happiness, but with an underlying apprehension, since nothing perfect can last.

To both of them the joys of the treasured moments were inexhaustible. Hours of talking made them feel as if they had just begun.

"We two will never be bored with each other, Recha, though we should reach a venerable old age. For each of us has come across thousands of years and now we have met for the first time. That gives us much to talk about."

But at night their fervor burned in silence, consumed itself and flared up high, time and again. They measured their sleep between their embraces against the sounds the cold mountain wind carried in through their windows. Around midnight, laughter and shouts from the village below. Two hours later, only the lone bark of the watchdog. After that, nothing—the vast silence that precedes the new day. At last, the crowing of the cock and the early cry of the jaybird sailing over the larchwood trees. But the merry gurgling of the near-by mountain brook they did not hear. That was part of the silence.

They were happy. It was granted them to have a span of complete fulfilment, an Elysian interval so rare and so brief in the life of a human being and in the life of a nation. A few years of peace, out of a whole century; a few weeks of bliss, in the course of a whole lifetime. But be it man or nation, they look upon this blessed calm not as the exception but as the rule, as their true lot. They do not see that struggle, suffering, error are the warp and woof which weave the pattern of life.

Recha had never asked how Pattay came to have his unexpected leave. She accepted it as a gift. Of his trouble with

Schaller she knew nothing, though of the disaster that still reverberated throughout the land, she was of course aware. Wherever one happened to listen, people talked about the coming war.

Pattay barely touched on the subject, he evaded it. Very occasionally he would glance at the newspapers down at the inn. But he read nothing much beyond the headlines. They reflected a brusk see-saw between alarm and hope. The Emperor in Vienna had dispatched a personal letter to the Emperor in Berlin and in answer received one of open encouragement. Yet two days later the German ally serenely left for his annual trip to the northern countries. And from Belgrade came Councillor von Wiesner's report, emphatically denying that the Serbian Government had anything to do with the crime. On that day all the Jewish families were relieved and in a festive mood.

One week later the thunderbolt of the ultimatum came crashing down. It was clear as day: in Vienna they wanted war. Belgrade had formulated an answer, contrite, submissive beyond all expectation. But this time there was no respite, no chance for a sigh of relief. Vienna barely scanned the answer. Relations were broken off. The Austrian minister left.

On the following noon, when Pattay and Recha stepped into the garden, it was empty. Everywhere the porters were on the way to the station, carting baggage for their frightened summer guests.

Pattay awaited his order to march. It was nearly dark when he saw the messenger coming uphill. There were no more trains that evening.

The night was oppressively sultry. They could not sleep. About two o'clock a cloudburst broke with such force that it sprayed in from the balcony onto their bed. Early in the morning, as they drove to the station, a thin, steady drizzle fell on the chilled valley.

Pattay found his regiment preparing to march. Nobody believed any longer that the conflict could be confined to

Serbia. The air was thick with rumors about enemy planes, about border incidents by the Cossacks.

That afternoon, when it became known that Russia had mobilized, he turned up unexpectedly at the villa. He was in his dress uniform.

"I have a carriage waiting outside, Recha. I should like to take you for a drive."

She opened her lips, surprised, a question in her mind. But it remained unasked. She only nodded.

"I just want to put on a hat."

"That nice three-cornered one, yes? And wear your blue frock. It's my favorite."

Piotr was sitting on the driver's seat. Without turning his head he cracked his whip in salute, the way he had seen fashionable coachmen do.

As they drove across the bridge, Pattay took Recha's hand.

"You know, of course, where we are going, don't you? The Mayor is expecting us. War wedding. Formerly they would have made a thousand difficulties. Now the gate simply opens. So there is some good in all this craziness."

"Franz," she said, "I don't feel right about it. You mustn't let circumstances force you."

He laughed and kissed her.

"Blessed be the circumstances. Without them you would still be holding me off. But you can't very well let me perish in a state of mortal sin."

These words, so lightly borrowed from the language of his Church, had for her an ominous ring.

The ceremony at the Mayor's went off in a sober, matter-of-fact fashion. His secretary and the bailiff signed a witnesses. Within less than ten minutes Pattay was helping Recha back into the carriage.

"Forgive me for letting you drive home alone. But I still have a lot to attend to. I'll be home at seven."

He climbed the stairs leading to the office of Solicitor Krasna, found him at his desk, and introduced himself.

"Your name should be familiar to me," said Krasna,

and his white beard shook with suppressed laughter at a relished memory.

"Mr. Krasna, I have just gotten married and should like you to draw my will. In case of my death, everything is to go to my wife."

"That sounds simple enough."

"It isn't quite so simple. I really don't own much—bachelor furniture, family tokens, a few old pictures. But concerning the actual fortune—" and in a few words he explained the situation to Krasna. Nor did he forget to mention the loan made him by Zweifuss, the sugar-works owner, which was to be paid off whatever happened.

Krasna nodded. "What you don't own, Count Pattay, you can't will to anybody. In a case like this, there is only one thing to do—to leave a request that Princess Weikersthal clear your liabilities, and add the wish that provision be made for your young wife out of whatever you would have inherited. Such a deed is, of course, not binding. But I will gladly draw it up for you and have it notarized."

"Please give it the right touch," said Pattay. "My aunt is impressed by formalities."

Krasna straightened out the paper. "Your wife's maiden name, Count Pattay?"

Pattay told him. The pen scratched in Krasna's hand as from an electric shock.

"As I picture your aunt, the Princess, she will not be very eager to listen to a request. Has your wife been baptized? Were you married in church?"

Pattay slowly shook his head. He saw Chana standing before him, he saw the small case beside the door with God's Commandments inside, he saw Recha's eyes, dark, luminous with a light from ages past.

"That's quite out of the question," he said.

An hour later, back with Recha, he found a festive table set for the evening meal. Two seven-armed candlesticks were burning. For the first time the table was laid out for three. Chana sat with them, dressed in her black silk Sabbath gown.

"Break the bread," she said to Pattay, "and divide it. I shall bless it since you do not know."

Pattay did what she asked. And in the language of her people Chana blessed the bread.

17

On August 5 the Lancers departed for the Krasnik-Komarov line, east of Lemberg, to participate in the action against the approaching Russians. That section of the front was within a few hours ride on horseback. The daily reports that came into town sounded favorable, reassuring.

Beyond a few amusing remarks on the lack of comforts in their quarters, Pattay's letters never mentioned war. His were the tender, passionate letters of a man who has found the woman of his life and who is vexed because adverse circumstances are keeping him away from her.

Not two weeks had passed when at midnight he knocked at the cottage gate, threw a hasty greeting at Chana who opened the door, and in the next second held the startled and happy Recha in his arms.

Between their caresses they could hear the snorting of the horses that Piotr was tending outside. One hour was all they had. When Pattay left, he would not let her get up and he tiptoed out so as not to waken Chana. But she stood in the lighted frame of the kitchen door, wrapped in a long, woollen house robe, waiting for him.

"I've made you some coffee. You don't mind drinking it out here?"

"Could my Piotr also have a cup?"

"He's had his."

They sat across from each other at the kitchen table and she watched him enjoy the hot drink.

"Wonderful coffee! I don't see how I could have made the ride back without it."

"Are you allowed to do this? To gallop off like this, in the night?"

He laughed. "I used to come over to Lemberg in the night, didn't I? But, of course, then you wouldn't have made coffee for me."

"What would happen if the Russians were to attack while you are away?"

"You won't denounce me, will you, Chana? A few months ago I wouldn't have been so sure."

He rose and she with him. She came over and put her arm around him. She was almost as tall as he, solid like an oak. He felt her affectionate grip on his shoulder. He was moved, strangely proud.

"God bless you, Pattay," she said close to his ear and let go. "I wish you everything good. Some things in life are simply stronger than religion. Take good care of yourself! Think of Recha! What would she do if anything happened?"

"I shall tell the Russians not to shoot my way."

But one week later, on the afternoon of August 24, First Lieutenant Pattay was killed while reconnoitering in the vicinity of Zloczov.

With their hasty marriage and the confusion of mobilization no marriage note had been entered in Pattay's army records. That was why Recha did not receive notice of his death. True, she was restless, his daily letters having ceased to arrive. But Chana's explanations sounded convincing enough. After all, her husband was on the battlefront where there might be military reasons for the postal service being interrupted. Recha calmed down; her thoughts were busy with something else.

It seemed to be something very private and mysterious. Twice during the last few days she had gone to town, finding a pretext for going alone. From the second visit she had returned feverishly excited and radiant.

That afternoon, as Chana was leaving the house to do her shopping, Recha put a letter for Pattay into her bag.

"Take it to the postoffice. I am always afraid they won't empty the mailboxes properly."

It was a dreary day, wet and windy. Chana hurried to finish her errands. Then she remembered that she had prom-

ised to buy Recha some dark green embroidery silk. So she turned into the winding Kreuzgasse toward Berges's dry-goods store.

Mrs. Berges was chatting with a customer across the counter. It was almost dark in the basement shop. Chana waited; she looked down at her heavy laced boots that were shedding pools of water. Suddenly Pattay's name struck her ear. Mrs. Berges spoke of his death. She mentioned it as though the sad fact was common knowledge.

Chana stepped into the narrow circle of light. Mrs. Berges recognized her and held her breath.

"Is that just a rumor, Mrs. Berges, or the truth?"

"You should know best."

"If I knew, I wouldn't be asking. Perhaps I had better run over to the barracks and inquire."

"There isn't a person left in that place."

"Someone must be there."

She suddenly leaned against the counter. Her heavy body began to sway.

"I'll get you some water," cried Mrs. Berges, but remained standing where she was. The other customer, a young girl, stared with wide eyes at the scene she did not understand.

"I'm all right," Chana nodded at no one in particular and walked out into the Kreuzgasse. The doorbell tinkled behind her. By now it was completely dark.

It was raining harder. Out there, where the houses ended, she walked across the barren stretch of ground toward the barracks, plowing through heavy mud that reached halfway up her boots.

She passed through the arched gate with the Madonna and stood in the court. There were endless rows of stables, all barricaded. But over in the right wing a light was burning on the ground floor. She opened the door.

Corporal Siebel was working on his papers. When he saw the caller was a woman, he rose and with a slight limp came toward her. He was the dapper, would-be gentleman type, an insurance-agent in civilian life. A few weeks ago

he had crushed his foot on the practice field and was left behind for office duty at the garrison. He could not make up his mind whether to feel glad or sorry, since like many cowards he had a craving for advancement and medals.

He was about to offer Chana a chair when he noticed the shopping bag. So he did not, there being no need to overstress politeness. Chana sat down anyway.

"I came to inquire whether anything is known here about the rumored death of First Lieutenant Pattay. It can't be true or we should have been notified. My niece is Pattay's wife."

Siebel's attitude changed again. "Of course, Madam, of course you should have been notified. Very sorry, Madam, but the sad news is correct. Very sorry, indeed, I assure you."

"Dead," said Chana, "really dead! But how in God's name could that happen?"

It was an odd question to ask. As though it were inconceivable that an officer should meet his death at the front. But Corporal Siebel had the necessary facts. With an air of importance he thumbed through his papers.

"A report did come in from the regiment. I am to put it into proper form and forward it to the Chancellery in Vienna."

"What does it say?"

According to the report, Pattay had been on patrol duty, reconnoitering the hilly and partially swampy strips in front of the Austrian line. To offer less of a target to the enemy, he had left his eight men in a village behind and set out alone, leaving word that he would be back within the hour. Yet barely had he disappeared behind the first hill, when his Lancers heard several shots in quick succession. When they reached the place, Pattay was lying on the ground. His horse stood unharmed and grazing a few steps away. Not a sign of the Russians. The Lancers lifted the body and discovered that the fatal shots had been fired from the back. The bullets had entered below the left shoulder blade. The cloth

of his uniform was singed; the shots must have been fired at very close range.

"That was four days ago," said Chana. "Where is the body now?"

"The body, Madam, has been sent to Vienna. As you know, Count Pattay's connections were of the highest." He made a tactful pause. "By the way, that is not the only sad casualty of that day. The regiment also deplores the loss of Captain Schaller."

"Schaller? Also dead?"

"His body wasn't found. Perhaps the Russians have carried it off."

"Carried off a dead man? What for?"

"Of course, there is a chance that they took him prisoner."

"Wouldn't his men know about that?"

"That's just it, Madam. He, too, had separated from them."

"Was that anywhere near the place where Pattay fell?"

"Yes indeed." Siebel was a bit surprised at this interest in the fate of a stranger. "Indeed very near by. Both patrols had orders to keep in constant touch."

Mechanically Chana's fingers tied and untied the strings of her bag. It was six weeks ago—Recha and Pattay were still up in the mountains—when the youngest Zweifuss had told her in deepest secrecy about Schaller's humiliation at the Archduke Rainer. She had kept her word, not even Recha knew about it. But the story had had much to do with Chana's change of heart toward Pattay. And now this man Schaller had disappeared close to the spot where Pattay had been killed.

Without another word she rose. Corporal Siebel limped hurriedly to the door to hold it open.

It took her a good hour to walk home through the wet darkness. She stopped on the bridge, leaned her elbows on the damp railing and looked down into the muddy torrent which rushed past quite close to her. How was she to break the news to Recha?

But when she arrived at the villa, there was not much for her to say. Recha was standing in the doorway.

"I've been waiting and waiting. What has happened?"

"Recha—look here—"

"You've heard something! Something about Franz! Speak up!"

Chana looked at her, closed her eyes and nodded.

There was hardly a cry, only a helpless peep as when someone quickly shuts off the throat of a small bird. Recha's arm reached out into the air, her body reeled and fell stiffly to the ground. Her head hit the flagstones.

Two hours later, Chana was taking the doctor to the front door.

"She'll soon fall asleep after taking these pills. And keep up the ice packs."

"Is there any danger, doctor?"

Doctor Adler shook his head. "She is a healthy young woman, despite her delicate frame. I examined her only this morning."

"This morning? What for?"

"Don't you know?" He looked at her from under his eyeglasses which he had forgotten to take off.

"I suppose she wanted Pattay to be the first one to know. She is expecting a child. Now he'll never know."

SECOND PART

Chana

1

THE country of Galicia was one of the focal points of the earthquake which, for four years, convulsed and unhinged the whole Continent of Europe. For months on end, there was not a day when the town had a respite from the boom of near-by or more distant guns. Nobody was able to tell any longer where the actual fighting front was. Newspaper readers had long tired of hopping their pinflags to and fro on the map. The powerful fortress on the river San, protector of the province, fell into Russian hands, then was retaken. In fierce slaughter, the Carpathian Mountain passes changed hands continually. The Russians took the town; the Cossacks slept in the bunks of the Lancers and their small, shaggy horses drank from the yellowish water of the Dniester. Soon they were gone and Hungarian cavalry horses and artillery mares from Moravia were watering in the river.

And so it went, back and forth. Some weeks the enemy occupied the town itself, while the Austrians held the southern bank of the river with the sugar-works and the white villa. Never did it develop into a real fight. The townspeople were Ukrainians, closely akin to the Russians. That saved the place from destruction. Once in a while a bullet would whistle across the river, more from boredom, as a playful reminder. The bridge had not been blown up and the traffic from side to side never quite stopped. In her mannish boots Chana would tramp across to buy food, not an easy job, as the countryside was almost completely drained. Milk was one of the hardest things to get, and just now milk was needed more than anything else in the villa. Often Chana would stay away for hours. Occasionally she would meet a detachment of Cossacks riding through the narrow streets. Her body would press back into a dark doorway, shivering with the memory of former horrors. Once she looked up and imagined she saw Captain Schaller's face under the foreign

cap of the troopleader. But the sotnik and his sotnie were past before she could make sure of her weird discovery.

In the fourth year of the war it looked as if Galicia finally was cleared of the enemy. The distant rumbling had ceased. But no one believed any longer in a victory, in a return to the days of yore. After a reign of awe-inspiring duration, the hapless Emperor had died in his yellow castle at Schönbrunn, leaving his crumbling crown and his agonized lands to a quite unknown and untried agnate. His adversary, the white Czar, tumbled from his byzantine throne. A gigantic finger, dripping with blood, began to trace the borderlines of a new Europe.

The future Poland was to be exactly like that old one which greedy and powerful neighbors had once torn to shreds. For that dream of a rebirth, now in process, a hundred thousand patriots had died throughout a period of five generations under the lash, on the gallows, in dungeons.

Here in Galicia, the aging hand of Austria had never inflicted such cruel suffering as had the Russian knout or the mailed fist of the Prussians. The new Poland was not exactly the wishful dream of that southern province. With Austria gone, they planned to set up a Ukrainian Reich that was to stretch from the crests of the Carpathians down to the Black Sea. When the collapse finally came, this smoldering ambition was fanned into a roaring flame. Victory appeared to have been all but gained by the Ukrainians. Their white-blue flag fluttered from the city hall in Lemberg, their future capital. But Polish reinforcements arrived and turned the tide.

And it was again those defenseless ones, who had to pay with their blood. When the pogrom was over, the Jewish quarters in the heart of Lemberg had been reduced to rubble and, under cover of night, seventy slain were carted to the cemetery. The Jews hardly knew what had happened to them. They had taken no part in this feud, had never shared in either dream. But that was just it. These eternal strangers, who did not belong, were the scapegoats. Once again Jewish

vendors and craftsmen sat behind barred shutters, straining in the dark, prayer shawls over their bent shoulders.

The pogrom did not spread over the country. Those seventy odd at Lemberg had bled for the rest. The town on the Dniester was also spared.

But the labor pains of this rebirth found no end. The plenipotentiaries of the great powers had long since, at Versailles, attached their seal to that instrument for peace. The borders of the newly created Poland were clearly marked on map and atlas. But in reality these borders quaked and shook and crumbled. At last, peace did come. The reunited country was to have a new lease on life.

Reunited and free. But after having been torn apart for well over a century, these thirty million people had little in common. No constitution, no administration, no law offered a common meeting ground for those Poles, Lithuanians, White Russians, Jews, Ukrainians. War had badly damaged their cities, wiped villages off the map, reduced roads to mire, ruined the fields, lamed industry and trade. There were no steady revenues, no sound financial standards. The depreciated money of the three fallen monarchies flooded the country with fantastic currency rates. There were no funds for hospitals, homes, schools, none for cripples and war orphans. Poland was a decrepit country writhing in turmoil and spasms—upheld and held together by nothing but a legend.

2

That legend wore the blue-gray uniform of the Polish Legion and carried the silver staff of a Marshal. The people had a tender and mysterious name for it: The Grandfather.

The Grandfather was not a very old man. But his life had been full and eventful enough to fill a whole century, and not only the half of one. His had been the life of a revolutionary and a patriot. Under ever-changing names it had been lived outside the pale of the law. Years of it were

spent as a prisoner in Siberia, more in the Citadel at Warsaw, some in an insane asylum, for he had simulated madness because escape from there had a better chance. But whether free or imprisoned, for thirty years he had been the burning heart of a dismembered Poland and the glowing hope of its poverty-stricken workmen and peasants. His name was whispered in their wooden hovels, in their slums at Warsaw and Lodz. Their departed gods had come back to life again in him. Just as Jagiello had chased off the German knights and Sobieski the Turks, so would he drive the Russians away and protect the poor, as Kosciusko had done.

The Russian press wrote that the Grandfather was a bandit. But the peasants knew better. They knew that everything he did was for their good. He held up a mail train and robbed it of two hundred thousand roubles. But the peasants knew that this was Polish money, sucked from their veins by the Russians and that the Grandfather needed it to equip his Legion which was to fight for their freedom.

Never had he been a soldier. Yet when war came, he led his motley crowd like a great general. He was loyal and shrewd, not to be deceived or misused. The Germans thought he was their ally. But he was not; he was a Pole and a rebel. And when they demanded a pledge from him, he refused and they threw him into their fortress at Magdeburg. That was his last prison. On the day of the German collapse, the dungeon was opened and within twenty-four hours his liberated nation received him jubilantly, ready to fall at his feet. Grandfather could have been King of Poland. But he did not care to be king. He accepted the Marshal's staff and retained his post as commander-in-chief, for peace was still a long way off. He continued to fight from one Polish border to the other, while his wife and his two small daughters sat waiting for him at the Belvedere at Warsaw.

The Belvedere was a gloomy, pretentious castle; Grandfather never cared for it. Neither did he care for ceremonies, official receptions, and state dinners. He thought them absurd and boring. But, most of all, he abhorred touring the country in state, an unavoidable duty after peace had finally come.

Reluctantly he would climb into his special train or onto his horse to show himself to the people. His talks to his liberated countrymen were quite unhampered by official rhetoric. Invariably he would say something unexpected, more often something baffling and quaint, and the sleek gentlemen of his suite—for a suite he now had to have—were secretly shocked. Still, he was the Grandfather and no one dared interfere.

But concerning his trip to that southern province which had once been called Galicia, there was little grumbling on his part. Here he had found shelter as a fugitive and here, under the tolerant eyes of the Austrians, he had formed the first units of his Legion. Besides, here the fighting had stopped only recently. So his appearance among the Ukrainians was of considerable importance and not perhaps without an element of danger. Grandfather almost enjoyed going there.

He first went to Cracow, the ancient capital. In Cracow's cathedral that was Poland's Pantheon, he stood beside the tombs of the men who had fought for their country before him. And he knew that he would soon take his place among these kings and poets and soldiers. He liked the thought. Death was always in his mind and often in his talk.

Death did not meet him in so stately a form when he came to Lemberg. Long hours he spent there, picking his way through the black, gaping ruins of the Jewish section which nobody bothered to clear away. This arson and murder was the handiwork of his own soldiers. What went on in the mind of that seasoned rebel? Jews had once stood shoulder to shoulder with him in his fight for freedom. Had the enmity against the pale strangers also taken root in his mind, a mind tormented by fate? No one dared pose that question.

He continued on toward the east, went further into Ukrainian territory, mostly on horseback now, for here the railway lines were still out. And he also came to the town on the Dniester.

The war had left it fairly intact and it was centrally located. So, in the reorganization of the land, it was singled

out as the seat of a regional administration. The Grandfather came to introduce officially the new governor, the Vaivode.

Every last vestige of Austria's former sovereignty had been erased from the town. The yellow paint on the County Building had been covered with whitewash. And in the place of the double-headed Hapsburg eagle, a white one in a red field now spread its claws and wings over the portal. The officials faced the approach of that festive occasion with greatest misgiving. The Marshal and Grandfather might relish the idea of exposing himself to a populace which, until very recently, had been hostile. But bullets of Ukrainian assassins whistled frighteningly through the nightmares of the Vaivode and his chief of police. The police force was increased. Quietly a few arrests were made, for no particular reasons. The townspeople, mostly simple, unassuming folk, seemed to look forward to the event. And when the Vaivode ruled that on May 14 every house in town, every single one, was to fly the Polish colors, all the lopsided, decaying walls were obediently covered with the white and red stripes. The first to fly them, and no one could hold it against them, were the Jews.

Surprising and decidedly fortunate was the fact that so much white and red bunting was to be found in the town. That was entirely due to the foresight of Gelbfisch and Son. The head of that firm had supplied himself in good time from the textile plants of Lodz and Tomaszov.

An investment of such magnitude would never have entered the mind of Gelbfisch senior. Nor would he ever have thought of selling such expensive merchandise without any gain whatsoever. Giving away yards and yards of all that white and red cloth without profit. But Gelbfisch senior had died at the outset of the war and his son was now the owner of the department store.

Heinrich Gelbfisch was of an ardent nature, one of those enthusiastic souls who are just as numerous among his people as its better known realistic sort. He was like a belated contemporary of Byron and Schiller. His lean, dark-eyed face would invariably glow when it came to subjects

like human rights, liberty, brotherhood of man. With impassioned concern he had closely followed the Polish fight for independence and the great achievements of the Grandfather. And now that the work was crowned with final success, Heinrich was flushed with a kind of personal pride, despite the fact that the position of the Jew was far from assured in this maelstrom of triumphant nationalism.

That his establishment was on the Ring and directly across from the steps of the town hall was to him like a gift from heaven. For there the highlight of the celebration, the big reception was to take place.

The three-story front of his shop was profusely decorated. White and red flags not only covered all available space between the windows, but wherever there was a spot vacant he displayed fan-shaped arrangements of small flags, the way he had seen it on memorial days in Paris. In view of the French-Polish alliance, he thought this particularly apt and symbolical.

Long before the noon hour the broad, wide-open windows were filled with invited onlookers. The most distinguished guests were placed on the first floor. There was Solicitor Krasna and his wife; Daniel Zweifuss, his two sons and their large flock; old Doctor Adler with his two spinster daughters; and Salomon Loew, the hotel owner. To be sure, his Archduke Rainer, now rechristened "White Eagle," also faced the market place but to the unfavored south side. Only the middle one of the five windows was still vacant and Heinrich Gelbfisch kept nervously looking down over the landing, like a theater manager who has the promise of illustrious guests and fears to be left in the lurch.

At last, these special guests appeared—two quiet women in black and a child. He ran down the stairs to greet them.

"It was impossible to get through," said Recha and gently withdrew her frail hand from his fervent grasp. "We finally found the back entrance."

She looked a bit thinner than she did six years ago. And the sufferings of these many years had left a nervous weakness in her pale, amber face, a constant throbbing below the

right eye, like the tremulous surface of the sea on a calm day. It was a curious reminder of that same trait in the face of her beloved dead. But she was unaware of this. For with him it only showed when he was angry and never had she seen Pattay in anger.

"What do you think of our child, Mr. Gelbfisch?" came Chana's deep voice. "She is wearing it for the first time."

"It" was a Scotch plaid dress, checkered in various reds, with white collar and cuffs and a loose, white belt. A Scotch cap with a saucy feather stuck through it completed the outfit. Heinrich Gelbfisch himself had sold it to the two women at so low a price that he felt good every time he thought of it. Mother and aunt held Elisabeth by the hand. She knew she was being examined and so her glance at Mr. Gelbfisch was a little self-conscious but confident and there was a delightful, roguish glint in her eye.

"We are too handsome for words," said Mr. Gelbfisch. "Poland's generalissimo will certainly get an eyeful when he looks at our little Miss here."

Elisabeth was now five years old. She was not pretty in an angelic sort of way. And she did not resemble either Recha or her father. Those two elements, coming from different worlds, had produced a very individual blend in her small features. Nothing in that face was quite regular and straight lined. The eyes had a slight slant upward. They were large, light eyes, almost as light as Pattay's, with a bluish-golden sparkle in them. Warm, eager eyes. Her winsome, childish mouth followed the slant of the eye. Delicate, sensitive, it curved upward in the corners. In this firm cast of features the unformed little stub of a nose looked like a joke. Elisabeth's hair had the color of honey and it flowed from under her cap in long silken waves. She stood there between the two women and looked up at Mr. Gelbfisch with one foot crosswise over the other, scraping the buttons of her boots. It was a position often reproved by Aunt Chana. But to ween Elizabeth from a habit was no easy matter.

Band music could now be faintly heard. Mr. Gelbfisch

led his three guests to the middle window. Unfortunately it did not reach all the way to the floor but stopped right where Elizabeth's nose began.

"What are we going to do?" said the host. "I'm afraid you won't see anything that way."

"Oh, I'll be all right. I'll just stand on my toes."

"Your little toes won't hold you up that long." And he brought a stool from the salesroom and lifted her up. The two women again took the child's hands and stepped a little aside.

There was not much to be seen of the multitude down on the market place, of the Ukrainians in their colorful costumes and of the Jewish people in their dark Sabbath garb. For a cordon of soldiers in brand-new uniforms was pushing the crowd back against the house fronts. The best spot was exactly opposite the festive terrace, where, at the head of the steps, all the dignitaries had taken up their position.

There they were: the new Vaivode, a smallish man in silk hat who concealed his nervousness behind a stony face. The mayor with his heavy chain of office; he was the same one who had joined Recha and Pattay in their quick marriage. The town councillors, several army officers, and the leading clergy. The prelate of the Roman-Catholic Church, the predominant religion in the new state, clothed in royal purple with a large amethyst cross resting on his bosom; the priest of the Greek-Catholic Church, the Ukrainian faith, a dazzling figure in silver stripes and sky-blue over a scarlet habit; and a step away from them, a white-bearded man in a long, black robe, the head rabbi. Endless and excited debates had been going on among the Jewry about his taking part in the festivities. Some feared that his participation might be considered presumptuous, others thought his staying away might be looked upon as an affront. After all, nearly half the town's population was Jewish. So now he stood there and tried hard to look unconcerned.

As it was, all of them were nervous and ill at ease. They looked hither and yon, began small talk that came to noth-

ing almost at once, or listened to the music that escorted the Grandfather toward them. But whoever glanced straight ahead at the façade of the department store could see in the very center of it a tiny, smiling, gaily dressed figure which seemed to be suspended in midair. And whoever saw her, smiled too.

3

The Grandfather sat astride a small, light gray horse of Arabian breed, which frisked along playfully to the sound of the bugles by the lancer escort. For lancers were once again garrisoned in the barracks, almost as gorgeous to look at as the Austrian ones had been, and their prize squadron had gone out on the road to Lemberg to meet him.

In the saddle, his overly broad shoulders made him look rather heavy. But when he dismounted, every one noticed that he was unusually slender in the waist and only of medium height. The Vaivode and the mayor received him. Together with them, and followed by his suite, he now mounted the steps with a springy gait, while the bugles blared and the cannons roared. A few huzzahs and the thin peal of a church bell were almost drowned out by the din.

Hurriedly and very much at random, the Marshal greeted the assembled dignitaries and so shook hands with the rabbi, who happened to stand nearest to him, ahead of the Christian clergy. Gentiles and Jews alike were shocked, though definitely not for the same reason. After that he was guided to a chair, standing aloof in the center. Because it was hot he took off his heavily braided cap, a most unmilitary gesture. One of the city councillors ran over to relieve him of it and stiffly held on to it for the rest of the ceremony.

Bugles and cannons were hushed. The Grandfather looked straight out from his throne-like chair and all could plainly study those legendary features.

The general's uniform he wore was poorly tailored, and here and there stars and medals were haphazardly pinned to it. From out of this uniform rose a sensitive, nervous head with a scholarly forehead reaching up to his graying, ruffled

hair. His deep-set, wise, and lonely looking eyes were shaded by conspicuously bushy eyebrows that grew together over the ridge of his nose.

The mouth was hidden by a billowy, drooping mustache, and people like Heinrich Gelbfisch, who took pride in knowing everything about the Grandfather, also knew that thereby hung a tale.

"He really doesn't like to wear that mustache, he hates it," Heinrich was saying under his breath to Recha. "But his mouth is deformed. Military police one knocked his rifle butt into it."

"Why did the soldier do that?" asked Elisabeth without turning her head.

This information had hardly been intended for her ears. But Heinrich eagerly turned to her. Recha's little daughter came in for a large share of the adoration that Mr. Gelbfisch felt for her mother. "Of course you know," he started off instantly, "that the Russian military police——"

"But Mr. Gelbfisch," Chana interrupted him with her low rumbling laugh. "You can't expect the child to understand such things." Gelbfisch was silenced.

"He looks sad, Mammi," said the child suddenly. "I think he would like to go away again."

"Sh-sh-sh—" whispered Recha, as if the Marshal over there could hear them.

He had listened to the mayor's speech with an expression that might be called resigned rather than sad. Now he stood up and the buglers gave off a shrill flourish of trumpets, introducing the address of their national hero.

He embarked on it with a most unconventional gesture, in that he took the hand of the Vaivode, who stood beside him, and presented him to the crowd by name—Tadeusz Skolski. Mr. Skolski balanced his shiny silk had in the other hand, his face several shades paler than before.

"He won't have an easy time of it," said the Grandfather. "Heavy burdens, difficult ones, will bear him down. And he will have to enforce measures that will make him unpopular. If that is so, all I can ask is that he take comfort in my lot.

I know only too well why they chose me for that post in wartime. Simply because no one else wanted it. We had no regular army, our soldiers tramped along like hoboes. Today the government isn't much better off. Confusion is everywhere. No recognized laws and almost no money. So we have to be grateful to men like Mr. Skolski for shouldering such a burden."

And he released the hand of the Vaivode who bowed several times.

"But you didn't come to hear hard words from me. What you want to hear is something that will lift up your hearts. You want to hear from me what you already know: that a heroic fight has at last been crowned by victory, that our age-old dream has become a reality. Yes, all that is true."

He fell silent, paused a long time, seemed to lose himself in thought.

"Every nation," he went on, "has her historic monuments, her sacred images to which she pays homage. But the greatest of our sacred images is something that, already today, we can no longer see. I am speaking of the borderlines which only yesterday divided our lands. They were phantom lines, so immaterial that the smallest animal, a mouse, a weasel, could flit across them. And yet, for a hundred and fifty long years they have disrupted our nation. 'Forget your common past,' the despots shouted at us, 'your common joys, common tears. Be strangers; better still, hate each other; best of all, fight and destroy each other!' You in this part of the country know that only too well. The blood that was spilled here is barely dry. It shall not happen again. Stop thinking: this one is a Pole by birth and that one a Ukrainian. Believe me, it is of no importance. Let me bring back to your mind something your mayor said a minute ago. I repeat it not in vanity, but because it proves my point. He referred to me as the very embodiment of Poland. Well, according to those who believe that only blood counts, I am not really a Pole. I am a Lithuanian, born on a Lithuanian farm of Lithuanian parents. The Lithuanians come from a place different from that of the Poles, they speak a

different language. But for centuries both peoples have lived in unity. And that is the only thing that counts."

Perhaps he felt he had talked enough; as if searching for a closing word, he lifted his head and so looked straight across.

A surprised look came into his face. He must have seen something that pleased him. Calmly, as if he were utterly alone, he reached into the side pocket of his uniform, brought out his glasses, put them on and looked intently at the opposite façade. He smiled. Then he took off the glasses and put them away again.

"I said that I am a Lithuanian. But just now something reminded me that part of me comes from yet farther away. Long ago, an ancestor of mine came across the seas, from Scotland. He came as a fugitive because he had kept faith with his Scottish king. I like to remember that man. That's how things stand with me. And yet, in spite of it all, your mayor could speak of me the way he did."

"He looked over at us," whispered Recha and put her arm around Elisabeth as if she needed protection from that gaze of the all-powerful.

"He looked at Elisabeth," said the proud Mr. Gelbfisch. "Her frock reminded him."

Chana turned to him. "All of them he mentions, your Marshal. Scots, Poles, Ukrainians and the rest. But about us not a word."

"And what is it that I really want to say?" the voice came across to them. Clear and refreshed, it rang out over the square. "I want to say, don't believe in that talk about breed and blood. Don't give in to a hatred that feeds from that source. What counts is something very different, something mysterious and deep down, for which there is no better word than 'our kindred spirit.' Once before it made a nation of us, and will make one again. Not a nation that delights in conquering and enslaving others, but one contented with a life of self-respect and decency to our fellow men. That won't come about overnight and not without doubts and setbacks. We older ones will hardly be here to see the full-blown day. But a child may safely smile."

Again and unmistakably he looked across at the small figure set into that large windowframe. What he now saw without his glasses was probably only a gay splash of color.

"For a whole century our children learned to weep early in life. That shall not happen again. I am an old man but I have two young daughters waiting for me at home. I still want to see them play and laugh. Then I may calmly look out onto that great void from which there is no return. On this earth, which has drunk so many tears, there is nothing better than the smile of a child."

The gentlemen of his suite looked at each other, wondering what other curious things the Grandfather was still going to say. But he did not say anything more. That had been the end of his talk.

4

Once again flowers were regularly brought to the villa. This time they came from Heinrich Gelbfisch.

It had been in the second year of the war that Recha first visited his store. Chana was with her. Mr. Gelbfisch himself was present. After the demise of his father, he had been classed as indispensable and so been released from military service, greatly to his relief, for Austria's cause never had been his.

The moment Recha stepped into the place, he recognized her, despite her long crape. His pulse quickened. He was a lover of the theater and a connoisseur, and he knew of her tragic life, which shed a poignant light on the magic of her art. He rushed over to assist her and adoringly listened to that sweet, slightly sharp voice which came in pained whispers from behind her black veil. He accompanied the women down the stairs, opened the door for them and bowed low.

On her second visit, after a long interval, she was leading three-year-old Elisabeth by the hand. Now she no longer wore a veil and Heinrich Gelbfisch noticed with emotion the slight disturbance which suffering had traced in her face. He again waited on her, then suddenly disappeared and returned

with a present which he put into Elisabeth's arms. It was a Ukrainian peasant doll that opened and closed her eyes.

"Her hair is just like yours," said Mr. Gelbfisch, and with a shy gesture his fingers touched her honey-colored curls.

Elisabeth's eyes questioned her mother.

"I am afraid we can't afford that," said Recha. "Who can buy such expensive dolls in wartime, anyhow?"

"That's just it, exactly. I can't sell them. You are really doing me a favor. Please!" he added softly and there was a touching emphasis on that last word.

Recha looked at him and a faint, hesitant smile came over her face. It was as if this face had so lost the power to smile that it pained her.

But after this incident, it was not long before Mr. Gelbfisch drove up before the white villa to make his call.

That was now four years ago, and more than two since the Marshal and Grandfather had put on his glasses to take a close look at Elisabeth. The Scottish dress no longer fitted her. But she had wept when it was to be cut up and so it hung in her closet, side by side with the cap.

She took it out, today as on many other days, and turned it around in her hands. It was evening and time to go to bed but, like all children, she dawdled to put it off. Heinrich Gelbfisch, who by now was practically a member of the household, stood beside her in the white-painted room which she shared with Chana.

"That was the most beautifulest dress I ever had, Uncle Heinrich. I'll never have another one like it."

"Oh come now, Bessie. You'll be having much more beautiful ones."

"But it won't be the Scottish one."

"Well, if you like it that much, why don't you have it copied?"

"It couldn't ever be the same thing."

It was said with a finality which could not be misunderstood. For Elisabeth also treated Mr. Gelbfisch as if he were not quite grown up.

Later on he sat in the living room with the women and

expatiated on events of the outside world with as much gusto as ever, in spite of a good many disappointments. Nothing could dampen his zeal, not even the fact that he was coldly rejected when he tried to join one of the political clubs which sprang up like mushrooms from the now united soil of the young republic. The fall of the three empires, "the three monsters" as he called them, continued to thrill him though new clouds had long ago begun to darken again the Continent. *"Ni dieu ni maître,"* he cried out enthusiastically, and Recha, who alone understood it, watched with melancholy irony the lambent flame in his round, dark eyes that were set too closely.

"Chana, really this can't go on," she said after he had gone. "Have you seen what he's sent us now?"

"What did he send?"

"A new dining room lamp."

"Well, the old one was quite a disgrace."

"Not a week goes by but he sends us something. This rug here, the tortoise shell set on my dresser, all those playthings for Bessie, expensive delicacies, wines——"

"If he likes to do it——"

"But, by and by, that will give him privileges too."

Chana was silent. They were sitting by the table. Chana busy with her sewing and still doing it without glasses in spite of her years, Recha embroidering something in brown and green, her favorite colors. The window was wide open; it was a warm April evening.

"I met the younger Zweifuss today," said Chana without any apparent connection with anything. "He looked the other way so he wouldn't have to greet me."

"They won't let us stay here much longer."

"They'll let us stay as long as we pay the rent."

"And how much longer will that be?"

"I wonder myself."

At the Zweifuss works, a thousand feet up the river, the smokestacks were cold. During the war the production had already fallen off by leaps and bounds. And now the tariffs barred all export to former markets. But by far the worst

thing was the lack of working capital. The major part of the claims, which old Daniel Zweifuss had left to his heirs, were unredeemable. The nobility, those historical names which his ugly hand had so confidently entered into his secret ledger, were scattered and destitute, many of their sons buried on the battlefields. So it was understandable when a letter arrived at the villa one day, sent over from the idle factory, asking the widow of First Lieutenant Count Pattay to pay off that long overdue twenty thousand crowns.

Recha had known absolutely nothing of this debt. The legal aspect was dubious. Solicitor Krasna, who was consulted, did not think an obligation existed. But, Pattay had taken up this loan for her sake, and the sons of the man who had given it now were themselves in distress. Her first impulse was to give whatever she possessed.

It was little enough. Frequent currency fluctuations had shrunk the savings of her professional years to almost nothing. So much so that even the quarterly payment of the rent was always a problem. Must they now really leave the house and garden beside the river?

At this point, Chana and the seasoned solicitor set to work. To take two rooms somewhere in the town, to have Elisabeth grow up in the dampness of those dark alleys, that was a step from which Recha recoiled.

And there was yet another renunciation, thought Chana never so much as touched it with a word. This white house held Recha's heart. Here she had been happy with Pattay, here she had lived the fleeting moment that had truly been her life.

5

Bessie had set the table while Chana was bringing in the supper.

The old woman and the child were now alone. Recha had gone off on a trip and perhaps months might pass before she would return. In fact, one could only hope that it would be that long.

A carriage drove up outside. The two dropped knife and

fork and looked at each other wonderingly. The door opened, and Recha walked in dressed in traveling clothes. She appeared perturbed and looked ill.

"Here I am again," she said with a vacant stare at Elisabeth who had run over to her. The girl's arms fell. One could hear the cab driver outside put down a trunk, could hear him drive off.

"You are just in time for supper," said Chana. Her voice did not betray the effort to appear natural. "And we've got something good besides."

Recha sat down at the table, in coat and hat, like a stranger.

And then it came. Her head fell forward over her outstretched arms, her slim body was rocked by convulsive sobs.

"Aunt Chana!" Elisabeth barely moved her lips.

"Go ahead into the bedroom, child. Get Mammi's bed ready."

Elisabeth nodded gravely. She stooped to pick up her mother's hat, which had fallen off, and left the room.

Chana stood behind Recha's chair, put her arms around her niece and with gentle firmness straightened her up. For a brief moment that quivering face rested against her shoulder. Then she took off her coat and continued to undress her as they walked to the bedroom.

"Chana, you don't know about——"

"I don't want to know about anything now. You just lie down. A cozy bed is the best doctor."

The crisis did not pass quickly. As always, Chana had the strength to wait in silence. She never asked if Recha wanted a physician and never worried the patient by fretting around. The minute she left the room, Elisabeth would take her place and push a chair close to the bed. She was a silent as Chana and bore up wonderfully under the strain, rare in one so young. Though she still clung to that habit of rubbing her shoes together. She was always doing it, cautiously, so it would not make a noise, and in all her sorrow she enjoyed the fact that no one was around to stop her.

On the morning of the third day, Recha ate for the first

time. She slept until the afternoon, and when she awoke, little Elizabeth could see that her mother's face was as it used to be.

A low fire burned in the stove. Outside, the bright September sun was shining. A sloping ray flickered along the tortoise shell and reached the large silver-framed picture on the small table beside it. It showed Franz Pattay in dress uniform, the tschapka with the brush pressed against his hip, his clear face with the candid smile looking frankly out.

"Bessie, push the little table with the photograph out of the glare so I can see it."

"Yes, Mother."

And she jumped up.

"Mother?" asked Recha, and the child saw that she was smiling. "Since when is it mother and no longer mammi?"

"Oh, Mother is lovinger."

"Dearer you mean?"

"Yes, dearer. Mother—is it all over now?"

"All over." And her tears began to flow again. But they no longer hurt. She opened her arms and the little girl threw herself into them, passionately.

"Bessie, you are squeezing me to death."

"I thought you didn't love me any more."

"How silly of you, child."

"Mother—was it so silly?"

The girl now sat up, dangled her legs over the side of the bed and beamed.

Chana came in. She was wearing her Sabbath gown and a dark-red silk shawl, one of Heinrich's presents.

"You're going out, Chana? I'm glad."

"I am going to the temple."

"Is this already Friday?"

"You certainly are mixed up. It's the Feast of the Tabernacles, the days of rejoicing. Don't you hear it?"

She pointed. A faint hammering and breaking of twigs came from the garden.

"Heinrich has sent us some of his people. They are setting up a hut on the lawn. Run out, Bessie, and watch them."

"Tabernacles, days of rejoicing," repeated Recha and turned her eyes to Pattay's smiling face. "Look, Chana, must you be leaving right off?"

"It's not yet five. I'll drive to town with Heinrich's men."

And she sat down. Now she would hear all about it.

Not quite two weeks ago, Recha had left for Warsaw to start a theater engagement.

Up to then she had shunned this natural way out of their straits. To again stand before a crowd, to dance, to sing—the thought alone threw her into a panic. She was certain she would disgrace herself. At thirty-four she felt too old, too worn out, passé, and very sure that no one would remember her.

But this past spring and summer want had gripped them by the throat. And when the time came for the July rent, Recha took her jewelry and offered it to the two dealers in town, who occasionally handled such things. But there was no market for valuables in this impoverished country, and especially not in the provinces. She salvaged just enough help for the moment.

She knew what other step Chana silently expected of her. Heinrich himself did not rush her. But many a night she lay wide-eyed and weighed the wrong toward her child against the wrong toward the man she did not love. Her scarred self shrank from the thought of an unwanted embrace. Surely it was not the way to enter marriage with a good and sincere man.

Then, around the middle of August, came the offer from Warsaw. The theater, where she had once been so successful, asked her to sing again the title role in an operetta by the younger Strauss. It was a delightful piece, one of her favorites. And the letter was most intriguing. The director from Warsaw wrote in a very flattering vein and, almost apologetically, offered her a very liberal salary. Evidently he took it for granted that the widow of a man from so exalted a house would be comfortably off.

It surprised Chana to see the effect of this letter on Recha.

The polite tone of that manager, who had not seen her for nearly ten years, instantly disbanded all her doubts. Now she saw clearly. Her talent still enabled her to end all their troubles. Her child would not have to grow up wretchedly, in unhealthy, cramped surroundings. And she accepted with such eagerness that Chana advised her to moderate her tone and write in a more restrained manner.

In Warsaw things started off promisingly. She had not been forgotten. The press eagerly took notice of her, unknown admirers filled her hotel room with flowers, and older actors, in true Polish effusiveness, welcomed her like a lost sister come back.

A shock and her greatest sorrow was that she no longer found Dossi, her old teacher. She had planned to work with him up to rehearsal time and had sent him a wire to that effect before arriving at Warsaw. The former baritone of La Scala, at Milan, famous not only for his teaching method but also for his wiry, elegant figure and exquisite manners, used to be very partial to her in days past. But Dossi was dead. And he had every reason to be dead, he would be well over eighty by now. She never thought of it, and it gave her a feeling of the years' ebbing away.

Greatly hurried, she took the first substitute suggested to her. He was a German opera singer, whose stage career had been cut short by an accident. Disfigured, embittered, he had withdrawn to this Polish city which, to his mind, lay outside the orb of civilization. To this day he had not learned more than twenty words of the language.

Recha was frightened as she looked at the face beneath the carefully waved, blond hair. The left half of it sagged down like a paralyzed mask. The man stared at her from eyes that were no longer on the same level. And with a nervous clairvoyance Recha knew that he looked on her affliction, that sickly throb in her face, as a mockery of his own horrible blemish.

The lessons began in a frigid atmosphere of mutual dislike. After so long a pause, Recha was deeply dissatisfied

with her voice, and the corrections of this teacher, given in an indifferent, almost scornful manner, did not help to build up her confidence.

"The voice isn't placed properly, Maestro," she nervously interrupted herself, "and it's getting steadily worse."

"Oh, it's *placed* all right," he replied and there was an ominous sneer in his repetition of the word.

She was standing beside him at the piano with that dead half of this face turned toward her; she did not dare to change her position.

When, after a week, she could at last bid him good-by, she was profoundly relieved. "Of course, it might have been better if we could have continued our study all through rehearsals. But I frankly admit, it is a question of money with me. Perhaps I will have a chance to work with the chorus master." He was holding the door open. "Yes, work with the chorus master," he said. "And perhaps you had better see a throat specialist, also." The door closed behind her.

Greatly upset, she arrived at the theater the following morning. She had been there only twice before, just to work out the stage setting. This was to be her first rehearsal with full orchestra. The conductor was a nervous young man who reminded her vaguely of Arnold Gruenbaum. He offered his excuses to the guest artist. His first violinist was sick. The orchestra would not be at its best.

"Neither will I," said Recha very much depressed.

And then she stood in the wings, listening to the recitativo of the opening scenes. The stage was empty. Then came the first bars of her entrance song. She went out. She opened her mouth.

Nothing came. Her voice was a thin, brittle thread. The sweep of the waltz music surged up to her like the surf of the sea. The conductor stopped.

"Don't sing it mezzo voce, my dear lady!" It was the producer, sitting out in front with the director. "Come on, sing out!"

Again the waltz music swelled up. Her voice did not rise above it. She could not even hear it. It was all over. No doc-

tor could help here. Not only one string hung lifeless, a whole instrument was broken.

Beyond the driving surf of the waltz the house gaped like a huge, black tomb. The boards under her feet came up in waves. She continued to sing, four bars, six.

The orchestra carried on. The conductor did not again dare to stop. Somewhere the two gentlemen sat silently, their cigars glowing bright in that dark tomb. There was nothing to be said, nothing to explain.

She made her exit. Her hat was lying on one of the stage props. She pushed against the heavy iron door. It yielded only after a terrific strain.

She reached her hotel. She took the train. Here she was.

6

Around this time of the year, devout Jews all over the world were building their huts. During those seven days the very orthodox ones lived in them, the others at least took their meals there. Such a hut must not be hewn entirely of timber and boards. Its thatch of leaves and branches should not altogether hold off the rain and the wind, and the stars should shine through it.

"This," so rules the book succinctly, "is to remind you of the time when you lived in the wilderness and in huts."

But it no longer reminded the Jews of anything. The festive significance of the seven days was only a dim memory even to those who bent over rabbinical scriptures. Too much time had gone by since they shepherded their flock as a wandering tribe, searching for new pastures or unclaimed and fertile lands whereon to settle and seed. Pasture and farmland, flock, seed and harvest—there was no other race on the surface of this globe so cut off from its initial patrimony, as this last one left over from the days of early antiquity.

But wherever a plot of ground could be found in back of the house, if only a dark, walled-in courtyard, they would build up something hut-like, push in benches and

table and sit and eat in the rickety shelter. Their children would run around in the filth of their narrow alleys and wave colored jubilee flags with Hebrew signs on them and the picture of Moses. Dutifully, the older ones proceeded to the temple to celebrate and rejoice. But what the rejoicing of their wandering forefathers had been about, that they no longer knew.

Gloriously the first of the seven mornings rose over the Dniester valley. As soon as Recha was dressed, the three stepped out into the garden to take their breakfast in the hut. The day before, the men had set it down below, near the river—a goodly hut it was, high, with walls as solid as the law would permit and covered by an airy green roof with bright autumn flowers woven through it. They stood and admired it. Then the old woman took Recha and the child by the hand and all three walked down over the dewy grass.

The broad door opened toward the river. Inside, the table was temptingly set. Next to Chana's place was her Hebraic book, bound in blue velvet and locked with gilded clasps. Recha had left her sickbed only that morning, so this breakfast was their first meal together. Before Chana broke the bread, she blessed it.

"Praised art thou, O Lord and God of my fathers, who commandeth us to live in huts."

"What does that mean?" asked Elisabeth.

Chana translated it for her. The child folded both her hands around her cup, blew at the hot milk, and with a slight squint, looked up at Chana.

"Why did the Lord command it, to live in huts?"

"That's the way it is. One doesn't have to know everything."

The child put down her cup and licked off the milk that had left a ring around her mouth.

"But if the Lord commanded it, He must know why."

"The Lord knows everything," said Recha. "Better take your napkin and don't lick yourself like a pussycat."

They sat and ate.

"How very pretty Heinrich's men made it!"

Recha looked around in the neatly joined place and her eyes roamed over the river to the town beyond. Above it, the last transparent morning mists dispersed before the sun.

"By the way, Recha, he was here yesterday. Only he didn't want to disturb you."

"Heinrich?"

"I knew it, Mother. Uncle Heinrich himself helped to build it."

"And you didn't tell me?"

"But, Mother, if someone tells you it's a secret!"

"Yes, you're right. Look, Bessie," Recha said slowly, "I want to ask you something."

Elisabeth's eyes turned eagerly to her mother; she put her piece of bread and honey on the tablecloth. Recha picked it up and laid it on the plate.

"Do you sometimes wish that Uncle Heinrich were your father?"

"Uncle Heinrich—not really."

"But you do like him."

"I like him all right. Only, I couldn't be afraid of him."

"Afraid! Do you have to be afraid of a father?"

"Not really afraid, Mother. But I've got to be able to pretend."

"That sounds like a lot of nonsense to me," said Chana. "Better run up and get me my woollen shawl. It's still coolish."

Elisabeth ran.

"Recha—he's coming this afternoon."

"I thought as much."

"I won't talk you into it. You're free to make your own decision."

"As free as anyone in our plight can be."

"That almost sounds as if you didn't like him."

Slowly Recha shook her head.

"He's as good as gold, a kind and honest man. There could never be any question of not liking him."

"Well, that's more than most brides can say of their future husbands."

"I shouldn't wonder." Recha smiled faintly at this sad truth.

"It would definitely be a piece of good luck for him. Between you and me, I think he's making a lot of mistakes in his business. It's a good thing that he's getting a sensible wife."

"I don't think I am such a sensible wife."

"But you have a sensible aunt," said Chana with her burry, low laughter that sounded quite content.

Elisabeth skipped in with the shawl. Chana laid it on the bench.

"Aren't you cold any more, Aunt Chana?"

"Now I'm no longer cold. Have you finished breakfast?"

Elisabeth nodded her head.

The old woman unfastened the gilded clasps of her book, opened it at the marked page and read the prayer.

"Lord my God and God of my fathers! We have followed your command and have sat in this hut. Grant, therefore, that in the year to come we will not be found wanting and may sit in the hut of the Leviathan."

"Auntie, what does it mean?"

A little annoyed, Chana wrinkled her forehead. But Recha took the velvet book and translated the Hebrew letters to the child.

"Who is the Leviathan, Mother?"

"The Leviathan—honestly, I don't know."

But in Chana's aged head memories of her childhood rose, of a Jewish town to the north, and of her father, long since dead, who on a Sabbath day would tell fables and homily tales from the Haggada. Then there was talk of the Leviathan, that bloodthirsty monster, slain by the righteous ones who spread out a tent for themselves from his inch-thick hide.

"The Leviathan, Bessie, is a demon—it means bad people."

"Bad people," repeated the girl with a pensive look. "Mother, why don't I understand Hebrew?"

"Hebrew isn't so easy."

"All the Jewish children know Hebrew."

"In the spring, when you go to school, you will learn it."

"Oh, good," said Elisabeth.

The two women sat thoughtfully, looking at the child's honey-colored hair and the light, gay eyes with their blueish-golden sparkle that were like Pattay's eyes.

7

The talk with Heinrich out on the sloping lawn lasted for more than two hours. It almost ended in an engagement. But that last, unmistakable word was not said. Recha stood before a wide-open gate and she knew she would have to go through it. But an impassable, magnetic bolt barred the threshold. Not that she disliked Heinrich as he sat there, his round, black eyes gazing at her with such gentle entreaty while he spoke. Nor did she feel a hindering strangeness. Quite the contrary, a feeling of being too closely related, as if her younger brother were about to take her into his arms and kiss her as his bride. Of course, all that was nothing but nerves, imagination—morbid rubbish. There was no road back, there never could be.

"I'll walk a little way with you, Heinrich," she said and stepped out into the road with him. The sun had already set, the air was pleasantly cool.

The moment had come. Before she would stop, before he would climb back into his carriage, which was slowly driving ahead, everything would have to be decided. Hesitantly, she went on. She gave herself grace. If they passed the Zweifuss yard and it was absolutely empty—then she would speak. But when they came close, the Zweifuss children looked sullenly through the gate bars. If she could count twenty before the horses reached those birch trees over there—she would say the word. But she did not get up to twenty in time. The road now dipped down and the bridge-head hove in sight. There was no further escape. Before they reached the bridge it would have to be said. She turned her eyes to Heinrich walking there beside her. He was barely

taller than she, a slip of a man. A feeling of pity shot through her like a pain, pity not only for herself but for him too. They reached the bridge. They could hear the dull thud of the horse's hoofs on the wooden planks.

A man was coming across it and met them at the bridgehead. The man stepped over to the side, stood as if at attention, took off his cap and bowed respectfully. Somewhat embarrassed, Recha acknowledged his greeting.

He looked like a Ukrainian peasant, broad-shouldered, friendly. Yet he was not wearing a peasant's tunic, but a faded gray-green coat which might once have been a uniform. On his back he carried a small canvas knapsack.

"I take the liberty to pay my respects to M'Lady," said the peasant in a halting German with a strong Slavic accent.

"But who are you?" asked Recha and knew the answer the moment she had put the question. "Why, of course, you are Piotr."

The man bowed again. He turned and carefully laid his shapeless cap on the railing behind him. Then he dug into his breast and pulled out a blue, knotted kerchief. One corner of it he gripped with his teeth and with his one hand untied the bundle. Only now did Recha see that his left sleeve was empty.

On the palm of his hand, Piotr now offered her the contents of his kerchief. It was an antique locket of hammered gold and a small leather watch.

"This I bring from the Count," Piotr said.

Recha took the locket and gazed at it. The finely engraved pattern on its cover twisted, became distorted through her veil of tears. She brushed them away with the back of her hand and pressed the spring. It opened up on a tiny snapshot—herself and Pattay, their two heads close together, a small but good likeness and clear, both of them young, smiling, happy. It was taken during that time in the mountains, those weeks of blessed calm.

Piotr stood there and kept holding out the leather watch on the blue kerchief. Recha leaned back against the railing. Time vanished. Those seven years had never been. And now

came this man Piotr who brought these things "from the Count."

"Where have you been all these years?" she at last said.

"I was a prisoner. Then I was at Yakutsk. That is very far away."

"When did you get back to this country?"

"Ten days ago, M'Lady. I came ten days ago."

"Things from Pattay," Recha turned to Heinrich just as if he had not watched the scene and needed an explanation. "Piotr was Pattay's man."

She used none of the average expressions, like Pattay's groom or his orderly or his valet. "Pattay's man," she said and the sound of it seemed to come from far away. "Heinrich, I must talk to him now."

"Yes, I understand," said Mr. Gelbfisch.

He nodded to Recha. It was more of a bow. Then he nodded to Piotr, turned and went off across the empty bridge to his carriage, waiting at the other end. Recha's eyes followed him, followed his slender, small figure in the black frock coat. He walked stiffly, slightly stooping forward. One could see even from the back that he knew this was the end.

8

Twilight was falling. House and garden were wrapped in silence. Chana, who had gone to town with the child, lingered, undoubtedly to allow time for the engagement to be made. The two chairs, where it should have taken place, were still standing together on the lawn. Here Recha and Piotr sat down and Piotr began to talk.

At first it was not easy for Recha to follow his tale. Scraps from the Ukrainian and the Polish mingled confusedly with his military German and with still other, stranger sounds that she could not trace. But the longer he spoke, the clearer that forgotten tongue came back to him.

The very first thing he assured Recha of was that he had taken those mementos with the express permission of his

superiors, at the time when Pattay's body was to be transferred to Vienna. He had planned to deliver them on his first furlough. But that furlough never came. The Lancers were buffeted around in Eastern Europe like cork on an ocean. And one day Piotr no longer was a Lancer but crouched as an infantryman in a trench of that deadlocked front. During a surprise night attack by the Russians in a hand-to-hand fight, he lost his arm and was taken prisoner. Shipped behind the lines, he fell ill and for months lay delirious in typhus barracks somewhere along the Siberian border. Without aid and care and always dragged eastward, he finally found himself, an almost unguarded cripple, in an unbelievable region between the Aldan and Lena rivers where nothing grew, where people gutted the chalky soil for gold and spoke something like Turkish.

No mail ever reached that far, and only a late, weak echo of the collapse. The old Austria had long ago ceased to exist, and the Czar's regime had ended even before that, when Piotr was again moved on, together with six others, but this time toward home. Foot marches through icy forests, weeks spent in sleighs, on carts, and at last in the freight car of a train. In a city called Omsk they were unloaded, for a stay of three months. The seven camped in a deserted brewery with hardly any food but plenty of cigarettes, and Piotr would sit puffing by the broken window and look out on the broad, field-like highway with its caravans of camels and Mongolian ponies. Then, one night, the home voyagers were roused and driven to the railway station. Instead of the expected freight and cattle train, a swift express picked them up, with soft beds and invitingly laid out dinner tables. And after a puzzling, luxurious trip Piotr landed at the border of the Polish Republic, of whose existence he had been completely ignorant and whose enfranchized citizen he had been for a number of years.

His own homestead he did not find. The war had razed the village to the ground. Green nature had covered the small wreckage of wood and stone. Only the wall of the cemetery stood upright and the firehouse with a rusting hose

inside. He walked to the county town. There, petty district officials made the shy cripple wait around for days on end. No one could tell him anything about his father, his brothers and sisters.

He was absolutely alone in the world. For the past seven years his master had been lying in that far-off grave, and the only thing now left for him was to deliver to his widow the locket and watch. Piotr had carried them next to his body through all those icy wanderings and wretched sleeping holes, but, as if by a miracle, they were never stolen from him. The white villa on the river was his last and only goal and his simple head knew no other thought but that this was the place where he belonged. His only worry was that Her Ladyship might think him useless, because of his one arm.

Recha listened to his laborious report and his blind hopes with a heavy heart. She should have interrupted him, should have shattered his illusions, made it clear to him that she was poor herself, was barely suffered in this house and that here was neither roof nor work for him. She could not bring herself to say it. There he sat in the falling darkness, utterly confident—a wrecked piece of humanity, swept toward her over incredibly tortuous ways with a last message from Pattay.

The windows were lighting up in the house. Chana's massive frame appeared in the garden door.

"Are you still sitting together out there?" came her deep voice. "It's getting cold."

Recha got up. Piotr followed her and both stepped into the light.

"Piotr has come," said Recha. "You remember him. He has brought me things from Franz."

"Now?" asked Chana and with one glance took in the maimed figure.

"He has been a prisoner in Asia. Aren't you hungry, Piotr? Come into the house."

"I thank you, M'Lady," said Piotr. "I have already had something today."

In the middle of the living room stood little Elisabeth,

who looked with wide open and excited eyes at the stranger. Her face was flushed.

"Bessie must have caught a cold," said the older woman. "She must get to bed right off."

Recha put her hand on Elisabeth's forehead. "Yes, she has a temperature. Piotr—this is our child. She's that big."

Piotr bowed his head. "I have the honor to wish you a good evening, Countess."

"What does he call me, Mother?"

"Her name is Elisabeth, Piotr. This man knew your father, Bessie. Shake hands with him."

Elisabeth stretched out her hand. Then she saw that the strange man had only one. Tears shot up into her eyes. She took this one hand and covered it with kisses.

"What are you doing, Bessie? You see, Piotr, she really is sick."

Deeply disturbed, Piotr stood there as stiff as if he were in drill on the practice field. He hardly dared to breathe, he felt so ashamed.

"Mother, is Piotr staying with us now?"

"I don't know about that."

"We have the hut now. That'll be a good place for him."

Chana stepped behind the child and took her by the shoulders. "Come, get to bed."

"But he's got to stay. I want him to," cried Elisabeth and stamped her feet. "Mother—promise."

"All right then. Tonight he'll stay with us."

Elisabeth tore herself away from Chana and wildly flung her arms around her mother. After that she quietly went to her bedroom.

Chana turned to the door.

"And Heinrich?" she only asked.

Recha shook her head.

9

Elisabeth had not caught just a cold. Chana woke up in the night, aroused by her loud moans. The child tossed about

between chills and fever and vomited. And the following forenoon it hardly needed the skilled eye of a physician to diagnose the nature of the illness. The rash on neck and throat clearly indicated scarlet fever.

Old Doctor Adler, who was on the verge of retiring from practice, came to her bedside and brought with him his colleague, who was gradually taken over. He was Doctor Casimir Silbermann, a high honor graduate, and probably much more up-to-date than the seventy-year-old family doctor, but without the other's quieting personality, in itself a remedy. Reprovingly he shook his lean head with the pitch black goatee when Recha declared herself bewildered by this infection. The child had not come into contact with other children for easily five or six weeks. That would have no bearing at all, Silbermann informed her. Contact was not always needed, an infected piece of clothing or furniture would serve. Milk, too, could carry the contagion, for the germ has been known to be found in cows. While he was talking, one could almost see the evil eruption spreading over the arms and chest of the little patient. Only half conscious, she lay there with breath gurgling in her thickly swollen throat, and, whimpering softly, pressed her hand to her ear.

Doctor Silbermann nodded. "You see how the inflammation expands, through the Eustachian tube from the throat to the middle ear." He spoke as if he had prophesied it all and nobody had cared to listen to him.

"The ears too?" questioned Chana. "What can be done about it, Doctor Adler?"

"Spray them every four hours. My colleague here will write out the solution for you."

He left all the necessary measures up to his colleague. They both knew that, in cases like these, nature takes its course and that the Dean of the Medical Faculty in Warsaw would be just as powerless here as a quack. With cool composure, Silbermann gave his instructions: warm baths with soda, lukewarm packs, rubs with a long-named liquid which was nothing but carbolated oil, and light food, very

light—as if it had been the intention of the women to stuff the feverish child with pâté de foie gras.

The strict man of science would have found little to criticize in the manner with which the two women carried out his instructions. Neither of them ever left the house. Two or three times daily Piotr trotted across the bridge to the pharmacy.

Because of Elisabeth's illness, his stay there never even became a problem. Now it was sheer luck to have him around. Piotr never saw the little patient. But oddly enough, in the midst of fever and pain she did not forget the strange man. A sudden shower came down. She woke from her shallow sleep and called out to cover the hut quickly so Piotr would not get wet. And when on the third, the critical day, her temperature reached life's boundary line, her flagging little soul hovered constantly around Piotr's missing hand. She plied mother and aunt with questions about this hand, which the Leviathan had bitten off, whether there was some way of making it grow again, albeit a little smaller.

"But he's got to have two hands! Couldn't you do it, Aunt Chana?" she cried and wept bitterly.

That night the fever broke and when Recha gave the child her oil rub, she saw that the burning rash was paling.

But a slow recovery was ahead and at first those throat and ear pains became worse than they had been in the days of that feverish haze.

"How is it today?"

"Just awful, Mother. It stings and burns like mad. But I believe I won't have to die any more."

"What are you talking about? Since when do children die?"

"Children die lots of times," said Elisabeth. "In my opinion, children die much more than old people. I must ask Uncle Adler about that."

She closed her eyes and smiled knowingly, which made her swollen lids throb with pain.

Recha's heart trembled with infinite love. She did not have to be the mother to find this child adorable in her illness. With a serenity that was ironic, almost amused, Elisabeth seemed to view her suffering like a spectator. That serenity came from far off—from out there somewhere. A kind of bewildered respect seeped into the worry and tenderness of the two women.

With the recovery of her health, Elisabeth's stubbornness came back with redoubled vigor. Indignantly she protested when she was deprived of the sips of champagne and the little lumps of ice which had been given her during those first critical days.

"But Bessie darling, your throat doesn't hurt you any longer. You can swallow your food and your drinks very nicely now."

"But that was the only thing, Mother, that was fun."

"You don't say! And for that Piotr must run to town every day."

"Must he? Oh, of course. I want to thank him anyway."

"Piotr can't come into the room," said Chana. "As long as your skin is peeling, it's not safe. You wouldn't want him to carry your scarlet fever into town, would you?"

So she asked to see Piotr from the distance, at least. His peasant face, with the kindly eyes and the sandy hair, appeared outside her window with a worshiping smile.

"Thank you, Piotr," she called out to him with an effort. Piotr awkwardly waved his hand and disappeared.

"I like Piotr," she declared with spoiled wilfulness.

It was unavoidable that in those weeks the one-armed peasant came to know the true situation of the little family. Missions of a very confidential nature had to be entrusted to him.

The nightmare about the rent falling due had been completely submerged in the worry about the child. The date had simply been forgotten. But a few days later, a reminder came from the sugar works, together with the notice to move.

Recha immediately answered it. She explained about everything and asked if they would please be kind enough to wait a little longer.

They had Piotr wait a whole hour outside the closed gate of the factory and then handed him a chill, curt note giving six weeks' time. On November 15, at twelve noon, the villa was to be turned over after payment of all back rent and thorough disinfection.

"You might just as well know how things are around here," said Chana to Piotr who had remained standing in the doorway. "We are poor. That my niece is still being allowed to stay on, is just a favor."

With his customary bow, Piotr said, "The Countess will find quarters with better people."

"Stop calling me Countess," cried Recha nervously, near weeping. "A nice countess, who can't even pay you your wages."

"That makes no difference. It was just bad fortune that the Count was killed."

"You will have to look for another place."

"As the Countess says. But no one will take a man with one arm."

And that is how it remained. Piotr continued to be their only contact with the outer world. It was he who went to the pawnbroker with the valuables Recha still possessed: table silver, the rest of her jewels, a seal skin coat from her stage days. He returned, highly indignant at the stinginess of the pawnbroker. The sum gained was really depressingly small, barely enough to defray the doctor's expenses.

The day arrived when little Elisabeth left her bed for the first time and tried to walk a few steps. She was in a painfully weakened condition. Fall had brought beastly weather to the Dniester valley. Icy blasts from the east alternated with torrents of rain. For weeks on end the sky remained hidden. In the opinion of the physician, the child urgently needed to be taken into pure mountain air to stave off dreaded after-effects. Up in the Tatra Mountains, in beautiful Zakopane, snow already covered the ground and the sun shone.

But Doctor Silbermann said Pontresina or St. Moritz in Switzerland would be better. And he looked up with a scowl at Chana's unexpected rumbling laugh, which escaped her at the mention of these expensive places. Her thoughts were on the unpaid bills of the apothecary and the grocer and no chance in sight to ever square them.

The time had come. Recha was forced to take that one step which, to her, was the most mortifying of all.

Nothing had been heard from Heinrich Gelbfisch since that afternoon when she had parted from him at the bridgehead. He had understood; her silent refusal had been final to him, as intended. He must have been aware of Elisabeth's illness, and that in all these weeks not a word from him had found its way to the villa showed how deeply he must be hurt. To appeal to his generosity under those conditions—it was an almost impassable way out. But she wrote, she asked him for help.

After a surprisingly short time Piotr returned. He carried Recha's letter in his hand, unopened.

"M'Lady, Mr. Gelbfisch is not in town. Mr. Gelbfisch is going around the whole world."

She knew instantly what this meant. For years Heinrich had planned this voyage, had dreamt of it for his honeymoon, had spoken of it that time he had hoped to win Recha. It was one of those chartered trips, arranged by the big steamship companies—along the beautiful Mediterranean shores into the wondrous continent of Asia and back over the big harbor towns of the New World. Now he was realizing that dream, hoping to forget. Months would pass before his return. The man in charge of the store—Piotr mentioned his name—was wholly unknown to the women.

By now little Elisabeth was up for most of the day. Warily, but quite happy again, she moved about in those familiar rooms. She had lost much weight during her sickness, and looked touchingly frail.

November came and a delay was no longer possible. On a dark afternoon, when gusts of wind howled across the river, the two women set out to look for new quarters. In

the end, they found two rooms on the fringe of the town, with a view into the open. Across a barren track of land without tree or bush, they looked out on the long, low building, the barracks. As the apartment house was new, perhaps too new to be healthy, the small flat offered a certain amount of modern comfort. And it was cheap. But that did not change the fact that Recha would have to look for work, without delay and without being too squeamish.

In silence they walked back through the early nightfall. They thought about the child they both loved.

"It's a curse to be old and useless," said Chana as they were passing the bridge. The storm tore at them so violently that they had to brace themselves against the railing. Recha thought now that Chana really was old, sixty-five in the month to come, and it was like a new, menacing discovery.

At home, they found Elisabeth already in bed. Piotr sat beside her. A scrupulously cleaned plate stood on the night table.

"He made me a rice mush, Mother. Thick with sugar and cinnamon. Piotr is a grand cook."

She was in a radiant mood, as always, when she had a chance to chat with him.

Recha turned off the light. In the next room, the table had been set. Supper was scanty but Piotr served it in style. He wore a white glove; heaven only knew where it came from.

"A slice of Roquefort cheese is also in the house," he said ceremoniously. "Would M'Lady have some for dessert?"

Just then they heard a carriage drive up, and the doorbell rang. The women looked at each other. Their situation was such that anything unforeseen must, of necessity, be a misfortune. Piotr went to open the door. Solicitor Krasna appeared.

The visitor touched the *mezuzah* with God's Commandments and then removed his hat. It was that same old-fashioned Jewish hat, flat, broad-brimmed, of brown velours and trimmed with fur, which he had so defiantly refused to take off at the Archduke Rainer.

White-bearded and bald, Krasna stood in the doorway and bowed. He carried a small leather briefcase under his arm.

10

Piotr had cleared the table. They sat down. The lawyer laid his briefcase in front of him.

"I had really intended to ask you to come to my office," he said, and as he addressed no one in particular, it was not quite clear whether he meant both of them or only Recha. "But your telephone appears to be out of order."

"We no longer have a telephone," said Chana. "We couldn't pay for it any more."

"Indeed, yes. Well, I have come about a legacy."

Recha smiled. The news sounded too improbable at this moment, almost comical. It did not form a connection with anything.

"A legacy," Chana repeated, and immediately shadowy faces passed through her mind, a phantom row of Jewish faces from the town of her youth up north—Uncle Horowitz, Cousin Freidla. But they had been poor people and, moreover, had died long ago. Suddenly Chana had an inspiration.

"Gruenbaums!" she cried out. "Gruenbaums in Berlin. Which one of them has died?"

Krasna lightly shook his head, leaned back and got ready to explain.

"Mother!"

It was the voice of little Elisabeth. Recha excused herself and went through the door that remained half open.

"Mother, please turn on the light!"

"What is it you want?"

"Another kiss!"

Recha bent down to the child and pulled the coverlet higher on her shoulders.

"Aunt Chana must come too!"

"You will have to go to sleep now. We have a visitor."

"Only one minute! I sleep much better if I can see you two again. Aunt Chana!"

Chana rose heavily and stepped into the doorway.

"Now you can see me. Do you feel better?"

"The child has been sick," Recha explained when all three were sitting down again. "So she is terribly spoiled just now."

"She was pretty well spoiled before that," remarked Chana. It did not sound very disapproving.

"It's about your child that I'm here," said the lawyer.

"About Bessie?"

"Yes indeed." He turned straight to Recha but still without directly addressing her.

"On your wedding day, your husband came to my office to arrange certain matters before going to war. Since he himself did not command any personal property, he asked me to set up a bequest in your favor. In case of his death, this bequest was to be forwarded to a relative of his who held the family fortune. A short time ago this relative, a Princess Sofie Weikersthal, died in Vienna. And in her will she has yielded to this bequest in so far as to have left something, not to you, but to a possible offspring from this marriage."

"A possible——" Recha repeated. She found it difficult to follow his explanations.

"Why yes. The bequest contained nothing regarding this. For Count Pattay expired several months before the birth of his daughter."

"Bessie inherits?" Chana said and broke into low laughter. "That sounds very good. But is it good?"

"How do you mean?"

"As far as I know, Austrian money is worth even less than our Polish money. For ten thousand crowns one can barely buy two eggs."

Doctor Krasna smiled. "For two eggs I would hardly have driven out here in weather like this."

He drew a document from his briefcase and assumed an official mien.

"This document here came to me from Privy Councillor Cajetan Dandl, trustee and new executor of the Princess' last will. Councillor Dandl is also curator of the Jesuit Society at Vienna which, I assume, is to be looked upon as the main heir of that considerable fortune. The Jesuit Fathers are canny administrators and it is not likely that alterations on the map would confuse them. No, this bequest has nothing to do with devaluated Austrian money. It consist of reliable gilt-edge English and Canadian securities. The legacy for your daughter Elisabeth amounts to ten thousand pounds sterling."

Recha was not very certain what ten thousand pounds sterling represented. She only knew that, in the moment of direst need, the hand of her dead love stretched from out of the grave to protect his child.

"In addition," she heard Krasna say, "provision has been made to clear a loan plus accumulated interest, which had been given to Count Pattay by the sugar manufacturer, Daniel Zweifuss."

Never again would Piotr have to wait outside the factory gate with a suppliant note. They would not be driven from this house, from this garden. Bessie would not have to live in that dreadful place with the view of the barracks. Now she would grow up, unhampered and free and healthy—from a happy child to a happy woman.

"My God," she whispered.

Chana said with a deep voice, "Those things don't work that way. I'm sure we haven't heard all of it. That one human being leaves money to another and simply says: 'take it and enjoy it'—that doesn't happen in this world! Probably one would have to go to court for it, the money is tied up somewhere."

"Nothing of the sort," answered Krasna. "The money is deposited in Vienna with the Anglo-Austrian Bank, to be drawn without notice. No, it's all as it should be."

"Bessie is going to be a rich lady," Chana mumbled. She appeared convinced. Her angular face was pale and intent.

"To be sure, there is one condition," said Krasna, his

eyes avoiding the women. "But that I had better read to you." He brought the letter from his pious colleague close to his old eyes.

"The requirement for entering upon this inheritance is that the offspring of Count Franz Pattay, if such an offspring exists, belongs to the Roman-Catholic Church for which clerical proof is to be submitted. Should the offspring have, hitherto, not been brought up in the religion of its father, it would have to be baptized within three months from this date and the consummation of this sacred act to be announced here. Such a notarized intelligence would have to be handed to the undersigned by March 15 of the coming year. Otherwise, the legacy in question will go to religious institutes stated by the testatrix."

"Once more, please," said Chana, and obligingly Doctor Krasna slowly read the paragraph a second time. Then he carefully put the letter back on top of the others, always avoiding the eyes of the two women. A complete and protracted silence set in.

Recha had known it all along. Such miracles do not happen. Never would Chana permit that necessary step, never even give consideration to the fact that the alien and rejected faith of the father might here have a spiritual right. That perhaps the decision might rest with her, the mother of the child—the thought did not even occur to Recha. Chana was the head of the family, always had been. Chana who had never looked upon those "others" as true humans. Chana, who in that German city had despairingly waited in her room while she, Recha, had gone out alone among that multitude of Christians. Chana who came home from the theater sick, because for a few hours she had been forced to endure the crowded presence of those "others." Chana rekindled and her own self once more, when she saw Jewish people in Jewish garb in the streets of Warsaw. Chana in the temple, in her Sabbath gown and silk kerchief. Chana, as she opened the gilded clasps of her book and, in her deep-toned voice, read the prayer in the sacred language of her people. And another voice came to Recha's ear: "Not all Christians are

devils, Chana!" That was the chiding voice of her father whom Christians had killed all the same.

It was all over. For a single moment the darkness of misery had been rent and a light had streamed down onto her child. Now everything seemed gloomier, darker than ever before.

"Well, Doctor Krasna," Recha finally said, "there isn't much to think over."

"No," came Chana's firm voice. "God's ways are not known to us. But that he created our child to have a happy, unburdened life, that I believe."

"What are you saying?" Recha's lips were white.

"The responsibility is ours, Recha. If God wants to punish, he punishes us, not the child."

She sat there, like a wooden statue. But she wept. Never had Recha seen her weep, not even that time when the father and brother had been murdered. The tears fell, one by one, like heavy beads from Chana's wide-open eyes.

A week later, Recha and the child went up into the Tatra, where the healing sun shone down on the early snow. And two months after that, in the Salvator Church near the Turkish Gate, little Elisabeth was received in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, into the community of the Church.

11

Just as her mother had promised that day in the hut, Elisabeth entered a school the following spring. But Hebrew was not taught there.

There had been no choice. The Jewish school, for obvious reasons, could no longer be taken into account. Neither could the Ukrainian school where the patois of the region was used. It was neglected and miserably endowed. So the only one left was the Polish school, well cared for by the authorities.

Twenty-two small girls sat together in the first class. All of them were somewhat younger than Bessie and the ma-

jority were daughters of government functionaries, army officers, and lawyers, whom the reorganization of the state had brought to this town. The daughters of the Vaivode and the police chief were also among them. Nearly half of the children had names of rank and so did the lady who taught all the subjects, with the exception of religion. She was Miss Skarga, daughter of a distinguished army officer who had been killed in the war, and she had been offered this position of schoolmistress as a form of settlement. She discharged her duties with ladylike aloofness. Physically she was delicate, and the atmosphere of a shut-in classroom affected her nervous system. So even in the cold winter months she insisted on having one window open, which resulted in occasional controversies with the worried parents of her pupils.

On the last bench, in a kind of exclusion, sat five little girls. It was doubtful whether they would be able to keep pace with the others. For in the homes of these five, not Polish but German or Yiddish had been the daily speech. Among them was Elisabeth.

In those few years of her life she had hardly ever heard a Polish word. So Recha decided to coach her a little. But every successive day, Elisabeth would come back from school, less and less troubled.

"I understand pretty well what they say," she announced after only a few weeks. And it was so. The new language came to her without effort. She needed no memorizing, no practicing. She seemed to manage without any conscious effort, sound and sense being absorbed by her the way the skin absorbs sun and air. There were times when she would suddenly interrupt herself in play or at the table, and reel off long Polish sentences with perfect pronunciation, manifestly enjoying herself, as if rhythm and cadence were good to her sensuous little ear.

Not that this facility to learn applied to all her subjects. What did not suit her passed through her mind as if it were a sieve. Disheartened, she struggled with her arithmetic and called to her mother and aunt to help her out.

"I simply can't learn that, Mother," she cried, and looked up at Recha with an expression very much like Pattay's when he sat, head in hand, poring over his *History of the Austrian Cavalry,* which had almost wrecked his love for that distinguished branch of the army. "Fifteen times twelve. How much is fifteen times twelve? I haven't the faintest notion. And if I had, what is there so wonderful about it?"

"Now Bessie, let's say you go to a store and buy twelve pounds of sugar at fifteen groschen each. You must know how much you should pay for it."

"But the girl who sells the sugar knows that."

"She also had to learn it when she was little. And if she could do it, you can."

"But that's just it. I can't. You know, Mother, there's really nothing to it."

"To what?"

"To figures like that. There's nothing in them. I just can't learn them."

"Oh, nonsense! Look how quickly you learned Polish. A thousand Polish words and many more."

"Yes, words, Mother! Words are lovely. One can't get enough of them. There are some Polish words that are so soft, it makes you want to cry."

Recha smoothed back a honey-colored strand of hair from the child's face.

"With all that, you're not going to tell me that a clever girl like you can't learn her tables."

"Perhaps I'm not really clever," said Bessie with a pensive face.

It was fortunate that Miss Skarga did not mind all other defects so long as a pupil showed progress in the national language. She had definitely not been partial to Elisabeth at first. It was known to her that the blood of the expelled foreign overlords had here been mixed with that of the disliked Jews. But that prejudice of the patriotic spinster faded away more and more, the greater number of times Elisabeth rose from the bench and answered question in ever better and purer Polish with her attractive and sensitive mouth.

"Beginning tomorrow, you will sit in the second bench. Daczynska and Bortnowska will move closer together."

Miss Skarga announced it impressively as if she were decorating Elisabeth with the Order of the White Eagle.

But after the class, when the children left the schoolroom, Bessie remained behind and edged over to the teacher's desk.

"What do you want, Elzunia?" asked the teacher.

Usually the children were called by their family names. Elisabeth, at the beginning of the term, had given her mother's name as her own and some involved reserve kept the teacher from correcting it. So she made an exception and called her Elisabeth. And lately, with her sympathy rising, she had gone over to the tender Polish diminutive.

"Elzunia, do you want something?" she asked again and looked up from her record-book in which she was making entries.

Bessie stood in front of her, with feet crossed in that characteristic manner of hers, rubbing her shoes together. The habit had, for some time now, lost much of its hold on her, but, being embarrassed, she fell back on it.

"Miss Skarga—if I may—I would rather stay back there."

"But why? You don't need any more extra help."

"Couldn't you, perhaps, make it possible?"

"But you speak Polish like a Pole—almost," she weakly concluded.

"It isn't that." Elisabeth squinted her eyes, she was in such a quandary. "The four others will feel hurt."

The aristocratic spinster fixed her glance on Elisabeth's face as if she wanted to study some particular detail. Her thin lips remained open.

"All right then, stay back there," she said, and with a dismissing gesture returned to her administrative task. Bessie left.

The four Jewish children had actually given Elisabeth little cause for this feeling of solidarity. From conversations at home, all four of them had learned that there was something awfully wrong with this schoolmate and that no kind

of intimacy was desirable. Right from the start they were as cold to her as if she were an enemy.

Elisabeth, of course, knew or at least suspected what was wrong. She would have to cope with it herself. To speak to either her mother or her aunt would never do. Since that ceremony at the Salvator Church there were certain barriers between them that could never be trespassed.

At that time, with a heavy heart, Recha had girded herself for all the questions that Bessie now would bring up. But those questions never came. Her affectionate outbursts, which were more frequent and more intense than before, seemed to pour forth like a feeling of guilt. Just what exactly went on inside her, no one could tell.

"She already keeps things to herself, like you," Recha said to the old woman. "It's almost uncanny."

Chana did not answer.

Among the four on that Ghetto bench sat Justine Zweifuss, Daniel's grandchild. She was a puffed-up, unhealthy-looking girl with two stiff black braids and round, dark, empty eyes. It would have been the most natural thing for Bessie to walk with her the long way to school. But that was out of the question.

Outwardly, everything had long ago been straightened out. Not only had the claims of the Zweifuss heirs been redeemed. Recha had also bought the white house and garden from them on terms which Krasna, in his advisory capacity, thought unduly high. But for inferior people nothing is harder to forgive than the injustice and inclemency they have themselves inflicted on others. They were glad that Elisabeth's conversion gave them cause and excuse to harbor new grudges. Though this act of apostasy had quite some bearing on the fact that some of the chimneys were now smoking again.

But Elisabeth had better company than the vacant-eyed daughter of Julius Zweifuss. For punctually every morning, Piotr stood waiting for her, and later again, on the dot, outside the schoolgate.

Right at the beginning a difference had arisen between him and Bessie when he, quite as a matter of course, wanted to carry her school knapsack for her. She protested.

"I simply won't have it, Piotr. I don't like all the children to see that you're carrying something for me."

It ended in a compromise. Beyond the bridge, as soon as they reached the town, Piotr fastened the small leather straps across Elisabeth's shoulders. But compromise seldom avails. Justine Zweifuss, whom they unavoidably met time and again, busily spread the news of Piotr's drudgery. Yet, since the two had decided on this arrangement, they went on exchanging the light burden at the bridgehead beyond.

Bessie relished those walks with Piotr. He had seen such outlandish things in war and imprisonment. He was like an inexhaustible book of fairy tales that one could thumb through at random.

"Where did we stop?" was the early morning query. "Oh, I know—at the river."

"At what river, Miss Bessie?" said Piotr who knew only too well what she meant. "That I can not seem to remember."

"Oh go on, Piotr, you only want to tease me. At that wide river where there was no bridge and no boat and no village anywhere near and nothing at all. And for two days and one night all of you sat there at the river's edge and no one knew what to do. And then, one of you pulled off his boots, because his feet hurt him, and he waded in. And all that water came up only to his ankle and the whole river was a great big fraud."

"Yes," said Piotr, "we did not try it at all. The ordinary man is so stupid."

"I wouldn't have tried it, either," declared Elisabeth. "Now go on. Over across the river, you said, there was a beautiful green land, a meadow from heaven. But when you came there, it was a swamp."

Piotr had, at first, told his tales in the garbled German which he had once used in his first labored report to Recha. But that soon changed. For whenever strains of his own

genuine Ukrainian would crop up, Elisabeth would prick her ears, fascinated.

"Once more, Piotr, how does it go? 'The ponies were no larger than dogs.' That is almost like Polish. Say it again—slowly!"

Soon, they talked fluently with each other in Piotr's idiom, the way he had learned it from his mother and brothers in that vanished village of his.

"You really are a grand teacher, Piotr. It's like going to two schools."

"The young lady is like her father, the Count. Right away he understood every language. I remember, like now, that first day when I had to unpack his fine shirts. He right away made a joke in Ukrainian."

That was not true. But in Piotr's mouth it was not an intentional lie. For him, Pattay had not been a human being that had flaws and merits like others. He was the never to be repeated image of the absolute, early discovered by Piotr, the way a devout believer, once in a life, beholds a vision which will sustain him forever. Pattay had been perfection itself, perfect beauty, perfect kindness, perfect wisdom, perfect courage.

"Had he only taken me with him that time"—and "that time" meant the August afternoon on which his master had not returned from his reconnaisance—"I wouldn't have stayed back with those Lancers in the village." Piotr forgot that an order would have been an order to him just as for the others. "I would have watched and the Russians would never have come upon him from the rear."

For Piotr there was no doubt that his master had been surrounded by a superior force, and that a cowardly Cossack had killed him from behind.

"He lay there so beautiful, as they carried him. Beautiful like God's best angel. That was a master for you—there'll never be another like him."

Elisabeth pressed Piotr's hand in which her tiny one was swallowed up. They usually walked that way. Piotr's only

hand was a big, strong-fingered peasant hand. It had become broader and stronger, since it did all the work by itself.

One day, in hot midsummer, Elisabeth noticed that he wore a cotton glove. She questioned him about it.

"It's more proper that way."

"Proper, how proper?"

"The common man perspires on the hands," answered Piotr, "so it is better this way."

Bessie stopped. "Give me your hand."

Obediently he held it out to her and she drew the glove from his fingers.

"You must never say anything like that again," she declared.

"But it is true. It cannot be nice. And it is not proper, either," he insisted.

She looked straight into his kind eyes. "I will tell you, Piotr, how it is. If one doesn't like somebody, then one doesn't care to touch his hand—whatever kind of hand it is. And if one likes somebody, then it is all the same whether he perspires or not."

She stuck the glove into his pocket, put her hand into his giant paw and walked on beside him.

12

The priest stopped in front of the villa and put his finger on the bell button. But he dropped his hand again and sighed.

He was a tall slender man with an old face which expressed a schooled meekness and a melancholy wisdom. His forehead under the low-crowned hat was a little clammy from the effort of the walk, and his clumsy, almost squarely cut boots, as well as the hem of his long robe, were white with dust. This spring the weather was prematurely warm and dry.

He made up his mind and rang the bell. For a long time not a sound came from the house. Then he heard slow,

heavy steps moving toward the door—steps from boots similar to his own. It was Chana who opened it. Her head almost touched the top of the door. She made several starts before she spoke.

"You have come about Elisabeth? She is at school."

"I should like to speak to Elisabeth's mother," said the visitor and took off his hat. "My name is Father Korzon."

Chana went ahead in her pounding steps and asked him to wait. The room was bright with the noonday sun.

It was one of the two rooms which had been added to the cottage after they had bought it, a wide-windowed, spacious room with cheerful cretonne furniture. A charming and cozy place.

Between the windows, on a small table covered with green silk stood Pattay's photograph in its silver frame, with the leather watch and the locket.

The priest, left alone, bent down to the picture, and when he straightened up again he sighed, possibly from the slight effort or for more personal reasons.

Then as he stood in the middle of the room holding his hat, his eye was attracted by the *mezuzah* which was fastened beside the door casing. He walked over and looked at it. The women came in—Recha, looking very frail in a high-necked, gray tea-gown with bell-like sleeves, Chana behind her. He turned.

"I see," he said as a greeting, "you observe the custom of reminding every visitor of the Lord's command. A wonderful custom."

He received no answer.

"This is my niece," said Chana, turning to leave the room.

"Wouldn't you care to stay and hear our talk? I know how close you are to the child."

"Please take a seat, Mr. Priest," said Recha.

This awkward address must have sounded strange to his ear. His clumsy dust-covered boots stood out oddly against the shiny floor of checkered wood.

"I am Elisabeth's catechist," said Korzon.

"Catechist?"

It was Chana who asked. It was as if she were touching a foreign and threatening object.

"Her teacher. I instruct her in religion and my visit is in connection with that."

"Is she giving you trouble?" asked Recha. "Is she slow in learning?"

"Not at all. Not in the least. There can be no question about that. On the contrary, she learns with the greatest of ease. And her behavior is of the very best. I have come to be very fond of the child—in these three years."

His voice discreetly underlined these last words.

"Only," he repeated, "it is three years now. It took her no more than one to be completely familiar with our catechism. She knew what it contained in question and answer, the Articles of Faith, the Commandments of our Lord, the Means of Grace——"

Too late he realized that this last expression would not be understood here. He blushed faintly, looked down at his white boots.

"Whoever has made that much his own, has really done his duty by the Church, as far as knowledge is concerned."

"And you say, Mr. Priest?"

He was more at ease now. "Elisabeth loved this book. And one cannot help loving it. Its contents, of course, are the same all over the world. But the version that is used here in this country is a particularly happy one. The Polish bishops, to whom we owe it, were masters of the Word. In the most impressive way they have made use of the most beautiful passages of the Scriptures. So I was sincerely glad to see how deeply it affected Elisabeth—yes, it made me very happy at first."

"At first," repeated Recha, uneasy, "later therefore——"

The priest's forehead was again clammy. He should have been clearer and quicker, he felt he should have headed straight for the point. But he could not find a way back from this round-about method.

"There are certain parts in our book," he continued, "where the prayers which the priest uses at mass are given

in Latin. This, with the aid of the appended translation, is to enable the children to follow the service from beginning to end. But I am most doubtful whether in this respect the prelates, in their editing, pursued the right course. My experience has been that this noble effort is wasted on most of the children. Not so with your Elisabeth. I was amazed with what understanding she instantly grasped the old and holy forms. The strong, candid, fervent cadences of the Latin seemed to make a deep impression on her. And when I added some private coaching—not regularly, fifteen minutes here, half an hour there—the spirit of the language revealed itself to her without an effort."

"Yes," said Recha, "she has a flair for such things."

"Flair and eagerness. To surprise me, she learned long Latin hymns by heart and recited them for me in a manner which moved me. My delight was great indeed. But today, I almost reproach myself."

He paused, hesitated, then made his decision.

"Too late it became clear to me that it was by no means the confession of faith in these words which attracted the child. She felt their magnificent beauty in quite a different way—in a worldly way. And that is not all. I have come to the conclusion that she wanted to keep away from their very core and content, from the creed itself. So that, in the end, with all her knowledge and keen feeling she was further from the goal than the dullest of my children."

"From which goal?" asked Recha.

Father Korzon took a deep breath. Only gradually it had become clear to him what wide and deep waters would have to be bridged.

"These lessons," he said gently, "are not without a definite purpose. They serve to prepare the young minds for the blessings of Our Lord. With the exception of Elisabeth, all my children have, at the end of the first year, entered into the Community of the Church."

"We thought that was achieved by baptism," whispered Recha. In the trying perplexity of this hour, the sickly throb below her eye was more marked than usual.

"Through baptism—certainly. Baptism is the first, the most essential sacrament. By it, the human being is freed from the original sin, becomes a child of God, an aspirant to Heaven. But baptism is a mere gateway; in most instances the child is carried through this portal unknowingly. It is different with communion. The first partaking of the Lord's Supper is a conscious act, the voluntary, joyous, and humble union with the flesh and blood of Our Lord. To lead the young souls to the very threshold of this holiest of days is the task of the catechist. With Elisabeth, I have been unable to fulfill this task."

Suddenly Chana rose from her chair. Her dark figure loomed large in the room, her breath came in gasps. For some time she had been suffering from oppressions which Doctor Silbermann traced to a beginning disorder of the heart.

"We are absolutely ignorant concerning these things," she said aloud, with an effort. "Tell us frankly wherein the child has failed and what you expect of us."

Korzon had also risen and this natural reaction suddenly revealed the man of the world, which he had been before taking the vow. Gaunt and tall, with a slight stoop, he now faced the old woman across the breadth of the sunlit room.

"Elisabeth did not, like the others, go to the Lord's Supper. She has withheld herself from confession and communion. So I finally came to believe that she was being kept back by you."

"By us!" cried Recha.

"I no longer believe it, Madame. Though perhaps, taking certain circumstances into account, my assumption was pardonable."

"No doubt," she murmured, "oh, definitely."

"At first, such difficulties had not entered my mind. At the end of the first year, when the day was nearing, she came to me and asked for postponement. She merely intimated, gave me no real reasons for it. But I sensed that the child was in a spiritual conflict. It seemed wrong to me,

perhaps almost dangerous, to force the issue. But the second year passed and Easter came around again. This time she fell ill. She remained away from the school and did not return until after Whitsuntide, when the time appointed by the Church had expired. You will surely remember——"

Recha cast her eyes down. "Last May, why yes, of course. She looked poorly, had no appetite, also a little fever. The doctor could not find anything wrong with her——"

"Now it is almost time again. She is in her eleventh year. To wait any longer would mean neglect of my sacred duty and a most serious laxity in my office. So, a few days ago, I kept Elisabeth after the lesson and earnestly questioned her. But she did not know what to say—she, who can always give a precise and sensible answer. I saw that she needed all her strength to hold back her tears. What else should I then assume but that she had been forbidden to take this holy step? It was an error. Now I know it. But yet I do not regret having spoken to you about it. Those who love the child best will give the best advice."

In the silence that now followed could be heard the opening of the front door and the sound of gay talk. Piotr's slightly rough voice and Elisabeth's laugh could be clearly discerned. Then the door was thrown open and she was there, in her blue schooldress, her hair a little wind-blown, her schoolbag tucked under her arm—the time for the knapsack was long past.

Her rushing came to a dead stop; she remained near the door that stayed ajar. She was tall for her age and very straight. Her shining eyes seemed immense in that suddenly paled face.

"Aren't you going to say good day to your teacher?" said Recha at last, with an effort.

Elisabeth put her schoolbag on a chair, then she turned toward Korzon and made a curtsy. Her movements looked precise, mechanical. Behind her, the door was quietly being shut from the outside. Nobody said a word.

Then she passed between her mother and the priest. She

walked straight to Chana who stood there, breathing heavily. She lifted both her arms and leaned her face against the old woman's breast.

"It didn't do any good," she whispered into the dark shawl. "Dear Aunt Chana, I wanted so much to spare you this."

13

Heinrich Gelbfisch had long ago returned from his journey over the Seven Seas. He had neither forgotten Recha, nor were his wounds healed. But he was resigned to his fate.

Again, as of old, he would sit of an evening with the women and entertain them with events of the big world outside. But what he said had a different ring. And at times a hard, fanatical light would pierce the dark luster of his round eyes, like steel of a newly sharpened blade.

A rude training of his enthusiastic soul had set in almost immediately after the start of this comforting voyage.

Normally the Dutch steamer on which they were sailing had room for twelve hundred passengers. However, on this tour around the world only one hundred and sixty were taken aboard, all of them people who could afford the costly leisure of seven months without so much as a glance at their bank account.

From the very outset the groups kept to themselves according to their nationality, with only an occasional exchange of polite amenities.

By far the most numerous were the Germans, and among these were a clan of Rhenish industrialists whose jovial voices rang constantly back and forth across the boat. The Dutch group remained inconspicuous, a bit on the dull side, but this stolid exterior covered a great deal of worldly experience and ironic wisdom. The Britons gave the effect of being surrounded by a vacuum. Some of their women were singularly beautiful and with by no means a cool but an intensely alive and alluring beauty. The older gentlemen, with fresh-looking faces, seemed proof of a life lived in incontested security. The younger ones belong to a more

nervous generation in whom a susceptible social conscience expressed itself to the point of sloppiness in dress.

Two French scholars, bachelors, close friends since their youthful days at the Ecole Normale, were engrossed in endless discussions while pacing the deck for hours; in the brightest sunshine they wore dark frock coats with the Commander's Rosette stuck in their buttonholes. There were two newly married Danish couples, very much in love. And a family of Spanish Grandees—their very name highlighted a world of faith, courage, and cruelty—numerous, with a retinue that was well nigh a court, complete with physician and chaplain.

All of them appeared to be classified and comfortably off. Only Heinrich Gelbfisch was alone. In his correct dress, he sat at his little table in the restaurant and, with shy movements, served himself from the sumptuous, endless menu. Alone he remained in the big salon, trying to feel entertained by the Malayan dance band. Alone he wandered on deck through the mild fall evening, or in the sunny hours reclined in his deck chair, before him a book from which his thoughts would stray back to Recha with sadness and longing.

Presumably the classified ones felt no special aversion to the silent, lone traveler. They merely took no notice of him.

But Heinrich had been only too well sensitized. Old, resolutely sealed-up wounds burned anew, as if just received. When, as a citizen of the young Republic, he had applied for membership in the Polish club—how they had treated him! Here on this boat it was like that and like always: they barred him because he was a Jew.

So not until all the passengers went on land for an excursion did he actually exchange his first words with any of them.

Cars were waiting for them at Ceuta to take them for a drive inland, through a rocky countryside, to the Moroccan city of Fez. Four people in a carriage and on a long drive are not likely to ignore any one member of the party. And

so the three Dutch people—an importer from Rotterdam with his charming sister and an old professor from Utrecht—drew the modest little man into their harmless conversation. But, unfortunately, Heinrich himself was at this juncture no longer free from harm. He suspected condescension, pity, and remained coldly reserved.

The two days in the glistening white city of Fez were richly rewarded. Here were the Middle Ages close to the gates of Europe. In the winding market alleys, around the silent Mosques, was the drone, the scent, and the bustle of eleventh-century Islam.

But on the second day the Mellah was visited. And the Mellah was the Jewish ghetto.

Drably dressed humans, downcast or uncomfortably impulsive—their faces barely set them apart from the Berbers in their burnous. Since time immemorial, the same soil and sun had formed them. Yet, they did not mix. They shunned and were being shunned.

The travelers, directed by their guide, gazed through a ground-floor window into a room. In there, thirty or forty little boys rolled their small heads from side to side, to the doleful rhythm of a chant, coached by a caftaned teacher with a dejected look past hope. Heinrich might have been gazing through a window of any small Polish town, where he would have seen the selfsame thing. None of the tourists said a word. And his sensitiveness made him suspect that they kept silent only because he was with them.

The second time the boat put to shore in the harbor at Jaffa, and he set foot on that land which had been opened as a new home for his people, according to the good will of Great Britain. Never had the world citizen Heinrich Gelbfisch shared that dream of a native land for the Jews. But the schedule of this journey seemed to have been specially outlined to further his education by leaps and bounds.

Without stopping anywhere, they went straight to Jerusalem, in the hallowed places. They saw them all, the Mount of Olives, the Pool of Bethesda. They saw the Holy Sepulcher, that bewildering place crowded closely by the

churches of the various denominations. Churches of the Greeks, Romans, Copts, Armenians, filled with their blest offerings, their lamps and candles, vessels and rugs, figures and icons. The disunited sectarians passed each other, murder and contempt in their eyes. Conceit and folly choked the thought of him whose gentle and strong heart radiates wisdom and hope.

Heinrich stayed here a long time. So this was what the innermost shrine of the Christian world looked like. While in lament and prayer, Jewish men lay prostrate over there by the scaling wall, which they believed, or tried to believe, was the remains of Solomon's Temple.

The following day, before returning to the ship, he saw the new city at the ocean front. It rose up with broad, airy avenues; one could almost see how intrepid work was filling the building gaps. Library, hospitals, theater—there they were. Those who designed and measured, leveled, burrowed, built and decorated, they had come home after having been scattered for two thousand years. For sixty generations they had wandered as outlaws. Now they again lived under a law of their own.

This was their modern fortress, totally Jewish, defiantly Jewish. If one spoke to them of the envy and enmity of the adjacent Arabs, the answer would be a shrug of the shoulder, a smile. They were proud and they were not too indulgent. The stranger, unable to decipher the national square letters in their streets, felt lost and expelled.

The members of the excursion returned on board after only a cursory sightseeing tour. Aside from the Hebraic signs, this Tel-Aviv to them did not differ from other nearby developed settlements in this impatient world.

But Heinrich could hardly tear himself away. His heart warmed. In all seriousness he considered giving up the rest of his travel and staying here.

He carried a heavy parcel of books to the boat, which he had acquired in a bright, well-ordered shop—works of economic, political, historic content. He had a lot to learn about that new country of his.

The books were crammed with honest reservations. Complicated economical problems were piling up, to be solved only after painstaking efforts. The British impulse, responsible for this foundation, might lag for political reasons at a not too distant day. The Arab danger remained flagrant.

He read and understood. But no tempering doubt penetrated to the enthusiastic core of his nature. His heart glowed as intensely for that home-coming of his people as once it had glowed for the brotherhood of man.

From now on, wherever he saw people of his own among dark and yellow faces, whether on African or Asiatic shores, he unvaryingly felt that they waited, only did not know for what. And to each one he would have liked to shout: Lift up your head, brother, I know where your welfare and your future lie!

On the boat he no longer felt himself a marked man. For, like all the rest, he now had a fatherland. And since he now moved among them with unconcern, many an easy relationship was the result.

His thoughts, however, continued to roam yearningly when from his deck chair he looked out over Indian or Pacific waters. And inevitably that one dream would rise in him—one day to win Recha and journey homeward with her to their people. But invariably his dream would be rudely interrupted. The figure of that Ukrainian peasant would appear standing there on the bridge, holding out the locket and watch of the "other" one, the dead man, and so call her away from him.

14

He received quite a shock when, for the first time since his return, he rang the bell at the villa and it was Piotr who opened the door.

But that was forgotten the minute after, when Recha gave him the warmest of welcomes. That she had been forced to disappoint him, had weighed heavily on her mind. Re-

lieved, she now offered him the same hospitable friendship as of old. And Chana was also glad to see him. They had been very much alone these last months.

Recently Doctor Krasna had come to the house quite often. But his visits were strictly professional. When the legacy fell due, he had been appointed Elisabeth's co-guardian. Now he watched over her inheritance with consummate correctness and skill. They had immediately felt confident in the seasoned lawyer, but they had never actually become confidential.

And for the rest, they lived in the white villa as on an island.

Recha's singular past had always cut them off from the ordinary families in the town. And Elisabeth's conversion only helped to widen the breach. It was not only the heirs of old Zweifuss who pounced on this with greedy spite. For all the orthodox Jews around, it was the horror of horrors.

Nor did they see it as a redeeming feature that the child was merely embracing the faith of her father. That only freshened the memory of the original outrage, Recha's unforgivable and unexpiable marriage.

The two women understood this, Chana above all—she understood only too well! But with deep distress they likewise saw that Elisabeth was growing up in the same isolated manner. The mistrust, so instilled into her Jewish schoolmates, was carried on from class to class. And Elisabeth herself made no effort to change this. For against the solid majority, against all the devout and patriotic daughters of the Polish gentry she remained immutably cool and unsociable.

It was a state of affairs that could hardly be considered normal or gratifying. But how change it? One day Chana suggested that the child be placed in another environment, perhaps in the unprejudiced atmosphere of a foreign finishing school. Recha was so alarmed that she was unable to utter a word. And Piotr, who was busy in the room, dropped a porcelain bowl from his one dexterous hand.

So the matter was never brought up again and Bessie's

small world went on, consisting of her mother and aunt, the mutilated peasant who was her vassal and dear confidant, and Uncle Gelbfisch for whom her prematurely tried heart felt a kind of sympathy that was odd and hardly suitable.

It could not be helped that Heinrich found out what had happened to the child while he was away. At first he refused to believe it. Then he heard the whole story from Recha's own lips.

"In want," he called out. "Actually in want! While I sailed through the oceans like a fool."

"Please forget it," murmured Recha. "It all worked out all right.'

"Worked out. Yes indeed! And how it worked out."

He sat there like a man who sees his last chance disappear forever. Recha would never be able to return home with him now into that age-old land of the future. He found it hard to resign himself. His newly aroused Jewish conscience spoke loud in him, and this new feeling of guilt only enhanced his devotion. Weeks passed before he could speak to Elisabeth without fighting against rising tears. And as he was not a man given to moderation, he began to spoil the girl so that Recha had to interfere.

"That can't go on. You're practically stripping your store for her. Again today——"

"Please, Recha! A little leather belt! Not much of a present."

"You're putting ideas into the child's head. In the end, she'll think she is something special."

"And so she is!"

"Ridiculous! Really, I'm serious. You spoil her."

"Not Bessie. Nobody can spoil Bessie."

Chana looked at him. "Nice and crazy you are, Heinrich," she grumbled. But, at bottom, she quite agreed.

Heinrich Gelbfisch "stripped his store" in still another, more effective way than by giving presents to Bessie.

On his return, he had found it flourishing. The manager in charge of it had worked much more profitably.

Since the town had been raised to a government seat,

the Polish upper classes were growing steadily. And they brought with them many needs. These civil servants, army officers, legal men, and physicians set up house and planned to stay. They bought furniture and carpets, linen and silver, dinner sets, pictures. Their wives were used to doing their shopping at Warsaw, and their innate gift for elegance, so characteristically Polish, had to be catered to. The Gelbfisch store had scarcely any competition in town. If Heinrich's late father could have checked the intake column of the main ledger, he would have been amazed and enchanted.

The bank account, on the other hand, would have had to remain hidden from him. For the capital kept on shrinking.

Heinrich Gelbfisch had lost nothing of his generosity since that day when he provided the whole town with Polish bunting for the Grandfather's visit. Only the recipients had changed.

With newly sharpened eyes, he looked around in the Republic and found that it only reluctantly gave room to the millions of its Jewish citizens. By the approval of the authorities, life was made more and more difficult for them, and the influence of the Marshal seemed no longer strong enough to stem this vicious tendency. Special taxes were invented for them. Their way to certain academic professions was blocked by trick examinations. One heard of boycotts. From out-of-the-way districts came rumors of bloody excesses.

The Jews had lived for six centuries on this soil. Now their eyes turned homeward.

Heinrich knew that he himself would never go home. For that he would have to give up being near Recha, and without her even the Land of Israel was exile to him. All the more enthusiastically he devoted himself to the task of opening to others those portals that were closed to himself.

Books, pamphlets, tracts, folders, piled up on his desk. Soon he was better informed on Palestine's agriculture and industries than on his own stock of goods. His time was taken up by correspondence with the organizations which

arranged for transport and settlement. Most of the people who desired to leave were dreadfully poor. Money and more money was needed. And he gave.

He gave without stint. Every month there were a number of home travelers whose steamer tickets had been paid for by the house of Gelbfisch. Heinrich's accountants uneasily shook their heads. In the very midst of a wave of prosperity, lack of capital threatened the firm. And the day came when the firm was forced to ask the wholesale houses at Warsaw and Lodz for an extension of their notes.

Heinrich never spoke of it. From a most casual remark, dropped by Krasna, the two women learned about his predicament. The lawyer was surprised to find they had known nothing about it.

"But how is that possible," asked Recha, "with business going so well? Are you sure?"

"Oh, very sure. People speak of liquidation. There is simply no more money."

It was a winter evening, rather cold, without snow. Inside it was cozy. Elisabeth sat at the end of the table and wrote with crooked finger in her exercise-book, her head turned sideways.

"If Uncle Heinrich has no more money," she said without looking up, "why don't we give him some?"

"Better finish your project. For three days, now, you've been working on it."

"But, Mother, this time it is hard."

"Hard? Why? Kosciusko in the United States. You know all about that."

"Oh, I know about Kosciusko all right, Mother. But I don't like my sentences. They are too long and awfully dull."

"If you have the dates and facts correctly, Mr. Karbowiak won't say anything."

"Karbowiak? He doesn't know the first thing about it. I am doing this for myself."

"Anyhow," said Recha and leaned over toward her, "your book looks simply terrible. Inkspots and criss-crosses all over."

"I'm going to copy it. Mother, why don't we give Uncle Heinrich some money? We're rich."

"Rich? Whoever gave you that idea?"

Bessie put down her pen. Her fingertips were covered with ink.

"But we have a car. Only rich people have cars."

True enough, a short time ago a small, blue Fiat had been bought, which Piotr was constantly dusting and polishing and which he drove amazingly well with his one hand. It had been bought mainly for Chana's sake; her feet no longer carried her very far.

Chana laughed with a heavy breath.

"Do you hear that, Doctor Krasna? And some people think a child like that clever."

But Mr. Krasna did not join in the laughter. He had become pensive. After a few minutes, he gathered his papers together and Piotr drove him back to town.

That was on a Monday. On Wednesday he was back again, unannounced and early in the day. Chana was still in bed, with lingering pains in the left arm and in the back, which she declared to be rheumatic. Only Recha was there to receive him.

"I have examined the books. It is exactly as we thought. The firm itself is absolutely sound."

"Recha did not remember having thought anything about it in particular. At first, she could not even make out what Krasna was talking about.

"Gelbfisch and Son," he went on, "had a net profit of fifteen per cent year before last, eighteen per cent last year, and the curve continues to point upward. An additional capital of 110,000 Zloty is required. That would be one-quarter of Elisabeth's inheritance. We couldn't wish for a better investment."

"And it would put Heinrich on his feet again?"

"It is self-understood that we should have to retain full control. Not one single check will go out without my counter-signature."

"And he agrees to it?"

"How could he not agree? His wild generosity at any rate has come to an end. And you know how he is."

"A child," said Recha.

The lawyer smiled.

"Certainly not what one pictures as a serious businessman. Do you know what he said when I came out with my plan? 'So Bessie is going to be my partner—how delightful that is!' "

15

Father Korzon, a light green stole over his meadow-green surplice, took the blessed Host from the silver vessel, held it between thumb and forefinger of his right hand and so made the sign of the cross.

"May the body of Our Lord bestow upon your soul eternal life."

And he placed the Host in Elisabeth's mouth. She received it, hands folded and eyes cast down. Her face was as white as the small veil that covered her hair.

The priest returned to the altar, replaced the silver vessel into its recess, genuflected and locked the shrine.

As he walked toward the side door, which his acolyte held open for him, he turned his head slightly toward that lone communicant in her pew. For a brief moment his eye lingered with a pensive look of tender solicitude, then he disappeared into the vestry.

It was the same Salvator Church where Elisabeth had been baptized. The humble place was quite empty at this early hour. Those among the Poles who went to early Mass preferred the new church on the Ring, which had been consecrated the year before with official pomp.

A still coolness. Only from the old workman with earth-colored face and dress praying by the altar of St. Anne, came a muffled coughing and mumbling. And in the last pew, near the door, sat Piotr wearing a black coat, though strictly speaking this was not the place for him; his place was in the other church with the Greek cross and the wooden cupolas.

Now he got up, came down to the still kneeling girl and touched her shoulder.

"Better come along now, Miss Bessie. You must eat something."

Through the whole ceremony he could not shake the thought that Elisabeth, in compliance with the rules, had been without food since the night before.

"You are all pale," he said again in the sunlight outside, "you are sure to get sick." And he tried to hurry her to the car, which glistened bright blue at the corner.

She gave him a wan smile.

"But Piotr, it won't hurt me to wait a couple of hours for my breakfast. That doesn't make anyone sick."

Still, he had not been so far wrong. She felt wretched. In the church she had shivered in her white dress.

"I don't feel like going home right away," she said. "Let's sit down in the sun for a little while."

Adjoining the chapel was a small cemetery. The gate stood open. They entered.

The little churchyard with its old, sunken graves, overgrown paths, and stone benches was more like a garden. No one ever trimmed its bushes.

It was not the same spring in which Father Korzon had appeared at the white villa.

A few days after that visit, he had promised Elisabeth in a heart-to-heart talk that he would wait. She herself was to let him know whenever she felt she was ready. And he showed no signs of impatience, not even when his superiors began to resent this singular exception. And when she finally came, he refrained from leading her over the threshold together with the children who were all so much younger than she. As ordinances permitted him to do, he performed the important act during a Low Mass, in a private and quiet way.

Now he was passing outside the gate, with his flat hat and long black robe. He saw the two sitting on their bench and greeted them. They both rose and remained standing until he had disappeared.

"It's lovely here, Piotr," said Elisabeth, "don't you think? Not at all sad like other cemeteries."

"That is because these graves are so old, Miss Bessie. The people buried here are long dead and the others that wept for them are dead too. It's all over with mourning—and so everything is over for good."

She looked at him musingly. "You mean, Piotr, once you lie there, there is nothing more—that's all there is to it? Not very religious."

"Indeed, I should not be saying things like that—today of all days."

"They don't teach you that in your church, Piotr, do they?"

Piotr made a wry face. "Good God, no," he said. "In our church the ceremonies are a bit different and the priest has another kind of dress. But the rest is the same. I always believed what one should believe. Up to the war. Then one day we marched to a village. We thought the village was empty. All of a sudden machine guns started shooting. Half of our company went down, sixty men, maybe eighty. They lay there like ducks. Since then I think that it's all over."

"But Piotr, why? If one man dies or sixty die all at once—how can that make any difference?"

"Like wild ducks after a hunt they lay there," Piotr repeated, as if that solved the whole problem.

"Everything over," repeated Elisabeth. "But that makes it terribly sad."

"I don't know," he said gently. "To rest, for good and forever, is also a beautiful thing."

Obviously this was not the first time Piotr had pondered these questions.

"There are a hundred times more dead people than living ones," he said. "Where is there place enough for them? People always say how sad it is that someone who has lived suddenly lives no longer. But before that there was a long time, and then he did not live either, and nobody thinks that is sad. I would love to see his grave," he concluded, rather irrelevantly.

Elisabeth gave him a questioning look.

"The family tomb in Vienna, I mean. It must be beautiful. I would like to see how the Count lies in his death."

"Maybe I will see it some day. Then I shall write down the inscriptions for you and tell you all about it."

He nodded. He looked at his watch. It was a handsome silver wrist watch, a present from Heinrich Gelbfisch. Piotr jumped up.

"Good heavens! Here I sit and prattle on like a fool. You must have your breakfast."

16

She never mentioned it at home, but her school life became more and more like that of a soldier lost in enemy territory.

She belonged to no one. Friendship among the Polish girls reached into their private life, into those army or civil service cliques, who were either kith and kin or linked together by common interests. The few Jewish pupils, carried along from class to class, were tolerated by them, coolly accepted or overlooked. Only Elisabeth, her very existence there, was a source of constant uneasiness. If, at least, she had felt her isolation a slight. But no. She appeared to lack nothing, miss nobody.

"She's arrogant, the lady with the mixed blood," said Jadwiga Lubecka, daughter of the police chief, who snapped up anti-Semitic phrases at home.

And Wanda Slawek, whose father headed the tax board, stated pointedly: "She's so snooty, she won't even show it. Her way to look down on us is not to look at us at all."

Elisabeth's teachers reacted very much the same way. With one exception, Miss Skarga.

A friendship had sprung up between the blue-blooded spinster and the young girl. It began with walks along the river bank. After that, she invited Elisabeth to her place for tea with those delicious little cookies for which Spiegel-

glass, the confectioner, was famous, and which she herself never touched. She also made a call at the white villa and kept up an embarrassed conversation with the two women. And she was moved all out of proportion when Elisabeth, as a birthday surprise for her, recited an important speech in archaic Polish, a famous political sermon by the Jesuit, Piotr Skarga, her ancestor.

"Elzunia, how did you ever find out about my birthday?" she said with shimmering eyes. "And you couldn't have thought of a lovelier gift. What force is in those utterances! What lofty sincerity in his warning! He knew his Poles and feared for them. If they would only listen to his voice again. The worm is in this state, today as then."

Unfortunately, Miss Skarga was no longer one of Elisabeth's teachers. Only men taught in the upper classes, most of them inherently nationalistic veterans for ever sporting their decorations. They looked at this outsider with distrust. Behind her courtesy, her invariably good manners, they suspected a mental reserve which, to them, was worse than the occasional misbehavior of the other children. Was it not rather impertinent that this daughter of a Jewess and an Austrian officer should write a purer Polish than all the others? That she was better informed about the heroic history of the land. French, too, she learned offensively fast. After only six months, she spoke it better than the pedant who taught it.

She gave little cause for complaint. And that was a rankling disappointment to her schoolmates. Nothing much was gained by snickering and sneering at someone who parried with precision and accuracy, with a glittering light in the eye that made it advisable to draw back. So the girls found themselves confined to the usual practical jokes, the desk painted with ink underneath, the schoolbag filled with water. Rarely did they rise to something more telling.

However, one rainy day, as Bessie was leaving the schoolhouse, she saw Piotr down on his knees beside the little Fiat.

"Do you see that?" he called to her from afar. "Barely ten minutes I was away from the car and now look at it, see what happened."

With a naïve and pathetic gesture he pointed to a flat tire and the blue paint of the car all scratched up.

"You've got to make a charge against them, Miss Bessie. You can't let those brats get away with everything."

He looked up at her, his face red with anger. She stood there in her dark raincape, which fell from her straight shoulders like a knight's mantle. The rain was dripping off it. From under the leather cap her honey-colored hair hung down wet and straggly.

"A charge, Piotr? With whom? The teachers would only gloat over it. But why did you have to drive here with the car? That comes from not listening to me."

"You don't listen to me either," said Piotr, made quite rebellious by the outrage on his dearly beloved Fiat. "You just look at yourself! In weather like this, any one of God's creatures would take an umbrella."

She laughed. "All right! Beginning today, I shall carry an umbrella like an old lady. Now come along and don't fret about it any more."

But she herself fretted a lot about that mischief. Her patience had long ago been worn down. And a few weeks later her irritation led to some incidents which were not as easily repaired as a slashed tire.

The end of the school year was near. It was two days before Easter vacation. With the best of intentions, the school board was again unable to refuse her promotion to the next higher class. To be sure, she was very bad in mathematics. But she was so good in all other subjects that she was still among the first five who were distinguished with a kind of honorary examination and a short address by the district inspector.

In hairdress, cut of beard, and manner of speech, this official betrayed his ambition to resemble their national hero, the Marshal and Grandfather, an ambition hopelessly doomed by his goggle eyes and receding chin. Now he

stood near the desk, with the principal of the school, and called the names from a list.

"Countess Elisabeth Pattay."

Not a stir.

"Didn't you hear?" said the principal.

Elisabeth half rose from her bench. "I didn't know you meant me."

"You should be familiar with your own name," said the inspector and stared at her while squinting his goggle eyes, not without effort.

"My name is Elisabeth Doktor. At least, that's what I want it to be."

An excited buzz stirred through the class. It was gratifying to all of them to join the authorities in legitimate indignation.

The inspector assumed an attitude of superior composure.

"Count Pattay was the name of you father—or am I wrong?"

"It was indeed."

"Well then. We Poles honor duty fulfilled even in an enemy. You do not need to be ashamed of his name. On the contrary, you may be proud of it."

Elisabeth looked with hatred at this man who was malignantly giving her conduct so spurious an interpretation.

"I'm not in need of any instruction, Inspector," she said. "I know myself what I have to be proud of."

The excited buzz of gleeful indigation rose up again. They all united in servile wedlock with the established powers.

"Leave the class, Elisabeth Pattay," commanded the principal. "Go and wait in the antechamber of my room."

The antechamber was windowless and poorly ventilated. It contained two wicker chairs, an enormous map of Poland, and a bust of the Grandfather. It was lit by one bare electric bulb.

Outside, the bell of the janitor announced the end of class. She heard the voices and the clattering of the girls as they raced out. Then everything was silent again.

The principal opened the door and crossed the room without stopping.

"You will be here tomorrow at ten," he flung at her and disappeared.

On the now deserted stairs, she encountered Miss Skarga and greeted her with a distracted look.

"Is anything wrong, Elzunia? Your face is flushed. Are you ill?"

"I feel very well," said Bessie. "I have been impertinent to the inspector and they're going to kick me out of school."

Miss Skarga opened her pale lips, but she said nothing. She only ran hastily up the steps.

On the grounds in front of the school, the girls were standing together in groups. Wherever Elisabeth passed, they fell silent. But when she walked by the police chief's daughter, the girl jumped squarely in front of her.

"I know myself what I have to be proud of," Jadwiga mimicked her in a shrill babbling voice.

Elisabeth pulled herself together and walked around her.

"Jew Countess!" they roared into her back. And at the same time a stone came whirling through the air. Elisabeth saw it coming. She lifted her hand to protect herself. The hand was hit. She felt a splitting pain.

With the eyes of that horde at her back, she turned into Sobieski Street. Her fourth finger was discolored, livid. She tried to move it. The pain shot all the way up into her shoulder.

Right around the corner was Doctor Silbermann's office. By means of his recently acquired Roentgen apparatus, his great pride, he gravely proceeded to X-ray her finger and found it broken. He carried out the setting and splinting with a local anesthesia, which proved insufficient.

Her arm in a sling, Elisabeth appeared before the school board the next day. Miss Skarga aroused resentment when, at the outset of the procedure, she worriedly asked about the nature of her injury.

"The fourth finger is broken," said Elisabeth. The words

were not yet out of her mouth before she felt sorry for this dry answer.

Then the decision of the board was announced to her. For the present, and as a special favor, they would let her continue at the institute, facing, however, immediate discharge at the least offense.

There was nothing more to say about the case. But it seemed as if the assembled gentlemen were relishing the situation to such a degree that they could not bring themselves to conclude it.

An absurd pause followed.

"It was very good of you to ask," said Elisabeth as if she were all alone with Miss Skarga.

She had not meant to be impertinent. But to the officiating board the whole effect was ruined.

"Go now," shouted the principal. "We'll write your mother about this."

This time, it was clear to everyone in the villa that a stay at the school was no longer possible. Better not wait for that "least offense."

With the aid of his foreign connections, Mr. Gelbfisch started to make enquiries. Finishing schools in England, Austria, Switzerland were considered. It was decided to send Elisabeth to the reputable institute of Madame Dieudonné, at Lausanne.

When the splint was removed from Elisabeth's finger, it showed that Doctor Silbermann had done a bad job. The finger was crooked, though not strikingly so. It would be necessary to break it again and then put it into proper shape.

Elisabeth refused to have it done. They were all surprised.

"It's really nothing at all, Bessie," said Heinrich who was dining with them. "And the doctor in Lemberg won't hurt you like this man Silbermann."

"Miss Bessie is not afraid," the serving Piotr spoke up. They looked at him with astonishment.

Elisabeth laughed and examined her finger.

"I rather like it that way," she said.

"Like it?" asked Chana.

"Yes, I rather like it. It's only the left hand, anyway."

Piotr stood across the table from her, still blushing to the roots of his sandy hair. She winked one eye at him, in a friendly manner. Then her glance ran down along his left side, where his empty sleeve dangled.

She was expected at the finishing school at the beginning of summer. Mr. Gelbfisch insisted upon the pleasure of chaperoning Recha and Elisabeth. And his insatiable solicitude made this trip to Switzerland extremely complicated and costly.

THIRD PART

Piotr

1

A WARM gust of wind pushed open the window. It played with Madame Dieudonné's big ledger and blew at the loose leaves of paper lying on the table in front of Elisabeth. She went to the window and closed it.

"The Foehn," she said and looked across the lake toward the mountains on the French side. The clarity of the early spring air brought them unusually close, with sharp shadows in the valleys between.

"Not the Foehn wind," said Madame. "You ought to know our Vent de Pluie by now—in your fourth year out here."

She glanced up at the sky which was still placid and clear. "I do hope the children will get home dry. Probably not one of them took an umbrella along."

"Probably," said Elisabeth. "That age doesn't seem to take to umbrellas." And she smiled as if she were reminded of bygone days.

The children, namely the whole group of pupils boarding at Madame's finishing school, today had been taken to the theater, where the Paris Comédie Française was giving a guest performance of Racine's *Athalie*.

Madame reveled in the rare afternoon silence of the house, alone with her older pupil. She also reveled in the balance of her main ledger; the finishing school was doing well.

It had been doing well for a quarter of a century. The death of her husband, a renowned archeologist and a member of the Académie des Inscriptions, had left her nearly penniless, and she started her institute on a moderate scale. In later years, she was never lured into expanding it. The reputation of reliable exclusiveness, of individual attention, could be sustained only if the number of students remained limited. There were twenty of them, today as then.

Madame was a portly lady, with a wealth of carefully

groomed black and silvery hair, a well-shaped forehead, perhaps a trifle too high; intelligent and friendly eyes looked out from behind gold-rimmed spectacles. But her small mouth did not fully confirm this general impression. It indicated that this very pleasant matron also had a good business head.

A crumpling noise from across the table made her look up from her columns.

"There you go scrapping another page," she said with a smile. "This translation must be very difficult."

"It's not only difficult, Madame, it's impossible."

"I can't believe that. In three days you translated that charming short story by Monsieur Géraldy. And a Warsaw magazine liked it and immediately published it."

"I know," said Elisabeth. "But this is something else."

"Saint Julien l'Hospitalier!" Madame Dieudonné shook her impressive head. "Why, it has long been translated into every known language."

"I'm just doing it for my own pleasure, Madame."

"For practice? You don't require that any longer."

Elisabeth put her pencil into the opened book and looked thoughtfully down.

"It's really only a better way of reading it," she said haltingly. "When you try to put it into another language, the miracle of it slowly dawns on you. Every one of these passages holds a secret, something more than the mere word conveys."

"Well," Madame said, "the great master would certainly be satisfied with a reader like you, that is, if he were still alive. I always considered his works highly polished, but a little dry and cool."

"Dry and cool," Elisabeth repeated.

Madame Dieudonné laughed. "You say that as if you faced a bottomless pit with no bridge in sight. I certainly don't want to rob you of your gods."

Elisabeth made one last effort.

"Somewhere he tells of a wall which he had seen—at the Acropolis in Athens. A simple, chaste wall, but so mag-

nificent, so exquisite in stone and proportion that he became breathless from sheer happiness. Prose writing should be like that, he says. At times, I think I understand what he means."

"I'm sure you do," Madame said appeasingly, for so much passion made her feel uncomfortable. "And one day, you yourself will do something fine."

"I, Madame? Never! Writing books should be reserved for people like Flaubert or Tolstoy. The others merely ape and should be ashamed of themselves."

"Aren't you going a little too far? To offer tasteful diversion to the public is a very nice profession."

Elisabeth gave it a moment's grace.

"Surely, Madame," she answered in her best manner.

"Besides, you have a number of chances. Only the other day, Monsieur Delangre insisted that in Geneva, with the League of Nations, you could make a name for yourself as interpreter. Too bad that you're so young."

"So young, Madame? A year and a half older than your oldest pupils. It is really about time that I go back to Poland, to my mother and aunt."

"But they themselves have wanted you to stay on here. Or have conditions changed there for the better lately?"

"Not for us Jews," said Elisabeth.

Madame winced.

"This everlasting harping on it, Lisa—honestly, it is not in the best of taste. A morose habit."

"I daresay that's what my schoolmates did for me. You should have known Jadwiga and Wanda, Madame."

"I thought that our girls here have made up for it. They admire and love you. I've noticed that they scramble for little souvenirs from you."

"So have I," said Elisabeth with a laugh. "One by one my handkerchiefs disappear."

"Sometimes I think," said Madame Dieudonné dreamily, "that you might teach here. And something still better comes to my mind. It's a calamity that you're so young."

Elisabeth looked up. She waited for an explanation of this

strange complaint. This was the second time she heard it.

Madame's eyes wandered across the lake over to the French shore. But she did not see the fading mountains there, nor the clouds gathering over them. What she did see were, in truth, the Pont-Neuf with the towers of Notre-Dame and the riverfront of the Louvre. She was sitting in the small flat, four flights up, at the Quai des Grands-Augustins where Professor Dieudonné's books stood untouched on the shelves, and his chests with antique gold coins. In spite of qualms and sacrifice, she had held on to this flat through the years, with her unmarried sister, Mademoiselle de Trévoux, as caretaker. Notwithstanding the four flights of stairs, she hoped to spend there a quiet decade of her remaining years or, still better, two.

"If you were only thirty, Lisa," she said—"twenty-six would do well enough—then you could step into my place here. That would be wonderful. It is a gloomy thought, to be forced to leave to indifferent hands what was built up with loving care."

"You have that much faith in me, Madame?" Elisabeth was so moved, she forgot to be proud.

"But that is all nonsense. I know it. By the time you are ready for it, you will be married and your thought of this house will be only a vague memory."

"I would make you a tempting offer," she went on, for even in daydreams her thrifty mind refused to let her ignore the practical side. "And though I shared in the profits, you would still have a neat little income. And your mother and aunt could come to live with you. It's a pleasant climate. Everybody could be happy. But these eight, nine years upset the whole plan," she ended and before her eye Notre-Dame and Pont-Neuf receded into the never-never land.

The room had grown dark and suddenly a heavy rain beat against the windowpanes.

Madame Dieudonné looked at her watch. "The play is over this very minute. The children will get good and wet."

Somebody knocked. The peasant boy from the Valais, the handy man around the house, brought the afternoon mail.

"Here is one for you, Lisa." And she handed her the letter across the table.

Elisabeth eagerly reached for it. She had received no mail from home for two weeks, which was unusual.

The letter bore a Polish stamp. But it was a coarse envelope and the curlicue handwriting was unfamiliar to her.

The boy from the Valais took the sorted mail and left to distribute it in the various rooms.

Madame was busy with her own mail. When she looked up, there was Elisabeth, the opened letter in her hand, tears streaming down her cheeks.

"What is it child? Bad news from home? Not your mother?"

Silently Elisabeth shook her head. Madame Dieudonné got up, went over and put her arms around her shoulders. She asked no more questions.

Elisabeth read the letter once more. It came from Piotr. But Piotr, who had not mastered the Latin letters, had dictated this tiding, and it sounded awkward and formal.

Chana was sick, sicker than she had ever been. It was her heart and Piotr knew, and wanted Elisabeth to know, that the end was not far off. He wrote contrary to Chana's express command. She will find out soon enough, when it is all over, Aunt Chana had said—and Elisabeth knew that this sentence was quoted verbatim. But Piotr had not thought it right to obey Aunt Chana. The honorable young lady, stated the writer of the ornate hand, might possibly never forgive that. Then came the usual closing phrases and the signature, also in that unfamiliar writing, Piotr Gargas.

But beneath it were two Ukrainian words, written in Cyrillic letters:

Prychody zywo. Come quickly.

2

Early in the day her train pulled in at the Vienna West Station. A stop of several hours in a strange town was ahead

of her, with nothing to do on this journey to one who was dying, but to visit one who was dead.

The gray light of a damp, cold February morning filtered into the station hall. She felt a need for freshening up after a night spent in half-sleep. But she found the washroom unpleasantly neglected and the hard paper towels and coarse soap odious. She sent her baggage over to the North Station and started out for the city.

In the long, poorly paved Mariahilfer Street only a few people passed her, sullenly trudging along to their early work. A drizzle had set in by the time she reached the Ring Boulevard. With forlorn despondency, state and residential palaces bordered it.

But through the draped curtains of a large coffeehouse near the opera, a yellow light invitingly fell on the wet sidewalk. Inside it was warm and the breakfast, a comfort after a disagreeable night, was brought to the small table almost the minute she had ordered it. Delicious strong coffee, dainty rolls that crackled between her healthy teeth. She asked for an egg, then had a second one. And, suddenly, she was horrified. Here she sat, enjoying herself, while in that white room which she had shared with her for so many years, Chana was struggling for air, saw death coming close. How could compassion be expected of anyone if this could happen to her in the case of one so near and so dear? And while this thought shot through Elisabeth's mind, her fingers were already reaching for a cigarette, without which the satisfaction of this breakfast would not be perfect.

A waiter ran over to give her a light. Then, in true Viennese fashion, he laid a batch of the latest papers ready for her.

He was an elderly waiter, bald-headed, with southern, black eyes and a humped nose. His white dicky was no longer very white and his tailcoat was shiny and threadbare.

An old man like this gets up at five in the morning, Elisabeth mused, and puts on his tails. Man thinks up strange duties for his fellow man.

He was still standing by her side and pointed to the paper lying on top.

"Big news, Miss," he said in a fawning yet confidential tone.

She looked sideways at the alarming headlines.

"German Reichstag in flames. Government lashes out at incendiaries."

Below it two pictures. To the left, the Parliament Building with flames shooting out through the cupola. But to the right, with Wotan's forelock, amorphous nose, and soothsayer's eyes, the latest master of German destiny, for weeks so abundantly familiar to all the white and yellow and dark-skinned newspaper readers throughout the world.

"He'll make them jump," whispered the waiter with breathless admiration.

"Whom?"

"Those Reds, of course. And it's high time, too. With them around, nothing is safe any more."

Elisabeth's eyes fastened on a patch near his elbow.

"Then are you yourself so well off?" she asked.

His mouth opened up round in a gasp of astonishment.

"Don't you understand?" The Reds. The Jews. They snatch the bread from everybody's mouth. Just look what they have done to our royal city, our Vienna. Of course, you yourself would hardly remember the good old times—yes, sir!" he interrupted himself and whisked out his napkin, for somewhere a guest had called.

But he was an enemy already. With hurt dignity he accepted the tip, as Elisabeth was leaving. And when she inquired of him the way to the church she was looking for, he stiffly answered that he did not know.

Now the Ring was busily awake. Shops and windows were open and the cold magnificence of the buildings was no longer so ghost-like. And farther along on her way, through the quaintly winding streets of the Inner City, the enchanting façades, the exquisitely wrought iron gates told a tale of another, a more sensitive time. Grass grew between the

flagstones of the honor courts into which she peered. On many doors, she read long and involved inscriptions indicating that these mansions were being used now as offices by the authorities. No doubt somewhere around here must be a small palace which, once upon a time, the Pattays had built for themselves. Now they were all together in that last house to which she was asking her way.

It was the Church of St. Quirin, not far from the square called Am Hof.

The heavily padded door closed behind her. She bent her knee in timorous courtesy. But she did not dip her fingers into the holy water; rather, like an intruder, she tiptoed into the jeweled light of the stained-glass window.

A still coolness. The church was empty. Only from an old woman with face and dress the color of the soil, kneeling somewhere at the side, there came the sounds of muffled coughs and murmurs. And it brought back to Elisabeth that morning of her first communion. Far away it seemed. She had rarely been to church since. Whenever she had come home from Switzerland on vacation, and had chanced to meet the kind priest who had so gently led her over the threshold, she would blush and look down as if she had cheated him.

And had she not? Placed by birth between the two creeds, she had never taken either one to her heart, and quite naturally had looked on sacred teachings and sacred history as one would on venerable fairy tales. A God who created so wicked a being that his other self had to die in order that man be redeemed—for millions he was a reality, removed from every doubting thought. Did it not point to a hidden disease, a dry-rot in her soul that she could not even long to believe, either in Chana's lone and exacting God, or in the gentle hero on the cross and his loving mother?

Shyly she gazed around her. Up in front tall, softly gleaming candles brought faint life to the gold and vermilion of the altar. And there, to the right, behind the richly carved choir stalls, began the row of the tombs.

This little Church of St. Quirin was like a family vault,

for to one side of the Nave only Pattays were buried. Elisabeth saw only the dim outlines of the earliest graves. She thought it improper to step up to the choir and to enter the enclosure. But those first ones down here in the Nave were also pretty old, with ornaments battered and epitaphs cleft.

Slowly she passed along the centuries. Clad in armor, the stone knights rested here above their crumbled selves, their hands in mailed gloves pointing up in prayer, their visors raised. In a niche she saw two tiny, bare coffins placed slantwise, their footends touching. No inscription gave the names of these two little counts who had died without a story. Next to them and towering up was the monument of one Matthias Cornelius Pattay, conqueror of the Turks and Generalissimo, carved in triumphant baroque with tuba-blowing genies, with winged lions and streaming stone banners. A clerical Pattay was also there, endued with dalmatic and infula, his delicately carved bishop's crook by his side. His likeness, in a creamy, softly polished stone, was the loveliest of all. Then followed an oddly disorderly gap. Masonry had dropped from the walls and no one had taken the trouble to clear it away. But at the end, and close to the door leading out into the open. Elisabeth beheld him whom she was seeking.

She stopped short. The likeness was perfect. Line for line, this father of stone resembled his photograph in the silver frame which stood on the small table at home.

Unlike the others, he was not stretched out on his coffin. In fact, his coffin was nowhere to be seen. He stood upright, slightly raised, at his feet the Pattay coat of arms cleft in two. The stone from which he was fashioned was still too chalky white, not yet ennobled by age. And this gave the lifelike resemblance something so weird, it was startling.

They had not presented him in soldier's attire. He was bareheaded and robed in a straight mantle falling to his feet, with embossed chain and cross on his chest. It was the vestment of a knight's order, a family heritage.

The expression on his face was far from solemn. With

stony lids closed in a smile, with clear forehead and kindly mouth, a gay, unburdened man stood there facing his child, which the daughter of sixty wandering, tormented generations had borne him when he himself was already dead.

Almost as much as his own picture, the stone image resembled the girl. Even the cape which she wore—now it was a black one made of heavy silk—fell from her straight shoulders very much like his knight's mantle. The light eyes with the golden sparks in them had the long cut and shape of his stone ones. The short, slender nose was his, the rounded chin. Only her mouth, which was already a woman's mouth, hinted in richer curves at a lusciousness ripened under a southern sun, sixty generations ago.

There was a spectral touch in this standing face to face. But she was not particularly stirred or sad, nor did she pretend that she was. She had not forgotten for whose sake she was here. She sat down on the edge of the pew, took out her notebook, and copied the inscription for Piotr.

Dominus
Dom. Franciscus Otto de Pattay et Schlern
Comes Palatinus
Natus A.D. 1886. Defunctus A.D. 1914
R.I.P.

But underneath it was written:

Homo, natus de muliere, brevi vivit tempore,
repletus multis miseriis, qui, tanquam flos,
egreditur et centeritur, et fugit velut umbra.

She read the passage through, and this beautiful and simple lament brought the tears to her eyes. She shook them off, annoyed with herself. These words did not even fit. True enough, short had been Pattay's span of life, his flower had been cut down before the summer—but "repletus multis miserii"? A life full of miseries? Who could have selected this passage for the carefree young nobleman who had been her father?

As she stepped out of the church, the deep tones of the

clock above struck the noon hour. She had barely enough time to make the train.

It left from the same station, was the same train in fact, which had taken Pattay toward his brief future, twenty years ago.

3

The bed Elisabeth had slept in, not more than a year ago, had been removed. But for the rest, the white-painted room looked the same. It had none of the usual confusion of a sick room, no scattered medicine bottles, no bowls or bandages, packs, wads of cotton.

On Chana's right, a single tiny bottle, filled with white tablets, stood on the bedside table. On her left, a tall, heavy iron cylinder rose from the floor. A thin tube carried oxygen to the rubber mask which covered the old woman's face. Her breath was loud and irregular.

Elisabeth sat alone beside the patient. Ten days ago she had arrived, but not until today could she persuade Recha, who had not left the house for weeks, to go for a drive with Piotr. Her heart beat fast with this new responsibility. Her eyes were fixed on that black mask, which billowed and collapsed over Chana's face.

Suddenly, this movement stopped. Frightened, she took Chana's hand but was reassured by a weak counter-pressure. She removed the mask. Chana's face appeared, unchanged, exactly as Elisabeth had known it for many years. Only the part below the eyes was discolored, brownish and puffy.

"You thought I was dead?"

In Chana's bleached voice was a faint echo of her rumbling laughter of old.

"But Aunt Chana——"

"No, we two don't have to pretend."

"Do you feel better now?"

"Better! I tell you, child, those pains there on the left—it's like a mountain pressing on it, but from inside. Oh——"

The wilted, parched lips opened pantingly. The nostrils caved in. Elisabeth grabbed the mask.

"No! Not the mask. Pills! Another one! Three!"

"But Silbermann said——"

There was such contempt in Chana's face, and such agony, that Elisabeth did what she asked. Chana swallowed the tablets. Almost instantly her face became calm.

"It still helps," she said much cheered. "Nitroglycerin, Bessie. They blast rocks with it. Oh, it feels good."

"You see, that'll heal all your troubles."

Chana laughed. This time it was really that rumbling laughter of old.

"You yourself don't believe that. What for, anyhow! Enough blasted! I would be eighty next year."

"You *will* be eighty," said Elisabeth.

Chana passed over it. "At least, I won't choke," she declared in a matter-of-fact way. "That man Silbermann puts on airs and doesn't tell anything. But the professor from Lemberg gave me very sensible answers. He thought it would be a sudden end. Something tears itself off in the vein, he said, a kind of tiny bullet, and flies straight into the heart. It's nice, Bessie, your having come," she said with no transition.

Affectionately, Elisabeth laid her hand on the brownish, spotted, haggard one. "You say that now. But if Piotr hadn't acted on his own——"

"Piotr is a good man," said Chana and these five words were like placet and seal on the person of Piotr Gargas.

She looked straight into the young face.

"You're nice-looking, Bessie. Too bad, I won't be here to meet your husband."

"You're just teasing me, Aunt Chana. I am only seventeen."

"I wasn't very much older than that. My husband was very religious—he never so much as looked at me before our wedding. If he had, he probably would have changed his mind."

Elisabeth laughed and swallowed the tears that tried to well up.

"Bessie!"

"Yes, Auntie!"

"What are you going to do when I am dead?"

"You shouldn't say things like that."

"But *when* should I say them? Bessie, you must all leave this place."

"Leave this place? Can you see Mother ever wanting to?"

"You come first. Can you see yourself sitting around here, helping Recha with the dusting?"

She sent an amused glance at the precise tidiness of the room.

"By the look of this place you'd think everything was already over—fumigated and cleaned up."

Elisabeth nodded. "It's like a phobia," she said softly.

Whenever she had returned home in vacation time, her mother's passion for order and cleanliness had intensified. Piotr, with his one hand, kept the house spick and span. But Recha would move restlessly from room to room, straighten pictures and mirrors, peek into corners and under rugs and rub nonexistent spots. She always wore cotton gloves that had to be washed daily. Her craving for bodily cleanliness had almost become a torture with her. She had acquired the habit of taking four or five hot baths daily. At one time, when a slight rash had broken out on her upper lip, she stayed in a darkened room for days, continually dabbing the inflamed spots with alcohol, trembling with loathing for herself.

"Yes, it is morbid," repeated Elisabeth. "We should really consult a nerve specialist."

"Child, that sits deep down inside, that loathing," answered Chana and closed her eyes. With the clear vision of one who is departing, she revived a past of long ago. Behind her closed eyelids she saw the hut and the dreary yard at Vieniava, saw herself locked in her room frantically tearing at the door, and outside, the horror: the two black figures swaying from the trees, and the Cossacks, sluggishly busying themselves with the fourteen-year-old child.

"You must leave this place," she said again. "Turn into cash whatever you can. Don't put it off. Things will get bad again here."

"Do you really think so? As long as the Marshal is still alive——"

"The Marshal. There are strange rumors about his doings at the Castle in Warsaw. And around him and behind him there are people—Oh, Bessie," she moaned, "that awful pressure—it's starting again——"

"You shouldn't talk so much, Auntie."

Elisabeth kneeled by her bedside and laid her cheek on the drooping hand. Chana quieted down. Her breath came more evenly.

"Your grandfather was murdered by those brutes," Elisabeth heard her say, "and then your father."

Frightened, she looked up. And she saw that Chana's parched lips were smiling.

"No, Bessie, I am not delirious. You think your father was killed in a fight with the Russians. But that is not true. The man he had shown up that time at the Archduke Rainer, he was the one who murdered your father."

"Captain Schaller?" Elisabeth asked incredulously.

She knew that old story. She invariably chuckled with delight whenever she thought of it. Not long ago, before the stone image at the church in Vienna, the story had come back to her.

"That man Schaller?" she asked again. "But when and how? It never did get as far as a duel."

"Duel! Have you ever heard that a scoundrel like that would risk his hide?"

Chana's voice was vibrant. Her eyes blazed with disgust and hatred. Completely disregarding her condition she turned to Elisabeth.

"Please, don't, Aunt Chana. You must lie still!"

"I'll have plenty of time to lie still. Bessie, I never told your mother about it. It's best that she believes what all of them believed. But you should know it . . ."

Amazing how her memory had it all stored away—all the

facts gleaned from the conceited twaddle of the corporal in the deserted barracks that time. How Pattay had left his lancers behind in the village to ride on alone across the hill. How his men had heard the shots, how they had followed him and how they had found him, his horse grazing beside him, with not a sign of the Russians anywhere.

"And the bullets had been fired into his back, Bessie! That anti-Semitic swine did it."

She had pulled herself up. And Elisabeth was so deeply engrossed that she forgot to caution her.

"But you only suspect all this," she cried. "You are not sure about it."

Chana's face showed red patches. Violently she shook her head.

"I am as sure as if I had seen it with my own eyes. Your father had to die because he looked on us Jews as human beings. Don't you think that is wonderful?"

Elisabeth nodded. She hardly breathed.

"I tell you—this is the way it was. The cur was close by. He sees your father riding over the hill. He follows him on his horse below. He cuts off Pattay's way. He is as silent as a snake. Down there is nothing but swampland. Then he lies waiting, hides, and as Pattay comes along, his eyes toward the enemy, he aims and sends the bullets from behind into your father's loyal heart——"

She sat up straight in her bed. She gesticulated while she spoke. Suddenly, her body was jerked back with a start, her head fell over the side of the bed, her mouth opened wide and a scream broke from it, high, shrill, piercing, harrowing.

With both her hands, Elisabeth embraced Chana's head. Nothing showed but the white of her eyes. There was one last gasp, a gurgle, a groan, but it came from the beyond. The end had come, the way she had known it would. A bullet had torn itself loose in her heart and had been hurled into the core of her strong, forthright heart.

4

The crocus and the white asphodels that had been planted on Chana's mound blossomed in thick clusters and long before their time. Almost without any warning, an early, bright summer was warming the Dniester valley.

Elisabeth felt that she was offending the one who was gone, when after weeks of sitting sadly at home she began to long for the outdoors and for exercise. She feared this urge might be unfair to the memory of the deceased. But she also knew that Chana would be the first one to laugh at such scruples. And down there, directly in front of the garden, was the Dniester, wide and deep, with quick waves rushing silently past.

She was a passionate swimmer. In years past, from March to November, she had hardly ever missed the joy of a dip in the gorgeous Swiss lake. Her swimming was not perfect in form but she never tired. Her healthy young chest, her straight shoulders and strong arms gave without effort what she demanded of them. She felt delightfully free and at home in that element.

Finally she made up her mind.

"I should so love to take a swim today. What do you say?"

"This early in the summer?" said Recha. "It won't be open yet."

"Open?" Bessie did not understand.

"And besides, Bessie, I don't know—those crowds in public baths, so many unclean people, you might catch something."

Elisabeth took her mother's arm and gently led her along the low yew hedge which fenced the garden from the riverbed.

"Not over there in the bay! That is reserved for frogs and little tots. Look—the Dniester is clean though it may look yellow. One can't catch anything in there."

"You mean, bathe in the open river? But nobody ever does that, with the river tearing along like that."

Stark horror shook Recha's voice. It was touching and a little comical. Elisabeth's heart sank. She had none of the callousness of inconsiderate youth and she well understood the sensitive egoism of her mother, whose life had been nothing but loss and denial. With a farewell glance over the flowing expanse she turned away.

But that evening, after supper, she carried her disappointment over to her truest friend. He was sitting on the small bench in front of the garage, which also was his living quarters, smoking a clay pipe. The moment he saw her approaching, he knocked out his pipe and rose.

"Now stop that nonsense, Piotr. You know I also smoke."

"To clean a pipe and light it again is half the fun," Piotr said sententiously and stuffed it into his pocket. "Besides, an old man should know how to behave."

Lately, Piotr was fond of talking about his age, though forty-three years was not sufficient reason. Ever since his hair started graying, he wore sideburns—a style that brought back vague memories of Hapsburg times and gave his clean-shaven peasant face an old-fashioned distinction.

Bessie sat down beside him and he listened.

"What your mother says is not so far wrong. The Dniester does tear along at a great speed."

"But, Piotr, what is there to worry about it? It's a little fast, that's all."

"I'm not so sure, Miss Bessie. Once I tried to swim straight across it. I landed way down below."

Elisabeth said nothing. He laughed.

"I know what's in your mind—my one arm, of course."

"I never even gave it a thought," said Bessie. She was a little embarrassed. "No one can swim upstream. But I could float along with it and then simply run back."

"That's right! In a wet suit and catch your death of a cold?"

Bessie was discouraged. "I guess you're not much of a help either. You better light your pipe again."

They sat there smoking; not another word was said. In the lit-up house ahead one could see Recha moving about,

could see her stop in front of the wall to straighten out what already was straight.

From across the river, a twangy church bell struck nine in quick succession. Far away, another nine followed, muffled and slow. Then everything was silent again, and one could hear the crickets.

The next afternoon Piotr appeared at Elisabeth's room, unexpectedly. With proper decorum he took off his cap.

"If Miss Bessie would now like to take a swim—I would be ready."

"You, Piotr? What for? Do you expect to swim along beside me?"

"*Drive* beside you," answered Piotr with delicate emphasis.

"In the car beside me? Did *you* think that up?"

"Your mother will no longer be worried. At least, she promised." Piotr smiled with a touch of pride in his diplomacy. "You swim as long as you want to, and then you get into the car."

"That sounds to me rather ridiculous," said Elisabeth, weakening.

It became the most enjoyable hour of the whole day, all summer long. In her steely-blue suit she ran through the hedge and across the river's rim into the water. While up on the road, Piotr slowly started his car. It was again a Fiat, but this time a convertible and deep red in color.

The road hugged the river closely. Not for one second did Piotr lose sight of his young mistress who rocked in the waves, leaped ahead, seemed to stop dead, splashed about with joy. She had a not very correct manner of stretching her head high out of the water. The light glittered on her smooth, blue cap. Suddenly she would disappear, remain under water for a long time, and although Piotr knew by now how sure a swimmer she was, his hand would invariably tighten on the steering wheel in those minutes. But there she was again, waving a glistening arm up to Piotr. She swam for two miles, for three. At a shallow place she would wade

out, run up the embankment. And there was Piotr, waiting and ready to wrap the bathrobe around her.

"Piotr, whose car passed by here a short while ago?"

"That was our chief of police."

"Lubecki?"

"Yes indeed. Miss Jadwiga with that corrupt pig, her father."

"Did you notice that they stopped? They'll be having a good laugh at our expense."

"That we will bear with fortitude," answered Piotr.

They reached home. Every day Recha stood waiting for them behind the overgrown gate, trying to look unconcerned.

"There you are," she said, as on every day, and with her gloved hand tidied back an obstinate twig.

5

But those precious months did not last. And just as the warmth had suddenly come this year, so an unexpectedly early winter set in. Uninterrupted, without any tempting relief, Elisabeth's convent-like seclusion spread out ahead of her peopled by elderly folk.

Piotr alone was not old. His insisting on it sounded more like a game, half prompted by impatience. As if his honest heart still harbored desires and agitations he would soon like to have done with.

Old was Miss Skarga. She still carried herself very erect and, as in winters past, continued to take long walks with Bessie by the frozen river. But since resigning from her position, the last connecting link between her and the present was torn. She lived looking backward. Through the door to her small, obsoletely furnished flat, a dead century opened up before Elisabeth.

Old before his time was Mr. Gelbfisch. Faithful, devoted, subdued, he took his place by the warm stove nearly every evening. Disillusioned, weighed down by premonitions, his

slight figure seemed to be shrunk. His hair was much grayer than Piotr's.

But Recha's was white. That rich, pure silver was a striking contrast to her amber-colored face with the wishful eyes. Her trim figure, her sensitive, beautiful hands, everything looked frail about her, though Recha was never ill.

Since Chana's going, life held for her no other content but Elisabeth. She showed an almost submissive tenderness toward her child. Never did she order her about. But her love, a silent, suffering infatuation, was tyrannic in its alarming exclusiveness. It became unbearable agony for her ever to leave the girl alone. Irresistibly drawn, she would open the door of her room.

"Where are you, Bessie?"

"But where would I be, darling? I am doing a little translating."

"I was suddenly worried."

For half an hour on end, she would sit beside her daughter and hold her hand, as if it were the hand of a lover. And it was just that. It was Pattay's hand she was holding. Elisabeth was the beautiful and strong embodiment of that short happiness, which had been blossom and fruit of her prematurely shattered existence.

Elisabeth's heart sank within her. She felt as if she would have to sit here forever, her hand locked in this frail one, enslaved by this poor, insatiable love.

Bravely she fought against this choking fear. She repressed it. She knew only too well how easily Recha sensed her inmost thoughts.

But it was already too late.

"Why am I still here," wailed the sharp, sweet voice, "a burden to you! It's I who should have died, not Chana."

"Darling, why do you torment yourself?"

Bessie embraced her, kissed the delicate cheek, the white hair. Without really being conscious of it, she never called her mother any more. Chana had left her behind and alone with a frightened, delicate child, cruelly maltreated by life.

But it was a tragically clearsighted child.

"Bessie, you know, life never carried things my way; it taught me little, I have seen nothing, learned nothing. And now I sit here with empty hands and have only you."

Taught little, learned nothing. But must that be final? The world was wide open. And there was Chana's strict counsel to turn their backs on the Polish land before it might be too late.

Chana had had in mind real dangers—those political clouds under whose shadows Heinrich had been silenced, had shrunk into himself. And perhaps going to another country might bring cure and contentment to Recha, and relief to herself.

But it remained a discouraging problem. She visualized her mother's life, so hushed, so fenced in. Rarely did Recha leave house or garden. A drive to town was a major decision. Elisabeth feared the very first hint would deeply distress her.

In no case must she speak before a clear, sensible plan had been mapped out. And there was no one to whom she could turn for advice.

To confide in Heinrich was out of the question. That change would cut too deeply into his own life. Miss Skarga? The hermit spinster had not traveled since her youthful days. The worldly-wise Doctor Krasna was dead; his son and successor in office was a smug mediocrity with little experience. And Piotr, the one person on whose sound judgment she had always relied, this time he could not be of any help to her.

The decision to be made slipped away from her. She felt helpless. After all, she was only nineteen years old.

Then, toward the spring, a voluminous letter arrived from Switzerland. Madame Dieudonné repeated her offer. She wrote that now that Lisa was alone with her mother, such a sweeping change might prove less of a venture than when her old aunt was still alive. And it would definitely be advisable to act soon. Nobody could foresee how long such a move would still be possible. Everywhere the earth was trembling with shocks portending a coming disaster.

And about herself—Madame Dieudonné had never believed that Lisa's going away could make such a difference. Her house had become lonely, in spite of the youngsters. Besides that, two teachers had left: Miss Dinklage, because of nervous irritability which had developed abruptly following the upheaval in Germany, and Miss Abercrombie because of marriage. Lisa would find a rich activity waiting for her.

But Madame Dieudonné went further than that. To place her life's work altogether into Elisabeth's hands one day, that plan dreamily touched upon on her last afternoon in Lausanne—now it was more than merely a daydream. Did it really matter that Elisabeth was not older? Had she not enjoyed among the children a kind of authority and devotion at a time when she herself was almost a child still? Humorously, Madame Dieudonné reminded her of those vanished handkerchiefs of hers. And then—who could tell how soon—Lisa would probably get married and choose a husband, a highly educated man perhaps who would share work and responsibility with her. Madame Dieudonné had carefully exhausted every possibility of her sensible wish-dream.

Then came the practical offers. She proposed an annuity that, in view of her thrifty nature, was considerable. Temptingly she described the apartment which was waiting for them. It consisted of the upper rooms in the side wing—Lisa naturally remembered them—cheerful rooms, attractively furnished, newly papered and painted, and all three of them with city and lake in full view. Surely Lisa's mother would feel at home there, away from the bustle of the house and yet close to gay and young life.

Elisabeth's hopes soared high. This letter was a sign from heaven, it pointed the way. Instantly she busied her mind with the details of this radical change to come.

Above all, how could Piotr, who would not be able to understand any tongue over there in Switzerland, be fitted in there? For there could never be any separation from Piotr, that was one thing she knew definitely.

She held back. She waited for the right moment. The signs

seemed to be in her favor. There was a chance that she would find Recha less retiring and unapproachable than she had been for a long time. Elisabeth had a small but encouraging indication of that.

Just about a week ago, Heinrich Gelbfisch had brought news of an artistic event which was to take place in the little town. A world-famous violinist touring the country was to appear as guest artist together with the Warsaw orchestra. It was an impressive, popular program: Szymanowski, Brahms, and Tchaikovsky's violin concerto. It was the first outstanding entertainment of its kind here. The tickets were almost sold out.

To Elisabeth's amazed delight, Recha expressed a desire to go. It turned out that in her past life she had known the artist. She described the famous man, her impression of him first in Berlin and then, later, in Warsaw: insignificant-looking, with the curiously fascinating head of a melancholy boy, not at all vain, wonderfully intelligent and a glowing conversationalist on sundry subjects.

Elisabeth listened to it as to a plaintive fairy tale. That her mother should have once belonged to a world in which one crossed the orbit of such personalities, that she should have stood behind the footlights, adored, admired and applauded on hundreds of evenings, and now nothing was left as a reminder of it all, was so painful to Elisabeth that she left the room and wept.

But she was very confident. She carried Madame Dieudonné's letters over her heart, like the golden key to the gate of the world. That evening, after the concert when Recha returned from that festive excursion into a long-forgotten past, her heart relaxed by music, then would be the moment in which she would speak.

On that day Elisabeth was awake before her usual time. The morning dragged on. In the afternoon, she could no longer keep quiet, she was feverish with anticipation.

Over the garage, Piotr was polishing his car.

"Piotr," she called to him, "my crooked finger tells me we're going to take a trip."

"Where to? Lemberg?"

"Lemberg! You'll be dumbfounded."

"Any place but Yakutsk, Miss Bessie. I would be against that."

She laughed and strode out for a walk along the road.

A dreary day. The Dniester ran high, carrying large chunks of ice. A gray, wadded sky fused into the bleak March scenery, from which every touch of color had gone. But she walked on briskly—on toward the glittering lake, toward those Alpine meadows of the Waadt and the Valais.

Darkness set in. By now she was so far from home that she had to ask a truck driver, headed for town, to give her a lift. She arrived with barely enough time to change.

"I'll be ready in a jiffy," she called over to Recha, for she heard Piotr driving the car up. Her mother did not answer, so she went to her room.

Recha sat in front of her dressing table, in her black velvet gown with the necklace of delicate gold spangles, her gloved hands lying idly, her head with the elaborate hairdress bent forward, her eyes filled with tears.

It was insurmountable. She could not do it. The thought of the crowds, of the brightly lit hall, the white faces, the voices, of the mighty music itself, made her choke with fright. In touching words she asked forgiveness from Elisabeth.

She had fought with herself, one could see that, and had been defeated. The barred gate to the world—the golden key would not unlock it. Elisabeth needed two heartbeats' time to pull herself together. She pushed a chair close.

"Nobody forces you, darling. And between you and me, they say he no longer is at his best."

But while she was talking and stroking her mother's hand, a frightening memory crept up in her.

It was at the Wawel in Cracow. The guide had led the tourists to the crypt beneath the cathedral. He was gloomily garrulous. He told of bodies that remained lifelike in their hermetically closed and sealed tombs, but at the slightest current of air streaming in would collapse and be dust.

6

About that time, the Marshal and Grandfather closed his pact with the Germans. Those wolfish howls from over there ceased, that yelping about maltreated brothers in blood, the bellowing for border regulations was turned off like the spigot of a cesspool. The stink evaporated.

So friendship and good will for ten long years was signed, sealed, and solemnly sworn to. Not another cross word against the neighbor. Force of arms, denounced and rejected by act of state and the word of man. Truly, it was a masterstroke with which the Marshal crowned his staggering career.

All of Poland breathed more freely, rulers and ruled.

The workman in the slums of Warsaw and Lodz, slaving for one-fifth of the pay his brother in Leeds and Pittsburgh was receiving; the peasant in crowded villages, so chained to barest needs that the purchase of a pair of boots upset his whole year's budget—they knew that at least there would be no war and they were thankful.

Others were thankful, too. But for different reasons.

The landed gentry on their vast, ill-managed estates, the Gentile tycoons of big business, the strutting army gods, the immense horde of civil servants and state pensionaries, they all knew only one fear: the fear of that gigantic shut-in world, pregnant with the future, which expanded from Poland's eastern border over the whole of Asia. From there, from that frightful doctrine which in defiance of all predictions and all denouncements had lived on for well-nigh two decades, their all was threatened: land tenure, industrial despotism, feudal manors and Warsaw mansions, class privilege and class aloofness.

Against this mortal danger, the German usurper was their natural crony. But he did not seem willing to join them. True, he kept on howling his crusading battle cry against the Kremlin. But the wicked man railed no less violently against Poland, whose titled and propertied masters stood invitingly ready to enter into nuptial bliss with the good-for-nothing.

Yes, the Marshal had just made it. He was still good for something, the old man. There was reveling in castles and county seats and in the high-ceilinged homes on the Avenue Szucha.

The only ones who did not revel were the Jews. Over there, in the awakened Germany, their brothers were being degraded to beasts, tortured, maimed, slaughtered without redress. What else could, and would, result from this, here in Poland! Once again, tradespeople and artisans sat in the dark, behind bolted shutters, wrapped in their prayer shawls. The one man in whom they had put their trust seemed to have betrayed them.

But this was not so. Very little, it is true, was left of the people's champion of yore, of that charging fighter for equal rights and for bread. Power wielded for so long a time does something to a man. His spirit, exhausted by too many vicissitudes, lost itself in shadowy by-paths. Sudden fits of disgust and fury gave way to long spells of weariness. His military and privileged satellites, the Colonels, drew their circle ever closer around him and barred the view from his weakening eyes.

However, he caught glimpses between their shoulders. He knew the game that was being set up since his pact. It was the old game of the Czar's government. All those who commanded and toadied breathed fresh morning air. He knew that stealthy crescendo in the press—how, from month to month, the goal was being pointed out with ever-increasing vulgarity. Staged riots broke out among the students. Soap-box orators wandered through the hungering plains, enlightening the peasants about those circumcized devils who fattened themselves in their midst by usury, fraud, white slavery and witchcraft.

The worst did not befall the Jews. In the clouded mind of the old man a light of decency and honesty flickered still, kindled in that far off time when Jewish enthusiasts and brothers-in-arms had bled beside him for a free Poland. He held his no longer steady hand over the helpless ones, protected their lives, and wherever he could their property also.

The blustering high school boys he placed under police surveillance. With one stroke of his pen he outlawed a new, impatient party, the "Nara," which all too manifestly had, as its aim, a pogrom.

His mind was still clear enough not to rely on his own pact. He probably despised that shrieking seer and his rabble still more than the former barbaric Russian generals. No, there was no covenant with the wolves. He shrugged his heavy shoulders over this friendship which was supposed to run ten years.

What he had wanted was a delay. And that he had accomplished. "Every day without a war is a battle won" was his pet phrase. And he spurred on the Colonels to arm—to arm so as to make Poland a rampart and bulwark against that day when that predatory friend would roll in on his mountains of steel, tearing up the pact.

The Colonels had much more confidence than their Marshal. What was there to doubt in this splendid army he himself had created? Was not the Polish soldier renowned for his bravery? Above all, there was the cavalry, splendidly mounted and highly trained, an uplifting sight to every patriotic heart.

And besides—there would be no war. The old man saw specters. The Colonels felt such a profound, brotherly sympathy for the Fuehrer and Chancellor. He was their marveled-at model. To build up accurately that kind of state, racially pure, free of the Jews, totalitarian, that was their fondest dream. Why should his love not last?

To be sure, time was short, for them too. The country was still a semblance of a Republic. It had a Parliament where laws were made and unmade by the mob, by peasant deputies, socialists, Ukrainian riff-raff, White Russians and even those Jews. That would have to go. Should anything at all remain of the Parliament, then only a front with a vacuum behind it. All power to the President, to him the "one and indivisible authority," including the right to choose his own successor. The Colonels would be sure to hold one in readiness. And that in the future this office

would propagate in the right direction—they would see to that too.

But the coup was possible only so long as the old man was still alive. Only by his unquestioned prestige, by his hallowed signature could an overthrow be legitimized. To guide his hand should not be so hard. For a long time he had been utterly weary of parties and factions, had looked with contempt upon the debates of the assembly as just so much cant and rant. Being one's own monument for so long is a costly privilege. If now a resolution were laid before him, wherein Parliament voted itself out of power, he would not object.

On the crucial day, the opposition must not participate in the session; everything depended on that. Then, like a thunderbolt, the motion, the vote—and the gate leading to Poland's true greatness would burst open.

Feverish, hushed activity. The Marshal did not have many more weeks. In darkest secret, a specialist from Vienna had been called to the Belvedere. Cancer of the liver—the verdict remained hidden from the dying man, but not from the hustlers. And they managed it. They bullied and bluffed and bamboozled him into it. Between a game of solitaire and feeding his pigeons, the Marshal-liberator set his legendary name under the new Constitution of April 23, 1935. A few days later he was dead.

National mourning week. Somber pageantry. Passing of tens of thousands by his catafalque in the cathedral at Warsaw. Elisabeth read of it in the papers. She had been reading the papers very carefully of late. They were now overflowing with solemn details. She read about the impending transfer to the Wawel in Cracow, so that the people's redeemer might lie with Poland's heroes and kings. But his heart, so read his wish, was to be laid to rest at Vilna at the feet of his mother.

That evening, Heinrich spoke of the day long ago when the Grandfather and Marshal rode into the town to speak from the steps of the city hall.

"He looked at you all the time, Bessie. His words were comforting and noble. 'Don't believe in that talk about

breed and blood. For a whole century, our children have learned to weep early in life. That shall not happen again.' And always with his eyes on you, Bessie, on your little Scottish dress. I see it all clearly."

"It still exists," said Piotr, who was serving the coffee. They were all amazed. Piotr left the room and returned almost instantly.

The dress was incredibly small. The red checks had paled, belt and collar were yellow. But it was not crumpled. It must have been hung up with great care, wherever Piotr had brought it from so promptly.

"That you could ever have gotten into that," said Recha and looked at her handsome, grown-up daughter.

"And this I wore on my head," said Elisabeth, twisting the Scottish cap in her hand. The saucy feather stuck through it was nicked in the middle.

"Yes, one day the little feather got broken," remarked Piotr. "I don't know how that happened."

They all looked at him.

7

A late afternoon in October was bidding a warm and golden farewell. Elisabeth had returned from a walk with Miss Skarga. She had sipped a cup of very thin tea at the old-fashioned flat and now, on her way to the Dniester bridge, was passing through the Kreuzgasse when an officer with a young woman came toward her on the narrow sidewalk near Berges's drygoods store. He flattened himself against the shopwindows to make room for her.

She had gone on quite some distance when someone called to her from behind. She turned. With outstretched arms Wanda Slawek came toward her.

"Elisabeth, you pass by as if you didn't know me any more."

"Not as if," said Elisabeth. "I really did not recognize you."

The schoolmate of times past, daughter of the tax com-

missioner, had grown into a pretty, ample-bosomed woman. She was one year younger than Bessie but already showed the effect of too many petits fours and sweet drinks.

By way of introduction, she pointed to the officer who had followed her in a more leisurely manner.

"My brother Stanislaw. He simply refused to let me pass you like that."

Hand on cap, the young man supported his sister's claim with a bow and a slight tinkle of spurs. Slender like a reed in his natty uniform, a trim little mustache on his eager face, brows as if pencilled, and softly impudent eyes, he was the dashing picture of a matinée idol.

"Really, that would have been the limit." He came toward her with a smile, after giving his appearance ample time to register. "For eleven months of the year, one stays shut away in those Wolynic swamps, keeping a valiant border-watch against the Reds. And when that chivalrous knight does return home on leave, his own sister conceals from him the charms of his home town. Wanda—this is outrageous."

All that was said with a conceited and stilted irony which he must have had reason to consider irresistible. Elisabeth's throat tickled with laughter.

Not without visible effort did his sister back him up.

"He's right. Why don't we ever see you? It can't be on purpose. After all, we were school chums."

"Were we?" asked Elisabeth. She lifted her crooked finger and wiggled it for a moment in front of Wanda's nose.

Wanda turned purple.

"But that was only puppy play—forgotten long since."

Lieutenant Slawek had looked on without understanding this by-play.

"My dear lady," he said jauntily, "permit me to do what the regulations command of us cavalrymen. *Attaquez toujours!* The Lancers here are giving a ball on the fifteenth. They have pledged their word that it will be a most brilliant affair. Anniversary of Poland's independence. Why don't you come? I would consider it an honor to escort you—the

greatest of pleasure," he added with a conqueror's flash from his impudent eyes.

"Look here, Wanda," cried Elisabeth reproachfully. "You completely forgot to enlighten your brother. Be glad, Mr. Slawek, that I do not accept your invitation. To appear at this national festival with me at your side would mean good-by to your career."

The moment demanded poise of Wanda. She swallowed her raging embarrassment.

"What are you talking about? Not a word of it is true. First of all, there is your father, am I right? And then, you are a baptized Catholic, just as good as we two."

"It did not do me any good," Elisabeth said in a hollow voice, as if this discovery had plunged her into a well of sadness.

But the moment she left them, she was angry at herself. That was not the way to behave! Icy friendliness would have been the right thing. She had acted like an ill-bred youngster, silly and cheap. After all, she was no longer fifteen.

But this self-rebuke held out only as far as the bridge. She debated what Chana would have said about this incident. Nothing. She would merely have laughed her low, rumbly laughter. And Piotr? Piotr would not have objected, either. So why worry? Quite contented, she arrived home.

That was on a Thursday. On Saturday morning at eleven the doorbell rang and Piotr brought in two calling cards: Dr. Alwin Zweifuss, lawyer, and Justine Salzer, née Zweifuss.

"Another sister with her brother," said Elisabeth and wrinkled her brow. But before Recha had time to ask what she meant by that "another," the two were in the room.

The once plumpish Justine now appeared to be rather skinny, although her union with the fur dealer Salzer had already been blessed with two sons. Her dark, vacant eyes took in every detail of her surroundings. For it was Justine's first appearance in the camp of these shunned ones who had kept the Zweifuss tongues wagging lustily all these years.

"How very kind of you to come to see us," said Recha, and with her crumpled handkerchief furtively wiped the hand that had touched the two.

"My brother," explained Justine, "has taken up his practice here. He lives next door, with our parents."

"And so," Alwin chimed in, "it is only natural that we should want to reinforce our neighborly connections."

Bessie's lips were already opening. For that, she wanted to say, he would have to start at the beginning; being neighborly had confined itself more or less to making faces at them. But a look at Recha's shy, tense expression made her give it up. All four sat down.

Unlike his sister's eyes, Alwin's eyes were demure but crafty. Nor was he dark as she was, but had reddish hair, and his slight, well-formed figure had the coarse, ugly hands of his grandfather, Daniel.

Carefully he spread out the tails of his frock coat behind him, pulled his pin-striped trousers up so as not to endanger their crease, and immediately began to talk about his accomplishments, just as if this wide world held no other subject worthy of even casual mention.

He announced that he had begun his studies at the University at Leipzig. That was four years ago. Deferentially and with full titles, he enumerated the famous teachers at whose feet he had sat. Then the political upheaval had unfortunately made his stay there impossible.

Concerning this upheaval in Germany, Alwin Zweifuss remained most objective. True enough, breach of law had occurred, excesses were a fact. But one should not overrate a few blemishes and so overlook the really magnificent aspects of this movement. An absolutely novel, portentous concept of state was on the march.

He paused and seemed to be waiting for plaudits.

"Don't you smoke?" asked Elisabeth.

Mr. Zweifuss held his ugly hand poised over the box as if it needed an expert to take a cigarette.

"But Alwin, not today," slipped from Justine's mouth.

He shook his head and closed his eyes with a grin,

superior to such Sabbath restrictions. Conspicuously he inhaled the vapor and then continued with his autobiography.

So then he had returned to finish his studies at Polish universities. Resistance existed here too—obviously. Because the number of Jewish students had risen far above any sensible proportion and the government made every effort toward a drastic reduction. Alwin was not inclined to criticize the administration for that. He, at any rate, had been passed. And these student riots, played up so irresponsibly by a certain reddish press! Boys' pranks, nothing more. If one remained tactfully in the background and happened not to look like an old-clothes' peddler, one was absolutely safe. It was true that for Jewish candidates the exams had been considerably toughened up. In spite of it, they were still passable—notice the example. It was true that young Jewish lawyers were not encouraged to set up practice. But here was Alwin Zweifuss, established in one of the most exclusive sections of the town, where, as a rule, Jewish tenants were not accepted. There was his office, at the corner of Sobieski Street and Kornhof.

Intently and not without grave doubts Justine had tried to gauge the effect of this brotherly recital. She remained in the dark. Recha would barely wedge in a polite word between the verses of Alwin's eulogy.

"A glass of sherry, perhaps?" she now said, a little tardy. Piotr brought it. They sipped it in almost unbroken silence. Elisabeth, at any rate, had not spoken a word.

They believe I am a complete imbecile, she reflected cheerfully and toyed with the idea of adding a few cross-eyed leers and an occasional weird grunt to round out the picture.

But they were already leaving. Elisabeth closed the door.

"It was priceless," she said gleefully. "Do you want to bet that I know what you will do this minute?"

And she pantomimed a thorough scrubbing of the hands.

Recha blushed faintly. It is true, every second of their stay, she had craved soap and water.

"Go ahead, make fun of me," she said without being upset.

"Make fun of you? I should say not. Never was it more necessary than now." And she embraced her mother.

Then she went out into the kitchen where Piotr was busy.

In the art of cooking, Piotr had improved appreciably since those early days of the rice mush. Simple dishes, and lunch, he almost always prepared without aid.

"Already gone, Miss Bessie?" he asked, and clattered around the stove.

"Yes, they have gone. Tell me, Piotr, what do all these brothers and sisters suddenly want from us?" And she told him about the meeting with Wanda and her uniformed brother. "Everywhere love and peace. Can you explain it?"

"That I can," answered Piotr. "Miss Bessie, you are a rich heiress."

"Never did I think of that," said Bessie startled.

"Of course not, but they think of it. And it will have to come some time." He bent low over his iron pan.

Bessie sniffed. "What are you making today?"

"*Omelette aux fines herbes.*"

"What? Please say that again."

"Did I say it wrong?" asked Piotr and turned his omelet.

"You never do anything wrong. When I think of how quickly you learned to write!"

A few weeks ago she had suggested to Piotr that she would teach him the Latin characters. "Then you will be able to write so that the Poles can understand and you can read Polish books."

"That's fine," Piotr had answered, "but an old man is not much good at learning new tricks."

She had figured that the coaching would take a long time, had quite looked forward to it. But after only a few lessons, Piotr had mastered it all.

"An old man ought to be able to learn a few letters," was his rejoinder now.

"Oh, go away, you with your age. Funny. There you stand over the stove, making omelets for us."

Piotr did not answer. He was busy folding up his omelet.

"There are those nincompoops who imagine everything

has to be the way it is—a riding monkey like Slawek or this smug Alwin. And it's all nothing but an accident. You might have become God-knows-what, Piotr. A scholar, a general, a statesman—and a better one than what we have now."

"Of course," Piotr said calmly. "Whether it's pulpit or gibbet—you can carve either from the same piece of wood."

Bessie pricked up her ears.

"I must try and remember that. It's a good proverb."

"What is a good proverb?" asked Piotr, surprised.

8

The office of Heinrich Gelbfisch was on the second floor of the store, both windows facing the Ring with the city hall in its center. Over to the right, one could see the government building behind whose whitewashed walls sat the officiating Vaivode, and also the Roman Catholic church, erected about ten years earlier in a meaningless, elaborate style. Over to the left, standing sideways to the edge of the Ring, was the Greek Catholic church, its three cupolas having grown even more irregular and warped with the years.

On the rough cobblestones of the Ring, stall was jammed against stall, cart against cart, with the picturesque costumes of the Ukrainian venders sprinkled in between. The din rose up. It was a market morning in May.

"We had better close the window," said Mr. Gelbfisch, "or Bessie won't be able to concentrate. And this, after all, is a big moment."

Solicitor Krasna agreed. He was a man this side of forty, with a brown goatee and cool eyes behind his gold-rimmed spectacles. The dignity of his father and predecessor had shrunk to a dry formality in him. Very much satisfied, he looked through his papers.

Just a week ago, Elisabeth had rounded out her twenty-first year. She was of age. It was at the proposal of Mr. Krasna that they met today.

"You are flattering me," said the junior partner of the house of Gelbfisch. "I won't be able to understand a word

of your statement, though I'm certain it will be clear enough."

"Accounting is mandatory," replied Krasna with dry courtesy. "You will have to approve or order my services discontinued." And he began to sketch a general picture of the financial status.

In spite of the precarious course of events, in spite of deflation and tax burdens, the financial standing was excellent. Whatever the troubles of the non-Christian citizens in the country, with whatever increasing brutality they were being eliminated from trade and industry since the death of the Marshal, Gelbfisch and Son had not suffered.

For the town's population was steadily increasing; it had doubled since the place became an administrative center. And as the existing capital shortage precluded the establishment of new, competitive firms, Gelbfisch and Son continued alone to provide the Polish upper classes with luxuries. In the last fiscal year, the net profits were thirty per cent. Elisabeth was indeed "a rich heiress," there could be no doubt about that.

With his thin fingers, the lawyer thumbed through the generously blessed pages of the main ledger.

"Will you want to go through all of this?"

"Good heavens, Mr. Krasna. I was always at the foot of the class in mathematics."

He acknowledged it with a thin smile.

"I have put the essential figures and balances on this sheet here. That should give you a comprehensive idea."

And he handed a double-folio page with red and black lines to Mr. Gelbfisch's partner.

Both men watched her while she read it. Krasna with a touch of satisfied pride, Heinrich in a thoughtful, emotional mood. To him it seemed only yesterday that, on the floor below, he had lifted the tiny girl up on a stool so that she might look out of the window. Now she sat there, a grown, sensible person reading a business statement. While he himself? Between that day and now lay the whole story of his sinking heart.

She took an unexpectedly long time to examine the balance sheet. And though she sat still, a strand of her honey-colored hair fell again and again over her eye.

"I see," she said finally and pushed the strand back for the last time. "But there is one point I don't quite understand. What is this: subventions and donations, 900 zloty?"

"That was unavoidable," declared Mr. Krasna. His voice suddenly had a respectful ring. "It is quite impossible for the well-to-do members of the community to go below a certain amount. That would only start gossip and foment trouble. A *nobile officium,* you might say."

Elisabeth nodded her head. She looked far from happy. She folded the paper and returned it to Mr. Krasna's documents. The conference had come to an end.

"Uncle Heinrich," she said as soon as she was alone with him, "come, look down here with me."

She had opened the window.

"A pretty sight, isn't it, these peasants in their costumes, all embroidery and frills! A year ago, it wasn't so colorful. Too many black caftans spotted the picture. Now it is much gayer."

Heinrich glanced at her from the side. Her light eyes flickered dangerously.

"Doesn't this man read the papers? The headlines, that's all he needs to look at. 'All market stands for our peasants!' 'Poland's markets purged of Jews!' And it's already working. The peasants don't understand much about this business, everyone knows that. But the Jews are out, and that is the main thing. Those measly odds and ends on their carts was all they ever had. Now they are done for. And at such a time that man hands out 900 zloty, with that super-profit of ours!"

Heinrich was enthusiastic. "Bessie," he cried weakly, pretending to take Krasna's side, "the lawyer has the firm's interest at heart. Our employees have to live too. He means well. Without his father and him, everything would have been finished and gone long ago. Don't forget, I almost ruined the business."

"But I know all that." In her eagerness, she put her warm, vibrant arm around the shoulders of the small man. "And yet—900 zloty! Passover was four weeks ago, wasn't it? In the paper, which he refuses to read, it stated in plain letters that two-thirds of the Jews in the town were forced to ask for help. Two-thirds of them did not have money enough to buy their unleavened bread and a decent dress for the temple. Nine hundred zloty—good heavens!"

She strode about the room, angry and embarrassed alike, shamed by her part. When she again looked at Heinrich, she saw that he was weeping.

"But Uncle Heinrich, what is it?"

He leaned his head against the young heaving breast and gave way to his silent tears. He wept because of his life, which had begun in such confidence, courage and generosity, and which had come to nothing.

9

"Piotr, I am desperate. I simply can't do it."

"What can't you do, Miss Bessie?"

It was after the swim, way out at a place where the countryside rose gently from out of the river into soft, green hills. It was so gorgeous a summer afternoon that she did not want to return home right off. Wrapped in her white bathrobe, she sat beside Piotr on the luscious green. A few paces below, down there in the road, stood the Fiat, with sparkling highlights on its wine-red polish.

"I can't do it," she said again. "They go on with their societies and committees—soup kitchens, child welfare, and I don't know what. They carry on with their meetings and investigate the 'cases' on their merits, these puffed-up ladies, the Mrs. Blauschild, Kupfermann, and that sweet Justine. And they act as if these 'cases' belonged to a different species of mankind, were savages that must, under no condition, be spoiled or they might get overbearing. The Czar of Russia himself was not nearly as exalted. They actu-

ally believe they are something special because their husbands or fathers earn money. Piotr, I have discovered one truth: money makes people stupid."

"I thought that was all over—those meetings."

"Yes, that is all over. They only put up with me—well, you know why. Every time a Yiddish word came up—and that happened in spite of the airs they give themselves—they would translate it for me sort of pityingly, you know. They are just too stupid for words. Well, then I tried it another way. I investigated the 'cases.' Naturally, I had the list. And now comes the worst—that didn't work either."

Piotr gave her an earnest look but did not say anything.

"You've no idea what their places look like. I'm sure, in your village, you had poverty too. But it couldn't have been like that. The filthy misery, Piotr, the sadness. The way they sleep in cellar-like holes with never a ray of sun to dry them out. And they have children, an incredible number of them, all such pale, puny prayer faces. They enter this world with hopeless eyes and soon it is only too clear that they are right."

"It is a good thing your mother knows nothing about those visits! She would be afraid of the diseases."

"She doesn't need to be afraid any longer. One just has to give money, as much as one can. Uncle Heinrich, thank God, is generous. But I can't bring myself to go there any more."

Piotr kept on looking at her.

"They are so humble, you know. One comes to them, bringing something that will take care of them. And they dust off the chair and ask God's blessing on one. It's as if they thought exactly the same thing as those committee women: that they are something different, something bad, contemptuous, because they have no money. And then you stand there like an ass on a tightrope and want nothing better than to sink into that filthy floor."

"That is the way it is," said Piotr. "To listen to gratitude is the hardest of all things for those who have a noble heart."

"Oh, fiddlesticks——"

But he would not let her go on. "With your father it was much the same," he insisted. "I had been with him only two months and then Christmas came. The Count gave me fifty crowns. Fifty crowns—I could not believe my eyes. I thanked him in the humble way we used in those days and I went to kiss the hem of his *litevka.* 'Have you gone crazy?' he said. 'Better be more careful and stop saddling my mare crookedly.' But he laughed as he said it. For that about the mare was not so. She was always saddled as straight as a streak. He simply could not listen to it, that was all."

"That definitely does not fit me," said Bessie with a frown. "I'm just no good for anything."

"Miss Bessie—it fits like a glove."

"And I am no longer 'Miss Bessie.' A useless, gawky affair, that's what I am. Come now, say Bessie to me."

A heavy truck roared past them along the road. The dense cloud of dust took some time before it settled down.

"Fine roads we have here in Poland!" said Piotr. "Remind me of Yakutsk."

The summer air was as gossamer as before. But on the polish of the Fiat no more reflections glittered; it was covered with a white coating.

"Our roads are nothing but holes and dirt," repeated Piotr. "But for that we have the new prison now, with pillars holding it up in the front, and the monument of King Sobieski, all in gold."

"Yes, awful," said Elisabeth. "The artist is the Vaivode's son-in-law."

"You would hardly know the King's face, his nose is so shiny from the gold. In my book, he looks different. That was a very wonderful book," he concluded with emphasis.

"What? Are you already finished with both volumes?"

The book she referred to was a popular history of Poland, richly illustrated, which Bessie had given him.

"It was a very exciting book to read. One can see they have always knocked each other's skulls in, here in this country." He hesitated for a short moment. "It came from Lemberg, did it?"

"The book? Oh yes, of course from Lemberg. There isn't a book to be had in this town."

Piotr nodded his head. "There isn't much to be had here anyway. In other towns they have music and theaters. In Omsk they had two, and that was a filthy hole. What do all our fine people do in the evening, before they go to bed? They surely would like to read books."

"So would I," said Elisabeth with a sigh.

It was truly calamitous. In her walled-in existence, lacking all productive occupation, this need of books had grown steadily in her. She longed for the enjoyment in the molded thought, for the hidden grace and charm of poetry. But where feast on these? They had no public library. Heinrich's shelves displayed only works of economic and political content, and even those were out of date. They belonged to that period when his life was brimming over with hope. Miss Skarga's small inventory of books stopped short with the eighteenth century. Whenever Elisabeth went over to Lemberg, which happened once or twice a year, she would spend hours at the bookstore, as if it were a rarely unlocked treasure-house.

"Now, for instance, at our department store," came Piotr's dreamy speculation, "one can buy almost anything. China with fine designs, evening dresses, electric tea kettles, not to forget the birds and the goldfish. Only books one cannot buy there. I wonder why not?"

That was particularly true. Why not? echoed Elisabeth's thoughts. Instantly her imagination set to work. One corner with books—a small section—a little shop within the big shop perhaps. Shelves filled to the rafters with the treasures of the mind. The gold lettering on the leather and linen backs glowed softly. To select books, recommend them, make them known—a vocation more modest than translating. But at least it would be a service, though a slight one, for something she loved.

She saw herself among those tall bookstands. And she also saw Recha. In a soft voice, Recha asked the customer what he wanted, silently nodded her head with the white

hair. Then the frail figure stood on the upper rung of the ladder, the sensitive hand found the book, drew it out. No glove covered her hand. A new book was so clean. When you opened it, it crackled invitingly, it was so fresh, and it smelled so wonderfully untouched. With light steps her mother dismounted, at ease in her quiet work . . .

Elisabeth turned her eyes to Piotr. He was suspiciously silent. His kind face between the gray sideburns wore a puzzling smile. Then it suddenly dawned on her. Piotr had patiently led her up to what he had wanted her to see.

"Miss Bessie," he now said, "we should be going home."

She got up.

"If I hear you say Miss Bessie once more—I have my own names for you too."

"What kind of names," he asked innocently.

"The right kind, don't you worry! Maybe Pied Piper, Sly Boots, Wise Guy. Or perhaps Friend Fox?"

10

In setting up the bookstore, an outside corner of the building—the one facing the Greek church—had been set off up to the first floor. A door of polished wood with copper trimmings opened in directly from the street. To the right and left of the corner were plate-glass windows, high and exceptionally wide.

Nothing like these windows had ever been seen in the town. The eye was regaled by literature arranged in groups or distinguished by isolation, opened up on small reading stands, interspersed with photographs of well-known authors. At night, long after closing time, everything remained brightly lit. People, out for their evening stroll, would gather in front of them, dazed by so much brilliance, and planned soon to visit this extravagant establishment.

And when they did, they stepped into an atmosphere of restfulness and good taste. This seemed hardly the kind of place where somebody was out to make money by selling as many books as possible. It was more like a private library.

Comfortable chairs invited the reader to sit around leather-covered tables. The round one carried a small bust of massive bronze, very lovely, of Slowacki, the poet.

It did not turn out to be just a small shop within the big one, but a rather grand, independent enterprise.

Heinrich had not been able to arouse any enthusiasm in his department heads when he submitted the project.

A bookstore? Whoever read books in this town? And for that, a section of Household Goods and Lamps was to be snipped off so that, in the future, no range and no standing lamp could be properly displayed? Without the curbing check of Solicitor Krasna, the new era certainly was starting off well!

But the department heads turned out to have been mistaken. The bookshop was a success.

Its first visitors, Poles only, walked into the place with a superior smile. They were the sophisticated crowd, at home in the bookstores of Cracow and Warsaw, possibly in those of Vienna and Paris. What could one expect in this provincial outpost!

They were amazed. And their amazement was of rather a complex nature.

For immediately opposite the stock of Polish books there were rows of French literature in that characteristic yellow paper binding. It affected one pleasantly. After all, one read French. Read it preferably, ostensibly. To know French was still a Freemasonry countersign in Poland, a tag by which the fashionable world recognized itself. In examining them more closely, though, one discovered names in those yellow rows that had a touch of the unreliable, the undesirable: Aragon, André Salmon, Cocteau, Jean-Richard Bloch. . . . Still, they did write in French.

One explored further, and stopped short. The eye was arrested by undecipherable titles in Cyrillic print. What was that? Russian perhaps, imported mutiny from Moscow? No, the books were Ukrainian. Such a thing existed? There actually were writers among this colorful mob of peasant illiterates?

But there was still more to come.

In full view, across from one of the big windowcases, an enormous bookstand displayed even stranger fare—Hebraic and Yiddish works in their Asiatic square letters. That was positively an affront. Did those two ladies imagine for one moment that Polish gentry would hobnob with caftaned figures, sit with them at the table that carried the bust of their national poet?

The two ladies! For Elisabeth's sudden vision on that summery wayside had become a happy reality.

Not until everything had been settled between her and Heinrich did she initiate her mother into the plan. Naturally, Recha was upset. She declared herself incapable of doing such work, felt uninformed and out of touch with people. In the end, however, not much persuasion had been needed.

"You will be simply wonderful, darling. When it's all finished and set, and before you say anything, take a look at it."

There was not much choice left. Anything was better than being separated from Bessie those many hours daily.

That first choking timidity was soon gone. Recha enjoyed the forgotten satisfaction of being useful. The neat, refined surroundings had its charms. And besides, meeting the customers was not at all what she had feared. It was impersonal, no close physical contacts, no shaking of hands. The arrangement had been that Recha should spend half the day there, whichever half she wished. But, in no time, she frequently came along with Bessie in the morning and did not return home before the evening.

On such days, a light meal was served for both of them up in Heinrich's office. Heinrich was happy to be close to the two people he loved. He was happy for a more secret reason. This enterprise here under his roof, this polyglot, unprejudiced little center of mankind's brain children—it was like an afterglow, like a modest realization of his former humanitarian dreams. Heinrich was proud of this bookshop and of her who conducted it.

Elisabeth did not attend to it alone with Recha. An

assistant took care of the literature which was unfamiliar to her. He was a college graduate, a young man named Jozef Sussmann. Under great sacrifice his father, a cantor at the synagogue, had sent him to college to study law. But Jozef had not been as fortunate as the smug Zweifuss. At the examination, questions were put to him that the dean of the faculty himself could not have satisfactorily answered. Now he sat, sickly and silent, thick glasses before his feeble eyes, waiting for customers to buy his Jewish tomes which he himself studied incessantly.

"How he reminds me of my brother," Recha whispered. "I seem to see him still, in his small shop at the Gate, really only a hole in the wall. His name was Jozef too. He was only eighteen when the Cossacks killed him. Do you believe it could happen again?"

"You're not to think about such things, my love," Bessie said uneasily. "That is so long ago, thirty years or more."

She felt relieved when talks like that were interrupted by someone entering the shop, by a customer.

Customers for Jozef were rare. Only orthodox Jews read the writings of which he was in charge. And they were mostly poor. Whoever came, exchanged muted words with the son of the cantor, as if they expected any moment to be expelled from this resplendent place. Gradually, more and more of them came. It got around that one could stand there, unmolested, and read one's fill without having to buy. But there was little danger that these men in caftans would sit down at the leather-covered tables with the Polish aristocrats.

Things were quite different with that affluent circle with which Bessie had come in a short and unpleasant contact at those committee meetings. Here, only the ladies came and bought books. Their husbands and fathers were too profitably engaged to find time for such trivialities. The ladies were self-confident, perhaps a fraction noisier than necessary. They had the names of the international authors at their fingertips. They bought Polish books, French books, English books. Only Jozef's square-letter books they ignored consistently.

Ukrainians also came. True, an intellectual class of

Ukrainians hardly existed here. Its center was Lemberg, where the struggle to found a Ukrainian university was still going on. However, colorfully dressed peasants were not the only Ukrainians here. Teachers, lawyers, Greek-Catholic priests lived in the vicinity, and so did civil servants in more modest positions. Overjoyed, they reached for the epics and folklore, the new novels written in their own tongue, which was an early severed, full-grown daughter of the Russian language.

But the Poles were in the majority, of course. Piotr's guess has been correct; they were grateful for the opportunity to add zest to their evening hours before retiring. To read books became the fashion; at any rate, to buy books became the fashion. Books were given as presents for Christmas and Easter, for birthdays and saints' days. Whatever was in stock, they accepted. And as the selection was in Elisabeth's hand, she made it a special point to keep the trite, the conventional stock away from her shelves. So in the homes of the most conservative families, progressive Warsaw literature piled up, as well as those yellow volumes with unreliable names.

Bessie saw all of them again, all those daughters of the gentry from whom she had so deliberately kept aloof to stay on her ghetto bench in school. The daughters had not forgotten her attitude. They came, spitefully anticipating the opportunity to get even with her, make her wait on them, keep her hustling.

But Elisabeth's politeness was a kind that upset their plans. Slender, tall and supple, her figure moved along the shelves. With a smile she would bring the book. It was an effort to bear in mind that here was someone selling goods for actual money. And that graceful, white-haired mother with the unmistakable features of her people in her slender face—she was very distinguished-looking, one had to admit it. No doubt the daughter's arrogance was inherited from her. Never had she been seen to shake hands with anyone.

Still, it was an agreeable place. One overlooked those committee ladies, one overlooked the few unobtrusive Ukrainians, and those black shapes in the background there, who turned

the leaves of their queer books from back to front. One felt at home. Around teatime it was almost nicer to meet here than at the marble tables of Spiegelglass the confectioner. About this hour, the Polish gentlemen would arrive and the bookstore would be alive with chatter, kissing of hands and flirtations.

One day, around the high-noon quiet, Wanda Slawek appeared. Since that encounter on the sidewalk in the Kreuzgasse, she had carefully avoided Elisabeth. But now she was engaged to the district attorney, Roman Klimecki, and arm in arm with him, she made her entrance.

Wanda had instructed him, one could see it in his face. He wore an armor of ironic reserve. But it melted with deplorable promptness, the moment he spied this light-eyed young lady with the blond hair. He could barely refrain from kissing her hand.

Wanda realized that the attack was up to her. She came out with something very bright.

"So now you're selling books, Elisabeth."

"Yes, just think of it," responded Elisabeth with a sad voice. But the next moment all eager salesgirl: "I recall, you prefer to read French. We can certainly assist you there."

And she led the district attorney and his fiancée over to the rows of yellow books.

It was downright mean of Bessie. She remembered just in time that in school Wanda had been conspicuous for her lack of talent for languages. The class had rocked with laughter one day when she read in French history that Marshal Turenne had been *"un des plus grands héros de la France,"* and had slurred the words *grands héros* in such a way that the valiant Turenne, one of France's greatest heroes, was reduced to one of its biggest zeros.

But while his fiancée helplessly studied the titles of the French books, Klimecki fastened his dark eyes—he thought them inquisitor's eyes—on the girl who waited on him and brazenly grinned at her. Bessie enjoyed herself hugely.

These were cheerful, busy times for Elisabeth. The wall

that had once shut her in had vanished. She also traveled, and there was no objection. Publishing houses in Cracow and Warsaw had to be visited. She was already planning trips farther away, to Vienna and Paris. For from every country printed words flowed to her shelves. Only from Germany nothing came. Those who had thought and sung over there were roving far afield. Germany was silenced.

Europe still sang and spoke. Warsaw, for instance, had an independent literature. And it was only natural that this circle of fertile minds around the *Literary News* and the *Skamander* took Elisabeth in.

About that time, readings by authors from their own works were very popular. They read before crowded halls in Lodz, in Cracow and Lemberg. Why should they not push a little farther south? The spacious library of Gelbfisch and Son offered a most harmonious setting.

The first one to appear here beside the lamp was Anton Slonimski, famous as a playwright. But what he read was his contemplative prose. From below its wittily sparkling surface came the subdued voices of compassion and longing, like the murmurs of a subterranean stream.

Poles and Jews and Ukrainians listened, crowded together but by no means blended into one whole. They sat sharply divided into groups, as if forced by a chemical law. And sharply divided they left, praising what they had heard, each in his own tongue.

A few weeks later came Poland's great poet, Tuwim. This time the rush was so terrific that the three floors together did not yield enough seats. The White Eagle had to supply some of the chairs. And still more people stood along Elisabeth's polyglot shelves and listened to those deep bell-like sounds of the Polish language intoned by a Jew.

These evenings became the established artistic events of the town. There were no others to look forward to. Suggestions poured in. Josef Wittlin was invited and came. Just then his forceful and forthright *Salt of the Earth* was stirring a great many readers. Madame Illakowicz came, also Jan Lechòn.

And there also came, way from Vienna, an exiled German author who had won native recognition because of his translations of Polish classics. He was an infectiously warm and friendly person, a prolific thinker and talker, and as negligent of his appearance as a Bohemian of Murger's world. He was supposed to leave the morning after his lecture, for he was expected in Warsaw. But he stayed. He stayed three days, stayed five. He was asked several times to the white villa and had heated discussions with Elisabeth, which lasted way into the night, about certain passages in his translation of Krasinski. In the daytime he appeared every few hours at the bookshop. He seemed to be unable, for whatever reason, to part from that little town on the Dniester.

On the morning of the sixth day, Elisabeth took him to the station. Piotr was carrying his dilapidated suitcase. As the train pulled out, the departing writer waved himself out of sight.

It was that same small station at which Pattay had arrived, far out, "halfway to Vienna." The whitewash on the building was peeling off and, like scars of a festering reminder, the old Austrian yellow shone through.

The Fiat was parked outside on the spot where once the carriage with the two shaggy little horses had waited for Pattay.

"Would you like to drive now, Bessie?"

"No thanks, you drive. Since I know how, I'm not nearly as ambitious."

The road went straight ahead, between the silent wintry fields. They passed a few settlements, modest farms which had not been there in Pattay's time. Though quite new, they already looked shabby, neglected.

"You know, Piotr," said Elisabeth, "I should really be ashamed of myself. There is our flourishing store, and famous people come and read there, and I get all the praise for it. Whereas the whole thing is entirely your doing, yours alone. Without you, there would be nothing. But you never say anything, never mention it."

"Bessie," Piotr said placidly, "there is one thing an old

man should have learned of life, never to speak certain words."

"What words? I don't understand?"

"The words: I told you so. One must never say them, not in anger, and even less in kindness."

"Good gracious," said Elisabeth, "you're getting cleverer every day. It's just unthinkable how clever you will be when you are really old."

They both laughed. The street curved and dipped down abruptly and there was the river, swollen with the thaw, yellowish white, dotted with ice floes.

"That German writer had blurred eyes when he waved at you from the train," said Piotr. "Blurred eyes like some I have seen before."

"You are right, Piotr. Isn't it queer? There must be something wrong with me. I can't help noticing, myself, that I attract certain people. But if all girls reacted the way I do, it would soon be all over with mankind."

"That'll come, that'll come," said Piotr, and drew his steering wheel sharply to the right, directly before the bridge.

"I'm not so sure that it will come. Here and in Warsaw—after all, there were men among them that amounted to something in this world, alive, intelligent men. But nothing stirs inside me. It looks as if the only man who ever meant anything to me is called Piotr Gargas."

It was well intended, it was said in a cheerful and friendly way. But suddenly she noticed that Piotr's hand clutched the steering wheel so that his knuckles turned white.

She was frightened. "Good God, what did I say then?" she thought. "Oh, what a blockhead, callous, cruel ass I am."

For these white knuckles of Piotr's hand had disclosed to her the simple truth of his heart.

FOURTH PART

Herkimer

1

A LARGE, open car drove slowly around the Ring and stopped in front of the bookstore. A man who wore neither hat nor coat got out and entered the shop. His car was quickly surrounded by a number of children as well as several grown-ups.

It displayed both American and English license plates. It was a powerfully built, expensive-looking car, but had had careless treatment. The fender showed several dents and the dark gray polish was scratched at many places. In the back the seat had been removed and the space thus gained was filled with a curious jumble of traveling articles. There was a twin pair of bulky suitcases, their exquisite Russian-green leather spotted, torn, and covered with torn hotel stickers. The keys of a typewriter peeked out from under its cloth cover. A huge thermos bottle, two other straw-covered bottles, a camel-hair blanket, a cap, a hat, books—strapped together or scattered about—newspapers, magazines, maps and folders. The whole thing looked disorderly in a comforting way, as if someone had been living in this car for quite some time.

Inside the bookstore, the traveler walked haltingly along the shelves. He then turned the pages of a large atlas of Poland which was on one of the tables, crossed over to the other side and continued to browse.

It was early in the afternoon. Aside from Jozef Sussmann, reading in his accustomed place in the back, only Elisabeth was in the store.

After a while she went up to the stranger. "Could I help you?" she asked in Polish. She was pretty sure he would not understand, but thought it presumptuous to show it.

The man looked up, or rather he looked down at her, for he was uncommonly tall, and blushed. He blushed as Elisabeth had never seen anyone blush before. Two flames leaped up on either side of his forehead and his eyes clouded over.

They were remarkable eyes, grayish green-blue with a pronounced dark ring around the iris. It was some time before he could answer.

"Do you speak German?" he asked finally, his own Anglo-Saxon use of the language bordering on the burlesque. Elisabeth nodded her head. Well then, the customer declared with relief, what he was looking for was something about this particular region here, its inhabitants, economy, educational problems, religions—in fact, anything at all. But most likely there was nothing to be had, he added pessimistically. Everybody wrote books. The world was full of writers. Yet the minute you wanted to get information about something, there was nothing to be had. At least, that had been his experience.

It sounded humorous and probably was so intended. But the underlying note was one of exasperation, more, of actual distress. One felt that something was preying on the mind of this sound, strong man—a grievance of some kind.

He was about thirty-five, long-headed, and with a rangy body and hands that were large and conspicuously well shaped. Unruly light brown hair tangled above a forehead that was broad but not very high. His straight nose seemed oddly broken off, as if, having inadvertently grown too long, it had been corrected by its sculptor with a slash of the chisel. Perhaps this nose might have given the face a grotesque air, had not the mouth redeemed it. It was a wonderful mouth, clear-cut and finely chiseled, full of life, full of dash, mobile, and with a perfect set of teeth, though somewhat stained from smoking.

An air of cleanliness surrounded the man—a kind of innate, absolute cleanliness that seemed independent of care. It hardly mattered, for instance, that he had shaved in a hurry or possibly in the early dark hours this morning. With such skin it was impossible to look unkempt. And the effect would have been the same after days of trudging along roads or weeks spent in the trenches. It is a quality you either possess or do not, and one of the most precious gifts man may inherit at birth.

"Let me see," said Elisabeth, "something about our section here—no, there really is very little. This is usable, quite good, in fact,"—and she got a book from the row of yellow-backed volumes—"written by a professor of law at the Sorbonne. But it might be too technical for your purpose."

The stranger read the title. "Can't be technical enough," he mumbled and took the book from her hand. "*The New Poland and the Jews*—yes indeed, there are a number of things to be said on that subject." He cast a severe look at Elisabeth and blushed again. "Day before yesterday was the first of May, wasn't it? The workers in Warsaw were parading, the Jewish workers among them. Suddenly shots were fired. Fascist youngsters, of course. Next to me stood a Jewish woman, her child in her arms. One of the shots hit the child, killed it instantly. But, I suppose, you don't much care."

"Did that really happen?" asked Elisabeth, the color gone from her face.

"Do you think I travel through the country to tell tales to young ladies?" said the visitor unnecessarily gruff. "How do you happen to live here anyway, being English?" he suddenly asked. For only now had he realized that they were conversing in his own tongue.

"I? I was born here. Good God, did that actually happen in Warsaw? There was nothing about it in the papers."

"Of course not. Do pardon my tone of voice. But one meets with so much indifference these days. That makes one jumpy. You have nothing else that I could use?"

She thought and shook her head. "Everything else is written in the vernacular Ukrainian. That won't be of much help to you."

"You are right. I hardly know the meaning of the term. One person tells me these people here are Ukrainians, another calls them Ruthenians. Still another talks about Huzules. It's darn complicated."

"Not at all," said Elisabeth and had to laugh. "Ruthenians —that is simply the old Austrian name for Ukrainians. And concerning the Huzules——"

Just then the door opened and a woman entered and asked for the latest novel by Kaden-Bandrowski.

"But I am taking your time," said the man as soon as the customer had left. And he started to go.

"My time isn't as valuable as all that. Let's sit down. You come from England, don't you? I never thought that anyone there would interested in our part of the world."

"You're right about that. And it goes for everything east of Vienna or Dresden. You probably will think this is another tall story—but only a few weeks ago an English statesman with whom I talked got mixed up on Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. Yes, a member of His Majesty's Cabinet. They will have to learn it the hard way, once the Continent flames up," he added, and that distress and grievance again darkened his face. "By the way, allow me to introduce myself." He mumbled his name, but so rapidly and indistinctly that Elisabeth did not quite catch it. To her it sounded something like Harriman or Harrison.

"I should like to get acquainted with this country," said the man, "drive around in it for a few days. But it's pointless if one can't talk the language. Do you think someone could be found who would come with me, someone intelligent?"

"Someone might," said Elisabeth and looked attentive.

He came to the point. "I should like to track down certain rumors. There's said to be an intensive propaganda project under way. One part of the population being whipped up against the other so that everything collapses the moment the Leviathan approaches."

The Leviathan.

The word rang in her ear like the call of a bell from the ocean deep. When was it she had heard it? Long ago. She smiled vaguely.

The man misunderstood this.

"Of course, you would smile. I never can get it into my head that there might be human beings who don't think as I do about things. Naturally this does not affect you. You with your Nordic superiority, pardon me."

"I admire your perspicacity," said Elisabeth. "I am Jewish."

"You don't say," was his sarcastic rejoinder. "I know there are people who consider that every American is gullible. But you exaggerate."

"Yes, I do," said Elisabeth. "I exaggerate by exactly one-half. Incidentally, here comes my mother."

Recha had walked into the bookstore. She stopped when she saw that Elisabeth was talking to someone.

Elisabeth rose and so did the stranger.

"Dearest," she said, "may I introduce Mr. Harrison to you—"

The stranger was at the point of correcting the name but let it go.

"—who has just made me a Nordic fascist."

The tall man bowed to the frail, white-haired lady in a rather un-American, formal manner. Recha held her hand out to him, much to Bessie's surprise.

"You will learn the truth soon enough," she said. "My daughter always sees to that."

And she left the two alone.

"I shall look around for someone," said Elisabeth, "to drive with you. The best person, of course, would be Piotr."

"Who is Piotr?"

"A Ukrainian who lives with us. A very intelligent man. How much time do you have?"

"That's just it. Not much. The Coronation is on the twelfth, in London."

"And you simply have to be there?"

"Yes," said the other dully. "On that day I shall have to talk to America from morning till night."

"Talk to America from morning till night, because there is the Coronation?" Elisabeth repeated slowly. For a moment the thought came to her that she might be dealing with a demented person.

"Do you imagine for an instant," he said, "that the people

of Springfield, Illinois, or of Springfield, Missouri, could do without a minute description of the golden carriage with the eight gray horses in which the King rides to church? And of the mantle, and scepter, and orb? And of all the little crowns that the peers place on their heads at a given moment? That's what people want to know. And yet, the Leviathan's jaws are already open, set to gulp down all kings and all crowns——"

"The Leviathan," Elisabeth repeated.

Everything came back—the leafy tabernacle in the garden, opening toward the river; her mother, still young; Chana in her Sabbath dress, holding the blue velvet book with the gilded clasps. There for the first time she had heard about Leviathan, that bloodthirsty monster, slain by the righteous ones, from whose inch-thick hide they spread a tent for themselves. "The Leviathan, Bessie," she heard Chana say. "that is a demon—it means bad people."

She listened to the echo of that deep, vanished voice.

The man was watching the girl who was lost in thought. And again two flames leaped up, one on either side of the forehead.

2

John Herkimer belonged to that group of American correspondents who have won the confidence of a multitude of human beings because of the forthright reliability of their reports, the judicious tenor of their broadcasts from across the seas. Their work is taxing and demands sober judgment. The ever-shrinking globe is their office; a trip from Europe to Asia and back again across their native land holds no more adventure than a walk from the desk to the shelf with the reference books.

They are few and they know one another intimately. They have so much information in common, which they are not permitted to divulge, that the traditional fight for exclusive news has lost its meaning for them. They all have gone to the original sources and seen how murky these are. They have sat opposite the new Caesars in the bloated void of their

audience chambers and have coldly evaluated their fumes and frenzies. They have proven impervious to splurge and flourish, to the melodramatic parades of bedecked and bedizened henchmen, to the command performance of fifty thousand roaring voices.

For here reigns an unwritten law, a mysterious blessing. Not one has ever been lured by that abyss. All apprehended the Leviathan in his earliest disguises. They have kept a keen eye on all those weak governments whose peoples were already marked for victims, on all the vacillating, faint-hearted, secretely sympathizing politicians. They have gone at all times to the absolute limit in what they were permitted to say. In their hotel rooms and offices, weary-eyed before their typewriters, their microphones, they are the historians and modest prophets of this bloody turn of events and the champions of an integrity that does honor to their native land.

But it was nerve-wracking to know the truth and yet be permitted to warn with only a suggestion of it. Many countries had a strict censorship. In those that had not, they were up against barbed wires of conventions that no shears could cut. Nor was this all. The news agencies, their employers, knew exactly, or thought they did, what amount of foresight the millions of their readers found palatable. The amount was moderate.

In the face of all this, to carry on required good nerves and a skeptic's disposition.

Herkimer had neither. The strain of having to conceal and tone down weighed on him heavily. He did his best to throw it off.

When across the Pyrenees the generals started their revolt, and the Caesars began to rehearse on the people of Spain, he went there. But his reports were printed only after careful editing. His employers in New York did not really understand what he was driving at. They were wholly in accord with the non-interference policy of the European State departments.

Near Madrid, at Leganes, a bullet went through his

shoulder. He was almost ashamed of the none too harmless wound, because he had received it as a collector of news and not with a gun in his hand. The wound healed slowly and he took a holiday at home. However, instead of resting, he traveled for three months through the different states, lecturing on the Spanish War—prologue to the tragedy.

He stood before his audience—such a towering figure that those in the first rows had to bend their heads back—his bandages carefully hidden under the wide jacket, stating things bluntly, passionately earnest.

He spoke before crowded halls, of course. Herkimer—Herk, as they called him—was a popular name. They sat there puzzled, but they had always believed in him. And so they tried to decipher the writing on the wall that his hand was tracing in thick, blood-red lines.

His agency gave him to understand that he was hurting himself and that he was risking his popularity. He answered, rather impatiently, that he was not forcing himself on anybody, and that they could change the leave of absence into a dismissal. But that they did not want. They knew only too well what he was worth. They valued this tireless worker, his reliability, his gift for lucid and concise information. Quite unexpectedly they did, on the contrary, offer him a raise.

Before he returned to his post in London, he spent a week, an only one, at his farm in Central Ohio which his father managed for him.

It was a sizable farm, twelve hundred acres in excellent condition. From the sprawling, low house on the hill one looked over peacefully rolling fields and meadowlands and across two shiny lakes toward a wreath of dark pines that encircled this self-sufficient little world. They had wheat, corn, oats on this farm, vegetables, live stock and poultry, a greater supply of everything than the fifteen families who were the tenants could use. And they amply shared in the surplus. It was a decent and wholesome existence for everyone.

Old Herkimer saw to it that they did not forget the one

to whom all this was due. At no time did he ever give orders in his own name. Nor was that an empty gesture. He himself lived only for his son who had made this Arcadian life possible for him in his declining years.

His early ones had been full of promise. He was born in a small Illinois town, son of an Irish mother and a father of old, respectable stock that had originally come from the German Palatinate. He was a brilliant law student and later on, in Chicago, a much sought-after young lawyer. This was in the middle nineties, when the city already boasted well over a million inhabitants and had grown into a national transportation center.

Strikes and violence broke out among the railroad workers. President Cleveland ordered the militia out. Several union leaders were indicted. George Herkimer was one of the counsels for the defense. The convicted were given long prison terms; the railroads and those who supported them had won out. And they forgot no one who had dared oppose them. George Herkimer saw himself suspected of seditious tendencies; he was labeled anarchist in the papers, his practice was ruined, his stay made impossible.

He never quite understood how he got under the crushing wheels of that faction's powerful machine. His faith in justice and in legal procedure was hopelessly gone. He made no effort to build up a legal practice again. He traveled about the states with his young wife, an affectionate, delicate young woman of French descent. He tried his luck as a cotton broker, clerk with a steamship company, real estate agent, and as a dealer in magazines. But he was too thin-skinned for most of these occupations.

Finally—it was after the turn of the century—he landed in Columbus, Ohio. Several insurance companies had settled there and with one of them he found a job as bookkeeper. He seemed at last to have found a haven. There was a shimmer of happiness ahead; his wife was expecting a child. She was no longer in her earliest youth, and she had suffered from eight years of wandering. She died in childbirth.

The broken-hearted man and his little son stayed on in the tiny flat with the view on the two confluent rivers. While he was small, a colored nurse took care of the boy. Later, he would run straight across town to his father's office after school and wait below until he came out. Hand in hand, they would stroll home.

The bookkeeper George Herkimer lay awake many a night, harassed by thoughts of the future. This boy whom he so loved must succeed where he himself had so incomprehensibly failed. He made plans and he worried. An education was long and expensive.

But his son was not yet sixteen when he appeared one day at the office, flushed and happy. He bent forward and whispered into his father's ear that he had made it, he had got a job at the *Ohio State Journal* as office boy.

What now followed remained the father's favorite topic. John Herkimer never dwelled on it much. When he was eighteen, he belonged to the staff of his paper as associate editor, at twenty he accepted an offer from Pittsburgh, where he went with his father whom he no longer permitted to drudge over premium columns. Soon after he refused a flattering call from Chicago, averse to bringing the aging man back to the scene of his life's defeat. And this sentimental renunciation turned out better than any planning might have done. For New York asked for him. He was established. Already throughout this vast country people had learned to look for his by-line. Those were the years when the deluge Red begun to rise in Europe. Now his by-lines came from there.

Financially, too, he prospered. He bought the farm in Ohio, not far from the city where his father had drudged for him. There his father now acted as his deputy over the fields and meadowlands enclosed by woods. Every day the big hour was when his son's voice came from over the ocean.

It was in no way a "beautiful" voice to which he listened together with so many millions. It was rather a husky voice that creaked and occasionally broke with a cough. But it was a manly voice which gave confidence.

Old Herkimer had sharp ears for its shadings. Since John had returned to London, it sounded more weary from day to day, weighed down by things unsaid, smothered.

Then one evening in March, the voice announced a discontinuation of his reports. Its owner was going off on a trip to the Continent—to Eastern Europe "about which so little is known and which soon will be more important than most people realize."

In his house on the hill, George Herkimer did not turn the radio on anymore. What John's successor had to say did not interest him.

3

That was five weeks ago.

John Herkimer had taken his much neglected car and had driven to Harwich harbor to cross over into Holland. He spent a few hours in Amsterdam attending to some private matters.

The following night found him in the Ruhr district, where he saw this furnace of world destruction belch flames into the sky from five hundred smokestacks. In Berlin he spoke with no one. He slept for twelve hours and on the next day pushed onward to the northernmost border of Germany.

Here his work began. It was still raw spring weather as he traveled through the Baltic countries, those three states that owed their precarious existence to a half-hearted peace treaty.

Their main highways were poor enough. But he left them, conscientiously entering the hinterland, crossing and re-crossing it, and thus coming at last to the town of Reval, which mirrors the red-brick hoods of its ancient towers in the icy waters of the Finnish Gulf. Hugging its waters, he continued east—to the spot whence there was no continuing farther.

He carried in his pocket a most serviceable passport, stamped with many responsible, long-term visas. Only one

visa was missing. That one it had been impossible to obtain.

At this spot beyond Narva, which was as far as he was permitted to go, he stopped at the frontier guardhouse for a long time. Across the bars he gazed into that inaccessible land which, from this boundary line on, extended over the whole breadth of Asia. He was able to discern the red star on the helmet of the soldiers patroling over there. He stopped for such a long time that the Esthonian guards came out of their wooden hut and looked at him suspiciously.

His return was done by easy stages. When he reached Poland, his notebook and to an even greater extent his mind were filled with information likely to be more accurate and more comprehensive than that of the specialists on Baltic affairs at the Foreign Office in London.

He had spoken with the presidents of the three states, the mayors of the cities, with priests of four denominations. With industrialists, every one of whom complained—owners of tanneries in Lithuania, of asphalt mines in Esthonia, of shipyards, lumberyards, pulp factories. And with the Teutonic barons at their country estates, who in a perfect paroxysm of desire were staring at a Germany that seemed to have at last rekindled the spirit of those conquering knights from whom they themselves had sprung.

Herkimer had done a thorough job. He also knew what the common man was thinking and fearing—the village provost, the schoolmaster, the pub owner, the small farmer and woodcutter, the fisherman in the Bay of Riga and on Lake Peipus.

It had not been so easy to establish contact with them. They used quaint idioms, vestiges of archaic tongues from innermost Asia. And every few miles the idiom changed. Though sooner or later some "intelligent person" would always turn up, some Karlis, Jonas, Stasys, or Peteris, who would accompany him on his quest and act as interpreter.

And now here, in the Ukraine, it was Piotr.

For Elisabeth had kept her word. That same afternoon her one-armed friend presented himself at the White Eagle, in Herkimer's room which was littered with all the traveling

things from the car. The two men bent over a map to outline their route for the following day.

The language they had in common, so to speak, was German. Herkimer's was more the burlesqued, Anglo-Saxon German, picked up here and there. Piotr's was the hybrid army patois, which since those Austrian days had grown rustier. A good many misunderstandings crept in at first. They laughed about them, and so a friendly atmosphere was created right from the start.

Early next morning they set out in Herkimer's car. Their trip took them to the south, through forests and hills. Afterwards they doubled back, crossed the Dniester and cut straight into Podolia. Open and fertile land, treeless and shrubless. This was the broad, easy gate through which, in the Middle Ages, the Golden Horde of the Tatars had made their entry, sacking and burning.

Another entry was not impending. But this time the Tatars were threatening from the west. The storm signals were only too evident. Their vanguard was already there.

Everywhere strange settlers were buying up land. Through freshly painted fences children who looked neither Ukrainian nor Polish stared at their car. They found the village walls plastered with announcements of a lecture on "The Ukrainian Mission." The farther they drove, the newer the posters. That German agitator had preceded them on exactly the same route.

It was a Friday afternoon. In village and town Jewish men, dressed in black, were stealing to the temple. As twilight fell, the travelers came to the Sereth river and, after a short search, found lodgings for the night.

In the pub below, the landlord was lighting the kerosene lamps that dangled from the ceiling. Five men in city clothes were sitting around a corner table, talking. They spoke in German. The moment the strangers entered, they lowered their voices and, after a few appropriate moments, left.

Over the table where they had been sitting was a colored print of a bold-looking man in general's uniform. Piotr read the caption: "Skoropadski, Ukrainian Hero."

Piotr did not know who Hero Skoropadski was. But Herkimer knew the name of this puppet-chief, whom the Germans had set up here in the last war. He took down the print. On the back of it could be read in Gothic letters: *"Kunst-Druckerei Egon Fritsche, Mockau bei Leipzig."*

The landlord came with the food they had ordered. He cast an uncertain look at Herkimer, who was still holding the print; he seemed on the verge of saying something but sighed and left the room.

Soon after, one of the Germans returned. He looked under the table as if he had lost something, even crawled under it, his ears pricked no doubt, and hesitatingly went out again.

"These starched-collar people," said Piotr, "were formerly not around here."

Herkimer nodded his head. "These starched-collar people are now sitting in all the four corners of the earth. They are sitting with the polar bears and with the monkeys, with the crocodiles and the kangaroos. They are an efficient lot."

The two had finished their meal. Outside, rain was beating against the panes.

Piotr got up. "I better go and put the top up."

"No rain could hurt the car. But there is a bottle in the back; we could use that."

When Piotr returned, Herkimer took two glasses from the shelf and filled them with tender care. It was a wonderfully smooth, very old brandy, bought at the corner of Piccadilly and Duke Street at an extravagant price.

"Don't you smoke?" asked Herkimer.

"If I may."

Piotr pulled out his small pipe and, his chin adroitly propping it against the table top, filled it from the pouch the other offered him. The instant he took the first puff his face beamed.

"And all my life," he said, "I thought I was smoking tobacco."

A newspaper was lying on one of the chairs, a local sheet from somewhere close by, printed in Ukrainian.

Herkimer looked at it. The back page was covered with vulgar cartoons about Jews.

"Yes," Piotr said slowly, "whenever that starts, evil days are not far off. In our family we also can tell a story about that."

Herkimer looked intently at his peasant face.

"In your family? How do you mean?"

"Oh well, not exactly in mine. There the calamity was different. The family of the Countess I mean."

Herkimer was not quite certain of whom he was talking. He waited.

"To gallop into the village like fiends incarnate," Piotr continued, "set upon a child, string innocent people up on trees—it's beyond one's power to grasp. And the little son ran off and never came back again. That was the brother of the Countess."

It was not Piotr's nature to gossip. Scarcely ever a word crossed his lips about the people who made up his world. But this was different. In front of this sober man, heavy-hearted and yet reassuring, it just flowed out of him. Bessie herself must hold this man in esteem, or else she would not have asked Piotr to go along on this tour that certainly was no pleasure trip.

He simply felt confidence in him. The same confidence that Herkimer aroused in millions of people, when his voice reached them across the ocean. It caused Piotr to unbend. Surely it could only be for the best if this Englishman or American knew about everything—what a wonderful master Piotr had had; how incredibly hard the Countess's life had been; nor could there be any harm if he heard about Mr. Gelbfisch and the late Aunt Chana. Only Elisabeth was hardly mentioned in Piotr's tale. And Herkimer did not ask about her.

As he spoke, the rust wore off from Piotr's army patois. By now Herkimer could understand almost every word. He kept on smoking in silence, now and then taking a grateful sip from the 1872 Meukow, and listened to the Ukrainian peasant as he had never listened to any of the new dictators.

4

When he entered the white villa next evening, he knew about a great many things that had happened there in the years past. Which was probably the reason why, almost immediately, neither Recha nor Heinrich Gelbfisch felt that he was a total stranger.

A congenial atmosphere prevailed during dinner. Piotr was serving it, very correctly, in white jacket and white glove. It was an excellent light meal, prepared by him with the assistance of the Ukrainian girl whom they sometimes called in to help. Bessie, too, had appeared in the kitchen today, and much earlier than usual, busily supervising.

After dinner, coffee was served in the living room. Herkimer stood next to Heinrich, towering high over the frail little man. It discomfited Herkimer—so Elisabeth noticed. She also noticed that he was careful not to bend down to talk to Heinrich; and that he was greatly relieved when Recha gave the signal to sit down. Elisabeth felt there was something gentle and considerate in Herkimer's way of talking to these two, like that of a doctor with a patient of distinction, and in whose voice a guilty feeling seems to ring.

She sat and watched this man who was all but a stranger and to whom she had, without a second thought, sent her dearest friend along on this problematic trip. She hardly joined the conversation, which was rather unusual for her, and smoked a great many cigarettes.

Everyone felt happy. Bessie heard her mother laugh. Heinrich, too, acted more carefree and gay than he had in a long time. And not because this John Herkimer proved a particularly amusing or original storyteller. He scarcely told anything. But he had a stimulating manner of listening, of drawing the other out. It might be, Elisabeth thought, that this gift had something to do with his work, of which she had only a vague idea.

Talk got around to traveling, to Herkimer's homeland. There was mention of the Panama Canal. It turned out

that about fifteen years ago Heinrich had sailed through it on his cruise around the world. Herkimer availed himself of the opportunity to pass the conversational thread into Mr. Gelbfisch's hand, for whom this journey had been the adventure of a lifetime. And there was nothing to betray that such journeys were as familiar to Herkimer as a daily chore. About these American harbors, those exotic places in Asia and Africa, he seemed to know just enough to supply the cue, with the result that Heinrich remembered more and more vividly a fund of colorful incidents, and was elated and happy.

Piotr entered the room and offered a drink from a gaily colored decanter. It was a crystal clear, potent plum liqueur, made by the peasants of that region.

"Our guest is also quite a smoker," he murmured to Elisabeth.

"Good gracious," she cried and pointed to her ashtray, which Piotr was about to empty, "and I've just lit my twentieth."

Much relieved, Herkimer started to light his pipe. The blue smoke trailed out through the open window.

It was a beautiful and bright night. Whenever the talk ceased for a moment, one could hear the crickets and the gentle flow of the river.

When Herkimer rose to go, everyone was amazed to find how late it was. Elisabeth walked ahead to take him to the door.

At the threshold he turned and bowed once again. When he straightened up, his head almost touched the upper part of the doorframe. Close to his face he noticed the small metal case that had never been removed.

He asked, "What is that?"

"A *mezuzah,*" Elizabeth answered from the outside. "There is one in every Jewish house."

"And what is in it?"

"A piece of parchment with God's Commandments," came Elisabeth's voice once more. "Everyone who enters should touch it and then kiss his hand."

"A beautiful custom," he said.

He bent his head slightly and then went out.

"Did you hear it, Heinrich?" whispered Recha as soon as the door had closed. "He said, a beautiful custom."

"Of course, he would—he is a sensitive man."

"Those were Pattay's exact words when he saw it for the first time. And Bessie's answer was exactly like mine—I still remember every word."

Heinrich took her hand.

"After all, this has to do with the same thing," he said as if to comfort her, "so it is only natural."

Recha nodded her head. But her eyes looked for Pattay's smiling picture with the gold locket and the watch lying in front of it.

Outside, Herkimer had seated himself in his car. Elisabeth stood beside it, her arm resting on the door, her foot on the running board.

"Strikingly good-looking—your eyes," he said. It sounded as if an admission had been wrung from him. "A glitter there as of all the colors of the rainbow."

"The moon does that," she said. "In the daytime they are really abominable. By the way. How did you get along with Piotr on your expedition?"

"I'm glad you ask me. In what way can I thank him?"

"Thank him?"

"Well," said Herkimer, "I can't very well offer him money—not to a man like Piotr."

Bessie's heart gave a leap. And John Herkimer, too, leaped in her esteem—a big leap.

She said, "Don't worry about that. Are you intending to leave so soon, since you are thinking of farewell presents?"

"A call came through from London. I should arrive at the Channel early. All the packet-boats are overcrowded for the Coronation."

"And it can't possibly come off without you!"

"Not possibly. Would have to be postponed. But I still have one more day. And I'd like to use it to take a look at the nearest frontier here."

"That's the Czechoslovakian one, in those mountains back there."

He shook his head impatiently.

"Not that one. That has already become useless."

She gave him a puzzled look.

"Become useless? Useless when? I don't understand."

"There you are in the best of company. The statesmen in Paris and London don't understand either. No, I mean the Rumanian frontier. About how far is it?"

"About four hours. A direct highway leads to it."

"And what is the name of the place there?"

"Zaleszczyki."

"What!"

"Za-lesz-czy-ki," she pronounced each syllable. "It is a kind of resort, I believe. It's supposed to be pretty."

"I care a hoot if it's pretty."

"Would you like Piotr to go with you again?"

"This time it won't be necessary."

Elisabeth reached a quick decision. She would hardly have done so if Herkimer had not spoken those three words about Piotr.

"It's funny," she said, "that I've never been there." She hesitated a moment. "Would you mind if I came along?"

"Not an awful lot," said Herkimer.

5

This was no longer the Dniester on whose banks she had been born and raised. This stream, so serene now, flowed past calmly, glittering in the May day's high-noon sun.

Apricots and cherries blossomed in the tavern garden by the water's edge. Despite the warmth of its southern climate, no summer guests were to be seen. Herkimer and Elisabeth were almost alone in the garden.

To their left, barely a thousand feet away, a railway bridge spanned the river. The hills on the other side, rising sharply from the water, were Rumania.

A waitress came and asked what they would like to have. She wore the gay costume of the countryside—the open jerkin over a blue, embroidered shirt, and the circular skirt with the many-colored, fringed apron. She was a young thing, pretty in a buxom sort of way, dark-haired, with smiling eyes.

"She suggests we drink wine with our fish," Elisabeth translated. "It's being grown right here and is supposed to be excellent."

"Polish wine?"

Herkimer's snub of a nose wrinkled skeptically. The girl laughed and ardently began to plead.

"She says the grapes come from California. These are experimental vineyards, owned by the state. Her father is one of the inspectors."

"Well, then, we can do nothing."

The girl ran off. Skirt and apron fluttered against her high laced boots. She disappeared in the house. Even the few guests who had been in the garden left. The faint tinkle of a bell came from the railroad station.

"It's a peaceful place," said Elisabeth.

"Yes, peaceful," repeated Herkimer and looked at the empty bridge. "It seems to be the only bridge in miles that leads across. And it will have been blown up by then."

She looked at him.

"This is the second time you talk like that. By then. The Czechoslovakian border won't matter by then. The bridge will have been blown up by them. The future is not exactly elementary arithmetic."

He did not answer.

"After all there is that pact with the Germans. I know it's not altogether reassuring. But a peace and friendship pact concluded for ten long years—it must mean something!"

Herkimer smiled sadly.

"Thinkest thou," he quoted softly, "that he will make a covenant with thee—wilt thou take him for a servant true——"

"What is that?"

"You smiled as if you knew, when the Leviathan was mentioned, didn't you?"

"The Leviathan. Yes, the name reminded me of something."

" 'Will he make a covenant with thee?' " Herkimer resumed haltingly, as if trying to recall the rest of the quotation. His eyes were fixed across the water on the green Rumanian hills.

" 'Will he make many supplications unto thee? Will he speak soft words unto thee? His heart is as firm as a stone, yea, as hard as a piece of the nether millstone. His scales are his pride, shut up together as with a close seal. When he raises himself up, the mighty are afraid'—fairly accurate description of the beast, isn't it?" he interrupted himself. For the maid was coming across the gravel, carrying a full tray.

The fish turned out to be delicious. It was a tench from the river, tender, and cooked with fragrant herbs.

The girl poured the wine and waited, expectantly. Herkimer tasted it.

"We'll have to pour it out, when her father isn't looking," he said with a delightful expression.

Elisabeth edited her translation. The girl smiled proudly.

"Ask her if it's easy to swim across here."

The girl gave the information. Not only was it easy, but one did not have to swim at all. One could wade across. Close to this side the water was still quite deep, it came up to her nose. But toward the middle it abruptly got shallow. Except, of course, in February and in June.

"Why not then?" Herkimer wanted to know.

She laughed, amused that someone should not see what was so obvious.

"Because up river the ice breaks in February. And in June the snow melts in the Carpathians. Then it is full."

"The ice breaks in February," repeated Herkimer, when she had left, "and in June the snow melts. Let's hope that the Iron Beast doesn't choose either of these months."

"You can't think of anything else, can you?" said Elisabeth.

"Because they, who could still stop it, don't. Please notice," he continued without looking at her, "that I am trying to find a way out for you, against the day when it comes tramping through."

Elisabeth's heart started to pound suddenly. She ought to have said something to the effect that his solicitude was a trifle perplexing, went a trifle far on so short an acquaintance. But she did not say it.

As they drove back, they had the afternoon sun directly in their eyes. Herkimer produced a pair of dark glasses and handed them to her.

"You fooled me," he said. "Your eyes are quite pretty in the daytime, too. They don't need the moonlight."

They passed a sign reading Niezwiska.

"Here," said Herkimer, "we crossed the Dniester day before yesterday, Piotr and I. That was also a good day."

The road had been good so far. Now it became poor. They slowed down.

"That about the Leviathan," asked Elisabeth, coming out of her thoughts, "was that from the Apocalypse?"

"Apocalypse!" he laughed. "But, Elisabeth, for you to say that! There you have a whole store of books, truly a literary League of Nations. Monsieur Proust and Mr. Joyce, Hamsun, Huxley, Hemingway, Rolland and Romains. And no doubt you've read every one of them. But the most wonderful book of all you have not read."

"And that is?"

"A Jewish drama, written by a Jewish Shakespeare. It is called The Book of Job. There you can read about the Leviathan, and about many more things. For instance, some thirty words about man's destiny—to which neither Hamsun nor Romains could add anything, if they wrote till doomsday."

He slowed down still more, nearly coming to a halt.

" 'Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.' "

"Yes," she whispered, "I did read that."

For it was the inscription on Pattay's tomb. The church in Vienna was before her eyes; the slab from which she had copied it for Piotr; and the stone cut in her father's likeness.

Their trip came to an end. They arrived in front of the villa as the twilight began to fall.

"Elisabeth," said Herkimer, "I should like you to know where you can always reach me." He took a piece of paper from his pocket. "I know a lot of people in London who might be helpful. Please, at the slightest difficulty, at the very first one, wire me!"

"*By then,*" she said sweetly sarcastic, "telegrams will be dispatched no longer."

But he did not even smile. He said, "Could you let me take Piotr to the hotel? Something is wheezing in my motor."

"Of course," said Elisabeth. And she held out her hand.

Piotr came almost instantly. Herkimer stalled for a little while. Several minutes passed. But she did not come out again.

"There is better light in the garage," said Piotr, when they reached the Ring and stopped in front of the White Eagle, "and they have all the tools there."

"Forget about the car. There is nothing wrong with it."

Surprised, Piotr followed him up the stairs. Herkimer's room looked almost tidy. One of the green bags was already packed.

"I believe there is still something in it," said Herkimer and shook the straw-covered bottle. There was a faint sound.

He poured a drinking cup half full and gave it to Piotr.

"You probably think I'm a drunkard," he said, raising the bottle to his lips.

Piotr smiled gently. "A drunkard is he who has no reason for drinking."

"Excellent, Piotr. Very good. Once those brutes dangle from the gallows, brandy and I part ways. But sit down, please!"

Piotr sat down, holding on to the drinking cup. Herkimer walked up and down the room.

"Look here, Piotr. Things, here, won't be running smoothly

very much longer. Those starched-collar people—Poland will be full of them. But then they won't be wearing their starched collars. Piotr, when your two ladies are forced to leave—you will come along?"

"If an old man is of any use out there."

"Old man—nonsense. I own a farm in America. My father takes care of it. Things don't look much different there from the way they do here. There is always a place for you. I should be happy if you came. Remember that, Piotr—To your ladies!"

"To the ladies," said Piotr a little self-conscious and drank.

"I'd like to give you some kind of souvenir." Herkimer stood in front of his bags. "But it would have to be something that I myself care for. And for what does one care?"

He brought out a leather case.

"For these, perhaps, still most of all."

There were four short pipes there, of different shape. They were the kind that warm the cockles of one's heart—fashioned of exquisite, straight-grained briar, shiningly polished.

"This one is nice and cool, it's the lightest one, too," he said and took out a Dunhill. "But, of course—I have smoked it hundreds of times. You may not like that."

"But I do," said Piotr.

6

Miss Skarga died in November.

Elisabeth learned of it accidentally from two of her former schoolmates. It was pneumonia and she had been ill only four days.

Elisabeth felt sick at heart. For weeks she had not seen her lonely friend. That one could be so neglectful, so without thought for someone loved! Now she was gone.

The two girls did not know the time or place of the funeral. Elisabeth left the store to inquire: she had just time enough to change.

A clouded, dark afternoon, and a dismal burial. It was at the Salvator Church near the Turkish Gate, where Bessie had been baptized; and in the old graveyard beside it, where she had paused with Piotr on the stone bench after her first communion.

No one had been laid to rest there for a long time; no new graves rose among the sunken ones. But evidently the aristocratic spinster had wished to lie there and must have made the arrangements. Perhaps she had even selected the site for her final rest—the remotest nook in the overgrown garden, between the wall of the apse and an untrodden path that threaded by.

Two members of the school board attended; a niece of the deceased who had come over from Sambor and seemed rather out of sorts at the imposition; a major in an obsolete uniform, a war veteran and friend of her father's; and a weazened old woman who toward the end had tended the household and in whose care she had died.

As the coffin was carried through the graveyard, rain began to fall, an unpleasant, icy rain, driven across in gusts. It tore the leaves from trees and bushes. To the embarrassment of everyone the old woman knelt close by the open grave, crossed herself incessantly and prayed out loud.

Two weeks later a large package was delivered at Elisabeth's house, containing heavily bound books of various sizes, all of them moldy and moth-eaten. It was Miss Skarga's dearest possession—earliest editions of the works of her famous ancestor, that Jesuit monk, tutor of kings, statesman and orator. In one of the tomes, the most imposing one, there was a dedication, written in Miss Skarga's precise, masculine hand.

"You people of Poland," Piotr Skarga was quoted, "the foreign enemy will break into your land and will turn your dissensions against you. Your hearts were divided, he will say, so now you will perish. All your rights will be swept away and a mockery. As vagabonds you will roam the earth that had been yours when you were free men. You will be destitute and despised, pushed about by your despots, good

enough only to hew their wood or draw water for them under the yoke."

Underneath it Miss Skarga had written:

"To Elzunia, who learned this by heart for me, when she was still so young and already *much too brave.*"

The words "much too brave" had been carefully underlined with the aid of a ruler.

A gruesome warning from lips long since returned to dust, passed on by lips now also beginning to decay.

And this was the third such warning.

"What will you do when I am dead? It's again going to be bad here." That had been Chana in her dying breath.

"Perhaps you notice I am trying to discover a way out." That was Herkimer.

Several short notes had come from him. Twice he had notified her of a change of address. "It's a good thing," he wrote in one, "that February is gone. Now you can wade across." Another time: "Debate in Parliament about the Beast. Half-hearted, hopeless. The mighty are afraid—verily, they are!"

Every word passed between us has remained important was what the allusions suggested.

But he received no answer. She could not find the right tone. Herkimer was so close to her—and yet, she hardly knew him. Whatever she wrote down seemed either too formal or too intimate. She finally gave up trying.

In other respects, too, there was no lack of storm signals in the events of this oppressive year. From Spain to China they flashed across the horizon. And the fury with which the Iron Beast lashed about and trampled down life in its lair could even be learned from the Polish papers, however pact-conscious their whispering.

One morning at breakfast, as Elisabeth looked up from such news, she saw her mother, who had an open letter in her hand, sitting there with a preoccupied expression on her face.

"You couldn't know, Bessie, from whom this is. I myself hardly know any more."

The letter came from Arnold Gruenbaum, the musical son of that Berlin family with whom she and Chana had found refuge in those days so long ago. This young man had loved her then.

This young man—Recha realized that he must be about sixty years old. And now he himself had fled. He had been more fortunate than Benno, his brother, he wrote.

Benno?—he was the shrewd and ambitious businessman who had traveled to fur auctions in London, who was one of the first to own a car, who could barely wait to move to the West End, to show they had arrived. Now he was finished. They had done him out of his business and when, foolhardy that he was, he appealed to the law courts, a camp had swallowed him up.

Arnold and his family had escaped to France, were stranded at Nancy. Here in a night club that well deserved another name, he played the piano for a singer of ribald songs—for the drunken soldiers of the Tenth Army Corps, growing oddly specific, as he wrote. They were destitute.

Arnold's cry for help, incorrectly addressed, had traveled far and wide. It was a miracle that it had reached Recha at all.

"Can we send money to France?" she asked. "What about those new regulations?"

"Heinrich knows all about that. Oh, those unhappy people!"

"Bessie, you can't imagine what a blow this is for them. It was so absolutely home to them. They felt so secure."

And we? Elisabeth should have asked. But she did not have the heart to.

Never, as far back as she could remember, had she seen her mother so content with life, enjoying her modest and pleasing work. Hardly a sign was left of her morbid reserve, her troubled aloofness. Should she rob her of this peace, closely approximating happiness—and without there being any need, perhaps?

Elisabeth had not forgotten the voices of those who warned. But their fears were not shared by the world.

From Germany there rang out paeans of good will, nothing but peace tunes. Never an unseemly word was said against Poland. German statesmen came over to hunt the wild ox in the forest of Bialewieza. And also from Berlin came a former President of the United States who was given an enthusiastic welcome. For it was he who had in that year of misery, after the last war, fed and saved Poland's children. No, none of this suggested a new war, a sudden assault.

Nevertheless two days after this presidential visit, the beast sprang for the first time from out of its lair. One small country went down its throat, though not much blood was shed. Only Jewish blood.

Not a stir from the European chancelleries. Not a protest was issued. After all, were not the Austrians German brothers and thus legitimate fodder for the beast? Now it would lie quiet and digest.

An open card, posted at Salzburg, arrived at the villa. "He will not make any covenant with thee," was written on it. There was no signature.

But as the adage has it: the Present is a powerful goddess. So friendly is the daily round of tasks, of earned rewards. Elisabeth's "League of Nations" prospered amazingly. She might have admitted to herself that in this out-of-the-way corner of the Polish hinterland a modest mission had come to her, still more so with Austria now suffocating under the iron hoof.

From there German writers and poets had still been able to speak to the world. Now the last ones were searching out another shelter for their work. They found it in Holland.

From Amsterdam this persecuted literature made its way to Elisabeth's shelves. It was a point of honor with her not to miss any of it.

But these books did not sell well. The same world that closed its eyes to the German peril—began to close its ears to the German language, and did so even when this language sounded grief and rebellion.

The shipping of these books from Holland to Poland was

no easy matter. It had to be done in a round-about way; ever new channels had to be found. To send payments was a problem.

All this demanded much corresponding, particularly with the publishing house that dared most and was the best known. Charming letters came from there, facile and humorous. The man who signed them was a Mr. Auerbach.

It might be useful, she thought, and stimulating at the same time, to establish personal contact. Besides she had not been abroad in ages and was longing for a change of scene. Another thing, the trip was short. You took a plane in Warsaw, and it was not necessary to step on German soil.

Amsterdam, incidentally, was pretty close to the British Isles. But Bessie did not care to examine what that had to do with her traveling plans.

7

The house, a graceful, hundred-year-old brick structure, turned its high and narrow front toward the Graacht. Elms mirrored their serrate foliage in the tranquil waters.

The room on the third floor to which Elisabeth was directed hummed with activity. Those who worked there were hedged in by stacks of books and packages that were ready to be shipped. Two typewriters rattled through the open windows into the stillness outside.

Mr. Auerbach came from his private office, holding out his hands to her. That office was more like a nook. There was not enough space for a desk, and so an old-fashioned reading stand had been placed near the window. It was littered with papers. Between the shelves and the piles of books there was just room enough for two chairs.

They had no sooner sat down than they were engrossed in conversation. No need of groping for a common ground. Those who came to see Mr. Auerbach were all fellow-partisans.

She received a favorable impression instantly, felt in no

way disappointed, after his letters. From out of a Mediterranean face very dark eyes sparkled brightly beneath a veritable helmet of jet-black hair. And he liked to laugh. His was a free and courageous laughter; he found enjoyment "in spite of everything."

Yes, in these two rooms the exiled literature had found shelter from the "contentious storm," like King Lear on the heath. One had to be grateful to the Dutch publisher who owned the house for this refuge. Grateful also for every single guilder of his shrewdly managed investment. A remarkable character, this old Mr. van Lennep, businessman and idealist—definitely, the visitor must meet him.

In the last year alone, forty publications had issued from these rooms. Some sort of an echo still existed. All around immured Germany, herself struck silent and deaf, people lived who read German books. They were scattered through Holland, through Switzerland, the Czechoslovakian Republic, the Scandinavian countries, and lately, yes—he laughed disarmingly—there were a few more such in Poland.

Of course, the printings were not very large, and many authors could not understand why. There were famous names among them, used to an eager public and an established income. With them patience was required—"the patience of a nurse," as Mr. Auerbach put it, and now his laughter sounded a little less happy. For instance, he could hardly inform them that he would have had to close shop long ago, were it not for certain translations of English and American works that brought money into his empty coffers.

"I am expecting big things from this," he said, and from a stack piled against the wall took a volume in a shiny blue jacket and a title in bright red. "And not only for business reasons—but good heavens, what's the matter? Is something wrong?"

"Nothing," she said weakly, "probably this plane trip——"

"May I get you some brandy?"

She shook her head and tried to smile. What a silly thing to do! She felt how the blood had left her face and that

tears were in her eyes. The title on the shiny blue jacket was a blurred and misty red.

John Herkimer
Leviathan

Auerbach's eyes looked past her, toward the gables beyond the Graacht.

"It deals with the advance of the Monster—the last four years and the four years to come. As sure when it prophesies as when it looks back. No question marks in the whole book. If you don't get the shivers! Only the title, I don't know——"

"A good title," she whispered.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"It had a tremendous sale in the United States. Over there they know their Bible better and so the word meant something. Anyway, he insisted on it."

"He did?" she said softly.

"What I don't see," continued Mr. Auerbach, "is how he gets to know so much. He can never leave London very long. Yet he certainly knows his Europe. Every mesh in the net they have spread—in France, Hungary, Portugal——"

"Poland!"

"Poland," he confirmed. He laughed, abruptly as was his wont, and pulled a few sheets from his upright desk.

"This is the list of complimentary copies he wants to be sent out. Four hundred in all! I timidly inquired who was to pay for them. Of course, he himself, was the answer. I should like to present that man to some of my authors. Well, I guess he can afford it."

She nodded. It was not Herkimer she now saw before her, but that expensive car of his, dented and scratched.

"Giving them a dig in the ribs, he calls it. Every person of influence in Europe should get one. So out go four-hundred digs in the ribs. We worked for three hours on the list."

"Oh, he was here?" said Elisabeth.

"Still is. Maybe you know him?" said Auerbach, as though he had thought of the possibility only now.

Herkimer, she learned, had to be back in London the next day. But this evening he was having dinner with the Auerbachs in their place in the country, in Laren.

"Why don't you come, too? Seven o'clock from the Weesperpoort Station?" He looked at her fair-skinned face. "My wife will be happy to see you."

There was a hesitant note here. But Elisabeth was in no frame of mind to pay attention to trifles.

Down below she walked along the water in the shade of the elm trees, carrying the book that Auerbach had given her. She came to Utrechtsche Straat.

The attractive restaurants around the Rembrandtplein had colorful awnings over their terraces. She felt hungry suddenly, ordered a dish of crabs and a glass of sherry, and then hardly touched any of it.

The spacious square with its awnings, with the luscious giant-leafed plants in its center, created an exotic impression. Young people drove around on bicycles, a remarkable number of good-looking girls among them. She saw everything through a colored mist.

How foolish of her, how provincial, not to have asked where Herkimer was staying! Now she would have to wait until evening, and then they would not be alone.

She went to the booth, was at the point of phoning Auerbach. Then she put the receiver back on the hook.

She did not even know what he would say at seeing her again. In fourteen months there was a lot that had happened in the life of a man like Herkimer. In fourteen months she had not answered a single one of his letters. In the last three months he himself had not written. He would have every reason to act strange.

She opened his book and in the shade of the awning tried to read. She drank three cups of wickedly strong coffee —not that her heart needed to beat any faster.

She set out walking again. It was a radiant July afternoon, cooled by the ocean breeze. Bessie crossed the center of the beautiful city, so cheerfully busy and yet composed. She stood a while in front of the Queen's Palace and looked at

the conservative façade with the numberless windows, all carefully shuttered. Then in a wide circle she returned, along a canal, in the direction she had come from.

The prudent thing to do would have been to return to her hotel now and rest. She certainly did not want to look tired in the evening. But sleep was out of the question. And she still had four hours to go.

She remembered the city's famous picture gallery and found her way there.

This proved but a feeble makeshift. She got lost in the halls and vestibules with portraits, pictures of still life, marine paintings, hunting pieces, aldermen groups. Bessie was not particularly fond of museums. This aldermen group was designed for a town hall, this marine piece for the stateroom of an admiral, this intimate portrait of a lady for a patrician husband. Here, everything was hung side by side, dead, as in a morgue.

She knew the fault was hers. She did not understand painting. Never had she felt that the core, the innermost secret of this art revealed itself to her the way the blissful harmony of a poem did, or the magic of a great piece of prose.

These endless flights of pictures intimidated her. What terrifying abundance; what a tedium of masters. There was one by the name of Wouwerman. He cropped up fifty times. Nothing but scenes on horseback, fights on horseback, hunts on horseback. The man must have been obsessed by a passion for white stallions. In the center of each of his paintings a powerful white stallion paraded his shiny rear. She fled from this Wouwerman, halted in a small room and, exhausted, looked out into the courtyard.

As she turned back again she found herself opposite a picture hung below the level of the eye. Elisabeth had never heard the name of its painter—not that that meant anything. But this was the first picture in all this mass that she actually saw. She brought the window stool over.

It was a typical Dutch landscape, but painted in a peculiar tone, something between brown and silver. At the side was

a windmill. In the foreground, the straight line of a canal, an afterglow's reflection on its moory waters. And this last reddish color of a declining day was answered by another, an intenser and warmer one. It came through the windows of a house faintly outlined in the background.

Nowhere a movement; no human figure. But this red of the lamp was waiting for a man who, any moment now, would turn into the footpath on his way home. Everything was in it: that good tiredness after an honest day's work, the steam of the evening soup, the halting talk around the table, and the prospect of a restful and dreamless night. More is not given to anyone, said the picture, more cannot come to a man than his peace at the end of a good day.

No wonder that such an uncomplaining message moved one today. For who could still contemplate a peaceful plot of land, a light that shines out into the quiet of the evening, and not feel his heart shrink in him in dark foreboding and sorrow?

A bell was being rung through the building. The guards announced the closing hour. It still was only five.

8

Mrs. Auerbach came toward them. Behind her stood Herkimer.

He was not surprised, Elisabeth realized instantly; he had known she was coming. He took her hand in both of his. Not a sign of feeling strange.

Her hand rested in that warm, dry shelter of his two giant ones, longer perhaps than seemed fitting. Mrs. Auerbach looked at the two, somewhat surprised.

Dinner was served immediately. Elisabeth recalled that first congenial meal with Herkimer, back home in the house on the Dniester. This one today was different. The fault lay with the hostess. Cool disapproval emanated from her.

She was a handsome woman, in a voluptuous way, with a fair skin and an abundance of light-blond hair too elaborately coiffured. Her clear face with the steely gray eyes

might have been beautiful, had not the space between the finely shaped nose and lip been too short, stamping the captivating features with a petty, ungenerous expression. Bessie had to keep from staring at it. She had a prejudice against such faces. Alwin Zweifuss and her classmate Jadwiga had looked like that.

Auerbach seemed hardly the same person in the presence of his wife. He looked depressed, sitting there at the table. His good laughter "in spite of everything" was seldom heard.

No great discernment was needed to see what was wrong with this marriage. It was evident in every other remark the woman made.

She shared her husband's exile under a compulsion that was not imposed upon her from the outside. She could have stayed in Germany, following the lead of those innumerable others who had cut off such precarious marriage ties like so much dead weight. As a paragon of what they called Nordic beauty, she could have reaped laurels at state receptions, possibly married one of the foremost hangmen.

But that career was not to be. She could not tear herself from this attractive dark man. She had followed him, enslaved by her senses.

But she resented it. She strained at the chains. Everything he stood for was repugnant to her. She hated those books in which the idea of the German *Herrenvolk* was disposed of with ridicule and contempt. And still more she hated their authors, those all too spirited writers whom Auerbach brought to his home.

And then she hated women. Her claim on this man, for whom she had sacrificed so brilliant a career, was exacting, exclusive.

Rivalry did not threaten from those brunettes, the sentimental Jewish girls that moved in his circle. They were not his type. It was different with this light, supple creature at their table tonight, who sat there in such silent hauteur. She had immediately sensed that between the girl and this American there was something. They had known each other. It probably was more. Her type nevertheless remained

dangerous. Mrs. Auerbach raised a barrier of ice between herself and her guest.

However, she was mistaken. What she thought hauteur was uneasiness. Elisabeth felt that this could come to no good end. Herkimer, she told herself, was hardly the man who would put up with this pricking of barbed shafts for a whole evening. She foresaw the moment when he would be forced to strike back. Then Auerbach would have to side with his wife, cover her. Elisabeth suffered for him in advance.

Yet it looked as if she had underestimated Herkimer's self-control. He displayed an unexpected skill in deflecting malice, or ignoring it. Leviathan appeared to have been banned from his thoughts. In a way a tourist might, he talked of the tulips in Haarlem; the isle of Marken and its picturesque fishermen; of the Café Royal at the Hague, where a ten-course dinner imperiled a guest's life through overfeeding; even of Rembrandt and Hals.

Apparently he was enjoying the situation. Whenever he looked at Elisabeth, he winked at her like a fellow conspirator.

She began to hope that the evening would pass without a mishap. They were now sipping some potent Dutch spirits. Another fifteen minutes, thirty at the most, and they could leave. It was at this point that Mrs. Auerbach said,

"Your name puzzles me. Herkimer? I've been racking my brain. Is it Scandinavian?"

"German, unfortunately."

He had not intended it. Now he could have kicked himself. With a guilty feeling he drank down a whole glass of the Bittertje. But that did not improve matters.

"A name from the Palatinate," he exclaimed. "My family came from there. Long ago though, thank goodness."

Second slip. Second glass of Bittertje. The hostess started to say something, already relishing her answer, when Mr. Auerbach forestalled it.

"You had a general by that name," he broke in aloud, "in your Revolutionary War."

"Possibly," answered Herkimer. "Every family has one of those blasted generals."

"Not this kind of general. I've read his biography. A most excellent, gallant man. It must be good to know that such blood runs in one's veins."

But it was too late. The conciliatory mood was gone. Herkimer spoke bluntly.

"There isn't an awful lot of that kind of blood left. We mix a great deal over there. My mother was French, my grandmother Irish. Outside of that there is some Spanish blood, a few drops of Slavic, and"—he gulped down a Bittertje—"some Jewish blood, I hope. I sincerely wish it!"

There was no glossing this over. Elisabeth saw pain and alarm in Auerbach's face. She rose, and took leave of her enemy.

Cheated out of her scene, Mrs. Auerbach withdrew her hand sharply.

Mr. Auerbach showed them to the street.

"Will we still get a bus back to town?" Bessie asked.

"Many," said Auerbach. "You did not stay so very late."

A sigh escaped him. He tried to cover it up by drawing a deep breath of the cool air. For a moment they stood silent there in the bright night.

"I am happy to know you, Auerbach," said Herkimer. "Thank you for everything."

Bessie, too, said, "Thank you. But we did not talk business."

"Avoided, on purpose," said Mr. Auerbach. "In this way I shall see you again at my office."

But it did not sound cheerful. He went back to his cottage.

"A defeated man," said Elisabeth. "Why does he drag it out?"

"Why?" grumbled Herkimer. "A man stays married because he pities the woman."

She did not answer. She sensed what was going on in him. It was not his nature to keep anything long to himself, nor did it agree with him. He only needed time to straighten himself out.

The empty road ran on through meadows and woods. They passed small bungalows like the one they had left. The moon glistened on their brightly polished windowpanes. It was good to wander on like this. The bus overtook them, slowed down. But neither gave the signal to stop.

Elisabeth walked as if in a dream. This meeting, this finding each other again, seemed to her an unbelievable coincidence, little short of a miracle, even though her reason told her that there was nothing astounding about it. Anyway, whatever it was, life was good to her.

She smiled as she walked on, because she was changing steps for the third time. As if she had said so aloud, he turned to her.

"What long legs I have! The last one who could have kept up with them was Abraham Lincoln."

He sounded like himself again. Mrs. Auerbach was gone from his mind.

"And how is your mother?"

Bessie told him.

"And Piotr?"

"Piotr at this particular moment is sitting in front of the garage, smoking your pipe before bedtime."

"I'm glad he likes it."

"It's almost a ritual with him."

Across an open gateway to their right, a blue sign flashed Café-Restaurant Surabaya. In the garden, which was part of the surrounding woods, fanciful lanterns hung over the empty tables, to justify the exotic name. An old waiter was busy climbing on chairs and blowing out candles.

"He'll not be very glad to see us this late," said Elisabeth. As by some tacit understanding, they had both turned into the place.

"Coffee again?" she asked as the waiter came over. "Or what should one have?"

"Cold milk for me," said Herkimer. The old man left, his shoulders drooping.

"Milk!" repeated Elisabeth. "I would have guessed anything——"

"Piotr once said, 'A drunkard is he who has no reason for drinking.' At the moment I have no reason, not the slightest."

In his way of doing things, it was a tribute, a declaration. She sat there, happy and confused. The waiter returned.

"Sorry to keep you up," said Herkimer. And he accompanied his German, here doubly hard to understand, with pressing something into the waiter's hand. The man stopped at the next lantern and glanced into his hand; straightening out, he disappeared in the house and that was the last of him.

Whispering silence. A salty breeze was wafted from the near-by sea. The moon gleamed through the foliage and with uneven patches daubed the surrounding forest.

"These are odd lanterns," said Elisabeth.

"Supposed to be Javanese. Come from Saxony, of course. Stuff like that always comes from Saxony."

"Have you ever been in Java?"

He nodded. "They have beautiful legends on those islands," he said, gazing at a moon patch on the ground. "Two people love each other, they marry, and soon they have a child. But they are too poor, they cannot bring up a child. At night the man goes down to the river and drowns it. Next year it's the same and so it is the third. Always it is a boy and they are always poor. At last, luck is with them and now they can afford a child. They love it dearly. One evening, the father and his boy walk along the river's edge. See, he says, how beautiful the moon shines on the water. Father, says the child, the moon shone just as beautiful the three times that you drowned me there."

She could not resist. Her hand reached out for his. It was the left hand with the crooked finger.

"Where did you get that?" asked Herkimer.

"A stone, when I was a child."

"A stone. Ah, yes."

It sounded as if he knew everything about her. Knew Miss Skarga, the ghetto bench, Justine, Jadwiga, and Wanda —all the old stories.

"I'm glad you have that, Elisabeth."

"That finger? It looks awful."

"I am glad," he repeated. "What is all too perfect makes a man shy. One cannot love what is all too perfect."

Her thoughts trailed after the sound. Slowly the words unveiled their meaning. She turned her face to him and saw the certainty. She leaned toward him, toward his breast, his lips. His arms enfolded her wholly. She knew that never again would she leave his embrace.

9

Two months later, the exiled Mrs. Auerbach had new cause to feel elated over her people and their master.

While French and British statesmen eagerly nodded their heads, he sprang at the throat of the Czechoslovakian Republic and tore off her protective limbs. The road to the East now lay open for him. A tremor shook Europe.

Yet the Colonels in Warsaw were not apprehensive. They had been graciously permitted to carve their share from the writhing torso. Flowers and music and chimes. They feasted at the brigand's table. It was only too clear now how grossly the late Marshal had underrated his own pact.

To be sure, there were many in Poland who disliked that sharing in the loot. Not only the Jews, who knew that at this very moment thousands of their brothers in Germany were being stripped of their last or dragged to those hell-holes of torture. The best among the Poles themselves objected no less to the deal. It ill agreed with the tradition of a nation whose whole history had been one of suffering, proudly borne.

Still, one felt somewhat relieved, how ever uneasy. This sorry business seemed to vouchsafe the future. For who ever allotted part of his booty to one he plans to attack on the morrow?

Whether Herkimer shared this view did not become clear from his letters. On questions concerning politics he expressed himself rather cautiously of late. Foreign mail was

no longer safe. More than one of his letters had been opened; Elisabeth saw traces of it.

They were long, detailed letters now, and they were wonderfully tender and warm. The two were of one mind about the future. Herkimer knew, and fully agreed, that she would never part from her mother. He realized that, even so, any transplantation would cut deeply into a nature like Recha's. At least they could spare her enduring it twice. There were signs that his own stay at the London post was coming to an end. He was much in demand on the other side.

There came a time when the pause after one of his letters was longer than usual. And then a cable arrived from aboard ship.

It was during those same days, in the spring of 1939, that renewed cause for elation came to the exiled Mrs. Auerbach. The German chieftain thrust his butcher knife into the bleeding rump of that completely forsaken Republic. Then he made his triumphal entry and slept at the Castle in Prague, in the bed of Bohemia's kings.

Now even his abettors of yesterday began to question their wisdom. The voices of those who had warned, disregarded till now, dinned in their ears.

One of them, Herkimer, arrived home in the United States, but not for good, as yet. He had come for a lecture tour through the states, as he had done two years before. But this time it was with the approval of his employers and their support. The hand of the clock had conspicuously advanced.

His name had grown in the meantime. His book was in everybody's hands. It was read by those who found their half-conscious misgivings clearly expressed in it. And it was read by those who, openly or in secret, sympathized with the other side and condemned the book in advance.

His tour was to last for four months. Summer was already in the air, but people kept on flocking into the stuffy halls.

It was hard work. In between his travels by rail and by plane, in between his meeting endless people, and the lectures themselves, he spoke four times weekly over his network to the country here that was slow to wake up.

He hardly had a moment to himself. His letters to Elisabeth had to be short. In every one he counseled haste. He had no doubt that Poland was to be the next victim. He urged openly. He no longer guarded against prying eyes.

But Elisabeth's first attempt to lead her mother toward a decision roused white horror in Recha. She wept and locked herself in. Her condition reminded the girl of those far-off days when her mother's sanity seemed to be threatened.

Elisabeth talked it over with Heinrich. But he was of no help. He appeared as if paralyzed by a fatalistic indifference —a man for whom life and the future held no more interest. He only saw that Recha suffered and that suffering should be spared her.

There was nothing to do but wait. At the end of the summer Herkimer would return to Europe. Then they would act.

The end of the summer was not far off when, at long last, she received a letter from him that had been written at leisure. It came from his farm.

She sensed how relieved he was that their separation was almost over. No further warning. No need for it any more.

He took Elisabeth by the hand and led her through the meadows, fields, and forests of his realm. It was her first glimpse of that beautiful home which awaited her. He walked with her through the house on the hill, described the rooms, the ones that would be ready for Recha, and Piotr's room too, leading right into the open, with a bench outside for a smoke before bedtime, just like home. As for himself—he would have to divide his time between the farm and Washington, his future place of work. But it was a short trip. She would get enough of him.

The whole letter breathed longing, and anticipation of bliss to come.

Below it, there were a few lines from the hand of his father. George Herkimer wrote:

"I shall take your little picture away from my son, before he leaves. He will see you soon, while I must still wait. And please ask your mother, whom I am looking

forward to meeting, if I ought to learn Polish. (There are two Polish families on the farm.) We must have a language in which we can complain about you two. In the meantime, Elisabeth, take care of your blessed self, and be thanked."

Herkimer left at the end of August. The day he arrived in London he sent her a wire. But the text was garbled. Three legible words stood out, alarmingly: "American Legation Bucharest."

She telegraphed back, in vain. She bought such newspapers as she could. They sounded reassuring. The British Government, they said, had suggested direct negotiations between Berlin and Warsaw. And Berlin had agreed.

On the last day of August, late at night, the telephone rang in the villa. Elisabeth hurried into the living room, stumbled against furniture. Still half asleep, she pressed the receiver to her ear.

It buzzed and whistled. Voices crossed and recrossed, Polish, German, then English voices. She waited a long time. She tipped the hook. No response. A new maze of voices. All at once the wire went dead. Everything broke off. Silence, a silence as from the tomb.

10

The monster of steel and frenzy broke across the flat borderland. It trampled the thin defenses, barbed wires, and pillar boxes, the way a five-thousand pound hippopotamus breaks reeds and rushes along a riverbank.

And beyond that there was nothing to stop it. The Colonels had wisely refrained from protecting the country farther inland. Their friend and associate might have taken it amiss. Now his attacking forces rolled with clockwork precision along the dusty roads of this fatefully rainless autumn.

Maybe the Colonels had not quite known what newfangled war instrument he had forged and welded together, under the approving eye of Western political wisdom. He had done with infantry long ago. Not a man in his army marched on foot. There were no horses. There were only

machines. Motorized storm troops, the heavy and the medium tanks, the heavy and medium armored cars, the motorized howitzers and the motorized field pieces. And this rolling fortress was roofed over by a swarm of bombers and fighters that darkened the blue.

Poland, then, was the victim. But Poland did not stand alone. The Cabinets of Britain and France, forced by public opinion, had honored their obligations and were also at war. The whole world waited to see what would come from these strong nations.

Nothing came. Nothing, most likely, could come. For the master minds in Paris and London had made no better provisions than the Colonels had. The world was dumbfounded.

Dumbfounded at Poland, too. She should have held out for a few months, at least. But after only twelve days, the American correspondents made it quite clear that of her shattered army only a few isolated remnants were still fighting—a mere savory for the digesting beast.

How was such a thing possible? Was not the Polish soldier renowned for his bravery? That he was, and rightly. It was only—and the American correspondents emphasized this—that he held an obsolete rifle in his hand, and that there were but a few miserable guns to protect him.

But what about the cavalry, splendidly mounted and highly trained, an uplifting sight to every patriotic heart? Yes, it was a peerless cavalry, as valorous in attack as it had once been against the Teutonic Order and against the Turks. But the gaily decorated spears of these Chevauxlegers and Lancers splintered like toys against the panzers. After such a medieval attack on a mountain of steel, nothing remained but a thousand mangled and dying knights and a thousand horses, their bellies gutted, their legs reared up toward the sky.

The peoples of Poland forgot their feuds and dissensions —too late. There were no more Poles, Lithuanians, Jews, White Russians, Ukrainians. Riveted together, workers, peasants, intellectuals, tradesmen, hurled themselves against

the common foe. With all but naked hands they resisted on the Westernplatte, at Hel, in Modlin, near Lemberg. The nation's capital, bombed from the air and shelled by a solid ring of heavy artillery, refused to capitulate for four hellish weeks. And wherever a section of the army collapsed, its officers scorned to give themselves up. The supercilious dandies of yesterday formed battalions of their own so that they yet might die. This was the privilege they now claimed for themselves.

For in the ferocious light of this cloudless September they all recognized what was forging ahead. Not just a foreign conqueror, as many times before in the history of their tormented Poland, but a horror which was still nameless. Horror, brain-rot, and hate. Empty-eyed hatred, cold and deaf, hatred of life and of joy. There came—reproduced in test tubes of steel—the lawless, fierce human beast of time immemorial.

For in the wake of the regular troops, another army marched in—an army not destined to conquer but to frighten, to torture, to debase and destroy. Everything called Shock Troops, Special Troops, Black Guard, Secret Police, and for which there was a common name, the one they themselves liked best: Murder Commandos. They were motorized regiments, in black and green uniforms, steel whip and revolver in belt, and on the cap their prized emblem: the skull and bones.

They were the headman's choicest product, culled from the German youth. Well-fed, brawny youngsters, trained in the torture chambers and death barracks of the Fatherland on Socialist workers and Jews. All carefully, scientifically dehumanized—toward one all-important goal.

For even torture and murder of conquered nations was still but a training for this élite.

The headman shuddered with fright at his own people

It was a gullible, wavering people, not yet come of age. He had first talked them into this madness with his rantings, then thrashed and lashed them into serfdom. But the specter of the German past dragged through his nights. He knew

what would come. A people whose lofty immortals sit at the upper table in the phantom hall of nations does not completely become one and merge with a venomous scamp. The time would come when it would open its eyes, stare down the abyss of vile misery—and recoil. That would be the hour. For that hour he needed, not regiments, but brigades, army corps of his motorized hyenas.

Buttressed by them, he made his entry, a triumphant coward, his nostrils bloated with the stench of arson and death. Then, on the Wawel at Cracow, he bent his knee at the tomb of the Marshal-Liberator.

Here repose the heroes of Poland, her poets and her kings, the best among those who have fought and bled for her freedom. He knew well what he did. It was desecration, coldly calculated. For he saw himself—a blood-dripping, scurvy scoundrel—in the nation's sanctum. To destroy the present of Poland's people was not enough. All their history, all their suffering pride—this sinister farce at the tomb was to root it out of their hearts.

11

Elisabeth went into town with Piotr. She had wanted to go much sooner, but did not dare leave her mother alone. So she had asked Heinrich to come. It was noon before he appeared.

"It is much too late to get the passports now," she said when they reached the bridge. She leaned against the railing and watched the yellowish water rushing by.

"It would have been useless anyhow, Bessie. There's only one man left in that office, and he's completely at a loss. In sheer desperation he shouts at everybody."

"Maybe we could do without passports. I know a spot down there at the border where we could wade across."

"That's all very well, Bessie. But how to get to that border! Not a drop of fuel is to be had in town. Just as if they'd swallowed it. And the horses are all with the army."

"What about trains?"

He only shrugged his shoulders.

The town on the Dniester had been cut off for days. All communications, including those over the wire, had stopped. There was no mail, no newspaper. Fugitives brought only sad tidings and sinister rumors from the fighting line which was a good distance off.

The two had walked on in silence, had reached the bridgehead.

"Don't you worry," said Piotr. "He'll bring gas along with him."

Startled, she turned to him.

"What do you mean?"

She knew well enough what he meant. The whole way she had thought of nothing else.

"He won't leave you in the lurch, Bessie. Not he."

"Do you think they let correspondents go along with the army?"

He nodded. "Kvitka, the locksmith, came yesterday. And he says they do. Those Germans must be awfully proud of their doings. They want the whole world to know. Kvitka was taken prisoner near Cracow together with many others. While they stood waiting to be shipped off, an American came who wanted to question them. A very clever man, he spoke our language. But the Germans wouldn't let him. Kvitka managed to escape. He's well enough, except for his teeth. They knocked those out—in fun."

And Piotr laughed good-naturedly, as if an approaching cataclysm was nothing unusual to him.

The Kreuzgasse was deserted. Heavy shutters barred all the shops, most of which were in Jewish hands. The street looked as it did on a Sabbath day.

On the narrow sidewalk a woman in black came toward them. She carried a black handkerchief in her hand. Not until she was close did Elisabeth recognize that pretty face, now swollen from weeping.

Wanda stopped short, cried out, and fell on Elisabeth's shoulder.

"Stanislaw," she sobbed.

Her soft, full body leaned heavily against the embarrassed Elisabeth who was shocked and sorry for her.

A strong whiff of perfume rose from the black handkerchief. In all her sorrow, Wanda had managed not to forget that.

"Do you remember," she breathed, "here, on this very spot he invited you that time!"

True enough, they were standing in front of Berges's drygoods store. Its windows were covered up.

"Yes, Wanda," said Elisabeth and instinctively turned her left hand away from Wanda's back. "But is it absolutely certain?"

Something nodded against her shoulder. "Dlugosz, his staff sergeant, brought the news last night."

Elisabeth gently kissed the one-time foe on the cheek, on the hair.

Piotr was standing in the street, a few steps off, like a soldier at a military funeral. His right arm and the empty sleeve hung stiffly by his side.

Gelbfisch's department store was open for customers. But none passed its revolving door. One could see the salesmen inside, standing motionless like wax dolls.

In the back of the bookstore Jozef Sussmann was leaning against his shelves, reading as usual. He took off his thick glasses and came up to them.

"Not a person has been in here all morning," he reported.

"What do you expect? For someone to come and ask for the latest Dekobra? Jozef—you should go away."

Silently he looked at her from out of his red-rimmed eyes.

"I know you have relatives near Buczacz. Why don't you and your father go there. It's safer out in the country."

Tenderly Jozef looked at his shelves with the square-lettered books.

"It is written," he said gently, "man goeth forth unto his work and to his labor until the evening."

Piotr seldom spoke without being addressed but this time he did.

"Mr. Sussmann, it is also written: a live dog is better than a dead lion."

Jozef had no time to answer. Ceiling, walls, shelves, shook with a mad vibration. Overhead there came a fierce crescendo of droning and throbbing. And now one could see them through the tall window—two planes, their rigid wings and iron bellies flying almost low enough to graze the roof of the town hall. But, there they were, over by the Dniester, gaily circling in the blue sky.

Behind them, a flurry of handbills had fluttered down on the market place. One could see the few people there bending to pick them up.

Piotr went out to fetch one.

"Ukrainians!" it said in Cyrillic print. "Your day has come. Shake off the yoke! Away with the infamous Poles; hound them out, kill them! This land is yours. We Germans come to you as friends. Long Live Free Ukraine!"

Bessie and Piotr jerked up, before the last word.

From across the bridge came a sound the like they had never heard—tearing, screeching, like the rasping of two giant pieces of metal. Then, with a dull thud, a crash. Another one. Three seconds' silence. And for a harmless finish, a weak sputter, a chucking.

For a moment the planes over there had been out of sight. Now they shot up straight into the blue, rocked playfully and vanished into the sky.

"Piotr—that was over on our side."

They were already running. In all her fright, Elisabeth noticed how evenly Piotr's breath came. His empty sleeve flapped back and forth. Speeding across the bridge, he pulled off his jacket. They saw clouds of smoke and the naked flame. It was the sugar mill. "God be praised, it's the mill!" Both had thought it at the same time, and were not ashamed.

They turned to the left. Smoke scaled the road. The mill

was a shambles. The front wall of one of the side wings was ripped off; one could see into the Zweifuss rooms.

They were a few hundred feet away from the villa. In running, Piotr grabbed Elisabeth's hand.

There was the white roof, unharmed. But nowhere a stir, a sound. Strange, that Recha and Heinrich had not run out to see and to help.

And here was the overgrown gate. Piotr suddenly pushed Elisabeth back and in the next second was inside the garden. He set his foot against the gate so that she might not open it, and bent forward.

"Not him—don't look at him," he said as he straightened up, and let her pass.

They were lying close to the gate. Piotr had spread his coat over Heinrich's face. But Recha was resting on the grass unmarred, no terror in her slender face, her white hair neat as always. The bullets from the machine gun of those playful flyers had struck her breast.

12

When they came, they came as liberators, just as their handbills had proclaimed. And since the military forces of Poland were lying prostrate and no organized resistance need be feared, they were able to devote themselves entirely to this liberation.

As the Ukrainians had disregarded all encouragement and had completely failed to kill off the vile Poles, this mission quite naturally fell to the liberators' lot. They set to work with the aid of minutely prepared lists; their emissaries had done a thorough job of it.

They seized all civilian offices and arrested the officials. Then they rounded up all the higher educated Poles, physicians, lawyers, engineers, professors. A military court was set up for them. It held its sessions on the ground floor of the government building, outside of which the Polish Eagle, torn off and befouled, was leaning against the wall.

The procedure at this court was brief and simple. The

auditor read the prepared indictment that held but few words and often the wrong name. After the sentence was passed, those condemned climbed into a truck. As a rule, they had to wait until the death-load was full. Then, under escort of motorcycles, they were carted to the place of execution, the "clay pit" just outside the town, behind the barracks.

Here the firing squad was busy all day long. It was composed of soldiers from the regular army, and whether they all relished their monotonous performance was dubious. The squads, in any case, had to be frequently relieved. Soldiers carried out the legal sentence—their duties were divided up that way—while the highly specialized hyenas were entrusted with the more spontaneous, the coarser work.

What gave the operation at the clay pit its peculiar character, was its stillness. Automatic rifles with silencers were being used. The condemned ones stood facing the clay bank. They did not see the officer in charge raise his hand. Death strode with absolute silence from one to the other.

The Ukrainian populace were called upon by posters to attend the liquidation of their oppressors. Oddly enough, only a modest number followed this invitation. Neither were those peasants and laborers in any way grateful when, escorted by the hyenas, Polish ladies appeared in their hovels to clean out cesspools with their bare hands. And this was not all. The few times that resistance actually did occur, it came from Ukrainians. Naturally, such misguided ones were not simply shot down or brained with the butt of a rifle. No indeed. They enjoyed the privilege of being sentenced in court. This was their due, as members of a liberated nation.

But for the hyenas this loss was negligible. The average Pole made up for it and, above all, the Jew. The Jews were slain by the hundreds and, in outstanding cases, were subjected to those seasoned methods which had been so consummately perfected in the camps of the Fatherland.

For example, Krasna, the lawyer, had to circle the city hall block for two hours in double march, stark naked, before a crack shot ended his flagging life.

Doctor Silbermann was lying amidst his brand-new diathermy equipment, his face crushed by a boot.

The young Alwin Zweifuss, who had escaped the family death when the mill was destroyed, now dangled from his window, at the corner of Sobieski Street and Kornhof where, as a rule, Jewish tenants were not accepted. As his office was only one flight up, his shoed feet brushed the heads of those who passed below.

The third day after the occupation was a Friday—Friday, September 15, 1939. At sundown the Jews were stealing to their synagogues and prayer houses. Rarely had a supplication to the Lord been as sorely needed. Their leading synagogue was not in full view like the Roman and Greek Catholic churches on the Ring. It was hidden somewhere back in the narrow alleys. But the hyenas found it.

Sabbath service had just begun. To the sound of chants the Torah scroll was being carried around, while the heavy-hearted faithfuls wept and kissed its red-velvet casing. The door was kicked open and a gang of lusty young men tramped down the center, straight toward the seven arches where, beneath the light of the red lamp, stood the Ark of the Covenant.

They knew their way about. They had practiced such improvisations in many a synagogue at home and in Poland. They filled the dimly lit house of worship with their roaring and cursing and with the carnal smell of their well-fed young bodies.

They began by playing football with the Torah scroll, before the eyes of a paralyzed congregation, until the red velvet hung in shreds and the white parchment peered out like bones of a cadaver. Then they went for the cantor—it was not Cantor Sussmann—who stood in his robe of office between the two rabbis, dressed in black. They tore the cap from his head, the striped prayer shawl from his shoulders, and stripped him of his white mantle. Left with nothing but his undershirt, they drove the thin old man out through the front door.

A few other Jews slipped out alongside him. The door closed behind the rest. A machine gun was posted outside. The faithful ones remained entombed in their temple, no one knew for how long—"until further disposition," as the jargon of the liberators had it.

The cantor was hooted on through the darkening alleys. They must be planning something delectable, for their barks and guffaws found no end. Behind the Turkish Gate they halted, in front of the Salvator Church where a faint light came through the high, narrow windows.

They cuffed the Jew inside and down to the choir. Some of them went straight to the vestry; Catholic sanctuaries held no mystery for them either. They returned with Liturgical vestments, haphazardly torn from their hooks—a chasuble in Easter red, a stole in gay Whitsun green.

They rigged up the old man and prodded him on to dance. They forced him to lift the vestments in a lewd way, and when he did not prance about grotesquely enough, their steel whips would lash between his legs. The vaulted dome reverberated with their coarse laughter. The few worshippers had fled.

At this point the leader had a brain wave. He pushed the Jew up the steps to the High Altar, pressed a rifle into his hands and demanded that he strike and smash the wooden statue of the Redeemer.

The Jew hesitated, reeling benumbed. His spark of conscious life was barely flickering, but the horror they exacted from him still pierced through to his foggy brain. His arms dropped. The gun fell from his hands, clattered on the flagstones.

"You bash in his thorny skull," roared the leader, "or I hack yours to a pulp."

From behind the altar came the priest of the church. It was Prelate Korzon, a man of fourscore now, preternaturally lean and white. He was in his robe. But it was the black robe which the Catholic priest wears only one day in the year, on the Friday of Golgotha.

Korzon stood still for a moment. He beheld that raucous pack, and the Jew before the altar with the green and red devotional splendor hanging askew from his tottering bones.

He went to him, embraced him and pressed him to his breast.

The liberators were stupefied. Then came an enraged howl from their leader. He tore the gun from his belt and took aim at the intertwined figures of those two. It was a master shot. They died of one bullet.

13

Piotr returned from town about noon. They had run short of provisions and for the first time he had had to leave Elisabeth alone.

He put his packages down in the hall and went to her in the living room. In the two hours he had been gone she had not moved. Though the windows stood open, the air was blue with the smoke of her cigarettes.

"Come, sit down, Piotr."

He did not have to be asked twice. His forehead was damp and he rested his hand on his knee to hide its shaking.

"May I smoke—yes?"

She answered wih a sound, a little like a laugh. She saw him fidget with his pipe, she rose and lit it for him. After a few puffs he seemed more composed.

"They're making a pretty bad job of it, aren't they?" she asked.

"A thorough job," answered Piotr. And that was all. What good was it to tell her what he had been told over there. Last night's happenings, for instance, at the synagogue and the church.

He said, "Bessie, no use waiting any longer. We can make it on foot."

"You mean, they will let us pass?" It sounded strangely indifferent.

"A lady and a cripple—why not? We travel by night, of

course, and sleep during the day. We will get across the border all right."

"Perhaps," she said, "perhaps. But why make the effort? Why leave?"

"Because your place is near him," said Piotr.

"Why did he not come?"

"He could not. Those Germans like to show what colossal fighters they are. What they do afterwards—that they are not so anxious to show."

"You think he has tried?"

"He has tried everything, be sure of that. Perhaps they have taken him prisoner."

"Or murdered him."

Piotr shook his head. "They do not murder Americans. They only murder when it's safe. Bessie, that telegram, the part you understood—you must do that."

"I don't want to run away."

"And what could you do here? Stand watch over the graves?"

Almost a week ago they had laid Recha and Heinrich to rest. During the few days since then Elisabeth had changed. Her lips had lost their soft roundness, and the gold and blue in her eyes did not sparkle any longer. Despite the September sun she was cold in her dark woollen dress that had become too large.

"An orderly lot—those Germans," said Piotr. "And they want us to see, too, how orderly they are. A few small shops have been looted, that's true. But otherwise life goes on. Gelbfisch and Son are open."

The name of him who, with his face blown away, lay in his crude coffin under the ground made Elisabeth shudder.

"Yes," continued Piotr, "life goes on. They are trading with us. They even pay. They have printed some kind of money and that's what they pay with. Anybody can see how orderly they are."

"Are the Jewish salespeople still there?" she asked, alarmed.

"Oh yes, they are. Maybe they weren't asked about it. But they are still there."

"They ought to be warned. What about Jozef? Maybe he, too, came back. He would just be foolish enough."

"No," said Piotr, "the bookshop was closed."

The bookshop. Was it really such a short time ago that in the airy room with the wide windows, the reading tables, the poets bust on the larger one, Recha and she had worked?

"Piotr, I can't sit by and do nothing while terrible things may be happening to those people. I can't sit here and hide."

He objected—objected feebly, though. For this was Pattay's voice he heard. It was as if Pattay were to order him on patrol, and he must disobey.

"It doesn't make sense, Bessie," was all he said, "and besides it's risky."

"But you yourself just said: what could they do to a woman, and to you! Anyway, I can no longer stand it."

Piotr rose. He knocked his pipe clean and put it, together with the tobacco pouch, on a plate beside the ash tray.

They were near the door, when he stopped.

"I think I'll take the ash tray out," he said.

When he came back, Bessie's eyes were full of tears. He wondered. In all that week of agony he had hardly seen her cry.

At Gelbfisch's Department Store things were as he had said. Soldiers came out of the revolving door, carrying packages, laughing.

But the bookshop was no longer closed. A van stood in front of it and inside people were busy.

They entered. Books littered the floor. The table with the small bust of Slowacki had been moved; in its place stood a pushcart. Two men in black uniform were snatching Hebrew books from the shelves and flinging them into the cart.

Their leader kept to himself at the table.

He was a big, well-knit man with an uncommonly ugly face. He had laid his cap, with the skull and bones on it, near the bust and thus showed his tapering cranium, covered with

a short crop of angular-cut yellowish hair which rose like a brush above his leathery forehead.

At the moment he was giving a kick, behind him, at the bookcase of Ukrainian literature.

"This Soviet junk can go too," he said.

"What are you doing here?" asked Elisabeth.

He looked her over.

"It's like this, baby. All going to the synagogue—so the sty will burn better. And if a few of the swine there get singed, that's their tough luck."

His insolent eyes slid up and down the light-haired fair-eyed girl.

"And what business is this of yours, may I ask? You talk as though you owned the store."

"I do own it," said Elisabeth.

"You won't tell me that a German woman sells this Jewish filth."

The cart was full. One of the uniformed men pushed it out of the door.

A few seconds passed. I am crazy, thought Elisabeth. I am crazy, if I say it. And then she said it.

"I am no German woman. I am a Jewess."

"You try that on another guy, my angel. That's not the hair of a Jewish sow, and not the breasts either."

He grabbed her, with both hands at once.

"You let her go," said Piotr.

The man whirled around. When he saw the one-armed cripple, he laughed and snatched at his whip.

"Are you *meschugge?*"

But that Jewish word was the last one he was ever to utter.

Piotr had seized the bust. He lifted it high and crushed the German's skull. You could hear the bones crack.

The man by the bookcase shot at once. But he missed. Piotr had ducked under the table and was feeling for the revolver in the fallen man's belt.

Elisabeth was still standing in the same spot. This is not true, she thought; such things do not happen. It was not fear

that she felt. If such things happened, it was over with life.

"What is going on?" asked a compelling voice in German.

From the door came two officers of the regular army. The one on the right was an older man with the insignia of a higher rank.

He cast a professional glance at the slain man's body and the sullied bronze bust beside it.

"Well?" he asked again, sharply.

The man in the black uniform snapped to attention.

"Beg to report, sir, that man has killed Herr Hauptsturmfuehrer Schaller. I was just about to finish him off."

"Schaller," repeated the major and, cocking an eye, looked at the younger officer. But this one did not seem to understand. "Is the culprit a Pole?"

"He is Ukrainian," said Elisabeth.

The major gave her a fleeting glance but at once turned to the storm-trooper again.

"In that case there is no finishing off. You know the orders: you don't take matters into your own hand against Ukrainians. Make your report at the military court. Dismissed!"

The floor under Elisabeth had started to rock. She felt for a chair.

"Piotr, my darling," was all she said.

Piotr stood upright behind the table where the slain man's cap still lay.

"What should I have done, Bessie?" he said, as if to excuse himself.

"Oertzen," the major told his companion, "call in two of our men." Oertzen saluted and went.

"Piotr, my dearest," she said once again and stretched out her hand to him.

The soldiers appeared.

"That man to the Government House," ordered the major. The soldiers led Piotr away.

"I am coming, Piotr," said Elisabeth, "I'll come right away."

But she felt as if she could never move from this chair, never stand on her feet again.

"How did this happen, miss?" asked the major, trying to be polite.

"That man had assaulted me. So my friend came to the rescue. They will let him go, won't they?"

The officer looked at her as if at a curiosity.

He was a good-looking man, of good family no doubt, trim as on parade—a shiny, polished cog in Germany's machine of conquest.

"I must rob you of this illusion, miss. The order reads that Ukrainians are to be dealt with by law. But of the verdict there can be no doubt. Well, at least he's going to die an honorable death at the hands of soldiers."

She tried to get up. Her head swam. One moment she scarcely could hear the officers' voices. The next they sounded like trumpets.

"Schaller," she heard the major. "His old man won't rejoice much. 'Twas his only son. Nothing but daughters."

"Beg pardon, sir, but I don't seem to know."

"Know, Oertzen? You have heard of Schaller, O-ber-gruppen-fuehrer Ferdinand Schaller!"

Obergruppenfuehrer, in the hyena-hierarchy, corresponded in rank to a high general. The major's sneering way of drawing out the syllables of the title bespoke the infuriated rivalry that existed between the regular army and this special corps.

"One of those careers," she heard the major. "Austrian cavalry officer. Deserts to the Russians. Serves with Denikin. Marauds with Erhardt. Well, now he is O-ber-grup-pen-fuehrer."

Elisabeth looked up.

"It is possible," asked her lifeless voice, "that this Schaller was once stationed here?"

"Indeed, yes, my dear lady. Cavalry has always been stationed here. Very possible."

All of a sudden he realized that, under the circumstances, her interest was highly irregular. He narrowed his eyes, saluted curtly, and left the room, the other one following.

She must go! Getting up, she avoided with an effort the

sight of the dead man. A thin trickle of blood drew a longish path on the floor.

The van was still standing outside, deserted. The push-cart lay on the sidewalk, tipped over.

It was only a short step to the Government House. She would surely make it. A court case takes time, nor would it necessarily be Piotr's turn right away.

However, when she reached the gate where the Eagle's soiled emblem was leaning, she saw him being led out.

He nodded to her. He got into the lorry in which there were ten or twelve victims. Piotr seemed to make it a load, for the truck started to move at once, escorted by soldiers on motorcycles.

The men swayed and had to hold on. Piotr's eyes looked for Elisabeth and again he nodded to her.

She was running alongside.

"Piotr," she shouted with all her might, "the man you killed——"

Impossible to make herself heard. The truck thundered away, the motorcycles roared.

She could not keep step any longer. She ran after that death car, out to the clay pit.

14

Admittance to the place was barred by a cordon. A few older men and several women stood behind the gray-green backs of the soldiers; one of the women held two children by the hand. Everybody looked on with eyes of stone. What was going on was so inconceivable, so outside the furthest ken of experience, that none had yet reached the stage where the body gives way to grief.

The truckload, the last to have arrived, was already lined up. But the row extended much farther. All in all about twenty-five men were standing there, in blue or white shirts, their faces turned to the clay bank. Their coats lay in a heap—on top of those of earlier victims.

The firing squad was just now advancing again and came to a halt opposite the first doomed man. It was composed of four soldiers, wearing steel helmets and overcoats despite the warm weather. Only the lieutenant in charge did not wear one. He was a mere stripling and there was a greenish look to his face. His men had been replaced several times; but he had been at this since early morning. And he was not, by special training, altogether inured to it as were the hyenas.

He now raised his hand. The squad fired. One heard scarcely a click. The victim fell. The soldiers lowered their rifles and the lieutenant looked at his watch. After each execution there was a brief pause.

Far back, on the other side of the pit, black-clothed people could be seen digging in the more arid soil. Four days ago, when the Germans marched in, they had immediately provided for a big common grave. Not a big enough one, though. With more and more executions, it had to be continually enlarged.

Those who were shoveling there were Jews—in skull cap and caftan. This being Sabbath, guilt at committing a sin was certain to mingle with their horror.

Elisabeth had reached the cordon. She paused a moment to recover her breath. Automatically she counted the row of victims. Piotr stood eleventh.

She, wanted to get through the soldiers. The push of an arm hurled her back.

"Piotr!" she called out. Piotr turned his head, his eyes searching for her.

"Face wall!" cried the lieutenant, in a boyish voice that cracked.

Strangely enough Piotr obeyed—he, who had nothing to fear any more.

"Piotr!"

Two of the soldiers turned around. "Shut up," one of them growled.

The lieutenant raised his hand again. The next victim fell. Piotr did not move. There were now eight living men between him and death.

She had to get to him. He had to know. It would make dying easier.

But she could not call it out to him. He would not possibly understand. For Piotr knew nothing of the murderer Schaller. She had always left him the illusion that his master had been killed by the enemy.

In despair she looked around. Soldiers everywhere. And in front was the clay bank, rising to double the height of a man. Now, three motionless bundles were lying there.

The bank—but, of course, that was the way! So simple. She started to run.

She ran around the little hill and then up its side, skidding on the soil, still slippery despite the drought. On the top there was some sickly grass, and some gnarled trees near the rim.

She looked down. A few places to the left and she was exactly over Piotr. She looked down on his gray and sandy hair. He held his head steady, his eyes straight to the wall.

She stretched herself flat on the ground and, holding on to one of the withered trees, leaned forward.

"Piotr!"

He bent his head back. When he saw her there above—her, whom he loved, his face became radiant. And, in very truth, he smiled.

"Piotr, my dearest."

But his smile faded.

"Bessie, you can't stay there. They might shoot."

"Piotr, listen to me—the man whom you killed——"

"You can't stay there."

"Please, listen to me. My father——"

"Yes, Bessie."

"You always believed the Cossacks killed him. My father was murdered."

"Murdered?"

"One of his regiment shot him in the back. Captain Schaller. He still lives. His son, though, you killed today!"

"How can you know?"

"I know it. I swear to you. I thought you would be happy to hear."

"Yes, Bessie. I am happy."

The squeaky voice of the lieutenant yelled out: "You up there! Go away! This very minute!"

"Are you sure, Bessie, it was that one's son?"

"Absolutely. His only son."

"That is good," said Piotr.

"Get the hell out of there," the squeaky voice came, "or you'll take the consequences."

Who else, she thought without moving. Down there, another man fell, the next but one to Piotr. She only knew she was near him, must stay near him. She cried.

"Bessie, don't cry. I'm not so young any more. And it goes quick. Make sure that you get over the border. It is easy, alone."

The lieutenant looked at his watch. The squad moved on.

"Piotr, if only I could hold your hand!"

Her right hand gripped the tree, her left reached down as far as it could. Her eyes held fast to his.

Piotr rose on his toes and his hand reached up. But there still was a gap.

"Can't be done, it is too far," he said laughing. "Hold on and don't you fall——"

And there he fell himself, like a rock.

He collapsed sideways, the face turned upward. His white shirt, with its one sleeve only, turned red.

Pause. The lieutenant raised his hand. The next man died.

Just then a motorcycle came from town, cut through the cordon, wabbled a little in the clay, and stopped in front of the lieutenant. The rider got off and delivered a paper.

The lieutenant did not raise his hand again. He crowed a command across the place. The four men tucked their rifles under their arms and did an "about face!" The cordon broke up. Motors started to clatter. Decampment. Uproar, subsiding.

Those who had been spared, about a dozen, remained

facing the bank. At last the one who would have been next took a cautious look around. Others followed. One, a very young man, fainted.

The men and women at the entrance, too, did not move for a long time—as if those soldiers' backs were still there. Finally the woman with the two children took a timid step forward.

The Jews continued to dig the grave.

15

Elisabeth remained lying where she was, her hand hanging over the embankment. She was not capable of any thought, not even that the ghoulish scene had ended just three minutes too late.

Then she walked down, walking like a person who does not see—past the dead and past those who, as yet all but incredulous, were feeling their way back to life. She did not even cry when she knelt beside Piotr and closed his eyes. The terrific tension persisted, the one thought of staying near him, of keeping Piotr, as if he still were alive.

One thing must not be. They must not throw him into that big hole. She must take him away, bury him in his own grave, his own decent grave, where he would rest, deep and forever—there could be no peace for him in that sorry heap of flesh and bone.

She lifted him, placed his arms around her shoulder and began to bear him away. The wounds bled more and stained her dress. She carried him clumsily, and Piotr was heavy, as if made of one big muscle. Using every ounce of her strength, she got as far as the entrance—there, where the cordon had been. She laid him down, a little to one side, so that no one from the big grave might see him.

To get help, find a carriage, was out of the question. All communication between human beings had ceased.

"Perhaps the cart is still there!"

She took fright at her voice. It was the first time she had ever spoken to herself—aloud, like that.

She ran back to town along the same road on which she had followed that lorry of death. Since then not an hour had passed.

There was much commotion in front of the barracks. Soldiers poured out through the gate. Vehicles lined up. It looked like a hasty departure.

She crossed the barren ground beyond which the houses began. In the town itself, from every street and alley the noise of motors, columns advancing. There was inspection at the market place. Orders rang out.

The revolving door at Gelbfisch's Department Store did not move. In front of the bookshop the van was still there, one-third filled with books. The pushcart lay on the sidewalk.

She seized the handlebars, with not so much as a look through the open door into the ravaged room that had once been her world.

On her way back through the narrow streets, every so often she would squeeze into a doorway to make room for the marching troops. They all moved in one direction, the one they had come from, toward the highway to Lemberg. Nobody paid any attention to the disheveled girl in the dirty and bloodstained dress.

She found Piotr where she had left him. The other dead bodies were also still there. In front of one of them, her arms hanging heavy, stood the woman with the two children. The Jews had disappeared.

Those who had escaped with their life had left the place as well—all, except two. The one, a Polish gentleman, with a pair of black silk suspenders over a milk-white shirt, was staring at the ground with a vacant expression as if his memory were gone. The second one, a peasant, was rummaging in that pile of coats, for his own maybe, or maybe for another, better one.

Elisabeth lifted her dead into the cart. His wounds did

not bleed any more. She placed him carefully so that his head would not sway with the motion. But the cart was too short, and she had to bend and tuck in his body. Thus she took Piotr home.

She met no one. There was the stillness of a sunny fall afternoon. But a fearful buzzing was in her head. When she reached the bridge, breaking through this buzzing verses began to hammer out a beat.

They were mighty verses—gloriously free and manly, written by one of the immortals who in the phantom hall of nations sit at the upper table. But they were by a German. She sought to drive them out, but the verses kept hammering.

> Wherever your friends are rotting
> It matters not, I ween,
> If under marble, jutting,
> Or in the meadow green.
> Remember, ye who live,
> Whatever be your lot,
> That to your friends ye give
> Things, that will never rot.

She could stand it no longer. She began to run behind her death-load—as if away from the verses. But they pressed on her, from every where, from the creaking cart, from the wheels bumping across the planks of the bridge.

> Wherever your friends are rotting
> It matters not . . .

There was no escaping. The hammering went on—along the dusty highway, past the ruins of the mill, right on into the house.

> That to your friends ye give
> Things, that will never rot.

She bedded her friend on the couch in the living room. She should have washed him, put clean clothes on him, against the long rest. But she lacked the courage. She brought

two large linen sheets and covered him. Nothing was to be seen but his face, smiling composedly between the gray sideburns.

Then she looked for the garden tools to prepare his grave.

16

She had thought of interring him in the spot he loved—near his dwelling, by the side of the bench. Here a big tree spread the canopy of its foliage, a sturdy ash that must have been there long before the house was built.

But she had not thought about the roots that stretched out to all sides. The spade struck upon them as upon rock. She would have to lay Piotr in another place, in the middle of the lawn, truly "in the meadow green."

Here was soil that yielded easily. Even so it would take until night. For the dead were to be buried deep in the earth, six feet deep, as the saying went.

She was content that it should be so. As long as she was shoveling his resting place, they were not yet wholly separated. Beyond was a void, was nothing.

But she had never done such work. She had to pause. Her arms ached as if heavy sticks had beaten her between shoulder and elbow.

Dust blew down from the street; she heard the marching of troops, the drone of wheels. She did not even look up. What difference whether the juggernaut rolled north or south? It had done its work on her.

The rolling and the stamping died down. There was a layer of dust over the grass. Once again the spade dug into the soil, tossing up a shovelful that came tumbling back.

She had not heard the gate; but now the gravel crunched.

He came across the grass toward her. She dropped her shovel. She fell on his breast.

"Oh Herk! Herk! Herk!"

He held her tight. From her clothes came an odor of earth and wounds mingling, from her tousled hair, with the touching fragrance of youth.

He looked at what had already the outline of a grave. "Your mother?" he asked in a low voice.

He felt her nod against his breast. She was crying. But it was not the kind of crying that relieves and washes away. These were high-pitched, cutting sounds with which her horror broke the dam. Spurts of fierce wails. A rearing up against a world in which the beast had broken its chain and clawed and ripped what yesterday had been life—peace and work and fair play and man's love and happiness.

Her sobs were heartrending. He held her more firmly, as if to keep them back in her.

It took a long time. At last she let herself be taken to the house. He half carried her.

Both doors stood open, and so he saw the dead man.

"Heavens above," he said. "When did that happen?"

"Two hours ago," said Elisabeth.

He led her to a chair, sat beside her and held her hand.

"Bessie, I could not come any sooner."

She nodded, still sobbing.

"You believe it, don't you?"

"Herk—I know it."

Piotr had guessed quite right. After the battle at the San was over, all the correspondents had been sent back to Germany. Herkimer managed to slip away, and in the darkness tried to make his way east. They caught up with him and he was locked up in the schoolhouse at Pruchnik. From there he escaped—this time by day. He found his car, plundered but otherwise all right, and dashed cross-country over plowed fields. First the Germans shot at the car and then the retreating Poles, by mistake. By a miracle neither the motor nor the tires was hit. Near the town of Chyrow the shooting stopped. He reached the highway.

Impossible, to tell all that now. And it was not necessary. She believed him.

But she told her tale. She made it brief. Three sentences held all the horror.

The noise of marching troops started again. The wind

that blew across the Dniester drove the dust the other way, and so she beheld the new uniforms of the moving troops.

"Herk, what kind of soldiers are these?"

"Russians. They are taking over this province. The Germans are handing it over to them."

"But they promised it to the Ukrainians!"

"Promised it," was all he said.

"So that's why they left in such a hurry. But the Russians, Herk—what does that mean?"

"I can't quite tell yet," he said slowly. "But it definitely doesn't mean what people now think it does."

"And here the slaughter will go on?"

"That would surprise me," he said, and rose. "Get ready, Bessie. We must be on our way."

"Today? Right now? You said yourself the Russians would not behave like those beasts."

"They won't; but they will separate us. They don't allow foreign correspondents with their armies."

"Just one more day, Herk!"

"We must leave this country tonight. If we don't, they will take me to the border tomorrow—and alone."

She yielded.

"By the way," he said, "we can get married at our legation in Bucharest. That will simplify matters."

"Yes, Herk," she said, and there was a fleeting and timid stir of happiness deep down in her heart—a heart so much tried, yet young.

Shyly she looked at where in the beginning dusk the white sheet seemed to cover a giant man. "And Piotr?" she said.

He gathered her to him.

"I will make him a deep grave," he said.

He went to the door, stopped, and began to feel in his coat for the place where his pipe usually was. But the hand came back empty.

"Go ahead and smoke," said Elisabeth. "I know how much one needs it."

"They have stolen everything."

She pointed toward the plate with Piotr's pipe on it and the tobacco pouch.

"You mean?" he asked, uncertain.

"It would make him happy."

She walked with Herkimer into the garden.

"Shouldn't you do some packing?"

"That is soon done, Herk." They stood now in front of the garage. "There might be some things in his room he would have liked to take along."

She still watched Herkimer picking up the shovel. Then she entered the garage.

The room was tidy. It was a soldier's neat room. There was a clean smell. Bessie turned on the light. Nothing but the most necessary things were there. She overcame reluctance and opened the closet door.

Two suits were there and the two white coats in which he had waited on table. Next, a piece of silk stretched across; and behind it, all by itself, hung a child's dress and a small cap above it.

She sat down on the matted chair, holding the little things in her lap. One could hardly see that the Scotch plaid had once been red. Collar and belt had turned yellow. But there was not a wrinkle. It looked as if somebody had recently pressed it. Of the broken feather on the cap nothing was left but the quill.

She carried them over to the house and laid them out beside Piotr. Then she took her father's picture in the silver frame. She turned it toward the fading light and looked at the clear forehead, the serene eyes that were hers.

For one second she wavered. No—she still had the locket that showed her father and Recha in that brief year of their happiness. This picture here was for Piotr.

She placed it on his breast. Since the arm was missing on that side, the picture sank deep into the linen sheet.

She went into the white room where as a child she had slept at Chana's side. She washed, changed her dress, and packed the necessary things.

When she came back, it was night. She was just about to

light a candle and place it at Piotr's head. Then it came to her what he would have thought of a thing like that. She sat down in the dark near the window and waited.

It was a clear, starry night. There was no moon. She heard the clods fall as Herkimer tossed them up. The pipe seemed to be glowing close to the ground; she could see how deep in the grave he was standing. The wind that came from across the Dniester blew a smoke cloud toward the western hills.