

Rose Street

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THE breath of summer blew through the ghetto. It carried Elizabeth Feiner, known for short as "Auntie," right up to the junk shop on L Avenue. The street, as you could see by looking at the sign on the corner by the barracks, used to be called Rose Street—it had not been an avenue, nor had this town been a ghetto, and the barbershop, "The Sun," shut down long before the war, could hardly have served for the sale of junk and castoffs.

The Star Fort was being smartened up. The German HQ building, where they were expecting a visit from Switzerland, had been whitewashed to resemble the other houses in the ghetto; beneath the scaffolding old women were scrubbing the pavement, and real roses appeared in the earth around the stone fountains.

There were no glass panes in the once wooden door of the shop, and Elizabeth Feiner had covered up the holes with greasy, brownish paper that looked like stretched donkey skin. From the dark interior of the shop she could watch the shadows and the heads flitting past. That was all she saw.

Ever since that morning, which had been hot and stifling, she announced to all comers that she had nothing really worthwhile in stock. Her slightly rasping voice, in which kindness mingled with irritation, suggested that the junk shop, of which she was in charge through no wish of her own, was no less a fake than the roses and the ostentatious L Avenue.

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When the door of the shop opened, the old woman's ugly head had dropped down almost onto her chest.

"Good morning, Mrs. Feiner." The words came through the rustle of paper.

The door creaked twice.

The man who came in, ceremoniously taking off his hat, worn low on his forehead even now in summer, slowly placed two boiled potatoes on the counter.

"Perhaps you can use them," he said.

"Oh, Mr. Spiegel," protested Elizabeth Feiner. "What have I done to deserve this?"

Embarrassed, the old man closed his eyes hesitantly. "My dear Mrs. Feiner," he said, "that's a question we might all ask. But of whom?"

His lips, once fleshy, were now coagulated by the bronze-purplish coating of anemia into small, whitish clots; yet his smile was boyishly gentle.

"You are incorrigible," said Elizabeth Feiner.

"I suppose I am," nodded the old man.

She would have liked to stroke his veiny hand. But she only asked almost absent-mindedly: "Do you need anything?"

"No, thank you."

He was ashamed of his husky voice. He must go at once—he had only wanted to look in, anyway.

"Well, I'd better be going."

"Good-bye, Mr. Spiegel."

The familiar creak of the door, and the bent back disappeared behind the greasy paper. Silence. Elizabeth Feiner mutely substituted other, far more friendly, words for the echo of the greeting, wishing herself au revoir soon, as she did every time Joachim Spiegel came, though at the same time she doubted it. How cleverly he passed from the small things to the big ones which she did not understand, she thought to herself.

The shadows were now more sharply outlined. The sun was sailing through a pink sea toward the other side of the town. As soon as it crossed over the beige

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gable of the house opposite, it would be noon. When it disappeared behind the rock with the eagle beak, the day would be over. If only the sun were more friendly, Elizabeth Feiner thought, it would stay longer in the sky. Or it would sail faster. But anyway, who knew which would be better?

She opened the ledger. She had sold nothing today. But even nothing must be entered, for the Reich was great and strict. It occurred to her that if a thousand Elizabeths decided to mess up their accounts, the war could hardly last so long. Then, however, she waved the thought away with her hand. Nonsense. She pushed aside the potatoes, which to her personified the image of the kind old man, and picked up a blue-and-white pencil.

Nevertheless, she noticed that the greasy paper on the door was again darkened. The door flew open as someone kicked it—she could hear the sharp, dry sound of the kick—from the outside. The paper was torn off and fell slowly into the street. The shop was flooded with light, and she saw the greenish-grey uniform and reddish face of an officer.

He came bursting into the room, shouting: "You damned old Jewish whore!"

Two long strides and he was in front of her and slapped her face.

Werner Binde, the driver from HQ, waddled in with his rolling gait.

It seemed for the moment, as if by slapping her, the officer had given vent to all that raged inside him, as if now he were at a loss what to do and what to say. His eyes traveled around the little shop, until at last they rested on the wooden, shiny top of the counter.

"The account books!" he snarled through his teeth.

He had decided it would be undignified to let the old Jewess witness—however shortly—the indecision of a German officer.

Elizabeth Feiner was, however, aware only of his menacing stare.

"Where's your husband?" he asked suddenly.

"He died," she said.

"How's that?"

She shrugged.

That was too much for Herz.

"Get into the corner!" he roared.

She was so frightened that she failed to do as she was bid. She had not the slightest idea why she had been singled out for this visit; she could not know that, at approximately the same time when she was deliberating whether Joachim Spiegel could become her partner in her old age and death, Herz had been called to see the newly appointed commandant of the town, Albert Ritsche. Somebody had reported to him that they had seen someone in the ghetto smoking. What had the First Officer to say to that?

"Into the corner with you, Jewish swine!" shouted Herz, irritated by her apathy. "At once, and be quick about it!"

Werner Binde was looking on with the same cold interest with which he had earlier scanned the shelves on the walls of the shop. If Herz had not told him outright to follow him, he would quite probably have stayed behind in the car. He transferred his weight from one foot to the other, rocking nonchalantly on his heels. Ever since the old commandant, Wolf Seidl, had left and the new one arrived without Berlin having appointed anyone of those who had served here longer, the HQ resembled a stirred-up wasps' nest, with everyone maneuvering for the best positions. Old sympathies had been disrupted and the officers were in no hurry to establish new ones. They were waiting to see what Ritsche was like. And Binde had only a while ago heard him telling Herz off. The old woman, whom Herz had picked on to work off his rage, repelled Binde by her ugliness. If not she, he thought, someone else

would have caught it instead. Nothing of this showed on Binde's face, however. On the contrary, it looked rather as if he were merely dividing up the shoddy things on the shelves in his mind, choosing the ones he had a use for and discarding those he did not want.

Herz turned to him suddenly, taking him by surprise, but Binde retained his composure. He brought his heels together with a loud click and said the first thing that came to his mind: "There's no water in the tank, sir. Shall I go get some?"

"No, stay here," said Herz, adding sibilantly, "Ass!"

It did not occur to him in the least that he was being unjust, having told Binde earlier that he would not need the car any more today. Nor did it occur to Binde himself, or so it seemed by the look in his cool, unconcerned, fishlike eyes.

Then Herz turned again to Elizabeth Feiner. Raising his hand, he made a threatening gesture right under her nose, the taut skin of his grey buckskin glove emphasizing the outlines of his clenched fist.

What a revolting hook of a nose, he thought with distaste, and said: "We'll soon knock rebellion out of your heads. As for you, you scab, you'll get a taste of it right here and now."

All her astonishment was written large in her wrinkled, sinewy and angular face and in the eyes with which she gazed at him. Why had they come here, of all places?

"Don't play the innocent with me," said Herz, as though he had read her thoughts.

"But I really don't know, sir . . ." she said.

"Shut up," Werner Binde hissed at her from the other side of the shop.

Elizabeth Feiner was, however, already sorry she had spoken.

Herz suddenly changed his tone. "Sarah, dear, don't you think your takings are very small?" he said, his voice sweet and coaxing.

And Werner Binde looked on as Herz pulled out of his well-polished black jackboot a length of reed, at whose end there was a dully gleaming lead pellet, doing it slowly and almost imperceptibly, so that the old woman should not see.

Elizabeth Feiner was still standing motionless in a corner of the shop underneath the clergyman's chasubles and the gloomy black-and-white folds of stoles which hung from a round wooden rod. Every now and then they would swing to and fro as they were touched by the wind or by the breath of the two men, and she would feel them quite close to her face. She closed her eyes and breathed in their pungent naphthalene smell. But she did not dare raise her hand and push them aside.

"Come here!" the officer called out to her.

She came back slowly, leaving the surplices to flutter behind her.

"Turn round," said Herz.

Elizabeth Feiner, her chin dropping timorously onto her chest, cast an uncertain glance at Herz's purplish face, at the root of his red nose, and at the cold eyes of Werner Binde, in whose depths she thought she saw a glimmer of mute disagreement.

Binde was leaning against the shelf and examining the old clothes. No, he could not use any of this stuff, his mouth with its slightly raised left corner seemed to indicate. But these sparks went out very quickly. Herz had taken off his cap and was hanging it up with exaggerated care on the peg. The inevitable was about to begin, and Binde's eyes went cold again as before.

Herz prodded Elizabeth Feiner with his elbow. Beneath the surface of his rage there was a gap of tranquillity. And in this gap he found both the impulse and the explanation of what he had come to do, which showed so vividly on his face that Elizabeth Feiner shuddered in fear of her life. For the eyes into which

she was gazing and the face which was now frozen in a chilly immobility were the living image of death.

Herz drew his arm back in abhorrence. The figure in front of him was no woman—it was the incarnation of Ritsche's reproof. He was faced with the task of obliterating that which had besmirched his soldierly honor.

He did not speak another word; but when the dirty old Jewish swine collapsed onto the counter at a single shove, as he had wished her to do, he could not help guffawing aloud with merriment.

Binde made no remark now, though he knew well enough that politeness demanded that he should. His mind was preoccupied with the thought that the events of this afternoon were like skittles, knocking each other down, although only one of them had been hit by the bowl. That conceited fool, Herz, had told him off because it had occurred to him to say that he had no water in the tank, yet he could just as easily have said he had no petrol, only because he had himself been given a dressing down earlier. Why? Because someone in this damned town had smoked, or perhaps even no one had smoked at all. Perhaps someone only imagined it. And now this old woman, whose days were numbered in any case, was going to pay for it. In the silence that followed Herz's laugh, Binde realized that if he now let Herz go through with this act without lending a hand, Herz would be sure to ram it down his throat at the most inopportune moment. He therefore responded with a belated sour grin.

But the corners of Herz's mouth were by this time only imperceptibly curved. The surface of his mood had risen in a tempestuous wave, which completely flooded the tranquil gap. The spark which had kindled his smile had now flared up into action.

Herz kicked the motionless feet, shod in old-fashioned galoshes with buckles. It came to his mind

that this was not Russia; these bastards obligingly waited until one chose to kick them.

Elizabeth Feiner lay slumped over the wooden counter, the blunt edge of which pressed against her stomach. Her eyes were closed. She could feel all the time how the blood streamed to her head; but it was no longer a head—it was a barrel which seemed to be bursting and yet was completely empty. There was a swoon inside that barrel, and it would claim her as soon as she gave it enough blood. Even thus, with her eyes closed, she saw Joachim Spiegel; he came again and brought her potatoes. Then she had an incredibly silly idea: it occurred to her that all three, the entire phantom of a funeral procession, Joachim Spiegel and both the soldiers who had come in, were from one and the same country. Who would have thought it a little while ago? Lucky they did not notice the potatoes. After all, they were not merely pieces of starch with a few vitamins in them; they secreted within themselves kindness and self-sacrifice. All these thoughts, which took place almost at the very ceiling of her consciousness, rapidly succumbing to a swoon, were responsible for her being able to feel nothing but the blows. It was only when the officer lost his head and started to beat her in a way calculated to make her cry out that she gave up all thought. By that time she was so far gone that she did not utter a sound.

It was half past five, and Herz replaced his whip in his boot. She had got hers all right, even though she didn't make a noise, he thought, looking at the old woman's back.

"Well, Binde, what d'you say?" he asked in a voice of tired satisfaction as he took off his gloves. "Neat work, wasn't it?"

"Very neat, sir. . . ." said Binde.

Herz pushed the door open with a vigorous movement and stood on the threshold. Proudly, with a bluishly purple face, bloodshot and covered with sweat,

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he looked up and down L Avenue. Today, he thought, his pride swelling still further, today they'll be talking about me all over the ghetto.

Werner Binde followed him out of the shop.

But Elizabeth Feiner did not yet know that she was alone.

She lay across the counter in such a way that she could not fall off. She swallowed her tears, and only then did she manage to faint.

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"It's after half past five, Binde," Herz said when they were back in the car. "Tomorrow's another day."

"Do you wish to go back to HQ, sir, or shall I drive you home?" asked Binde.

"Don't you like boxing?" asked Herz, following a different line of thought. He was no longer thinking of the old woman. And it occurred to him that there had been in the family, on his mother's side, an uncle Helmut Rinde or Binde or some such name. He felt wonderful. Then he added, "Home."

The driver nodded. Did he like boxing? That, after all, was not boxing. It was a thrashing, and a pretty mean one at that. All right, he thought, they'd put all Jews on the same garbage heap. Well, let them rot there then, but by themselves.

"Do you know something, Binde?" Herz asked him gaily. "Perhaps we are relatives."

Binde saw that Herz's foul mood had been left behind in the town, where he had shaken off the load of abuse piled on him by the new commandant.

"How come?" he asked. "Your name is Herz and mine Binde; you come from Hamburg and I from Berlin."

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"Are you free this evening?" Herz began, again on another tack.

"I guess so," replied Binde.

"Come and have dinner with us," said Herz, his voice filled with satisfaction, for he had no doubt that the commandant would find out from the Jewish elder's report how he had dealt with that Jewess.

"Thanks," said Binde.

There was nothing in this reply, however, to tell Herz whether Binde had accepted the invitation or not.

Werner Binde stared with cold eyes at the road ahead, conscious at the same time of Herz's searching gaze upon him. They had once driven together to Berlin like this, at a time when Herz was deputizing for Wolf Seidl. Herz told him, laughingly, that his eyes reminded him of a fish. That was the first time he had taken a dislike to Herz. He really did sometimes concentrate so intently on something that it seemed as though all activity had ceased behind that blunt, low brow of his. And now there was an unexpected invitation inside the limited circle of Werner Binde's cumbersome thought.

Herz stared at Binde's masklike profile. He had been glad at the time that he had been allotted Binde, the best driver at HQ. It was something in the nature of a distinction. Binde was not over-popular—they nicknamed him "kohlrahi" because of his low, forehead-shortened head—but he was not unpopular, either. His army papers said that his reliable driving had served SS General Erich von Stumpke in the Buchenwald concentration camp, and later the head of the Reich Winterhilfe for South Germany, Oswald Trautenfelder. He had been transferred from Buchenwald at his own request, which fact, Herz recalled, had at first given rise to all sorts of conjectures. Nevertheless it was possible, and Herz was inclined to take that view himself now, that it had all been a personal matter. Still, there was something slightly fishy about the chap. They'd dis-

cussed it with Ritsche when he took up his post, but he had only said:

"One camp or another, what's the difference?"

And the conjectures had ceased.

A little later Binde stopped the car in front of a yellow villa. Herz's wife, Rosemarie Ilse, a stoutish woman of thirty-five with a white skin, light blue, watery eyes, and a head that sat upon her fat shoulders as though she had no neck, was waiting by the gate in front of the garden.

"Maurice," she called out. "At last you're home! Oh, Herr Binde . . . your name is Binde, isn't it?"

The driver nodded.

"You must be tired," Rosemarie Ilse went on. "Come on in, both of you."

The eight-year-old Adolf barred their way as they entered the gate.

"Heil Hitler!" he shouted at his father.

Herz stroked his head, but the little boy drew away, offended.

"I said Heil Hitler, daddy, and you didn't."

"Well, all right then, 'Heil Hitler' . . ."

Little Adolf, however, burst into tears.

"Binde will have dinner with us tonight," said Herz.

That, of course, was more than Rosemarie Ilse had reckoned with. Since when was Maurice inviting non-coms to his house? She had intended to offer Binde a glass of something—after all, he was also a German, and she knew well enough that they had to stick together in this hostile land. But dinner? She stared at her husband in surprise, but a single grimace on his reddish face sufficed to keep her quiet.

Binde did not notice anything. So they were perhaps relatives. What was he to think of that?

They sat down in the drawing room.

Herz's five-year-old daughter came running up to him. She was better behaved than her brother and had waited for her father here. She was called Rosemarie

after her mother and grandmother, and Hilde after the mother-in-law.

"Did you annoy Mother today?" asked Herz.

Rosemarie Hilde shook her head.

Ilse smiled happily.

"And Grannie?"

"No."

"They are the nicest children in the world, Maurice," said Rosemarie Ilse.

Just then the maid came in with the dishes.

Rosemarie Ilse still could not understand why Maurice had to drag his subordinates home with him. Surely they were entitled to have a few moments to themselves, just the two of them.

Binde was staring unseeingly into a corner of the room where a vase with artificial flowers was standing. Better be careful about palling up with Herz, he said to himself. But that was only a side-stream of the turbid, muddy flow of thought whose limpid waves conjured up the image of the ugly old woman in the little shop on L Avenue.

He felt the eyes of his hostess resting upon him. His own glided along the white tablecloth, as though running away. Fat lump! he thought.

Rosemarie Ilse's mother then made her appearance, an old lady with a pince-nez on a silver chain, all dressed in black up to her neck, with small yellow pieces of lace on her sleeves.

"Good evening," she said.

All of them replied to the greeting, Werner Binde even getting up from his chair, only Herz nodded silently.

It was evident that the old lady did not feel a great deal of affection for the master of the house. Indeed, she considered Herz a rather rough man. Once she had seen her daughter removing a red stain from the sleeve of his uniform. Since then she was the prey of disturb-

ing notions, but she never plucked up enough courage to ask Ilse what it was.

As for Herz, if it occurred to him that he did not like the old woman, he put the cause down to the relationship. Even a decent woman could be a bad mother-in-law. Her son, Rosemarie Ilse's brother, was at the front as a fairly highly placed Nazi official. He could have been safely somewhere in the rear, but had volunteered to stay in the front line. The old woman was not too proud of it, and her remarks sometimes almost drove him to fury.

The old lady sat down in a spacious armchair in the middle and put a sewing-basket in her lap.

The maid started to serve dinner.

The conversation was sporadic and uneasy, Binde's presence being the obvious cause. Herz admitted it to himself and was vexed. The similarity between the name of the uncle and the driver was all nonsense, he said to himself, and he saw that Rosemarie Ilse's mother was just as annoyed as her daughter. Then Rosemarie Ilse complained that the cinema, where there had been a breakdown yesterday, was still not in order. The talk touched on new films and Rosemarie Ilse commented:

"My God, there's nothing but the war in all of them."

Her mother nodded agreement, now and again looking Werner Binde over from under her pince-nez.

"It's getting quite unbearable at times," added Rosemarie Ilse.

Herz fixed his eyes on her, severe and reproachful. He was watching carefully how Binde was reacting to it all. But the driver was fully occupied in the troublesome business of picking the bone of his leg of chicken.

"Germany is an empire that can wage and survive a ten times bigger war than this one, if need be," said Herz.

Little Adolf agreed eagerly.

"All the same," Rosemarie Ilse went on dreamily, her

mouth full of food, "I'd much rather have singing and dancing in my films. Oh, how gay we used to be, Maurice! We had such lovely times."

Herz felt his face suffuse with blood. He'd like to slap the silly cow—why must she talk such drivel?

"Those times are gone," said Binde. "And heaven knows what's in store for us."

"That's right, Binde," said Herz; but he was not sure what exactly the driver meant.

"But surely you're not going to be in the war forever," protested Rosemarie Ilse. "After all, you must get something out of it for yourselves."

"I had a letter from the Hochfellers in Düsseldorf today," said the old lady. "Their house has been wrecked by an English bomb."

"That is the lot of Germany at war," said Herz, replying as it were to his wife's earlier statement (if the cow would only keep her trap shut) and glaring sternly at his mother-in-law.

The old lady rose, offended.

"I am going to bed," she said.

After a while Werner Binde got up, too. He did not feel altogether at his ease with the Herzs. He left his fruit salad untouched, thanked them for the dinner, and said good night. He left full of doubt whether the evening had been good for anything, and even supposing it had, whether things were not bad just the same.

He started the car, switched on the muffled blue lights and, with an uncertain feeling inside him, drove the car along the yellow fence that bordered the ghetto at the place where the road cut through it, to the garage of the HQ.

Some ten minutes later that same evening, Herz walked into his study in the upper left wing of the villa.

He sat down behind a large mahogany table and carefully got ready his writing utensils. With slow, deliberate movements he took a sheet of glazed paper, a bottle of light blue ink, and a wooden penholder ornamented with burnt stripes. After a short deliberation, having, as he told himself, thought it all out in advance, he wrote a letter to the Third Department of the Berlin Gestapo.

He set his suspicions down in detail, underlining what were sentiments inspired by his fond regard for the welfare of the Third Reich rather than tangible proofs. He put one word down after another with painstaking care, as though they were not words but stones in a building he was erecting. The ideas behind the words took up all his thoughts. It was no longer a letter he was writing, it was a fort he was building, and it was necessary to eliminate all loopholes which might not remain unnoticed, and to strengthen the embrasures in case a hidden enemy should try to squeeze his impudent elbows into them. Finally he expressed quite openly his suspicion that the present commandant of the Theresienstadt ghetto was, before the decisive year 1933, a member of a leftist trade union organization, just like most of the other members of the staff of the Europa Café in Cologne, in which Heinz Albert Ritsche had worked as a waiter. It was a daring, indeed a highly dangerous, attack—Herz was fully aware of that. In fact, an unpleasant comparison came to him as he thought about it: if someone were to make such an attack against him, Herz would not know how to defend himself. Words of denunciation were at a great advantage these days: they were invariably the first. He suppressed a chill which had begun to tingle his spine and, with the aid of a wave of anger which he always found it easy to invoke, persuaded himself that all was fair in war. After all, it wasn't decent of Berlin to send a new man when the old commandant, Wolf Seidl, left, was it? And if the erstwhile commandant was now at the

front, which offered him the possibility of a hero's death, was that not chiefly due to his, Herz's, letters and reports? Yes, almost everything spoke for him. Perhaps it would not then be altogether ill-considered if the High Command were to appoint him, Maurice Herz, commandant of the ghetto. He raised his pen for the final full stop as though it were a spear with which he wished to stab Heinz Albert Ritsche. Then he signed himself with a flourish. He folded the letter and put it in the envelope, heated the sealing wax, and carved his initials, M.H., into the small mound.

He waited a few moments, then pushed the letter underneath a bronze paper-weight. It was a statuette of Atlas carrying the globe on his shoulders. To Maurice Herz it was a material symbol of his dream. He stroked the lifeless bronze with his eyes. Why should he now believe it completely out of the question that he would gain his ends? He had once already come so close . . . I have helped to build this hole, he thought as he gazed out excitedly at the darkened ghetto, this Godforsaken Jewish lair, ever since 'forty-one. At that time they had meted out punishment not only with their fists, but with hempen cord. In his mind's eye he saw the number seventeen, That's how many there were of them, and he had shot the only one to break loose, without the commandant's orders. It had been a good joke to appoint a Jewish hangman for the executions. No, he mustn't allow himself to be pushed around! The time had come to say: Enough! He started pacing up and down the room. Bringing Binde, he thought, had not been such a good idea. As for that silly goose, Rosemarie Ilse, she deserved a kick in the pants. Her twaddle was driving him crazy lately, just like the idiotic chatter of her mother, the aristocratic bitch. Between the two of them they'd get him into a concentration camp one of these days, he thought darkly.

The sealing-wax was reflected on the bronze surface of the statuette. It had set some time ago, and the ini-

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tials M.H. looked like sharp incisions. But still Maurice Herz did not come down to his bedroom on the ground floor. He was gazing at the statuette and at the white envelope, thinking out a plan of action whose tentacles penetrated every nook and cranny in the white building of the HQ, enveloping everything and everyone. He saw himself in a variety of places, behind the commandant's desk and in his villa, at the head of his colleagues sitting round the carved table at the Casino, as well as in Berlin, in new silver epaulettes, making his report which would serve as a model of military brevity and precision: destroyed. Destroyed and annihilated.

It was late in the night before he went to bed.

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The people who passed by the little shop on L Avenue that evening, trying to look as though the afternoon that had just passed was a normal part of the ghetto's routine, were nevertheless in a hurry. It was clear that no one had the least inclination to wander about in the ghetto. And since they had prudently vanished from the streets at the time of Maurice Herz's and Werner Binde's visit, many of them must have wondered why, on this particular summer evening, the shop, "The Sun," was still open. However, none of those to whom this occurred ventured inside, while Joachim Spiegel, the only one who would certainly have called, did not dare even set foot in Rose Street. The sentry who came on later did not notice, and people had other things to think about than how to enlarge their wardrobe by the addition of torn stockings or stoles. The Jewish sentries paced their beats slowly and with pretended assurance for only short distances from their posts, so

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that no one came to know about Elizabeth Feiner, who was still lying inside the shop. Thus no report of the incident was included in the Jewish elder's report and was therefore not among the documents which were next day presented to commandant Heinz Albert Ritsche. And Herz's efforts came to nothing.

It was a little before this, at about the time Maurice Herz finally went to sleep, that Elizabeth Feiner came to. It would be an exaggeration to say that after those six hours she completely regained consciousness; everything seemed to give way beneath her and to swim in darkness. An unpleasant whistling noise sounded in her ears, mingling with the shouts of children who called her "Auntie," and changing to the piercing shriek of a locomotive's whistle, then to the wailing of dozens of sirens and, at the same time, to steamrollers which kept running over her forehead with their rough-surfaced, heavy wheels. Suddenly she found it revolting to lie helplessly on the floorboards. When she at last picked herself up and laboriously got to her feet, she did not know for a long time what time it was. All round her there was nothing but silence. It must be time for her to pull down the shutters. It was also dark, which meant that it was after the curfew and thus impossible for any Jew to appear in the streets. Her dazed mind conjured up images of a long-forgotten, distant childhood, of nights when she had been afraid to go out in the dark and frightened when she woke up in her bed in the middle of the night. Now, too, she was afraid, but for different reasons. She wished that the darkness would swallow everything and that the rough, opaque curtain which seemed to hang in front of her eyes would never be raised. And she wished that Joachim Spiegel might be somewhere near at that last moment which would put an end to all the troubles of this world. She immediately rebuked herself, however; she must not link anyone with her misfortune. She realized that she could not stand long on her feet without sup-

port, so she sat down on the floor. She longed to be able to close her eyes and sleep off everything that had happened if she was to survive it and to go on living. Thus she sat, her former ideas, according to which a human being could keep his dignity even in this place, shattered and ruined like a wretched pile of debris. Worst of all, an evil thought fought its way through to the surface of her consciousness, searing her brain; had the red-faced officer who had knocked her down not even for a moment seen in her his own mother? The reply which seemed to roar inside her transformed her face so that it now resembled that of an ugly, astonished child. She knew only one thing for certain: that she must not leave the shop in the night. She therefore remained sitting where she was, feeling her legs, her face, and her whole body with her hands. Each touch she felt in the marrow of her bones. But this time, painful though it was, she no longer succeeded in fainting. She had to squat on the cold planks of the floor, alone with the mice and her own, now wide-awake consciousness.

The night passed slowly and heavily. It was like a chilly blanket of darkness retaliating for the hot day. Not even the faint rays of the yet distant dawn, nor the bluish glow of the stars which she could see through the windows of the shop, could penetrate this blanket.

5

The morning was foggy. From inside the shop the figures, flitting past on the other side of the greasy paper in the window like a grotesque shadow play of L Avenue, appeared only as a monotonous pantomime of heads. It was difficult to make out just how much they were bent under their broad-brimmed hats. The

shiny metal or bamboo sticks of umbrellas heralded a wet autumn—the rain and the damp mists, which came early in this region, bringing confirmation. The paper was soon soaked through with rain, and before she pulled down the corrugated iron shutters, Elizabeth Feiner took down the paper and left it to dry overnight on the counter.

Her angular head, even more scarred with bluish veins, large and small, than it was before the end of the summer, looked as though the blood inside it were getting darker. She was racking her brains with a single question, precise and yet ramified at the same time. A few blows were enough to put out what burns in human beings from beginning to end, to become the beacon which we call conscience.

She was now in the habit of sitting motionless on a low stool, as though the contradiction between the depths of her experience and the heights of her resolutions, which had swallowed up everything, had consumed her as well. Thus she would forget that she was not alone.

With her in the shop was Ruth, Joachim Spiegel's niece, who had arrived with the August transport, a month after the SS visit in July, while her parents had remained in Kassel, one of them being an Aryan. She had not heard from them for two whole months. How was Elizabeth Feiner to explain to her why her parents had stayed at home in Kassel while she was here? Would Ruth be able to understand that, according to the Nuremberg laws, there were two kinds of human blood?

She treated Ruth with a curious kind of consideration, which took the form of silence. Now she was staring at the small, thin girl, whose soft dark hair sprouted up from a sallow forehead and whose white teeth were rather widely spaced and almost transparent, as though they were made of ivory. The girl's face with its inquisitive black eyes, such as she once used to have

NIGHT AND HOPE

herself, seemed to her to represent a future reproach, because something that not even Elizabeth Feiner was able to give a name to was marking the child's face with the sorrowful expression that Jewish children so frequently have. This reproach at her own constant silence was mixed up with a feeling of gratitude, Ruth being the only one to come these days, as the ghetto was in the throes of an influenza epidemic and many children were ill.

Ruth played with the stoles, straightening them out with her thin, long fingers. After a while she became tired of the silence.

"Auntie Feiner," she said, "why don't you keep the fire going?"

The dark silence which had depressed her but which she herself was unable to break was shattered at last.

"There's nothing to keep it going with," she replied. "I've burned everything."

She couldn't touch the few pieces of furniture that had been left in the place. Where would she put the things if she did? And what if the owner of the barber-shop were to return one day?

The little girl was not satisfied, however. She pouted, this childish grimace contrasting strangely with her grave, grown-up eyes; the white expanse of teeth, the two front ones at the top thrusting forward a little, was parted restlessly. She and Auntie Feiner were in the habit of composing verses.

The sun has flown far from our street;
Now snow is there;
Like slippers white beneath our feet,
For us to wear.

But they knew this one by heart now. Perhaps they could try to compose some new lines.

It rained all the time, thought Elizabeth Feiner in an effort to distract her thoughts in another direction.

ROSE STREET

Winter was coming. But what were they going to do if the winter came so soon? And why was she not saying all this out loud?

"I'll tell you a story," she said at last.

Ruth nodded.

"Once upon a time there was an evil man," she began. "He wanted to rule the whole wide world. Nobody loved him, and he was angry about it and so he sent his subjects to the hangman to be executed, one by one . . ."

She did not realize that she had stopped speaking and there was silence again.

"But Auntie Feiner," protested Ruth. "It's not finished yet."

"Yes, that's just the trouble, child," said Elizabeth Feiner.

Then she burst out, so suddenly and so urgently that Ruth was startled and opened her mouth with the small mouselike teeth:

"I'll tell you the rest tomorrow. You must leave me alone now. Go on, run home, Ruth!"

Her voice was so gritty and unkind and there was so much urgency in it that it frightened her.

"I know who the evil man is, anyway . . ." said Ruth.

"Go on, run . . ."

Elizabeth Feiner shook all over until the door closed behind the girl. Her mind was filled with a single question. What would happen when the door opened again to admit the greenish-grey uniform with the reddish face? It was not finished yet. That was what troubled her so much. Whatever happened, she had to be alone, she told herself.

On several occasions during the time when the pale glow of the sun was obliterated by rain, from the beginning to the end of October, she had thought of going to the Council of Elders to hand over the keys of the shop to someone else. She did not wish to remain

here any longer. But she hardly ever got farther than halfway up the stairs. She would like to scrub the pavements as she used to do. There was nothing to be ashamed of in that. It was only when she saw that reddish face with its tight-lipped mouth in front of her that she knew where humiliation came from. Would she succeed in getting away from here before they arrived? She had sixty-two years of life behind her, she did not make hasty decisions. And yet she had changed her mind every time just before she got there. There was something else to be taken into account; someone would have to take her place. Perhaps Joachim Feiner—oh, she admonished herself, how silly of her, that wasn't his name! Both these things were rooted deeply within her, the idiotic desire for human company and sympathy, and the repudiation of this desire. She mustn't tie anyone to herself, and yet, it was so sad to be alone. So she wavered between her resolve to hand over the keys and her repeated last-minute withdrawals. She toyed with the idea, recurrent like the ebb and tide, that if the expected Swiss delegation arrived before the two SS men, it would be composed entirely of young people in whom she would be able to confide. She thought back to that summer morning, the rosy day, and the night when she was unable to get up from the floor. She was glad she had sent Ruth away. It was windy outside, and a slight drizzle wafted from the mountains was washing away the last traces of summer's beauty. It looked as if it was going to start raining in earnest.

She felt tired. Intending to sit down on her white stool, she stopped dead halfway, her shoulders hunched. Someone was standing outside the shop. Now he was about to enter. And although it flashed across her mind for a mere fraction of a second that it might be Joachim Spiegel, she was not surprised to see the green cloth, flecked with countless grey spots. She was not frightened even when Werner Binde carefully closed

the door behind him, leaving his hand to rest on the handle for a while. She was only conscious of an uncertain feeling of expectancy.

Werner Binde shook off the rain. He felt none too brave. He was on his way back from the building which housed the Council of Elders and had stopped here, in front of the little shop on L Avenue. "The Sun"—a stone sun with its rays sharply chiseled above the door, that was a barrier beyond which he was reluctant to penetrate. The passersby saw this, and because he had hesitated a little, they immediately vacated his side of the street. He failed to observe this, however, because as soon as he entered the shop and as soon as he left it again and hurried on through the town, he was sure that no one except Elizabeth Feiner had noticed him, since the sidewalks on both sides were again crowded.

"Good day," he said.

She regarded him distrustfully. Was the greeting only a polite ruse? She took off her spectacles, then said: "Good day."

She could not bring herself to ask boldly what it was the soldier wanted, despite the fact that something was impelling her to ask just that question. She was puzzled by his calmness and by the look in his cold, quiet eyes.

Werner Binde was standing face to face with the old woman's angular head, bewhiskered chin, and the red root of her nose.

And Elizabeth Feiner, waiting all the time for what was to come, could not make out what was concealed behind the soldier's fishlike eyes. She had no idea that the very fact that he was here had a certain meaning, that it meant the result of a three months' invisible struggle against Maurice Herz. Werner Binde had come to see the old woman whom Herz had humiliated. This was a climax, the transformation of a wish into action. He did not like Herz, thinking it was because here Herz punctuated every sentence with a slap, while at HQ he acted the perfect gentleman. That, Werner

Binde said to himself, is just what I can't stand. He had resented it already in the case of Erich von Stumpke and Oswald Trautenfelder, with whom he used to drive out to inspect the stores supplied by the Mauthausen camp and used for the purposes of the Winterhilfe for South Germany. He was hardly aware that this feeling of distaste dated back to the time when he had met his own stepbrother, Fritz, in Buchenwald. He was not allowed as much as to shake his hand or throw him a handkerchief with which to bandage his wounds. Fritz died in front of his eyes like some animal, and he, Werner, had smiled inanely so that no one would see that he was in any way concerned about the bloody bundle of flesh which had been suspected of a nonsensical offense—listening to foreign radio stations.

Elizabeth Feiner debated with herself: should I ask, or not?

Werner Binde searched his mind to find out whether there was something that drew him to this ugly old woman with the prominent cheekbones and with grey hairs on her chin and under her nose. He did not dare to dwell on the idea of what the others would think of him standing here inactive like this.

Elizabeth Feiner was suddenly disturbed by a feeling that the silence was about to blow up like a load of dynamite. When was it going to start?

But Werner Binde was thinking of other things. He did not wish to play with the word *coward*, and yet it was this very word that haunted him ever since that July evening when he had had dinner with Maurice Herz and his wife. It had all started with that silly dinner. Nevertheless, Werner Binde knew very well that there was something that had happened before the dinner. And everything after it. On the following day the soldiers had each received a tin of sardines, brought from Portugal via Switzerland. He could not eat his sardines, even though at the time he had only a vague

idea of what he was going to do with them and did not want to admit it even to himself. So he carried them around in his pocket, knowing very well that he intended to give them to this old woman. He had only been looking for a suitable opportunity. "I feel nothing towards her," he kept repeating to himself, "absolutely nothing, she is only old and ugly." Yet, he had never carried out his intention. There was a barrier in his way, an obstacle that was fully and precisely described by the word *cowardice*. It was not only that he was afraid of prying eyes—they could be put off the scent in a number of ways, all of them foolproof. He could, for instance, pretend to beat the old woman and then leave the sardines here as if by accident; he could be at hand in the vicinity of the shop when she went to open up in the morning. But he rejected them all. They did not afford him what he was seeking: satisfaction once and for all. That satisfaction, however, did not come even now that he was finally standing here, almost feeling her breath upon him. The old woman, he saw clearly, was afraid of him. She could not look inside his soul. There was no reason why he should feel anything for her, she was merely a mediator between him and his future peace of mind. All the same, he could not rid himself of the worrying thought that what he had dared to do would never be properly appreciated. He stood there in front of her, quiet and subdued, disappointment staring out of his eyes; he looked into hers, sunken and old, and read in them a combination of fear and defiance and a profound resignation. She was not as ugly as he had imagined her all this time. And yet—she was ripe for the crematorium. One blow would do the trick. He was furious with himself for thinking like this. He turned quickly to look at the entrance. Nobody there. He looked at his watch, hardly knowing why he did so. He was jumpy, he told himself. Out of the pocket of his greatcoat he pulled the tin and, thinking suddenly that all this fuss was useless, that he should have been

rougher, should have simply handed the thing over and nothing more, he left as unexpectedly as he had come, almost without a greeting, perhaps a little nervously, walking out of the shop with his rolling, sailor's gait.

Elizabeth Feiner was left looking at the spot where he had been standing, at the greasy paper that replaced the glass. She stood thus for a long time, uncomprehending. The dynamite did not go off, then. She had, nevertheless, not failed to register the moment when the soldier had been on the point of hitting her. She could not pluck up the courage to touch the sardines in their gaudy yellow wrapping. What if the soldier's shadow appeared again on the paper in the window? And yet, something told her that he would not come back. Had it perhaps been fear that had made him glance at his watch and at the door? But fear was attentiveness intensified and only rarely was it transmuted into action; fear was merely the transformation of one's own thoughts into those of the enemy. She pushed the tin away with loathing, under the stoles hanging down in folds from the ceiling. She was confused. As so often before, it again occurred to her that one had always something to learn, that no final impression was ever accurate, because as long as events were being uncoiled from the spool of life no impression was really final. Who could tell what people were like underneath their shell of coarseness or despair, where only they themselves could see, sometimes not even they. Where then lay the boundaries that divided people? Unthinkingly she reached out for the sardines.

She went out of the shop and pulled down the shutters. Then she opened the old, black silk, man's umbrella, whose great width was quite out of proportion to her emaciated figure, clad in a dark blue dress with grey, opaque buttons. In her shiny alligator handbag with its brass clasps she carried the yellow tin of sardines in oil, that strange gift which she could not as yet comprehend.

Halfway up Rose Street she changed her direction. She felt feverish, as if a flame were burning her up from within, and she was unable to fight against it. Wasn't the whole thing just a trap? Was it permissible for a woman who was trained as she was, and as were all the other people herded together in the ghetto, to accept something that rightfully belonged to pure-blooded soldiers? But yet another voice inside her was asking why Binde had been so careful and quiet. And the first voice answered: that's just a mask! The sardines had become a source of disquiet, a time bomb planted on her soul.

She saw it all again, as it had been three months ago and as it had been today. Two men were in the shop, one red-faced and indifferent, his head a little flattened, like a beet-root. The other one had only acted roughly in one instance, by telling her to shut up. But perhaps even that was intended to help her. It was all so very complicated. Why, after today's encounter, did she want to think well of him, as though it were out of the question that there should be a trick in it somewhere? The red-faced one had beaten her, and he would have done so even if she had kept quiet. The old proverb about the dog and the stick came to her mind.

No, she would not go straight to the barracks.

She made for a square building with two crossed horses' heads in a coat of arms above a stone doorway—the house of the Council of Elders.

The street, it seemed to her, was not level, it wound itself round the trees, up and down like a great swing, and the people were laughing at the sight. She touched her head; it was burning. She could not stand it if Binde were to come to her today, or even tomorrow, she thought. After all, it was not only the blows and the kicks—there was something else besides that. She was at the mercy of her own thoughts, which her brain shot at her heart, and she was helpless to prevent it. She would tell the Council of Elders that her involun-

NIGHT AND HOPE

tary service was at an end. She would hand over the keys. Good-bye to "The Sun"! Yes, that would rid her of the worry of what would happen if she were unable to go to the shop tomorrow.

She trotted through the town perseveringly, under her huge umbrella, the tears in which permitted the wind to blow the rain in and to soak her more than could be healthy for a sick old woman.

At last she reached the house with the coat of arms.

The staircase with its high steps resembled a pyramid. With difficulty she raised one foot and then the other, one foot and the other, and again and again, so that she lost all count of time as she struggled up and up until she stopped in front of the Chief Administrator's desk. She did not even know how she signed the written declaration saying that the shop, The Sun, was in perfect order, nor was she aware of the searching gaze of the man to whom she handed the keys. All she knew was that he was kind and that he agreed with her in everything.

"Just a moment, Mrs. Feiner," he was saying, his voice sounding as if it came from a long way off. "I'll see you to the door."

"Yes. . . ."

"Just a moment, I won't be a minute."

But Elizabeth Feiner did not hear him. She was already walking down the stairs.

The barracks in which she lived were not far—just across the road, standing there along steep slopes that towered up in the twilight and fell on the other side into the depths of a different world which was no longer the ghetto.

She could not remember when she had last felt so ill. Every intake of breath hurt her. Pleurisy, she thought. But it could also be just flu. Notwithstanding the pain, she managed an inward smile. Just. What a silly word!

ROSE STREET

She was already halfway home before the rain-soaked administrator caught up with her.

"Really, Mrs. Feiner," he was saying. "Why didn't you wait for me?"

She looked at him, puzzled. She couldn't for the life of her think of his name.

She went on taking short steps and not noticing that the man was supporting her.

At the door the Chief Administrator had to leave her.

"Good night . . ."

She thought she nodded her head in farewell. Or at least she wanted to.

She placed the small, shiny tin underneath her pillow, took off her shoes, and lay down. She closed her eyes straightaway, and then pulled the quilt over her head. She wouldn't tell anyone—the other women might be afraid of infection. An indescribable weight was constantly upon her. The end was approaching. That delusive game which she had called life would soon be over. And on just such a remarkable day. The stone frame of the window, with its thin rusty bars set close to one another, was jumping up and down before her closed eyes. On the other side of the room was a real, red-hot stove, surrounded by a swarm of women preparing supper. Room 38, peopled by the evening, full of children and visitors. And from outside she could hear the water swirling in the drainpipe, and thought of Joachim Spiegel's niece, who recited:

The sun has flown far from our street;
Now snow is there. . . .

The arrows kept on coming. Now they came from afar and embedded themselves in the center of her forehead. The autumn and its rains should not have set in. Not yet. She fell asleep, willing herself to sleep so eagerly that an unpleasant, sticky perspiration sprang

up all over her body. She was completely covered by the quilt, out of whose torn, ragged end small grey feathers kept fluttering and were then carried upward by the draft, toward the ceiling.

6

That evening Maurice Herz was already at home. Rosemarie Ilse was somewhat excited, and the way she ran about the kitchen made Herz think of everything that he had so successfully brought into play. Events had taken an unexpected turn. Rosemarie Ilse looked at him frequently, her eyes—in contrast to the confused haste with which she hopped round the table—full of gratitude, brilliant and devoted. Maurice had been named Heinz Albert Ritsche's adjutant, to the dismay of all the wives of the other SS officers, who were jealous of her. As far as he was concerned, he was quite content with this new appointment, considering it to be the embryo of his future promotions. True, the Party's special plenipotentiary, who had recently paid a visit to the ghetto to supervise the preparations for the visit from Switzerland, had, in the course of a private talk, made it clear to Herz that the thing with the trade unions and the commandant was unfounded; at the same time, however, he had told Herz that the Third Department commended him on his vigilance. "You are a man who uses his eyes and ears," he said. "That's the kind of man we like." I've undoubtedly strengthened my position, thought Herz. A special plenipotentiary would not have come to tell him if it had been otherwise. It, of course, immediately occurred to him that the fellow in black had not spilled everything he knew. But he at once rejected this idea, which undermined the pillars upon which his satisfaction

rested, imparting to him the notion that the plenipotentiary might likewise have told Ritsche everything. They trusted him! That was clear! Well, he would not disappoint them. At the party that was held in the evening the plenipotentiary had honored him with special attention. He was tall and slim, in a black uniform, his personality devoid of the menace which was no doubt inherent in his mission. Herz felt on top of the world. Had it not been for this, he would never have done what he had done just now. His decision was truly born of a momentary impulse: he had, at an opportune moment, invited both the commandant and the plenipotentiary "for a little dinner" to his villa. The plenipotentiary had excused himself with a smile. It looked as if he really regretted his inability to accept the invitation; but he was leaving that very night. Ritsche, however, had accepted. And thus, for the second time in less than a quarter of a year, Maurice Herz had infringed on the unwritten rules of the Nazi hierarchy: the first time from the bottom, by inviting Binde, and now from the top—that was more daring and, it struck him, more dangerous. When he had done it, he had of course had quite a lot of French cognac inside him. But in any case, he told himself as he thought the whole thing over, if you risk nothing you gain nothing.

The lion's share of this evening's success fell to Rosemarie Ilse, who, even though she was not in the least aware of the events that had set into motion the impetuous gesture of invitation, was fully aware of the greatness of the moment. She did not know what to do first. The chickens had not yet arrived from the refrigerator, and she had no time left to distribute the flowers in the vases. She wouldn't make do with artificial ones today, of course! Since the day when she had to let the maidservant, Greta, go because the silly wench had applied to serve on the eastern front, she was continually on the go. No time to do anything. And even if Maurice did not say much, she could see

what high hopes he had of tonight's dinner. He sat by the stove, warming his feet, his reddish, powdered face showing how intensively he was thinking.

Every now and again Maurice Herz would rub his temples with the palms of his hands. He could not make himself out. Were there two personalities in him, one of them daring and enterprising, yes, you might even say rapacious, in its desire to climb to the top, and the other timid and self-effacing, constantly realizing the fact that he was nothing but an unfinished house-painter's apprentice? Both these Herzs were now waiting for the big occasion. To the first it seemed that the drops of water which drizzled persistently from the skies were turning the wheels on his behalf. The second doubted that the commandant would come at all. Perhaps he had not wanted to say anything in front of the plenipotentiary, but now he would show him who was whose superior and who was only an unfinished house-painter. After all, said Herz to himself, an adjutant was only an adjutant. An adjutant must not jump too high or he might slip and fall. But, he rebuked himself, the game was on. Now it was necessary to rake in the trumps.

He gazed into the fire. His disquiet quickly vanished. The plenipotentiary's favor was a card well worth having. And, seeing that Rosemarie Ilse kept hopping around the stove like a goat, he said, languidly: "Plenty of time."

When at last the car's brakes were heard in front of the villa, everything was in its place.

Heinz Albert Ritsche was a small, stoutish man wearing gold-rimmed spectacles on a white fleshy nose. Altogether he resembled a businessman rather than a high SS officer. As a matter of fact nobody knew how he had managed to gain his position in the rear. The subject was never mentioned, however, as any undue curiosity would most probably have resulted in the questioners being sent to the front themselves, and that

was a possibility that appealed to no one. It was just this, though, that gave Ritsche a flattering aura of mystery, which for others, including Herz, represented an easy target.

They ate in silence. Herz was at a loss to discover the cause of this taciturnity. The dinner over, Ritsche laid aside his napkin and said he had enjoyed the meal.

"Did you really?" asked Rosemarie Ilse, pleased, but slightly disconcerted by the reserved manner of their distinguished guest.

"Yes, really, thank you," said Ritsche.

The children came into the drawing-room.

"Uncle Ritsche," shouted little Adolf, "I want to scalp ten Jewish pigs!"

"You're not old enough yet," Herz told him, smiling.

He turned to the commandant, still a little uneasy: "Children, Herr Kommandant, they're the hope of Germany."

Ritsche nodded his satisfaction. It sounded good: the hope of Germany.

Now it seemed to Herz that the barrier of ice had been breached. He would be damned if he would do it a second time, though. In the next instant, however, he felt a warm glow of satisfaction at having invited the commandant.

Little Hilda asked: "Have Jews got children, too?"

Rosemarie Ilse smiled happily: "Oh, Lord, how clever these children are!"

Herz's satisfaction increased every minute. I was right, after all, he thought. This was the kind of easy-going comradeship he had in mind all along, the kind that as a rule was not without its effect on service relations. He was convinced that this impression was correct. What he needed was to gain Ritsche's confidence, then he would be able to make his weight felt far more than hitherto. He would have an invisible pillar against which to lean. It occurred to him at the same time that

in these days, so troublesome for the Reich, personal wrangles were highly undesirable. He would not be disappointed even if the only outcome of his plan were to be a closer friendship between the two of them. It struck him suddenly and pleasurably, that now, as adjutant, he was actually able to view things from a loftier standpoint, on a higher scale.

Rosemarie Ilse, her cheeks full of color, wore a black silk dress and a white apron which she kept taking off and putting on again. She was under the impression that she looked particularly good in that apron, and in the end she left it on. To Ritsche, her neckless body seemed comical. The neck got lost somewhere when she was being born, he thought. After the plenipotentiary had left, he had debated with himself for a long time whether to accept the invitation or not. He had not liked the way those two talked together and could not rid himself of the idea that the red-faced nosy parker had been assigned to spy on him. In the end he had come, but he had not capitulated; he was merely reconnoitering in enemy territory. In order to keep a certain, not too offensive, distance, he had left his wife at home. The devoted glances bestowed on him by Herz's wife he found unpleasant. What an impossible cow, he said to himself. What does she think she is doing, staring at me like that?

Rosemarie Ilse felt that the commandant was looking her over. She leant towards him across the table and, taking courage, blurted out with a girlish giggle:

"You are men, but in your uniforms you look like boys."

The bitch, thought Ritsche.

After a while he said, aloud: "We can well be proud of our women. They're our second reserve."

That was the only thing that occurred to him.

Rosemarie Ilse thought: Mother was right to stay upstairs—every conversation in this house is bound to end with the reserve, the front, and the war. When they

had told her who was coming, she had excused herself and had her dinner taken up to her room.

"But, Herr Kommandant," said Rosemarie Ilse, "you'll never let them get as far as this, will you?"

He realized at once what she was driving at.

"Our Führer," he said, irritated. "has several times spoken on the subject, and he has left no room for doubt. It is completely out of the question. If you ask your husband, he is sure to set your mind at rest on that score."

Herz threw a worried look in Ritsche's direction.

The joyful, intoxicated feeling, which had taken hold of Rosemarie Ilse and had made her happy all through the dinner, was gone.

Herz realized that the commandant might think that he was neglecting his wife, or even might wonder why she was still not working as other officer's wives.

"We have already talked about it, haven't we, Ilse?" he said quickly.

She fixed desperate eyes on her husband. What had they already talked about? Oh, God, let her not spoil anything. She couldn't remember. And even she knew very well that these political discussions were no joking matter.

Maurice Herz's reddish face changed its color to blue. The stupid bitch! But he kept his temper and, mistakenly interpreting the commandant's silence as agreement, he said: "Ilse and I have often thought that perhaps she might work on the requisitioning commission . . ."

If the idiot has invited me because of this, thought Ritsche, then he might have saved himself the trouble. Let him send his fat sow where he likes.

Rosemarie Ilse was offended. How silly to lie like that. Surely they didn't have to resort to lies. Was she supposed to go to the Jewesses, like that ginger-haired Herta? Did Maurice think she didn't have enough on

her hands as it was? Why were they fighting the war, in that case? She almost started to cry on the spot.

"That is very commendable," said Ritsche. "Your children are growing fast, and anyway, you can always take a Czech maid."

"Never!" cried Rosemarie Ilse. "They're so terribly lazy. And apart from that, I couldn't stand a Jewess in my house. I simply couldn't."

"I'd throw her out, Mummie," put in little Adolf. "You'd let me throw her out, wouldn't you?"

Heinz Albert Ritsche got up suddenly. "It is very pleasant here," he said, "but I must go now."

Herz did not fail to notice how cold, curt, and stiff his words were.

They saw him to the car.

It was Herz's Mercedes-Benz, which he had sent that afternoon to fetch Ritsche. Werner Binde stood by the car's door, and he saluted them with his fishlike eyes.

"It was a great honor, Herr Kommandant," said Herz.

Suddenly he felt terribly small, stupid and vile. No, he should not have played about with that invitation.

Ritsche, on the other hand, lounging comfortably in his seat, did not seem to be thinking along such serious lines as Herz.

Back in the house, Rosemarie Ilse told herself that no one invited Maurice with such a show of politeness. With belated tears in her eyes she flared up at him:

"It's not enough for you that the maid has gone, that I slave away like a nigger from morning till night, is it? What a fool I was to marry you . . ."

"Don't be silly!" Herz replied in irritation. "The requisitioning commission is child's play. And you'll pick up all sorts of useful things for yourself."

He was furious with her, and if it weren't for the children, he would have slapped her. But it was just as well, at least let him have peace and quiet at home. No, Maurice Herz did not have sufficient self-assurance

tonight. The meek one inside him was on top. Wasn't it better to be small? He had to think things out.

Rosemarie Ilse came to the conclusion that there was some truth in what Maurice said. She'd take a dog with her to the ghetto. What was she to do with such an impossible husband, in such times, and . . . But she could think of nothing more. She stopped crying, powdered her face, and then went upstairs to talk to her mother and to confide her troubles. After a time she returned downstairs and went to bed.

7

A week later Werner Binde drove the members of the requisitioning commission—generally known under the nickname of "grab-alls"—to the ghetto. Among them was Rosemarie Ilse Herz. He stopped to let them get out at various places according to a plan that had been drawn up beforehand. In the end he was left with the ginger-haired Herta, the gardener's wife, and with Rosemarie Ilse, who recalled that the driver had dined with them last summer, and asked him to be so kind and accompany her everywhere she went. Herta's Alsatian, Rex, sat huddled in a corner of the car, jumping up on to the window and barking all the time.

In accordance with the instructions he had received, Werner Binde stopped the car in front of the Hamburg barracks, in which the women of Theresienstadt lived.

He shambled behind Herta and Rosemarie Ilse along the corridors with the small balconies built in severe military style.

The two women were a long time deciding in which room to start their work, finally making up their minds to begin on the first floor, right in the corner. And so it happened that at about half past nine in the morning

they walked into Room 38, the room in which Elizabeth Feiner was lying.

The room was long and high, but the huge and cumbersome three-storey bunks filled it so completely that only a little space was left between the two rows.

Rosemarie Ilse did not feel too well in the stuffy, badly aired room. She kept darting quick glances to one side and another, and turning all the time, afraid that something or somebody might fly out at her. But as nothing happened, she grew used to it in a very short while. The only thing she saw on turning round were the eyes of Werner Binde; he was standing against the wall, almost motionless, staring ahead of himself with a vague expression on his face that might have signified indifference or even superciliousness.

She was ashamed, before herself as well as before the ginger-haired Herta, ashamed of being here and of being so clumsy. Where was she to start? And how was she to do it? Was she perhaps to rummage among those foul-smelling possessions, or in those filthy beds?

Just then she heard Herta give a slight scream.

"Is anybody here?"

Elizabeth Feiner's face took on an almost imperceptible shade of astonishment, so slight that it was gone immediately; only her parchmentlike skin, which had no further layer underneath, became slightly wrinkled around the eyes. For the seventh day running she was being burnt up by high fever. Something was devouring her from within, she was shriveling up, she could resist no longer and was losing her strength.

In those seven days she had not once tried to solve the question that had worried her so much while she was still in the shop: whether she would withstand the onslaught to human dignity that the present time brought with it. The question only cropped up again now, though very feebly.

She lay staring at the yellowish ceiling, her hands under the quilt. It was not the ceiling she saw—it was

a stretched-out cloth, with her life parading dimly across it, divided into years, weeks, and seconds. She saw a large blackboard, on which invisible fingers drew the likeness of her father, with his carefully tended ginger moustache, and a little girl rather like Joachim Spiegel's niece. All this was dim and yet somehow extremely clearly outlined. The little girl told her father a lie; instead of doing her homework she had been to visit a friend and then blamed her for her own omission. The father first wanted to strike her, but then he said: "No, I won't beat you, life will give you a worse spanking than I ever could. But don't lie again, ever. A human being should keep himself clean." This picture was rapidly followed by a succession of other scenes faintly remembered from childhood: the girl with the pigtails grows up, and her skin terribly quickly becomes as yellow as the ceiling; her veins become blue and stand out on her forehead, reshaping her face into curious angles; Elizabeth Feiner recognizes herself and opens her eyes.

At this moment Herta called out:

"Damn it all, is anyone here or not?"

Herta, of course, knew there was someone there. But she wanted to hear her own voice.

Elizabeth Feiner again saw in her mind's eye the shapeless and dull days in which she was in charge of the shop, The Sun. Outside it was beautiful weather and inside it was dark. Then Rose Street and the former barbershop were replaced by the moment when she relinquished the keys, that incarnation of a mission which had not led anywhere. Now the pictures grew hazy—all she saw was the ceiling, yellow, dark and depressing. Elizabeth Feiner at last discovered the answer to her question, the question of how to avoid humiliation: the answer was to remain silent.

The echo of Herta's words died away.

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had the strength to keep death at bay by thoughts of the little girl; the only thing she knew was that from now on she was not going to speak any more. Reconciled with everything, she lay still, only her eyes roving round the room. From her bunk, low above the ground, she at once caught sight of the German women, the dog, and the soldier in the background. She could not make out his face because of the distance, and she was not altogether sure as to the size of the animal, either. But she had distinctly heard the penetrating voice of the German woman, and she had understood her words. Only now did she make any reply, quite quietly and only to herself, for she did not know how much strength she could spare to lend her voice; and in a way she wished that she alone and no one else might hear it. She narrowed her eyes to mere slits, trying to keep out vision and to prevent daylight from hurting them. The inspection did not concern her, she could still realize that much, for she had nothing at all that might be of interest to the living. She lay still, her head inclined to one side on a none too clean pillow, like someone who is losing a struggle that is being waged inside his body but is already out of reach of his spirit.

"You swine!" shrieked Herta. "Are you dumb, or what? What're you doing, wallowing here in bed?"

Elizabeth Feiner did not reply. What was coming next? Why had she feared the fever in the long, cold nights when the wind howled outside? Thinking of the wind was pleasant, so cool and incredible. The rain was rattling on the rusty metal of the drain-pipe; she heard that now very distinctly. The rain!

"These lazy swine!" said Herta again. "Nothing wrong with them, but they don't feel like work."

Herta's voice was coarse and full of hatred. Elizabeth Feiner took no notice of it. Somewhere there were mountain slopes and somewhere there were roses. And elsewhere nothing.

Herta was a child of hatred. Her mother, herself

alone in the world, had abandoned her, and later no one had come to take the little girl from the Berlin orphanage. Up to the age of eighteen she had been like a discarded thing that walked, breathed and spoke. Now at last she had found people who were lower than she, upon whom even she might trample. And thus she said what she did calmly and with a feeling of superiority, even though she saw that the woman in front of her had only a few steps to go to the end of her life.

"Frau Ilse," she said. "Go through her things, and you'll see how these bitches can sham."

Although she protested inwardly against this form of address, Rosemarie Ilse Herz nevertheless obediently, but with a feeling of revulsion she found hard to overcome, bent down to the pieces of luggage under the sick woman's bunk, and opened them.

The top suitcase did not belong to Elizabeth Feiner, but to her neighbor. She was one of a numerous family, who kept all they had with their mother; a partly eaten stick of imitation Hungarian salami, two bagfuls of sugar, a cake of soap, and wedding rings in a box that used to hold a watch.

The dog barked, having smelt the meat, and Herta had to hold him back.

"There, you see!" she said.

Rosemarie Ilse threw the salami to the dog. He pounced on it eagerly, but found it too highly seasoned to devour all of it. Rosemarie Ilse was about to put back the things she had taken out of the suitcase, but Herta stopped her, saying:

"Oh, don't bother about that!"

Rosemarie Ilse was still not altogether at ease. She was unable to accustom herself so quickly to her new role, yet she had a feeling that if she were to come again (now she saw how silly she had been not to have come before) she would know what to do and how to do it. She had no doubt that when she was alone without curious eyes watching her, Herta picked up quite

a few things that the Winterhilfe never saw! Those two gold wedding rings . . . Rosemarie Ilse was scared to think of it further.

"Frau Ilse," Herta interrupted, "you'd better look under the mattress, too."

Rosemarie Ilse cautiously reached out toward the bunk and, as though she did not even wish to see the sick woman lying on it, gingerly picked up one corner of the pillow between her fingers; she tugged at it sharply, lifted it, and let it fall again.

There was a hollow, crunchy sound as Elizabeth Feiner's head rolled off the pillow and onto the wooden bedstead. Underneath the pillow, on a sheet grey with mold, lay the gaudy yellow tin of sardines.

The stench drove Rosemarie Ilse Herz a step back. She stared at the tin and, with her hand pressed against her mouth, gave a slight scream. Looking at the sardines, carefully wrapped and giving the impression of plentitude, she grew suddenly furious.

"Well, and then we think that they're dying of hunger!" she exclaimed.

"The swine!" said Herta by way of an answer.

She leant toward Rex and, her voice quiet and inciting, urged the dog: "Go on, fetch! Fetch, Rex!"

The animal bounded forward and in one leap reached Elizabeth Feiner's bedside. She was not aware of its presence. Her eyes were already closed. She no longer knew whether anyone was standing next to her, how far away they were, nor if there was anyone in the room at all. She only felt the dog's hot breath on her face, but did not see its open mouth.

All this time Werner Binde had been standing quite still, and it seemed that his eyes penetrated everything with their glassy stare, encompassing everything with a single, greenish-grey look. Suddenly he came alive—before either of the two women realized what was happening he had a pistol in his hand and had fired.

There was a hurt, surprised look in the wounded Al-

sation's eyes, and the animal gave out a rattling sound. Finally it fell and remained lying motionless across the open suitcase.

Herta cried out.

Then, screaming and holding hands, she and Rosemarie Ilse Herz ran through the narrow space between the bunks, out on to the veranda, and down the stairs.

Still not a muscle had moved in Werner Binde's flat face. He was still standing where he was, immobile. Then with his usual rolling gait he crossed over to the bunk where only fractions of time divided Elizabeth Feiner from death. But this he did not know. Very gently he moved her head back to the pillow and rearranged her blanket. The old woman's ugly, angular head suddenly seemed to him tender and kind. At that moment she reminded him of his stepbrother, Fritz. It was then he realized that there was more to it than just his personal duel with Maurice Herz. And although his brain immediately started a feverish search for some means of averting the suspicion which his action was sure to arouse, he was aware of something dark at the bottom of his consciousness that would have to be thought out later. Then he bent down, picked the dead animal up by the legs, and, with a single jerk, slung it across his shoulders. Then he waddled out of the room and down the stairs to the car.

"Oh, Herr Binde, what happened?" Rosemarie Ilse's teeth chattered as she spoke.

"Why did you do it?" asked Herta, nervously smoothing her hair under its broad red band.

Werner Binde measured them with his fish-cold eyes, which penetrated Rosemarie Ilse to the marrow of her bones, and before whose stare Herta's eyes swerved away. Then he dumped the dog on the floor of the car.

"Where do we go from here?" he asked, speaking slowly and in a dull voice. After a while, nonchalantly and without deeming it necessary to turn his face toward them, he explained, drawing out the words:

NIGHT AND HOPE

"That dog . . . it was sick . . . I saw it. It had the rabies."

"Oh . . ." said Rosemarie Ilse.

Herta was silent.

When they got in, Rosemarie Ilse loathingly drew her feet away from the dead animal. Binde turned the car round, and then drove along the main L Avenue, along damp mounds of russet-colored leaves, past the shuttered shop underneath the stone sun, and back to the German HQ.

8

Two beautiful sleek limousines stood outside the white house which flew the swastikas on its flagstaffs. They were not painted the dull grey military color, but, on the contrary, shone black like dark mirrors. Each car had a little flag on the radiator, the red cross standing out against the white background.

A clean-shaven, slim gentleman in a pepper-and-salt suit of perfect cut turned—evidently in the name of all the other gentlemen—to Albert Heinz Ritsche, the commandant of the Large Fortress of Theresienstadt, for there was no time left to see the Small Fortress, and said:

"What we have seen so far, Herr Kommandant, is enough for the time being, really. We have a long journey ahead of us."

"Quite, I understand," replied Ritsche politely, without trying by as much as a hint of insistence to prevail upon them to remain longer. "At your service, gentlemen."

The company then slowly climbed into the cars and drove off to the accompaniment of general hand-waving. The officers from the HQ who had accompanied

ROSE STREET

the guests walked unhurriedly back into the building. Werner Binde stopped his car just as the second shining limousine disappeared behind a bend in the road.

Maurice Herz turned round when he heard the sound of the car's brakes, and saw his wife Rosemarie Ilse, Herta, and the driver. He went back to meet them.

"What a coincidence we didn't meet," he said. "We were in the ghetto with them a few moments ago."

Werner Binde muttered something under his breath. Then he lowered his eyes, excused himself, and got back into the car.

He drove at once to a valley between two villages near the town, and threw the dead dog out onto the garbage dump.

9

About three weeks after the morning on which the Swiss health committee paid its visit to the Jewish ghetto in Bohemia, Werner Binde again drove Rosemarie Ilse Herz to town. This time Maurice Herz was with them, his wife having asked him to accompany her.

Rosemarie Ilse started her work of requisitioning in exactly the same way as she had done twenty-one days ago—from Room 38. Werner Binde noticed that in the very corner, underneath the barred window, where Elizabeth Feiner had lain there was an empty bunk.

And then, on their way back, even though they drove very rapidly along L Avenue, he saw quite clearly that the customers in the shop called "The Sun" were being served by a strange man with his hat worn low on his forehead and a black-haired girl.