Also by Jurek Becker:

Sleepless Days
Bronstein's Children

JACOB THE LIAR

Jurek Becker

Translated from the German by Leila Vennewitz

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I can already hear everyone saying, A tree? So what's a tree — a trunk, leaves, roots, some beetles in the bark, and a shapely crown at best; so? I can hear them saying, Don't you have anything better to think about to give you that rapturous look like a hungry goat being shown a nice juicy bunch of grass? Or maybe you mean one tree in particular, a special one that for all I know gave its name to a battle, the Battle of the Black Pine, say, do you mean one like that? Or was someone special hanged from it? No, not even that? Oh, all right, it seems pretty inane, but if you get such a kick out of it, we can go on playing this silly game for a while, it's up to you. Maybe you mean that soft sound people call rustling, when the wind has found your tree and improvises a tune on it? Or do you mean the number of board feet your tree yields? Or the well-known shade it casts? It's a funny thing, but at the very mention of shade everyone thinks of trees, although buildings or blast furnaces cast much more shade. Do you mean the shade?

No, all wrong, I say then, you can stop guessing, you'll never get it. I don't mean any of that, although its heating potential is not to be sneezed at. Quite simply, I mean a tree. I have my reasons. First of all, trees have played a certain role in my life, a role I may be overestimating, but that's how it appears to me. When I was nine I fell out of a tree, an apple tree incidentally, and broke my left hand. It healed up fairly well, though there are a few intricate movements I can no longer perform with my left hand. I mention this merely because it had always been taken for granted that I would one day be a violinist, but that's really not important. First my mother had the idea, then my father wanted it too, and finally all three of us wanted it. So, not a violinist.

A few years later, I must have been about seventeen, I lay for the first time in my life with a girl, under a tree. This time it was a beech tree, a good fifty feet tall. The girl's name was Esther — no, Moira, I think — at any rate it was a beech tree, and a wild boar disturbed us. Could have been more than one, we didn't have time to look back. Then a few years later my wife, Hannah, was executed under a tree. I can't say what kind of tree that one was, I wasn't there, I was just told about it, and I forgot to ask about the tree.

And now the second reason why I get that rapturous look when I think about that tree — probably or even certainly the more important reason of the two. It so happens that trees are not allowed in this ghetto (Ordinance 31: "It is strictly prohibited to maintain any kind of ornamental or edible plants within the confines of the ghetto. The same applies to *trees*. Should any wild plants have been overlooked during the establishment of the ghetto, these are to be removed immediately. Offenders will be . . .").

Hardtloff dreamed this up, God knows why, perhaps because of the birds. Countless other things are prohibited too, of course — rings and other valuable objects, keeping pets, being out on the street after eight at night — there's no sense in listing them all. I try to picture what would happen to a person who, wearing a ring, is found with a dog on the street after eight P.M. Actually no, I don't try to picture that at all. I don't even think about rings or dogs or the time of day. I think only of this tree, and my eyes get that rapturous look. I can see their point of view, I mean, theoretically I can understand it: You are Jews, you are less than dirt, why do you need rings, why do you have to hang about on the street after eight P.M.? We have such and such plans for you and intend to carry them out in such and such a way. I can see their point of view; I weep over it, I would kill them all if I could, I would wring Hardtloff's neck with this left hand of mine whose fingers can no longer perform intricate movements; still, I can see the logic of it. But why do they forbid us to have trees?

I've tried hundreds of times to unload this blasted story, without success. Either I tried it with the wrong people, or I made some

mistake or other. I mixed up a lot of things, I got names wrong, or, as I said, they were the wrong people. Every time I have a few drinks, it comes up again; I can't help myself. I mustn't drink so much. Every time I think these must be the right people, and I think I've got it all nicely together, nothing can go wrong when I tell it.

Yet Jacob, to look at him, isn't the least bit like a tree. There are men, after all, whom one might describe as "sturdy as an oak," tall, strong, a bit awe inspiring, men one would like to lean against every day for a few minutes. Jacob is much shorter; he'd hardly reach the shoulder of any sturdy oak of a fellow. He is scared like all the rest of us, he is really no different from Kirschbaum or Frankfurter or me or Kowalski. The only thing that distinguishes him from the rest of us is that without him, this whole damn story could never have happened. But even there one can be of two minds.

So it is evening. Don't ask the exact time, only the Germans know that; we have no clocks or watches. It's been dark for some time now, a few windows show light: that's all I can tell you. Jacob is hurrying, there's not much time left, it's been dark for quite a while. Then suddenly there's no time at all, not even half a second, for there he is, bathed in light. This happens right in the middle of the street, the Kurländischer Damm, close to the ghetto boundary where most of the tailors used to be located. There stands the sentry, fifteen feet above Jacob, on a wooden tower behind the barbed wire stretched clear across the street. At first the sentry says nothing, just holds Jacob in the beam of his searchlight, right there in the middle of the street, waiting. To the left, on the corner, is what used to be the store belonging to Mariutan, an immigrant Romanian who has meanwhile returned to Romania to safeguard the interests of his country at the front. And on the right is the business that used to belong to Tintenfass, a local Jew now living in Brooklyn, New York, who continues to make high-class ladies' dresses. And between them, standing on the cobblestones and alone with his fear, is Jacob Heym, really too old for such a test of nerves. He snatches off his cap, can't make out a thing in the light; all he knows is that somewhere behind this dazzle are

two soldier's eyes that have found him. Jacob mentally runs through all the obvious transgressions and can't think of any he has committed. He has his identity card on him, he hasn't been absent from work, the yellow star on his chest is on exactly the prescribed spot — he glances down at it again — and he sewed on the one for his back only two days ago. If the man doesn't shoot right away, Jacob can answer all his questions satisfactorily: just let him ask.

"Am I mistaken, or is it forbidden to be on the street after eight o'clock?" the soldier says at last. One of the easygoing kind, his voice doesn't even sound angry, quite mild in fact. One might feel like having a chat; a touch of humor might not be out of place.

"It is forbidden," says Jacob.

"And what time is it now?"

"I don't know."

"But you ought to know," the soldier says.

Jacob might now say, That's true, or he could ask, How could I? or, What time is it, then? Or he could say nothing and wait, which is what he does, as that seems the most advisable course.

"Do you at least know what that building is over there?" asks the soldier, having realized, no doubt, that this partner is not the kind of person to keep a conversation going. Jacob knows. He hasn't seen in which direction the soldier has nodded or pointed; he sees only the blinding searchlight, and beyond it are quite a few buildings, but, the way things are at the moment, only one can be meant.

"The military office," Jacob says.

"What you do now is go in there and report to the duty officer. You tell him that you were out on the street after eight o'clock, and you ask him for a well-deserved punishment."

The military office. Jacob doesn't know much about this building; he knows that it houses some sort of German administration — at least that's what people say. As to what is being administered there, nobody knows. He knows that the tax department used to be there; he knows there are two exits, one in the front and one leading out of the ghetto. But above all he knows that the chances of

a Jew leaving this building alive are very poor. To this day, no such case has ever been heard of.

"Anything the matter?" asks the soldier.

"No."

Jacob turns and walks away. The searchlight follows him, draws his attention to uneven spots in the paving, makes his shadow grow longer and longer, makes his shadow climb up the heavy steel door with its round peephole when Jacob still has many steps to go.

"And what do you ask for?" says the soldier.

Jacob stops, turns around patiently, and replies, "For a well-deserved punishment."

He does not shout — only people lacking in self-control or respect shout — but neither does he say it too softly, so as to be sure the man in the light can hear him clearly across the distance. He takes pains to find exactly the right tone; it should indicate that he knows what he is to ask for, all he needs is to be asked.

Jacob opens the door, quickly shuts it again between himself and the searchlight, and looks down the long empty corridor. He has been here often; there used to be a small table just inside the entrance on the left, with a minor official seated behind it. As long as Jacob can remember, it was always Mr. Kominek who used to ask each visitor, "What can we do for you?" "I've come to pay my semiannual taxes, Mr. Kominek," Jacob would reply. But Kominek would behave as if he had never seen Jacob before, although from October to the end of April he had been in Jacob's little shop almost every week and eaten potato pancakes there. "Occupation?" Kominek would ask. "Tradesman," Jacob would answer. He never showed his annoyance, not even a trace; Kominek invariably managed four pancakes, and sometimes he would bring his wife along too. "Name?" Kominek would ask next. "Heym, Jacob Heym." "Letters *F* to *K*, room 16." Yet whenever Kominek came to his shop he had never bothered to order pancakes; he would simply say, "The usual." For he was a regular.

Where the table once stood there is now no longer a table, but

the floor still shows the four marks where its legs used to be, whereas the chair has left no trace, probably because it never stood as consistently on the self-same spot as the table had. Jacob leans against the door to catch his breath. The last few minutes have not been easy, but what does that matter now? The smell in this building has changed, somehow for the better. The acrid odor of ammonia that at one time pervaded the corridor has gone; instead there is, inexplicably, a more civilian smell. There is a hint of leather in the air, female sweat, coffee, and a trace of perfume. At the far end of the corridor a door opens, a woman in a green dress comes out, walks a few steps; she has nice straight legs, she goes into another room, two doors are left open, he hears her laugh, she comes out of the room again, walks back, the doors are closed again, the corridor is empty once more. Jacob is still leaning against the steel door. He wants to go outside again, maybe the searchlight is no longer waiting for him, maybe it has sought out something new, but maybe it is still waiting; it seems rather unlikely that it is not waiting; the soldier's last question had sounded so final.

Jacob walks along the corridor. There is nothing on the doors to indicate who is behind them, only numbers. Perhaps the duty officer has the room formerly occupied by the bureau chief, but one can't be sure and it is not advisable to knock at the wrong door. What do you want, some information? Did you hear that? He wants information! We have such and such plans for him, and he comes wandering in here and wants information!

Behind number 15, formerly TRADESMEN A–E, Jacob can hear sounds. He puts his ear to the door, tries to listen, can't understand anything, only single words that make no sense; but even if the wood were thinner, it wouldn't help much, for no one is likely to address another person as "Duty Officer." Suddenly the door opens — what else but number 15! — but fortunately the doors here open outward so that the person coming out doesn't see Jacob, who is hidden by the door. Fortunately, too, the person leaves the door open; he'll be back in a moment — when people think there's no one else around they

leave doors open — and Jacob is concealed. Inside the room a radio is turned on; it crackles a bit, one of their "people's radios" no doubt, but there is no music. Since being in the ghetto Jacob has never heard any music, none of us has, except when someone happened to be singing. An announcer is reporting trivialities from some headquarters, someone has been posthumously promoted to lieutenant colonel, next comes a bit about ensured supplies for the population, and then the announcer reads a bulletin that has just come in: "In a fierce defensive battle our heroically fighting troops succeeded in halting the Bolshevist attack twelve miles from Bezanika. In the course of the action our side . . ."

Then the fellow is back in his room; he closes the door, and the wood is too thick. Jacob doesn't move. He has heard a great deal: Bezanika is not that far away, more than a stone's throw but certainly not an enormous distance. He has never been there, but he has heard of Bezanika, a very small town; if you travel southeast by train via Mieloworno and the district town of Pry, where his maternal grandfather once had a pharmacy, and you then change trains for Kostawka, you eventually arrive in Bezanika. It may be all of two hundred and fifty miles, maybe even three hundred, not more, he hopes, and that's where they are now. A dead man has heard some good news and he is happy, he would like to go on being happy, but in his situation — the duty officer is waiting for him and Jacob must move on.

The next step is the hardest; Jacob tries to take it but is stymied. His sleeve is caught in the door. The fellow who came back to the room has pinned him there without the slightest malicious aforethought; he simply closed the door behind him, and Jacob was caught. He gives a cautious tug. The door is well made, it fits perfectly, no superfluous gaps; you couldn't slip a sheet of paper through. Jacob would like to cut off that piece of sleeve, but his knife is at home, and using his teeth, of which half are missing, would be a waste of time.

It occurs to him to take off his jacket, simply take it off and leave it stuck in the door — what does he need a jacket for now anyway?

He has already slipped out of one sleeve when he remembers that he does still need the jacket. Not for the approaching winter — when you're in the ghetto the oncoming cold doesn't scare you — but for the duty officer, if Jacob ever finds him. The duty officer doubtless could stand the sight of a Jew without a jacket — Jacob's shirt is clean and only slightly mended — but hardly the sight of a Jew without a yellow star on his chest and back (Ordinance 1). Last summer the stars were on the shirt, you can still see the stitch marks, but not anymore; the stars are now on the jacket. So he puts it on again, sticks with his stars, tugs more firmly, gains a few millimeters, but not enough. The situation is, one might say, desperate; he tugs with all his might, something rips, making a sound, and the door opens. Jacob falls into the corridor, a man in civilian clothes stands over him, looking very surprised; the man laughs, then turns serious again. What does Jacob think he is doing here? Jacob gets up and chooses his words very carefully. Not that he's been out on the street after eight. No, the sentry who stopped him had told him it was eight o'clock and he was to report here to the duty officer.

"And then you decided to eavesdrop at this door?"

"I wasn't eavesdropping. I've never been here before and didn't know what room to go to. So I was just about to knock here."

The man asks no more questions and nods his head toward the end of the corridor. Jacob walks ahead of him until the man says, "Right here"; it is not the bureau chief's room. Jacob looks at the man, then knocks. The man walks away, but there is no answer from inside.

"Go in," the man tells him, and disappears behind his own door after Jacob has pressed down the latch.

Jacob in the duty officer's room: he stays by the door, he hasn't put his cap back on since he got caught in the searchlight. The duty officer is quite a young man, thirty at most. His hair is dark brown, almost black, slightly wavy. His rank is not apparent as he is in shirtsleeves; his jacket is hanging from a hook on the wall in such a way that the shoulder boards cannot be seen. Hanging over the jacket

is his leather belt with his revolver. Somehow this seems illogical; it should really be hanging under the jacket. Surely a man first takes off his belt and then the jacket, but the belt is hanging over the jacket.

The duty officer is lying on a black leather sofa, asleep. Jacob believes he is fast asleep; Jacob has heard many people sleeping, he has an ear for it. The man isn't snoring, but he is breathing deeply and regularly; somehow Jacob must make his presence known. Normally he would clear his throat, but that won't do here, that's something you do when visiting good friends. Although actually, when visiting a very good friend you don't clear your throat; you say, Wake up, Salomon, I'm here, or you simply tap him on the shoulder. But, even so, throat clearing won't do, that's somewhere between here and Salomon. Jacob is about to knock on the inside of the door but drops his hand when he sees a clock on the desk, its back to him. He has to know what time it is; there is nothing he has to know more urgently right now than this. The clock says 7:36. Jacob walks softly back to the door. They've been having you on, or not *they*, just that one fellow behind the searchlight, he's been having you on, and you fell for it.

Jacob still has twenty-four minutes left; if they are fair, he actually has twenty-four minutes plus the time his stay here has already cost him. He still doesn't knock. He recognizes the black leather sofa the duty officer is lying on; he has sat on it himself. It used to belong to Rettig, Rettig the broker, one of the richest men in the town. In the fall of 1935 Jacob borrowed some money from him, at 20 percent interest. The whole summer had been so cool that he could hardly sell any ice cream at all. Business had never been so slow; not even his famous raspberry ice cream had sold well. Jacob had needed to start selling potato pancakes as early as August but hadn't yet made enough money for the potatoes, so he had to borrow. And he had sat on the sofa in February 1936 when he returned the money to Rettig. It had stood in the outer office; Jacob had sat on it for an hour, waiting for Rettig. He remembered how surprised he was at the extravagance; there was easily enough leather for two overcoats or three jackets — and in the outer office!

The duty officer turns on his side, sighs, smacks his lips a few times; a cigarette lighter slips out of his trouser pocket and drops on the floor. Jacob simply must wake him up now; it would be a bad thing for him to wake up without Jacob rousing him. He knocks on the inside of the door, the duty officer says, "Yes?" moves, and goes on sleeping. Jacob knocks again — how can anyone be that fast asleep? — he knocks louder, the duty officer sits up before being properly awake, rubs his eyes, and asks, "What time is it?"

"Just past seven-thirty," says Jacob.

The duty officer has stopped rubbing his eyes, sees Jacob, rubs his eyes again, doesn't know whether to be angry or to laugh: it's quite incredible, no one's going to believe him. He stands up, takes his belt from the hook, then the jacket, puts them on, buckles his belt. He sits down behind the desk, leans back, stretches both arms wide apart.

"To what do I owe this honor?"

Jacob tries to answer, but he can't, his mouth is too dry: so that's what the duty officer looks like.

"No false modesty, now," says the duty officer. "Out with it! What's the problem?"

A bit of saliva has collected in his mouth. This seems to be a friendly fellow; maybe he's new here, maybe he isn't even aware of this building's terrible reputation. For a moment it occurs to Jacob that possibly he miscalculated the distance, maybe Bezanika isn't that far, maybe barely two hundred miles, or even a good deal less; maybe the man facing him is scared, and the smart thing is to be prepared; there must be a natural explanation for everything. But then he remembers that the report has only just reached the announcer; the duty officer has been asleep and can't have heard it yet. Then again it might be just as well if he hasn't heard it. The report mentioned that the Russians had been halted, you Germans have succeeded in stopping the advance, you've had a success, but maybe this fellow thinks that the Russians are still advancing. Jacob has

been speculating too long; that's not smart, the duty officer is getting impatient; he's beginning to frown.

"Don't you speak to Germans?"

Of course Jacob speaks to Germans, why wouldn't he speak to Germans, that's the last impression he wants to give, for God's sake, we're all sensible people after all, of course we can speak to each other.

"The sentry on the tower on the Kurländischer Damm told me to report to you. He said I was out on the street after eight o'clock."

The duty officer looks at the clock in front of him on the desk, then pushes back his sleeve and looks at his watch.

"And that's all he said?"

"He also told me I was to ask for a well-deserved punishment."

That answer can't do any harm, Jacob thinks; it sounds obedient, disarmingly honest. Someone who carries his frankness to such an extreme might be entitled to fair treatment, especially when the offense of which he is accused was never committed: any clock can bear witness to that.

"What's your name?"

"Heym, Jacob Heym."

The duty officer takes paper and pencil, writes down something, not only the name, goes on writing; he looks at the clock again, it's getting later and later, he goes on writing, almost half a page, then puts the paper aside. He opens a little box, takes out a cigarette, and gropes in his trouser pocket. Jacob walks to the black leather sofa, bends down, picks up the lighter from the floor, and puts it on the table in front of the duty officer.

"Thanks."

Jacob goes and stands by the door again; a glance at the clock on the desk has shown him that it's already past 7:45. The duty officer lights his cigarette, takes a puff; his fingers fiddle with the lighter. He flicks it on a few times, then snaps it shut again; the flame is already quite small.

"Do you live far from here?" he asks.

"Less than ten minutes."

"Go on home."

Should he believe it? How many people had the duty officer said that to without their ever getting out of here? What will he do with his revolver when Jacob turns his back? What's out there in the corridor? How will the sentry react when he sees that Jacob has eluded his well-deserved punishment? Why should Jacob Heym of all people, that insignificant, trembling little Jacob Heym with the tears in his eyes, be the first Jew to describe what the inside of the military office looks like? It would take another six days of the Creation, as the saying goes; the world has grown even more chaotic than it was then.

"Come on now, beat it!" says the duty officer.

The corridor is empty again, which was almost to be expected; it's one of the minor sources of danger. But then the door to the outside: had it made any noise when he opened it before, did it open without a sound, or did it squeak or creak or grate? Go ahead, just try to take in every detail, quite impossible — if only he'd known in advance that it would really matter! Matter? In practical terms it makes absolutely no difference whether it can be moved quietly or not. If it doesn't squeak, Jacob will open it; and if it does squeak, is Jacob supposed to stay where he is? At ten minutes to eight?

Gently he presses down the latch. Too bad there's no other word for gently — maybe *very gently* or *infinitely gently*, all equally far from what is meant. One might say, Open the door quietly; if he hears you, it could cost you your life, the life that has suddenly acquired meaning. So he opens the door. And then Jacob is standing outside: how cold it has suddenly become. The wide square lies before him, a joy to step into it. The searchlight has grown tired of waiting; it's having fun somewhere else, it's at a standstill, perhaps it's resting up for new adventures. Keep close to the wall, Jacob, that's it; once you've reached the corner of the building, grit your teeth for the twenty yards across the square. If he does notice anything, he'll first have to

swing the beam around and search, but here's the corner already, only a measly twenty yards to go.

It is almost exactly twenty yards, I've measured the distance: to be precise, fifty-nine feet six and a half inches. I've been there, the building is still standing, completely undamaged, only the watchtower is gone. But I had someone show me the exact spot, right in the middle of the Kurländischer Damm, and then I paced off the distance — I have a pretty good feeling for a yard. But it wasn't accurate enough for me so I bought a tape measure, then went back and measured it again. The children looked on and took me for an important person, and the grown-ups watched in amazement and took me for a madman. Even a policeman turned up, asked me for my identity card, and wanted to know what I was measuring. In any case it's exactly fifty-nine feet six and a half inches, no doubt about that.

The building has come to an end; Jacob gets ready to take off. Almost twenty yards have to be covered a few minutes before eight; it's a safe bet, and yet. A mouse is what one ought to be. A mouse is so insignificant, so small and quiet. And you? Officially you are a louse, a bedbug, we are all bedbugs, by a whim of our Creator absurdly overgrown bedbugs, and when was the last time a bedbug wanted to trade places with a mouse? Jacob decides not to run, he'd rather creep, it's easier to control the sounds that way. If the searchlight starts moving, he can still speed up. Halfway across he hears the sentry's voice — don't panic, it's not directed at him — the sentry says, "Yessir!" Again he says, "Yessir," and again. There's only one explanation: he's on the phone. Maybe it's a call from another sentry who is also bored. But he wouldn't keep saying, "Yessir," to him, of course he wouldn't. So it's the sentry's superior giving him some sort of orders? Actually quite irrelevant, but, assuming the best, it's the duty officer on the line: What the hell are you thinking of? Have you gone crazy, giving poor innocent Jews a scare like that? ("Yessir.") Couldn't you see the man was half out of his mind — his legs were trembling with fear! Don't ever let me catch you at it again, is that

clear? ("Yessir.") At the fourth "Yessir," Jacob has reached the opposite corner; let the fellow go on talking till he's blue in the face. Then, in less than ten minutes, Jacob is home.

Jacob shares a room with Josef Piwowa and Nathan Rosenblatt. They met for the first time here, in this room. None of them likes the others much; cramped quarters and hunger make for discord, but in all fairness it must be said that even the very first meeting was quite stiff.

Rosenblatt died well over a year before Jacob's safe return. He had eaten a cat that was careless enough to ignore the warning notices along the barbed wire, and one day there it lay in the yard, dead of starvation. Rosenblatt was the first to find it, and as I was saying, he ate it, and that's what he died of. Piwowa has only been dead for three months. His passing was accompanied by certain mysterious circumstances; all that is known is that he was shot to death by a foreman in the shoe factory where he worked. He became insolent one day, uttered words that even in normal times are better left unspoken to a foreman, and predictably the enraged man shot him. Some said that Piwowa could never control his temper; he had always been subject to sudden rages and was bound to come to such an end. Others, however, maintained that a violent temper and emotions were no explanation here; they said it was a case of a perfectly ordinary though very skillfully provoked suicide. One way or the other, Piwowa has been dead for three months, Rosenblatt for well over a year. His bed went up the chimney last winter, while Piwowa's bed, chopped into neat lengths, is still in Jacob's basement waiting for the cold times ahead. So far no replacements for his roommates have appeared; the supply has been used up, damned or blessed be all cats and guards — in any case they hadn't liked each other. At least Rosenblatt is silent when he is at home, sitting with closed eyes on his bed and praying; he is the last to go to bed and the first to get up

because his debates with God consume all his time. Even after his death he didn't give up this habit, but at least he is silent, sitting silently with closed eyes and only an occasional furtive glance.

Piwowa is quarrelsome. The last to move in, he behaves as if he were the first: he changes everything around, has to sleep with his feet toward the window; our bread rations have to be hidden from him. To be frank, Piwowa used to work in the woods, as a poacher. His father before him had been a poacher, but he himself was an even better one; he has no children.

So Jacob comes home. The day has been a great strain: many things experienced, endured, suffered, heard, with much trembling. Rejoice, brothers, go wild with joy, the Russians are twelve miles from Bezanika, if that means anything to you! Open your eyes, Nathan Rosenblatt; stop quarreling, Piwowa. The Russians are on their way, don't you understand? Twelve miles from Bezanika! But Rosenblatt goes on praying; Piwowa goes on lying with his feet toward the window. Let them lie there and quarrel and pray and be dead. Jacob is home, and the Russians had better hurry.

We're going to have a little chat now.

We're going to have a little chat, as befits any self-respecting story. Grant me my little pleasure; without a little chat everything is so sad and gloomy. Just a few words about doubtful memories, a few words about the carefree life; we're going to whip up a cake with modest ingredients, eat only a mouthful of it, and push the plate to one side before we lose our appetite for anything else.

I am alive, there can be no doubt about that. I am alive, and no one can force me to have a drink and remember trees and remember Jacob and everything to do with his story. On the contrary, I am offered some choices. They tell me to enjoy myself a bit: we only live once, my friend. Wherever I look, I see diversion: new cheerful worries interspersed with a little unhappiness; women, that's not over

yet; reforested woods; well-tended graves that at the least excuse receive such quantities of fresh flowers as to look almost overdone. I don't want to be demanding. Piwowa, whom I never saw, was demanding: game and bread had to be hidden from him; but I am not Piwowa.

Hannah, my quarrelsome wife, once told me, "You're wrong" — that's how she began almost everything she said to me — "a person is only undemanding when he is content with what he's entitled to. Not with less."

Seen like that, I must be very content. Sometimes I even feel privileged: people are kind, obliging, make every effort to look patient. I can't complain.

Sometimes I say, "That was the whole story, thank you for listening, you don't have to prove anything to me."

"That's not my intention. But you must realize that I was born in '29 —"

"You don't have to prove a thing to me!" I say again.

"I know. But when the war was over I was just —"

"Kiss my ass," I say as I get up and leave. After five steps I could kick myself for being so rude, so needlessly insulting, and it hadn't meant a thing to him. But I don't turn around, I walk on. I pay the waiter and, as I go out, look back over my shoulder toward the table and see him sitting there with a baffled expression — What's got into him? — and I shut the door behind me and refuse to explain.

Or I'm lying in bed with Elvira. To make this clear: I am forty-six, born in 1921. I am lying in bed with Elvira. We work in a factory; she has the whitest skin I have ever seen. I imagine we'll get married one day. We are still panting, we have never mentioned it, then suddenly she asks me, "Tell me, is it true that you . . ."

God knows who told her. I can hear the pity in her voice and go crazy. I go into the bathroom, sit down in the tub, and start singing, to stop myself from doing what I know I will regret after five steps. When I come back after half an hour she asks me in surprise what suddenly came over me, and I say, "Nothing," and give her a kiss, turn out the light, and try to fall asleep.

The whole town lies in a green belt, the surroundings are incomparable, the parks well cared for, every tree invites my memories, and I make ample use of this. But when it looks into my eyes, that tree, to see whether I have that rapturous look, I have to disappoint it, for it's not the right tree.

Jacob tells Mischa.

He hadn't come to the freight yard with the intention of telling anyone, but neither had he planned not to tell anyone. He'd come there with no intentions at all. He knew he would find it hard to keep the news to himself, almost impossible: after all, it was the best possible news, and what's good news for but to be passed on? But we know how it is: the informant is held responsible for all the consequences. In time the news becomes a promise, you can't prevent it. At the other end of town they'll be saying that the first Russians have already been sighted, three young ones and another who looked like a Tartar; the old women will swear to it and so will anxious fathers. Someone will say he heard it from so-and-so, and that person heard it from so-and-so, and someone down the line knows that it came from Jacob. From Jacob Heym? Inquiries will be made about him, everything connected with this most vital of all questions must be most carefully investigated; an honorable, reliable fellow, seems respectable enough, is said to have once owned a modest restaurant somewhere. Rejoicing seems to be in order.

Then days will pass, weeks, if God finds it necessary — two or three hundred miles are a fair bit of country — and the looks Jacob encounters will no longer be quite as friendly, not quite. On the other side of the street there will be whisperings; the old women will commit the sin of wishing him ill. The ice cream he has sold will

gradually turn out to have been the worst in the whole town, even his famous raspberry ice cream, and his potato pancakes never quite kosher, this can happen.

Jacob is lugging crates with Mischa to a freight car.

Or let's look at another possibility. Heym says he has heard that the Russians are advancing, are already two hundred and fifty miles from the town. So where does he claim to have heard that? That's the point: at the military office. At the military office?! A look of horror may follow, answered by a slow nod, a nod that confirms the suspicion. Who would ever have believed that of him, Heym of all people, never! But that's how wrong you can be about a person. And the ghetto will have acquired one more suspected informer.

Well, anyway, Jacob didn't come to the freight yard with any firm intentions. It would be wonderful if they already knew about it without him, if they had met him with the news: that would be ideal. He would have rejoiced with them, wouldn't have let on that there were three people already in the know: Rosenblatt, himself, and Piwowa. He would have kept his mouth shut and, at the most, asked after a few hours who had brought the news. But as soon as Jacob arrived at the freight yard he realized that they didn't know yet; their backs were enough to tell him. The lucky break hadn't happened, indeed it would have been crazy to count on it; two lucky breaks in such a short time can only happen to Rockefeller on a Sunday.

They haul the crates to a freight car. As a carrying mate Jacob is not particularly sought after; no one is eager to have him; making pancakes is hardly conducive to muscle-building, and the crates are heavy. The yard is full of such people no one is eager to have; the big fellows are scarce. Everyone is eager to have them, but they don't negotiate, preferring to haul together. Don't talk to me about camaraderie and all that stuff; anyone who talks like that has no idea what goes on here, not the slightest. Personally I am not one of the big ones; I've cursed and hated them like the plague when I've had to haul with another fellow like myself. But if I had been one of them, I

would have behaved exactly the same, exactly the same and not one bit differently.

Jacob and Mischa are hauling a crate to the freight car.

Mischa is a tall fellow of twenty-five, with light blue eyes, a great rarity among us. At one time he did some boxing at the *hakoah,* but only three fights, two of which he lost, and once his opponent was disqualified for hitting below the belt. He was a middleweight or, rather, more of a light heavyweight, really, but his trainer advised him to lose those few pounds in training, there being too much competition in the light-heavyweight class. Mischa took his advice, but it didn't help much; he didn't do all that well even as a middleweight, as was proved by his three fights. He was already toying with the idea of eating himself into a heavyweight; maybe he would have done better in that class. At about one hundred and eighty-five pounds the ghetto interfered with his plans, and ever since then his weight has gradually been going down. Even so, he is still in pretty good shape; he really deserves a better partner than Jacob. Many people believe that one day his good nature will cost him his head, but no one tells him that; maybe someday that person will suffer a similar fate.

"Stop gawking and look where you're going, or we'll both trip and fall," says Jacob. He is furious because the crate is so heavy, in spite of Mischa, and what annoys him most is the knowledge that Mischa will be the first person he tells; the trouble is, he doesn't know how to begin.

They heave the crates onto the edge of the freight car; Mischa's mind really isn't on his work. They go back to the pile to pick up another crate. Jacob tries to follow Mischa's gaze: the fellow is driving him crazy the way he keeps looking sideways. The yard looks the same as always.

"That freight car over there," says Mischa.

"Which one?"

"On the next-to-last track. The one without a roof." Mischa is

whispering, although the nearest sentry is at least twenty yards away and not even looking in their direction.

"What about it?" asks Jacob.

"There are potatoes in that car."

Jacob grumbles all through the next haul. So there are potatoes in it, what's so special about that? Potatoes are only interesting when you have some, when you can cook them or eat them raw or make pancakes out of them, but not when they're lying around in some freight car or other at a yard like this one; potatoes in that freight car over there are the most boring thing in the world. Even if there were pickled herrings in there or roast goose or millions of pots of *tsholnt* . . . Jacob goes on and on, trying to get Mischa's mind off the subject and draw him into conversation.

Only Mischa isn't listening; the sentries' relief will soon show up, something they always turn into a little ceremony, standing at attention and reporting and shouldering arms, and that is the only moment at which to try. Jacob's objections aren't worth a second thought, Mischa says, of course there's a risk — all right, even a great risk, so what? Nobody's saying the potatoes are as good as eaten; every opportunity is a risk; must one explain that to a businessman? If there were no risk, there would be no opportunity either. Then it would be a sure thing, and sure things are rare in life; risk and the chance of success are two sides of the same coin.

Jacob knows that time is running out; Mischa is in a state in which no normal conversation is possible with him. And then he sees the relief column marching up: now he has to tell him.

"Do you know where Bezanika is?"

"Just a moment," says Mischa tensely.

"Do you know where Bezanika is? I said."

"No," says Mischa, his eyes following the column as it covers the last few yards.

"Bezanika is about two hundred and fifty miles from here."

"Oh yes."

"The Russians are within twelve miles of Bezanika!"

Mischa manages to tear his gaze for a moment from the marching soldiers; his unusual eyes smile at Jacob; actually this is very nice of Heym, and he says, "That's nice of you, Jacob."

Jacob almost has a fit. Here you overcome all your scruples, ignore all the rules of caution and all your misgivings, for which there are reasons enough, you carefully choose a blue-eyed young idiot to confide in, and what does that snot-nose do? He doesn't believe you! And you can't simply walk away, you can't leave him standing there in his stupidity, tell him to go to hell, and simply walk away. You have to stay with him, save up your rage for some later occasion, and you can't even relish the vision of such an occasion. You have to beg for his indulgence as if your own life depended on it. You have to prove your credibility although you shouldn't need to; he's the one who needs to. And you have to do all that terribly fast, before the sentries face each other, slap their rifles on their shoulders, and exchange the information that there is nothing special to report.

"Aren't you glad?" asks Jacob.

Mischa smiles at him kindly. "That's fine," he says in a voice that, while sounding a little sad, is intended to convey a certain appreciation of Jacob's touching efforts. And then he has something more important to watch again. The column is approaching, it has already passed the little redbrick building used by the railway men and the sentries.

Mischa is trembling with excitement, and Jacob tries to get his words out faster than the soldiers can approach. He tells his story in a shortened version — why hadn't he started it earlier? He tells about the man with the searchlight, about the corridor in the military office, about the door that opened outward and hid him. About the report he heard coming from the room, word for word as he has been repeating it to himself a thousand times during the night, nothing added and nothing withheld. He omits his brief imprisonment in the doorjamb, keeps to essentials, nothing either about the man who took him to the duty officer, a minor figure in the story, only about the duty officer himself, who must have been human and hence a weak link in the

otherwise logical chain of evidence. He had looked at the clock like a human being and then, like a human being, told Jacob to go home.

And then to his horror Jacob sees that there is no stopping Mischa now. The only way is through certainty, and already the soldiers are facing each other. The enemy must be caught off guard, when his attention is at a low point. Mischa is crouching, ready to leap, certainty and the Russians are far away; the only thing left for Jacob to do is grab Mischa and hold on to his leg. They both fall to the ground, and Jacob sees the hatred in Mischa's eyes: he has ruined his chance, at least he is trying to. Mischa wrenches himself free, nothing can stop him now, and he thrusts Jacob away.

"I have a radio!" says Jacob.

It's not the sentries who have fired. So far, busy with their changeover ritual, they haven't seen a thing — Jacob has fired, a bullet straight to the heart. A lucky shot from the hip without taking proper aim, yet it found its mark. Mischa sits there motionless: the Russians are two hundred and fifty miles from here, near some place called Bezanika, and Jacob has a radio. They sit on the ground staring at each other: there never was any freight car with potatoes, no one has ever waited for the sentries to be relieved, quite suddenly tomorrow is another day. Although it is still true, of course, that opportunity and risk are two sides of the same coin, one would have to be crazy to forget that there must be some sort of healthy relationship between the two.

They go on sitting for a bit, Mischa with a blissful smile in his eyes, the result of Jacob's handiwork. Jacob gets up; they can't sit there indefinitely. He is angrier than ever. He has been forced to launch irresponsible claims, and it's that ignorant idiot who has forced him, just because he didn't believe him, because he suddenly had a craving for potatoes. He'll tell Mischa the truth all right, not this minute but sometime today, no matter whether that freight car is still there tomorrow or not. Within an hour in fact, an hour at most, maybe even sooner, he'll tell him the truth. Let the fellow enjoy a few more carefree minutes, not that he deserves them. Soon he won't

be able to live without that happiness, then Jacob will tell him the truth, and Mischa will have to believe what went on at the military office. After all, that doesn't change anything about the Russians; he'll have to believe it.

"Pull yourself together and get up. And above all, keep your trap shut. You know what that means, a radio in the ghetto. Not a soul must find out about it."

Mischa couldn't care less what that means, a radio in the ghetto. Even if a thousand regulations were to prohibit it on pain of death, let them — does that matter now, when suddenly tomorrow is another day?

"Oh, Jacob . . ."

The corporal in command of the sentry detail sees a lanky fellow sitting on the ground, just sitting there, hasn't even collapsed, propping himself on his hands and staring up into the sky. The corporal straightens his tunic and comes striding toward them, little fellow that he is.

"Watch out!" Jacob cries, nodding toward the danger approaching in all its dignity.

Mischa regains his senses, comes down to earth, gets up, knows what is about to happen but can't keep the look of pleasure off his face. He busies himself with the crates, is about to tip one on its side, when the corporal hits him from the side. Mischa turns toward him; the corporal is a head shorter than he and has trouble reaching up to hit Mischa in the face. It almost verges on the comical, not suitable for a German newsreel, more like a scene from an old slapstick silent movie when Charlie the little policeman tries to arrest the giant with the bushy eyebrows, and, try as he will, the big fellow doesn't even notice him. We all know that Mischa could lift him off the ground and tear him to pieces. If he wanted to. The corporal hits him a few more times — by now his hands must be hurting — then shouts something or other that nobody's interested in and only lays off when a thin trickle of blood runs out of the corner of Mischa's mouth. Then he straightens his tunic again and

belatedly notices that in the excitement his cap has fallen off; he picks it up, puts it on, goes back to his men, and marches away with the off-duty sentry detail behind him.

Mischa wipes the blood from his mouth with his sleeve, winks at Jacob, and reaches for a crate.

"All right, let's get on with it," he says.

They lift up the crate, and, as they carry it, Jacob's anger flares up again, almost tearing his teeth apart. He's not superstitious, and there's no such thing as a higher power, but in some inexplicable way — perhaps only because it verged on the comical — he feels that Mischa deserved the beating.

"Oh, Jacob . . ."

We know what will happen. We have some modest experience in the course events are apt to take; we have some imagination so we know what will happen. Mischa won't be able to keep his mouth shut. Never mind that he has been forbidden to talk. It won't be spite that will make him break his silence or make him not even try to remain silent; it won't be some malevolent desire to get Jacob into trouble — it will be joy, pure and simple. Stop taking your own lives, you'll soon be needing them again! Stop living without hope, our days of misery are numbered! Make an effort to survive, you've had plenty of practice, you're familiar with all the thousands of tricks that can cheat death — after all, you've managed so far. Just survive the last two hundred and fifty miles, then survival will be over, then life will begin.

Those are the reasons why Mischa won't be able to keep his mouth shut. He'll be asked for his source; he will reveal it, what's wrong with that? Soon even the children in the ghetto will know the big secret, in the strictest confidence of course, they will hear about it when their parents in their joy forget to whisper. People will come to Jacob, to Heym the possessor of a radio, and want to hear the latest

news; they will come with eyes such as Jacob has never seen before. And what on earth is he going to tell them?

Half a day has passed, the big crates have been stowed away in the freight cars, now it's time for the smaller ones, the kind that one man can carry alone, and Jacob has lost sight of Mischa. Well, not literally lost sight of him, they see each other every few minutes but always a few feet apart, in passing, with their backs under a load or on their way to pick up another crate. The opportunity for a word of explanation hasn't come yet; he can't just take Mischa aside and say, This is how things really are. Whenever they see each other, Mischa winks at him or smiles or makes a face or waves surreptitiously; whether carrying a crate or not, it hardly makes any difference, each time some confidential gesture: we both know what it's all about. Once Jacob forgets himself and winks back, but he recovers immediately — that would be going too far, that would block the way to the opportunity. But he can't help himself; each time they pass his anger subsides. After all, the fellow has a right to be happy. Why shouldn't he be happy after all that has happened?

The day is bright blue, as if specially chosen for the joyous occasion. The sentry by the wooden shed is sitting on a few bricks, having taken off his rifle and placed it beside him; he is leaning his head against the wall with his eyes shut, basking in the sun. He is smiling; one could almost feel sorry for him.

As Jacob walks past he gets a good look at him. Walking quite slowly he studies that face with its closed eyes; he takes note of the smile, the prominent Adam's apple, the wide gold signet ring on the sentry's little finger. Jacob walks on and discovers, so he has told me, that he has changed. From one day to the next his senses are suddenly far more alert; he is beginning to observe. The apathetic despair has not survived the excitement of the previous night; nothing is left of that numbness. Now it is as if one must remember

everything exactly as it was so as to be able to tell about it afterward. Afterward.

Jacob invents an innocent little game. On his way to the freight car or on his way back to the crates he always passes very close to the drowsing sentry. So close that he almost walks over his outstretched legs, each time depriving him for a brief moment of the sun. The sentry, of course, doesn't notice, doesn't even open his eyes although he is not asleep; he moves his head once slightly or twitches his mouth — in annoyance, it seems to Jacob — or does nothing at all. But each time Jacob passes him he loses a moment of sunshine. Jacob carries on his little game until he has to turn to another pile of crates. The sentry is no longer in Jacob's path; he would have to make a detour, and for that the joke is too slight and the risk too great. Jacob sees with satisfaction that a few little clouds are carrying on his prank. Then it is noon.

A man in railway uniform emerges from the redbrick building, the same man ever since we've been working here. He has a stiff leg that makes a noise with every step like a pebble falling into water, obviously a wooden leg. We call him the Whistle, not at all disparagingly, for we know nothing about his human or professional qualities. The only thing we have against him is that he happens to be a German, which, strictly speaking of course, should not be reason enough for a low opinion, but that's how unfair our plight can make us. As soon as he emerges from the building he pulls from his breast pocket a whistle fastened with a black cord to his buttonhole and proceeds to blow it at a remarkable volume, a signal that it is now noon. This is the only sound we have ever heard from him, apart from the *pit-pat* of his wooden leg. That's why we call him the Whistle. For all we know he may be mute.

We form a line, very disciplined and with no jostling. That's how they've taught us, under the threat of no food. It must look as if at the moment we had absolutely no appetite: What, already time to eat again? A fellow hardly has a chance to settle into the job before he is interrupted yet again by another of these many meals. So we form a

line, without haste; we look around and make sure we're all standing in an imaginary straight line. With outstretched arm you check the distance to the man in front of you, then correct it by a few inches to create the impression that you are among well-mannered people here. The spoon is taken out of the trouser pocket and held in the left hand against the left trouser seam. Then the handcart appears around the corner of the shed, with the tin bowls piled beside the two steaming green cauldrons. The cart stops at the head of the greedy line. The first man steps forward, opens the cauldron (invariably burning his fingers as he does so), and begins doling out the contents. The Whistle stands to one side, mute and staring fixedly, to see that everything is done fairly.

On this bright blue day I do the doling. I know nothing, I'm always the last to find out, the sun gets on my nerves, I'm furious. I'm annoyed at the extra work, my burned fingers are hurting, I'm the last to get my food. I slap the ladleful of soup into their bowls, the men move off, I discover nothing unusual in their faces, in none of them, but then I'm not paying attention. I don't even see whom I happen to be giving soup to; I just look down at the bowls.

Jacob has drawn his ration, as they put it; he is looking for Mischa, who was far ahead of him in the line. Noon would be such a good opportunity for a private word with him, a little correction that does nothing to alter the actual facts. Mischa is nowhere to be seen; it is a large area, and the men have spread out with their bowls. The break is too short for a long search. Jacob sits down on a crate and swallows his hot soup. He's only human, his thoughts roam far away from the bowl, what's going to happen and how long will it take, and then what. The sun is shining on him, and no one is casting a shadow. Then Kowalski arrives.

Kowalski arrives.

"Is there a spot of room for me here too?" asks Kowalski.

He sits down beside Jacob and begins to spoon up his soup. Kowalski is marvelous. He thinks he is a real fox of a fellow who knows all the ins and outs, yet his expression can conceal nothing; it

tells all. You only have to be slightly acquainted with him to know what he's going to say before he has even opened his mouth. His words are always merely the confirmation of long-held assumptions, if you're only slightly acquainted with him. At the freight yard everyone is slightly acquainted with Kowalski, and Jacob has known him since they were at school together. Here, in these grim times, they have rather lost sight of each other, which is easy enough to explain. Neither of them is one of the big fellows; a crate doesn't get any lighter when the one at the other end is an old friend, so their estrangement is simply due to circumstances. And otherwise there is virtually no opportunity. Two people get thrown together, or they don't. Jacob and Kowalski hardly ever did, and now here comes Kowalski with his bowl, saying, "Is there room for me here too?" and sits down beside Jacob and starts to eat.

Kowalski had been Jacob's most frequent customer. Not his best, his most frequent. Every day, just before seven, the shop bell would tinkle and, sure enough, there was Kowalski. He would sit down in his usual place and eat potato pancakes until the sight made you dizzy. Never fewer than four or five, usually followed by a little glass from under the counter, since Jacob didn't have a license for schnapps. Most shopkeepers would have been ecstatic over such a customer, but not Jacob, for Kowalski never paid, not a penny, not once. Being schoolmates wasn't the reason for Jacob's generosity — what kind of a reason would that be? — and generosity simply didn't enter into it. In a stupid moment one tipsy evening they had made a bargain. Kowalski's barber shop was only a few doors away; they met almost every day anyway, and the bargain had seemed advantageous to both of them. You don't pay at my place, and I don't pay at yours. Later they both regretted it, but a bargain is a bargain, and one man alone can't ruin another man. Not that they didn't try.

At first, potato pancakes were Kowalski's favorite dish, a fact that probably accounted in part for his proposing the deal, but that soon changed. After a while he grew sick and tired of them, and the only reason he went on eating four at a time was that, out of habit,

Jacob set them down in front of him without a word. Much more important to him by this time was the little drink that followed.

Jacob, on the other hand, suffered at first from the inescapable fact that, although a fellow can eat potato pancakes every day, he can't have his hair cut every day. After much thought Jacob hit on the idea of going regularly for a shave. He even sacrificed his sparse little beard, although he felt bad about that. His best times were the summers; fortunately Kowalski's stomach could not tolerate ice cream, and for a while Jacob was the only beneficiary of their bargain. However, as time passed his ambition subsided; other worries were really more important. He let his beard grow again, and the whole thing quietly petered out except for an occasional flare-up.

But that's old history. Kowalski is sitting beside him, spooning up his soup — how much longer in silence? — a single suppressed question imprinted in red spots on his gaunt cheeks. Jacob stares into his empty bowl, thinking. Perhaps it's only a coincidence; funny coincidences do happen. How are you? would sound idiotic, he thinks. He carefully licks his spoon clean and puts it in his pocket. There's no reason to get up yet; they still have a few minutes left on their break. The last men in line are just getting their soup. Putting his bowl aside he leans back, props himself on his hands, tilts his head back, and closes his eyes: to be a sentry for a few moments and enjoy the sun.

Kowalski stops eating; through his closed eyes Jacob can hear that his bowl is not yet empty; he hasn't scraped the bottom yet. So Jacob can hear that Kowalski is looking at him. It can't go on much longer; Kowalski just has to figure out how to begin.

"Any news?" he asks casually.

When Jacob looks at him he starts eating again, the ulterior motive still on his cheeks but his innocent eyes fixed on the soup. It sounds as if you've just entered his barbershop, sat down on the only chair facing the only mirror, while he shakes the black hairs of the previous customer from the cape and ties it around you — as always, much too tight. "Any news?" Mundek's son has won his first court

case; it looks as if he's going to do well, but that's no longer news, Hübscher was talking about it yesterday. But what you don't know yet: Kvart's wife has left him, no one knows where she's gone, but then no normal person can get along with Kvart. It sounds so familiar that Jacob feels tempted to say: "Not as short in the back as last time, please."

"Well?" Kowalski asks, his eyes threatening to drown in the soup.

"What do you mean, news?" says Jacob. "Why ask *me?*"

Kowalski raises his face toward Jacob, that fox's face that is like an open book. He turns it toward Jacob with an expression of mild reproach, of some understanding of Jacob's caution, and the implication that in this particular case caution might well be considered misplaced.

"Jacob! . . . Aren't we old friends?"

"What's that got to do with it?" says Jacob. He's not sure whether his attempt to play dumb is convincing; after all, Kowalski has known him a long time. And he can imagine that basically it doesn't much matter whether he's convincing or not: if Kowalski knows something, no acting talent in the world is going to help. If Kowalski knows something, he won't let go; he can hound you almost to death.

Moving a little closer, Kowalski lets his spoon float in the soup and grabs Jacob's arm with his free hand to prevent him getting away.

"All right then, let's speak plainly." Lowering his voice to the level at which secrets are discussed, he whispers, "Is it true about the Russians?"

Jacob is shocked at the tone. Not at the whispering: people whisper on all sorts of occasions, that doesn't frighten him. He is shocked at the seriousness; he can see that it's not going to be a picnic, nothing to be taken lightly; he is shocked at the quaver in Kowalski's voice. It holds an expectation that will not tolerate ridicule; certainty is demanded here. A man is asking — a man who wants only this one question answered, and there's no escape — just

this one question, nothing else, for all time. And yet Jacob makes one last, vain attempt.

"About what Russians?"

"About what Russians! Do you have to insult me like that, Jacob? Have I ever done you any harm? Remember, Jacob, remember who's sitting beside you! The whole world knows he has a radio, and to me, his only, his best friend, he refuses to tell anything!"

"The whole world knows?"

Kowalski backs down. "Not exactly the whole world, but one or two people do know about it. Has someone told me, or do I have second sight?"

In Jacob's head, one annoyance displaces the other. Kowalski is upstaged by Mischa: that blabbermouth is going to land him in an impossible situation. Suddenly it is no longer necessary to take Mischa aside for a correction — totally superfluous. The fire can no longer be contained — who knows how many others would now have to be taken aside! And even if he were to try his best with every single one of them, try with the patience of an angel to explain to each individual the crazy route by which the glorious news has fluttered into the ghetto, into their very ears, what else could they do but not believe him, with all due respect and much sympathy for his situation? Or does anyone seriously believe that Kowalski could afford to be fobbed off with a story so manifestly full of holes?

"Well?"

"It's true about the Russians," says Jacob. "And now stop bothering me."

"Are they twelve miles from Bezanika?"

Jacob rolls his eyes and says, "Yes!"

He gets to his feet: that's how they sour one's joy, yet Kowalski is as entitled to it as all the rest of them. He would give anything for Kowalski to have been spotted by the sentry on the Kurländischer Damm, Kowalski or anyone else. What on earth made him go there? All good citizens are in bed, but at that dark hour he has to roam the streets because the walls of his room are closing in on him, because

once again Piwowa and Rosenblatt have become unbearable, because a stroll after work seems to bring a strange, faint whiff of normal times. A stroll in a town you know, have known since they used to sit you up in your baby carriage with a pillow at your back. The buildings tell you about almost forgotten trifles: over there you once fell down and sprained your left ankle, at this corner you finally told Gideon the truth to his face, in that building there was once a fire in the middle of winter. A longed-for whiff of normal times, that's what he had promised himself; he hadn't been able to enjoy it for long, and now this.

"Will you at least keep it to yourself?"

"You know me!" answers Kowalski, who wants to be left in peace, for the time being. The break is short, and he has enough just coping with his own emotions and with what is suddenly looming ahead of him.

Jacob picks up his bowl from the ground and walks away. He carries Kowalski's expression with him, the face tilted to one side, the eyes fixed on a distant point that no one else can see; no war far and wide. He hears Kowalski's lips whispering rapturously, "The Russians . . ." Then Jacob reaches the handcart. He adds his bowl to the others and glances back again at Kowalski, who is now fishing his spoon out of his soup. The whistle shrills, even Kowalski hears it, and a little tower of bowls is quickly erected. To Jacob it seems that all the men are looking at him strangely, differently from the day before, somehow with the secret in their eyes. Maybe it's an illusion; in fact it must be: they can't possibly all know about it already, but there may well be one or two who do.

I would like, while it's still not too late, to say a few words about how I came by my knowledge, before any suspicions arise. My principal informant is Jacob; most of what I have heard from him will turn up in this story somewhere, I can vouch for that. But I say "most," not all; I

say it deliberately, and in this case the reason is not my poor memory. After all, *I* am telling the story, not Jacob: Jacob is dead, and besides, I'm not telling his story but a story.

He told me the story, but I am talking to you. That's a big difference, because I was there. He tried to explain how one thing followed another and that he couldn't have acted any differently, but I want you to know that he was a hero. Not three sentences would pass his lips without his mentioning his fear, but I want you to know about his courage. About those trees, for example, about those nonexistent trees I'm looking for, that I don't want to think about but have to, and my eyes grow moist when I do. He had no inkling of that; that's simply and solely my concern. I can't quite piece it all together, but there are some things that he knew nothing about, when he might have asked me how I got such ideas in my head, but somehow I feel that it is all part of it. I would like so much to tell him why I feel that, I owe him an explanation, and I think he would say I was right.

Some things I know from Mischa, but then there is a big gap for which there are simply no witnesses. I tell myself that it must have happened more or less in such and such a way, or that it would be best if it had happened in such and such a way, and then I tell it and pretend that's how it was. And that *is* how it was; it's not my fault that the witnesses who could confirm it can no longer be found.

For me, probability is not a determining factor; it is improbable that I of all people should still be alive. Much more important is my feeling that it could or should have happened this way, and that has nothing whatsoever to do with probability, I can vouch for that too.

It wasn't at all a bad idea of Mischa's to speak to Rosa during the ration card distribution, to pluck up his courage and ask her whether they couldn't walk part of the way home together, and luckily she agreed. At first it was only her face that loosened his tongue — how

many girls have been addressed merely because of their bright eyes! — but one thing led to another, and today, about a year later, he loves all of her, just the way she is. The first steps were awkwardly silent; his head felt hollowed out. He received no help at all from her, not even an encouraging glance; she looked straight ahead shyly, apparently waiting for something important to happen. But nothing happened until they reached her front door; her mother was already standing anxiously at the window, wondering what was keeping her only daughter. With lowered eyes Rosa hurriedly said good-bye, but she must have had just enough time to hear where exactly he would be waiting for her the next day.

At any rate she did show up, much to Mischa's relief. He reached into his pocket and gave her his first gift. It was a little book of poems and songs; by that time he knew them all by heart, and it was the only book he happened to own. Actually he had wanted to present her with an onion, if possible one with a bluish skin; right from the start he was very serious about Rosa, but the idea was too ambitious. In such a short time he was unable to find one, try as he would. At first she was a little coy about accepting the gift at all, the way unsophisticated girls often are, but then of course she did accept the book and tell him how pleased she was. At this point he introduced himself — the day before they had been too excited to get around to that — and now for the first time he heard her name: Rosa Frankfurter.

"Frankfurter?" he asked. "Are you by any chance related to that famous actor Felix Frankfurter?"

As could later be readily established by means of theater programs, this was something of an exaggeration. Frankfurter the actor never got beyond supporting roles. But Mischa, never having seen Frankfurter onstage, had not meant it ironically. He had been to the theater only once, and he knew of Felix Frankfurter only from what he had read and heard. And Rosa didn't take it that way either. She blushingly admitted that such was indeed the case, that Frankfurter the actor was her father. They went on to chat a bit about the theater, about which he knew practically nothing, until he managed gradually

with great skill to bring the conversation around to boxing, about which she in turn knew practically nothing. In this way they had a marvelous time together, and that same evening she did not resist Mişcha's first kiss on her silky hair.

When Mischa arrives, Felix Frankfurter is sitting at the table playing a game of checkers with his daughter. He is a big man, tall and gaunt; Mischa described his appearance to me with loving detail. What was once a massive corpulence has left the old man's skin in folds, which is greatly emphasized by the clothes he is wearing, which date from considerably stouter times. Photos prove that some years ago man and skin formed a well-balanced entity: Frankfurter had pressed a weighty album on Mischa during his very first visit, for he couldn't possibly allow the unfavorable impression, of which he was fully aware, to remain. Around his neck a scarf, artistically yet casually arranged with one end in front and one on his back, and in his mouth a pipe, a meerschaum that has long since forgotten the taste of tobacco.

He is seated at the table with his daughter; the game looks hopeless for Rosa. Mrs. Frankfurter is sitting with them, paying no attention to the game. She is altering one of her husband's shirts, making it smaller and perhaps dreaming of some quiet happiness. When Mischa arrives, Rosa has just been grumbling that the game with her father is so boring because he takes ages to contemplate each move, and he has been trying to explain to her that it is better to win one game in two hours than lose five in the same amount of time.

"But why are you taking so long now?" she had asked. "You're ahead anyway."

"I'm not ahead 'anyway,' " he had answered. "I'm ahead because I give each move so much thought."

She had made an impatient gesture; any pleasure in the game was now gone. Only obedience keeps her from sweeping the pieces

from the board, plus the fact that Mischa hasn't yet arrived, but at that moment there is a knock at the door. She hurries to open it, and Mischa comes in. Greetings are exchanged, Mr. Frankfurter offers Mischa a chair, Mischa sits down. Rosa quickly clears away the board and pieces before Mischa can take over her losing game. Many a time he has taken her place, looked for a way out, and in the end had to give up and ask for a return match. Frankfurter would agree, and then they would both sit there lost in thought, and suddenly it was so late that Mischa would have to leave before Rosa could spend any time with him.

"Have you been playing?" asks Mischa. "So who won today?"

"Who do you think?" says Rosa, making it sound like a reproach. Mr. Frankfurter draws on his meerschaum pipe, as content as circumstances permit, and winks at Mischa. "She plays faster than she thinks. But I'll bet you've noticed that yourself on other occasions, right?"

Mischa disregards the little joke. Today he is not coming empty-handed; he is merely wondering how to convey the news with the greatest possible effect, for there's nothing Frankfurter enjoys more than a story that ends with a punch line. When he talks about the theater, where, if one is to believe him, the wildest things have happened, every step, every glance he describes carries some special implication: someone falls down or makes a fool of himself or messes up the performance or doesn't understand why the others are laughing. If that weren't so, Frankfurter probably feels, there would be no point in telling the anecdote in the first place.

"What can one offer a guest these days?" Frankfurter says to his silent wife. And then to Mischa: "What can one offer a guest apart from one's daughter?"

He smiles, having brought off his little joke, then draws on his pipe again. Anyone can draw on an empty pipe, nothing to it, but not the way Frankfurter does. Included in his performance are the enjoyment, the pleasurable richness of the smoke. Someone not looking too closely might be tempted to wave the smoke away.

There is a thoughtful silence. Any moment now Mr. Frankfurter will tell a story, one of his anecdotes at the end of which he puts on such a display of mirth that he slaps his thigh: for instance, the one about the actor Strelezki, otherwise said to have been a divine Othello, whose false teeth fell out just as he was bending over Desdemona to strangle her. Rosa lays her fingers on Mischa's hands, her mother goes on making the shirt smaller, Frankfurter is rubbing his knees, perhaps he's not in the mood today, and here comes Mischa with such good news, still wondering how best to tell them, as if pondering a checkers move.

"Have you heard the latest?" Rosa asks him suddenly.

Startled, Mischa looks from one to the other; he gives up his search and is surprised that Mrs. Frankfurter doesn't even look up from the shirt. They already know, yet he hasn't noticed till now that they know. He is surprised to find that everything in the room looks just as it did on his last visit. He is amazed at the speed: it was only this morning that he heard it from Jacob, and now it's already here at the Frankfurters, by way of who knows how many intermediaries. But strangest of all is that Rosa should wait till now to bring up the subject. She can't have forgotten it and only just remembered it: impossible. Something's wrong — maybe they have a reason not to believe it.

"You already know?"

"They were talking about it at work today," says Rosa.

"And you're not glad?"

"Glad?" says Mr. Frankfurter. "We're supposed to be glad? What are we supposed to be glad about, my boy, eh? Before, they could have been glad about it, gathered all the relatives together, got drunk, but today there are a few little things that have changed. In my opinion, it's all a big calamity, my lad, almost a disaster for those people, and you're asking why I'm not glad?"

Mischa instantly realizes that they are talking about something quite different, the only explanation for their mood. Otherwise Frankfurter has taken leave of his senses and doesn't know what he's saying.

"It will be hard to bring up a child," says Mrs. Frankfurter between two stitches.

The first clue. Renewed astonishment in Mischa's eyes: they are talking about some child, so news doesn't travel all that quickly. Apparently two crazy people have brought a child into this world, without having heard the news — in normal ghetto times, certainly a subject for discussion. But as of yesterday the times are no longer normal, a different wind is blowing, we can tell you about things that will make you forget child and husband and wife and eating and drinking: as of yesterday, tomorrow will be another day.

Now Rosa is surprised: first she is surprised, then she smiles at Mischa's expression.

"So you really don't know about it yet," she says. "But that's what he's like. He can't stand it if other people know more than he does. He's such a know-it-all, while the truth is he doesn't know anything. A child has been born in Witebsker-Strasse. Actually there were twins, but one of them died almost at once. Last night. When all this is over they intend to have the boy registered under the name of Abraham."

"When all this is over," says Frankfurter. He lays his pipe on the table, gets up, and starts to pace the room, head bowed, hands behind his back. His disapproving glances are directed at Mischa — surely the boy isn't grinning? They take everything so lightly, including Rosa; perhaps they are too young to grasp it. They speak of the future as if it were a weekend that can't fail to arrive — the whole family goes off to the country with a picnic basket, rain or shine. "When all this is over the child will have died and the parents will have died. All of us will have died, that's when this will be over."

Frankfurter has finished his pacing and sits down again.

"I think David sounds nicer," says Mrs. Frankfurter gently.

"Dovidl . . . Do you remember? That's what Annette's son was called. Abraham sounds so terribly old, not at all like a child. Yet it's only for children that names are important. Later, by the time they're grown up, names don't matter so much anymore."

Rosa tends to favor Jan or Roman; she feels it's time to get away from the traditional names. When it's no longer necessary to wear the yellow star, why not choose different names? Frankfurter shakes his head over such women's talk, and suddenly Mischa wishes he had arrived at this moment instead of earlier, blurting it out the moment he arrived. For if he starts telling them now, they will feel just as he did in his error: Why did he wait till now to tell us? He can't have forgotten it! He's been sitting and sitting while they talk themselves ever deeper into their gloomy mood. Either he doesn't tell them till tomorrow and then pretends that it's the latest news, or he'll have to think up some story to explain why he's telling them only now and not as soon as the door was opened. He decides on today. It'll be a little extra punch line for Frankfurter. Mischa gets up, affects reluctance, even he doesn't know whether it's simulated or real, looks diffidently at Frankfurter, who is already wondering about the lengthy prelude, and formally requests the hand of his daughter.

Rosa discovers something on her fingernail that claims her undivided attention, something so important that her face turns fiery red: they have never exchanged so much as a syllable about it, which, of course, is really the way it should be. Mrs. Frankfurter bends lower over the shirt, which is nowhere near small enough yet, most of the work being required by the collar because of the great importance of a perfect fit. Mischa relishes his inspiration, successful or otherwise; Frankfurter is taken aback and is about to say something. It is his turn to speak, since a polite question deserves an answer, and, no matter how out of place the question may seem at first, Frankfurter's answer will build a bridge to the great news, and this will at the same time explain why Mischa waited until now to tell them. That is Mischa's plan, devised in extreme haste and not so bad at that; Felix Frankfurter will build a bridge, it's his turn, they are all waiting for his answer.

So, great astonishment on Frankfurter's part, incredulity in his expression; he has just been drawing on his pipe and has forgotten to blow out the smoke. The father who would give his only daughter to no one but Mischa, loving him as he does like his own son, the man of

hard facts who is nobody's fool, is staggered. "He's gone mad," he whispers. "Suffering has confused him. It's these cursed times when perfectly normal desires sound monstrous. Why don't *you* say something?"

But Mrs. Frankfurter won't say anything. A few tears drop soundlessly onto the shirt; she doesn't know what to say, all important questions having invariably been decided by her husband.

Felix Frankfurter resumes his pacing, inner turmoil, and Mischa looks as hopeful as if the next words could only be "Take her and be happy."

"We are in the ghetto, Mischa, don't you know that? We can't do what we want because they do what they want with us. Should I ask you what security you can offer, since she is my only daughter? Should I ask you where you intend to find a place to live? Should I tell you what kind of a dowry Rosa will receive from me? Surely that must interest you? Or should I give you some advice on how to conduct a happy marriage and then go to the rabbi and ask when it would suit him best to perform the *khasene?* You'd be better off racking your brain for a place to hide when they come for you."

Mischa remains confidently silent; that still wasn't an answer, after all.

"Just listen to that! His ship has foundered, he's swimming in the middle of the ocean, not a soul in sight to help him. And he's wondering whether he'd rather spend the evening at a concert or the opera!"

His arms sink to his sides; Frankfurter has said all that was to be said, even throwing in a little allegory at the end. No one need be clearer than that.

But Mischa is not impressed. On the contrary, everything has gone just as he hoped. No help in sight, that's the kind of phrase Mischa has been waiting for — soon you'll all know the real situation. It does make sense to speak of the future, Mischa isn't an idiot after all, of course he knows where we are, of course he knows that one

can't get married until — and that's the real issue — until the Russians arrive.

Mischa to me: "So I simply told them (that was his word: simply) that the Russians were twelve miles from Bezanika. You see, it wasn't just a piece of news: now it was also an argument. I had imagined they would be thrilled — you don't hear that kind of news every day. But Rosa didn't throw her arms around my neck, far from it; she looked at her father almost in alarm, and he looked at me. For a long time he didn't say a word, just looked at me, so that I began to get nervous. My first thought was, Maybe they need time to grasp it, judging by the way the old man was looking at me, but then I realized it wasn't time they needed but certainty. After all, the same thing had happened to me: I too had thought that Jacob was just trying to divert my attention from the carload of potatoes, and I went on thinking this till he told me the whole truth, how he had found out. News like that without a source simply isn't worth anything, it's no more than a rumor. So I was about to open my mouth and dispel their doubts, but then I decided to wait. Let them ask, I thought: if you have to squeeze something out of another person, you can absorb it better than if he tells it to you on his own and all in one piece. And that's exactly the way it happened."

So, an endless silence, the needle paused in the middle of a stitch, Rosa's hot breath, Frankfurter's eyes, and Mischa standing there in the spotlight, the audience hanging on his lips.

"Do you know what you're saying?" says Frankfurter. "That's not something to joke about."

"You don't need to tell me that," says Mischa. "I heard it from Heym."

"From Jacob Heym?"

"Yes."

"And he? Where did he hear it?"

Mischa smiles weakly, pretends to be embarrassed, shrugs his shoulders unhappily, which they won't accept. Somewhere there was

a promise. That he is not going to keep it is another matter, but the promise was made, and he would like at least to be forced to break it, he would like to have done his utmost: in my place you wouldn't have acted any differently.

"Where did he hear it?"

"I promised him I wouldn't tell anyone," says Mischa, actually quite prepared to do so, but obviously not prepared enough, at least not obviously enough for Felix Frankfurter. This is not the time to note nuances in a voice; Frankfurter takes two or three quick steps and gives Mischa a slap, a cross between a stage slap and a genuine one, but more likely genuine, for it contains indignation: we're not talking here to pass the time.

Naturally Mischa is a bit shocked — that much force wasn't really necessary — but he can't be offended now. The force, after all, had to assume some form or other. He can't sit down with a stony face, arms crossed on his chest, waiting for an apology. He could wait a long time for that. He can, and he does, remove all doubts: the moment has arrived, his plan worked — no one is going to ask now why he took so long.

"Jacob Heym has a radio."

Another short silence, a few glances exchanged, the shirt — still too big — floats unnoticed to the floor. It's all right to believe one's own son-in-law. At last Rosa throws her arms around his neck; he's waited long enough for that. Over her shoulder he sees her father sitting down exhausted and covering his deeply furrowed face with his hands. There will be no discussion; there is nothing to say. Rosa pulls his ear to her mouth and whispers. He doesn't understand, the old man still has his hands in front of his face, and Mischa looks at her inquiringly.

"Let's go to your place," Rosa whispers again.

A brilliant idea, she has taken the words out of Mischa's mouth; today one inspiration follows on the heels of another. They tiptoe out of the room with exaggerated care, the door clicks shut, no one hears it. Outside, it is already getting dangerously dark.

Then Frankfurter is alone with his wife, without witnesses. All I know is how it ended. I only know the outcome, nothing in between, but I can only imagine it to have been something like this.

His wife finally gets up, at some point. She wipes away her tears, no longer those of the marriage proposal, or she doesn't wipe them away. She goes to her husband, quietly, as if not wanting to disturb him. She stands behind him, puts her hands on his shoulders, brings her face close to his, which is still covered with his hands, and waits. Nothing happens, not even when he lowers his arms. He stares at the opposite wall, and she gives him a little nudge. She is looking for something in his eyes and cannot find it.

"Felix," she may have said softly after a while. "Aren't you glad? Bezanika isn't so far away. If they've come that far they'll come as far as here too."

Or she might have said: "Just think, Felix, if it's true! My head's in a whirl, just think! Not much longer now, and everything will be just the way it used to be. You'll be able to perform again, on a real stage, I'm sure they'll reopen the theater. I'll be waiting for you beside the bulletin board next to the porter's lodge. Just think, Felix!"

He doesn't answer. He gets up from under her hands and goes over to the cupboard. Perhaps he looks like a man who has come to an important decision and doesn't want to waste any time in carrying it out.

Frankfurter opens the cupboard, takes out a cup or a little box, and finds a key in it.

"What are you going to do in the basement?" she asks.

He weighs the key in his hand, as if there were still something to be considered, possibly the matter of finding the right moment, but the sooner the better. Nothing is the same anymore. Perhaps he tells her now what he has in mind, taking her into his confidence while still in the room, but that's unlikely since he has never been in the habit of asking for her opinion. Besides, it makes no difference when

he tells her; it won't change anything, the key is already in his pocket. So let us assume that he closes the cupboard without a word, walks to the door, turns around, and says only, "Come."

They go down into the basement.

In these houses of the poor one would formerly never have set foot: the wooden stairs are worn, they creak abominably, but he walks close to the wall and on tiptoe. She follows him uneasily, also softly, also on tiptoe — she doesn't know why, just because he's doing it. She has always followed him, without asking; often she has only been able to guess what was to be done, and it wasn't always the right thing.

"Won't you tell me now what we're doing here?"

"Sssh!"

They walk along the narrow basement passage; no need to tiptoe here. The next-to-last cubicle on the right is theirs. Frankfurter turns the key in the padlock and opens the wire door in its iron frame, which is no good as fuel and so is still there. He goes in, she follows hesitantly, he closes the wire door behind her, and there they are.

Felix Frankfurter is a cautious man. He looks for a piece of sacking or a sack with holes that he can tear or, if there is no sack, he takes off his jacket and hangs it across the door, just in case. I imagine that for a moment he puts his finger to his lips, closing his eyes and listening, but there is not a sound. Then he goes to work on the little pile filling one corner of the space, a little pile of useless stuff, a small heap of memories.

At the time they received the notice, they spent two days with their heads together considering what they should take along — apart from the prohibited things, of course. The situation was very serious, no doubt about that; they didn't expect it to be a paradise, but nobody had any definite knowledge. Mrs. Frankfurter thought in practical terms, too practical for his liking, solely of bed linen and dishes and things to wear, but he was reluctant to part with many items that she regarded as superfluous. Such as the drum on which at

a highly successful performance he had announced the arrival of the heir to the Spanish throne; or Rosa's ballet slippers from the time when she was five years old, to this day almost unworn; or the album of carefully pasted-in reviews in which his name is mentioned and underlined in red. Give me one good reason why I should part with them: life is more than just eating and sleeping. The problem of transporting them? In great haste he bought a handcart, at an exorbitant price, for at that time prices for handcarts shot up overnight, and now the little pile fills a corner of their basement.

He lays aside one item after another, his wife watching him silently, seething with curiosity: What is he looking for? Maybe for a moment he studies the framed photograph of all his fellow actors at the theater, his portly figure over on the right, between Salzer and Strelezki, who in those days wasn't yet so well known. But that's not what he's looking for; if he did study the picture, he puts it aside again and goes on reducing the pile.

"That Jacob Heym is a fool."

"Why?"

"Why! Why! He heard some news, marvelous, but that's his affair. Some good news, very good news in fact: then he should just be glad and not drive everyone else crazy with it."

"I don't understand you, Felix," she says. "You're not being fair to him. Surely it's a great thing for us to know about it. Everybody should know about it."

"Women!" Frankfurter says angrily. "Today you know about it, tomorrow the neighbors know, and the next day the whole ghetto is talking about nothing else!"

She may nod, surprised at his fury. But so far he's given no reason at all to reproach Heym.

"And all of a sudden the gestapo knows!" he says. "They have more ears than you think."

"Oh, Felix," she interrupts him, "do you seriously believe that the gestapo needs us to find out where the Russians are?"

"Who's talking about that! What I mean is, all of a sudden the

gestapo knows that there's a radio in the ghetto. And what will they do? They'll immediately turn every street upside down, house by house. They won't give up till they've found the radio. And where will they find one?"

The pile has been leveled. Frankfurter lifts up a cardboard box, white or brown, in any case a cardboard box containing the reason for a just and valid death sentence. He opens the lid and shows his wife the radio.

She may give a little shriek, she may be horrified, certainly shocked; she stares at the radio and at him and is at a loss.

"You brought our radio along!" she whispers and folds her hands. "You brought our radio along! They could have shot all of us for that, and I knew nothing about it. . . . I knew nothing. . . ."

"Why should you?" he said. "Why should I have told you? I've trembled enough alone, and you've trembled enough even without a radio. There were days when I forgot it, simply forgot it, sometimes even for weeks at a time. So one happens to have an old radio in the basement and stops thinking about it. But whenever I did remember I would start trembling, and I've never been reminded of it as I was today. The worst part is that I never listened, not a single time, not even in the early days. Not so that you wouldn't notice — I simply didn't dare. Sometimes I wanted to; my curiosity would almost get the better of me. I'd pick up the key, and you remember how from time to time I'd go down to the basement. You would ask me what I wanted down there, and I told you I wanted to look at photos or read the old reviews again. But that was a lie; I wanted to listen to the radio. I would go down into the basement, hang something across the door, and didn't dare. I would sit down, look at the photos or read the reviews, just as I'd told you, and I didn't dare. But that's all over now!"

"I had no idea," she whispers to herself.

"That's all over, once and for all!" he says. "You were right all the time, it was useless stuff, I don't need it anymore. There'll be nothing left, nothing to suggest a radio. Then let them come and search."

He takes the radio apart, piece by piece, probably the only radio in the hands of any of us; without much fuss he destroys it. The tubes are trodden to dust, an indestructible piece of wire is wound as a harmless cord around a box, the wooden casing is put aside piece by piece and will have to wait a few weeks before being burned. At this time of year any smoking chimney is suspect, but that's no great tragedy: wood is wood, after all.

"Did you also hear them say that the Russians have almost reached Bezanika?" Mrs. Frankfurter asks in a low voice.

He looks at her in astonishment.

"Didn't I tell you I never listened?" he may have answered.

Mischa enters his room with Rosa, and that is a whole story on its own. If it is a story when somebody must be lied to in order to make her a little bit happy, that's what happened with Rosa; if it is a story when bold ruses must be employed and fear of discovery is present, and there must on no account be any slipups, and one's expression must remain solemn and innocent throughout; if all this yields a serviceable story, then Rosa's going with Mischa to his room is also a story.

In the middle of the room is a curtain.

Fayngold is the name of the man sleeping in the other bed, it's because of Isaak Fayngold that they have to go to all this trouble, even if he couldn't care less. He's wiped out with fatigue anyway every night, he's over sixty and his hair is snow white; he really does have other worries, but go ahead and do what you like. At first only the wardrobe had divided the room; to Mischa this seemed enough and to Fayngold more than enough, but for Rosa it hadn't been sufficient. She told Mischa that, even if Fayngold is deaf and dumb,

he still isn't blind, and the moon shines so brightly into the room, and in any case the wardrobe is too narrow. Mischa cheerfully removed the piece of cloth from the window and fastened it to the ceiling beside the wardrobe. Now the moon could shine in more brightly than ever, but not for Fayngold. The main thing was that Rosa was reassured.

Fayngold is no more deaf and dumb than I or Kowalski or anyone else who knows how to use his ears and tongue, but for Rosa he is as deaf and dumb as a clam. It was clear to Mischa from the start that Rosa would not set foot near his bed because there was another bed next to it with a strange man in it; the understanding landladies and the discreet little hotels with their hall porters who tactfully look the other way and ask no questions — these can be found only in some other town. He knew that under the circumstances she could only say no, she's not that kind of girl, that's out of the question. Neither is he that kind of fellow. But if renunciation is to be the ultimate option, there is still ample time for brooding. No one can fault him for that, and Mischa did plenty of it.

One blessed night he was lying awake in bed thinking of Rosa, with Fayngold about to fall asleep in the other bed, and Mischa began to tell him about Rosa. Who she was and how she was and what she looked like and how much he loved her and how much she loved him, and Fayngold merely sighed. That's when Mischa confessed his burning desire to have Rosa with him for one night.

"By all means," Fayngold answered, without going more deeply into the problem. "I don't mind. And now, do let me go to sleep."

Mischa didn't let him go to sleep. He explained to Fayngold that the point was not whether Fayngold agreed but whether Rosa agreed. Also that he hadn't mentioned Fayngold to her, he hardly dared to, and if they didn't come up with a solution, presumably nothing would come of the whole idea. Fayngold switched on the light and stared at him for a long time.

"You're not serious!" he said in a shocked whisper. "You can't expect me to hang around in the street until you're finished. Have you forgotten the regulations?"

Mischa didn't expect any such thing, and he hadn't forgotten the regulations either. He was simply looking for a solution, which was nowhere in sight. Fayngold switched off the light and soon fell asleep: it's not we who must come up with something, but Mischa, all by himself.

After an hour or two Mischa woke Fayngold, patiently put up with his abuse, and then told him his idea. As Mischa has said, Rosa will never spend the night with him if she finds out that there is another man in the room, regardless of whether he's twenty or a hundred. If Mischa doesn't tell her, maybe she will come, then she'll see Fayngold, so she'll leave again and never forgive Mischa. No matter which way you look at it, the only solution is for Fayngold to remain in the room and yet be as good as not there.

"You want me to hide?" was Fayngold's weary response. "You want me to spend night after night under my bed or in the wardrobe?"

"I'll tell her you're deaf and dumb," Mischa announced.

Fayngold protested; for days he bitterly resisted the idea, but eventually Mischa managed to convince him of the urgency. At night a person can't see much anyway, and if she is also sure that you can't hear anything, we should be able to manage. So with distinctly mixed feelings Fayngold gave his consent: If it means so much to you. And ever since then, for Rosa he has been as deaf and dumb as a clam.

For Mischa, though, there was another worry: from a few hints dropped by Fayngold he became aware that Fayngold had once been listening. True, Rosa hadn't noticed anything and Fayngold had kept his mouth shut, but he must have heard a thing or two not intended for his ears. After all, when two people lie in each other's arms, quite a few words are spoken that are not meant for other ears, and it was very embarrassing for Mischa. Since then he has been studying Fayngold's sleep, often deliberately lying awake to listen to the pitch of his breathing and snoring. No one has ever heard himself sleep; no

one can imitate his own sleep. A person can imitate sleeping as such but cannot know anything about his own sleep. And Mischa knows what Fayngold's sleep sounds like: he could swear, he says, that he knows it in every detail. And during the rare nights when Rosa is with him, Mischa always first listens intently as he lies beside her, and only when he is quite sure that Fayngold is asleep behind the screen does he begin to caress her and kiss her, and Rosa forgets her disappointment and stops wondering why he has kept her waiting so long.

On one occasion something terrible happened: while deeply asleep, in the midst of a confused dream, Fayngold suddenly began to speak, clearly audible individual words, ignoring the fact that deaf mutes must be deaf and dumb in their sleep too. This woke Mischa, whose heart almost stopped beating; he looked anxiously at Rosa, who lay asleep in the moonlight and merely turned her head from one side to the other. He couldn't call out, Fayngold, shut up! He could only lie there motionless and hope, and luckily Fayngold stopped his fantasizing before there was a disaster. Dreams last for only a few seconds, people say, and it never happened again.

So much for the miniature comedy. All in all, we see that some bold paths have led Rosa to this room, right beneath these covers, not merely straight down one street, then a turn to the left and a turn to the right. Mischa has found a way, Fayngold has cooperated, Rosa is happy to be here.

She is lying on her back, I know, her hands under her head, tonight as always, even though that's a bit selfish since with a big fellow like Mischa the bed has more than enough to cope with: he has to make do with the edge. There she lies, a faraway look in her eyes; the evening, the most wonderful yet, is over. They have already whispered their sweet nothings into each other's ears. Although Fayngold is deaf and dumb, they always whisper, as people do who lie as Rosa and Mischa do now. They would whisper even on a lonely island, if, that is, it were absolutely necessary to speak. The night is far advanced; the mute Fayngold has long since been asleep behind the screen of wardrobe and curtain. The hot weather and the news

must have worn him out: tonight he was only a brief impediment. After only a few minutes Mischa was satisfied with the sounds coming from the other side and could lavish his entire attention on Rosa.

Rosa gently nudges Mischa, her foot against his foot, persisting until he is sufficiently awake to ask her what's up.

"My parents will be living with us, won't they?" she says.

Her parents. They had never come as far as this room. There had always been only the night when Mischa and Rosa were lying together and making love — that particular night and no other. All the following ones were yet to come, and there was no use wasting time thinking about them. But now that the parents are here, let's look briefly at what may one day happen, let's peek through the hole in the curtain. Her parents are here, along with an idea of what the future may hold; they can't be thrown out, Rosa is adamant.

"They won't be living with us," says Mischa in the darkness.

"And why not? Do you have something against them?" Rosa raises her voice — these are not matters that demand to be whispered — raises it so rebelliously, perhaps, that Fayngold might wake up, but of course she never suspects this danger.

"Good heavens, is that so important that you have to wake me up in the middle of the night?"

"Yes," says Rosa.

All right. He props himself on his elbows. She can pride herself on having finally chased away his sleep; he sighs, as if life wasn't already difficult enough.

"All right. I have nothing against them, nothing whatsoever. I really like them very much indeed, they won't be living with us, and now I want to sleep!"

He heaves himself onto his other side, a minor demonstration in the moonlight: their first tiff. Not yet a real quarrel, merely a foretaste of everyday worries. A few silent minutes pass during which Mischa notices that Fayngold has woken up.

"Mamma could look after the children," says Rosa.

"Grandmas always spoil children," says Mischa.

"And I don't know how to cook, either."

"There are books."

Now she sighs, Let's quarrel later, we'll have all the time in the world. Rosa has to lift her head slightly because he is pushing his reconciling arm under it: now a kiss to make up, then finally back to sleep. But she can't simply close her eyes and run away. What she sees she sees: we've been waiting a long time for this glimpse into the future. When they knock, when they are standing in the doorway, those Russians, good morning, here we are, now we can start, by that time it's too late, we can't wait till then to decide, we must know by then what has to be done first and what next. But Mischa wants to sleep, and Rosa can't. So many things are mixed up; at least some of them should be straightened out. Important matters will somehow take care of themselves; people of consequence who'll take care of those are sure to show up. Let's start with our own little affairs, no one's going to look after those for us.

From pondering, Rosa progresses to whispering. First of all there's the question of the house, one we'd feel comfortable in, but we might also discuss something other than the house, if you can think of anything, anyway let's begin with the house. Not too small, not too big, let's say five rooms, that's not asking too much. Now don't start yelling, that much one can ask for, we've been modest long enough. There'd be one room for you, one for me, and two for my parents. And a children's room, of course, where they can do what they like, stand on their heads or scribble all over the walls. We would sleep in my room, we don't need a special bedroom, that would be giving away space that would be wasted during the day. We have to think in practical terms too. When we have guests we could sit in your room: a sofa in the middle of the room, that's quite modern, a long, low table in front of it and three or four armchairs. Though I don't want too many guests, just so you know right now. Not because of the upheaval, that's no great problem, but I'd rather be alone with

you. Maybe when we're a bit older. And no one's going to tell me how my kitchen should be. It has to be tiled, that's always clean and attractive. Blue and white is what I like best. The Klosenbergs used to have a kitchen like that, just like that, I can't imagine a nicer one. The floor covered with pale gray tiles, on the wall shelves for plates and jugs and ladles, and there must also be a little shelf for all those spices. Nobody knows how many spices there are — saffron, for instance. Do you have any idea what saffron is used for? That it makes cakes and noodles yellow?

The rest of it I don't know since just about here my informant Mischa finally fell asleep, in the midst of all the spices. Perhaps Fayngold could have told me more about this particular night, perhaps he lay awake all the way from basement to attic, but I never asked him.

Then at last it is daytime again, daytime at last. We hurry this way and that in the freight yard with our crates; only a few years earlier it would have been described as cheerful, bustling activity. The sentries behave quite normally, shouting or dozing or shoving as usual; they show no alarm or don't feel it yet. Maybe I am mistaken, but I seem to remember that day very well, although nothing unusual happened, at least not to me. As if it were today, I am standing, so I recall, on a freight car; my job is to take the crates and stack them so that as many as possible will fit into the car. There is another man with me, Herschel Schtamm, and that, come to think of it, *is* something unusual. For Herschel Schtamm has a brother, in fact he has a twin brother, Roman, and the two of them work together and normally are always seen together. But not today. Herschel had a little accident right after starting work. He stumbled while carrying a crate, Roman couldn't hold the crate alone, crate and Herschel crashed to the ground. Herschel had to suffer the usual beating, but that wasn't

the worst part: in stumbling, he sprained one foot and could hardly walk, so he couldn't go on carrying with Roman, which is why he is now standing with me on the freight car.

He is sweating buckets, I have never seen anyone sweat like that, and he won't stop sweating until the Russians have captured this damn ghetto, not a day earlier. For Herschel Schtamm is devout. In his lifetime he was a sexton in a synagogue, we call that a shammes, as devout as the rabbi himself. And then there are the earlocks, the pride of all Orthodox Jews: go and ask Herschel whether he is prepared to part with them. Not for all the money in the world, he'll tell you, looking at you as if you were mad. How can you ask such a thing? But the earlocks may only be displayed within one's own four walls, nowhere else. In the street and here at the freight yard one runs into Germans who take a dim view of them: where do we people think we're living for some of us to be running around in a get-up like that? Cases have been known where a grab was made for the nearest pair of scissors, and to the accompaniment of secret prayers and tears of laughter, the matter was taken care of on the spot, but there have been worse cases too.

Herschel has taken the only possible way out: he hides his earlocks. He is smuggling them through these times. Summer and winter he wears a hat. Presumably one is still allowed to wear a hat: a black fur hat with earflaps that can be fastened under the chin. In the sun the hat is terribly hot, but it was the only one he could get hold of, and for his purposes it is eminently suitable. We nondevout ones, even his brother Roman, smiled and made our little jokes only during the first warm week. After that we lost interest: Herschel must know what he's doing.

We hoist a crate onto the very top; he wipes the sweat from his face and asks me, while we are picking up the next one, what I think of that business. I know at once what he is talking about and tell him I'm already wild with joy and can think of nothing else. Everything I once owned will belong to me again, everything except Hannah, who was executed. There will be trees again; in my parents' garden I can see myself sitting in the walnut tree, on such slender branches that my mother is almost ready to faint; right there in the tree I stuff myself with walnuts. My fingers turn so brown from the shells that it takes weeks for the stains to disappear, but Herschel doesn't seem so enthusiastic.

Jacob lifts a crate onto the edge of the freight car. Why all the hurry? Jacob rushes back to the pile with Mischa at his heels. As of yesterday, Jacob is fortune's darling, one of the elect. Everyone is after him, the big fellows as well as the little ones; everyone wants to work with him, with the man who has a direct line to God. Mischa was the first in line, the first to lend a hand when Jacob's eye fell on a crate, and now he's running after him. The fairest way would be to raffle him off, with so-and-so many blanks and one grand prize; then everyone would have the same chance at the supreme stroke of luck, at what has suddenly become so important: being close to Jacob. Only Jacob looks disgruntled: thanks a lot for that kind of luck, five or ten times today he's already been asked — confidentially and hopefully, even by complete strangers — what the radio has been saying. Five or ten times he hasn't known how to answer, has merely repeated what he said yesterday, "Bezanika," or put his fingers to his lips with a conspiratorial "Sssh!" or said nothing and walked on in annoyance. And all this annoyance has been foisted on him by that stupid beanpole who is now scurrying after him, all innocence, in unwarranted joyous anticipation. Something no one could possibly have foreseen. They are behaving like kids, like people eagerly clustering around a bulletin board. Barring a miracle, it will be at best a few hours before the sentries start noticing. Jacob would have welcomed such a crowd in normal times; his shop was open every day except *shabbes*, all year round, and there was a radio in clear view behind the counter: people could listen to whatever they liked. But there you people mostly stayed away, each of you had to be treated like a king, otherwise

you'd leave and not come back; and now you're treating *me* like a king and won't leave and keep coming back. A fellow needs a bodyguard for protection against you.

Mischa has no idea what furious thoughts are being ignited so close to him, that it is rage that makes Jacob walk so briskly. They haul a few crates, and Mischa imagines that it will go on like this until noon; he fails to notice the hostile looks directed at him from time to time, more and more often. Until the pot boils over, until Jacob stops in his tracks, in the hope that Mischa will walk on, as far away as possible. But Mischa stops too, looking puzzled: he really is totally unaware, so he might as well be told.

"Please, Mischa," Jacob says in an agonized voice, "there are so many nice fellows here. Do you *have* to haul with me?"

"What's up all of a sudden?"

" 'All of a sudden,' he says! I can't stand the sight of your face anymore!"

"My face?" Mischa smiles stupidly; so far his face hasn't bothered anyone, Jacob least of all. At most there's been the occasional remark about his blue eyes, when people couldn't think of anything better to talk about, and now suddenly this little eruption, almost an insult.

"Yes, your face! With that blabbermouth!" Jacob adds, since Mischa seems so completely in the dark. And now Mischa knows which way the wind is blowing: he is the weak link in the chain of silence — Jacob is right. Although that's no reason to make such a scene, God knows there have been worse things to endure. Mischa shrugs his shoulders: it just happened, too late to change it now. Without a word, before Jacob can get even more worked up, Mischa walks away, which is none of the sentries' business; later or tomorrow there's sure to be time for a conciliatory word.

So Mischa goes alone to the crates and quickly finds a new partner; after all, he hasn't been completely downgraded yet. His powerful arms haven't been forgotten, they are still appreciated; if you can't haul with Jacob, at least you can with Mischa. And Jacob

also comes alone to the pyramid, doesn't even see who reaches with him for the crate: his eyes are still glued to Mischa, who eventually disappears without turning around, maybe offended, maybe not. But after a few steps Jacob notices that his new partner doesn't hold the crate as firmly as Mischa does, not nearly, and he looks at him and sees that the new man is Kowalski, and he makes a face and knows that he has fallen from the frying pan into the fire: Kowalski won't leave him in peace for long.

Kowalski doesn't say a word, or rather, he is not just silent, he is restraining himself: how long can he keep this up? He hauls and hauls, which is fine with Jacob. But somehow it irritates him, Kowalski being silent; the red spots on his cheeks haven't come from exertion. Three whole crates are moved in silence. If Kowalski thinks he can starve him out, he's mistaken: Jacob will never bring up the subject on his own since he has nothing to tell, but it gets on his nerves all the same. I'll outwit you, Jacob thinks suddenly. I'll set a trap for you, a harmless conversation that could make you forget the question you're still keeping to yourself. What should we talk about? The noon whistle will blow any minute, and then try and find me.

"Do you know of anything to keep from going bald?" Jacob asks.

"What do you mean?"

"Every morning my comb is full of hair. Isn't there something one can do about it?"

"Nothing," says Kowalski, clearly implying that the subject doesn't interest him.

"Surely there's something? I remember that at your shop you used to treat a customer with some such stuff. . . . I seem to remember it was green?"

"Just a racket," says Kowalski. "I treated lots of people with that, but I might just as well have rubbed water into their scalps. Some customers insist on having something rubbed in. And it wasn't green, it was yellow."

"There's nothing that'll help?"

"You heard me."

So far so good. They keep on hauling in silence. In Jacob the hope is growing that he is mistaken, that Kowalski has no intention of asking him, that he reached for the crate simply because he was the closest, and the red spots might actually be due to exertion or bedbug bites. Why do we often fail to think of the obvious? There's no reason to lose faith in all integrity on account of a few bad experiences: Kowalski also has his good side, as countless memories go to show. After all, they were almost close friends. Already Jacob looks at the sweating Kowalski more kindly, a secret apology in his glance, secret because, fortunately, the reproaches have also remained secret. Each new crate that is carried wordlessly to the freight car is leading him away from the suspicion that he has apparently been directing at an innocent person.

Then suddenly, just before noon, Kowalski puts his sneaky question. Without preamble and in a humiliatingly innocent voice he says, "Well?"

That's all. Jacob flinches; we know what is meant. Instantly all his rage returns. Jacob feels deceived; the red spots are the same old ones after all. And it wasn't by chance that Kowalski was closest to the crate; he was lying in wait, working all day toward that infamous "Well?" He didn't keep quiet for so long out of consideration — he doesn't even know what that is — he kept quiet because he saw Jacob having an argument with Mischa, and he has merely been waiting for a favorable moment, cold and calculating as he is: Jacob was to be lulled into a sense of security.

Jacob flinches; the worst thing in this ghetto is that you can't just turn your back and walk away. It isn't advisable to repeat this ploy too often.

"Anything new?" Kowalski asks more pointedly. He is not in the mood for a prolonged exchange of stares. If you don't understand my "Well?" then so be it.

"No," says Jacob.

"You're not seriously trying to tell me that in wartime a whole day passes and nothing happens? A whole day and a whole night?"

They lift the crate onto the edge of the freight car and go back to the pile. Jacob takes a deep breath, and Kowalski gives him an encouraging nod; Jacob loses his self-control and raises his voice to an undesirable pitch.

"For God's sake, stop pestering me, can't you? Didn't I tell you yesterday that they're within twelve miles of Bezanika? Isn't that enough?"

Of course it is not enough for Kowalski if the Russians are within twelve miles of some place called Bezanika and he is here: how could that be enough for him? But he has no time for logical rejoinders, not at the moment. He looks around nervously, Jacob having been less than cautious. In fact a sentry is standing quite close by. They have to walk past him, and he is already looking their way. The uniform doesn't look right on him; he is much too young for it. They have already noticed him several times. He has a loud mouth but so far hasn't done much in the way of beating.

"What have you scumbags got to argue about?" he asks as they are about to walk by him. Obviously he hasn't heard any details, only raised voices, which can be quickly explained.

"We're not arguing, sir," says Kowalski loudly. "It's just that I'm a bit hard of hearing."

The sentry looks them up and down and rocks on his toes, then turns around and walks away. Kowalski and Jacob pick up another crate without wasting a word over the incident.

"A whole day has gone by, Jacob. Twenty-four long hours. Surely they must have advanced at least a few measly miles!"

"Yes, two miles according to the latest reports."

"And you act as if you don't care? Every foot counts, I tell you, every single foot!"

"So what's two miles?" says Jacob.

"I like that! Maybe for you it isn't much, you hear the news every day. But two miles is two miles!"

The ordeal is over, Kowalski won't bother him again today; he is as mute as Fayngold now that he's found out what he wanted to know.

Jacob has to admit that it wasn't so bad; actually the words came out quite easily, as he explained to me at length. It was an important moment for him, he told me. The first lie, which may not even have been one, such a little lie, and Kowalski is satisfied. It's worth it: hope must not be allowed to fade away, otherwise they won't survive. He knows for sure that the Russians are advancing, he has heard it with his own ears, and if there is a God in heaven, they must come at least this far; and if there is no God, they must come at least this far and they must find as many survivors as possible, so it's worth it. And if we should all be dead, it was an attempt, so it's worth it. The trouble is, he has to dream up enough bits of news, for they will go on asking questions, they will want to know details, not just how many miles; he must invent the answers. He hopes his brain will be equal to it. Not everyone is good at inventing things; so far he has invented only one other thing in his life, that was years ago, a new recipe for potato pancakes with cottage cheese and onions and caraway seeds, you can hardly compare the two.

"And besides, it's important that they're advancing at all," says Kowalski reflectively. "I mean, better to advance slowly than to retreat quickly. . . ."

We're late enough coming to Lina, inexcusably late, for she is of some importance to all this. It is she who rounds it out, if one can say such a thing. Jacob goes to her every day, but we have only come now.

Lina is eight years old, long black hair and brown eyes, just the way they should be, a strikingly beautiful child, most people say. She can look at you so that you feel like sharing your last mouthful with her, but only Jacob does that; sometimes he even gives her everything. That's because he has never had children of his own.

For two years Lina has had no parents: they went away, they got on a freight train and went away, leaving behind their only child, alone. Barely two years ago Lina's father was walking along the

street; no one had pointed out to him that he was wearing the wrong jacket, the jacket without the yellow stars. It was early autumn, and he was walking along with nothing bad in mind; they would certainly have noticed on the job, but he never got there. Halfway to work he met a patrol; one sharp look was enough, but Nuriel didn't know how to interpret it.

"Are you married?" one of the two men asked him.

"Yes," Nuriel said, never suspecting what they wanted of him with their strange question.

"Where does your wife work?"

In such and such a place, Nuriel replied. So off they went with him to the factory and hauled her out of the building. The moment she saw him with the two men she noticed the bare places on the front and back of Nuriel's jacket. She looked at him in horror, and Nuriel said to her, "I don't know what's going on either."

"Your stars," she whispered.

Nuriel looked down at his chest. Only then did he realize that this was the end, the end or shortly before it; a much lesser reason would have sufficed for the end, according to the rules of the ghetto. The men accompanied Nuriel and his wife to their home, telling them on the way what they would be allowed to take with them. Lina wasn't playing in front of the building, neither was she in the hallway; her mother had given her strict instructions to leave their room as seldom as possible. But we can't know, can we, what children get up to all day while their parents are at work: a fervent prayer that this one time she may have been disobedient. She wasn't in the room either, so she couldn't be surprised and ask what was the matter, why were Papa and Mama coming home so early, and the men would have known that Nuriel had more than a wife. They packed their few things, the two men standing beside them to make sure everything was being done correctly. Nuriel moved like a sleepwalker until his wife nudged him and told him to hurry up. Now he hurried too. He had caught her meaning: at any moment Lina might come into the room.

Going down the stairs he had seen through a landing window that Lina was playing in the yard (all this without witnesses, but perhaps that's exactly how it was and not otherwise). She was balancing on the low wall between the two yards: God knows how many times he had forbidden her to do this, but that's the way children are. A neighbor who happened to be on night shift that week met them on the stairs, and she heard Nuriel's wife telling him that he shouldn't keep looking out of the window but should watch his step or he'd fall. So he did that, he didn't fall. Without incident they emerged into the street, and since then Lina has had no parents. Shortly afterward, a new family was allocated to the Nuriels' room: at that time there was still a stream of new arrivals.

What to do with Lina became a problem: no one could take her in permanently, and not only because of insufficient space or lack of kindness. All it needed was a spot check: What is this child doing here? For weeks everyone waited for a search to be made for Lina: someone in some office somewhere, in going through some papers, could have noticed that instead of three Nuriels only two went on that transport, but nothing of the kind occurred. Eventually a few women in the building cleaned up the little attic, her bed was moved upstairs together with a chest of drawers containing her belongings — which of course were still there — and Lina lived on the top floor. Only a stove was lacking, but none could be found. During the coldest nights, when even two blankets were not enough, Jacob, who never had any children of his own, risked taking her secretly into his bed. The natural result of this was that she belongs to him more than to anyone else; she has had two years to twist him around her little finger, more than enough time.

Tonight is not a cold night, let alone the coldest; Herschel Schtamm has been sweating profusely all day. Lina will have to sleep alone. Jacob goes up to her room; he does this every evening. Lina is lying there with her eyes closed. Jacob knows quite well that she isn't asleep, and she knows quite well that he knows, which results every

evening in some new joke. He takes a paper bag from his pocket, in the bag is a carrot, which he puts down on the chest of drawers beside the bed, then he performs today's joke. He blows up the paper bag and bursts it by clapping his hands, but Lina is already laughing while her eyes are still closed: something is about to happen. So what happens is the bang. Lina sits up, gives him the kiss he has earned, and insists that she is already feeling much better. She intends to get up tomorrow, this silly old whooping cough can't last forever, but Jacob can't make that decision himself. He puts his hand on her forehead.

"Do I still have a temperature?" Lina asks.

"Maybe just a little, if my thermometer is working properly."

She picks up the carrot, asks him what that actually means, a temperature, and starts to eat.

"I'll explain that some other time," says Jacob. "Has the professor been to see you today?" No, not yet, but he said yesterday that there was some improvement, and Jacob shouldn't always put her off with "some other time": he still has to explain to her about gas masks, epidemics, balloons, martial law, she's forgotten what else, and now he also owes her about temperatures.

Jacob lets her talk; she seems quite cheerful. Perhaps he thinks a bit wistfully of the three cigarettes the carrot cost him; he must get the next one more cheaply. In the end everything turns into pure conversation, of which Lina is a master; she must have been born with that gift.

"How's work going?" she asks.

"Couldn't be better," replies Jacob. "Nice of you to ask."

"Was it also so hot where you were today? Here it was frightfully hot."

"Not too bad."

"So what did you do today? Did you ride the locomotive again?"

"What gave you that idea?"

"The other day you rode it as far as Rudpol and back again — don't you remember?"

"Oh yes, of course. But not today, the locomotive has been out of commission for the last few days."

"What's wrong with it?"

"It's lost a wheel, and there aren't any new ones."

"What a shame. How's Mischa, by the way? He hasn't been to see me for ages."

"He's very busy. But I'm glad you reminded me; he sends you his love."

"Thank you," says Lina. "Give him mine too."

"I will."

It could go on like this for hours, via twenty carrots. It doesn't matter what they chat about; they keep talking until the door opens, until Kirschbaum comes in.

If I hadn't made up my mind from the start to deal with something else, I would tell Kirschbaum's story. Maybe I will someday, the temptation is great, although we only met briefly two or three times, and he never even knew my name. I really only know him from Jacob's sparse comments; he mentioned Kirschbaum almost marginally, but he made me curious. Kirschbaum plays no major role in this particular context: the main thing is that he cured Lina. Years ago Kirschbaum was a celebrity, nothing like Rosa's father, but a genuine, bona fide celebrity heaped with honors, head of a Kraków hospital, in great demand as a heart specialist; lectures at universities all over the world, fluent in French, Spanish, and German, said to have been in intermittent correspondence with Albert Schweitzer. Anyone wanting to be cured by him had to go to a good deal of trouble; to this day he continues to exude the dignity of an eminent personage, with no effort on his part. His suits do, too: made of the best English cloth, a little worn at elbows and knees, but they're still beautifully cut; all of them dark in color as an effective contrast to his snow-white hair.

Kirschbaum has never given a thought to being a Jew; his father before him was a surgeon. What does it mean, of Jewish origin? They force you to be a Jew while you yourself have no idea what it really is.

Now he is surrounded only by Jews, for the first time in his life nothing but Jews. He has racked his brains about them, wanting to find out what it is that they all have in common, in vain. They have nothing recognizably in common, and he most certainly nothing with them.

For most of them he is something of a wizard. Kirschbaum doesn't feel comfortable with that; he'd prefer warmth to respect. He tries to adjust but goes about it awkwardly, while everyone expects something special from him, and he is so totally lacking in the humor that might help.

He comes into the attic bringing a pot of soup for Lina, his step as springy as a thirty-year-old's; the tennis club has kept him young.

"Good evening, everyone," he says.

"Good evening, Professor."

Jacob gets up from the bed, making room for Kirschbaum, who wants to listen to Lina's chest. She is already taking off her nightgown. The soup is still too hot; she is always examined first. Jacob goes to the window, which is open, a little attic window, yet from it one can see half the town. Perhaps a sunset, the buildings gray and gold, and much peace. The Russians will march along all the streets, not omitting a single one, those damned stars will be removed from the doors and leave behind light patches, like ugly pictures that have hung too long on the wall and go to their well-deserved end on the rubbish heap. At last he has, like the others, a little time for rosy thoughts, as if it were Kowalski who had reported the miracle. Somewhere down there the future lies hidden: no more great adventures; let the younger generation plunge into those. No doubt the shop will need a new coat of paint, perhaps a few new tables as well. He might even get a license to serve schnapps, something that would have been virtually impossible for him before. A place for Lina could be fixed up in the storage room; he just hopes no distant relatives will come barging in wanting to take her away. Only her parents can have her, but who knows whether they are still alive? Next year she'll start school: ridiculous, a young lady of nine in the lowest grade. The lowest grade will be full of overgrown children; perhaps someone will

come up with an idea so they won't have to waste too much time. It wouldn't be a bad idea to teach her a few things in advance, at least reading and a bit of arithmetic — why hadn't he ever thought of that before? But first she must get well.

"Well, now I can tell you," says Kirschbaum. "Things looked rather bad for this young lady. But when young ladies do as they are told it is usually possible to achieve something. We have pretty well repaired the damage. Take a deep breath and hold it!"

In the cupboard, right at the bottom, is an old book, a travel description of Africa or America that would do quite nicely for learning to read; it even has a few illustrations. Somehow the idea must be made appealing to her, for if she doesn't feel like it, you can talk until you're blue in the face. As soon as it's possible I'll adopt her, after searching for her parents first of course, without her knowing about it. They say adoption is not so simple; there are a whole lot of formalities and authorities if someone at an advanced age comes by a child. The Germans have their share of responsibility, and the Russians have theirs; who has the greater? I'll tell her that we're finished now with forever telling fairy tales, that there's more to life than princes and witches and magicians and robbers; reality looks quite different, you're old enough now, this is an *A*. She is bound to ask what that means, an *A*, she will want to know what it's for, she has a very practical mind, at her age questions are half of life. He can see difficult times ahead. As a child she is already eight years old, and as a father I am barely two.

Kirschbaum is holding the stethoscope to her chest and listening intently. Suddenly he registers mock surprise, looks at Lina with wide eyes, and asks: "Dear me, what have we here? Do I hear some whistling in there?"

Lina throws an amused glance at Jacob, who doesn't stop; he didn't realize he'd started, but now he carries on, not wanting to spoil Kirschbaum's meager joke, and Lina laughs at the silly professor who hasn't understood that the whistling comes not from her chest but from Uncle Jacob.

Why, one wonders, did anyone say that coming events cast their shadows before them? Far and wide no shadows, a few uneventful days pass, uneventful for the historian. No new decrees, nothing visibly happening, nothing you can put your finger on, nothing that would seem to indicate change. Some say they have noticed that the Germans have become more restrained; some say that, because nothing at all is happening, it is the calm before the storm. But I say the calm before the storm is a lie, that nothing at all is a lie, the storm, or part of it, is already there: the whispering in the rooms, the fears and speculations, the hopes and prayers. The great day of the prophets has arrived. When people argue, they argue about plans: mine is better than yours. They have all packed their belongings, all are aware of the inconceivable. Anyone who is not must be a hermit. Not everyone knows the source of the report, the ghetto is too big for that, but the Russians are on everybody's mind. Old debts raise their heads again, diffidently the debtors are reminded, daughters turn into brides, weddings are planned for the week before New Year's, people have gone stark staring mad, suicide figures have dropped to zero.

Anyone executed now, so shortly before the end, will have suddenly lost a future. For heaven's sake, give no cause now for Majdanek or Auschwitz (if causes can be said to have any meaning); use caution, Jews, the utmost caution, and make no thoughtless move.

Two parties soon form and divide every building — not every one is Jacob's friend — two parties without statutes but with weighty arguments and a platform and the art of persuasion. One group is feverish for news: what happened last night, how high are the losses on each side? No report is so trivial that one conclusion or another can't be drawn from it. And the others, Frankfurter's party, have heard enough; for them this radio is a source of constant danger, and it would be so easy for Jacob to put their fears to rest. I hear their misgivings at the freight yard and on the way home and in the

building. In your naïveté you'll be the death of us all, they warn; the Germans are not deaf or blind. And the ghetto regulations are not merely suggestions for good behavior; it says right there in black and white what it means to listen to a radio, as well as what happens to those who know that someone is listening and who don't report it. So calm down and wait quietly in your corner. When the Russians show up they'll show up; no amount of talking will get them here. And above all stop talking about that wretched radio, about that potential cause of a thousand deaths; the sooner it's destroyed the better.

That's the situation, so not everyone is Jacob's friend, but he is not aware of this, nor has he any way of finding out.

Those who crowd around him, those greedy for news, the hundred Kowalskis, they'll be sure not to tell him because Jacob might have second thoughts, change his mind, and suddenly decide to say nothing; they'd rather say nothing themselves. And the admonishers would be the last to tell him. They're not going to send any warning delegation to him, that would be far too risky. They give Jacob a wide berth: no one must be able to testify that they'd been seen in his company.

The earlocked Herschel Schtamm, for example, is one of the others, those who don't want to hear and see anymore and don't wish to be accessories. At the freight yard, when, our hands held to our mouths, we evaluate the latest Russian successes, fresh from Jacob's lips, he moves a few steps away, but not too far, still within earshot I'd say. As long as it's not a conversation in which he is seen to be involved: that's obviously what he is worried about. Herschel's gaze wanders aimlessly over the tracks, or lands on one of us with disapproving severity, yet it is quite possible that under the sweat-inducing fur hat he pricks up his ears like a rabbit.

The power failure that turns Jacob's radio for days into a life-threatening dust gatherer is, Herschel feels, his personal achievement. Not that he makes any such claim in public: Herschel is not given to boasting, but we heard about this from his twin brother Roman, who spends every evening and every morning in the same

room with him and every night in the same bed. He must know, after all. When we ask Herschel how he brought off such a feat — cutting off the power in several streets for several days isn't exactly child's play — a benign expression spreads over his face, almost a smile as after surviving a great ordeal, but he refuses to say a word.

And then we ask, "How was it, Roman? How did he manage it?" The last few minutes before going to bed, Roman tells us, are filled with prayer, quietly in a corner, an old habit established well before the radio. Roman waits patiently in bed until their shared blanket can be drawn over their heads. He has long ceased urging Herschel to hurry up and come to bed, having been enlightened as to the incompatibility of prayer and haste. He disregards the monotonous murmuring, the chanting; to listen would be a waste of time since Roman doesn't understand a word of Hebrew. But recently some familiar sounds have been penetrating his ear. Ever since Herschel has had concrete petitions to send up to God, no longer the usual pious stuff about protecting and making everything turn out for the best, he resorts more and more often to the vernacular. In a fragmentary way, Roman can now listen to what is preoccupying and tormenting his brother: nothing extraordinary — if he were to pray himself, he wouldn't have anything very different to say. Night after night God is informed about hunger, about the fear of deportation or being beaten by sentries, all of which cannot possibly be happening with His approval; would He please see what could be done about this, soon, if possible, it is urgent, and could He also give a sign that one has been heard? The sign is slow to appear, a test of constancy passed with flying colors by Herschel: each succeeding day has been scanned in vain for some modifying intervention. Until at last it did appear, that longed-for sign, unheralded like all divine action and so potent that any word of doubt could not but die away on the lips of even the most hardened unbeliever.

That night Herschel's topic was the radio, at present the most overriding of all worries. He explains to God in minute detail the incalculable consequences that will result if thoughtlessness and

carelessness allow the gossips to overlook a German ear and, before you know it, it's happened: the gossips are called to account, in line with the present law, together with their silent accessories. And it will be claimed that we are all accessories, that the news has not circumvented a single person, and actually they will be right. Besides, it need not even be a German ear that happens to be nearby; there are also camouflaged German ears, and only You know how many informers are at large among us. Or someone wants to save his own skin and betrays on his own initiative the existence of the radio. There are scoundrels everywhere, You know that too; without Your consent they would not be in this world. Don't permit the great disaster to overwhelm us, so close to the end, seeing that all these years You have held Your sheltering hand over us and saved us from the worst. For Your own sake, don't permit it. Don't let the Germans find out anything about the radio; You know what they are capable of. Or better still, if I may make a suggestion, destroy that cursed radio; that would be the most satisfactory solution.

At this point the lightbulb below the ceiling suddenly begins to flicker. At first Herschel ignores it, but then he looks up with wide eyes: in a flash the significance of this is revealed to him. God has granted his request, his prayers have not been in vain; at the appropriate moment He sends His sign, the acknowledgment of receipt, truly a sign that could not be more practical: this proves He is God! Without power the radio will be doomed to shut up; the more ardently Herschel prays, the more the light flickers. "Don't stop now!" Roman spurs him on, but there's no need for him to say it, Herschel knows what is at stake: advice from scoffers is not asked for when bliss beckons as a reward. Fervently he exploits his contact until the crowning success: the light finally goes out, the ultimate word has been spoken. Herschel rushes to the window and scans the other side of the street: not a single curtain shows a glimmer of light, not even in Jacob Heym's building. We have silenced you, my friend, heavenly silence will reign, take your terrible box and give it to the devil; it's of no further use to you. And don't imagine that the power,

the loss of which you innocently assume to be a breakdown, will be restored tomorrow: short circuits instigated by the Supreme Being take their time.

Proud and moderately happy, as far as circumstances permit, Herschel, his day's labors over, goes to bed and serenely accepts Roman's congratulations.

Worried faces wherever Jacob looks: What's going to happen? Here they sit, high and dry, with no idea what is going on in the outside world. These intolerable conditions are already in their third day; this is no longer a power failure, this is a natural disaster. Must we really be the victims of this catastrophe too? They had been rash enough to take the joyful reports for granted; they had become addicted to the advance of a few miles every morning, and all day long there was something to hope for and to discuss. And now this dismal silence. Our first step each morning has led us to the light switch; some of us even got up in the middle of the night. We have pressed the switch and obtained the dreaded response that for yet another day Jacob will be no wiser than we are. Only the electricity will make him all-knowing again, only the electricity that the powers of darkness have turned off, only when the lights go on again in all the rooms, only then will his light shine with a special brilliance. But when will that be?

The one person who is not affected by the new reason for anxiety is Jacob. For once, Jacob is not affected by this calamity. His connection with the outside world has not broken off; what does not exist cannot break off. The connection is as tenuous as it had ever been, only that at last he can admit this. No rhyme or reason the way Fortune chooses which pot will boil, even though it be a very modest Fortune disguised as a power failure. May it last until the first Russian faces take the sentries at the outskirts of the town by surprise. At least Jacob can breathe more freely now, can revert to being

just one among many; nobody forces him to know more than all the others, but he must keep up the pretense, a constant pretense, he must feign regret where there is none, regret over the power failure — no easy task considering his relief: You have seen, my friends, that I was doing my best; as long as it was possible I supplied you with the latest and the best. There hasn't been a day when you have been deprived of comforting reports. How I would love to go on reporting until that longed-for hour arrives, but my hands are tied, you can see for yourselves.

Next morning Kowalski has won the race again: he is hauling with Jacob, except that this time it was no longer really a race. Overnight Jacob has become just another worker, an elderly person with two undeniably weak hands that are no longer in great demand. Kowalski has paired off with Jacob more from habit, or out of friendship; in any case they are hauling together. It is a long time since things have been so quiet between them. To Jacob the crates seem a shade lighter since Kowalski and the others have stopped plying him with questions; to Kowalski no doubt heavier now that answers are no longer forthcoming. Weight, as can be seen, is not an absolute quantity. The last question was whether in Jacob's building the light — God forbid — had also failed, to which Jacob answered simply and truthfully yes. After such a long time he was quite happy to be able to speak the unadulterated truth, and since then it has been as quiet around him as around anybody else. That's how it will remain until the electricity is restored, and no one should be surprised at Jacob's composure.

When the whistle blows for soup, they sit down side by side in the sunshine. Kowalski sighs and spoons and sighs; this is not due to the soup, which tastes neither better nor worse than on any other day. Recently Jacob has learned to dread Kowalski's presence. Kowalski was the most avid among the curious, letting Jacob neither eat nor sleep and using him simply as a vehicle for his curiosity, relentlessly. But today his presence cannot alarm Jacob; questions would be a waste of words. The sun is shining, they are sitting side by side,

peacefully and silently eating, and somewhere in the distance Stalin's soldiers are approaching at an unknown speed.

"How long do you think this power failure can go on?" Kowalski asks.

"For twenty years, I hope," says Jacob.

Kowalski looks up from his bowl with an injured expression: that's no kind of answer between friends. Of course the last few days haven't been easy for Jacob, the sole connection with the outside world that everybody wanted to take advantage of, we've been assaulting and peppering you, and there's been some risk too, but can one in our situation object to that little extra effort? Who in your position would have acted otherwise? Look for him among us and you will not find him, and then in reply to our modest question we have to listen to such harsh words.

"Why are you so mean?" Kowalski asks.

"You'll never find out," says Jacob.

Kowalski shrugs and goes on eating; there's no talking to Jacob today. Maybe he's in a bad mood — as a matter of fact, there have always been days when he was strangely quarrelsome. When one came into his cheerless shop, in the old days, after entering in the best of moods and sitting down at one of the many empty tables and asking Jacob a perfectly normal question, such as "How's business?" the way anyone would, it sometimes happened that, instead of giving a normal answer, like "Business is thus and so," as might be expected from an adult person, he would snap back with "What a stupid question — can't you see for yourself?"

Not entirely by chance, Kowalski and Jacob are joined by two others. Mischa sits down beside them: he's brought along Schwoch, junior partner of Lifschitz and Schwoch, wholesale and retail stamp pads. At first Jacob assumes that they've sat down simply because there is still room here, a little unobserved spot in the sunshine, until he notices that they keep exchanging looks, Mischa's being encouraging and Schwoch's undecided. Now he realizes that it's no coincidence, some unknown factor is involved; he has learned to pay

attention to the minutest nuances. Mischa's looks mean Go ahead and say it, and Schwoch's mean No, I'd rather you said it, and when all these looks threaten to go on forever, Jacob says between two spoonfuls, "I'm listening."

"We have sort of an idea," says Schwoch.

So far so good, there's always room for a decent idea, good ideas are like air for breathing. Let's hear what you've come up with, then we'll see.

But Schwoch seems tongue-tied after his tentative opening. He looks at Mischa again, and his eyes convey, I'd rather you said it.

"The thing is this," says Mischa. "We've been thinking: if the power won't come to the radio, then the radio must go to the power."

"Is this some kind of a riddle?" Jacob asks uneasily, though there's no mystery about Mischa's words. They mean no more and no less than that somewhere in some street in this ghetto the lights are still on, he'll soon hear in which street; any normal intelligence can put two and two together.

"In Kowalski's street the power is on," says Schwoch.

These propitious words, uttered for Jacob's benefit, reach Kowalski's ears just as he is scraping out his bowl. His hands stop in midair, for a brief moment he closes his eyes, his lips whisper bitterly, may Schwoch be struck by lightning, and he moves aside. Not far, just a few symbolic inches. He hasn't heard a thing, let these madmen go on saying what they like, all this has nothing to do with him.

This minor revelation is not lost on Jacob; a pity he can't smile. There are important things to do before their break is over and Mischa and Schwoch's plan begins to circulate and is judged worthy of at least some consideration. That with Kowalski they'll find themselves up against a brick wall is as clear as day to Jacob; there's no danger from that quarter. Anyone who has lived within earshot of Kowalski all these years knows what a hero does not look like. Trimming your beard in the latest fashion and arranging your hair artistically so that people in the street turn around to look at you, these may be within his scope; but listening to broadcasts on pain of

death and passing on their contents — he's not that stupid. The problem certainly doesn't lie with Kowalski; the real worry is that someone else will be found — Kowalski's street is a long one. Someone else may come and say, Hand over the set, we'll let it play and sing and proclaim heaven on earth.

They must be totally persuaded to drop their plan if nothing is to come of it, and nothing will come of it: it must be the plan's fault, not Kowalski's. He must emerge from the affair as a perfectly honorable man; words must be found that disparage the very idea itself and prove its complete uselessness. So, let's have such proof, but where to find it in a hurry? Maybe Kowalski will come up with the right thing. For once he is Jacob's ally; they are sitting in the same uncomfortable boat. Kowalski, too, will gnaw away with all his strength at Mischa and Schwoch's idea; he'll say anything except that he is too scared. He has to be shoved into the water up to his neck, then he'll talk; all one can hope is that in this short time he will be able to grow the appropriate angel's tongue.

"Did you hear what they want you to do?" Jacob asks.

Kowalski turns his head toward Jacob, pretending that his thoughts were far away, and asks with perfect innocence, "Who, me?" And then he asks Schwoch: "What is it?"

"We're talking about the electricity," Schwoch explains patiently. "The radio might be taken to your place, mightn't it?"

Kowalski acts as if he has heard a bad joke. "To my place?"

"Yes."

"The radio?"

"Yes."

"Wonderful!"

These idiots want to kill me, he must be thinking; they want to ruin me, as if I don't have enough to worry about, and they talk about my doom as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

"How about you, Jacob? What do you say?"

"Why not?" says Jacob. "It's up to you. It's fine with me."

It only looks as if he's playing with fire; he knows exactly what to

expect from Kowalski, and besides, if Kowalski were suddenly to turn into a hero, he could always change his mind later. But it's safe to assume that won't be necessary. Kowalski is an arithmetic problem for six-year-olds.

"Don't you realize the risk you're running?" Kowalski asks, utterly astonished at such recklessness. "And what does that mean, anyway: the radio might be taken to my place? Who by? Me? You? He? Who by? Do you intend to carry the radio through the ghetto in broad daylight? Or better still, at night, after eight o'clock maybe?"

He leans back, indignant; it verges on the comical, what they're suggesting, and they claim to be intelligent people.

"They're planning on a procession! The patrols and sentries will go to bed during that time, and when it's over we'll go and wake them up and say, 'You can carry on now, the radio is safely at Kowalski's!' "

Schwoch and Mischa exchange worried looks; taken apart, their plan no longer seems quite so brilliant, and Jacob also contributes a few significant looks, serious and full of doubt. Kowalski's outburst seems to have given even him food for thought.

"Besides, there's another important point," Kowalski goes on. "By this time many people know there is a radio in the ghetto, but who has any idea that it's at Jacob's? We four here at the freight yard and maybe his neighbors. If so far nothing has gone wrong, that's to say, if so far the Germans haven't the slightest suspicion, we can assume that there are reliable people living in Jacob's building. But what makes you think it's like that in my building? I share with three men: who can guarantee that there isn't a traitor or a coward above me or beside me or below me? And that he will have nothing more urgent to do than run to the gestapo and tell them what he knows?"

A long pause, Kowalski's words are assessed and weighed, and in a low voice Schwoch says, "Shit, he's right."

Mischa shrugs, undecided, and Jacob stands up, saying, "If that's how you feel . . ."

"Why be in such a hurry and run a risk, fellows?" Kowalski says. "The power is bound to come back on again, if not tomorrow then

the day after. Then it still won't be too late for Jacob to tell us how far they've got."

By the time the Whistle summons them back to work, Mischa and Schwoch's plan is dead and buried. It has been discussed in detail, as is only proper among people endowed with intelligence; its weak points have been brought to light, and it could not withstand the light. It would have been wonderful, what a shame, but clear thinking has opened our eyes. Schwoch and Mischa put their empty bowls back on the handcart. They are almost the last; the sentry is already casting impatient and threatening looks their way.

Once again Jacob and Kowalski form a solitary pair, each relieved of an anxiety, each having survived an ordeal.

"The ideas they come up with!" says Kowalski with a grin, more to himself than to Jacob, thus closing this chapter.

Lina is standing idly in the doorway, watching Rafael and Siegfried sitting on the curb and whispering together, whispering with exaggerated caution, it seems to her. As soon as someone walks by they stop and squint innocently into the sun. Lina pricks up her ears in vain, her restraint quickly melts away, and she crosses the street to find out what the two show-offs are whispering about. She hears Siegfried maintain that there's not much time left, and Rafael says that at home they claim it can't last more than a few days.

Then she is discovered. The two boys look at her nonchalantly and wait with deadpan expressions for the interruption to end. But they can wait forever, Lina doesn't walk on; she stays where she is and smiles brightly. Until Rafael finally gets up.

"Come on. What we have to discuss is none of her business," he says.

That's just what Siegfried thinks too. Drawing himself up to his full height in front of Lina, he gives her to understand that they would beat the daylights out of her if she weren't just a runt of a girl. Lina

accepts the threat impassively, since anyway the two boys turn and disappear into their own building. Lina waits for a few moments; Jacob, who has strictly forbidden her to go into strange buildings, is far away, and Lina follows them in. Carefully sticking her head through the door to the inner courtyard, she catches sight of Siegfried and Rafael going into the shed where, in happier days, Panno the carpenter used to have his workshop; to this day it still reeks of glue. There is no glass in the window of the shed, Lina knows that without checking; she was there herself when Rafael managed to hit the last remaining pane with his first throw. So the nefarious thoughts of the two boys won't remain hidden for long, not from her. She tiptoes to the dark window and quietly crouches down on the ground. She is ready; they can fire away now.

"What we could do is blow up the military office," she hears Siegfried say.

"What if they catch us?" asks Rafael.

"Don't wet your pants. The Russians will soon be here, you heard it, too. Besides, they can't catch us if we blow them up because then they'll all be dead. Only we mustn't let them spot us first."

Siegfried has always been full of hot air; Lina could bet then and there that nothing will come of it.

"D'you think the top Russian will give us something if we bring it off?" asks greedy Rafael.

"What a stupid question. A decoration, or a real pistol, or something to eat!"

"Or all three?"

"For sure! Wouldn't that be something? And we wouldn't tell anybody at home."

For a second or two there was silence. No doubt the two idiots were imagining all the things the Russians would fish out of their overflowing pockets to reward them for their heroic deeds.

Suddenly Rafael says disconsolately, "Siegfried . . . it won't work."

"Why?"

"Where are we going to get hold of some dynamite? Even if I empty my two cartridges, that'll never be enough."

"You're right. You got any more at home?"

"No."

"Nor have we."

Lina laughs and puts her hands over her mouth, which almost lets out a shriek; it's incredible how stupid two ten-year-old boys can be.

Rafael has another idea: "You know what? We'll lock 'em up!"

"Who?"

"The gestapos, who else? We'll just lock up the military office. At night they're all asleep, and then we'll lock 'em up. The doors are at least that thick, and they put bars on all the windows themselves. . . . They'll never get out! And then when the Russkies get here we'll have them all!" Rafael is panting with excitement.

"But we don't have a key!"

"We'll find one," says Rafael confidently. "In my dad's drawer there's a ring with at least twenty keys on it. One of them is sure to fit, you'll see."

"Not bad at all," Siegfried grumbles, audibly annoyed at not having thought of this brilliant idea himself. He'd be only too glad to find fault with Rafi's plan, but there's nothing wrong with it.

Just then the door to the courtyard opens and little Mrs. Bujok appears, looking for her wayward son, but she can't see him. She sees only Lina sitting on her heels and smiling. "Have you seen Siegfried?"

Lina is startled out of her absorption; she looks up at Mrs. Bujok and regains her smile. That "runt of a girl" still echoes in her ear. She might as well make hay while the sun shines: Lina gestures with her thumb to the shed behind her. Mrs. Bujok looks menacingly at the shed, pauses for a moment to take a deep breath, then marches in. Lina hears a none-too-gentle slap, then "Ow!" and "How often do I have to tell you to stay close to my window!" and finally one more slap and "You go home too, you rascal!"

As silence settles over the yard, Lina gets up and brushes off her skirt; the performance is over. Mrs. Bujok emerges from the shed; anger has made her red in the face. Siegfried is hanging on to her with one hand while holding the other against his cheek. At least he's not howling. They quickly leave the yard; Siegfried doesn't notice Lina.

Lina also goes toward the courtyard door. She is in no hurry. She could stay, actually, but since Rafael is alone, her listening post has lost its value. He might even deign to make do with her now, but she couldn't care less about that; she no longer feels like it. Let him sit there by himself and stew over which of the twenty keys will fit; nothing's going to come of it anyway.

So she leaves, turning back once more in the doorway. Rafael is taking his time.

"You're both pretty stupid!" she shouts across the yard toward the shed, which doesn't make her exactly popular.

And the resistance, I will be asked: Where is the resistance? Could it be that the heroes are gathering in the shoe factory or in the freight yard, at least a few? Is it possible that at the ghetto's southern limits, which are the least clearly defined and hence the hardest to keep under surveillance, dark passages have been discovered through which weapons can be smuggled into the ghetto? Or are there in this wretched town only hands that do exactly what Hardtloff and his sentries demand of them?

Condemn them, go ahead and condemn us; those were the only hands there were. Not a single righteous shot was fired, law and order were strictly maintained, there was never a trace of resistance. I suppose I should say that I believe there was no resistance. I am not omniscient, but I base this assertion on what is called probability bordering on certainty. Had there been anything of the kind, I would have been bound to notice it.

I would have participated, I can swear to that; they need only

have asked me, if only for Hannah's sake. Unfortunately I am not one of those rare individuals who raises the battle cry; I cannot inspire others, but I would have participated. And not only myself: why didn't the man emerge who could cry, "Follow me!"? The last few hundred miles would not necessarily have been so long and so hard. The worst that could have happened to us would have been a meaningful death.

I can tell you that I have since read with awe about Warsaw and Buchenwald — another world, but comparable. I have read much about heroism, probably too much, I have been gripped by senseless envy, but I don't ask anyone to believe me. Be that as it may, we remained passive until the last second, and there's nothing I can do about it now. I am not unaware that an oppressed people can only be truly liberated if it contributes toward its liberation, if it goes at least a little bit of the way to meet the Messiah. We did not do this, I did not take a single step, I learned the rules by heart and adhered strictly to them, and only asked poor Jacob from time to time what new reports had come in. I will probably never come to terms with this; I haven't deserved any better. My whole thing about the trees no doubt has something to do with it; as well as my fatal sentimentality and the generosity of my tear ducts. Where I was, there was no resistance.

They say that what is good for your enemies is bad for you. I don't intend to argue about this; anyway, it only makes sense with concrete examples, such as the one I now have, but I don't want to argue about it. My example is the electric current. Jacob doesn't mind in the least doing without it; in fact he manages splendidly without it. Doing without? No one would ever have thought how good no electricity can be. Apart from the Russians and good health for Lina, there is nothing Jacob wishes for as much as no electricity. But Jacob is only one, and we are many. We want electricity. We are at the mercy of our imaginations: if not our saviors, then let it at least be electric current.

The Germans, to return to the example, also want electricity, and not only because at the military office they are ruining their eyes with candlelight. The fine-tuned plans have been thrown into disarray; not a chair, not a sideboard leaves the furniture factory, there are no pliers or hammers or screws coming out of the tool factory, no shoes, no trousers: the Jews are sitting around twiddling their thumbs. Two groups of hurriedly assembled electricians swarm out in search of the damage, double rations of bread and cigarettes, day and night they test fuses and whatever else can be tested, dig up streets, expose cables, accompanied by our good wishes. After five fruitless days Hardtloff has them shot; there is talk of sabotage, which is sheer madness. The electricians were all in one way or another Jacob's customers and had a personal interest in eliminating the problem. They are executed in the square in front of the military office. Anyone is free to watch: Let this be a warning and do what is demanded of you.

Then a German special detachment arrives on a truck, like men from Mars. Equipped like deep-sea divers, they are seen to laugh and relish their importance: We'll take care of it all right, let's see what's stumped these Jewish bunglers. Two days, and the trouble spot is exposed: a swarm of rats has been gnawing at a cable and succumbed to their greed. A new cable is lowered into the ground, and once again there are chairs, shoes, pliers, screws, Jacob's radio.

We want to know whether it is true that they intended to sell us for ransom. If so, where's the money? We want to know whether it is a fact that a Jewish state is to be founded. If so, when? If not, who is obstructing it? Above all we want to know what's taking the Russians so long. For three weeks you've been making our mouths water the way you never managed to do with your pancakes. Tell us how they are breaking through the front, what tactics they are employing, whether they are treating prisoners as prisoners or as convicts,

whether the Japanese are being a big nuisance to them in the east, whether the Americans can't at least relieve them of that burden if they aren't landing in Europe. And we also want to know what kind of a career Jan Kiepura is having, how he's getting along in America. By this time a whole lot of news must have accumulated. Fair enough, so they won't broadcast a special news summary for us, they've no idea how we've been suffering from the power failure, but there are a few things one could find out about other than the latest news. Please don't leave out anything, do you hear, nothing, please.

Jacob deserves our sympathy. He should have a well-equipped office, a headquarters with three secretaries, better still with five, a few contacts in all the important capitals who punctually and reliably relay every little detail they have managed to ferret out to headquarters, where secretaries are slaving away at sorting the details, scanning all the leading newspapers, listening to all the radio stations, and extracting from all this a summary that they submit to Jacob as the person ultimately responsible. Only then could he truthfully answer roughly a third of the questions — to the extent that newspapers and radio stations and contacts are to be trusted.

A newspaper is tucked into the Whistle's pocket. The Whistle emerges from the redbrick building and, dragging his wooden leg, walks past the freight cars and right through all the Jews, who are not even aware of what is limping past them. Why care about newspapers? We have Jacob. Only Jacob sees and cares, the magnifying glass in his eye is glued to the precious object in the railway man's pocket, some pieces of paper containing truthful or fabricated reports of actual events — at any rate, infinitely more valuable than a nonexistent radio. Respite for his exhausted powers of invention, if he could bring off a bold exchange of ownership.

Beyond the last track the Whistle reaches his goal, a wooden outhouse for Germans only: it says so on the door, right under the

little heart-shaped opening they carved into it, as is the custom in their own country, I imagine.

Jacob refuses to be distracted by his job with Kowalski and keeps one eye firmly on the outhouse. If the newspaper is intact so far, as appears to be the case, and the railway man is not too wasteful, there should be some left over. If the railway man isn't stingy, he should leave some of it behind. He mustn't be wasteful, he mustn't be stingy, there's no way of knowing one way or the other; when Jacob gets a chance, he will go and take what's left. Yet whatever the chance, it would inevitably mean risking his life. What business has a Jew using a German outhouse? For you, my brothers, I'll risk life and limb. I don't intend to steal potatoes like Mischa, who is a more practical type and thinks realistically; if all goes well I'll carry off a few ounces of news and turn them into a ton of hope for you. If my mother had endowed me with a smarter brain, gifted with as much imagination as Sholem Aleichem — what am I saying, half that much would be enough — I wouldn't need to resort to such petty theft. I could dream up ten times as much as they can write in their newspapers, and better too. But I can't, I can't, I am so empty it almost frightens me. I'll do it for you, my brothers, for you and for myself; I'll do it for myself too, for one thing is certain: I can't survive as an individual, only together with you. That's what a liar looks like from behind. I'll go into their outhouse and take what's left, hoping there is something left.

At last the Whistle emerges into God's sunshine, takes a few deep breaths, and lights a cigarette, for which in that wind he needs four matches. He takes enough time for Jacob to want to throttle him, but the pocket, the all-important pocket, is empty. What were newspapers like in the old days? Ours usually had eight pages, four sheets; let's assume his also had four, that's a reasonable assumption. You tear one sheet in half, then once again, then a third time, that means per page — let's see — eight small pieces per page. You can also tear it four times, but then the pieces turn out rather small, so let's stay with three times; after all, he has plenty of paper. Four sheets times eight,

that makes thirty-two pieces, no healthy person needs that many; you tear up only one page and put the others aside for reading. But even if he has torn them all up, there's bound to be something left over, unless in his ignorance he has tossed the remainder down the hole.

"What do you keep mumbling about?" Kowalski asks.

"Me, mumbling?" says Jacob.

"All the time. Four and sixteen should make so-and-so much — what are you figuring out?"

The Whistle at last disappears into the brick building. Jacob looks at the sentries: one is standing by the gate, looking bored; another is sitting on the footboard of a freight car, reassuringly far away; the third is nowhere in sight, presumably he's inside the building or hiding somewhere in order to take a nap since nothing ever happens. And there are no more than three.

"Go on working and don't turn around to look at me," Jacob says.

"Why?" asks Kowalski. "What's going on?"

"I'm going to use their outhouse."

Kowalski, astonishment in his face, stops working: Next thing you know, this lunatic will be going into the redbrick building for schnapps and tobacco, trying to borrow money from a sentry, and they'll put him up against the wall for that just as they will for what he's about to do now.

"Are you crazy? Can't you wait till soup time and then go behind the fence?"

"No, I can't."

Jacob ducks and runs off like a professional; the stacked crates shield him almost all the way from eyes in the brick building, except for the last few feet, but they're part of it and he manages them too. Jacob closes the outhouse door behind him. Not a word about the smell or the graffiti on the walls: beside the hole lies the rich booty. But first a glance out through the little heart: no one has noticed anything; in the freight yard framed by a heart everything looks

normal. The booty consists of the expected remainder, the German has not been wasteful, there are a good number of neatly torn squares of paper, as if cut with a knife, and under the squares a double sheet, intact. Jacob stuffs the squares under his shirt, as flat as he can so they won't rustle while he is working, better on his back than on his stomach. The double page is worth nothing, or rather, it *is* worth something: four pages, filled from top to bottom with death notices bordered in black, gratifying in one way but short on information. Killed in action . . . killed in action . . . We'll leave those behind, we don't want to carry around any ballast; they're not hard to memorize, four pages of the dead, let the next visitor enjoy them too. But we'd better not linger, as if we were in our own outhouse, we won't risk spending too much time in here, we want to return to work, we're impatient to get it over with. Then we'll go to our unobserved room, free our back of its burden, and play our new radio. And tomorrow you can come again and ask as long as the supply lasts.

Jacob looks outside once more to see whether the coast is clear. It's not clear at all, far from it, the way back is strewn with mines: a soldier is walking toward the outhouse, purposefully one might say. His fingers are already fumbling with his belt buckle; in his mind's eye he is already sitting down and feeling better. It's too late for anyone to leave the outhouse without his noticing. What do you do now? Jacob's knees remind him emphatically that he is no longer young, no matter how speedily he covered the ground to get here; one always finds this out too late. The door can't be fastened, some idiot has ripped off the loop for the hook; if you try to keep it closed, one shove of the shoulder and the man will be inside and gape and do God knows what to you. Theoretically we should keep a cool head, remain calm, the advantage of surprise is on our side, and he still has eight whole steps to go. The planks of the back wall will take at least five minutes and make far too much noise, five steps to go, and all that's left for you is the little oval hole, down into their crap. To which you can't bring yourself, though you're skinny enough.

The soldier opens the door, which offers no resistance; to his

dismay he sees before him an opened double sheet of newspaper, trembling moderately, although at such an embarrassing moment this doesn't particularly strike him.

"Oh, excuse me!" he says, quickly closing the door, without having seen the disintegrating Jewish shoes beneath the newspaper or the want of a display of lowered trousers that would have rounded out the picture, a maneuver, however, for which the head had been not cool enough and the time too short. Perhaps just as well, too much camouflage can be damaging too, the main things being that the soldier has shut the door devoid of any suspicion: he prepares for a brief wait, his belt is already looped over his arm, and he walks up and down, that being less uncomfortable than standing.

For how long a wait should Jacob prepare? Over the edge of the newspaper and through the little heart he sees the gray uniform walking up and down. The only thing that can help now is a miracle, any old miracle will do, no need to cudgel the brain; true miracles are not calculable. There are at most two more minutes for the unexpected to materialize, and if it fails to do so, and there's no reason to expect otherwise, then the proverbial last hour will look this ridiculous.

"Hurry up, comrade. I've got the trots," he hears the soldier pleading.

The squares of paper on his back are beginning to stick; they will have to be dried before use, if by some miracle everything turns out well. And Jacob tells me that suddenly he is tired, suddenly fear and hope slip away, everything becomes strangely heavy and light at the same time, his legs, his eyelids, his hands, from which the four pages of heroes fallen for the Fatherland slide to the ground.

"Did you hear that Marotzke's got another furlough? Smells fishy to me! He must know some people right at the top, eh? He's always going off, while guys like us have to wait and wait and hang around with these garlic eaters."

My God, garlic, if a fellow could have just one clove, spread very thin on warm bread. You idiot, you think some Schulz or Müller is in

the outhouse, someone who's no friend of Marotzke's, which is true enough, in a way, whoever Marotzke is. Jacob leans back against the back wall and closes his eyes; if they expect some heroic resistance from him, they can wait a long time, he is beyond that. It's up to the comrade outside; he has to keep the action going. He's welcome to leave or stay. Tormented by stomach cramps he can fling open the door, gasp, and shoot; the man he hits will not be taken by surprise. What follows is his business.

Who could possibly suspect that the miracle is already in the works, the rough outline already designed? There is still Kowalski, Kowalski with two horrified eyes in his head, he knows what's going on, he's aware of the situation. He sees the soldier in dire need and the door still presenting a barrier; he knows who's inside and can't be set free without his help, assuming he hasn't already died of fear. Salvation lies in distracting the German, not merely by throwing a pebble against the wall to make him turn around to see who threw it: something has to happen that requires his immediate intervention. The first thing that comes to mind is the stack of crates, some six feet high and rather wobbly. If two crates are pulled out from below, the stack will cease to stand there all proud and ready for transport, its balance will be destroyed, and that could provide a fine distraction. But what will happen to the numskull who is responsible for such clumsiness, what will happen to Jacob if there is no clumsy oaf far and wide, what are forty years of friendship worth? Calculations facing Kowalski.

Jacob hears a low rumbling in the distance, the ears can't be closed as the eyes can, then he hears military boots hurrying away. Reason enough to open the eyes wide again: that's exactly what a miracle sounds like. Arms and legs reassuringly regain their former weight; things are on the move again. The glance through the heart tells him that the coast looks clear; the Jews visible through the opening in the door have paused in their work and are all staring in one direction, toward the spot where the miracle is presumably happening.

Kowalski has successfully penetrated the stack of crates. His strength was only just sufficient, and one crate fell on his head. The soldier rushes blindly from the outhouse into the trap and flings himself upon the bait, Kowalski. It may be said that rarely has sleight of hand been more successfully performed. Although the blows find their mark — the crate falling on his head was nothing in comparison — Kowalski merely whimpers as he tries to protect his face with his hands and apologizes profusely for his unforgivable blunder.

The rest of us stand as if rooted to the spot and grind our teeth; one man beside me claims he saw Kowalski toppling the stack deliberately. The soldier goes on punching and beating, Marotzke has been granted a furlough again and he hasn't; maybe he is genuinely outraged over such clumsiness, but suddenly he stops in the midst of his task. Something is moving inside him, not pity and not exhaustion: it is his diarrhea demanding its rights, as is plain for all to see. He grimaces and runs in long strides to the outhouse that has meanwhile been vacated for his benefit, or rather, first he calls out: "I want to see it all stacked up again when I come out, got it?" Only then does he perform his long leaps, which, in spite of everything, look very comical. The matter permits no delay: now he would insist that any newspaper reader vacate the position, immediately, instantly, otherwise there'll be a minor disaster. But he can save himself the trouble: he flings open the door onto an empty latrine. The minor disaster was prevented in the very nick of time.

Not one of us looking on dares help Kowalski or comfort him. The place is for work, not for comforting. He wipes the blood from his face and tests his teeth, which are still there except for one; all things considered, it could have turned out considerably worse. The pain will pass, Jacob has been preserved for us, after the war we'll present him with his own private outhouse where he can sit for hours to his heart's content and think about his good friend Kowalski. The man so miraculously rescued comes around what remains of the stack of crates, behind Kowalski, who is still feeling himself all over. Jacob

plucks up the courage to face him, for Kowalski must not find out the true reason for the daring expedition. He of all people; he has deserved not to be bothered with this reason; for him it must remain an inexplicable whim of Jacob's, a whim that came within a hair of costing him his life.

"Thank you," Jacob says in an emotional voice. *Emotional* is the right word, emotional for the first time in forty years; you don't have your life saved every day, and then by someone you have known for such a long time and of whom, to be quite honest, you wouldn't have expected it.

Kowalski doesn't deign to glance at him; getting up with a groan he sets to work on the crates, which had better be stacked up before the soldier returns from his urgent business and checks to see how much his word is worth here. They could all still be standing in neat rows, like the few teeth in Kowalski's mouth, if Jacob were a normal person, if he hadn't yielded so irresponsibly to some wondrous yearning for which others must pay bitterly.

Jacob makes his hands fly: one crate by Kowalski is matched by three of his, which in Kowalski's case is due partly to the question of guilt, partly to fury, and no doubt also to pain. "Did you at least have a good shit?" Kowalski inquires, making an effort not to shout. "Have a look at my face, have a good look. I bet it's quite a sight! It wasn't him, it was you! But why am I getting excited? The main thing is you had a high-class shit, that's all that matters. There's just one thing I'll swear, Heym: just try that again! Go ahead, try it, then you'll find out who helps you!"

Jacob takes shelter behind his work; Kowalski is right, of course, from his point of view. The words that would calm him down Jacob mustn't say, and any others would lead to a new outburst. Later, Kowalski, when all this is behind us, when we two are sitting quietly over a glass of schnapps, when the pancakes are sizzling in the pan, then I'll tell you everything. At our leisure, Kowalski, you'll hear the whole truth; we'll laugh and shake our heads to think how crazy the times once were. You'll ask why I didn't tell you right away, tell you, at least, my best friend, and I'll answer that I couldn't because you would have told all the others, and they would have taken me for one of those thousands of liars and rumormongers and would have been without hope again. And then you'll put your hand on my arm, because maybe you'll have understood, and you'll say, "Come, Jacob my friend, let's have another vodka."

When, after quite some time, the outhouse door opens again, the stack of crates rears up proudly, as if no one had ever brought about its collapse. The soldier strolls over, his hands clasped behind his back, uniform all adjusted; he has been expected. Not exactly with longing, merely to have the matter finally over and done with. But the way he approaches and then stops and holds his head, his whole manner, is enough to make one uneasy, for he looks more benign than critical. Somehow he is looking at the world with different eyes; how a few good minutes can change a person. The crates, he's completely forgotten about the crates, he has eyes only for Kowalski's swollen face, which for the time being is red but on which one can already divine blue and green and purple, and the soldier looks concerned. If Jacob can trust his eyes, he looks concerned. What's one to make of that? Without a word he turns around and walks away. Jacob is thinking, Lucky he didn't discover his soft heart until now and wasn't a good person from the beginning or he would never have dashed away from the outhouse door; he would have stayed there and very soon his goodness of heart would have undergone much too severe a test.

In passing, the comrade drops two cigarettes, Junos, without tips. He drops them either by mistake or on purpose, a question that will never be resolved, any more than his motives, assuming it was deliberate. Anyway the cigarettes belong to Kowalski; he has paid for them, after all.

A few minutes later the Whistle emerges from the brick building and trills for the midday break: the railway man whom up to this hour none of us has heard say a word, but who nevertheless is the most informative among our Germans because he left behind a

halfway useful radio. It all started with the Whistle today, and he suspects nothing, whistles as usual for soup time, and has no way of knowing how shamelessly his forgetfulness, or whatever it had been, was exploited. Only Jacob knows, reminded by the little squares of paper under his shirt, and the double page that meanwhile has suffered an uncertain fate and shouldn't really have been left behind unused.

"By the way, did I tell you that the Germans are suffering huge losses?" Jacob asks.

They are already lining up; Kowalski turns around to him, and in the midst of his bruises, a hint of a grateful smile — grateful in spite of everything — blooms fleetingly.

The radio turns out to be not particularly fruitful. Jacob arranges the squares side by side on his table, nine of them altogether, and Piwowa and Rosenblatt refrain from disturbing him. Today they are what they are, long since dead, due to cat meat and a guard; today they don't interfere in Jacob's business, for he has to concentrate on his game of patience.

The name of the newspaper appears nowhere, nor does the date; blind chance has seen to that. The nine squares of newspaper yield not a single coherent page, the Whistle having picked up squares at random, which means extra work for Jacob. He tries this way and that but can find scarcely two scraps that fit together. At the end of all his effort he is faced with two extremely patchy pages, the gaps revealing the color of the tablecloth: two pages that look as if a circumspect censor had cut out everything worth knowing and taken care that only items of no consequence find their way into the hands of unauthorized persons. The sports section, for instance, has been perfectly preserved: how happy the Jews will be that the Luftwaffe boxing team has defeated a Navy team ten to six. Or that once again the Berlin soccer team, as so often in the past, didn't have a chance

against the Hamburg eleven. Then the uncommunicative page divulges the earth-shattering news that a *Gauleiter* whose name has been torn off has made some favorable comments about an art exhibition somewhere, that His Excellency the Spanish ambassador would like to see a further expansion of mutual friendly relations, and that, in a people's court trial of two agents in the pay of Jewish world capitalism, justice has prevailed.

You sit there looking disappointed; you hadn't ever expected much — a little favorable wind for your poor brain, the occasional hidden allusion from which with a bit of skill a feast could be prepared — but you hadn't counted on quite so little. Not a word about Bezanika, through which the Russians must long since have advanced; not so much as a hint that the Germans are encountering difficulties. Instead, those nitwits are playing soccer and putting on exhibitions and meting out justice.

Let us at least try to be fair and admit the possibility the newspaper is old or that the best part of it was used by the Whistle, but still, one way or another, it was idiotic to have had such high hopes. Anyone who gave it a mere five seconds' thought would have known what to expect. We all know what kind of newspapers those people can produce; years ago there was a German paper in our area, the *Völkischer Kurier*, and don't ask me what that was worth. No one ever bought it. Throwing away money is a sin, but sometimes you did run across it, whether you wanted to or not. At the market they wrapped fish in it, at the dentist's there was a copy in the waiting room, and at the insurance office as well, of course, and occasionally at Kowalski's barbershop, because he wanted to make a cosmopolitan impression. He was told; Kowalski, we told him, if you leave that filthy rag lying around any longer, you'll ruin your business. Or do you really think some German customer will happen to stray into your place so that your Yiddish fingers can fiddle around with his Kaiser Wilhelm mustache? That's none of your business, Kowalski replied in an offended tone. Do I tell you how much sawdust to mix into your potato pancakes? That's how Kowalski was, and may my

hands fall off right here and now if this slander is true. Anyway, a glance at the *Kurier* was enough to show what kind of rag it was. The Germans were constantly feeling threatened and humiliated and discriminated against by God and the world; according to them, it wasn't they who humiliated us, but we them. The question of how long Germany was to go on suffering from the shameful consequences of the last war obsessed them in every issue, three times a week. And on the last page, alongside the picture puzzle, there were poems so unintelligible that you almost thought you had forgotten their language.

Only the classified advertisements weren't so bad; they had a certain flair for that section. Every other Wednesday or Tuesday the two middle pages were closely printed with classified ads, and if you needed something that was hard or impossible to find on the market, say a few nice-looking chairs with woven rattan seats, perhaps, or a modern standard lamp or a sizable lot of plates because dishes never lasted long in the shop, then a glance at the *Kurier* wouldn't do any harm. Of course, it was essential to pay attention to the name of the person offering the goods. If it was Hagedorn or Leineweber, you didn't even bother to go; if it was Skrzypczak or Bartosiewicz, you went with great reluctance; and if it was Silberstreif, you simply went. For when it came to advertising, the *Kurier* people weren't choosy. They took from anyone; what counted was the ability to pay. But, as I said, that was only the classified section, every other Wednesday or Tuesday; the rest was sheer unadulterated rubbish.

All this might have been remembered in time to avoid sticking one's head in the noose, to no avail, and only getting it out again through a miracle wrought by a friend. That's how they used to produce newspapers, and that's how they produce newspapers to this day; so far nobody has shown them a better way. Only the talent for successful classified sections has apparently stayed with them, and the four abandoned pages filled with death notices would seem to indicate that there are still people on the job who know their business.

Jacob turns over each square, one by one, all is not yet lost; there is still an unread reverse side that has as many gaps as the front but may tell us a little more. There is an item about a hero such as only our nation can produce, a pilot with a French name who shoots down enemy planes like sparrows out of the African sky. The Führer has replied to a message from the Duce, and in Munich a truck collided with a streetcar, causing a traffic jam for several hours. A cartoon. A man holding a lighted match over a sandwich. Question: What does this mean? Answer: Sandwich under fire. And a fat headline claiming, Victories on All Fronts! One can believe it or not, we'd rather not, the lower half is missing. As a claim it hangs in the air, so to speak, and we know they have been trying to tell us that they were already not far from Moscow. It was the Germans who claimed that, not us, but we heard with our own ears that there is fighting near Bezanika. There's quite some distance between the two; if that's what a victory looks like, you're welcome to hundreds more of the same.

That's all very well; Jacob can figure out for himself that they tell a few fibs, but how is he to answer the questions that will rain down upon him first thing tomorrow morning? His notion of what it would be like, he told me with a sigh, had been far too naive: one reads their slanted reports, he had thought, sees through them with no effort, or very little effort, simply turns everything around, and right away one's mouth is bursting with news ready to be released at the appropriate time. But now try just turning things around. The Luftwaffe boxers didn't win against the Navy, they lost; the *Gauleiter* with the torn-off name declared the art exhibition to have been atrocious; the German hero didn't shoot down a single plane in Africa; the streetcar in Munich skillfully avoided the truck; and the Führer didn't reply to the Duce's message because he never received one. I tell you, nothing but rubbish. Perhaps I can make something out of the cartoon, I think; Sandwich under fire means they're firing at Sandwich, and Sandwich, if I'm not mistaken, is a town in England, and if they're firing at England, then England will be firing back, which seems

reasonable. Wonderful, they'll tell me tomorrow morning, so England is defending itself, but England is far away, and what about us? Perhaps I could turn the victories on all fronts into defeats, but what do I know about fronts, where they are or how many there are? Defeats must be substantiated with details, and I don't know any. What would you have done in my place?

Jacob comes to a crucial decision. The power failure was a divine respite, the only drawback being that we had no influence on its duration. We'll gain another respite for ourselves, but without the drawback, because the interruption we have in mind has no end. When they ask us, What's the latest, Jacob, our shoulders will droop and we'll put on our saddest expression and whisper in a despairing voice: Just imagine, Jews, last night I sit down with expectant ears at my set and turn the knob, like I always do, but not a sound! Not one! Yesterday it was still singing like a little bird, and today not a murmur. It's no use wringing our hands, Jews. You know how temperamental a radio can be, and now it's dead.

The radio is dead. Jacob scrunches up the squares of newspaper, all nine of them, into a little heap; he is able to contain his annoyance at not having had this brilliant idea earlier. It is far surpassed by the joy of discovery: if the toilet paper had been of no other use than to enlighten him, then, in spite of everything, it was worthwhile, then the price paid by Kowalski was not too high. No longer will he be lying night after night with wide-open eyes, racking his brain over what lies to tell them next morning. Now he can spend night after night with wide-open ears, listening, like everybody else, for whether the longed-for distant rumble of cannon has finally broken its silence. The radio is dead, the scraps of newspaper are tossed into the stove, Jacob will set a match to them when it becomes necessary to heat the room, the lid is firmly closed.

Just in time, for in his haste Jacob has forgotten to lock his door: it opens, and a smiling Lina enters without knocking.

"Did you forget about me today?" she asks.

"Of course not," says Jacob, giving her a kiss, and at least now he

locks the door. "I was just about to come up to see you, but I had something to do first."

"What was that?"

"Nothing you need to know about. Have you had your supper?"

"Yes, what you put out for me."

Lina looks around the room, not in search of anything special but just to make sure everything is tidy and not dusty. She draws her finger across the cupboard, inspects it; the result is not that fantastic.

"I'll tidy up your room tomorrow," she says. "I don't feel like it today."

"No, you won't," Jacob says sternly. "The professor said you weren't supposed to move around too much yet."

Lina doesn't reply. With a smile she sits down at the table; Jacob knows as well as she does that she is going to tidy his room. For some time it has been quite clear who sets the tone here; it's no longer a subject of discussion. Jacob's job is to provide the food and clothing and in winter the heating; she is responsible for everything else, even though occasionally he still makes a bit of a fuss. She hasn't come into the room to argue about matters long since settled, or out of fear he might have forgotten her; she knew he wouldn't. The reason for her coming goes back a few days, when she heard much and understood little; there was something that was rather unclear to her.

"Have you heard what they're all talking about?" Lina asks.

"About what?"

"That the Russians will be here soon?"

"You don't say!"

Jacob goes to the cupboard, takes out his weekly bread ration, breaks off enough for his supper, and starts eating.

"Who's talking about that?"

"Oh, Siegfried and Rafael and Mrs. Sonschein and Mrs. London — everybody. Haven't you heard anything?"

"No."

Jacob sits down opposite her, sees the disappointment in her

face; she had hoped for enlightenment, and he knows nothing. He divides his bread and holds out one half of it to Lina as compensation. She accepts it, even starts eating, but the bread is not nearly as good as his lack of knowledge is bad.

"Or rather, I did hear something," says Jacob. "But nothing definite. What's so important about it?"

Her eyes gradually grow resentful; how stupid does he think she is, as if she were a baby, she who takes care of all the housework. Everybody is talking about something tremendous, and what's so important about it?

"What's it going to be like when the Russkies are here?"

"How should I know?" says Jacob.

"Better or worse?"

Jacob is ready to groan. You've managed to escape the hyenas at the freight yard for today, even forever if the idea of the broken-down radio stands the test. But already you have to look for some other means of escape, for within your own four walls a new tormentor is taking shape — albeit a much-loved one, but she can ask more questions than you have hairs on your head. Or you don't look for an escape, you submit to your fate: a child of less than nine, surely you can cope with her. You'll tell her, as best you can, something about the world of tomorrow, after all that interests you too, and to have a rough idea of what is in store for her certainly won't do her any harm.

"Will it be better or worse?"

"Better, of course," says Jacob.

"But how better? What will be different?"

"We won't have to wear stars anymore. Lina can wear whatever she likes, and no one will stop her in the street and ask where she has left her yellow star."

"Is that all?"

"Of course not. You'll get enough to eat. . . ."

"As much as I like?"

"As much as you like. Just imagine: there's all kinds of food on the table, you take whatever you happen to fancy, and when you can't eat any more the table is cleared, and at the next meal it's all there again."

"You're pulling my leg," she says, because it would be quite nice if he confirmed it to her all over again.

"That's the solemn truth. And you'll have pretty dresses, we'll go shopping together, and —"

"Wait a minute. What kind of food will there be on the table?"

"Whatever you like best. Pâté with butter and challah and hard-boiled eggs and fish. You can choose."

"Will you be making potato pancakes again?"

"I certainly will."

"In your shop?"

"In my shop."

"You haven't forgotten your promise, have you? That I'll be allowed to help you in the shop?"

"Of course not."

"You'll stand behind the counter making the pancakes, and it'll be my job to take them to the customers, in my white apron. And in the summer I'll serve them ice cream."

"That's how it'll be."

"I can hardly wait!"

Lina can hardly wait, and whenever she is in that mood she hunches her shoulders up to her ears. At last Jacob can get on with his supper, starting with the dry bread, until after some thought she frowns because she has suddenly foreseen a snag.

"But what's going to happen about school? You've also told me that later on I'll have to go to school. And if that's true, I won't have any time for the shop, will I?"

"School is more important," Jacob decides. "While you're there I'll be able to handle the customers by myself. After school you can come and help me, if you still feel like it."

"But I'd rather help right away!"

"What have you got against school, anyway? Has some idiot been telling you bad things about it?"

She shakes her head.

"There you are then. School is a wonderful, wonderful place, where all kinds of stupid kids go in and all kinds of clever kids come out. But if you think I like you better stupid . . ."

"Will Siegfried and Rafael have to go to school too?"

"Of course."

After this reassurance there is a knock at the door. Lina jumps up to run to the door and unlock it, but Jacob holds her back and places his finger on his lips. A knock is always suspicious; not every suspicion is confirmed. It might be Kirschbaum, for instance, come to discuss Lina's recovery, or his neighbor Horowitz to borrow a spoonful of malt coffee till the next distribution, word of honor. It may be quite an ordinary knock, we'll soon find out, but even so there's no need for Lina to be seen; she's nobody else's business. Jacob puts his arm around her shoulders, draws her to the window, points behind the bed.

"Hide behind there," he whispers. "Don't move till I tell you. Right?"

Right. Lina crouches down and doesn't move, and Jacob opens the door. Who should be outside but Kowalski, standing there with his swollen face, trying to smile.

"Can't get rid of me, can you!"

Jacob would gladly dispatch him right there at the door; tell me quickly what's up and then good-bye. But Kowalski clearly gives the impression of having all the time in the world. Walking past Jacob, who is still holding the door handle, he sits down at the table and says: "Aren't you going to close the door?"

Jacob closes the door rather loudly; Lina, as ordered, makes no sound. He has no choice but to sit down on the other chair, and he tries hard to look pressed for time.

"I see you're just having supper," Kowalski observes. "I hope I'm not disturbing you?"

"Aren't you ever going to tell me why you're here?"

"Is that the way to treat a guest?" Kowalski asks amiably.

"No, it isn't. I'll rush down and bring up some wine from the cellar!"

"Why so impatient? That always was your problem, Jacob. You weren't pleasant enough with your customers, they often used to tell me as much while I was cutting their hair. That's why you were getting fewer and fewer customers."

"Thanks for the advice. But did you come here to tell me that?"

From behind the bed comes a soundless giggle, audible only to someone who knows there is another person in the room.

"Believe it or not, I've nothing special in mind. At home the walls are closing in on me; a man can't spend evening after evening in the same room. I'll go and have a chat with Jacob, I thought, he'll be in the same boat, I thought, he'll be glad. In the old days people used to meet after work, didn't they? Everybody found that quite normal. Shouldn't we gradually start getting used to something normal again?"

Before Jacob can reply that the old days were the old days and today is today, and that he wants to be left in peace and to go to bed because the work at the freight yard is getting to be too much for him, Kowalski digs into his pocket, brings out the two cigarettes, and puts them on the table, one in front of himself and one in front of Jacob, and thus momentarily silences him.

"That's very kind of you," says Jacob. Kowalski may believe that Jacob is referring to the visit, but Jacob is looking at the cigarettes; perhaps he actually means both.

"Besides, you've told me very little today," Kowalski says after a suitable pause. "The news about the losses was pretty encouraging, but you can imagine that other things interest me just as much. And there hasn't been a word about those today."

"For crying out loud, Kowalski, why do you keep badgering me? Aren't things difficult enough? Do you have to keep harping on that? I can't take it anymore! When I know something I'll tell you, but surely in my own room at least you can leave me in peace!"

Kowalski nods a few times thoughtfully, rolling his cigarette

between his fingers, and pushes out his lower lip, the swollen one. He has come with a suspicion that seems to contain some truth. "You know, Jacob," he says, "I've noticed that you always get impatient with me. You even lose your temper when I ask you for news. You never volunteer anything, so I have to ask, and the moment I do, you get furious. I simply don't understand it. I can't see any logic in it. Imagine if it was the other way around, Jacob, if I had the radio and you didn't. Wouldn't you also be asking me then?"

"Are you mad? In front of the child!"

Jacob jumps from his chair and turns toward the window. Lina has been crouching and listening long enough, and, as agreed, she emerges from her uncomfortable hiding place; after all, in a way he did call her. She is grinning from ear to ear.

"Good God!" stammers Kowalski in a shocked voice as he claps his hands together. But no one pays any attention to him; this is a matter between Jacob and Lina. They exchange glances, Lina winks: Now you're in trouble, I bet you weren't counting on that! Jacob abandons his faint hope that she might not have heard anything, children are often God knows where with their thoughts, or that at least she hadn't understood; she is a wide-awake young rascal, she winks, and everything is crystal clear. It'll take him a good while to think his way out of this one, every day a fresh disaster, once again he can forget about listening for the rumble of cannon in the night. But night has yet to come, and Lina is still standing there, enjoying the little triumph which that fool of a Kowalski has so unthinkingly handed her. Jacob can't take root and sweat blood and water forever; he has to give some kind of sign of life.

"Run upstairs now, Lina. I'll be up to see you later," says Jacob wearily.

First, though, she goes over to him and pulls down his head. Jacob thinks this is for the kiss that is part of even the briefest separation. But he can think what he likes, Lina's mind is not on kissing, not now; she pulls down his head because his ears are

attached to it, and into one of them she whispers, "So they've all heard it from you! You were pulling my leg!"

Then she is out of the room, Jacob and Kowalski are again seated at the table, Kowalski expecting a flood of reproaches while feeling completely innocent. For nothing would have happened if Jacob hadn't hidden his child from him, from his best friend. And if he did have to hide her because he couldn't be sure who was knocking at the door, he should have let her out when he saw who it was. But no, he leaves her there in her corner, probably he's forgotten her. I ask you, how can anybody forget a child? No one's clairvoyant, after all, and now he's angry and about to let loose his accusations.

"A fine job you've made of it! It's not enough that the whole ghetto is yacking about it, now she knows about it too!" Jacob does in fact say.

"I'm sorry, but there was no way I could have seen her. With this eye . . ."

Kowalski points to his eyes: Jacob can take his pick, both are orientally narrow, impressively framed in dark blue. Yes, Kowalski is pointing to his eyes, a discreet reminder of this morning's lifesaving operation, no need to press the point; if reproaches are in order here, the question is by whom to whom. Or we can both be a bit generous and forget about what happened; it's all water under the bridge anyway. And the ploy is successful; the eyes are superbly effective. Instantly the mood at the table changes, becomes a few degrees warmer, instantly Jacob responds to the demand made on his pity; he shifts a little closer and looks with new eyes at the damage he has caused.

"Doesn't look too good."

Kowalski makes a dismissive gesture: it'll soon heal up; if Jacob wants to be conciliatory, Kowalski won't be petty either, he's in a generous mood. There lie the cigarettes, still cold, but Kowalski has thought of everything, even matches. As a final surprise he takes some out of his pocket and lights one on the worn striking surface: now the time has come for a smoke, brother. Come on, lean back and

close your eyes, let's not spoil the pleasure by talking, let's take a few puffs and dream of old times, which will soon be back again. Come on, let's think of Chaim Balabusne with his thick steel-rimmed glasses and the tiny shop where we always bought our cigarettes, or rather the tobacco to roll our own. His shop was closer to yours than mine was, and closer to mine than yours was, it was between our two shops, yet we never became real friends with him, but that was his fault. Because he wasn't interested in pancakes and ice cream, or in a haircut or a shave. Many people said he let his red hair grow so long out of religious piety, but I know better; it was out of stinginess, nothing else. Ah well, never mind, better not speak ill of the dead. Balabusne always had a good selection — cigars, pipes, cigarette cases with little flowers, gold-tipped cigarettes for the rich — always tried to persuade us to take a more expensive brand, but we stuck with Excelsior. And the stand with the little gas flame and the cigar cutter on the counter, the brass stand he was always polishing when you went into his shop, it's that brass stand you always remember when you think of the old days, though we only bought tobacco from him once a week at most and never used the stand.

"Are you thinking about Chaim Balabusne too?"

"Why bring up Chaim Balabusne all of a sudden?"

"No special reason. Maybe the smoking."

"I'm not thinking of anything."

The last pull, one more would burn the lips. The smoke has tickled the lungs gloriously and made them a little woozy, like after a few little glasses too many; the world is circling leisurely, but they are firmly seated, hands on the table. A bit of sighing, a bit of groaning, the smoke is still floating around the room. "And now let's get to the point, Jacob," says Kowalski. "How do things look out there? What's the news about the Russians?"

Jacob remains calm. It was only a matter of time anyway before Kowalski brought up the real reason for his visit; the cigarette couldn't deceive anyone. Now there's no Lina hiding in the background, now it's possible to speak freely, I've already concocted an

answer for you and your kind, brace yourself. So, bring on the despairing expression, bring on the sad, drooping shoulders, now comes the last act in our question-and-answer game, Kowalski, and you won't like it. But I can't worry about that anymore, I've been doing it long enough, I'm just another tormented human being.

"I didn't want to tell you. . . ."

"They're being pushed back!" cries Kowalski.

"No, no, it's not that bad!"

"What then? For God's sake tell me!"

"Can you imagine," says Jacob in a low voice, offering a perfect picture of distress, "a while ago I sit down at my set and turn the knob like I always do, but not a single sound comes out. I mean, yesterday it was still working perfectly, and today it's completely silent! It's hopeless, my friend, a radio is a miraculous object, and now it's broken."

"Good God!" exclaims Kowalski in horror; for the second time tonight Kowalski exclaims, "Good God!" and even claps his hands together, probably because for him one is not possible without the other.

"If only we could have a smoke!" Jacob says longingly, for it is the next day, and the cigarette, the Juno without a tip, lives on only in his memory. He is standing in a boxcar, doing a *yontev* job, a holiday job, as it may well be called, which consists of taking from us Jews the bags that we are privileged to carry today. We carry the hundred-pound bags to him across a distance of fifty yards or more; all he has to do is move them along in the freight car and stack them up neatly against the walls, hence holiday job, also because there are two of them to do it, Jacob and Leonard Schmidt. The day, incidentally, had started out surprisingly enough when we were shown what we were to do; we had looked at each other in amazement and thought, they don't know what they want. Well over two weeks ago a whole trainload of bags of

cement arrived as if they were planning to put up some buildings; we unloaded every last one and covered them with tarpaulins, and today we are suddenly told to load the bags back onto the cars. Well, it's their business. We obediently reload the bags, just the way they want them, we lug them over to the cars, in one of which Jacob is doing his *yontev* job and saying, "If only we could have a smoke!" and Schmidt answers him, half amused: "If that's all you've got to worry about, Mr. Heym . . ."

Leonard Schmidt. The fluke that had brought him to this ghetto transcended anything he could ever have imagined, since Schmidt could look back on a life that deserved to have continued on the other side of the fence. His presence in our midst was, for him, one of the few mysteries on this earth.

Born in 1895, in the town of Brandenburg, the son of a wealthy father and a monarchist mother, attended an excellent high school in Berlin where his father had moved two years after Leonard's birth for business reasons (acquisition of a textile factory); joined the army immediately on completing school, Flanders offensive, Verdun, occupation of the Crimea and later Champagne when the army was short of men: such was Schmidt's war. Then he received an honorable discharge from the defeated army as a proud lieutenant decorated for bravery in the face of the enemy and whatever else, and he turned his attention to his future career. University was the next step, as was expected of privileged sons: studying law first in Heidelberg and then in Berlin. The results couldn't have been better, passed all his exams with flying colors, most of them even with honors. Three obligatory years of clerking, then the professional card LEONARD SCHMIDT, ESQ., and finally the longed-for moment, the opening of his own law practice in the best part of town. Good clients were quick to show up; his father's connections more or less propelled them there. Soon he had to engage two juniors for the less important cases, and he made a name for himself ten times as fast as many another lawyer. A love match, two beautiful fair-haired daughters, the world respectfully doffed its hat to him every day, until an envious fellow

member of the bar association conceived the fateful idea of looking into his family tree, then chopping away at it and allowing everything to reach its disastrous conclusion. His wife, his two daughters, and his bank account made it safely to Switzerland because good friends had warned him, but he himself was too late. He was still busy settling his most urgent affairs when there came a peremptory knock at his door.

In Schmidt's mind the whole thing persists like some idiotic joke; perhaps he'll wake up one morning to find clients once more sitting in his waiting room. He had been well on the way to becoming a German nationalist. But they didn't let him, they knocked on his door and told him not to make a fuss while the maid stood looking horrified between the white-shrouded, plush-covered armchairs. They brought him here because his great-grandfather attended the synagogue and his parents had been stupid enough to have him circumcised, although by now they had forgotten why. Joke or no joke, he suffers doubly and triply. In the first few days, when he was still a newcomer, he told me his life story, and added miserably, "Can you understand that?"

And a short time later — it was possible, insofar as one thought about him at all, to imagine that he was gradually getting used to life in the ghetto — he turns up at the freight yard, and what we see makes our hearts stand still. On his shirt is a pin from which hangs a small object, black and white, that on closer inspection proves to be an Iron Cross. "Have some sense!" someone tells him. "Take that cross off and hide it or they'll shoot you down like a mad dog!" But Schmidt turns away and starts working as if nothing were wrong. We all give him a wide berth, no one wants to be involved, he's beyond help, and from a safe distance we don't take our eyes off him. It is a good hour before a sentry notices the enormity, swallows a few times, stands mutely before Schmidt, and Schmidt stands pale faced before him. After an eternity the sentry turns on his heel; it really looks as if he had been rendered speechless. He goes into the redbrick building, returns immediately with his superior, and points at Schmidt, the only person to have resumed work. The superior beckons Schmidt

over; no one will give two cents for his life now. The superior bends down to the pin and carefully inspects the object like a watchmaker examining a tiny damaged part.

"Where did you get that?" he asks.

"Verdun," says Schmidt in a shaky voice.

"We can't have that here. It's against regulations," says the superior. He removes the decoration from Schmidt's chest, puts it in his pocket, doesn't make a note of any name, doesn't shoot any malefactor. Treats the incident like a nice diversion that will cause general mirth in the bar that night. He returns cheerfully to the brick building, the sentry has his eyes elsewhere again, nothing more is said about it, Schmidt has had his fun and we have had our spectacle. Thus, not long after arriving, he achieved an odd notoriety; so much for the life story of Leonard Schmidt.

"Never in my life have I had anything to do with a court case," says Jacob.

"I see," says Schmidt.

They make an easy day of it, picking up each bag together after we have lifted it onto the edge of the car, then hoisting it with a "One, two!" onto the right spot. Even the rain doesn't bother them since their boxcar has a roof. In the brief intervals that occur they lean against the wall, wipe from their brows the sweat that has inexplicably appeared there, and chat just like in peacetime. When Kowalski or the Schtamms or Mischa pantingly unload their bags, look at them enviously, and snidely remark that if they don't watch out they'll work themselves to death, they smile. "Don't worry about us!"

"Actually, I once was a witness," says Jacob.

"I see."

"But not in court. Only in the office of the district attorney who was handling the case."

"What case?"

"It had to do with whether Kowalski owed money to Porfir the usurer or not. Porfir had miraculously mislaid the promissory note, and I merely had to testify that Kowalski had paid him back the money."

"Were you actually there at the time?" asks Schmidt.

"Oh no! But Kowalski had already explained the whole thing to me in detail."

"But if you were not there and thus knew the facts merely from hearsay, you should not have appeared as a witness at all. How could you be certain that Kowalski had actually returned the money? I don't wish to insinuate anything, but after all, it is conceivable, isn't it, that Kowalski might have lied to you so that you would testify in his favor?"

"I don't think so," Jacob says without hesitation. "He has many faults, nobody knows them as well as I do, but he's not a liar. He told me right away that he hadn't paid Porfir back. Where would he have got the money?"

"And although you knew that, you testified before the district attorney that he had paid it back in your presence?"

"Naturally!"

"Well, it's hardly that natural, is it, Mr. Heym?" Schmidt says with a smile; he is undoubtedly wondering about the remarkable notions of justice harbored by these quaint people to whom he is supposed to belong.

"Anyway, it helped quite a bit," Jacob went on, bringing his story to a close. "That cutthroat Porfir had no luck with his accusation. His money was gone, but what am I saying, *his* money! Over the years he had gradually managed to fleece every one of us small businessmen. Thirty percent interest, can you believe it? The whole street broke into cheers as Porfir and Kowalski came out of the courthouse after the verdict, Porfir seething with rage and Kowalski beaming with joy!"

Kowalski of the many-hued eyes tips his bag onto the floor of the car; with half an ear he has caught something about Kowalski beaming with joy, and he asks, "What kind of stories are you telling about me?"

"That old business of Porfir's mislaid promissory note."

"Don't believe a word he says," Kowalski tells Schmidt. "He gives me a bad name whenever he gets a chance."

Kowalski pads back for the next bag, drenched to the skin, after giving Jacob a come-off-it look. Schmidt and Jacob, both comfortably dry, also make some effort — without chatting, for a change — to see how many bags will fit into one car. Until the next little interruption, until Schmidt remembers something important, until he asks: "I hope you don't mind my curiosity, Mr. Heym, but what has Mr. Churchill to say about the present situation?"

"Who?"

"Winston Churchill, the British prime minister."

"I have no idea what he has to say. Haven't you heard? My radio's on the blink."

"You must be joking!"

"What do you take me for?" Jacob says seriously.

Schmidt seems stunned and looks narrowly at Jacob, just like the others he'd had to tell that very morning, with drooping shoulders and despairing voice, the only real news of the day. Schmidt, who is a bit stuck up and whom some wit has dubbed Leonard Assimilinski, this same Schmidt seems to feel a stab to the heart like all the others; suddenly he is no different from the rest.

"How did it happen?" he asks in a low voice.

The answer to this question had been reworded that morning; there hadn't been time to present it to each one as it had been handed to Kowalski, wrapped in tissue paper. Jacob had to settle for some major deletions. How did it happen? "How do you think? The way a radio like that goes on the blink, that's how. Yesterday it was still working, and today it isn't."

Reactions had been mixed; some cursed an unjust God, others prayed to Him, and some consoled themselves with the thought that radio and Russians were two entirely different things. One man had wept like a child, his tears blending with the raindrops running down his cheeks. One of them said: "Let's hope that isn't a bad omen."

Jacob couldn't say yes and couldn't say no; he had to leave them to their minor anguish rather than expose them to the whole truth. Neither has he any words of comfort now to whisper to the disconsolate Schmidt. His store of comfort is exhausted. At this point we should remind ourselves briefly that Jacob is just as much in need of consolation as all the other poor souls around him, just as cut off from all further supply of news, that he is tormented by the same hopes. Only a freak coincidence has turned an equal person into a special person and prevented him thus far from laying all his cards on the table. But only thus far: today I have let you glance up my sleeve, you have seen how empty it is, there is no trump card inside. Now we are all equally informed, there is no difference between us anymore, except for your belief that I was once a special person.

"There's nothing to be done, Mr. Schmidt. We have to carry on. Right now in fact!"

Across the freight yard, through the rain that has abated somewhat, booms an unfamiliar voice, "Keep your hands off that!"

Jacob and Schmidt hurry to the door to see what is happening outside. Herschel Schtamm, one of the twins, is standing on the siding beside an ordinary-looking boxcar that is still closed. Thinking no doubt that this was the next one to be loaded, he hears the unfamiliar voice that can mean only him, and he snatches his hand away from the bolt, which he was just about to raise. The only remarkable thing about the incident so far is the voice, but it is indeed very remarkable: it is the Whistle's, hence unfamiliar. The Whistle in his railway man's uniform advances, as quickly as his wooden leg allows, on Herschel Schtamm, who backs away in fear. The Whistle stops beside the boxcar and checks the bolt, which is still firmly closed.

"Didn't you hear before? This car is not to be touched, goddammit!"

"Yessir!" says Herschel Schtamm.

Then the Whistle turns toward all the Jews, who have paused in their work to enjoy the thrill of a totally new sound. Raising his

voice, he turns toward them and shouts, "Have you all got it into your heads now, you scumbags? This car is not to be touched! Next time there will be a bullet!"

So that's what his voice sounds like, not a very impressive premiere I'd say, a weak baritone I'd say, the tone leaves a lot to be desired. The Whistle stalks back to the brick building, Herschel Schtamm resumes work as fast as he can so as to get out of the limelight, and we do the same. The incident, which wasn't a genuine one, has come to its temporary conclusion.

"What kind of a boxcar do you suppose that is?" asks Schmidt.

"How should I know?" Jacob replies.

"Mr. Schtamm can count himself lucky to have got away with it. Actually the sentry did order us this morning to leave that boxcar alone. You must have heard that too."

"Yes, of course."

"So why did he go over there?"

"How in the world am I supposed to know!"

Schmidt has no instinct for when a conversation has come to an end. He expresses his views on the advisability of strictly obeying orders, on the increased chances of survival resulting from such adherence, then delivers a brief lecture on the factual legal situation deriving from the present power configuration. Jacob listens with only half an ear. Frankly, he doesn't find Schmidt particularly likable; without ever actually saying so, Schmidt considers himself superior and more intelligent and more cultured — he probably wouldn't have had the slightest objection to the Germans' establishing the ghetto at all if they hadn't picked on him to be put in it. When he makes an effort to gloss over social differences, which he usually does, the impression is inescapable that he is pretending: Look how nice of me, I'm just behaving as if we were all of the same kind. The differences are there, he can't fight them: if only in the way he looks at a person or speaks or eats or talks about the Germans or the past, but above all in the way he thinks. One can't choose one's fellow sufferers, and a fellow sufferer he undoubtedly is; he trembles no

differently from anyone else for his portion of life — well, yes, a bit differently perhaps, in his special way, a way that our kind don't happen to find all that pleasant.

Soon Herschel Schtamm appears lugging a sack, wearing the soaked fur cap under which he hides his piety, and Jacob asks him, "What was all that about, Herschel?"

"You won't believe it, but I heard voices in that car," Herschel says.

"Voices?"

"Voices," says Herschel. "As true as I'm standing here, human voices."

He may be feeling a cold shiver down his spine, especially since he is always much too hot under his fur cap. He puffs out his cheeks and nods anxiously a few times: you can imagine what that must mean. Jacob can; he reacts to Herschel's announcement by sighing despairingly, closing his eyes, and raising his eyebrows. They are carrying on an inaudible little dialogue, and Schmidt stands beside them without understanding a single syllable.

Mischa comes up to them, sets down his bag of cement, and says quietly, "You'd better go on working, the sentry's already looking this way."

Suddenly Jacob is all thumbs, the bag slips from his hands, and Schmidt says in annoyance: "Watch what you're doing!"

Jacob does have to watch himself. He feels, as he remembers later, like you do just after dreaming of happiness and quiet little places, and then someone comes and pulls away your warm blanket, and you lie there naked and trembling from the impact of cold reality.

"You're very silent," says Schmidt after a while.

Jacob persists in his silence; deeply distressed, he picks up the bags as they are handed to him, merely casting an occasional furtive glance at the innocuous-looking boxcar on its siding, behind whose walls human voices have been heard. Ventilation holes right up under the roof, no one is tall enough to look out, and no one is screaming, from neither inside nor outside, why isn't anyone screaming, the bags

need to be carefully stacked. Standing there reddish-brown on its siding as if forgotten, but they won't forget it, in some ways they can be relied upon. Yesterday it wasn't here, tomorrow it'll be gone, just a brief stop on its way to somewhere. A car like that — loaded and unloaded and loaded by us a hundred times, crates, coal, potatoes under strict surveillance, machinery, stones, boxcars exactly like that, but this one isn't to be touched, or they'll shoot.

"Do you think it's true?" asks Schmidt.

"Think what's true?"

"About those voices."

"Don't ask such stupid questions. Do you think Herschel Schtamm is trying to impress us?"

"But who can possibly be inside that car?"

"Who do you think?"

Schmidt's mouth opens; suddenly he is seized by a dreadful suspicion. "You mean . . . ," he whispers.

"Yes, I do!"

"You mean, they're still sending people to the camps?"

Unfortunately that's how it is. Schmidt is not at home in the game of hints where certain things aren't mentioned and yet are said. He'll never be at home; in his heart he is and always will be an outsider. He needs to be told everything in blunt, unequivocal terms.

"No, they're not sending anyone anymore! The war is long since over, we could all go home if we wanted to, but we don't want to because we're having such a good time here!" says Jacob, rolling his eyes. "Are they still sending people! Do you imagine there are none left? I'm left, you're left, all of us here are left. Just don't get the idea it's as good as over!"

Schmidt interrupts the well-deserved lecture with a quick gesture, pointing outside in alarm and exclaiming: "Look! Schtamm!"

Herschel had never attracted much attention, except for his praying, which at the time he was convinced had led to the power

failure. Now he's making up for it: he is standing on the siding beside the boxcar. The sentries haven't noticed him yet. Herschel is pressing his ear to the wall of the car and speaking: I can clearly see his lips moving, see him listening and then speaking again, our pious Herschel. His brother Roman happens to be standing next to me, his eyes like cartwheels: he makes a move to dash over to Herschel and bring him back before it's too late. Two men have to restrain him by force, and one of them has to whisper: "Calm down, you idiot, you'll only draw their attention to him!"

I can't hear what Herschel is saying or what the people inside are telling him, it's much too far away, but I can imagine it, and this is not a case of vague conjectures. The longer I think about it, the surer I am of his words, even though he never confirmed them to me.

"Hello! Can you hear me?" Herschel begins.

"We can hear you," a voice from inside must surely answer. "Who are you?"

"I'm from the ghetto," Herschel says. "You must hang on; only for a short time, you must hang on. The Russians have already advanced past Bezanika!"

"How do you know?" they ask from inside, all quite logical and predictable.

"You can believe me. We have a secret radio. I have to get back now!"

The people locked up inside thank him, utterly bewildered; a little white dove has strayed into their darkness. What they say is of no consequence; maybe they wish him happiness and riches and a hundred and twenty years of life before they hear his footsteps moving away.

Everyone is watching spellbound as Herschel starts on his way back. Crazy fools that we are, we stand there gaping instead of getting on with our work and behaving as if everything were normal. First we keep Roman from committing a stupid blunder, then we commit one ourselves. Perhaps Herschel wouldn't have escaped

them anyway, who can tell in retrospect? In any event we do nothing to distract their attention from him. Only now does he seem to have discovered fear; so far everything has gone as if of its own volition, according to the unfathomable laws obeyed by sleepwalkers. Cover is pitifully inadequate, almost nonexistent. Herschel has good reason to be afraid. A stack of crates, another empty boxcar, otherwise nothing along his path where he would need the protection of a convoy. I see him sticking his head around the corner of the boxcar, inch by inch; with his eyes he has already reached us; I can already hear him telling us about his great journey.

So far the opposition is quiet. The sentry by the gate is standing with his back to the railway tracks; there is no sound to rouse his attention. The other two sentries have disappeared, are inside the building presumably, driven in by the rain. I see Herschel making his final preparations for the great sprint; I see him pray. Although he is still standing beside the boxcar and moving his lips, it is obvious that he is not talking to the people inside but conversing with his God. And then I turn my head toward the brick building: it has a little window in the gable. The window is open, and on the sill lies a rifle being aimed, very calmly and deliberately. I can't make out the man behind it, it is too dark in the room; I see only two hands adjusting the aim of the barrel until they are satisfied: then they are still, as in a painting. What should I have done, I who have never been a hero, what would I have done if I were a hero — given a shout, that's all, but what good would that have been? I don't shout, I close my eyes, an eternity passes, Roman says to me: "Why are you closing your eyes? Look, he's going to make it, that crazy fool!"

I don't know why, but at this moment I think of Hannah, executed in front of a tree whose name I don't know. I'm still thinking of her after the shot is fired, until the men around me are all talking at the same time. A single dry shot; the two hands had, as I said, plenty of time to prepare everything all the while Herschel was praying. It is a strange sound — I have never heard a single shot before, always several at a time — like a naughty child stamping its

foot in a tantrum, or a toy balloon being blown up too hard and bursting, or even, since I am already indulging in images, as if God had coughed, a cough of dismissal for Herschel.

Those locked behind the reddish-brown walls of the boxcar may be asking: "Hey, you there, what's happened?"

Herschel is lying on his stomach, across the track and between two ties. His clenched right hand has fallen into a black puddle; his face, of which at first I can see only one half, has a surprised look with its open eye. We stand silently around him; they allow us this little respite. Roman bends down to him, pulls him off the track, and turns him over on his back. Then he removes the fur cap, his fingers fumbling awkwardly with the flaps under the chin. He thrusts the cap into his pocket and walks away. For the first time in this freight yard, Herschel's earlocks are allowed to wave freely in the wind; many of us have never seen them before, have merely been told about them. So this is what Herschel Schtamm really looks like, without disguise. For the last time his face, darkly framed by wet earth and black hair; someone has closed his eyes. I won't lie, why should I, he was no beauty, he was very pious, wanted to pass on hope, and in so doing he died.

Unnoticed, the sentry from the gate has come up behind us; it is time to divert our thoughts, and he says: "You've been gawking long enough, or haven't you ever seen a dead man before? Come on, back to work on the double!"

At the end of the day we will take him with us and bury him; that's permitted, without its being printed in black and white in one of the many regulations; it has simply become accepted. I look once more up to the window, which is now closed again: no rifle, no hands. And no one emerges from the building, they pay no further attention to us, for them the incident is closed.

Life goes on; Schmidt and Jacob start moving the bags again. By this time Schmidt has understood enough to hold his tongue and not let on why Herschel insisted on dashing over to the boxcar although the railway man emphatically and specifically warned him earlier.

In Jacob's head, self-reproaches follow one upon the other; the part he has played in this drama is frighteningly clear. You construct some scanty consolation for yourself; you visualize a huge scale with two trays, on one you place Herschel while on the other you pile up all the hope you have been spreading among the people. Which side will go down? The problem is, you don't know how much hope weighs, and no one is going to tell you. You must find the formula by yourself and complete the calculation alone. But you calculate in vain, the problems mount. Here's another: who can divulge to you how much harm was prevented by your inventions? Ten disasters or twenty or only a single one? What has been prevented will remain hidden from you forever. Only the one you caused is visible: there it lies beside the tracks in the rain.

Even later, during the lunch break, Jacob hasn't come one bit closer to the solution of the problem with all its unknown factors. He sits apart as he swallows his soup; today everyone leaves everyone else in peace. He has avoided Roman Schtamm. Roman hasn't sought him out; only beside the cart where the empty tin bowls are always deposited do they find themselves suddenly face-to-face. They look each other in the eye, especially Roman. Jacob tells me, "He looked at me as if I had shot his brother."

The evenings belong to Lina.

A long time ago, Jacob stopped with her in the corridor outside his door and said: "Listen carefully, Lina, so that, if anything should happen, you'll be able to find the key to my room" is what he said. "Here behind the doorframe is a little hole in the wall, see? I'll put the key in here now, then wedge this stone in front of it. It's quite easy to remove — if you stand on tiptoe you'll be tall enough. Try." Lina tried; she stretched up her arm, removed the stone, barely managed to grasp the key, and held it out proudly to Jacob. "Wonderful," Jacob said. "Remember the place carefully. I don't really know

why, but maybe someday it'll be important. And one more thing — never tell anyone about this place."

By now Lina no longer has to stand on tiptoe; for two years she has been tirelessly growing up toward the little hole behind the doorframe. If anything should happen, Jacob had said; today something had happened. Lina retrieves the key, unlocks the door, and stands with bated breath in the empty room. She is a bit nervous, but that will pass; if Jacob comes in unexpectedly she'll simply tell him she's tidying up. The motives driving her are adventurous, he would hardly approve of them, and what he doesn't know won't hurt him.

In her path lie two obstacles, she is under no illusions: the first is the hiding place, still unknown; the second is that she doesn't know what a radio looks like. Hiding places are not unlimited in this room; in a few minutes it could be turned upside down. The second obstacle seems much more difficult to her. There are all kinds of things that Jacob has explained to her. She would have no difficulty, for instance, in describing a bus, although she has never been face-to-face with one; she could talk about bananas, airplanes, teddy bears that start to growl when you lay them on their backs. During the recent power failure, Jacob even traced with her the highly mysterious path traveled by the light from the coal mine to the little bulb under the ceiling, but not a single word has he ever uttered about a radio. There are a few scanty clues: everyone is talking about it, it is forbidden to own one, it reveals things not known before, it is small enough to be easily hidden.

"Will you show me your radio tomorrow?" she'd asked him the previous evening, when he came up to the attic to see her after Kowalski's futile visit.

"No," he said.

"And the day after tomorrow?"

"No!"

"And the day after the day after tomorrow?"

"No, I said! And that's enough!"

Even her normally infallible look of wide-eyed entreaty had no