effect; Jacob didn't even notice it. Hence her new attempt after a resentful pause: "Are you ever going to show it to me?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because."

"Will you at least tell me what it looks like?" she asked then, her plan already half-formed in her mind. But he refused to answer this either, so her half-formed plan became a whole one.

In a nutshell: Lina must look for an object of which all she knows is that Jacob keeps it hidden away, an object without color, shape, or weight, the only good thing being that Jacob can't have that many unfamiliar objects in his room. The first one she finds and has never seen before can confidently be assumed to be called a radio.

Lina starts with the obvious hiding places: under the bed, on top of the cupboard, in the table drawer. Quite possibly a radio is too big to fit into a table drawer — perhaps anyone watching would laugh out loud to see Lina looking in there for a radio. But it's not her fault that Jacob remains so obstinately silent, and besides, no one is watching. It's not in the drawer; there's nothing in it. All she finds under the bed and on top of the cupboard is dust. All that's left is the inside of the cupboard; there's no other hiding place. The cupboard has two doors, one at the top and one at the bottom. She can forget about the top one; behind it are the two soup plates and two flat plates, the two cups of which one lost its handle when Lina dropped it on the floor while doing the dishes, also a knife and two spoons, the ever-empty sugar jar, and behind all that the food, when there is any. Behind this door Lina is at home; she often sets the table, serves the meal, and clears it away. She can forget about that one, but her project must not fail for want of thoroughness. She looks: the four plates, two cups, sugar jar, knife and spoons, plus some bread and a small bag of dried beans, no surprises.

Now for the bottom door. Lina hesitates: her fingers are already around the key and can't make up their mind. If what she is looking for isn't in there, then it's nowhere. So far she'd never had any reason

to look inside. "That's where I keep my stuff,
Nothing could sound more harmless. His stuff; o
what is concealed behind two such innocent word

There is a limit to her hesitation, and Lina
outside in the corridor footsteps hurry by. Locking
if Jacob comes he won't ask what she's doing here,
has locked herself in, and there's no answer fo
everything out: a pair of trousers and a shirt, a ne
saucepan — why isn't that in the top section? —
screws, an empty picture frame, the book about
herself a brief pause; the book has more to offer t
letters to which Jacob has recently been attaching s
tance. The pictures do deserve a few moments' att
The woman with those amazingly long breasts, s
looking, and the ring stuck through her nose — Jac
explain the meaning of that later. The naked men
their faces all over, carry long spears, and on thei
mous structures of feathers, hair, and ribbons. Or th
with round, protruding stomachs, animals with hor
endless noses and even longer necks: all this can ce
but not enough to make one forget one's real purp

Lina crawls waist deep into the cupboard;
removed, a modest pile of underwear with a green
then. . . . The path has been cleared to that as ye
proud smile of triumph, there it stands, inconspic
ner, mysterious and forbidden. She brings it out
delicate latticework, a little knob, glass, and ro
reverently on the table and sits down facing it. N
happen. His stuff, Jacob had said; while she i
minutes tick away: what will be revealed now tha
before? Does this thing speak like an ordinary
deliver up its secrets in some other way, in some
After a prolonged, expectant silence, Lina realizes
it will reveal nothing, it must be made to speak; ma

ask it something. If so, then not, she hopes, by means of some prearranged formula like with Ali Baba outside the cave of Sesame.

"What is my name?" Lina starts off with the simplest words she can think of, but already this seems to be too much for the thing. Lina allows it plenty of time, in vain. Her disappointment makes way for the thought that she has to ask for something unknown, for something she doesn't already know — after all, she does know her own name. "How much is thirty times two million?" she asks. When this evokes no reply either, she takes a new approach; she remembers the light that can be switched on and off according to one's fancy. Perhaps this thing can be switched on in the same way, let's try the little knob. It's rusted, can hardly be moved; after much effort, just a tiny squeak, and already her fingers are sore. At that moment Jacob appears in the doorway and asks, as predicted: "What are you doing here?"

"I," says Lina, "I wanted . . ." she says, having to recover from the shock, "I wanted to tidy up your room. Don't you remember?"

Jacob remembers; he looks at the Sodom and Gomorrah in front of the cupboard, then back at Lina, who had wanted to tidy up; before he can open his mouth she knows it won't be all that bad. "But I hope you haven't finished yet?" asks Jacob.

Of course she hasn't finished yet, she's only just begun. She jumps up and stuffs saucepan and book and underwear back into the cupboard, so quickly that his eyes can scarcely follow her. Next, the picture frame, in her haste the nails fall out of the box, in no time they're gathered up, then come the needle and thread, where are the needle and thread, she'll find them next time, the cupboard door is slammed shut, and already the mess is forgotten. Only that thing remains on the table. He has seen it anyway; there stands his only secret, and he is still not giving vent to his anger.

"You're not cross with me, are you?"

"No, no!"

Jacob takes off his jacket, then washes the dirt from the freight

yard off his hands. Lina grows uneasy: the thing is standing there being ignored.

"And what did you really mean to do here?"

"Nothing. I was tidying up," she says, knowing that it's hopeless.

"What were you looking for?"

Now he does begin to raise his voice, but she finds the question too silly for words: he's sitting in front of the thing, asking in pretended innocence what she has been looking for, and to that we refuse to give the obvious reply.

"What's the lamp doing here?"

"What lamp?"

"This one. Do you see any other?"

When Lina remains silent and wide eyed, staring at the alleged lamp, and the wide eyes gradually fill with tears, Jacob draws her close and asks in a much gentler voice: "What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

He pulls her onto his knee; she doesn't often cry. Who is to know what's going on in a little mind like that, a mind that has all day to brood alone? "Come on, tell me what's the matter. Does it have anything to do with the lamp?"

"No."

"Have you ever seen it before?"

"No."

"Would you like me to explain how it works?"

Lina stops her tears: after all, Jacob can't be blamed for her mistake, and besides, tomorrow is another day, somehow she'll find the hiding place that she overlooked today. She attends to eyes and nose with her sleeve, which is not quite adequate: Jacob's handkerchief hurries to her aid.

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"Yes."

"Well, then. This thing is a kerosene lamp. In the old days all the

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"Would you like me to explain?"

"Yes."

"Well, then. This thing is a kerosene lamp. In the old days all the

lamps were like this, before there was any electric light. This is where you pour in the kerosene, into this little bowl. This is the wick, it sucks up the kerosene, and only its tip sticks out. It can be made longer or shorter, with this knob here. You hold a match to the wick, and then the room is lighted up."

"Could you do it for me?"

"I'm sorry, I don't have any kerosene."

Lina slips off Jacob's knee; she picks up the lamp in both hands and looks at it from all sides: so that's why it was no use waiting for an answer. At home, in the Nuriel family, there had been no kerosene lamp and no radio; mistakes arise from lack of experience. After one last look she puts the thing back in the cupboard. Order is completely restored, also with Lina. She even discovers a funny side to her unsuccessful voyage of discovery.

"Do you know what I thought it was?"

"Well?"

"But you won't laugh at me?"

"I wouldn't dream of it."

"I thought it was your radio."

Jacob smiles; he remembers how, as a very little boy, he had believed an old woman who lived next door, a hunchback, to be a witch, a similar mistaken conclusion; but soon his smile gradually fades. Lina was looking for the radio, she admits that. It wouldn't have been a bad idea to leave her to her belief: what difference does it make to a lamp to be taken for a radio? He would have sworn her to secrecy: Now at last you've found it, now you know what it looks like, now not another word about it, above all not to strangers. And for weeks there would have been peace for him, at least at home. But he had let the opportunity slip by; Lina hadn't betrayed herself until it was too late, and he hadn't had enough presence of mind to size up the situation in the room and the lamp on the table and the significance of her tears. Any minute now she will ask, All right, so that was a lamp, now where's the radio? Any minute now, or in an hour, or tomorrow at the latest, she's already itching with impatience. Telling her it's broken won't satisfy her, Then show me the broken one, and unfortunately he's not one of those who can answer awkward questions with the occasional slap. There is still, of course, one way out, a very simple one: Jacob could claim to have burned it, a damaged radio, if found, being no less dangerous than an intact one.

He could say that, then he'd be happily rid of the radio, for Lina and all the world, but it so happens that the day just past at the freight yard also plays a certain role. The dead Herschel Schtamm, his brother Roman with the tormenting gaze, the unknown people locked up on the siding: they all have a right to speak before the radio is finally destroyed. And the individual Jews who arrived hopefully in the early morning with their questions and left again in dismay, without the news to which they are entitled. By this time they will already be home, relatives and friends will be knocking on their doors, what's the latest news at the freight yard? Nothing, they'll be told, the radio says nothing anymore, it's broken, yesterday it was still working, and today not a sound. The relatives and friends leave, spread the latest news throughout all the buildings and streets, which soon will once again seem as wretched as they did before that night when the searchlight picked up Jacob about seven-thirty on the Kurländischer Damm. There's a lot to be considered before making frivolous decisions, before buying the peace that is no peace.

"Will you show me the radio now?"

"I already said no yesterday. Has anything changed since then?"

"I'll find it anyway," says Lina.

"Then go on looking."

"Want to bet that I'll find it?"

She is switching to open attack, let her search rather than ask questions, Jacob is not going to talk her out of the next radio she finds. And the radio that she'll never find will for the time being be saved from the fire, for many reasons, the first being Herschel of the earlocks: that very morning, as he lay in the rain between the railway ties, he had as good as repaired it.

Jacob goes to work with a light heart. Anyone observing his posture and his brisk walk and drawing comparisons with yesterday or the last few days is struck by the change: there goes a man of poise. With a light heart, for the hours in bed had been rich in important decisions; contact with the outer world has been restored. The radio had been on half the night, right after Lina had been shaken off it went on and stayed on until sleep came unbidden, and by that time his ear had picked up a number of reports, and not to be sneezed at either. With a light heart, for the little flame of expectation must not go out. Thus Jacob's resolve; he had spent half the night looking for wood and kindling to keep it going. He has succeeded in achieving a substantial advance, he and the Russians; he has quietly let them win a great battle on the banks of a little river, the Rudna, which, although it doesn't babble along right outside the front door, is gratifyingly closer than the town of Bezanika.

In reviewing the news items supplied thus far, Jacob noticed that, when looked at more closely, these had consisted only of extended trifles; except for the very first item about Bezanika, nothing substantial. He had turned every little idea into a tremendous story, often transparent and lacking in credibility. Doubts had so far not arisen merely because hope had made the people blind and stupid. But during the night before the battle of the Rudna an insight was gained: Jacob has at last discovered the source of his difficulties. In other words, hardly had he turned out the light when it came to him in a flash why his inventions had become so laborious and eventually failed him almost entirely. He was too modest, he suspected; he had always tried to keep his news items within a sphere that at some later date, after life resumed its normal course, cannot be verified. With each news item some inhibition had stood in his way, some pang of conscience; the lies had come stumbling reluctantly from his lips, as if looking for a hiding place they could crawl away to in a hurry before anyone took a closer look at them.

But this procedure was fundamentally wrong, as he came to

realize last night; a liar with pangs of conscience will always remain a bungler. In this type of activity, restraint and false modesty are inappropriate; you must go the whole hog, you must exude conviction, you must act the part of a person who is already aware of what they are going to hear from you the very next moment. You must throw out figures and names and dates right and left; the battle of the Rudna is merely a modest beginning. It will never go down in history, but in our history it will be given a place of honor. And when all these tribulations are over, when anyone who is interested can look up the true events of the war in books, he will be free to come and ask: "Hey you, what kind of nonsense did you tell us back in those days? When was there ever a battle of the Rudna?" "Wasn't there?" will be your surprised answer. "Let's have a look at that book. . . . You're right, there never was. It's not in here. So I suppose I must have misheard at the time, I'm sorry." They will probably forgive you, at worst they'll shrug and walk off, and perhaps there will even be some among them who will thank you for the error.

As regards the progress of the fighting, Jacob has done some preliminary work, and for this his local knowledge has come in very handy. The battle of the Rudna and its aftermath are to suffice for the next three days; we mustn't go overboard, for the crossing of the river isn't altogether without its problems. We're not going to make it that easy for the Russians: the Germans have blown up the only bridge, Jacob has thought it all out. Before the advance can be continued, a temporary pontoon bridge has to be built, and this will take three or four days. When that's been taken care of, the Russians will march on the little town of Tobolin, which the Germans have turned into a kind of fortress. Tobolin, in turn, resists for three days; it is surrounded, softened up by the artillery, and stormed by the infantry. In a hopeless situation Major Karthäuser, a splendid name with a credible rank, signs the document of surrender: Tobolin is liberated. Incidentally that will please Mischa — he has an aunt living there who, it is hoped, will live to see this victory. The aunt, Lea Malamut, owned a haberdashery and, when Mischa was a boy, always used to

send him a little box of colored buttons and threads for his birthday. But let's not linger in Tobolin, it's a long way from there to the district town of Pry, the next town in our direction. Some forty miles; they have already been planned in rough outline but aren't yet ready in every detail. That will be Jacob's night work for a while. As far as Tobolin everything is clear, and today at the freight yard the result of the glorious battle of the Rudna will be announced.

With a light heart Jacob goes off to work, and a little added touch occurs to him that he could apply to the events at the Rudna. Might not secret German plans have fallen into Russian hands, thus revealing all the enemy's actions on this front for weeks to come and rendering them ineffectual? That would be a few raisins in Jacob's cake, but immediately doubts arise in terms of probability, for would secret plans be kept in such an insecure place? After all, the Germans are no fools. Neither are the Russians: even if they did capture plans of that kind, they're not going to broadcast the fact to the world over the radio. They'll keep it carefully to themselves and discreetly make their preparations. So we'll dispense with the added touch. What we already have is enough to give the Jews a bit of the poise with which Jacob continues on his way to work, with a light heart.

At the corner of Tismenizer-Strasse he sees Kowalski waiting for him, nothing special about that, Kowalski often waits for him here, he lives here. As he approaches, though, it turns out that Kowalski is not alone; with him is a young man, which *is* somewhat unusual, especially since Jacob has never seen the young man before.

From some way off, Kowalski points at Jacob; the young stranger follows the finger with his eyes, as if Kowalski were explaining, That's the man, the one in the dark gray jacket.

Jacob comes up to them, they shake hands, and all three walk on; there have been no introductions yet. "You're late today," Kowalski says. "We've been waiting quite a while for you."

"Had we arranged to meet?" Jacob asks. He looks out of the corner of his eye at the young man, who doesn't say a word and seems

a bit awkward and embarrassed, staring straight ahead. A blind man would be aware that there is some special significance to his presence. Kowalski has said, "We've been waiting," so the young man is not here by chance. Kowalski has a hand in this; he must have told him to come.

"Won't you introduce us?" says Jacob.

"You've never met?" asks Kowalski with a show of surprise. "This is Josef Neidorf."

"I'm Jacob Heym."

"I know," says the shy young man. So his name is Neidorf. His first words convey nothing.

"You don't work at the freight yard?" asks Jacob.

"No."

"Where, then?"

"At the tool factory."

"But then you're heading the wrong way. You should be going in exactly the opposite direction."

"We start later than you do," Neidorf says, and it is obvious that he is not comfortable with his explanation.

"I see. And since you have some time to spare, you choose to accompany us all the way to the freight yard. Stands to reason."

Neidorf suddenly stops, the way one does before running away; he looks haunted and says in a low voice to Kowalski, "Can't you really manage without me? You see, I don't want to have anything to do with this whole business. I'm scared, you see."

"Oh, don't start that again! Didn't I already explain it all to you till I was blue in the face?" Kowalski says impatiently, taking him by the arm before he can get away. "Can't you get it into your head? He won't say a word, *I* won't say a word, and *you* won't say a word. Apart from us three, not a soul will ever find out about it. So what can happen?"

Neidorf still looks most unhappy, but he stays when Kowalski cautiously lets go of him.

"What won't I say a word about?" asks Jacob, who by now has become curious.

Kowalski gestures to him to be patient. The gesture means many things: that you can see what a state the boy's in, that we must allow him a moment or two to come to terms with himself and his fear, for Kowalski's gestures can be highly expressive. He gives Neidorf an encouraging wink, which with his swollen eyes isn't easy, and says, "Now you can tell him what you are."

Neidorf still hesitates. Jacob is quite intrigued, a surprise early in the morning that makes a young man afraid and about which they must — although so far for unknown reasons — keep silent: Kowalski can't bring off one like that every day.

"Actually I'm a radio repairman," Neidorf finally says in an agonized voice.

A radio repairman.

There is no chair waiting for Jacob: looks fly back and forth, pleased ones and withering ones. An insane rage toward Kowalski almost chokes Jacob. Trying to play God, this cretin of a friend arranges for repairs without the vaguest idea of their extent and, what's more, undoubtedly expects you to feel grateful to him for his enterprising efforts. It couldn't have been easy, after all, in a single short evening that is already over by eight o'clock, to dig up someone who knows something about radios, but not too difficult for a friend like Kowalski. There he stands, beaming expectantly: Haven't I done a good job? Magnificent of course. Any more help like that and you might as well go and hang yourself right away. And it is for him that you have just helped to win the battle of the Rudna; you're tempted to burn the radio after all. Right after they parted yesterday evening, he must have dashed off and driven the whole ghetto frantic. He hadn't known this Neidorf before, you would have known if he had, for unfortunately Kowalski's friends are also your own. He must have sidled up to one person after another, asking confidently in his penetrating voice, "Do you happen to know anybody who can

repair a radio?" "A radio? Why on earth do you need someone to repair a radio?" "Why do you think?"

Someone or other must have then put him on to this poor fellow Neidorf, who has more intelligence in his little finger than Kowalski has in his whole head; the boy's fear is the best proof. Kowalski has told him God knows what to reassure him, then dragged him here and contrived this highly embarrassing situation, and now you're confronted with a radio repairman in the flesh.

"What a splendid profession!" says Jacob.

"Yes, isn't it?"

Kowalski is as pleased as Punch. There is simply no end to his deeds of friendship — the other day the miraculous rescue from the outhouse, today the second noble deed. He dares anyone to match it, in a place where there is so little room for kind actions. But he's not looking for any special gratitude; among true friends such things are taken for granted: they don't waste much time on talk, they act. And because time is getting on, and because so far no visible signs of joy or comprehension are noticeable in Jacob, Kowalski explains to him: "He's going to fix your radio, you see. And don't worry, the lad's trustworthy."

"I'm glad to know that," says Jacob.

"Of course, I can't guarantee anything," Neidorf says with modest eagerness. "If, say, a tube's gone, there's nothing I can do about it. I have no spare parts — I told Mr. Kowalski that right away."

"Just go there and have a look at it," says Kowalski.

Jacob has only minutes to find a way out; one would imagine that it gets easier from one time to the next, seeing that practice makes perfect, but actually it always remains just as difficult. Ruefully he remembers all the decisions he reached last night, more easily made than carried out when obstacles of this kind show up, but Jacob pulls himself together. Happy news requires a happy face, but Jacob can't manage one: the sight of Kowalski the demon helper precludes all possibility of a smile. With a great effort, Jacob stretches

his lips from side to side and forces a look of grim affability into his eyes as he tries to convey that something of immense importance has just occurred to him.

"Of course, you couldn't know!" he says. "You've gone to all that trouble for nothing. The radio is working again!"

"You don't say!"

"But I appreciate your efforts all the same."

"How did it happen? Did you fix it yourself?" Kowalski asks, and it's impossible to tell whether he is genuinely glad or whether he is disappointed at his helpfulness having gone for nothing.

"It's working again. Isn't that enough?"

"But how?" asks Kowalski. "A radio can't repair itself, can it?"

If Neidorf weren't with them, Jacob could tell Kowalski anything — a tube had come loose, or he had banged it a few times with his fist and it came on again — Kowalski knows as little about radios as he does. But unfortunately this Neidorf with his expert knowledge is still there; not only does he look relieved because his help isn't needed after all, but there is also a gleam of professional interest in his eye. And now it's up to you to improvise a suitable explanation that will satisfy nitwit and expert alike. You must know, after all, how you repaired your radio: tell them quickly and look cheerful about it.

"It was one of the wires in the electrical cord. I just shortened it a bit."

So everything has worked out splendidly, Jacob is quite proud of himself, all three parties are satisfied. As he leaves, Neidorf shakes hands with Jacob, many thanks again for your trouble, he walks off in the direction of the tool factory and doesn't have to be scared anymore.

Kowalski and Jacob continue on their way to the freight yard: Jacob is thinking up a revenge for the ruined morning that had started out so well, namely, the battle of the Rudna will be withheld from Kowalski; let others bring him the joyful news. Friends who never miss a chance to torture a person nearly to death don't deserve

battles won during sleepless nights of torment. Even if no harm was intended. What Kowalski has inflicted on you today, the difficulties he lands you in with no harm intended, are getting alarmingly out of hand; you can't stand idly by watching this trend. Two days ago Kowalski forced him to cope with Lina, today with Neidorf, and among all the questioners Kowalski is the most tireless, so the countermeasure of a single suppressed battle is surely appropriate.

"Was there any news last night?" asks Kowalski.

"Nothing."

A few men they know say good morning as they pass, the street is the only one leading to the freight yard, and it gradually becomes crowded. Jacob notices people looking at him narrowly, at Kowalski too apparently. Kowalski is basking in Jacob's glory and whispers to someone: "The radio is working again!" As if he had been instrumental, and the other fellow quickens his step and whispers it to others. Soon many are turning to look at Jacob and seem to perk up. Jacob nods imperceptibly — that's right; you heard correctly — and the repaired radio will probably arrive at the freight yard before its owner.

"I meant to ask you," Kowalski says, "I've been wondering whether the time hasn't come to think of some other things."

"Such as?"

"Such as business."

"Business? What kind of business?"

"I'm a businessman," Kowalski says. "Isn't this the best time to prepare at least mentally for the future?"

"What do you mean, business? And what do you want to prepare? Isn't your barbershop standing there waiting for you?"

"That's what I'm wondering about. I've been thinking for a long time that maybe I should try something different in the future."

"Something different, at your age?"

"Why not? Just between ourselves, I've got some money tucked away. Not exactly a fortune, mind you, but maybe there's some better way to invest it than in my old shop, which I never really liked, anyway. Any more than you did, if you're honest. And if I go ahead

with something like that, I want to be sure I'm not throwing my money away."

"And where do I come in?"

"From time to time there must surely be some business news on the radio."

"There is."

"Hasn't there been anything that could be taken as a guideline? Some hint or other?"

"I'm not interested in such things."

"Not interested in such things — look who's talking!" says Kowalski. "I'm sure you must have heard something!"

"What is it you want to know, then? So far I haven't understood a single word."

"I simply want to know which line of business has the best prospects."

"Sometimes you're positively childish, Kowalski. Do you seriously think that they announce over the radio: 'We advise you to invest your money after the war in such and such businesses'?"

This makes sense to Kowalski, and he says: "Well, all right, then I'll simply ask you as a friend. If you had some money, where would you be most likely to invest it?"

So Jacob considers it too; an investment like that deserves a lot of consideration: where would he be most likely to invest it? "Alcohol, or tobacco, perhaps? If you remember, after the last war no one could get enough of them. And David Gedalye, you must have known him too, built himself a magnificent house in those days from schnapps."

"He did, he did," says Kowalski, "but where to find the raw materials? Do you really think that, right after the war, there'll be enough potatoes to make schnapps?"

"That's not the way to look at it. There'll be no raw materials for anything. What you need for postwar commerce is not logic but a good nose for business."

Kowalski is still doubtful, his nose doesn't favor schnapps, his money's too good for that.

"Actually, textiles shouldn't do too badly. There's always a need for clothing," he says.

"You may be right. For years they only made clothing for soldiers: soldiers' trousers, soldiers' socks, soldiers' tunics, soldiers' overcoats. Ordinary people went on wearing their old clothes. And what does that mean?"

"Well?"

"There'll be a demand."

"That's only half the truth, Jacob. Don't forget that during the same period a lot of clothing has been lying unused in cupboards — I mean, all the soldiers' civilian clothes. And today they're as good as new."

"Hm," Jacob says pensively.

And so on, while they consider two or three other possibilities, and Kowalski even toys with the idea of joining forces with Jacob and establishing a large restaurant with all the frills. But Jacob thinks this is too big a risk; besides, he is sure Kowalski isn't really serious. Jacob reverts to his first suggestion, which is that Kowalski is to remain in his old shop, and if he doesn't know what else to do with that bit of money tucked away, he can have the place modernized, and for heaven's sake get some new chairs — demand or no demand, hair and beards will go on growing. By the time they reach the freight yard, Kowalski is almost back to being a barber again.

Lina wins her bet, for in the long run Jacob is no match in the unequal battle: he shows her the radio.

After some days of fruitless searching — there was nothing left she didn't already know — she resorts to pleading. No one can plead like Lina, and she particularly knows how to plead with Jacob, with

flattery, tears, hurt looks of a special kind, more tears, and all this with incredible perseverance. Jacob has held out for a few days, then his strength is exhausted: one predictable evening Lina wins her bet. For me, probably the only one who is still alive and able to reflect on the matter, that evening is the most incomprehensible of the whole story. Even when Jacob explained it to me, as best he could, I didn't fully understand it; I asked him: "Didn't you go a bit too far? Couldn't she have betrayed you and everything would have been over?" "Of course not," Jacob replied with a smile, "Lina would never betray me." I said, "I mean without the slightest intention. Children so easily let fall a thoughtless remark, and someone or other picks it up and builds a whole house out of it." "Lina is always very careful about what she says," Jacob replied, and I had to believe him.

But there was also something else that I found almost impossible to understand. "There's something else, Jacob. How could you be sure that she didn't see through the whole thing? She could so easily have noticed what was actually going on — she's a clever girl, you've said so yourself. Wasn't it an outrageous stroke of luck that she didn't see through it?" "She did see through it," Jacob said, his eyes lighting up with pride. "You know, I really didn't care whether she noticed or not. I simply wanted to give her pleasure, regardless of the consequences: that's why I went down into the basement with her." And after a pause, which was much too short to allow me to understand that evening, he added, "Or rather, I did care. I believe that at the time I wanted her to know about everything. I had reached a point where I simply had to show my radio to someone, and I would rather it was Lina than anyone else: with her it was like a game. Anyone else would have been horrified by the truth, but she was happy afterward. So that evening I said to her, 'Come down now into the basement; we'll listen to the radio together.' "

And at this point I suddenly smiled and said: "If I'd known at the time all the things you're capable of, I would have come to you and asked you to show me a tree." Which in turn Jacob couldn't understand. Let's listen to that evening.

Considerable suspense, Lina hangs on to Jacob's jacket, the basement corridor is long and dim. The metal doors that are passed on tiptoe are all locked, as if to hide riches of incalculable worth. The air is damp and cold, although it's August outside. With anxious foresight, Jacob has insisted on a winter dress, stockings, and a scarf for Lina; from ceiling and walls hang droplets that glisten like tiny, feeble lamps.

"Are you scared?"

"No," she whispers firmly, and it's not that much of a lie; her curiosity will make her forget everything else. After all, at the end of the passage waits the thing she has been searching for in vain for days and that she has almost given up as a lost cause, and who is she to say now, I'm scared, let's go back?

At last Jacob stops, at almost the last locker in the long row. Taking the key from his pocket, he unlocks the door and turns on the light, which is only slightly brighter than no light at all.

The locker has to be described: twelve feet square with no window. Its most noticeable feature is a partition built right across it, making almost two out of it and leaving only a narrow passage: the builders must have had a coal bin in mind. The inventory is quickly listed: an iron bedstead with rusty springs, the remains of an old stove with some leftover tiles, green and brown, and a few stovepipes, including an elbow. And in the corner by the door, the only treasure worth locking up: a small, carefully stacked pile of firewood in which Piwowa, the demanding poacher, had been sleeping some months ago while it still represented a piece of furniture. Then a glance behind the partition: more stove debris, bricks, a spade, a bucket with holes in it, and an ax. That's all: I'm being so accurate not because these items are of any significance but because later I was there, during my search for witnesses and traces and nonexistent trees. Just as I have measured the distance between the military office and the next corner with my tape measure, just as I went into Jacob's room where by that time an old woman was living by herself who knew nothing about the fate of any former

tenants — the housing authorities had allocated the room to her on a temporary basis — I have also been in this locker; it still belongs to that room. Mrs. Domnik handed me the key without question, saying merely that she had never been down there, she didn't own anything that needed to be kept in the basement, so I mustn't be surprised at the dust or at any mess I might find there, she wasn't responsible for that. And indeed it was dusty, with cobwebs everywhere, that is the truth, but I didn't notice any mess, I found everything just as Jacob had described it to me. The bedstead, stove debris, ax and bucket; even the chopped-up wood was still by the door.

Jacob locks the door from the inside; he says, "So nobody will disturb us." Then he goes on: "And now sit down here," pointing to the iron bedstead.

Lina has already looked around a bit, so far without any result, yet she sits down without protest; under these circumstances he could demand a much greater display of obedience from her.

"Where do you keep the radio?"

"It won't hurt you to wait."

He squats down in front of her, takes her chin in one hand, turns her face toward him, forcing her to look at him, and starts off with the necessary preparation: "Now listen carefully to what I have to say. First of all you must promise me you'll be good and do everything that I'm now going to ask of you. Sacred word of honor?"

The sacred word of honor, intended only for occasions of the utmost importance, is given impatiently; her eyes demand that he cut short the preliminaries.

"You'll sit here keeping perfectly still. The radio is behind that partition. I'll go behind there now and turn it on, then we'll both hear it play. But if I notice you getting up, I'll shut it off again immediately."

"Can't I see it?"

"Absolutely not!" says Jacob firmly. "Actually little girls like you

aren't even allowed to hear it either, it's strictly forbidden. But I'm making an exception with you. Agreed?"

What can she do, she's being blackmailed and must submit. Hearing is better than nothing, although she had been looking forward to actually seeing it. Besides, she still might, she might, you never know.

"What is your radio going to play?"

"I don't know in advance, I have to switch it on first."

The preparations are completed, nothing more can be done to protect himself. Jacob stands up. He goes to the partition, pauses in the little passage, and looks once more at Lina, with an expression intended, if it were possible, to chain her to the bedstead; then he finally disappears. Jacob's eyes must first get used to the unfamiliar light, which hardly reaches beyond the partition, and he knocks the bucket with his foot.

"Was that the radio?"

"No, not yet. It'll be another moment or two."

Something is needed to sit on, for the stunt may take a while once it gets started. Jacob turns the bucket bottom side up and settles down on it. At this late stage he is faced with the question of what kind of program the radio has to offer, Lina having already touched briefly on this, and the time is ripe for an answer. He should have thought about this earlier, should have done all sorts of things, perhaps even practiced a bit, but as things are the radio will have to play whatever comes to mind, whether it be music or talk. Jacob remembers how, eons ago, his father could imitate an entire brass band, with tuba, trumpets, trombones, and a big drum, enough to send the family into fits of laughter. After supper, if the day had passed without any major annoyance, he could sometimes be persuaded. But Jacob wonders whether he can manage to produce an orchestra like that the very first time; his father spent hours polishing his act. Lina is waiting silently in her winter dress, and Jacob is already sweating, although the performance hasn't even begun yet.

"Here we go," says Jacob, ready for whatever suggests itself.

A fingernail flicks against the bucket, that's how radios are switched on, then the air is filled with buzzing and whistling. He skips the warming-up period, a detail for connoisseurs, Jacob's radio has the correct temperature right away, and the station is also quickly selected.

An announcer with a high voice — the first thing to suggest itself, as has been said — comes on the air: "Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, far and near, you are about to hear an interview with the British prime minister Mr. Winston Churchill."

Then the announcer releases the microphone and a man with a midlevel voice is heard, the reporter: "Good evening, Mr. Churchill."

Then Churchill himself, in a very deep voice and with a noticeable foreign accent: "Good evening one and all!"

REPORTER: "I am delighted to welcome you to our studio. And here is my first question: Would you please tell our listeners how from your vantage point you assess the present situation?"

CHURCHILL: "That's not too difficult. I am firmly convinced that the whole schlimazl will soon be over, in another few weeks at most."

REPORTER: "And may one ask the source of this reassuring conviction?"

CHURCHILL (somewhat embarrassed): "Oh well, things are progressing nicely on all fronts. It is fairly obvious that the Germans won't be able to hold out much longer."

REPORTER: "Wonderful! And what is the situation in the area of Bezanika specifically?"

There is a minor interruption. Either it's the sweating and the cold air in the basement, or something has got into Jacob's nose; whatever the cause, reporter, announcer, and Mr. Churchill all have to sneeze at the same time.

REPORTER (the first to recover himself): "Gesundheit, Mr. Prime Minister!"

CHURCHILL (after blowing his nose): "Thanks. But back to your question. In the Bezanika area, things are looking particularly bad for the Germans. The Russians are having it all their own way, and Bezanika has been in their hands for some time. Only yesterday they won an important battle on the River Rudna, if you know where that is."

REPORTER: "Yes, I'm familiar with that river."

CHURCHILL: "Then you also know where the front is now. I'm certain it can't last much longer."

REPORTER (delighted): "That will please our listeners very much, if they don't happen to be Germans. Thank you very much, Mr. Churchill, for this enlightening conversation."

CHURCHILL: "Don't mention it."

ANNOUNCER (after a brief pause): "That, ladies and gentlemen, was the promised interview with the British prime minister Mr. Winston Churchill. Good night."

A fingernail flicks against the bucket, that's how radios are switched off, and Jacob wipes the sweat from his forehead. A bit thin, that interview, he thinks, and also a bit above Lina's head, but unfortunately this will never change. He hasn't the inventive gifts of a Sholem Aleichem, don't ask too much of a harassed man, that should be enough for today.

Jacob reappears; the situation proves highly satisfactory not only in the area of Bezanika but no less so here in the basement. At last Lina's own ears have heard a radio, strictly forbidden for children, and she is thrilled. It might have turned out differently, disguising his voice had been a step onto virgin soil, and in three variations too; Lina might have icily demanded that he stop this nonsense and turn on the radio. Jacob would have died of heart failure, the mere thought of it, but Lina wouldn't dream of saying anything of the kind. The situation couldn't be better, he sees that at once.

"Did you like that?"

"Oh yes!"

Satisfaction on both sides. Jacob stands in front of her and is about to suggest they leave — We've had our fun; bed is waiting — but Lina says, "You don't mean it's all over."

"What else?"

"I'd like to hear some more."

"No, no, that's enough," he says, but without much conviction. A brief verbal skirmish, it's already too late, she would like to hear more, some other time perhaps, anything, can't get enough, all he has to do is turn the radio on again, she'll be happy with anything. Jacob sneezes again, this evening the whole world has to sneeze. As he blows his nose he studies her expression and finds no suspicion reflected in it. That settles it.

"What do you want to hear?"

So Jacob is again sitting on the bucket, in complete silence, now seized by ambition. Ambition in terms of the brass band: he can't get it out of his head, although it has been silent for a good forty years, covered with dust, the instruments all rusty. Jacob is ready to take a chance, so determined is he today.

First there is the flicking, then the buzzing and whistling; the second time it already sounds more convincing, and then the music starts in a rush, with drum and cymbals taking the first bar. Drum and cymbals are followed by a solitary trombone, which needs a few notes to get onto the right track. The tune is uncertain, Jacob tells me, an improvised series of notes, interspersed with a variety of familiar themes but with no particular pattern; the only certainty is that it is a march. Tentatively the feet take over the percussion, supported by the fingers using the bucket, thus leaving the mouth free for the remaining instruments. For one trombone does not a brass band make; it must be relieved by the trumpet, and that in turn by the falsetto of the clarinet, and from time to time a tuba note from the back of the throat. Jacob loses, as one says, all inhibition. The only constraint he submits to — despite his haste his ear has not forgotten a certain rule, strictly observed by his father — is that vowels be used sparingly, if possible avoided altogether, since instruments give voice only in consonants or, to be more precise, only in sounds that can be approximated by consonants and are remotely similar but not identical to them. So his lips don't produce a simple ta-ta-ra-ta or la-li-la; he

has to shape sounds not found in any alphabet. The basement reverberates with sounds never yet heard. Maybe too much effort for the sake of a child like Lina, who would be satisfied with less polish, but let us remember that ambition is involved, a self-imposed test, and virtuosity thrives best without compulsion. Soon the key is maintained without difficulty, trumpets and trombones toss phrases back and forth, experiment with antiphony, and almost always bring things to a happy conclusion. The clarinet, too uncomfortably high in pitch, is forced to retreat farther and farther into the background: instead the tuba makes itself heard more often, now and then even venturing a little extra flourish, a run in the lower regions, to escape, when breath runs short, into two or three bars of bucket thumping.

In a word, a piece of musical history is being written, Jacob has brought off a triumph, and Lina can't bear to stay where she is any longer. Without a sound she gets up, all sacred words of honor forgotten, and her legs move irresistibly toward the partition. She must see this thing that sounds so much like Jacob and yet so different, that can speak with various voices, sneeze like he does, and make such strange noises. Just one look, even at the cost of the discovery of a breach of confidence; there's no resisting her legs, which have a will of their own. Actually such great caution isn't necessary; the racket made by that thing drowns out all else. Nevertheless she moves stealthily, as far as the narrow passage, just as the trombone is finishing a masterly solo and making way for the trumpet. Lina cautiously pokes her head around the corner, invisible to Jacob. He is not only sitting sideways, he is also keeping his eyes firmly closed, a sign of extreme physical and mental concentration, the world forgotten as he rends the air according to rules known only to himself. No, Jacob isn't aware that for a few seconds he is sitting there totally exposed. Later, Lina's cryptic allusions will rouse his suspicions, and only much later will she tell him to his face what actually happened down there in that basement. For the time being, a brief glance and a few seconds' surprise are enough for her; she set out for India and has discovered America. The

purpose of this expedition was to find out what the thing looked like, and now she knows: it looks exactly like Jacob. There remains only one question: one day she will ask him whether he has another radio besides this one. Presumably not; where could he keep it hidden if not here? Lina knows something that no one else knows. Quietly she returns to her place; her pleasure in listening has not been diminished, only mixed with a few thoughts that are of no concern to anyone but her.

Then the march comes to an end, but not the performance. When Jacob emerges, exhausted and relieved and with a parched mouth, Lina clamors for an encore: all good things come in threes, now especially. This proves to him that she had not become suspicious, and such was her intention. If this march went well, he thinks, nothing can go wrong now.

"But this will be the very last," says Jacob.

He goes back to his post, the next broadcast already in mind, and flicks. Lina is in luck, Jacob soon finds the station where fairy tales are being told by a kindly uncle who says: "For all the children listening to us, your fairy-tale uncle will tell you the story of the sick princess."

He has a voice similar to Winston Churchill's, just as deep, only a little softer and, of course, without a foreign accent.

"Do you know that one?" Jacob asks as Jacob.

"No. But how can there be a fairy-tale uncle on the radio?"

"What do you mean, how? There is, that's all."

"But you said radio was forbidden for children. And fairy tales are only for children, aren't they?"

"True. But what I meant was that it's forbidden here in the ghetto. Where there's no ghetto, children are allowed to listen. And there are radios everywhere. Right?"

"Right."

The fairy-tale uncle, a bit put out by the interruption but fair enough to look for the reasons in himself, takes off his jacket and puts it under him, since the bucket is hard and sharp edged and the fairy

tale one of the longer ones — provided, that is, he can remember how it all goes. My God, how long ago that was, he has to think, now of all times. Fairy tales were not his father's responsibility but his mother's. You used to lie in bed and wait and wait for her to be finished with her housework and come to you, and you almost always fell asleep while you were waiting. But sometimes she did sit down beside you, slip her warm hand under the cover onto your chest, and tell you stories. About Jaromir the robber with the three eyes, who always had to sleep on the cold ground because there was no bed long enough for him; about Raschka the cat that wouldn't catch mice but only birds until one day it saw a bat; about Lake Schapun into which Dvoyre the witch made all the children cry so many tears that it rose and rose and overflowed its banks and Dvoyre drowned miserably in it; and sometimes about the sick princess.

"When's it going to start?" Lina asks.

"The tale of the sick princess," the fairy-tale uncle begins.

About the good old king who had a vast country and a gloriously beautiful palace and a daughter as well, the old story, and how he got a terrible scare. Because, you see, he loved her more than anything in the world, his princess. He loved her so much that, whenever she fell and tears came into her eyes, he had to cry himself. And the scare came when one morning she didn't want to get out of bed and looked really sick. Then the most expensive doctor in all the land was summoned to make her well quickly and happy again. But the doctor tapped and listened to her from head to toe and then said in great perplexity: "I'm terribly sorry, Mr. King, I can't find anything. Your daughter must be suffering from a disease I have never come across during my entire lifetime."

Now the good old king was even more scared, so he went to see the princess himself and asked her what on earth was the matter. And she told him she wanted a cloud: once she had that, she would be well again immediately. "But a real one!" she said. What a shock that was, for, as anyone can imagine, it is far from easy to get hold of a real cloud, even for a king. All day long he was so worried that he couldn't

rule, and that evening he had letters sent out to all the clever men in his kingdom ordering them to drop everything and come forthwith to the royal palace.

Next morning they were all assembled, the doctors and the ministers, the stargazers and the weathermen, and the king stood up on his throne so that everyone in the hall could hear him properly and shouted: "Si—lence!" Instantly you could have heard a pin drop, and the king announced: "To the one among you wise men who brings my daughter a cloud from the sky I will give as much gold and silver as can be heaped onto the biggest wagon in all the land!" When the clever men heard that, they started then and there to study, to ponder, to scheme and to calculate. For they all wanted that heap of gold and silver, who wouldn't? One especially smart fellow even began building a tower that was to reach up to the clouds, the idea being that, when the tower was finished, he would climb up, grab a cloud, and then cash in the reward. But before the tower was even halfway up, it fell down. And none of the others had any luck either; not one of the wise men could get the princess the cloud she so badly wanted. She grew thinner and sicker, thinner and thinner, since from sheer misery she never touched a morsel, not even matzo with butter.

One fine day the garden boy, who the princess sometimes used to play with outdoors before she got sick, looked into the palace to see whether any of the vases needed flowers. So it came about that he saw her lying in her bed, under a silken coverlet, pale as snow. All through the last few days he had been puzzling over why she never came out into the garden anymore. And that is why he asked her, "What is the matter, little princess? Why don't you come out into the sunshine anymore?" And so she told him, too, that she was sick and wouldn't get well again until someone brought her a cloud. The garden boy thought for a bit, then exclaimed, "But that's quite easy, little princess!" "Is it?" the princess asked in surprise. "Is it quite easy? All the wise men in the land have been racking their brains in vain, and you claim that it's quite easy?" "Yes," the garden boy said, "you just have to tell me what a cloud is made of." That would have

almost made the princess laugh if she hadn't been so weak. She replied, "What silly questions you ask! Everybody knows that clouds are made of cotton!" "I see, and will you also tell me how big a cloud is?" "You don't even know *that?*" she said in surprise. "A cloud is as big as my pillow. You can see that for yourself if you'll just pull the curtain aside and look up at the sky." Whereupon the garden boy went to the window, looked up at the sky, and exclaimed, "You're right! Just as big as your pillow!" Then he went off and soon returned, bringing the princess a piece of cotton as big as her pillow.

I needn't bother with the rest. Everyone can easily imagine how the princess's eyes lit up and her lips turned red and she got well again, how the good old king rejoiced, how the garden boy didn't want the promised reward but preferred to marry the princess, and they lived happily ever after. That's Jacob's story.

It is probably the same evening, or possibly one before or one after; lovely, gentle Rosa is lying beside Mischa listening to the battle of the Rudna. Mischa is telling her in a soft voice, but he is not whispering; there is a big difference between talking softly and whispering, and you may well ask, Why isn't he whispering? And you may ask, Why is the cupboard no longer in the middle of the room but standing quite normally against the wall, and Why is the curtain covering the window again instead of dividing the room into two halves? What has happened to the screen? you may wonder, and above all, Why is Rosa suddenly lying there naked although the light is still on, why is she no longer embarrassed? Then please be good enough to glance at the other bed, you will find it empty, and all those questions will boil down to one: Where is the deaf and dumb Isaak Fayngold of the sharp ears?

I don't know the answer any better than Mischa does, let alone Rosa. A week ago Fayngold left early in the morning to go to work, as he did every day, and has not been heard of since. The first evening it

didn't seem too serious; Mischa thought he might have gone to visit a friend, that they got to talking and Fayngold suddenly noticed that it was past eight o'clock and too late to go home, so he had just lain down on the floor and spent the night there. "What do you mean, got to talking?" Rosa asked suspiciously. "He's deaf and dumb, isn't he?" "What makes you think deaf and dumb people can't talk to each other?" Mischa answered quick as a flash. "Do you think they're condemned to keep everything that's going around in their heads to themselves? They can communicate every bit as well as you and I, only in sign language, that's all."

But the second evening Fayngold didn't come home either, or the third, so on the fourth day Mischa went to see the only person with whom, as far as he knew, Fayngold was friendly, Hersch Praschker, who worked with Fayngold in the cleanup detail, clearing the streets of garbage and of the bodies of those who had died of starvation. But Praschker had no idea either. "I meant to go and look in at his place tomorrow," he said, "and find out why he wasn't turning up for work. They're sure to come for him; they've already got his name down." "When was the last time he came to work?" "Tuesday." "And Wednesday morning he left home as usual."

He never arrived, never returned home; perhaps he escaped or died or was in an accident or was arrested off the street. Death or accident seems unlikely since he was never found; inquiries established this. A planned escape seems unlikely; none of his things are missing from the cupboard, not even the photograph of his grandson; he would never have left that behind, he guarded it like a treasure. So all that really remains is an arrest off the street. Why, is a mystery, for Fayngold has always been a reliable and law-abiding person, but we all know the saying, where there's a will there's a way. And all this makes it clear why Mischa is telling the story of the battle of the Rudna in a soft voice and not whispering.

Rosa is lying beside him for the second night in a row, something that has never happened before. Old Mr. Frankfurter, who, as a man of the theater, is not known to be partial to ultrastrict morals, has

uttered a word of warning: "Very well, children, you love each other, that's understandable. But don't go overboard right away." Because of that and because of Rosa's reserve, the number of nights they spend together remains within modest limits. Mischa has had to persuade her each time almost as if it were the first, with one or two exceptions. And now the very next night again. Rosa imagines it must be something like this when one is married, but, frankly, she doesn't feel all that comfortable about it. This has nothing to do with Mischa, as if he were suddenly different from before, less inhibited, perhaps, or more demanding; Mischa's stock has not dropped by a single point, for she regards him with no less love than on the first day. Or let's say, the fifth. The reason for this, unaccountable though it may sound to some, is Isaak Fayngold; in some strange way she has become accustomed to him. But how can one become accustomed to a person who is only a distraction, deaf and dumb though he may be? In such a situation, in which privacy is taken for granted, how can one? One can, and one can't; we will try to get to the bottom of this.

In the first place, it was in this room that Rosa first made love, in Fayngold's presence; he was there from the very first instant, and keeping him in ignorance was a constant ingredient of all their caresses. In the second place, Fayngold's bed is not just an empty bed: no, Fayngold isn't lying in it, which makes a considerable difference. Each time she looks behind the screen, now superfluous and hence removed, she is reminded of his grim fate — uncertain, true, but the longer she broods over it, only uncertain as to the manner of death. And in the third and final place, when Mischa told her that Fayngold had disappeared, her face showed dismay, as expected, but after a while not nearly as much dismay, and she caught herself thinking: At last. That wasn't directed at Fayngold, she wished him only the best; it simply had to do with herself and Mischa and implied: alone at last, at last undisturbed, at last a little nook for the two of us. That's what she caught herself thinking, and it bothered her quite a bit; she was ashamed of such thoughts, yet kept on thinking: At last. Then she thought too, Just as well Mischa doesn't

know what selfish notions are being hatched in my head. And she also thought, Regardless of what happened to Fayngold, it's over and done with now, and the thoughts we keep to ourselves can't have any effect on people's lives.

But they did have an effect; it wasn't that simple. For several days she gave Mischa reasons why she couldn't go with him to his room, and he went off disappointed. Until yesterday, when she couldn't or wouldn't find any more reasons. "And why aren't you coming today?" he asked her. "But I am!" and then he said it: "At last!" They went to his room. Mischa had already rearranged it, now that Fayngold's absence could be regarded as permanent. The cupboard stood, as noted before, against the wall, the curtain hung in front of the window. Rosa stopped short in the middle of the room and first had to get used to it, having never seen it like this. Of course she noticed Fayngold's neatly made bed, sensing right away that there would be a problem about that. "What's that box there?" she asked.

"His things. In case someone comes for them," Mischa replied. And that immediately set the mood.

At some point they lay down, but for a long time without speaking or moving and without joy. In the same way that everything else was different that evening, the light was still on. Mischa lay on his side and she on her back because the bed was too narrow for both to lie on their backs. With a glance at Fayngold's smooth bed he asked: "What do you think, couldn't we —?"

"Oh no, please!" she broke in nervously.

"All right then."

He turned out the light, slid his arm under her head — that's how it usually began — and tried to kiss her, but she turned aside. Until he asked: "What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing."

He pondered for a while what *nothing* might mean, then said: "But you didn't really know him at all, and even if you did, what can we do about it?"

Again he tried to kiss her, and this time she let him, but only just. He soon noticed that there was nothing doing, so he closed his eyes, tomorrow is another day, and fell asleep. That was the only thing that was as usual: he is always the first to fall asleep.

In the middle of the night she woke him up; he wasn't annoyed, he hoped she had finally changed her mind, and one is glad to be woken up for that.

"I have to tell you something, Mischa," she whispered.

"Yes?"

Completely misinterpreting the ensuing silence, he drew her to him, and as he brushed his lips over her face he noticed that it was wet and salty, from the eyes down. That shook him to the core because he was used to her seldom laughing and never crying; not even when her only friend had to board that train six months ago was she able to cry, although for days she didn't utter a word. And now suddenly her face was wet, it was enough to shake anyone, but she hadn't sobbed or moaned, it must have happened quite silently; he wouldn't even have woken up if she hadn't woken him. And besides, it seemed to be more or less over, to judge by her voice.

"I have a request, I'm sure you'll find it strange."

"Tell me."

"I'd like the room put back the way it was before."

"What do you mean — the way it was before?"

"I'd like the cupboard back in the middle. And the curtain."

"But why? Fayngold isn't there anymore."

"I'd like it that way," she said.

He really did find it strange — first strange, then childish, then silly, then plain ridiculous. Then he remembered having heard or read something about the unfathomable moods of women and that it is advisable to nip them in the bud. The whole change that she wanted would have taken him no more than ten minutes, but he said: "Only if you can give me a sensible reason."

"I'd like it that way," she said.

And that wasn't a sensible reason, not by any standards, and he

steadfastly refused. He told her that, although it was to her credit to take Fayngold's disappearance so much to heart in spite of hardly knowing him, only his breathing and snoring, in the ghetto many people one knew just as little disappear every day, after all, and if one were to make such a fuss about every single one of those, it would be unbearable. And she accused him of being an uncouth, insensitive clot. Their first quarrel was under way and, if it hadn't been for the eight-o'clock curfew, she would undoubtedly have got up, dressed, and said good-bye. But as it was she merely turned her back to him to make him realize how much she despised him.

The next day — today, that is — he went to meet her right outside the factory because at her home, in the presence of her parents, a reconciliation would have been much more difficult. It was difficult enough anyway, not for any lack of goodwill but because they had no experience in ending quarrels. Finally they both admitted that they hadn't behaved all that well, a kiss in a doorway, and each could breathe more freely again. They dropped by her home to let them know where she would be spending the night. Mr. Frankfurter did not seem enthusiastic; he could not know that last night had been practically a washout. Mischa heard Mrs. Frankfurter murmuring to her husband, "Let them be."

So on to his room. Both did all in their power to be nice to each other, showing their best sides after the quarrel, but one could sense that a little more time would have to pass before everything was back to normal.

Mischa told her about the battle of the Rudna, or rather, since we have returned to the present, Mischa tells her about the battle of the Rudna in a low voice, and finally finishes it, as heard today from Jacob, the latest news, so to speak, from the ether. Rosa melts with bliss, she knows where the Rudna flows and how much progress since Bezanika this battle represents, and she's half-inclined to start making new plans. But Mischa isn't interested in plans, not at the moment, they won't run away as this second night might, and he turns out the light to devote himself to Rosa. There is to be no more

talk of victories; last night was practically a washout. The Rudna and Fayngold and words spoken in anger are forgotten; the two come closer together in the old familiar way, insofar as individual volition is in control. But it does not hold unlimited sway; they catch themselves making comparisons: That's how it is now, really no different from before. For a while they lie side by side looking at each other. And perhaps they are even conscious of there being no third person's breathing from the other half of the room to disturb them. Let's come right out with it: the attempt to make up for a lost night turns out rather woefully, even though they would never admit it, even though they pretend to be as content as young lovers.

We will leave them now, with some regret but in the hope that more carefree times will return; we are at liberty to hope this. Let us stop a moment to listen to Mischa, riding the wave of restored harmony, asking with a smile something he would have done better not to ask: "Do you still want me to divide the room again with the cupboard and the curtain?" He says this with a smile, not doubting for a moment that Rosa sees things differently now, that in reply she'll say something about silly moods, that she didn't know what got into her yesterday, and that the whole tiresome incident would best be forgotten.

And, just before we leave, let us hear Rosa say, "Yes, please."

Jacob has to hear with his own ears how distorted his stories become when they are passed on.

Jacob is on his way to the attic to see Lina; not that it's bedtime, but he has to do more with her than just to make sure she washes properly, brushes her teeth, and goes to bed at the right time. At the freight yard we were sent home two hours early; there was nothing left to be unloaded, and the sentries didn't feel like watching over idlers, so they told us to shove off. A few particularly bold theorists speculate that there is more than mere laziness behind this order:

perhaps the sentries are trying to be friends; after all they could just as easily have kept us there another two hours, standing in line. But they sent us home. Perhaps this is a subtle indication that a new era is knocking at the door. Anyway, the two hours will be well spent with Lina, Jacob thinks. As he places his hand on the door handle he realizes that she is not alone. He hears Rafael's voice asking, "What's it all about, then?"

"About a princess," says Lina.

"Does she get kidnapped?"

"What makes you think that?"

"Of course she does. I know all that. She's kidnapped by a robber. He wants a lot of ransom money for her, but the prince kills him and sets her free. And afterward they get married."

"What nonsense you talk," Lina retorts. "That's a whole other story. Do you think there's only one story about a princess?"

"All right then, tell it!"

"Aren't we going to wait for Siegfried?"

"He won't come."

Jacob can hear them waiting and the attic window being opened. Rafael shouts, "Siegfried!"

Then he says Siegfried is nowhere in sight, and shortly afterward Lina screams at Rafael to stop that nonsense. What nonsense she means isn't clear, but he doesn't seem to be stopping right away. Then he asks, "Who told you the story anyway?"

"Uncle Jacob."

That gives an eavesdropper pause for thought. Jacob has never told her a fairy tale about a princess, he would be bound to remember that. It must have been the fairy-tale uncle, and without a tremor in her voice she turns two separate people into one man. That gives pause for thought; perhaps it was even Jacob who played the march music and asked the questions and gave the answers. Or it was a hasty slip of the tongue on Lina's part, or — and this would be best — she had resorted to a white lie so as not to reveal the existence of the radio. That remains to be seen; they will have to discuss it later.

"He won't be coming now, so you might as well start," says Rafael.

And that's what happens. Lina clears her throat, Jacob pricks up his ears; he has never heard what his stories sound like when they are passed on.

"Once upon a time there was a king, a good old king, and he had a daughter, that was the princess," Lina began.

"What was the king called?"

Lina is evidently trying to remember whether any names were mentioned at all. For Rafael this takes too long, and he says, "Surely you must at least know what he was called?"

"His name was Benjamin," Lina recalls. "And the princess was called Magdalena."

"*What* was he called? Benjamin? Do you know who's called Benjamin? My uncle in Tarnopol, he's called Benjamin. But never a king."

"I don't care if you believe it or not, but the king in this fairy tale was called Benjamin."

"Oh, all right!" says Rafi generously, not about to spoil things for the sake of a name. Jacob is almost sure that he is standing there with folded arms in a patronizing manner.

Lina continues, but more hurriedly than at first, as if she had lost the thread, as if expecting further objections: "One day the princess got sick. The doctor couldn't find anything because he didn't know what her disease was, but she wouldn't eat any more bread, and she wouldn't drink either. So the king went to her himself, he loved her so much, you see — I forgot that part. And he asked her what was the matter. Then she told him she wouldn't get well again till someone brought her a bunch of cotton as big as her pillow. And then the old king —"

But that's as far as she gets, Rafael has had enough; he has tried

hard and listened patiently, but too much is too much, his credulity can be stretched, but it has limits.

"What kind of a disease is your Magdalena supposed to have had?"

"You just heard."

"And I'm telling you, there is no such disease! Not in the whole world!"

"How do you know?"

"If at least she had measles, or whooping cough, or typhoid," Rafael protests. "You know what the princess really had? A fart in her head!"

He laughs, much louder than Jacob, but Lina can find nothing funny about his explanation. "Do you want to go on hearing the story or don't you?" she asks.

"I don't," says Rafael, still amused; the best jokes are always one's own. "Because she had a fart in her head. Because the whole story is a load of nonsense. First about the king, in the whole world you'll never find a king called Benjamin. And then princesses never eat bread, only cake. And the biggest nonsense of all is that disease. Or have you seriously ever heard of a person getting sick from not having any cotton?"

Lina seems to be impressed by Rafael's reasoning; at least she is silent, without tears, Jacob hopes. And he doesn't alter his opinion; she is a clever girl, anyone can make mistakes. The excitement in the basement may have been responsible for the misunderstanding, or such flights of fancy are simply beyond a child of Lina's age. Jacob's hand is on the door handle again; you should intervene, console and explain, they might — God forbid — come to blows. You could go in quite innocently, Hello Lina, hello Rafael, nice of you to come and see her, how's your mother? Then the conversation will automatically turn to the argument, which will be recounted by both parties, Calm down, children; let's hear you each in turn. Then you will undoubtedly come up with conciliatory words that will make what is unclear appear in a fresh light, Not a reason in the world, children, to be angry

with each other; things actually look thus and so. And in the end it'll all be settled to everyone's satisfaction. So Jacob is about to plunge into the fray when he hears Rafael's peaceable voice: "If your uncle happens to tell you another story, ask him to think up something better than that nonsense. That princess just had a huge fart in her head."

Jacob never gets to intervene; the door opens and, with his usual luck with doors, it opens outward and provides a hiding place. Rafael is off to more rewarding pastimes; no doubt he is going to look for Siegfried and report. He can be heard running down the stairs and whistling, he is whistling "Oranges and Lemons," and he goes on whistling as Lina shouts the meager remainder of the story after him: "But she did have that disease! And the garden boy got her the cotton! And that made her well again, and they got married!"

She has said everything, although to closed ears; down on the ground floor the little tune dies away, the front door clicks shut, and up in the attic a long, disappointed tongue is stuck out, and the attic door is slammed, with Jacob outside the door as at the beginning. Doubts arise as to whether the two bonus hours will be well spent with Lina after this. He tells me that although it was quite amusing, listening to those two children, he suddenly lost all desire to go in; he suddenly felt worn out. He would rather keep the two hours for himself after all. And he asks whether he is boring me with such details, if so I only have to tell him.

I tell him, "No."

Jacob goes for a walk with his two hours; there are other places to relax besides cramped rooms or with children one has grown fond of. He still feels the urge to take a stroll, despite the searchlight and the military office. To take a stroll in a little town from which in your whole life you have never been farther away than a week; the sunshine is pleasant on your path, as pleasant as the memories that are after all the true reason for your having left the house, memories to which every second street builds a bridge, as we know. Around one corner, then another, and there you are in front of the building where

it was so often decided how good your next winter would be, for here lived none other than Aaron Ehrlicher, the potato merchant. Much depended on the prices set by him: the price of potato pancakes and with that the volume of business. Ehrlicher could never be persuaded to bargain, so-and-so much and not a penny less, if you think that's too high, Mr. Heym, you're welcome to look around to see whether you can get potatoes cheaper somewhere else. If you do, please be kind enough to let me know, I'd like to buy there too. Never, ever did he consent to bargain, and once Jacob said to him, "Mr. Ehrlicher, you don't deal in potatoes, you just sell potatoes." Only in fun, of course, but Ehrlicher didn't burst out laughing. And it was hard to tell whether he was a poor soul, a humble tradesman, like yourself, or a businessman of a higher category. His wife used to wear a fine, brown fur piece, and his children were plump and round and stuck-up, yet his office smelled moldy; it was small and shabby and consisted of a table, a chair, and blank walls. He would gesture at all this with a sigh and ask, "How can I afford to reduce my prices?"

Now there are strangers living there, you turn the page of Aaron Ehrlicher and walk on, two free hours are a long time, head for Libauer-Gasse and stop in front of Number 38. There is no building you walk to as often as this one, when you're out for a stroll, none that you stand outside for so long, and there are good reasons for this. The fact that you even go into the dark inner courtyard . . . it all has its reasons; suspicious eyes inspect you through the windows, what is a stranger doing in their courtyard, but you aren't that much of a stranger here.

On the third floor, behind the door on the left of the corridor, is where, to put it grandly, you gambled away or won your life's happiness: at the crucial moment you couldn't make up your mind, and to this day you don't know how good or bad that was. Josefa Litwin asked you point-blank what your intentions were, and you couldn't think of anything better to do than cast your eyes down and stammer that you needed a bit more time to think about it.

A magnificent woman, if eyes are any judge. You saw her for the

first time in the train and instantly you thought, Boyoboy! She was wearing a green velvet dress with a white lace collar, and a hat the size of an open umbrella. And she was at most in her mid-thirties and thus exactly right for the forty-year-old you were then, right as far as age was concerned. But there in the compartment you never dreamed that sitting opposite you was the greatest problem of your next few years. You just gaped at her, so you tell me, like a young idiot; she may not even have noticed. Coincidence or not, when you got off the train together and there was no porter in sight, she asked whether you would mind carrying her heavy suitcase, she lived only a few streets further on, at Number 38 Libauer-Gasse. But she didn't ask as if you were a man of inferior position, although even then you wouldn't have refused; she was helpless and smiled and asked you a favor in her capacity as a weak woman. In your capacity as a gentleman. Delighted you said: "What a question!" Snatched up her suitcase as if you were afraid a porter might yet turn up and hurried after her as far as Number 38, as far as her own front door. There you set down the suitcase, and for a few seconds you smiled at each other in embarrassment. Then she thanked you nicely and said good-bye. And you stood there thinking, Too bad.

A few weeks later, and that was certainly a coincidence, she appeared in your shop one afternoon accompanied by a man. You recognized her at once, and quite unjustifiably felt annoyed about the man, but then you were pleased because she recognized you too. You didn't exchange a word, and the two of them had lemonade and raspberry ice cream. You observed them and couldn't make out their relationship, and why should you?

But when she came back the very next day, this time alone, you knew that was no coincidence. For the first time you were glad your shop was empty; apart from her, there was no other customer in the place — and the very next day! You sat down beside her, you chatted and introduced yourselves; she was the widow of a watchmaker who had been dead four years. It goes without saying that you didn't allow her to pay for her ice cream; she was to consider herself your guest,

it was so often decided how good your next winter would be, for here lived none other than Aaron Ehrlicher, the potato merchant. Much depended on the prices set by him: the price of potato pancakes and with that the volume of business. Ehrlicher could never be persuaded to bargain, so-and-so much and not a penny less, if you think that's too high, Mr. Heym, you're welcome to look around to see whether you can get potatoes cheaper somewhere else. If you do, please be kind enough to let me know, I'd like to buy there too. Never, ever did he consent to bargain, and once Jacob said to him, "Mr. Ehrlicher, you don't deal in potatoes, you just sell potatoes." Only in fun, of course, but Ehrlicher didn't burst out laughing. And it was hard to tell whether he was a poor soul, a humble tradesman, like yourself, or a businessman of a higher category. His wife used to wear a fine, brown fur piece, and his children were plump and round and stuck-up, yet his office smelled moldy; it was small and shabby and consisted of a table, a chair, and blank walls. He would gesture at all this with a sigh and ask, "How can I afford to reduce my prices?"

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today and as often as she liked. The man yesterday was mentioned as a casual acquaintance, he was no reason for you not to meet often, and there was no other reason either. So the next day in the shop, once again in the shop, then in another restaurant, in a neutral location so to speak, an innocent little dance. Then soon in your flat. Meanwhile, you had found out about her modest but by no means straitened circumstances, and that she had no children. Finally at Number 38 too. A cup of tea and some little homemade cakes, in the air a hint of delicate, flowery perfume; you spoke of mutual attraction, from the first moment really, and then another cup of tea, and there were more cakes in the kitchen.

That was an evening such as no poet ever described, my God, and a night, my God, ah well. What can one say, this story isn't about Jacob and Josefa, soon this page must be turned too. Just this: four whole years were the result, four years of living together as man and wife, though they never actually moved in together, though one subject was always avoided: rabbi or civil ceremony. Most carefully by Jacob, probably. There was ample opportunity to explore one another, Josefa's glitter wasn't always gold, some less precious metals were worked in with it. Sometimes Jacob found her domineering, sometimes too talkative, sometimes an indifferent housewife, and she in turn found the occasional flaw in him, without any of this immediately leading to a breakup. Quite the contrary, they got along very nicely together, and Jacob was beginning to think that things could go on like this indefinitely. But when she suddenly — what am I saying, suddenly! — suggested it might be better if she moved in with him and she could help in the shop, he was afraid he would become his own employee, and he replied, "We'll discuss that later."

Very well, later, Josefa was in no hurry, or so it seemed. Until, as noted, that particular evening came along, the one at Number 38 Libauer-Gasse, when Jacob gambled away or won his life's happiness, who knows? He arrived as usual and, as usual, took off his shoes and put his feet up on the sofa. Josefa stood at the window with her back to him.

"What's the matter with you today?" Jacob asked her. "No tea?"

Josefa didn't turn around at once, but soon. With a forbidding expression she sat down, not beside him on the sofa but in the armchair opposite.

"Jacob Heym, I have to talk to you."

"Go ahead," he said, prepared for quite a lot but not for what came now.

"Do you know Avrom Minsch?"

"Should I know him?"

"Avrom Minsch is the man I came into your shop with on that very first day, if you happen to remember."

"I remember all right. You told me at the time that he was a casual acquaintance."

"This morning Avrom Minsch asked me to marry him."

"And what did you tell him?"

"Jacob, this is serious! It's time you made up your mind!"

"Who, me?"

"Stop trying to be funny, Jacob. I'm now thirty-eight. I can't go on living like this forever. He plans to join his brother in America, and he asked me whether I would go with him as his wife."

What was Jacob supposed to answer? He didn't care for a pistol being held to his head, even less for the fact that Avrom Minsch had been kept a secret from him until this minute. No one proposes marriage to a casual acquaintance; for this purpose one must be more than slightly acquainted with her, and for four years he had imagined that Josefa and he knew each other inside out. The fact that Josefa was now offering him first refusal, as it were, could not dispel Jacob's disappointment, far from it. Silently he put on his shoes again, carefully avoided meeting her eyes until he reached the door, then by the open door said awkwardly, "I need some time to think about it."

One thinks about it and thinks about it, and to this very day is still thinking about it; even two bonus hours aren't long enough. A helpful person opens his window and calls softly across the courtyard, "Hey there!"

Jacob is startled and sees the moon coming up over the roof. He asks: "What is it?"

"You don't live here, do you?"

"No."

"It's way past seven."

"Thanks."

Jacob pulls himself together, not stopping as he walks home, while further memory-fraught buildings are ignored: it's already way past seven.

Lina is already in bed, and he has to explain why he is so late coming home from work: because there was much more to be loaded than usual. She chats away, not about personal worries such as fairy tales or tiresomely suspicious neighbors' sons, and Jacob can't very well ask. She knows how strenuous the days at the freight yard are, and now this extra work, he mustn't stay too long, just give her a quick kiss and go down to his room, love is entirely mutual.

Jacob leaves her, with a conscience that could be clearer. On the stairs he plans to make it up to Lina, tomorrow or quite soon. At his own table, meanwhile, as he is about to start on his supper of bread and malt coffee, he is not dissatisfied with the day just past, all in all: at the freight yard the Jews had been modest in their demands, the battle of the Rudna was still having its effects; then the bonus of two nostalgic hours, a diverting little fairy tale at the attic door, a less diverting Aaron Ehrlicher, but then Josefa. Josefa still there, between the few mouthfuls, between the sips, you simply can't get rid of the woman, what would have become of us two charmers if at Number 38 I had . . . ? Impossible to say, yet the question asked a thousand times over almost answers itself: a life halfway between heaven and hell, in other words, a perfectly ordinary life. How could it have turned out differently, and in what way, from those four familiar years? Years filled with variety, quarrels and misunderstandings, with moodiness, good times and some measure of contentment. And with a secret not discovered till the very last day. You simply can't get this woman out of your head, until there's a knock at the door.

There is a knock, and Jacob is tempted to call out immediately: "Come in, Kowalski!" That is to say, not exactly tempted, he merely assumes, but then he no longer assumes because it had been past seven over an hour ago, so it must be well past eight now, and even Kowalski isn't that crazy. Jacob calls out: "Come in!"

Professor Kirschbaum is honoring Jacob at his supper, he trusts he's not disturbing him, no not at all, won't he please be seated, to what do we owe this rare pleasure?

Kirschbaum sits down, delays the start of the conversation with many and diverse looks, and succeeds in gaining Jacob's concerned attention, except that Jacob doesn't know for what.

"Can you not imagine why I have come to see you, Mr. Heym?"

His first thought: "Is it about Lina? Is she worse again?"

"I am not here about Lina. To come straight to the point: I am here to speak to you about your radio set."

What a disappointment, what a shock, for a few hours the monster had been blissfully forgotten: now the battle of the Rudna will have to be dug up again. For your fellow citizens you are no longer a human being but the owner of the radio, the two being mutually exclusive, as has been clear for some time, and here it comes again. The right to the normal conversations of the old days has been forfeited. About the weather, or back pain, for which Kirschbaum would be an ideal conversation partner, or gossip about mutual acquaintances. There is no talk of important nothings when you're around — you with your treasure are too good for that.

"You also want to hear the news," says Jacob, more as a statement. Now he has Kirschbaum on his back too; never mind, one more or less.

"I do not wish to hear any news," Kirschbaum says, however. "I am here to express my disapproval. I should have done so long ago."

"Disapproval?"

"I do not know, my dear Mr. Heym, what motives led you to spread the information in question. But I find it difficult to imagine

that you have given proper consideration to the danger to which you are thereby exposing us."

Not news but disapproval, the ideas people have! No question, Kirschbaum is a very strange man. Do you, Professor, have to ruin my evening, my hard-earned free time? Do you have to make holier-than-thou speeches about matters over which my conscience was already struggling when for you my radio was an object hidden under seven seals? Do you have to tell *me?* Instead of patting me on the back and saying, Well done Mr. Heym, carry on, there is no medicine people need as much as hope. Or rather, not coming at all, for we learned long ago not to expect a pat on the back, yet here you come knocking at my door, damn you, and interfering and trying to teach me how to survive. And to top it all off I have to look interested because your concern is a thoroughly worthy one, because someday I may need you again for Lina, and I must also provide you with some good reasons for my action, although I can think of nothing that concerns you less. Just so that, after lengthy explanations, your learned lips are able to say: I see, yes of course, I understand.

"I need not tell you where we are living, my dear Mr. Heym," says Kirschbaum.

"No, you need not," says Jacob.

"And yet it seems to me essential. What would happen, for example, if this information were to come to the ears of the German gestapo? Have you thought of that?"

"Yes."

"I find that impossible to believe. Otherwise you would have acted differently."

"I see," says Jacob. "Would I."

Jacob gets up to take a walk, not the first one today, past table and bed and cupboard and Kirschbaum; his fury, since it cannot be put into words, has moved into his legs. But not all his fury, the room is too small for that; there remains for his voice an unmistakable residue that momentarily nettles Kirschbaum. When Jacob says, "Have you ever once seen their eyes when they beg me for news?

No? And do you know how badly they need some good news? Do you know that?"

"I can well imagine. Furthermore, I do not doubt that you are motivated by the best intentions. Nevertheless, I must —"

"Oh, you make me sick with your 'nevertheless'! Isn't it enough for you that we have almost nothing to eat, that in winter one in five of us freezes to death, that every day half a street gets taken away in transports? All that still isn't enough? And when I try to make use of the very last possibility that keeps them from just lying down and dying — with words, do you understand? I try to do that with words! Because that's all I have! — then you come and tell me it's prohibited!"

Oddly enough it is at this moment that Jacob thinks of a cigarette, so he tells me, of an untipped Juno. What Kirschbaum is thinking of is anybody's guess: whatever it is, he reaches into the pocket of his worn double-breasted suit and, hard though it is to believe, at this very moment pulls out a packet of cigarettes. And matches, and asks Jacob, with surprising politeness considering that barely concluded tirade: "Care for one?"

A question, that's how civilized people behave, a tactful example perhaps, a good one, perhaps also a sign of some slight doubts arising, or neither. Silently they smoke and smooth their furrowed brows, whatever the explanation.

The greedily inhaled smoke not only creates a sense of well-being, it also tends to make a person more amenable. Let me tell you: as he smokes Jacob undergoes a change of mood, or something of the kind. Because a noble donor is sitting, intimidated, opposite him. Kirschbaum is helplessly twisting the cigarette between his thin fingers, scarcely daring to glance up, let alone open his mouth for anything but the next pull. Because uncontrolled outbursts are bound to follow: You make me sick with your "nevertheless." Or: Isn't that enough for you? And he had only come to have a talk with his neighbor: after all, a radio like that isn't private property in this town, like a chair or a shirt. He has come not to accuse but to discuss

an important matter in quiet debate, and now this. Then you come and tell me it's prohibited. Kirschbaum did not leave, an indication of goodwill or excessive fear. He stayed, put his hand in his pocket like a magician, and fulfilled secret wishes, so surely he is entitled to a few neighborly words.

"Of course I'm aware that the Russians won't arrive any more quickly," Jacob says halfway through his cigarette. "And even if I tell people a thousand times, the Russians won't alter their route. But I would like to draw your attention to one further detail. Since the news has been passed around in the ghetto, I haven't heard of a single suicide. Have you?"

At that Kirschbaum looks astonished and says: "You're right!"

"And before that there were many, nobody knows that better than you. I can remember your being called on many occasions, and usually it was too late."

"Why didn't I notice that?" Kirschbaum asks.

On one of the following days there is a sensation: a car drives through our little town, the only passenger car in our long story. A sensation, yes, but nothing to rouse hopes, not even in the most imaginative among those bold theorists: one is inclined to say, quite the contrary. It drives purposefully, unerringly; the exact route must have been studied in advance on a map of the town. The car is black; the streets empty as it proceeds. In the back sit two men in civilian clothes; behind the steering wheel, a well-pressed uniform. The only ones who are of any importance are the two in the back. That is to say, they're not all that important either; in fact, the whole car isn't important, in spite of its SS pennant, neither does it matter where it comes from or where it's going or whom it is conveying. Or just a little important, shall we say, or not entirely unimportant in terms of the consequences.

The names of the two men are Preuss and Meyer. I know what

they are talking about; I don't know what they are thinking about, although that is no insoluble riddle. I can tell you their ranks, if pressed, even a rough outline of their careers, hence also their names. Later, when it comes to explaining, I shall unfortunately have to intervene clumsily and directly in the action to make sure no gap remains. The explanation will provide a stopgap, but that will come later; first the gap must be visible in its entirety.

The car stops beside Siegfried and Rafael, who, as usual, are hanging around in the street, at the curb, the only heroes far and wide who are not hiding. All the other Jews, neither blind nor crippled, are standing behind their windows or in sheltering corridors, trembling for two crazy children and for the as-yet-uncertain harm the German car can be expected to cause here. But many of those in the know will be thinking that the harm is not all that uncertain, since after all the car is not stopping at random: it is stopping outside Jacob Heym's building.

Preuss and Meyer get out of the car, on a special mission. Preuss is rather tall, with brown hair, slim, good-looking, maybe a bit on the soft side; Meyer, as described to me, a head shorter, beefy, at first sight fiercely determined. Presumably a carefully chosen combination: what one man lacks, the other has, and vice versa, thus complementing each other nicely. They enter the building.

"Do you know which apartment?" Preuss asks.

"One floor up," says Meyer. "The names are probably on the doors."

One floor up, Jacob lives two floors up, yet they walk up only one floor, as far as Kirschbaum's door. After knocking politely they wait patiently outside the door, until a woman's voice, whose tone betrays that visitors are highly unwelcome, asks, "Who is it?"

"Open up, please."

Although this is not a very plausible reason for opening, a key is fumblingly inserted in the lock, then turned, and the door opens, first just a crack, then with no further hesitation. Quite unnecessarily, Meyer places his foot on the threshold. Facing them is Elisa

Kirschbaum, old and severe, with well-concealed fear. Her much-mended apron does not deceive: Preuss and Meyer are not being scrutinized by some nonentity; the way she holds her head is enough to tell them that they are being scrutinized by a masterful woman. The fear is well concealed, the contempt not; a cool look into the faces of two tiresome visitors, then a glance at Meyer's foot making its crudely superfluous statement on the threshold. Meyer is doing his best to control himself.

"Yes?"

"Good morning," says Preuss politely; perhaps he has no choice under such scrutiny. "We wish to speak to Professor Kirschbaum."

"He is not in."

"Then we'll wait," says Preuss firmly. He walks past her through the door, and at last Meyer can detach his unyielding foot from its position. He follows Preuss. They look around the room: What's all this talk, they don't seem so badly off here, sideboard with knick-knacks, sofa and two armchairs, a bit shabby, true, but still, bookcase crammed with books, like in the movies, a fancy ceiling light, almost a chandelier, these people are living in the lap of luxury here. Maybe only this fellow Kirschbaum, supposed to have been some kind of an authority, special rations and all that. They're certainly smart, these kikes, always managing to wriggle through and making themselves at home everywhere.

Meyer flops onto the sofa, but not Preuss, because Elisa Kirschbaum is still standing by the door with the air of a person awaiting an explanation.

"Are you Professor Kirschbaum's wife?" asks Preuss.

"I am his sister."

"You won't mind if I have a seat." Preuss also sits down, in an armchair, crosses his legs, plenty of time, Elisa Kirschbaum remains standing. But eventually she has to ask, "Kindly tell me what this is about."

"None of your bloody business," says Meyer. He can't remain silent any longer; what's going on here already seems weird enough to

him, farce, pure farce, but he wants no part of it. In response to an insolent question he means to give more than an answer, he needs to straighten out the world a bit, or else where will it all end.

Well, Elisa Kirschbaum is hardly in a position to call the maid and tell her to show this boor the way out; her arsenal is as empty as can be. But at least she can punish Meyer by ignoring him, turning to Preuss and demanding frostily, "Would you please tell this gentleman that he is not in his own home and that I am not accustomed to such behavior?"

Meyer is ready to explode, is about to jump up, burst forth, cry out, but Preuss gives him an official look, special mission, then says, "You are absolutely right. Please accept our apologies."

"You were going to tell me why you are here."

"I think I would prefer to tell that to Professor Kirschbaum personally. Do you know when he will be back?"

"No. Not later than eight o'clock."

She sits down in the vacant armchair, very upright, and places her hands in her lap. They wait. I feel safe in saying that Kirschbaum arrives after about half an hour; the time is passed with trivialities. For example, Meyer lights a cigar and throws the match on the floor; Elisa Kirschbaum picks it up, brings him an ashtray, and opens the window. Meyer is a shade disconcerted.

Or: Preuss gets up after drumming a minute or two on the table; he is interested in the bookcase. Sliding open the glass panel, he tilts his head to one side, reads the titles on the spines, then picks out a book, leafs through it, then another, leafs through that one, all this for several minutes, then puts them back in their proper places.

"They are all medical books, every one of them," says Elisa Kirschbaum.

"So I see."

"We have a permit for them," she says. And, since Preuss continues to study more titles: "Perhaps you wish to see it?"

"No, thank you."

He finds one that appeals to him especially, sits down, and has found something to occupy him. *Forensic Medicine.*

Or: suddenly Meyer jumps up, dashes to a door, flings it open, looks into an empty kitchen, is reassured, sits down.

"You never know," he explains to Preuss, who goes on reading.

Or: again Meyer gets up, this time without haste, goes to the window, looks down. He sees two women dragging two children away from the car into the building opposite, sees in that building a face behind almost every windowpane; the uniform is standing beside the car, bored.

"May be a while yet," Meyer calls, then sits down again. As I said, half an hour.

Or: Elisa Kirschbaum goes into the kitchen, where she is heard moving about, and returns with a tray. Two supper plates, two cups, knives, forks, teaspoons, two linen napkins. She sets the table. Preuss hardly looks up from his book, whereas Meyer feels things are getting out of hand. Preuss hardly looks up from his book and says: "Let her be."

After about half an hour the professor arrives. He can be heard trying to insert his key in the lock, but there is another key in it, on the inside. Meyer stubs out his cigar, in the ashtray. Preuss puts the book down on the table, between the plates. Elisa Kirschbaum opens the door.

Alarmed, the professor pauses in the doorway, no use pretending, though he is not totally unprepared: the car down there outside the building. He would have hoped, of course, that it had something to do with Heym — that is to say, not hoped but assumed; he had merely hoped that it had nothing to do with himself. In vain. Preuss stands up.

"We have visitors," says Elisa Kirschbaum. She picks up *Forensic Medicine* from the table, puts it back in the bookcase, slides the panel shut. With a cloth taken from her apron pocket she wipes away any possible finger marks.

"Professor Kirschbaum?" Preuss asks at last.

"Yes?"

"My name is Preuss." Then a look toward Meyer.

"I'm Meyer," growls Meyer.

They abstain from shaking hands. Preuss asks, "Do you know Hardtloff?"

"You mean the head of the gestapo?"

"I mean Sturmbannführer Hardtloff. He requests your presence."

"He requests my presence?"

Now Elisa Kirschbaum has to struggle to remain calm, as, incidentally, Meyer does too: requests his presence, the whole tone here, what a farce. Preuss says: "Yes. He had a heart attack this morning."

The professor sits down, looks helplessly at his sister, who is now standing as stiffly as if turned to stone: Hardtloff had a heart attack this morning.

"I don't quite understand."

"He wishes you to examine him," said Preuss. "Although I can imagine that you feel no particular grief at the sufferings of the Sturmbannführer. You have no cause for alarm."

"But . . ."

"What do you mean, but?" Meyer asks.

More glances toward the sister: his entire life she has removed all unpleasant situations from his path; with her cool head, her clear vision, her keen mind, she has kept every annoyance from him, hence one last look in her direction.

"Dis-leur que tu n'en as plus l'habitude," she says.

"What's she saying?" Meyer asks Preuss and also stands up to his full height.

"Please, you must realize," says the professor. "What you are asking of me is out of the question. Under no circumstances could I as a doctor take the responsibility, after so many years, my . . . After all, it's four years since I treated a patient."

Preuss remains admirably calm and places a soothing hand on the shoulder of the belligerent Meyer: special mission. Then he steps up to the professor, too close for comfort. His eyes express reproach, but not coldly, let alone angrily — compassionately rather, as if wishing to recall an impetuous person to his senses before it is too late. "I am almost afraid, Professor, that you have misunderstood me," he says. "We are not here to plead with you. Please don't make things difficult for us."

"But I just told you . . ."

"Do you need to take anything with you?" Preuss asks firmly.

With that the professor finally grasps that he need not look for further excuses; these two are not motivated by any desire to test their powers of persuasion. The relative courtesy of this man Preuss is his personal mark and does not entitle one to anything. So the professor must forget all the ifs and buts and strive to emulate his sister, to be as aloof and dignified as she. At least this much, at least now, all his life he has admired her for this, admired more than feared; some people say she is rather odd. He is not going to offer two German creatures the spectacle of collapse, did he need to take anything with him was the question, he is not going to fall on his knees before them — look at the way Elisa stands there! That cannot be imitated at first shot, but normal, everyday gestures can be found, an impassive expression as if nothing out of the ordinary has occurred: a dignitary has been taken ill, he has been asked to have a look at him, run-of-the-mill stuff.

"Do we understand each other correctly?" Preuss asks.

The professor gets up. Below the bookcase are doors; he opens one and looks for his brown leather doctor's bag.

"It's in the cupboard," says Elisa Kirschbaum.

He takes the bag out of the cupboard, opens it, checks the contents, then holds it out to Preuss, who doesn't bother to look inside.

"Medical equipment."

"Good enough."

Elisa Kirschbaum opens the cupboard again: a scarf, she holds it out to her brother.

"I won't need it. It's warm outside," he says.

"You will need it," says Elisa Kirschbaum. "You don't know how chilly it gets after eight."

He stuffs the scarf in his pocket, Meyer opens the door, the parting is at hand.

"Good-bye, Elisa."

"Good-bye."

That's what a parting looks like.

Then, outside the building, they get into the car, no doubt according to a preplanned seating arrangement: Preuss and the professor in the back, Meyer in front beside the uniform. Elisa is standing at the window, the whole street is standing at windows, but only the one is open. The car makes a U-turn, driving over the low curb; a pale blue cloud hangs in the air for a few seconds. At the end of the street the car turns left, heading for Hardtloff.

Preuss snaps open a silver cigarette case and asks, "Care for one?"

"No, thanks," says Kirschbaum.

Meyer shakes his head without turning around and casts a sidelong glance at the uniform to see what it thinks of this farce; the uniform merely grins while looking straight ahead. Preuss observes the two in the rearview mirror, but Kirschbaum doesn't; he sits there as if reluctant to waste a single movement.

"Why don't you put your bag on the floor?" Preuss asks. "We've still got quite a long way to go."

"About how long?"

"Oh, about half an hour."

Kirschbaum keeps his bag on his knees.

They reach the ghetto gate, they stop. Meyer winds down the window. A sentry sticks his helmet in and asks, "Who's that old codger you've got in there?"

"Don't tell me you don't know him!" cries Meyer. "Why, that's the famous professor Kirschbaum!"

Preuss shows the sentry a permit and says, very formally, "Open the gate. We're in a hurry."

"Right away — no harm meant," says the sentry, giving a hand signal to another sentry, who releases the barrier and pushes open the gate.

They drive on, now in the free part of town; the street scene changes. Pedestrians not wearing yellow stars will catch Kirschbaum's eye, shops displaying goods, not exactly overcrowded but with customers going in and out, and, above all, trees lining the streets, I imagine. The Imperial in the market square is showing a German film. From time to time a car in the opposite direction, a streetcar, soldiers in dress uniform with a girl on each arm. Kirschbaum looks on with moderate interest; the sights cannot tell him much, cannot evoke memories, as they would with Jacob, for instance, for this is not his town.

"Come to think of it, you must actually be quite glad to get your hands on a new patient again, at long last," says Preuss.

"May I know how you came to choose me?"

"That wasn't difficult. Hardtloff's personal physician had done all he could and asked for a specialist to be brought in. But try and find a specialist these days! We looked through the lists of inhabitants and came across your name. Hardtloff's doctor knows you."

"He knows me?"

"Not personally, of course. Only by name."

They reach the better-class residential areas; the buildings are lower, stand apart with more green and more trees. Kirschbaum opens his leather bag, takes out a little glass tube, unscrews the cap, and shakes two tablets into his palm. A questioning look from Preuss.

"For heartburn," Kirschbaum explains. "Care for some too?"

"No."

Kirschbaum swallows the tablets, screws the cap back on, into the bag again, resumes his former posture.

"Feeling better now?" asks Preuss after a short interval.

"The tablets don't work that fast." They drive out of town, another barrier, and continue more or less through open country: Hardtloff has picked himself a secluded spot. Birch woods on either side. "Naturally you will be driven back again, after everything has been taken care of," Preuss says.

Now Kirschbaum does put the bag down on the floor. All through the drive it has been on his knees; but so close to their destination, down on the floor. With a deep breath he leans back.

"If you would let me have a cigarette now?"

Preuss gives him one, and lights it. We might point again to Meyer's exaggerated display of bafflement. Kirschbaum suffers a mild coughing fit, soon recovers, and throws a half-smoked cigarette out of the window.

"On the other hand, I can in a way understand your misgivings," says Preuss, taking up what seems to have been a long-lost thread of conversation.

"I no longer have any misgivings," Kirschbaum says.

"Oh, but you do, I can tell from looking at you! Your situation isn't exactly enviable, I can see that. If you succeed in saving the Sturmbannführer's life, you won't be very popular with your own people, I imagine. And if you don't succeed —"

Preuss breaks off his pithy analysis, the rest would be tactless, as well as superfluous. He has said enough for Kirschbaum to grasp the value ascribed to Hardtloff's survival. For the first time during the drive, Meyer turns around. His expression makes it plain that he, too, knows how Preuss would have continued; above all it conveys his opinion of that continuation. With this in mind, so to speak, he turns around for a moment. Kirschbaum ignores him; he seems sufficiently preoccupied with himself. Preuss attempts one or two more trivial remarks, but Kirschbaum no longer responds.

They arrive at the Hardtloff villa. A driveway through an overgrown park, then around a circular flower bed containing a dried-up ornamental fish pond, all somewhat neglected, but magnificently laid out, quite magnificently.

"We're here," says Preuss to the still absentminded Kirschbaum, and gets out.

Hurrying down the flight of steps comes Hardtloff's personal physician, a bald-headed little man in shiny boots and unbuttoned tunic, looking as unkempt as the garden. His haste indicates worry or fear, presumably fear; he bears the responsibility here — for Hardtloff's health and, as we have heard, for today's bold experiment. While still on the higher steps he calls out: "He's worse again! What took you so long?"

"We had to wait; he wasn't at home," said Preuss.

"Hurry, hurry!"

There being no movement inside the car, Preuss opens the door on Kirschbaum's side and says again: "We're here. Will you get out, please."

But Kirschbaum just sits there, as if still a long way from sorting out his thoughts; he doesn't even turn his head toward Preuss. Delayed rebelliousness or a professor's proverbial absentmindedness: the worst possible moment to have chosen, whichever it is. Impatience sets in. Meyer would have no problem deciding what should be done.

Preuss grips the professor by the arm and says in a low voice: "Don't be difficult now," punctilious to the last, and pulls him out with gentle force.

Kirschbaum's exit from the car proceeds in a surprising manner: sliding unhurriedly toward Preuss, who is too surprised to hold him up, Kirschbaum falls out of the car onto the neglected ground.

"What's going on?"

Hardtloff's doctor pushes his way between the two, bends down over the Jewish patient, and with no effort arrives at the unequivocal result of his examination.

"The man is dead!"

It's not news to Preuss, not by this time. Preuss takes the leather bag out of the car. The usual brown leather doctor's bag. "Do you need to take anything with you?" "Medical equipment." "Good enough." Perhaps it was he who had given Kirschbaum the idea.

Preuss opens the bag, finds the little tube among the contents. He hands it to the doctor.

"For heartburn," says Preuss.

"Idiot," says the doctor.

Now for the promised explanation.

Superfluous, really, but I imagine that some people will ask suspiciously how I can account for what happened in that car. Hardly via Kirschbaum, so where was my informant sitting? And from the questioner's point of view the question is perfectly legitimate.

I could, of course, reply that it's not up to me to explain, I am telling a story I don't understand myself. I might say that I know from witnesses that Kirschbaum got into the car, that I managed to find out that by the end of the trip he was dead; the part in between can only have happened in such and such a way, anything else being inconceivable. But I would be lying, for the part in between could very well have happened differently, I would even say that it is far more likely to have happened differently. And herein, I suppose, lies the real reason for my explanation.

So: some time after the war I made a trip to our ghetto, on my first holiday. My few friends had advised against it, the trip would merely ruin the whole of my next year, memories were one thing, living something else. I told them they were right, and went. Jacob's room, the military office, Kurländischer Damm, Mischa's room, the basement: I took my time looking at them all, measuring, examining, or just looking. I also went to Jacob's shop, where a shoemaker had moved in temporarily: "Until I find something better," he told me.

It seemed to me that mixed with the smell of leather there was also a scorched smell, but the shoemaker didn't think so. On the next

to last day of my holiday, I wondered as I was packing whether I had forgotten anything; I would probably never return to this town, and this was the last chance for anything I had overlooked. All I could think of was Kirschbaum's journey by car, but I didn't see how I could check on that; besides, I didn't consider it essential to the story for whose sake I had come. Even so, I went that afternoon to the Russian kommandatura, probably out of boredom, or perhaps because I couldn't find a restaurant open.

The duty officer was a woman of about forty, with the rank of a lieutenant. I told her that I had lived in the ghetto, that before the war my father and Kirschbaum had been close friends and so I was interested in Kirschbaum's fate. I made a proper Red Cross action out of it. Then I explained the connection between Kirschbaum and Hardtloff: all I knew was that Kirschbaum had entered the car, beyond that nothing, which was the truth. The two men who came for him were, I thought, called Preuss and Meyer or something like that. And I went on to say that, even if she couldn't tell me what had happened to the professor, maybe she could at least tell me something about those two men, which might provide a starting point. She made a note of the names and asked me to come back in two hours.

Two hours later I learned that, a few days before the Red Army marched in, Meyer was killed, by partisans, during a night raid.

"And the other man?" I asked.

"I have his German address here," she replied.

Just as I was about to reach for the slip of paper, she gave me a worried look and said, "You wouldn't be planning anything foolish, would you?"

"No, of course not — what an idea!" I said.

She handed me the paper. I looked at the address and said, "That's a bit of luck. I'm also living in Berlin now."

"You didn't leave Germany?" she asked in surprise. "Why was that?"

"I don't really know," I answered truthfully. "It just happened that way."

Preuss was living in Schöneberg, which is part of West Berlin. Nice wife and two children, the wife had only one arm. I went out there on Sunday afternoon. When I rang the bell the door was opened by a tall, brown-haired, good-looking man, a bit on the soft side, scarcely older than myself.

"Yes?" he asked.

"Are you Mr. Preuss?"

"Yes?"

"I'm sorry to bother you," I said. "Might I talk to you for a few minutes?"

"Come in," he replied, then led me into the living room and sent the children out after a few complications. On the wall hung a reproduction of Dürer's *Hands* and a photograph of a little girl in mourning crepe.

He asked me to sit down.

I began by telling him my name, which obviously caught his attention, although he couldn't make too much of it. But he could with my question, which was whether I had been correctly informed that he had worked for Hardtloff. I could observe him turning pale before he asked in a low voice, "Why have you come?"

"I'm here on account of a story," I said. "To be more precise, on account of a gap in that story that you may be able to fill."

He got up, started rummaging in a cupboard, soon found what he was looking for, and placed a piece of paper on the table in front of me. It was his certificate of denazification, duly stamped and signed.

"You don't need to show me that," I said.

However, he left the paper lying in front of me until I had finished reading it; then he picked it up, folded it, and locked it away again.

"Can I offer you something?" he asked.

"No, thank you."

"A cup of tea, perhaps?"

"No, thank you."

He called out, "Ingrid!" His wife came in, and it was obvious that she still wasn't used to having only one arm.

"This is my wife," he said.

I stood up, and we shook hands.

"Would you mind running down to Sebald's and fetching the syphon of beer? He promised me two liters for the weekend," he told her.

After she had left the room I said, "Do you remember a Professor Kirschbaum?"

"Oh yes," he replied at once. "Very well indeed."

"You went to pick him up, didn't you, because he was to examine Hardtloff? You and someone called Meyer?"

"That's correct. Meyer caught it some time later."

"I know. But what happened to Kirschbaum? Was he shot, after Hardtloff died?"

"What makes you think that? The two never met."

I looked at Preuss in surprise and asked: "Did he refuse to examine him?"

"I suppose you could call it that," he answered. "He took poison in the car. As we were driving, right before our eyes."

"Poison?" I asked, and he noticed that I didn't believe him.

"I can prove it to you," he said. "You need only ask Letzerich, he'll confirm every word."

"Who is Letzerich?"

"He was the driver. He was there the whole time. I'm sorry I haven't got his address; all I know is that he was from Cologne. But it should be possible somehow or other to get hold of his address."

I asked him to describe this drive to me in more detail; the result has been told. It took quite a while; at some point his wife brought us the beer, I drank a glass, it tasted horrible. I hardly interrupted him because he was giving me the details without prompting. He attached special importance to the fact that Kirschbaum had offered the tablets to him too. "And I really do sometimes suffer from

heartburn, quite often in fact. Just imagine if I had taken one of them!"

"It was a blatant attempt at murder," I said.

He continued his story, driving out of town, the last part of the trip, the last cigarette, Meyer's meaningful looks, until they reached the villa, until Hardtloff's doctor came, until Kirschbaum lay dead on the ground in front of him. How he suddenly grasped what had really happened, how he took the little bag out of the car, the glass tube, handing it to the doctor, how the doctor had said, "Idiot."

For quite some time we were silent; he must have assumed that I was profoundly shaken, but actually I was wondering what else I could ask him. He had told the story well, graphically and omitting nothing, and I felt there were enough convincing reasons for him to have remembered that drive so well.

Finally he felt an irresistible urge to confide to me his present thoughts about those ill-fated times, to talk to a sensible person and get the whole rotten business off his chest. But I really hadn't come to listen to that. I said I had stayed much too long anyway, I still had a few things to do, as no doubt he did too, so I got up and thanked him for his cooperation.

"And remember the name, in case you want to double-check," he said. "Egon Letzerich. Cologne."

In the corridor we met his wife, who was just taking the children to the bathroom. They were already in their pajama bottoms, naked from the waist up.

"Come on now, what do you say?" Preuss asked them.

Both put out their hands simultaneously, curtsied and bowed, and said: "Good night, Uncle."

"Good night," I said.

All three disappeared into the bathroom. Preuss insisted on accompanying me out of the building. In case the front door was already locked.

The front door was still open. Preuss walked ahead of me into

the street, took a deep breath, flung out his arms, and said, "May is almost here again!"

I had the impression that he was slightly drunk; after all, he had consumed two liters of tepid beer, minus one glass.

"Ah yes," I said, "can you tell me anything more about his sister?"

"Kirschbaum's sister? We never had anything to do with her. I only saw her that one time. Is there any more to tell?"

As I was finally leaving he said, "Would you answer a question for me too?"

"Of course," I replied.

He hesitated a moment before asking, "How did you find out my address?"

"From the British secret service," I said. Then I really did leave.

Hardtloff is dead, died of a weak heart. The news has come all the way to us here at the freight yard. It must have happened last night. When we left the yard yesterday after work, the flag was hanging limply at its normal spot on the redbrick building, but this morning when we turned up for work it was fluttering gaily at half-mast, so it happened sometime in between. Of course the flag in itself is only a vague clue, betraying merely that someone high up has passed on, without giving any name. The name was supplied by a sentry while he was talking to another sentry: at some point during the morning Roman Schtamm overheard the revealing conversation. He approached a stack of crates, with nothing reprehensible in mind, and the two sentries were standing behind it discussing Hardtloff's death. It was a fluke. Roman took a little longer than usual over the lifting of the crate, only managing to complete the job when the two sentries changed the subject.

By this time every one of us knows for whom the flag is flying at half-mast, Roman having seen no reason to keep it to himself. It can

be said that we bear the news with composure; it will scarcely mean any change for us. If there is ever to be any, it won't be as a result of Hardtloff's death; nevertheless, worse things can be imagined. Only Jacob regrets that it was Roman Schtamm and not he who overheard the sentries' conversation: the Sturmbannführer's misfortune would have yielded an excellent radio report. Not only because of the content: it would have been the first report that didn't have to be accepted in good faith. Everyone would have had a chance to verify its truth, with his own eyes and without effort — the confirmation has been flying from the flagpole since early this morning. To tell them now that one had heard about Hardtloff's death on the early morning news would be pretty senseless, what's past is past, a radio has its pride, it doesn't come limping in the wake of events.

When the Whistle blows punctually for soup time, Jacob finally abandons this pleasant train of thought. The little cart with the tin bowls is pulled over, and we form the customary impeccable line.

Someone behind Jacob asks softly, "Were you listening again last night?"

"Yes," says Jacob.

"Did they say anything about Hardtloff?"

"Don't be daft! Do you imagine they're concerned with such trivial stuff?"

Someone in front of Jacob asks, "What stations do you listen to?"

"Whatever's available," says Jacob. "Moscow, London, Switzerland, depends on the weather too."

"Never any German stations?"

"What for?"

"Do you sometimes listen to music too?"

"Not very often," says Jacob. "Only when I'm waiting for the news. I'm not keeping the radio for entertainment, you know."

"I'd give anything to hear some music again. Any music," says someone in front of the man in front of Jacob.

The cauldrons of soup are a long time coming, yet the line is as straight as an arrow, word of honor. The men automatically continue

to correct any irregularities, even the almost imperceptible ones, but that doesn't bring on the cauldrons this time. Instead the window in the gable of the brick building opens, a hand commands silence, a voice calls out from above sounding like the irate Almighty in person: "Ten-minute break! No lunch today!"

The cart with its bowls is pushed away again, the hungry line loses its neatness and spreads out over the yard. Unused spoons are returned to pockets, a few oaths, curses, and angry looks, The Russians will show you bastards.

Kowalski comes up to me and asks, "No food for us because Hardtloff is dead?"

"Obviously," I say.

"If you ask me," says Kowalski, "it's worth it."

He wasn't exactly rewarded with gales of laughter; no midday meal, that really hurts, like a blow to the stomach. But Kowalski in his kind way attempts another modest joke: "Just imagine if every time one of us kicks the bucket the Germans get nothing to eat — what a fine starvation that would be!"

No response.

As Jacob walks to the spot he has chosen for those ten minutes he is followed by a faithful little bevy of Jews. Kowalski drops back to join them before Jacob actually misses him. Jacob knows they are behind him; the meal has been canceled so a word from him will have to do instead. He goes to an empty railcar where they can all find a place to sit down, a thoughtfulness that has long become a habit. Jacob doesn't feel quite comfortable: he had intended to rest a bit on yesterday's laurels, on the liberation of the little town of Tobolin. With our enthusiastic approval, Major Karthäuser had set his name with a flourish to the document of surrender, the fortress had fallen; but that was yesterday. No one could have foreseen the desperate need of the following day. Jacob sits unprepared in the midst of his flock.

Suddenly, so I am told, as they are sitting there looking at him, for he is expected to start his report right away, he is struck by a

wicked thought that drives out Tobolin and all other victories. Suddenly he realizes that two pieces of news have reached the freight yard today, although only one of them was immediately grasped: Hardtloff. The other, the bad one, has been ignored, although it has been in the air, clear and unmistakable: the only thing needed was the effort. "The news isn't that good at all, I'm sorry to say," Jacob announces gravely.

"What news do you mean?"

"That Hardtloff is dead."

"Did you care about him?" comes a mocking voice.

"Not about him," says Jacob, "but about Kirschbaum."

Reluctantly they must agree, it's not easy, a convincing correlation that most of them understand without any further explanation. The way things are, a Jewish doctor is not likely to survive his Aryan patient for long, in this particular case not at all. "Who's Kirschbaum?" someone asks; it's impossible to know everyone. It is explained to him: a leading light, at one time a famous heart specialist, here Jacob's neighbor, was picked up and taken away to cure Hardtloff. Now belatedly a quiet grieving for the professor; the ten minutes pass without questions or reports of successes. Jacob could have wished for a different distraction. He feels an urge to dispense some sort of consolation, one can't let them sit there hungry like that. The old story about the secret German plans that fell into Russian hands in the fortress of Tobolin flashes across his mind. But the Whistle preserves him from this folly by putting an end in the usual way to the midday meal that today was so singularly lacking in flavor.

Thus in spite of Hardtloff's death the day passes dismally, and continues to do so. In the midst of work a tank wagon appears, drawn by two scrawny horses; the sight is familiar, as is the rattling that can be heard a long way off. On an average it turns up once every three months, less often in summer, somewhat more often in winter, when the ground is frozen, but always on a Monday. Its visit has to do with the little German hut with the heart in the door: for three months the hut can manage without it, but no longer than that, or it will overflow.

The wagon is driven by a farmer from somewhere in the surrounding countryside; no one knows how he came by this honor. We can't stand him. On his first visit the Germans forbade him to talk to any of us, and he strictly obeys this rule. At first, long before Jacob's radio, we tried to coax a word out of him, we didn't know ourselves what kind of a word, any tiny detail from the outside. There would have been no danger, but he would sit there with compressed lips, not saying a word and squinting over at the distant sentries. He probably feared for his head or his manure. Or he is anti-Semitic, or quite simply an idiot.

He stops his wagon behind the outhouse. A German comes out of the brick building and walks in among the men, who all pretend to be terribly busy as soon as the hateful rattling is heard. The job for which four men are now to be picked is no easier than lugging crates; afterward you stink to high heaven and can't wash till you get home.

"You, you, you, and you," says the German.

Schmidt, Jacob, and two strangers grit their teeth as they walk behind the outhouse and begin the filthy job. They take the two shovels and the two buckets hanging from the side of the wagon, and Jacob and the lawyer lift the cover off the pit. They proceed to shovel the muck into the buckets, which the other two empty into the tank. Schmidt's disgusted expression doesn't help matters. It'll take about three hours, and at halftime they switch, shovels for buckets.

"Have you ever done this before?" asks Schmidt.

"Twice."

"I never have."

The farmer is seated on the wagon with his back to them. He takes a little parcel out of his pocket, waxed paper, unwraps it, bread and bacon. The sun low, the world well forgotten, he enjoys his noon or evening meal, Jacob's eyes fill with tears.

The older of the two bucket carriers begs the farmer for a mouthful, with a muttered explanation as to what happened to his lunch, just a little piece of bread, we won't even mention bacon. The farmer seems undecided; as Jacob shovels he observes the farmer's

oafish eyes raking the yard for watchers, of whom none is interested in the proceedings behind the outhouse.

"Don't be scared," says our man. "You don't have to speak to us. Just drop a piece of bread, you know, by mistake. No one can blame you for that. I'll pick it up so no one'll notice. . . . Do you hear? No one, not even you, will notice it!"

"Could you eat in this stench?" Schmidt asks.

"Yes," says Jacob.

The farmer puts his hand in his pocket again, brings out the waxed paper, carefully wraps up what's left of the bread and bacon, and stows it away. Either he has had enough, or he really has lost his appetite. Just an ample gulp from his canteen, and he wipes his mouth with his dirty sleeve.

"Asshole" is what he has to hear, but not even this filthy epithet makes him come alive.

Shortly before it's time to switch, Schmidt slows down noticeably in his shoveling. Finally he stops entirely, claiming that he can't go on, that everything is turning before his eyes, black spots. Sweating, he leans against the back wall of the outhouse.

"It's because you haven't had any food," says Jacob.

That's no help to Schmidt; big drops of sweat run down his face; he tries to throw up, but nothing comes. Jacob fills a bucket in his place, the carriers are forced to wait, not a long-term solution.

"You have to keep going," Jacob says.

"That's easy for you to say," gasps Schmidt, leaning back and very pale.

"Either you keep going now, or you might as well just lie down and die," says Jacob.

This appeals even less to Lawyer Schmidt. He picks up his shovel again and on unsteady legs starts filling the waiting bucket. He groans; it looks like a desperate effort doomed, one fears, to failure. The shovel pokes around on the surface, not going as deep as it should, so that it is pulled out of the muck only half full, more work for Jacob.

"By the way, I've heard something from your Mr. Churchill," says Jacob, in an undertone so that the farmer can't understand anything no matter how hard he tries.

"From Winston Churchill?" says Schmidt, weakly yet with audible interest.

"He has a cold."

"Is it serious?"

"No, no, just an ordinary cold. He sneezed through half the interview."

"A whole interview?"

"A short one."

"And what did he say?"

Jacob indicates that this is not a suitable place for a chat: those sentries over there, at the moment they are concerned with other things, but in three hours one of them is sure to come over and check, and by that time the pit must be empty. So a report only if it can be camouflaged with work. Schmidt sees the point, his grip on the shovel grows firmer by necessity, the drops on his forehead remain the same, What did Churchill say?

Jacob tells him; the cellar conversation between the reporter and the British prime minister is still in his memory, although no longer quite so fresh. The situation on the eastern front, without naming any towns, in any case desperate for the Germans, those were his own words, a great colorful bouquet of good prospects. And Mr. Churchill can well afford an opinion, wouldn't you say, from his vantage point? Of course, there are still some problems here and there — I ask you, in what kind of a war does everything go without a hitch?

And there are also differences between Schmidt and Lina, considerable ones, that must be taken into account. You aren't sitting with a little girl in a dusky basement, for fun, as it were, or for love; you are standing in the sunshine with the highly educated Schmidt, every word must be weighed, in three hours the pit must be empty of muck.

On the morning of this day, which has been earmarked for the advance on the district town of Pry — the Russians won't quite reach it but will come a good deal closer to it, Jacob has decided — on the morning of this promising day Mischa while on his way to work notices an agitated little group standing in the street. They point first in one direction and then another, two of them are talking excitedly, the others are listening in dismay. Mischa is not going to walk past without finding out what's going on. Then he hears the name of a street, Franziskaner; Mischa grabs the man nearest him by the arm, pulls him out of the hubbub, and insists he tell him for heaven's sake what's happening in Franziskaner-Strasse. He is quickly told, A disaster has overtaken it, the people living in that street are being lined up in rows of three. A house-to-house search is under way, they have just got as far as Number 10, in a few hours there won't be a soul left living there, off to camp or God knows where. "And the Russians are said to have already taken Tobolin," the man says.

Mischa dashes off. The fate of Franziskaner-Strasse affects him more than in a general way, for that street is a very special one: Rosa lives in it. The man said they had just reached Number 10, which means only a few minutes ago, normally by this hour Rosa is already at the factory. Mischa blames himself for not having simply made her stay with him every night, especially last night. He will go to her factory, the sentry at the gate won't let him in, but he can hang about close by. Until they come off work, Mischa himself will be a sentry, because Rosa must be prevented from going home. He hopes to God he won't have to spend the entire day watching an empty factory; if Rosa left home on time, she must be in there, that's his only hope. Mischa runs, why so fast, he doesn't know himself, Rosa won't be coming off work for a long time, he runs.

Outside the building, a gray brick garment factory, the world looks quite normal. Mischa stands on the opposite side of the street; no one else is about. He is prepared for a long day, but it proves to be

much shorter than expected. A Jewish girl emerges from the factory, and Mischa wonders why she is coming out during working hours; she strolls aimlessly across the roadway, past him. Mischa stands there hesitating until she has almost reached the next corner, then follows her. She soon notices it, coquettishly turns her head, once, then again; a blue-eyed, broad-shouldered young man is, after all, a rarity in the ghetto, and in broad daylight at that. She slows down at once, she has no objection to being overtaken, and that finally happens too; just past the corner he is standing beside her.

"Excuse me," says Mischa. "Do you work in that factory?"

"Yes," she says with a smile.

"Do you happen to know whether Rosa Frankfurter is still in there?"

She considers this for a few seconds before saying: "You're Mischa, aren't you?"

"Yes," he replies. "Is she inside?"

"She left a few minutes ago. She was told she could go home today."

"How many is that, a few minutes?" his voice already shrill. "How many, exactly?"

"Ten, maybe," she answers, surprised at his sudden agitation.

Again he rushes off, feverishly calculating that he can make it if ten minutes is correct. From here to Franziskaner-Strasse would take Rosa almost half an hour, more if she's not hurrying, and she's not likely to be. They told her she could go home, without giving any reason, the bastards, so there's no need to hurry. All at once Mischa turns on his heel, dashes back the same way, an oversight must be corrected, an unforgivable one. The girl is slowly coming toward him and smiles again.

"Did they send you home too?" he calls out while still some distance away.

"Yes."

"Don't go home! Hide somewhere!"

He hears her calling after him: "But why?"

"Because Franziskaner-Strasse is being deported!"

"But I don't live there, I live in Sagorsker-Strasse!"

This awkward exchange costs him far too much time. So Sagorsker-Strasse too. He has told her all he knows; she can draw her own conclusions and save her life or not. If she's smart, she'll stand outside the factory and tell each of the women being sent home, "Don't go home, hide somewhere, never mind where you live!" All this is going through his head long after he has started running again, to catch up with Rosa, and that Franziskaner- and Sagorsker-Strasse don't even meet: between them is Blumenbinder-Gasse, which doesn't have many houses, mostly open storage places that are not being used these days, except for a few. And beyond each new corner he looks for Rosa. Maybe she isn't even taking the shortest route, maybe she's going for a stroll in this nice weather and wants to make the most of the unexpected free day. If she is really taking her time, he can't fail to reach Franziskaner-Strasse ahead of her, and he could occupy one end and intercept her. But only one end, Franziskaner-Strasse has two ends, which of those ends do you propose to occupy, and at this hour you won't find anyone to help you at any price. For a moment, a new glimmer of hope flares up: Mischa is banking on Rosa's instinct for self-preservation. Regardless of which end she appears at, she will see what's happening to her street. Perhaps she'll turn around then, run to his building, stay hidden in the courtyard, and wait until he arrives in the evening with the key. But Mischa doesn't rely too heavily on that, he knows her too well, his crazy Rosa won't be able to banish her love for her father and mother from her head, all that useless girlish stuff. The best she'll be able to manage at that sight will be a hesitation, then she'll burst into tears and run straight into her doom, to where her parents are, who can well do without her, and all this won't help a soul.

All calculations come to an end when at last he sees her in a long, straight street. In Argentinische-Allee, whose linden trees have been carefully chopped down, close to the ground, resulting in a wide, clear vista. The street is virtually empty; he recognizes her rust-

colored dress when it is still only a dot, then her blue headscarf, her walk — slow, as he had foreseen. What luck, Mischa thinks.

Within a short distance of her he stops running and follows her quietly for a few steps. Rosa is looking at the fine old gables in this once-prosperous merchants' area; Rosa is out for a stroll. His last thoughts before making himself known are that his behavior must seem perfectly natural: he happens to be on his way to her home because he has heard that the factory has given her the day off. Nothing about great anxiety, not a word about the fate of Franziskaner-Strasse, that would only remind her of her love for her parents.

He intends to put his hands over her eyes from behind and in a disguised voice ask her to guess who it is; that would be a harmless enough way to begin. He notices that his hands are sticky with sweat, his face too; he wipes it dry with his sleeve and says with forced casualness, "Fancy meeting you here!"

She quickly turns around, startled at first, then smiles, the prettiest girls smile at Mischa. "What are you doing here?" she asks.

"And what are you doing here?"

"I'm on my way home," she says. "Just imagine, I was at the factory less than an hour and I was allowed to leave!"

"Why?"

"No idea. They simply told me I could go home. A few others too, but not everyone."

"The same thing happened to me," Mischa says.

"Have you got the day off too? The whole day?"

"Yes."

"Wonderful!"

She links her arm through his; a solitary passer-by looks in wonderment at young love.

"We'll go to my room," says Mischa.

"But how do you happen to be here of all places?"

"Because I wanted to fetch you from the factory. When they gave me the day off, I thought maybe they'd let you off today too."

"You're a clever one."

"But you had just left. A girl told me so, a cute-looking girl with red hair."

"That was Larissa," she says.

They go to his place, in no hurry, for the direction doesn't worry him, Franziskaner-Strasse being off to the left. Rosa tells him about Larissa, that she had sometimes spoken to Larissa about Mischa, Rosa hopes he doesn't mind, they sew at the same table, and the day is long. Larissa is still water that runs deep, one mustn't be deceived by her dreamy eyes. For instance, she also has a boyfriend, his name is Neidorf, Josef, she calls him Jossele, he works in a tool factory, Mischa wouldn't know him. They live in the same building, Larissa has a mother and two grown-up brothers, and a funny thing happened with the two brothers. They once gave Josef Neidorf a beating when they caught him with their sister in the attic, doing what, do you suppose? Necking and kissing, of course, but Larissa let them have it all right. Meanwhile they've calmed down; they realize she is no longer a child; Jossele is sometimes even allowed to visit her at home, just for a chat of course. And abruptly, in the midst of her flow of talk, Rosa stops and asks: "Why on earth would they suddenly give us a whole day off?"

"How should I know?"

"But there must be a reason."

He shrugs, he had hoped she wouldn't bring up the subject. He can't give her an answer, but she's right, it is strange.

"I wonder if it has anything to do with the Russians," she says.

"With the Russians?"

"I mean, if they feel that the game is up and they want to try and make themselves popular while there's still time," says Rosa. "Don't you see? Thinking ahead."

"Maybe," says Mischa, having no better explanation to offer.

So on they stroll toward his place, Rosa chattering away as never before, out of sheer lightheartedness. Mischa lets her chatter on without interruption; she has much more to talk about than just

Larissa: Klara and Annette and above all Nina are having affairs, and what affairs! Furthermore, her father is at last beginning to have some tentative thoughts about the future. Two evenings ago he placed a curious piece of paper on the table, says Rosa. On it, divided into three groups, were theatrical roles corresponding to his ideas of what he hopes one day to perform, God willing; the theater management has denied them to him long enough. Rosa doesn't know the details, she doesn't understand enough about the theater for that, but there were at least twenty.

At the front door an unpleasant thought strikes Mischa: no work means no midday meal today. He asks Rosa whether she happens to have her ration card with her. Sorry, she's left it at home; wouldn't you know it, he thinks. Should she quickly go and get it; No, she shouldn't. He gives her the key, he'll follow in a few minutes, and goes off with his own ration card.

In the shop Mischa is the only customer; normally after work there's never less than a half-hour wait.

"So early?" asks Rosenek the well nourished. His scales are suspected of inaccuracy, always in the same direction, only they could have provided him with that potbelly. Although he tries to hide the little monster with an outsize overall, overall and Rosenek cannot deceive: no overall, no matter how big, can hide those pudgy cheeks.

"They've given us the day off," says Mischa.

"Day off? What does that mean?"

"A day off."

Mischa puts his food coupons down on the counter in front of Rosenek, all of them.

"It's only Tuesday," says Rosenek in surprise, as a reminder.

"Never mind."

"Well, it's up to you."

From a floury drawer behind him Rosenek takes out a round loaf that doesn't smell of bread like in the old days, puts it on the counter, groans as he cuts it in two with a serrated knife, then places one half

on the famous scales, the deceitful brass weights ranged like organ pipes.

"Please weigh properly," Mischa says.

"What's that supposed to mean? I always weigh properly!"

Mischa is not about to engage in hairsplitting, which will lead nowhere, so he says: "Be sure to weigh properly. I have a guest."

"A guest? What does that mean?"

"A guest."

Rosenek discovers his heart and gives Mischa the other half of the loaf, the alleged half, without placing it on the scales. Two pocketfuls of potatoes come next, Mischa having nothing else to carry them in, then a small bag of ground dried peas, some sausage, more so in appearance than in essence, and a little package of malt coffee.

"The coupons also say something about fat," Mischa says.

"So they do! Do they also say where I'm supposed to get it from?"

"Mr. Rosenek," says Mischa.

Rosenek looks at him as if faced with the most difficult decision of his life, You'll be the death of me yet, my boy. "Do you need the coffee?" Rosenek asks.

"Not that badly."

Rosenek persists for a while longer in his long-suffering pose, finally picks up the little package of coffee from the counter, and goes off into an adjoining room. He returns bearing a piece of waxed paper. At first sight it appears to be nothing but a folded piece of paper, but then it is clear that there is something wrapped in it. Fat. To judge by his expression, Rosenek has cut it out of his own belly.

"Because it's you," says Rosenek. "But for heaven's sake don't tell anyone!"

"What do you take me for?"

Mischa arrives upstairs with his spoils. Rosa marvels at what he has brought; she has opened the window wide.

"Otherwise the sun will think no one's home and will go away again, Mother says," she says.

Mischa puts Rosenek's largesse away in the cupboard and empties his pockets of the earth from the potatoes. Rosa calls him to the window: he doesn't like the sound of her voice. Leaning out beside her, he sees a gray procession approaching, still too distant to make out details. So far the only sound is of the dogs barking, intermittently and unnecessarily since no one is getting out of line.

"Which street is it today?" Rosa asks.

"I don't know."

He pulls her away from the window and shuts it, but he can't prevent her remaining behind the windowpane and waiting for the procession to pass by. "Let me look," Rosa says. "Maybe there'll be people we know."

"Are you hungry?" he asks. "Shall we make ourselves something?"

"Not now."

He saves himself the trouble of further offers, knowing that her answer to any suggestion from him would be "Not now." Only force could separate her from the window — quite silly, really, because she has no idea whom she will see in the procession, but she fancies that in such situations she mustn't hide her head in the sand. A kind of rule of the game for Rosa: that's how she is. The simplest would be to grab her, throw her on the bed, and start kissing her as if obeying an uncontrollable impulse. Mischa takes his first step in this direction, but at the second his courage deserts him; Rosa knows him too well and would immediately see through his ruse. He has no choice but to leave her standing there until the terrible sight: there is no way she can be spared that.

He sits down on the bed and tries to look composed, a total waste of time since Rosa continues to look fixedly out of the window. Her forehead leans against the glass so she can obtain the earliest possible view of the transport. A little patch of mist forms on the pane; she is breathing through her mouth, as excited people do.

"Come on over here!" he says.

Why did those idiots have to pick his street of all streets? There are enough others. Mischa feels an urge to get up and go out into the corridor, or at least into Fayngold's half of the room, which, needless to say, had resumed its former appearance the day after Rosa's intervention. What in the world will she do? The yapping of the dogs becomes louder; when it subsides for a moment they can hear the sound of the people's feet on the pavement, even a single voice calling out: "Step lively now, step lively!"

"Mischa," Rosa says softly.

"Mischa!" she screams seconds later. "Mischa, Mischa, Mischa, it's our street!"

He is standing behind her now; the thought that her parents must be in that transport doesn't seem to have occurred to her yet. In a whisper she counts off the names of neighbors whom she recognizes; each of them is carrying something, a bag, a suitcase, a bundle of whatever was worth taking along. Mischa has time to look for her parents; he discovers them before she does, Felix Frankfurter with his inevitable scarf wound about his neck. His walk somehow expresses confidence; his wife, a head shorter, is walking beside him. She looks up at their window; Mischa had never been a secret.

Rosa is still counting off names; her mother's upward glances give Mischa the push he needs. He grips Rosa tightly in his arms and carries her away from the window, intending to put her down on the bed and keep her there by force. But nothing comes of that; on the way they fall to the floor because Rosa is struggling. He lets her hit him and scratch him and pull his hair while he just keeps his arms gripped tightly around her waist; they lie on the floor for an eternity. She screams for him to let her go, maybe twenty times she screams nothing but the words "Let me go!" Until they can hear no more barking, no more footsteps; her blows become weaker and finally cease. Cautiously he lets go of her, ready to grab her again the next instant. But she lies there without moving, with her eyes closed, breathing heavily, as if after some great exertion. There is a knock at

the door, and a woman from the building asks whether she can help; she thought she heard someone screaming.

"No, no, it's quite all right," says Mischa through the closed door. "Thank you."

He gets up and opens the window, otherwise the sun will think no one's home and will go away again, so we've been told. The street is silent and empty. He looks out for a long time, and when he turns around Rosa is still lying on the floor, her position unchanged.

"Come on, get up."

She gets up — not, it seems to him, because he has told her to. So far not a tear has been shed. She sits down on the bed; he dare not speak to her.

"Your neck is bleeding," she says.

He goes over to her, squats down in front of her, and tries to look into her eyes, but she looks past him.

"That's why you came to fetch me," she says. "You knew."

He is shocked at the reproach in her words. He wishes he could explain that there was no time to warn her parents, but at the moment she won't accept any reasons.

"Did you actually see them?" he asks.

"You wouldn't let me," she says, and at last begins to cry.

He says he didn't see them either, not even right at the end of the transport, maybe they sensed the danger in time and found a safe place to go. He knows how ridiculous this is; after three words he realizes the futility of lying, but he finishes his sentences like an automaton.

"I'm sure you'll see them again," he adds. "Jacob said —"

"You're lying!" she screams. "You're all lying! You talk and talk and nothing ever changes!"

She jumps up and tries to run out of the room, but Mischa manages to catch her just as she flings open the door. In the corridor the woman straightens up, from keyhole level. "Are you sure I can't help?" she asks.

"For God's sake, no!" Mischa screams; now he is screaming too.

Offended, the woman withdraws; most likely her desire to help has been quenched forever, at least as far as this screaming maniac is concerned. However, the appearance of a third person has brought Rosa to her senses again, it seems; she goes back into the room without Mischa having to force her. He closes the door. Dreading her silence, he sets to work immediately to take renewed possession of Fayngold's fallow half of the room: the cupboard against the wall, precisely covering the big square of still-clean wallpaper, the curtain down from the ceiling and in front of the window again. For Rosa is going to be living here now; that much at least is clear.

Have you been hearing anything recently about the deportations?" Mischa asks.

"No, I haven't," Jacob replies.

"They've not only evacuated Franziskaner-Strasse. They're in Sagorsker-Strasse too and —"

"I know," says Jacob.

They walk on for a bit without speaking, on their way home from the freight yard, having shaken Kowalski at the last corner. He had held back with his questions in Mischa's presence.

Since that day, five men have failed to show up at the yard, maybe even more; one only misses the five one knows personally. Jacob had thought there were six, having included Mischa among them because he didn't show up for work that day. Luckily that was a mistake.

"How are things going with Rosa?" Jacob asks.

"How should they go?"

"Are you managing with food?"

"Splendidly!"

"But she can't go and get any more ration cards, can she?"

"Don't I know it!"

"Couldn't someone in the building help out? I have the same

problem with Lina. Kirschbaum always used to let me have something for her."

"I can no longer believe this will end well," says Mischa. "They're combing street after street now."

Jacob seems to hear a veiled reproach in his voice.

"Maybe," says Jacob. "But think for yourself. The Germans are in a state of panic. The transports are the best proof that the Russians must already be really close! Seen in that light, they're actually a good sign."

"Some good sign! Try explaining that to Rosa."

On one of her deadly boring and tear-filled afternoons, Rosa leaves the room, although Mischa has strictly forbidden her to do so. Actually he would have liked to lock her in, regardless of her protests; the only reason he hasn't is that the toilet is in the courtyard.

She has no fixed destination; all she wants to do is stretch her legs after a whole week of prison. The dangers Mischa is always talking about seem to her exaggerated. In his room she is no safer than anywhere else, it can be this building's turn any day. And who is there to recognize her? There is hardly anyone left whom she knows, and the street patrols don't show up until the evening, about curfew time. None of that really matters to her anyway, and besides, Mischa needn't find out about the walk she's taking, she won't stay away long.

Later when, as it happens, he arrives home long before her, it doesn't necessarily have to be the truth when she tells him that she happened to have the key to her old home with her, and that, without really intending to, she found herself in Franziskaner-Strasse, her feet having taken that route by force of habit, she says.

The street seems eerily empty to her; people also avoid walking through it, as if it had been smitten by the plague. Rosa looks into deserted ground-floor rooms, into rooms of people she had spoken to

only the other day. Through one window she notices a boy, about fourteen years old. He is kneeling in front of an open cupboard and hurriedly stuffing whatever he can lay hands on into a rucksack — dishes, bed linen, trousers, a wooden box without checking its contents for usefulness. Rosa stands stock-still as she watches him, the sole living creature apart from herself. The cupboard appears to be completely empty, but the rucksack is not yet full; the boy straightens up and carefully surveys the room. Then he sees the wide eyes outside the window; at first he gets a shock, then he also sees the yellow star on Rosa's chest, and a conspiratorial grin spreads over his face. He probably takes her for a harmless competitor.

Rosa hurries on, wondering whether someone like that has meanwhile been in her home too: she can't think of any other word, a looter. While she feels no rage, mere tolerance is not enough. What bothers her is the thought that behind the walls there exists a second, secret life, at first sight not discernible, slowly wiping out all traces.

She quietly opens her front door and listens with a beating heart. She wishes she had Mischa with her, perhaps he could have been persuaded to come, but now she happens to be here without him. One can never be sure, but after a lengthy silence she assumes that there is no one else in the building. She walks quickly up the two flights and looks through the keyhole before unlocking the door. Then she is standing in the room, which looks very tidy. The dust hasn't had much time to settle; the four chairs are standing neatly around the table, which is covered with a yellow cloth, a tassel at each corner. The tap is dripping. So far no one with a rucksack has been here, Rosa can see that right away, also that her parents must have left without haste. The first thing she looks for is some kind of a message: this only occurs to her when she remembers that her mother never went out for a second without leaving a message. But this time she had broken with her old habit, evidently; this time there is no scribbled note, which anyway could say no more than "I don't know where to, I don't know for how long."

Then Rosa looks again, this time no longer for a message, simply

looks around. Mischa tells me she is a sentimental little thing and wanted to get some idea of what her parents had taken with them. Probably she wept buckets as she did so. The brown-and-white-checked shopping bag is missing, as is the black cardboard suitcase, nothing else in the way of containers. Since Rosa knows exactly what had been in the room, she would have been able at the end of her search to draw up a list of what her parents had taken along. Including the album of photos and reviews, the book about Felix Frankfurter's true life.

Her own things lie untouched, among them the ration card, part of which has already expired. Rosa puts it in her pocket; otherwise there are no objects to which she feels especially attached. She forces herself to think in practical terms. A briefcase has been left behind; into it she stuffs her other dress, underwear and stockings, finally her winter coat, wondering as she does so how she can manage to think as far ahead as next winter. With the coat in it, the briefcase won't close. Rosa considers wearing it, but then she would have to unpick the yellow stars from her dress and sew them on the coat. So she crams it as best she can into the briefcase, which she then ties up with the belt from her coat. If she should run into that boy in the street, he will be envious of her rich booty.

Rosa firmly turns off the tap; she is finished here. As she goes she leaves the key in the door, for the boy or anyone else, as if to draw a line under her past.

"I'll give you ten guesses," Mischa says to me, "but you'll never guess where she went next."

Rosa goes to see Jacob, whom she doesn't know, except from Mischa's accounts, though from them quite well. Since Bezanika they have never spent an evening together without talking about him, about his radio, his courage, about the Russian successes at the front. At the time, when the first rejoicing over the news reports had subsided, Rosa had asked why this Jacob person had waited until now before beginning to pass on reports; after all, they had been

living in the ghetto for three years, and if he was keeping a radio hidden he must have had it from the very beginning.

"Most likely the Germans were advancing all the time until just recently. Was he supposed to tell us that things were getting worse and worse every day?" Mischa answered, and that sounded convincing.

So here she is standing outside his door, not, so she tries to persuade herself, out of any desire for revenge or personal resentment. No doubt he is nice and kind and well meaning, but those reports, day by day more encouraging, and then the empty room in Franziskaner-Strasse, the whole neighborhood in fact — she's going to ask him how one can be reconciled with the other. She's going to put it to him, is it permissible to raise such hopes in their situation, don't start telling me about the radio, that can report what it likes, all he had to do was take a look around.

Rosa knocks several times, with no result. Why hadn't it occurred to her earlier that Jacob must come home at about the same time as Mischa? The waiting saps her confidence; by the time she confronts him her head will feel hollow. There is still time for her to leave and get back to their room before Mischa and avoid the argument that is bound to arise if she doesn't. The longer she waits, the more clearly she has to admit to herself that she has come with the vaguest of intentions. Jacob will persist in citing his radio, regardless of what she blames him for. She had hoped to survive these times intact; now things have turned out differently, and that, when one gets right down to it, is her whole reason. "She plays faster than she thinks," her father once said after a game of checkers; her father. The thought crosses Rosa's mind that Jacob may be spreading news other than what he hears on his radio.

Suddenly Lina is standing at the end of the corridor, just back from the street and Rafael. She sees a young woman with a bulging briefcase outside a certain door, and she approaches, full of curiosity. They eye each other for a few moments, neither of them suspicious. Lina asks: "Are you looking for Uncle Jacob?"

"Yes."

"He should be here soon. Wouldn't you rather wait inside?"

"Do you live here, then?" Rosa asks.

For an answer, Lina takes the key from behind the doorframe, unlocks the door, and gestures invitingly and a little proudly. Rosa enters with some hesitation, a chair is promptly pulled out for her, she has fallen into the hands of an attentive hostess. Lina sits down too, and they continue to look at each other, approvingly.

"You're Lina, aren't you?" says Rosa.

"How do you know my name?"

"From Mischa. You're good friends, I hear."

"Of course. And now I know who you are."

"Do tell me!"

"You're Rosa. Right?"

They exchange whatever information they have about each other. Lina, incidentally, is still cross with Mischa because the whole time she was ill in bed he didn't come to see her once, just sent his love via Jacob. Rosa looks around surreptitiously — not that she expects the radio to be standing there in full view to regale every chance guest.

"What do you want to see Uncle Jacob about?" Lina asks, any other topic having soon been exhausted.

"Let's wait till he's here."

"Have you brought a message from Mischa?"

"No."

"It's all right to tell me. He has no secrets from me."

But Rosa refuses to budge; she smiles and says nothing. Now Lina tries a roundabout approach.

"Have you ever been here before?" she asks.

"No, never."

"I mean, lots of people have been coming here lately, and you know what they want?" Lina pauses, to give Rosa a chance to appreciate this special proof of trust, before divulging: "They want to hear the news. Is that why you're here too?"

Rosa's smile vanishes: she certainly hasn't come for that reason; on the contrary, rather. She already regrets having come at all, has regretted it increasingly from the first moment. She feels she is in the wrong place with her despair; here everything is being done honestly and in good faith. She wonders what she would do if Jacob were to come in now and tell her that the transport with her parents on its way to such and such a place had met up with the liberators. And she dare not give an answer, nor to the second question either: whether she has been deceiving herself all along as to the real reason for her coming. She doesn't exclude the possibility.

"Well?" says Lina. "Is that why you're here too?"

"No," says Rosa.

"But you've heard about it?"

"About what?"

"That everything's going to change soon?"

"Yes."

"So why aren't you glad?"

Rosa sits up straight; the threshold has been reached where one either turns around or speaks the truth, but what is the truth, apart from her misgivings? "Because I don't believe it," she says.

"You don't believe what Uncle Jacob has been saying?" Lina asks, in a tone implying that she must have misheard.

"No, I don't."

"Do you think he's fibbing?"

Rosa likes the word and wouldn't have thought of it in this context. She would quite like to discuss nice things with this nice child. On no account continue in the direction already taken; how could she have done that, with a child? Without any conclusive reasons to offer, she is suddenly convinced that she has made a mistake that, she hopes, will have no bad effects. She can't just calmly get up and leave. So she sits there forlornly, waiting — now no longer for Jacob — but for some convenient opportunity to bring to an end a visit that she now perceives to be wrong. But that opportunity is moving further and further away. After her first shock, Lina

becomes almost alarmingly worked up, for her uncle is most certainly not a liar. But Rosa didn't say that, Yes, that's exactly what you said, how can anyone say such a thing? Since she heard for herself on his radio that the Russians will soon be here, with her own ears, what do you say to that? A man with a very deep voice told that to another man, she can't remember his name but she remembers his voice exactly, word for word he said that the whole schlimazl would soon be over, in another few weeks at most. Does Rosa think that man has been fibbing too, what has got into Rosa anyway, to accuse her uncle of telling lies? Just wait till he comes home, *he'd* give her the right answer!

Before she has got it all off her chest in a torrent of verbal indignation, Lina suddenly breaks off and stares past Rosa, with a startled look. Rosa turns her head toward the door: Jacob is standing there, stony faced; no one has noticed the door opening.

Rosa gets up. Regardless of how much or how little he may have heard, she feels he has seen through her, such is the dismay in his eyes. With lowered head she goes to the door, no chance now for a breezy departure; she has put her foot in it. Jacob takes half a step aside for her, but back she must go to the chair for the briefcase lying forgotten on the floor. The whole length of the corridor Rosa doesn't dare look back. But on reaching the stairs she does: Jacob is still standing there motionless, watching her go. Soon the little girl will tell him what he no doubt already knows.

Let us stay with Rosa. She comes out into the street, in the early dusk, where the next unpleasantness is waiting. What meets her eyes is wild excitement, Jews fleeing into hallways, yet again. At first Rosa can't make out why. Then she sees a car approaching, a small, dark green van with a man in uniform standing on the running board. Without thinking, Rosa dashes the few yards back into Jacob's building, caught up in the panic. She leans against the wall and keeps her eyes closed, then opens them when she hears hurrying footsteps. An old man, gasping for breath, stops beside her, also coming in from the street.

"What do they want?" he asks.

Rosa shrugs her shoulders. The van will drive on and soon be forgotten; the scene with Mischa awaits her. The man assumes that it is a matter for the highest authorities, otherwise they would come on foot, as apparently happens every few days. To their horror there is a screeching of brakes; the frightened old man clutches Rosa's arm so tight that it hurts.

Two men in uniform come into the very hallway they are standing in, leather straps under their chins. The old man clings desperately to Rosa's arm. Outside, the engine has been left running. At first the Germans think they are alone in the semidarkness, but when they have almost reached the stairs one of them says, "Look!"

They turn toward the two figures against the wall. Rosa seems to interest them more than the man does, but maybe she is just imagining it. They come a few steps closer, then one of them shakes his head and says: "No, no."

The other one tells them, "Get out of here!"

Then the Germans walk up the stairs, the clatter of their boots alarming the whole building. A door is slammed. Agitated voices sound confusedly from everywhere, though it would have been better to stay calm. A child is crying.

"Come on!" whispers the old man.

Rosa follows him. In the doorway he hesitates, afraid of the van, but they must pass it if they are to obey the German's order.

"Go on, get going!" says Rosa.

They hurry straight across the road, toward the building opposite where the door is already being opened for them from the inside. The old man sits down exhausted on the bottom stair, groaning as if he had run around the entire block and massaging his chest over his heart. Rosa sees three other men and a woman in the hallway, which is even darker than the first one; she doesn't know any of them. She looks toward the door, which is of metal; a fourth man, fairly young, is peering out through the keyhole and reports for the benefit of all.

"Nothing yet," he says.

"Who are they looking for over there?" the woman asks the old man.

"How would I know?" he says, continuing to massage his left chest.

"Does someone special live there?" asks a bald-headed man.

At first he receives no reply; they are all on their way home from work and strangers in this street, until Rosa says softly, "They've come for Jacob Heym."

Who is Jacob Heym, which Jacob Heym? The scout at the keyhole straightens up and asks, "Jacob Heym? Is he the one with the radio?"

"Yes."

"Nice mess," he says, without much sympathy, it seems to Rosa. "It was bound to come out sooner or later."

At that the old man on the stairs flies into a rage, much to Rosa's surprise; he had appeared to be fully occupied with his fear and his heart. Now his veins are swelling. "Why did he have to be found out, you young pip-squeak? Eh? Why? I can tell you why he was found out. Because somebody ratted on him! That's why! Or do you imagine it happened all by itself?"

The embarrassed pip-squeak submits to this dressing-down without protest. He bends over again to the keyhole and says after a short pause, "Still nothing."

The old man summons Rosa to him with a movement of his head and, when she is standing in front of him, moves slightly to one side, so she sits down beside him.

"Do you know him?" he asks.

"Who?"

"That Jacob Heym?"

"No."

"Then how do you know he lives there?"

"From friends."

"They're still inside," the pip-squeak reports. The old man ponders for a few moments in silence, then says in the direction of

the door, "When they bring him out, let me know. I'd like to see what he looks like," a remark that, right at this moment, Rosa finds in poor taste; then she doesn't.

"He has taken a great risk," says the old man admiringly, now back again to Rosa, who nods. And wonders what she will tell Mischa now. Let him scold her all he likes about her visit to her old home, she couldn't keep that a secret even if she wanted to; the telltale briefcase and ration card would be enough without any confession on her part. But she would rather not mention Jacob; she doesn't dare face Mischa with that, especially after what's happening now. And, bitter as it is, she runs no risk if she doesn't mention her encounter with Jacob: Jacob will be in no position to tell Mischa she's lying.

"Perhaps he isn't even at home," says the old man.

"He is at home," Rosa says without thinking.

The old man looks at her in surprise, a question already in his eyes, but before he can voice it the pip-squeak calls from the door, "You were wrong — they're bringing out a woman!"

Let us permit ourselves a closer look and go out into the street. The woman being led away is Elisa Kirschbaum. She is being made to pay for her brother's incompetence, for the fact that, contrary to expectations, he was unable to cure the Sturmbannführer: it has taken them long enough to think of that.

For some time now, people living in the building have been afraid that events might take such a turn; anyone can put two and two together. Someone had mentioned the hitherto unknown expression "clan liability" in conversation. The very evening of the day the flag at the freight yard was flying at half-mast, Jacob had gone to see Elisa Kirschbaum. He had put it to her that it might be better for her to go into hiding with friends she undoubtedly had, at least for the time being, until it became clear whether the threatened reprisals would actually be carried out. For, however painful it might be, they had to assume the worst for her brother, and if by some miracle he should, in spite of everything, return unharmed, Jacob promised to let her know at once. But she wanted none of all that and told Jacob, "It's very kind

of you, my dear Mr. Heym. But let that be my worry." As if she still held a trump card that nobody suspected.

Now she is walking ahead of the two Germans, briskly so there can be no excuse for pushing or touching her. And briskly also, as Jacob behind the window suspects, so as not to offer any spectacle to the street, which, although apparently deserted, is full of hidden eyes. The display of concentrated power being exuded by the two men behind her appears excessive for so frail a prisoner. Elisa Kirschbaum stops behind the van without looking around at her escorts. One of them lets down the tailgate, on the inside of which is a narrow step. Just as she is about to put her foot on it the van moves forward, and Elisa Kirschbaum steps into a void and falls onto the street. The van is merely making a U-turn so it can wait on the other side of the street; the driver has already stuck his head out of the window in preparation.

Jacob's vantage point is not near enough for him to make out the expressions of the participants. People living closer by report later that the Germans had grinned as if at an oft-repeated practical joke. Elisa Kirschbaum gets up immediately, with surprising agility; she is on her feet again, waiting, before the van has completed its turn, for which it has to stop and back up twice. Then she climbs in; it is rather high for her, and in spite of all her efforts she is given a shove. The two Germans also climb into the back, the tailgate is pulled up, Elisa Kirschbaum has finally disappeared behind the dark green tarpaulin. The van drives off, and after a safe interval many of the front doors open. The narrow sidewalks gradually fill up again with people, some silent, some debating, most of them on their way home from work, as we already know, and strangers to this street.

Meanwhile, according to the radio the Red Army has advanced to the outskirts of the district town of Pry. Pry is not to be compared with Bezanika; anyone can visualize Pry, no one has to ask where in

the world Pry is. Pry is exactly eighty-seven miles away from us; most of the local inhabitants know the little town from occasional visits. A few have even lived there and were moved here after the outbreak of the war, for due to its fortunate population structure Pry has no ghetto of its own.

The position of the Russians becomes the subject of an argument. Kowalski has a quarrel with his three roommates, whose names I don't know. Now, as both the easygoing Jacob and I have good reason to know, it is the simplest thing in the world to disagree with Kowalski, but in this particular case one is inclined to agree with him. The issue is no trivial one: what is involved is that this one man, for simplicity's sake let us call him Abraham, this Abraham claims that the Russians have already passed through Pry on their way to Mieloworno. Someone at his factory, let us assume the brickyard, has said so. Kowalski, on the other hand, swears up and down that they haven't even reached Pry. But Abraham sees no reason whatever to believe Kowalski more than his fellow worker.

"Who's working at the freight yard?" Kowalski asks angrily. "You or me? Who hears everything firsthand? You or me?"

For Abraham this is no valid proof, presumably because his version sounds so much better than Kowalski's. Anyone can make a mistake, he says. Nor will he accept the logical objection that whatever this mysterious fellow worker at the brickyard claims to know must, in some way or other, originate with Jacob.

"Or are you suggesting there is another radio?"

"How should I know?" says Abraham.

It might not matter to Kowalski — let Abraham think what he likes, let him be taken in like a naive child by crude rumors — except that somehow he feels partially responsible for the truth. For the radio is, in a way, also his radio, given his long-standing friendship with Jacob, as strong today as it ever was; during the power failure the radio had actually come within an ace of landing in his room. So he patiently explains the long route that every news item has to take from Jacob's mouth to the factory, via so many people, the dangers it

is exposed to along the way, dangers of mutilation and enhancement. How everyone adds something to it, turns something good into something better, which means the news finally arrives, as it turns out, in such shape that even its own creator doesn't recognize it.

"Anyway, the Russians are on their way to Mieloworno," Abraham says stubbornly. "Maybe you got it wrong, or he got it wrong. You'd better ask him again tomorrow."

Kowalski doesn't ask Jacob tomorrow; excuses for a leisurely chat with Jacob are scarce enough, so Kowalski goes to Jacob then and there.

He finds him in the worst possible shape: weary, apathetic, taciturn. Half an hour ago they took Elisa Kirschbaum away.

"Am I intruding?" Kowalski asks, conjuring a smile that, as soon as he has peered into Jacob's face, he feels is all wrong.

"It's you," says Jacob. After closing the door behind Kowalski, he lies down fully dressed on the bed, where he obviously was already lying before the knock at the door. He clasps his hands behind his head and stares at the ceiling. Kowalski wonders what has suddenly got into him. Only a little while ago, on their way back from the freight yard, he seemed quite cheerful, if the word *cheerful* may be used in these times at all.

"Has something happened?" asks Kowalski.

Happened or not happened: Jacob feels a strange new weakness, alarmingly sudden. Before, on his way down from the attic, where he had gone with Lina, he had had to hold on to the banister. He has tried to account for this new condition with that perpetual hunger, but that could explain only the trembling of his knees, scarcely the origin of that other weakness, equally tormenting, his sense of discouragement. This is what he is now attempting to analyze while staring at the ceiling, trying to dissuade himself from minimizing it; it is too massive and weighty for that. The incident with Elisa Kirschbaum was probably only a small component; it had unquestionably shaken Jacob, but it would be too much to describe it as the experience that robbed Jacob of his courage from one minute

to the next. Certainly of greater impact was Rosa's visit, having to hear Lina defending him with lies, with his own weapons, although even that visit should not be held wholly responsible, for Jacob's dwindling powers either. It is a number of things coming together from all sides — mainly, perhaps, just contemplating the situation all around. More and more often someone takes you aside and says, Jacob, Jacob, I can no longer believe this will end well, and by the time you have offered one person some modest consolation by way of the very latest news, there are already six other people waiting to tell you the same thing. According to the radio, the Russians are exerting pressure on Pry; God alone knows who they are really exerting pressure on, or who is exerting pressure on them. According to the radio, one should soon be able to see the first artillery flashes in the distance, but day after day all you ever see is the same scene, that repulsive desolation. You will gradually have to consider some withdrawal tactics, for in your enthusiasm you have allowed the advance to proceed at a speed that unfortunately won't stand up to grim reality.

And Kowalski stands around idly, waiting in vain for an inviting look.

"Do you want me to go away again?" he asks after an appropriate interval, and sits down.

Jacob remembers that he has a visitor; he abandons the ceiling and says, "Sorry, I'm not feeling too good."

"Has something happened?"

"Yes and no," says Jacob. "They've just taken Kirschbaum's sister away. But apart from that, I'm beginning to feel my age."

"Kirschbaum's sister? After all this time?"

"Yes, just imagine."

Jacob gets up; his ears buzz with suspicious signals, and these are combined with giddiness and nausea. All he needs now is to become seriously ill. From quite far away he hears Kowalski saying, "Are you all right?"

He quickly sits down at the table; fortunately he begins to feel

better. He thinks of Lina and what is to become of her and that it's preferable to stay well. And when he finally looks at Kowalski he is reminded of a little cardboard sign, a little white sign with green lettering: CLOSED TEMPORARILY DUE TO ILLNESS. He got it from Leyb Pachman when he bought the shop from him, together with a lot of other stuff in the inventory. Only once did he ever use it, during all those twenty years spent over potato pancakes, ice cream, and comparatively minor worries, only once did the little sign hang on the shop door. And it wasn't even a proper illness, Jacob having the constitution of an ox: while trying to repair a stuck blind he had fallen off the ladder and broken a leg. The best health in the world is of no help there. That had been long before Josefa Litwin's time; she could have been very useful as a nurse, but he was looked after by a wizened old witch from the building across the courtyard. For money, of course, since he had no one else. But as for looking after him, all she did was push the table with his meals close enough for him to feed himself, occasionally empty the ashtray and air the room, and in the mornings straighten the bed. Beyond that, all she did was say, "And if there's anything else you need, Reb Heym, just call me. I'll leave my window open." Jacob took her up on this once or twice, but either she had closed her window or she was as hard of hearing as an old mule. And every second or third evening Kowalski would drop in with a small bottle and express his sympathy for Jacob having to lie there with his leg in a splint, unable to move. Would sit there until the bottle was empty, neither of them being great conversationalists. Jacob thanked God that the fracture healed without complications. A few days longer, and the boredom would have killed him. And shortly after that he threw the blameless little sign into the stove, watching with grim enjoyment as it was consumed by the flames. The threat had such a lasting effect that to this day he has never again had to be confined to bed.

"Are you sure you don't want me to leave?" asks Kowalski, at the end of his patience and interrupting Jacob's thoughts.

"Don't go," says Jacob.

Kowalski looks at him with raised eyebrows. He has a feeling that Jacob intends to tell him something, most likely nothing good to judge by the past few minutes and the sluggish introduction. Yet all he had in mind was a completely innocent visit, for on his way here he decided not to bother about a confirmation regarding Pry, an error being out of the question — that fellow Abraham must have been hoodwinked by a busybody. He merely wanted to drop by and say hello and talk a bit about the old days and the days to come, with whom else if not with his only old friend, if he doesn't come to you, you come to him.

"What do you think, Kowalski, how much can a person endure?"

So he wants to philosophize, Kowalski must be thinking. He waits for a clarification of the question, for it to be narrowed down in one direction or another, but Jacob appears to have asked it in quite a general sense. "Well?" he says. "What do you think?"

"If you put it like that," Kowalski replies, "a lot. An awful lot."

"But there is a limit."

"Of course. . . ."

"I'm sorry," says Jacob, "but I have now reached that limit. Perhaps someone else could have gone on longer, but I simply can't."

"What can't you?"

"I can't go on," says Jacob.

Kowalski lets him take his time. He doesn't know that Jacob is preparing an unconditional surrender, the worst of all admissions. He sees only Jacob's gaunt face, propped on his hands, maybe a bit paler than usual, possibly a bit more weary, but it's still the face of that same Jacob he knows better than anyone else. He is worried, because such attacks of melancholy are completely foreign to Jacob; he can be grouchy and quarrelsome at times, but that's different. He's never been known to moan; moaning is what all the others do, whereas Jacob has been something of a spiritual comforter. Quite often, whether consciously or not, Kowalski went to him for his own weaknesses to be exorcised. Even before the days of the radio, actually even before the days of the ghetto. At the end of a particularly foul

day, after standing from early morning to late evening behind the shop window, watching in vain for customers, or when some enormous bill arrived and he hadn't the slightest idea out of which pocket it was to be paid: where did he go that evening? To Jacob's shop, but not because his schnapps tasted any better. It was the same schnapps as anywhere else, besides being illegal because it was served without a license. He went there because afterward the world looked just a bit rosier, because Jacob could say something like "Chin up" or "Things are going to be all right," with just a bit more conviction than other people. But also because among his scanty acquaintances, only Jacob made the effort to say such things. Kowalski lets him take his time.

Now Jacob starts to speak: judging by appearances, to Kowalski, there being no one else in the room; judging by the words, to a larger audience, that is to say just thinking out loud, into the room, with a wistfulness in his low voice and that new tone of resignation, the last of an extravagant diversity of messages to everyone. That, if their vanishing strength permits it, they shouldn't be angry with him: the fact is, he doesn't have a radio, he has never possessed one. Furthermore, he doesn't know where the Russians are; maybe they will come tomorrow, maybe they will never come, they are in Pry or in Tobolin or in Kiev or in Poltawa or still farther away, maybe by this time they have suffered a crushing defeat, he doesn't even know that much. The only thing he can say with certainty is that some numbers of days ago they were fighting at Bezanika. How can he be so sure? That's a whole separate story, no longer of interest to anyone, but at least that is the truth. And he can well imagine how devastating this confession must sound to their ears, so once again his plea for forbearance; he had only acted for the best, but his plans went awry.

Then there is a long silence in the room as if a king had abdicated. Jacob tries in vain to discover some emotion in Kowalski's face, but Kowalski looks straight through him and sits there like a pillar of salt. Needless to say, Jacob feels pangs of conscience the moment he

comes to the end of his speech. Not because of the message itself, which is overdue and could no longer be delayed, but couldn't he have conveyed it more gently, perhaps tucked in with a Russian retreat, instead of shifting the whole load all at once onto other shoulders, shoulders no broader than his own? Was he sure Kowalski was the right man in whose presence the curtain had to be rung down, Kowalski of all people? If he had heard it from a stranger, or from someone not that close to Jacob, he would undoubtedly have taken it for an error or spiteful slander. After a night filled with doubts he would have said to you, "Do you know what those idiots are telling each other? That you haven't got a radio!" "That's true," the answer would then have been, which would also have hurt him but perhaps less so because during the previous night he would have at least considered the possibility. And it could somehow have been arranged like that, exactly like that; it was Kowalski's bad luck that he turned up this very evening.

"You're not saying anything?" says Jacob.

"What can I say."

From unfathomable depths Kowalski brings his smile to the surface; without this smile he would not be Kowalski. He looks at Jacob again. Although his eyes smile less than his mouth, they still do not proclaim the end of all hope. They have more of a sly look, as if this time too, as always, they could see beyond appearances.

"What can I say, Jacob? I do understand you, I understand you very well. You know, I'm what you might call the opposite of a hero, you've known me long enough. If I'd had a radio here, I don't suppose a single soul would ever have heard a word. Or more likely still, fear would have simply made me throw it in the fire, I have no illusions about that. To keep an entire ghetto supplied with news! I would never have gone that far — you never know who else is listening. If I have ever in my life understood anybody, I can understand you now."

Jacob could not have expected such a flight of fancy; cunning

old Kowalski has surpassed himself, has even made his calculations where there was nothing to calculate. How are you going to convince him that at least now you are telling the truth? All you can do is suggest that he ransack every nook and cranny in this room and the basement. But to protest with upturned palms — "When did I ever lie to you?" — that you can no longer do. And if you actually do urge him to search the place and tell him that whatever radios you find here, Kowalski, you can keep, he will give you a knowing wink and respond with something like, "Let's not play games, Jacob. Haven't we known each other for forty years?" He will intimate that any attempt at hide-and-seek is a waste of time. The impossible can never be proved. Jacob, alarmed, says: "You don't believe me?"

"Believe, disbelieve, what's the difference?" says Kowalski in a low voice and more absently than expected, in a tone similar to Jacob's just now in his little speech to all. That's all he says for the time being, as his fingers drum a measured theme on the table, his head tilted back, sunk in private thoughts.

Jacob considers further ways of justifying himself. It means a lot to him that he be judged with leniency, and for that the reasons for his actions must be known, as well as the reasons for the sudden cessation. But these are still not entirely clear to himself; and because of this, and because he realizes that not only his standing but Kowalski's, too, is at stake in all this, he says nothing and saves his request for extenuating circumstances for some later date.

This is followed by the sobering thought that his own standing is not at stake at all; no one in the ghetto is less important than he, without a radio. The only people who matter are his recipients, Kowalski among a great many others. And they couldn't care less about excuses, however plausible; they have other worries, and not minor ones either — they want to know, for instance, what is going to happen now after Pry.

Kowalski stops his drumming and brooding, gets up, and places a friendly hand on Jacob's shoulder. "Don't worry, old man," he says. "You're safe with me. I won't ask you anymore."

He goes to the door, reviving his smile. Before opening the door he turns around once more and actually winks with both eyes.

"And I'm not angry with you."

And leaves.

Next morning, after the most sleepless night for a long time, Jacob is on his way to work. Before stepping out into the street he had furtively pressed down the handle of Kirschbaum's door, for whatever reason, but the door was locked. Horowitz, his neighbor, caught him at the unrevealing keyhole and asked: "Are you looking for something in particular?"

Of course Jacob hadn't been looking for anything in particular, just looking, human curiosity, and with a vague explanation to Horowitz he left. Then there had been that iridescent patch in front of the building, on the road, where the small German van had stood yesterday. A few drops of oil had seeped from it and were now gleaming in thin streaks on the dwindling remains of a reservoir deposited there by Siegfried and Rafael, first by way of their rolled-up shorts, then, when their sources had dried up, with the aid of a bucket of water. They had set to work immediately after Elisa Kirschbaum's departure, for with so little motor traffic such opportunities were few and far between. Jacob had still been at the window observing them with Lina, who was disgusted at the boys' indecency.

But back to Jacob on his way to work: from a distance he can already see a fair-sized crowd at a street corner, right in front of the building where Kowalski lives. Jacob's first thought is that Kowalski must be at the center of the crowd; his best friend will have come out into the street and, true to his nature, been unable to keep his mouth shut. Either, in thinking it over last night, he has come to the conclusion that he has after all been told the truth, or, as is more likely with Kowalski, he still doesn't believe it but outwardly pretends to do so, for true friendship means sticking together. Has come

out of the building and has lost no time in scaring the Jews to death with his dire news, since he must at all costs be the first; whether on the road to hell or to paradise, Kowalski always in the lead. Has thereby cut off all one's paths of retreat — not that, after giving it much thought, one meant to take any such path, but what business was that of Kowalski's?

Jacob feels inclined to turn back, he tells me, and to make a short detour; it's going to be hard enough anyway, they'll give him a grueling time at the yard. Let Kowalski cope with this on his own, that's his problem, this is a good opportunity to stay out of it. Now Jacob notices, while still some way off, that those people are hardly speaking, yet surely they should be agitated after the presumed revelation. As he approaches he sees that most of them are standing in shocked silence. Some are looking up at an open window that, at first sight, does not seem to have anything unusual about it, being merely empty and open. Jacob is not quite sure whether it is Kowalski's window or the one next to it. But on closer inspection he does see what is unusual: a short piece of rope, fastened to the transom and no longer than a finger, hence unnoticed until now.

Jacob, forcing his way through the crowd, dashes into the building. He tries to take two stairs at a time but manages only the first two; luckily Kowalski lives only one floor up. The door is open, like the window, so there is a draft. Kowalski's three neighbors, one of whom we arbitrarily called Abraham, are not at home. Only Kowalski is at home, and two complete strangers are in the room, the first passersby to have seen him hanging. They have cut him down and laid him on the bed; now they are standing about helplessly, not knowing what to do next. One of them asks Jacob, "Did you know him?"

"What?" Jacob asks, standing by the bed.

"I said, did you know him?"

"Yes," says Jacob.

When after a while he turns around, he is alone; they have closed the door. Jacob walks to the window and looks out into the street:

nothing left of the crowd, only people walking past. He tries to shut the window, but it jams: first he has to remove the rope with its double knot from the transom. Then he draws the curtain shut; in the subdued light, Kowalski's face seems easier to bear. He pulls up a chair, not wanting to sit on the bed, and sits down for an indefinite period. I say indefinite because later he is unable to tell me anything about how long he stayed there.

The sight of a dead person is far from unfamiliar to Jacob; it is not uncommon to have to step over somebody, a victim of starvation, lying on the sidewalk and not yet removed by the cleanup squad. But Kowalski is not just somebody, dear God, no he isn't. Kowalski is Kowalski. A confession has resulted in his death, a confession, moreover, that he pretended not to believe. You crazy fool, why didn't you stay on last night? We would have had a calm discussion about everything and scraped up that little bit of courage needed to go on living. Haven't we scraped up enough together, rightfully or wrongfully? If it works, no one asks how it was done. Why did you have to behave like a poker player on your last evening? We could have helped each other, but only you knew what was going on inside both of us, you hid from your friend Jacob Heym, you showed me a false face, yet we could have gone on living, Kowalski, we could have managed.

By profession a barber, had some money stashed away, as we know, intending to change his life one day but would probably have gone on being a barber; was equipped with various questionable attributes, was suspicious, quirky, awkward, garrulous, too clever for his own good, but all in all, in hindsight, suddenly endearing. Once rescued Jacob from a horrendous situation, from a German outhouse, subscribed to the *Völkischer Kurier* for the advertisements, could sometimes put away seven large potato pancakes at a sitting but couldn't tolerate ice cream, would rather borrow than pay back, wanted to seem calculating but wasn't like that at all, except once.

As is to be expected, self-reproaches are whirling around in Jacob's head: that he had Kowalski on his conscience, that he with his

petty fatigue was to blame for Kowalski's resorting to the rope, once you start something you have to see it through, you have to estimate your strength in advance. Here I interrupted Jacob and told him, "You're talking nonsense. You didn't overestimate your strength because you had no way of knowing that it would go on so long." And I told him, "The point is not that you're to blame for Kowalski's death but that he has to thank you for having stayed alive up to that day." "Yes, I know," was Jacob's response, "but none of that helps."

Finally Jacob gets up. He pulls the curtain aside again and, when he goes, leaves the door wide open so that one of the neighbors returning from work will see what has happened and do what's necessary. It is far too late to go to the freight yard; he can hardly tell the sentry at the gate that he was delayed on the way, and there'll definitely be no midday meal for him today. Jacob goes home, his only hope being that Kowalski kept his reasons to himself, that for once he held his tongue. For Jacob has rediscovered his radio.

No matter how often Jacob rediscovers, reports, invents battles and circulates them, there is one thing he cannot prevent: inexorably the story approaches its infamous ending. Or rather, it has two endings; actually, of course, only one, the one experienced by Jacob and the rest of us, but for me it also has another ending. Without wishing to boast, I know an ending that could make a person turn pale with envy; not exactly a happy one, somewhat at Jacob's expense, yet incomparably more satisfactory than the real ending. I devised it over the years. I said to myself, What a terrible pity for such a beautiful story to peter out so miserably. Find a halfway satisfactory ending for it, one that will hold water; a decent ending allows many a weakness to be forgotten. Besides, they all deserved a better ending, not only Jacob, and that will be your justification, in case you need one. That's what I told myself, and so I spared no effort — successfully, if you ask me. But then I was beset by misgivings as to its veracity; by comparison it simply sounded too good, and I asked myself whether attaching a peacock's magnificent tail to some miserable animal, merely out of love, has any hope of success, whether that wouldn't be just creating a monster. Then it seemed to me a weak comparison, but I never could make up my mind. And now here I am with the two endings, not knowing which one to tell, mine or the ugly one. Until it occurs to me to get both off my chest, not because I lack decisiveness but merely because I think that this way we will both have our say. On the one hand the story that is independent of me and, on the other, myself with all the effort I would like not to have made in vain.

So, first the ending that never happened.

Kowalski is allowed to celebrate his resurrection; he completely ignores transom and rope, Jacob having foregone his confession. The evening in question they chat about irrelevant things, although Jacob has something else on his mind. However, Kowalski needn't be aware of that. Only later, when he is alone again, does Jacob realize that it is beyond his dwindling strength to carry on with the radio lies, especially with no end in sight. Nevertheless, the true state of affairs must not come to light. Jacob imagines the consequences this would have: he might have to fear, for example, that the series of suicides, which for some time has mercifully been at a standstill, would flare up again and increase by leaps and bounds.

The following nights — which, of course, are now free because he need not reproach himself with Kowalski's death — Jacob spends trying to come up with a final credible lie. Its purpose is to explain why the radio has stopped playing; he has to get rid of this worst of all torments, but the lie simply won't come to him. It is proving harder to find than all the others.

I imagine for a moment that Jacob hits upon the obvious idea of announcing that the radio has been stolen from him. A lot of things are stolen in the ghetto, why not a radio too? Objects of less value and

usefulness have gone missing. I imagine an entire ghetto hunting for the unscrupulous thief. People eye each other suspiciously; visits are now made only to camouflage inspections. In the evening each person listens at the door of his neighbor — perhaps he has just tuned in to the BBC, perhaps he is this contemptible person — hasn't there always been a strange look in his eyes that your inner voice warned you about? Only one thing is a mystery: what advantage does the thief derive from his crime? None at all; even now he won't find out any more than he would have heard anyway from Jacob or one of the intermediaries. Just that the rest of us are left groping in the dark: what sense is there in that? How else can one explain his motives than by a thoroughly evil disposition? I go on to imagine that the search for the thief assumes alarming proportions, that a sort of illegal committee is formed that combs through the ghetto building by building after work. And let us assume that, among the several thousand inhabitants, there is one other person like Felix Frankfurter, just one, who also keeps a radio hidden and, unlike Frankfurter, has not destroyed it.

I am well aware that this one person would present a problem for the whole story; for either, like Frankfurter, he was always too scared to listen, or he did listen and must therefore know that Jacob's daily reports were a tissue of lies, except for the battle of Bezanika. And all this time said nothing. However unlikely either of these two possibilities may be, let us accept one or the other of them for the next three sentences, since that person is a mere figment of my imagination, an ephemeral fancy. During the search the radio is discovered at his place; he is killed by the enraged searchers, a fine fancy one might say, or he isn't killed, it's of no consequence. The radio is taken to Jacob, the rightful owner: just the thought of his face is worth the whole idea. Now things resume their normal course, Jacob listens and reports, and for days the talk continues to be of the outrageous incident, how any person can behave so despicably, for no good reason.

But enough of that. Jacob doesn't come up with the idea of the

theft, neither in the actual ending, which surprises me, nor in mine. In mine, no matter how hard he tries he can't rid himself of the radio, so he decides to rid himself of the Jews. He stops receiving visitors, simply doesn't open the door; at the freight yard he goes off by himself to eat his midday soup near the Germans' brick building, where he can't be asked anything. And as soon as work is over he vanishes like a ghost, even taking the long way around so as to dodge those lying in wait for him. Now and again he does get waylaid, in spite of all his precautions, and he is asked what has suddenly got into him, why he's stopped telling them anything.

"There's no news," he says then. "Don't worry, if there is any I'll tell you."

Or, to even greater effect, he'll say, "It's getting too dangerous for me, I don't want to run any risk so close to the end. Do me a favor and stop asking me."

This doesn't make him exactly popular; there are only a few who feel for him in his situation, and yesterday's great man rapidly declines in prestige. He's called a coward and a bastard, also because he stubbornly refuses to hand over the radio to someone else, someone with more guts. Soon glances come his way that could scare a person; words are whispered behind his back that are better not heard, but Jacob sticks to his guns. Let them look upon him as the wicked one, he would feel exactly the same in their place, never mind if they take every opportunity of letting him know the taste of contempt: anything is better than telling them the truth.

Not that he has been entirely deserted by well-wishers. I would think that Kowalski and Mischa remain faithful. Mischa goes on carrying crates with him, and Kowalski says sometimes, although less often than before, "Well, what's new, old man? Surely you can give *me* a little hint? No one else needs to know about it."

Jacob always refuses, even if it means losing his oldest friend. He doesn't lose him; Kowalski proves to be a tenacious friend.

One day Mischa says, "Jacob, I hate to tell you this, but they're talking about taking away your radio."

"Taking it away?"

"Yes," says Mischa gravely. "By force."

Jacob looks across to the others. So there are one or two among them who are prepared to resort to intimidation; Jacob doesn't want to know who it is.

"Can't you stop them?" he asks.

"How?" asks Mischa. "I'd be glad to. But can you tell me how?"

"Tell them I've hidden it so well that they'll never find it," says Jacob.

"I'll tell them," says Mischa.

At home Jacob strictly forbids Lina to be in his room when he is not there. As a precaution he no longer leaves the key in the hole in the wall behind the doorframe, not for Lina and not for anybody. As far as possible she is to remain in her attic and stay put. To offset her boredom he lets her take the book about Africa upstairs; she can use it to learn to read, which will do her more good than hanging around doing nothing.

The next few days prove to be a strenuous test of Jacob's sorely tried nerves. Twiddling his thumbs, he has to sit still and wait, for liberators and intruders, in both cases uncertain whether they will come or not. Mischa tells him he has no idea whether the opposition has changed its mind; ever since his loyalty to Jacob has been noticed, in spite of all that has happened, ever since he has offered his services as a go-between, he has been excluded from the deliberations. Moreover, something of the general contempt has rubbed off on him too. The same goes for Kowalski.

I have not given any thought to my own attitude in this matter, on whose side I am, whether I am Jacob's friend or enemy. But knowing myself, and considering how much the steady flow of information has meant to me, I would say I am his enemy, one of the worst, in fact. Let us assume that I strongly plead that no one be confused by all this talk, that the sooner his radio is taken away the better. Many people share my view, but there are also some Jews who think differently and want to be heard — those, for example, who

right from the start have regarded the radio as a danger. Basically they are delighted with Jacob's change of heart. "What's all the fuss about?" they say. "If the Russians come at all, they'll come, radio or no radio." And others again say, "Let's hold our horses, maybe Heym will come to his senses. We must give him a little more time."

In any event, the break-in does not take place, not in my ending.

These bad days are a test of Jacob's nerves in another respect, too. At some point he has to acknowledge that he has clung to what is by now almost an old habit, that once again he has overestimated his own strength. He was convinced that the wave of hostility, which he obviously had to count on, would not affect him very much, that he could survive it intact. He found encouragement in the thought that he was experienced in such matters, that all his years in the shop had, after all, been little more than a struggle of one against all. That was a facile and mistaken conclusion. What Jacob overlooked was the period after Bezanika during which he had been showered with goodwill, affection, and respect, with every indication that he was indispensable, something to which he had become accustomed with absurd rapidity. And now the exact opposite: after ten days at most, that wave of hostility threatens to engulf him; the cold shoulders become unbearable.

Lina notices changes in Jacob that she cannot account for. Because she obediently heeds his instructions and keeps to her attic, she hears nothing. She merely notices that, whenever Jacob is with her, he sinks into a gloomy abstraction, hardly speaks, doesn't even show the proper surprise when she reads out a whole sentence from the Africa book, unaided. Whenever she sits on his lap she might as well be sitting on a chair. Only a short while ago he would gladly take her on his knees, and now he seems not to notice her at all. When she asks him for a story he says he can't think of any and puts her off till such time as he remembers one.

"Are you angry about something?" Lina asks.

"Angry? Why angry?"

"Because you're acting so strangely."

"Acting strangely, am I?" says Jacob, lacking the strength to avoid an unmerited sharpness in his voice. "Look after your own business and don't bother me."

Lina continues to be mostly alone and has very little to look after — except Jacob, to whom something incomprehensible must have happened.

One important evening in my ending, shortly after the first of the month because that is when the ration cards are always distributed, Jacob knocks on Mischa's door. He has to wait a while before it is cautiously opened. Mischa says in surprise: "Jacob?"

Jacob enters the room. The first thing he says is: "If you really want to hide her you shouldn't leave two cups on the table, you donkey."

"You're right," says Mischa. He goes to the wardrobe and lets Rosa out. Rosa and Jacob stand facing each other wordlessly, until at length Mischa finds the situation embarrassing.

"Do you two know each other?" he asks.

"We once saw each other very briefly," says Jacob.

"Won't you sit down?" Rosa says quickly, with a smile, before Mischa can ask about that once. Jacob sits down and looks for a way to begin, for he hasn't just dropped in: what he has in mind is quite a tall order.

"The reason I'm here," he says, "I want to ask you a favor, and if you say no I'll fully understand. I just couldn't think of anyone else to turn to."

"I'm listening," says Mischa.

"The thing is, these last few days I've been feeling rotten. Physically, I mean. I'm not as young as I was, my heart's starting to act up, so's my back, and my head aches all the time — it's rather sudden and a bit much all at once."

Mischa still can't think what kind of favor it could be and says, "That's bad."

"Well, not that bad really, it'll pass. But until it does, Mischa, I was wondering whether you could take Lina in for a while."

The general awkwardness results in a pause, during which Jacob doesn't look up; probably he's expecting a bit too much of the young man. Two illegal womenfolk in his room; but after all Jacob did say he wouldn't blame him if he refused.

"Well, you know," Mischa says slowly, his intention being quite clear.

"Of course you can bring Lina here," says Rosa, with a reproachful look at Mischa.

"I would never have come to you if you'd been alone," Jacob tells the unhappy Mischa. "But since Miss Frankfurter is here all day, and Lina is always alone too . . ."

"I'm looking forward to having her," says Rosa.

"How about you?"

"He's looking forward to it too," says Rosa.

Mischa gives himself time to rearrange his expression — they all know he isn't exactly happy. "All right," he says, "bring her here."

Relieved, Jacob puts the ration card down on the table; it is intact except for one coupon, so Mischa need no longer fear that Jacob is also demanding full board, free of charge.

"When can I bring her?"

"When did you have in mind?"

"Tomorrow evening?" asks Jacob.

Although Jacob assures him that it is entirely unnecessary, Mischa accompanies him for a few steps out into the street. When Jacob holds out his hand to say good night and Mischa keeps it in his a shade longer than necessary, Jacob detects a vital question in Mischa's blue eyes. Mischa is absolutely right, Jacob concludes, one good turn deserves another, especially when it is sought so modestly.

"You'd like to know what the situation is?" he asks.

"If you don't mind," says Mischa.

Jacob divulges that Pry has meanwhile been taken but that halfway to Mieloworno the Germans have established a fortified line that will be fought over for quite some time, it appears, but which has already been breached at several points, this in turn leaving room for

hope. And he asks Mischa to keep this news to himself, otherwise there'll only be endless questions at the freight yard, why is one person told and all the others are not. Mischa promises, no doubt hoping for further periodic news items. That is how I account for his tactics.

The following evening Lina moves. Jacob has given her the same reason he gave Mischa, a separation for only a few days, and Lina accepts it calmly enough. After all, she is fond of Mischa, it's almost a secret love, and he is presumably fond of her too, only that Rosa woman sticks in her gullet because of that visit and those reproaches — she might have some trouble with her. But Jacob again assures her on the way to Mischa's that Rosa is very easy to get along with, helpful and kind, that only last evening she told him she was looking forward to having Lina. It would be best not to say a word about that stupid visit the other day.

"You're a big girl now, so don't disgrace me."

After delivering Lina, Jacob goes straight home, ostensibly to lie down. For a long time he sits in the dark room, brooding over whether his decision, for the sake of which Lina had to leave, is justified. He doesn't want to have to reproach himself later, if there is a later; he has made enough wrong decisions recently. To have the Russians come almost within sight was a mistake, to discontinue the radio broadcasts was a mistake, the radio itself was the first and biggest mistake, it seems to him: too many mistakes for one man. Of course, he could still undo some of that, go back to his old routine. In three or four days he could feel better, illnesses of this kind can be cured at will, then he could bring Lina back, act as though he's had a change of heart and go on supplying reports, both good and bad, to the news hungry at the freight yard. But where would that all lead, Jacob wonders?

After a couple of hours, I imagine, Jacob makes up his mind. He hangs the cloth in front of the window, turns on the light, then picks up a knife, takes off his jacket and removes the yellow stars from front and back. He does this very carefully, even unpicking the little

white threads so they won't betray the infamous places. That done, Jacob puts on the jacket, which now seems strangely denuded. His eyes roam the room for objects that might be useful for his undertaking: the pliers, of course, which he puts in his pocket. Nothing else catches his eye, so he turns out the light and gives a last look out of the window, into the black deserted street. It is long past eight o'clock and curfew time, probably already midnight. In the distance he might, if you like, recognize his searchlight as it ranges duty-obsessed and aimlessly over the roofs.

Since there are no limits to my arbitrary inventions, I say that it is a cold and starry night. Not only does that sound pleasing, it also comes in handy for my ending, as we shall see. Accordingly, Jacob, without his yellow stars and long after eight o'clock, walks along the street, or rather, he slinks along close to the buildings, trying to resemble a shadow; after all, he has no intention of forfeiting his life. One street, and another, and yet another: what they all have in common is that they represent the shortest route to the boundary of the ghetto.

Then the boundary. I have chosen the most favorable spot of all, the old vegetable market, a small cobbled square with barbed wire drawn across it. Previous escape attempts have succeeded or failed almost invariably at this place. To the right, at the very end of the square, is the watchtower, this one without a searchlight. The sentry on top doesn't move while Jacob observes him from a doorway on the far left side. The distance may amount to five hundred feet. Along the whole length of the barbed wire, which surrounds the entire ghetto without a gap, there is no other spot that far from a watchtower. Only here have they left that much space, either for the sake of economy or because of the unimpeded view.

On the tower all is as quiet as on a monument, so that Jacob is already beginning to hope that the sentry has fallen asleep. Jacob looks up at the sky, waiting prudently until one of the few clouds drifts across the inconvenient moon. When the cloud finally does him the favor, Jacob takes the pliers out of his pocket and starts running.

Let us pause briefly at this highly dramatic moment in my ending, to give me a chance to admit that I cannot provide the reason for Jacob's sudden flight. In other words: I don't take the easy way out and declare, "In my ending he just wants to escape, that's all." Obviously I am in a position to offer several reasons, all of which I consider plausible; I just don't know which one to choose. For instance: Jacob has given up all hope of the ghetto being liberated while there are any Jews still left in it and therefore decides to save his own skin. Or: he is fleeing from his own people, from their persecution and hostility, and from their thirst for news too, an attempt to find a refuge from the radio and its consequences. Or a third reason, for Jacob the most creditable one: he has the daring plan of returning to the ghetto some time during the following night; he only wants to get out now so as to obtain some useful information to feed through his radio.

Those would be the chief reasons. None of them to be ruled out, one must admit, but I can't bring myself to commit Jacob to any one of them. So I offer them as a selection; let each reader choose the one that, according to his own experience, he finds the most valid. Maybe some readers will come up with even more plausible ones. I merely wish to remind them that almost anything of importance that has ever happened has had more than one reason.

Under cover of the cloud, Jacob reaches the barbed wire unobserved. He lies flat on the ground; his simple plan is to crawl out under the barrier, which, of course, is easier planned than done, the lowest of the many strands being only four inches above the ground; but that is no more than was expected, hence the precautionary pliers. These are now put to work, rapidly snipping away at the thin wire that can't resist them indefinitely and splits more quickly than expected. But then there is that noise, for the wire is taut, an appalling whine that Jacob imagines capable of rousing a whole town from its sleep. He holds his breath and listens in fear, but everything remains as calm as before. Gradually, however, the light increases, for no cloud lasts forever. The next strand is four inches higher, thus

eight above the ground. Jacob calculates that to crawl under it would entail some risk to body and clothing; after all, though he has become terribly thin, he still is a fully grown man. On the other hand, he would rather not risk breaking the silence by twanging the second wire, which will be not a jot quieter than the first one, and he can't for the life of him think of any third option.

Jacob is still lying there undecided, plucking cautiously at that second strand to see if it can be loosened and the noise thus reduced as the pliers cut through it, when the decision is taken out of his hands by a higher authority. I said at the beginning that this ending of mine is rather at Jacob's expense. A raucous burst from a submachine gun shatters the night silence: our sentry hasn't been that fast asleep. And there is nothing more to calculate, and Jacob is dead, all his endeavors at an end.

But there's more to come; what kind of an ending would this be anyway? I imagine further that tranquillity is far from returning to the ghetto. I visualize a revenge for Jacob, this, I have decided, being the cold and starry night when the Russians arrive. Thus the Red Army succeeds in surrounding the city in no time at all; the sky is lit up by flashes from the heavy artillery. Immediately following the salvo aimed at Jacob, an ear-splitting, thunderous roar starts up, as if inadvertently triggered by the unfortunate marksman on the watchtower. The first ghostly tanks, shells hitting the military office, the watchtowers in flames, tenacious Germans defending themselves to the last bullet, or fleeing Germans unable to find any hole to crawl into — dear God, what a night that would have been. And, behind the windows, weeping Jews for whom everything has happened so suddenly that they can only stand there in disbelief, holding each other by the hand, Jews who would give anything to rejoice yet find themselves unable to; there'll be a time for that later. I imagine that by dawn the last battles are over, the ghetto is no longer a ghetto but merely the most run-down part of town. Anyone can go wherever he likes.

How Mischa thinks that Jacob is sure to be feeling better now; how he tries to take Lina back to him but doesn't find him in his

room; the taste of the bread given us in ample quantities; what happens to the poor Germans who fall into our hands — all that and more is, to my mind, not important enough to be accorded a place in my ending. Only one thing is important to me.

Some of the Jews leave the ghetto by way of the old vegetable market. There they see a man, not wearing stars, lying on the ground with the pliers still clenched in his right hand, under the barbed wire of which one strand is cut — obviously caught while trying to escape. They turn him over on his back, Who is this poor fellow, they ask, and someone is there who knows Jacob. Preferably Kowalski, but it could also be a neighbor or myself or anyone else from the freight yard, just someone who knows him, except Lina. This person stares in horror at Jacob's face; perhaps he heard the first good news from Jacob the very day he himself was preparing to forego the rest of his life, and he now murmurs words of incomprehension. Someone asks him, "What do you mean, you don't understand? The poor fellow was trying to escape because he didn't know the end was so near. What's so hard to understand about that?"

And, with a lump in his throat, that one person makes the hopeless attempt to explain what will forever remain inexplicable to him.

"But that's Jacob Heym," he says. "Don't you understand? It's Jacob Heym! Why was he trying to escape? He must have gone out of his mind. He knew perfectly well that they were coming. He had a radio. . . ."

That, roughly speaking, is what he says; then, shaking his head, he walks with the others out into freedom, and that, roughly speaking, would be my ending.

But, finally, after the invented ending, here is the pallid and depressing, the true and unimaginative ending that makes one inclined to ask the foolish question: What was the point of it all?

Kowalski is irrevocably dead, and for the time being Jacob goes on living, with no thought of foisting Lina upon strangers, does not strip his jacket of the prescribed stars, leaves the pliers in the drawer (assuming he even owns any), consequently does not tempt any sentry at the old vegetable market, on a cold and starry night, to fire shots capable of setting off such a mighty echo. That day, and we know why, he missed going to work; the friend who hanged himself haunts his mind but must by next morning give way to some hard thinking. Jacob could see with his own eyes what the elimination of the radio can lead to; perhaps not in such extreme form in every case but quite possibly in one or two, and for that reason there will be no change regarding the radio. The grieving for Kowalski, whom suddenly he misses more than he ever wanted him around while he was still alive, must be put aside for now. Instead, the little news factory that feeds its man so laboriously starts working, for tomorrow there will be questions again, as there are every day. Like it or not, life drags on.

So next morning Jacob, tight-lipped, walks past Kowalski's building, his eyes fixed firmly on a safe point at the end of the street. Yet, as we know, any attempt to force oneself not to think of something specific is doomed. Jacob sees him lying there exactly as if he were still standing beside him in the room; once again he unties the remains of the rope from the window, pulls up the chair because he doesn't want to sit on the bed, and as if that were not enough, hears the end or the beginning of a conversation.

"In that building there."

"Number 14?"

"No, 16. The corner building."

"And do they know who?"

"Not really. A name like Kaminski or something."

While still some distance from the freight yard, Jacob realizes that something unusual must have happened: the Jews who have arrived for work are crowding around the entrance because the gate is locked. Why they are not being allowed in is at first a mystery to him;

a mystery also why the first man to notice him points in his direction, says something, and the others turn to look at him. Fifty or sixty men have been waiting for Jacob, myself among them: we are watching the only person who can still, we hope, stand between us and disaster as, looking puzzled, he hesitantly approaches us. We make room for him, forming a narrow lane to allow him to walk right up to the gate and read the notice on it, then tell us that things aren't that bad. Beside me, Lawyer Schmidt shifts his weight from one foot to the other, and I hear him muttering, "Get a move on, can't you?" because Jacob is walking with such maddening slowness and looking at people's faces rather than straight ahead.

Punctual for work, Jacob reaches the locked freight yard gate and reads the notice attached to it. That today, at 1300 hours sharp, we are to assemble in the square in front of the military office, ten pounds of luggage per head, all rooms to be left unlocked and in clean condition, anyone still found in his building after the appointed time . . . , the same applies to the bedridden and the infirm. Further details at 1300 hours at the location indicated.

And now try and give them some more comfort, where to find it is your business, make them believe it's all a bad joke, that actually it's going to be a mystery trip with lots of nice surprises; after all, that's the kind of thing they're waiting for behind your back. Not to worry, brothers, is what they want to hear, just forget about that scrap of paper. Anyone who is curious can, if he likes, go to the military office at one o'clock if he has nothing better to do. Either way, nothing can happen because — of course you don't know this yet, stupidly I forgot to tell you — the Russians are waiting around the corner and will take care that not a hair on the head of a single one of you will be harmed.

Jacob stands so long in front of the sign without moving that one would think he is learning the few lines by heart. Why is he standing there so long? we silently wonder and begin to fear the worst. What will his face look like when he shows it to us again, and what will he say? He'll have to say something. I also notice the first few starting to

drift quietly away. With dreadful certainty I know they are right, there is nothing more to hope for here, yet I go on hoping and stay rooted to the spot like most of the others.

A waste of time. After an eternity Jacob turns around, presenting us with two vacant eyes, and at that same moment even the stupidest must recognize that the last hope of salvation is gone. Jacob has no time, he tells me, for any private horror at the course of events, this being pushed aside by the horror of the others who are looking at him like bilked creditors, as if he were someone for whom it was now time to redeem the pledges he had so carelessly distributed. Again he stands for a long time without daring to raise his eyes, and they don't make things any easier for him either, by leaving, say. For the ten pounds of luggage to be selected there is still plenty of time, the rest of their lives so to speak. The narrow lane that had opened for Jacob on his way to the gate has closed up behind him; now he is standing in a tight semicircle — to use Jacob's own words, like an entertainer who has forgotten his lines at the crucial moment.

"Don't you have anything better to do than stand there gaping?" asks a sentry on the other side of the fence.

Only now do we notice him standing a few feet from the gate; he alone knows how long he's been there. In any case he won't have heard much, though everything that matters has already been said. We finally move off, why annoy him unnecessarily, and silently go our separate ways. The sentry shakes his head in amusement at these strange creatures. Jacob is almost grateful to him for the unintentional help.

On reaching home Jacob immediately goes up to the attic, expecting to find Lina still in bed, but she is not even in the room, although the weather is by no means ideal, with only a few patches of blue visible in the sky, but Jacob can imagine that his instructions are not taken too seriously. Her bed has been neatly made, the piece of

bread has disappeared from the plate on the chest of drawers. Right after he said good-bye to her this morning she must have got up and hurried off to some project or other that he is never told about. Jacob decides to look for her later and first to pack her things, then his own. When that's done, he can still go and find Lina. He wastes no time wondering whether the notice on the gate applies only to those employed at the freight yard or to all inhabitants of the ghetto. For he has no choice but to take Lina with him; leaving her behind would not mean hoping for an uncertain fate for her, that's pretty obvious.

The maximum luggage allowance proves to be fairly generous, the total of her usable belongings amounting to scarcely more than a handful. Jacob stuffs underwear, stockings, and scarf into his pockets. While he is folding her winter dress, Lina shows up, holding what remains of the bread in her fingers. She is very surprised to see Jacob but is immediately aware of his disapproving look, which she has no trouble interpreting: he won't like her having left the attic against his wishes.

"I just went to the pump. I was thirsty," she explains.

"Never mind," says Jacob.

He finishes folding the dress and gives it to her to hold, then looks around and once again opens the cupboard doors to see whether he has forgotten anything.

"Am I going to stay with you again downstairs?" asks Lina.

"Come along," he says.

They go down to his room. On the stairs they meet Horowitz, the neighbor, who has apparently come up from the basement and is lugging a heavy leather suitcase whose locks fail to keep the lid shut.

"What is your opinion about it?" Horowitz asks.

"Have a guess," Jacob replies.

For the first time he knows with certainty that the proclamation on the freight yard gate applies to the whole ghetto; Horowitz's inane question and the suitcase he is carrying mean that the same notice was posted overnight at every factory entrance.

"Did you happen to hear where they are taking us?"

"No," says Jacob.

He hurries into his room with Lina before he can become involved in any lengthy discussions; the only thing he might like to know is what Horowitz, a single man, hopes to gain by that enormous suitcase — his notice can hardly have mentioned four hundredweight per person.

When the door is closed behind them, Lina confesses that she can't stand Horowitz. She always gives him a wide berth because he invariably has some admonishment ready for her, such as not to hang about, to say good morning nicely, not to act so fresh, to stop making that noise: there's always something he can think up. Once he even shook her by the arm because she had slid down the banister and landed at his feet.

Jacob says, "Well, fancy that."

After taking Lina's things out of his pockets and putting them on the table, he starts packing. But first he has to choose between suitcase and rucksack; there's plenty of room in either one. Because of its handiness the rucksack wins, for on a journey of uncertain length, when one hand must constantly be available for Lina, a suitcase can become a nuisance.

For quite a while Lina patiently hopes that Jacob will volunteer an explanation for his strange actions, but all he says from time to time is, Hand me that, Hold this, and not a word to satisfy her curiosity. So she has to ask: "Why are you packing all those things?"

"Well, why does anyone pack?"

"I don't know," she says, emphasizing her words with an exaggerated shrug, the kind already known to us, pulling her shoulders up to her ears.

"Then think about it."

"To go on a trip?"

"Clever girl."

"We're going on a trip?" Lina cries, and it sounds a bit like, And you're only telling me now?

"That's right, we're going away," Jacob says.

"Where are we going?"
"I don't know exactly."
"Far away or not so far?"
"Quite far away, I think."
"As far as America?"
"No."
"As far as China?"
"No."
"As far as Africa?"

Knowing from experience that she is capable of keeping up this game for hours, Jacob says, "Yes, about as far as Africa."

She starts skipping around the room, hardly able to grasp her good fortune, and Jacob doesn't try to stop her — after all, the child has never been on a real trip. The hardest part comes when she suddenly gives him a kiss and asks why he isn't glad too.

"Because I don't like traveling," he answers.

"You'll see what fun it will be!"

As he is finishing up with the rucksack, putting two spoons on top, and is about to fasten it, Lina lays her hand on his arm and says, "You've left out the book."

"What book?"

"The one about Africa."

"Oh yes. Where is it?"

"Under my pillow. I'll run and get it for you!"

Lina hurries out of the room, and Jacob can hear her cheery voice in the corridor and up the stairs: "We're going on a trip! We're going on a trip! . . ." From sheer joy, or to annoy grumpy old Horowitz a bit while under Jacob's protection.

Then we are on our way.

It is very cramped and stuffy in the boxcar. The Jews are squatting or sitting on the floor beside their ten pounds, at least thirty of

them, I would think. Sleeping at night, if the journey should take that long, will be a problem, for we can't all lie down at the same time; we'll have to do it in shifts. It is dark, too; the few narrow openings right under the roof let in only a meager light, besides being almost permanently occupied. There is hardly any conversation to be heard; most people look as if they had terribly important and serious matters to reflect upon, yet with the noise of the rumbling wheels it would be possible to talk, if one wanted to, without being overheard, despite the close quarters.

I am sitting on a checked pillowcase containing whatever I'd been able to salvage, and I am bored; beside me a very old woman is weeping, quietly, out of consideration for others. Her tears have long since been used up, yet from time to time she sniffs so violently that it would seem whole torrents were being held back. And her husband, with whom she is sitting on their suitcase, looks around apologetically each time, because no doubt he is embarrassed, because he wants to convey that there's nothing he can do about it.

To my left, where I now switch my attention, Jacob has managed to get hold of a spot by one of the narrow openings, but I can truthfully state that this proximity is pure coincidence. I didn't push my way next to him; I don't go as far as some idiots who make out he is partly to blame for this journey, but I can't deny a feeling of unwarranted resentment toward him because everything I built up on the foundations he supplied has collapsed. I didn't push my way next to him; I don't care who I'm next to: it simply happened that way. Looking between Jacob's legs I can see Lina, who so far I have known only from hearsay; she is sitting on the rucksack. Because of Lina I find myself liking him a little more again. Who else, I think, would have taken on the burden of a child, and that, I think, almost outweighs my disappointment.

I would so much like to be friends with her, by winking or making funny faces, the kind of thing one does, but she takes no notice of me whatever. She is looking dreamily at the floor, her mind doubtless occupied by thoughts that are remote from everyone else's,

for she occasionally smiles to herself. Or her lips form soundless words, or she grimaces as if suddenly unsure of herself. I enjoy watching her. On the floor I find a little pebble and flick it against her arm. She comes out of her reverie and gazes around to see who it could have been, in every direction except mine. Then she looks up at Jacob, who is beyond all suspicion as he stands motionless at the little opening, his whole attention absorbed by the passing countryside. She taps his leg.

He looks down and asks, "What is it?"

"Do you remember the fairy tale?" asks Lina.

"Which one?"

"About the sick princess?"

"Yes."

"Is it true?"

It is clear from his expression that he finds it strange for her to be thinking of that just now.

"Of course it's true," he says.

"But Siegfried and Rafi wouldn't believe me."

"Maybe you didn't tell it properly?"

"I told it exactly as you did. But they say there's no such thing in the whole world."

"No such thing as what?"

"That a person can get well again by being given a bunch of cotton."

Jacob bends down and lifts her up to the little window. I stand up too: the wheels make quite a racket, and I'd like to hear how it goes on.

"But it's true, isn't it?" says Lina. "The princess wanted a bunch of cotton as big as a pillow? And when she had it she got well again?"

I see Jacob's mouth widen, and he says, "Not exactly. She wished for a cloud. The point is that she thought clouds are made of cotton, and that's why she was satisfied with the cotton."

Lina looks out for a while, surprised, it seems to me, before asking him: "But aren't clouds made of cotton?"

Between their heads I can make out a bit of sky with a few clouds, and I must admit that there really is an amazing resemblance: they do look like tufts of cotton.

"Then what *are* clouds made of?" Lina asks.

But Jacob promises to give her an answer later, probably partly because she is getting too heavy for him. He sets her down on the rucksack again, then resumes watching the landscape slip past.

This, I think, is my moment. I sit down too, move closer to her, and ask whether she would like me to explain what clouds are made of. Of course she would, and I tell her about rivers and lakes, and about the ocean, about the never-ending cycle of water, about that almost incredible process of evaporation, how water flows invisibly into the sky, in tiny droplets, and forms clouds there, which at some point become as heavy and wet as soaking sponges until they lose the drops again as rain. I tell her about steam too, from locomotives for instance, and from chimneys and all the various kinds of fires. She listens attentively but skeptically; I know that the whole lengthy story cannot be covered in one lesson. And I see Jacob casting a friendly eye on me; perhaps that lesson is responsible for his singling me out, a few days later, to tell me an even crazier story. For there is nothing from my appearance to show that I would be one of the few to survive.

When my knowledge about the formation and composition of clouds is exhausted, I tell Lina not to be shy about asking if there is anything she hasn't understood. But she makes no use of this offer; with her chin cupped in her hands, she takes her time thinking through the whole matter again. After all, she has to come to terms with a very significant mistake: clouds are not made of cotton.

"You don't know what you're letting yourself in for," Jacob whispers in my ear.

"Why?"

"Because you have no idea the kind of questions this child can ask."

I look at her and say, "I'll manage all right."

His eyes tell me, Just wait and see. Then he asks me whether I would like to look out of the opening for a bit.

"Thanks, I would," I say.

I stand up expectantly and look out until darkness falls. I see villages and fields, once even a little town in the distance; at a half-overgrown pond I see a group of soldiers resting among lorries, cannon, and cows. And I see a few sleepy stations with platforms and barriers and railway men's cottages with green window boxes overflowing with flowers, and I wonder whether these are regulation window boxes because they are attached to each cottage and each one is green. And I see people whose faces I can't make out watching our train pass, but above all I see trees, which I had almost forgotten although I'm still a young fellow, vast numbers of trees. Beeches and alders and birches and willows and pines — my God, look at all those trees, there's no end to them. A tree was responsible for my not becoming a violinist, and under a tree I became a real man: the wild boar came too late to prevent it. And at an unknown tree my wife Hannah was lost to me, and an ordinance tried to deprive me of trees for all time. Some say that trees addle my mind, I go on standing there, and to this day I like sometimes to take a ride on a train passing through a thickly wooded area, best of all a mixed forest. Till I hear Jacob's voice: "Aren't you ever going to get some sleep?"

"Let me stand here a little longer," I say.

"But there's nothing more for you to see," I hear him say.

"Yes, there is."

For I can still see the shadows of trees, and I can't sleep. We are heading for wherever we are heading.