"I can't get out", groaned Erna.

He tried to lift the timber: no use! Stones and sand ran down across his hands. His forehead touched something hard. "Damn it", he puffed, pulled his legs up to one side and let Erna's body slide to the floor. "Careful", he said, "watch it, it won't work that way." He could feel her trying to move her legs.

A little spark jumped momentarily through the darkness some distance away. All Franz could see was a serrated slanted silhouette shooting across the room. Erna was lying below it. But just as quickly, they were plunged back into darkness. The voices around them grew louder but the two of them didn't take much notice. Franz knelt at Erna's side and examined the beam which lay on her tibia as she sat, half propped up against the upset bench by this stage. It was now clear beyond all doubt: her legs were trapped. Rubble was now covering the timber, and running continuously in a fine stream over Franz's hands.

"Does it hurt?" he asked.

"No, but I can't get out", she repeated. Her voice sounded forced, it was clear she was trying hard.

Again a spark glimmered faintly, several times in succession, then the small flame of a cigarette lighter came alive. Franz saw Erna's body in front of him, indistinct but still recognisable. The narrow blue stripes of her nurse's uniform across her hips, the torn stockings with knees peering through, the half-naked calves; her body was slightly twisted. Franz knelt down beside her and laid his hand on her hip. She didn't take any notice. She felt only the dust between her teeth, the pressure in her ears, the throbbing of the blood in her veins. He turned around and looked into Erna's face. The blond hair was a mess. She stared at him with large eyes. A red stripe drew a shaky line from her right temple down to her neck before being smudged into a lighter wide spot on her right cheek.

"You're hurt", he said and bent towards her head.

She pulled herself up a little, and tried again in vain to free her legs. He felt her head. But he couldn't find the source of the bloody trickle. She touched her forehead too and saw that her fingers were covered in a red sticky mess. "It can't be much", she said, "it doesn't hurt."

Franz turned his attention back to the beam and tried, lying on

"It's me, the officer from this afternoon."

The door opened and the frightened face of the old woman appeared. When she saw him, her expression changed into one of astonishment.

"What happened to you?" she asked, concerned, and looked at his head.

Wohlleben was covered in voluminous bandages. The dressings were new, but loosely and carelessly applied.

"Nothing", he said. "May I come in?"

They stood again in the small space. The only light came from a table-lamp, which cast a dim light over the room. Of all the many faces, only the whites of the eyes were recognisable.

"You have friends", he said, "maybe they could help me too."

"What happened to you?" the woman asked again. "Please, take a seat."

He sat down. "Nothing happened. The bandage is a disguise because I lost my cap - it might come in useful all round." And now he told the woman what had happened to him. He even told her about today's meeting with the Intelligence Service. He knew full well: she would not betray him.

"And now you don't know where to go?" asked the woman.

Wohlleben nodded.

"Don't you have anyone you can trust? Why do you come to me, of all people. I'm constantly afraid of being found out and arrested myself. When you knocked a while ago, I thought, now they've found you. Whenever anybody knocks unexpectedly, that's what I think." They looked at each other.

Wohlleben asked himself whether it was sensible to have come here. How could he expect her to help, when it was she who should have been helped! But isn't it always the way, that those who are in need of help themselves are often the most willing to help as well?

"Perhaps", said the woman, as if confirming his thoughts, "perhaps I could recommend you to someone who could hide you. But now, now it is almost dark, there's nothing I can do."

Wohlleben got up.

The woman looked up at him, shook her head and said: "What are you doing? Do you want to go? Where? You can't go back to your house, where your housekeeper would betray you if she saw

you, you're supposed to be dead! Don't forget that!"

Wohlleben stood undecided behind the chair, his hands resting on the back, and let his eyes wander from painting to painting.

"Well, sit down again", said the woman.

He sat down, with some hesitation.

"I'm sure you haven't had any dinner yet. If you would accept the little I can offer you." She went to the side-board where the collection of paint-pots and jars with brushes he had seen on the table that afternoon was now sitting. She opened the door, and as the boards rubbed together they emitted an extended squeaking sound. It sounded like the whining of a child.

But before she could take anything out of the cupboard, Wohlleben interrupted. "No, please, don't. I couldn't eat anything at all just now."

"Why? What's the matter?" The woman stood between the open doors of the cupboard. "It's quite all right to take a piece of bread from me. My friends will look after me. I'm lucky."

"Yes, of course, but..."

"What else?" asked the woman. She sounded almost suspicious. She took a quarter loaf of bread from a shelf.

"This young man. He wasn't yet nineteen. Can you understand! I'm very grateful, but I can't just now."

"Oh, I see", she said. "Well, I can understand that." She put the bread back on the shelf and closed the cupboard door. "I'm sure he would have enjoyed his dinner though, if he had shot you. Who knows how often he has already ..." She didn't finish the sentence.

Of course, he said to himself. Nevertheless. "Still, he was very young."

"Those are often the worst", she said, unrelentingly.

"They know not what they do!"

The woman sat down opposite him at the table. "That's easy to say." Her words sounded harsh. "But before that it reads: Father forgive them! Am I their father? Is it our job to play God? Can we possibly take his place? Perhaps he can. Perhaps. But what about us? And is that what he's doing? I'm asking you now: is that what he's doing? Judas would have needed forgiveness. And why did he weep? If it wasn't repentance that he was feeling. But they'll never feel repentance! They'll only be sorry that they didn't kill even

more!"

Wohlleben didn't quite know why he'd quoted those words. He wasn't that religious, and what's the difference between "that religious" and simply religious anyway? Who is the latter? Who isn't? Religious instruction! It was a long time ago. And just this afternoon, when the woman had whispered her prayers, he had said resentfully: Your God doesn't care for poor dogs like us.

For a while they were both silent.

Then she continued: "They killed my husband, my parents and almost all my friends. One after the other, they were all arrested. They would have arrested me too, if I hadn't been able to disappear with the help of some brave friends. And you, and the likes of you, didn't notice a thing. And now you've lost your appetite for the simple reason that you gunned down one of these murderers." Her voice sounded bitter. "Nobody sees anything. Nobody wants to see anything."

Of course the last sentence hit him. It was spot on. It burrowed into the same region of his consciousness which had registered the slogan-painting on the windows of Mayer's ready-made clothing shop in 1938.

"You're right", he said. "You're most certainly right. We've all noticed that something has been going on, that something wasn't right. We've been suppressing it. We didn't want to see or hear."

"Something going on! Something going on that wasn't right! Nonsense! You all agreed unanimously that we were to be killed!" The woman hissed these words. "You must have known it!"

For a moment Wohlleben tried to think of a way to make this woman understand the way it had been for him and most of his fellow-citizens. Make it comprehensible? But was it even comprehensible? The Jews were robbed of their businesses, they were excluded from all professional organisations, they were forbidden to work, and finally all those who hadn't emigrated to foreign countries in spite of all that had happened, were deported to the East. There was talk that in Poland, where - as everybody knew - all the Jews came from in the first place, they were locked up in a certain territory. Resettled. Where they could cheat and exploit each other. That was what had been talked about initially, in the years when the first large groups were herded together and taken to the

goods stations and sent off. And after all, they were Jews, different from us. And most likely - one thought to oneself - they're to some extent to blame for their fate. They always wanted to be different, the chosen people, wanted to be better than other people. Well then. And later on, when the war was on, it wasn't mentioned any more. Everyone had their own personal problems. Everyone knew someone else who was in danger, everyone was in danger themselves. There was Fritz who lost a leg, and Karl who has an artificial eye now, there was the party comrade Pomeisl from the house opposite who didn't come back from Stalingrad, and Aunt Mitzi who was killed with her three children in an air-raid, it was the very first or second one. To whom had she or her three children ever done anything?

"No", he said. "We didn't, I mean most people, they didn't know anything about what you told me today. The restrictions, the infringements on your rights, yes, everyone knew about them and that they were happening. But the things you told me about today, no, nobody knows about them here. - You have to believe me!"

"'Infringements'! Probably isolated incidents of people who just got carried away! No, no, my dear sir, you didn't have to wait for the 'infringements'. One only needed to have read *Mein Kampf* and one would have known what to expect."

He shook his head: "Who in the world has read that?"

"I have, of course!"

"You? You of all people?"

"It's important to be informed. Even if you have different opinions."

"You've read the book! But ask around, randomly, among the people, who has read that book, read it from cover to cover. Ask the little air-raid warden or ask the SS-officer. You won't find many who've done more than thumb through the pages or put it on their bookshelf, in the front row, for everyone to see."

"It is important to read. At home we read a lot. Old literature and new. My father adored Schiller."

"My father has never read a book", said Wohlleben. "I read. And I've always believed that many things are possible. Bloodshed and destruction. I had a brother who was ... well, he was an old comrade. I've noticed a lot of things, picked up a lot. But what you

told me today..."

"And the other things, the things you noticed and picked up, or maybe witnessed for yourself, that wasn't enough for you?"

Wohlleben made a helpless gesture with his shoulders: "Not enough, not enough! You don't think about it. Everyone thinks of himself first, of his relatives, and it's only when one meets someone like you, like I'm doing now, and is confronted with that person's story, that one starts to think. But who, I ask you now, who has any sort of contact with people like you?"

"Oh, I have friends."

"Yes, thank God that there are people like that in this city. I don't think there are many of them. And even those people who don't necessarily agree with the regime - there are many people today whose eyes have been opened - even they will avoid contact with you, in order not to endanger you and themselves."

"But my friends did know, and helped me regardless."

"I think", he concluded for himself and her, "let's be honest: We didn't know, because we didn't want to know, because, like all people at all times, we only react to the things which concern us directly, which we experience with our own body."

Wohlleben could see it was going to be a long night for him.

It didn't take long for Franz Prannowitz to notice the next day that something was wrong. *Oberleutnant* Wohlleben didn't turn up for work, and the head of the department, Lieutenant-Colonel Perkal, had also disappeared. As is always the case in such circumstances, diverse rumours circulated the offices of the Central Command. At about lunch-time it was said that the lieutenant-colonel had been arrested. A secretary, a Luftwaffe girl, who worked in the office of Major Reindorf told her friend during a cigarette break. The major had asked her to connect him with the Lieutenant-Colonel in his flat in Döbling, and when she had been put through, the mother-in-law of the Lieutenant-Colonel had answered and said with enormous loquacity but in a very disjointed and confused manner, that it had come as a great surprise to her, but she had come to look after the children only yesterday, because her daughter, the wife of the Lieutenant-Colonel, had needed to go to hospital immediately, apparently due to a premature birth. And it was only when the secretary had asked whether the Lieutenant-

Colonel was coming to the office, or whether he was with his wife in hospital, that the agitated old woman had revealed that he had been arrested yesterday evening. And so that was the reason as well, and it all came down to the son-in-law's stubbornness, and now this on top of it all... The girl reported all this to the major, who contacted the Intelligence Service immediately, and it was confirmed that the Lieutenant-Colonel had been arrested. He was helping them with their inquiries and it wouldn't take long.

Over the next few days, the news came through that *Oberleutnant* Wohlleben had died a hero's death for his People and his Fatherland during the air-raid of March twelfth, on his way back to the Central Command Office after a meeting. A sanitary brigade had found his identification disk under the rubble in Augustinerstraße. After a number of detours, this information arrived at the office ten days later. Franz Prannowitz felt as if he had heard of the death of a friend. He thought again of their first meeting in 1934:

It was on the plateau of the Leopoldsberg, on the side from where one had a view of the whole city. A young man sat dressed in old tattered clothes, his forehead covered with a dirty bandage. He was looking after a few goats, and carving ornaments on a stick. But he had to tell him. Had to tell him that Leni, his sister and her husband had been shot as they fled, and he knew that it would be a severe blow to this man, although it could well have been all the same to him, although it really needn't have been any of his business at all, although to him it might just as easily have been like one newspaper notice among others.

You're Herr Wohlleben? he had asked the man. Yes, he had said, how do you know me? I'm Leni's brother. And then the glimmer in the eyes of the gaunt man. You have some information? How is she? I don't think her husband needs to be afraid any more. At most, they'll imprison him.

He knew now that this objective phrase "At most they'll imprison him" had acted like a barrier. This sentence, with its unquestioning acceptance of imprisonment was what had kept him from closer contact with Wohlleben. At most they'll imprison him!

And then the collapse after he had informed him of Leni's death. He'd had to support him all the way back to the forester's house.

Only now, when he himself learned of Wohlleben's death, was he sorry that he hadn't opened up to him with more trust, more friendliness, last autumn, always. There had always been that thin wall between them: At most they'll imprison him.

Shortly after the news of *Oberleutnant* Wohlleben's death, Prannowitz was telephoned by Dr Mayerhofer one lunchtime. The small printing-press at Klosterneuburg was closing down, the paper was all used up, new paper impossible to get, he would therefore not be required any more in the evenings. The outstanding wages for services rendered would be posted to him. He was surprised, because he knew there was quite a lot of paper in store, and whenever he began to mention it, Dr Mayerhofer would cut him short. He learned also, that Dr Mayerhofer was being transferred to a publishing house in Linz.

He now went to his mother's, instead of Klosterneuburg, and asked her to send the boy to Groß with the message that Uncle couldn't bring him any more books, because the library had been closed down.

Again he sat in the room which had been allocated to the woman and her grandchild by the accommodation office ever since she had lost her own home in that air-raid, and where he and Groß had met again after they saw each other in the tram. The bookshelves were still stacked up to the ceiling, but today he took as little notice of them as his mother and nephew, who lived between these walls, did. The library was closed. The code-word had come to him because of the bookshelves in front of him. It occurred to him that the boy must have noticed something if he'd ever thought about the situation. He knew that the books were never returned.

But the boy noticed nothing. He never thought about the situation. Almost every day after work he went to the Hitler Youth pre-military training. Nowadays, the firm which employed him often had to let him go in the mornings as well. And as there was an air-raid almost every day, not a lot of work was done anyway. He told his uncle about rifle practice and the training with the panzer-fist they'd just started recently. A wounded Knight of the Iron Cross, a one-armed captain of the Greater German Regiment was training the sixteen year old youths. His grandmother swiftly convinced her son that there was no sense in trying to explain the situation to the

boy. It's sad, she said, he won't believe us. He won't believe us, until he experiences it for himself. Franz didn't like to think about Helmut. Because then he remembered: the way Wohlleben had sensed their mistrust then, when they had collected the boy from his parents'. To make sure he doesn't get corrupted, maybe even become a Conservative, he'd said with bitterness in his voice. His head had been bandaged still. And now this boy was learning to handle panzer-fists and would still be convinced of the German victory when the last German city was occupied.

It seemed to him that Poldi was more reasonable! Since they'd been sleeping together, they'd hardly ever spoken about politics. But once - when news came over the radio that, in the process of correcting the front, the fighting-lines near the border of Niederdonau had been taken back and the enemy had successfully crossed the Wechsel - she had asked whether he would shoot if they came. And he had just shrugged his shoulders and asked whether she would like him to. She had hugged him close and held him for a long time. He had said something about civilian clothes and she'd pressed herself against him. He'd talked about disappearing in time and she'd put her arms around his neck. Two days later, she and her mother had gone to the farm in Upper Austria where Frau Mihatsch used to help at harvest time, and where she got the produce from, to bring back to the city.

It was just in time. A week later, the noise of artillery fire could be clearly heard just south of the city. His department was to be quickly transferred to the West. There was talk of the Alpine Fortress. Some thought this meant the Salzkammergut, others thought it meant Tyrol. Many officers, and especially the female ancillary staff had already left as a vanguard. Lieutenant-Colonel Perkal was back again. His face was even more bony. He had black rings round his eyes. His left arm was in a plaster cast supported by a cloth sling. Some said it had happened in the course of the arrest. Of course, everyone had their own ideas about what "happened" meant. He and his considerably shrunken department made no preparations for a transfer to the West. There was talk of a rear-guard or something like that.

Fewer people showed up for duty every day. First the women who had remained, stayed away. Then the older civilian employees.

As there were frequent air-raids, only some of the tram-lines were operational and as they were irregular at best, it was impossible for some men to be on time for duty. Everyone knew that the end was near. Not even the superiors of the individual departments cared when some people didn't show up, it was acknowledged with a shrug of the shoulders. More remarkable was when a missing person showed up after two days and reported that he'd lost his flat because a bomb had hit the building. Telephone connections to some districts had been out of order for quite a while, but the weather was mild and spring-like as it hadn't been for a long time.

Two days before Easter, Groß awaited Prannowitz at his mother's lodgings. They were alone. His nephew was on duty with the People in Arms. He was guarding a bridge across the Donaukanal with two men and a few Hitler Youths.

Groß sat again at the small table and smoked a cigarette which he had rolled himself. It smelled of all kinds of things, except good tobacco. Franz sat down next to him and lit a cigarette as well. Both were silent for a while, then Franz asked: "Well, have you got something for me?"

Groß nodded. "You could join a small group. Two fire-fighters, a few foreign workers, Ukrainians, one Italian and some deserters."

Not exactly confidence-inspiring company, thought Franz.

"And where are these people?" he asked.

"You must remember", said Groß, "that the city is absolutely riddled with military police who catch everything with a head and two legs. They stopped even me, and it was only when they saw my ID-card and my date of birth that they let me go again. Well, you could hide with the fire brigade, it's not unusual there to find a man with two sound legs without a gun."

"Well, and what about those people there?" asked Franz. He didn't say any more, but the other man knew what he meant.

"Well, the two fire-fighters are old social democrats. Dolezal was one of the comrades in the headquarters in Floridsdorf in thirty-four. You can rely on him. He'll find a solution."

That evening, Franz went to the Fire Command Am Hof. Here too, the effects of bombing were evident, mountains of rubble, and, the thing he found most surprising, almost no personnel and only two engines. He asked after Dolezal. He was directed to a cellar

store. A Russian in the uniform of the fire brigade stared at him and greeted him several times with a nod of his head.

He met Dolezal in the cellar store. He had the feeling that they had met before. "Do I know you from somewhere?" he asked.

The other one frowned: "From roll-call, I think."

"How do you mean?" asked Prannowitz. "Which roll-call?" Like a film, the images from his basic military training, the flying school, the squadrons in the West and South and East ran before his eyes. He searched in vain for the face in front of him.

"The one in Wöllersdorf", said the other man.

And now it began to come back to Prannowitz. Under Dollfuß, in the detention camp. This man must have a very good memory for faces.

"I wouldn't have recognised you", he said.

"Well, I've gone white", said Dolezal, "but you're still young."

"Not all that..."

"You are, you are. And now, hurry up and see that you get rid of those clothes of yours. Go over there to the store and look for an overall. We'll dispose of your old things safely. Can you drive?"

"Yes."

"That's excellent. Maybe we'll get this old rust-bucket going."

"What? Which one?"

"The second truck. There's something wrong with it."

"Where are the others?"

"All gone. They took them to make their escape. On higher authority, the pigs! All gone. All they left, were these two broken-down ones. I've managed to repair one of them in the meantime. Now we'll be able to tinker with the other one when we're not out attending to fires. Anyway, now you might as well go and get Richard to show you what else we've got." He went over to the vehicles with him, waved to one of the Russians to join them, and told him to guide Franz to the store, and then on to Richard.

When he was alone with the man, the man said: "You good. You given us cigarettes."

"Me? What do you mean?" Prannowitz shook his head. What was the man talking about?

"You in station hall, given us cigarettes", repeated the Russian.

And now Prannowitz remembered. It was obviously one of the

Russians he'd met months ago in the Red-Cross hall at the *Südbahnhof* and long forgotten.

A few minutes later, he met someone else he hadn't expected to meet there.

The Russian continued to guide him through corridors and down staircases, led him through vaults, showed him the store with the uniforms, and after he had changed, went with him to the command room. There was a huge map of Vienna on the wall with the streets painted red and blue, some were thicker, some were thinner. There were also red and blue spots, larger ones and smaller ones, and red and blue crosses. There was a table with a number of telephones, two camp beds with blankets and a few chairs. On one of the camp beds, a man in full kit was lying with his face to the wall. He seemed to be sleeping. At the table, another man was sitting smoking a cigarette. Prannowitz thought he was seeing things: It was *Oberleutnant* Wohlleben. He was wearing the uniform of a fire-fighter and had his head bandaged, expertly done this time, but already somewhat dirty. It looked as if there were blood-stains on the bandage.

Prannowitz was stunned for a moment, then he stammered: "What, you? You, Herr *Oberleutnant?* I thought..."

"Of course", Wohlleben said, "you thought I was dead. But no! I'm alive!" They shook hands, he pushed a chair towards him and offered him a cigarette.

"But", he said and smiled, "Herr Prannowitz, we're not with the Luftwaffe here, we're with the fire-brigade now. And they're all on first name terms here. If you're agreeable...Franz. You know, the *Oberleutnant* is indeed dead, and I hope forever. By that I mean that none of us has to put on one of those uniforms any more, no-one has to touch a gun. I'm Richard here, you understand. And that one", he pointed behind him with his thumb to the camp bed, "his name is Gerhard, and the Russian who brought you here is called Stefan. Maybe it's pronounced differently in his language. That's what we call him here anyway, and he's never tried to get out of anything when we were able to help somewhere."

"Yes, but...", said Prannowitz.

"Your name is Franz, if I'm not mistaken", said Richard. "By the way, the one who got me here has helped others too, he's a man

Herr Dolezal - I mean Hans - can rely on, even though he knows I wasn't in Wöllersdorf." He smiled again.

"I think, said Franz, "that there were things I would have done differently as well." Again he saw London burning beneath him, Tobruk in smoke and vapour, next to him he saw the *Oberleutnant* who had got him home from the front, he saw the communist Dozekal in front of the German Labour Front notice-board and heard him ask: Did you see the tanks and the bombers?

"It's all over", said Richard.

At that moment, the telephone rang. Richard answered it. The man on the camp bed rolled over. Richard got up. "Emergency! We have to go." He pressed an alarm button. The man on the camp bed sat up. His hair was almost totally white. "Where?" was all he asked.

"Ballhausplatz", said Richard, grabbed Franz's arm and left the room with him.

the floor, to lift the timber a few centimetres at least. But it was no good, the heap of rubble on top was too big.

Now there was some light. A man was standing next to them holding a candle. His clothing was totally covered in dust. Franz raised his eyes. The young woman who had been sitting with her children on the bench opposite them lay on the floor. All he could see were her legs and part of her torso clad in salmon-pink underwear. The skirt was torn to pieces and lay draped around her hips, bricks and stones surrounded her body. The two old women were bent over her, partly obscuring her with their long, black dresses. Franz couldn't make out what they were doing, then there was the man with the candle speaking to Erna. We could have used your help. There were some heavily wounded people out the back, on the other side of the rubble-heap, and Frau Dworschak must be buried under the rubble and Fräulein Brandstätter probably too, he remarked.

"Can't you see, she's trapped herself," said Franz, "help me lift this." He tried again to raise the beam.

"Careful", said the other one and put the candle on the floor, "make sure the rubble doesn't start to slide."

"Bloody hell", panted Franz, "just what I needed."

The other man took no notice of this outburst, just looked around searchingly. "A good thing that beam got wedged in, otherwise her legs would have been squashed", he said.

"Yes, a very good thing", replied Franz, "jut like this shitty war. What about inserting this piece here and then trying to lever the whole bloody thing?" He grabbed the top of the bench on which Erna had been propping herself.

It was a strong piece of timber. The two men pulled it out from beneath Erna. She squirmed. From somewhere in the room came a call for an ambulance, and there were also cries: Frau Fischl! Frau Fischl! They were directed at Erna. The three of them took no notice. Neither did they notice the high-pitched sound of the siren sounding the All-Clear. Erna was now lying flat on the floor. By this stage, she seemed to have started to feel pain. Her mouth was puckered up. The two men tried to push the board next to Erna's legs below the jammed beam. After a few fruitless attempts, they managed to lift the load a few centimetres. It was enough.

But Erna couldn't put any weight on her right foot. It seemed to be broken. The man still fumbled with the beam, and only now did Franz notice that he was wearing the party badge on his lapel. Erna used his shoulder as a support. That way they limped towards the exit of the cellar. All Franz could see was the silhouette of the young mother on the floor, her limbs twisted like those of a big doll, he couldn't recognise her face, he saw only bloody strands of hair, a blueish-white something stuck in between them, the clenched arms around the body of the smaller girl, who, with blank open eyes and a head forced onto her back, revealed a white doll's face to the onlooker. A woman carried the bigger girl before the limping Erna and the man supporting her to the exit. The two old ones stood silently with the dead woman.

Had he ever thought about it? Hadn't he always shied away from thoughts like these?

A mousetrap, thought Franz.

"As of the 5th of February of this year, the Airman Franz Prannowitz is ordered to undergo special training at the flying school at Fels am Wagram", read the sergeant-major. The soldiers fell out and Franz went to the orderly room.

"Well", said the corporal behind the desk, shuffling papers without any apparent purpose, "you've got something to look forward to for the next few months. Special training! The war will be over before you've finished."

Fat chance of that happening, the war being over, thought Franz. He still had the feeling of being caught in a mousetrap.

It was nothing more than a construction of thin metal pipes covered in oil cloth, painted grey, with the black cross on the wings and the swastika on the tail-fin. Sitting on the cushion of his folded parachute, feeling the cold March-wind like a thousand needles pricking his cheeks, the grinding noise of a small engine, sometimes misfiring with an explosion-like crackling, hearing the humming in the wires running from wing to wing, flying in large circles and loops. Among all this, he sometimes forgot what his skills were supposed to be good for. He moved the control-stick up and down between his legs, his feet on the pedals, left and right, and below him the rows of grape-vines, some houses, a church on a river-bank, and over there, there the silver ribbon of the river meandering

through the still bare and patchy river-meadows. The flying instructor sitting behind him was still guiding him, he could still correct his manoeuvres, they were still practising take-offs and landings, but this construction of pipes in which the two men were sitting was gliding above the ground, gliding, powered into space by the large twin-blade propeller, a space which seemed without boundaries, a space foreign to countless generations of human beings. And then the first longer flight: caught up in a dream of freedom.

Caught up in, addicted to, devoted to this peculiar element, this nothing, nothing concrete, air, whipped up by horse power, cut to shreds by the supporting metal, and yet more than this, more than what he could express in words, that self-awareness too, that floating. Having been isolated since the 5th of February 1940, alone, surrounded again and again by nothingness, driven into an alienation from the objects of this earth by the circulating, sucking propellers, a release from the insolvable difficulties of this particular here and now, purchased with the movement of a few levers. But then being woken up again and again. Woken up again and again in the small hut at the runway from Dnjepropetrowsk to Woroschilowgrad, being woken up during Christmas celebrations as a guest of the Italian family whose son had been imprisoned in a German camp, being woken up in the casino when the Pomeranian squire raged against the earthbound newts in Berlin, as he called them.

Erna. Wohlleben. Groß.

Landed.

Was it a crash landing? An emergency landing? Parachuting in above enemy territory?

Unfamiliar people had appeared with lights, some half-grown youth with shovels, they'd met two people carrying a stretcher as they came up the staircase.

All you could see in the courtyard was that the back part of the house had been hit and everything down to the first floor had collapsed. The front wall had disappeared, rooms were partly exposed to the open air: a couch with little cushions, plush tassels on the arm rests, a glass cabinet with broken dishes and without glass, double beds with lacy throws, a lampshade covered in cloth swung

in the air, the parquet floor, torn to shreds like a well worn rag, leaked out into the open air right down to the ground floor. On one wall there hung a large picture, a reproduction print of Raphael's Sistine Madonna in a gilded plaster frame. Wherever you stood, you had the impression that the eyes of the Madonna were looking right at you. Next to it a room: dark wallpaper, an old German sideboard against the wall, an old German table in front of it with two broken legs, half kneeling above the torn floor. In the corner, a black baby grand showed its teeth, the wires hanging in an untidy fashion from its brick-covered body. Above it on the wall could be seen the pale oval of Beethoven in plaster. Everything was covered over and over in the grey dust of rubble.

Franz tried very hard to guide the limping woman over the heap of stones which covered the whole courtyard and rose in a slope up to the first floor. Fire-fighters and Red-Cross volunteers came through the entrance, went down into the cellar. There was the sound of shouting and commands being given, from the street came the rattling sound of a car, and suddenly the man with the party badge was with Erna and Franz and helping him to carry the wounded woman as she limped across the rubble.

Franz followed her gaze. She was looking up towards the windows of her flat. All the glass had been broken and two of the casements had been dislodged. "If that's all it is", he said.

"Yes." She nodded. "But I could have spared myself the whole lot if I'd gone to the country with my parents."

"We could have all spared ourselves a lot", Franz couldn't resist remarking, and thought of the round party badge on the lapel of the man next to Erna.

"It's the second time for me in three weeks", said the other one.

"A truly great era!" Franz's words sounded cynical.

"We have to see if we can get her into an ambulance and to hospital. The fracture has to be set", the man interrupted. "If it isn't done soon, the leg might stay crooked." It sounded deflecting, conciliatory.

There were some stretchers with wounded in front of the entrance. Erna sat down on the curbstone. The wound on her head didn't seem too serious. The bleeding had stopped. Franz stood next to her, not knowing what to do. The man with the party badge

had gone back to the cellar.

"Who's that?" asked Franz.

"The teacher from upstairs; from just above us", said Erna.

Franz was still standing next to her, unable to decide what to do. What would it be like at Mother's, he thought.

There was a large blue hole in the sky, in amongst the busy cover of clouds. White stripes stretched out above them. Franz sat down next to Erna.

"Does it hurt?" he asked.

"Not really."

"An old party comrade?" Franz gestured with his thumb towards the air-raid shelter.

"No, I think he only joined up in 1940. He's a Catholic, but always supported the idea of a Greater Germany."

Franz was standing again with the galley proofs next to the provisional administrator's work station. The latter was talking with the manager across two desks joined back to back.

"For hundreds of years, my dear colleague, our shared language, our shared culture, our ancestors from Swabia and Bavaria. All those other races, what were they? The *Reich,* my dear colleague, the *Empire* has always been the bulwark of the Occident. Only a strong Germany, my dear Doctor, think of the Middle Ages, the greatness of the emperors, the Ottonians, the Stauffers, then there's that Henry the Lion and, well your Hapsburgs too, the early ones, they brought order to Europe, created values, lasting values for all times, intellect and culture can only blossom in a large powerful Reich."

"I wonder whether that's necessarily the case?" said the manager, "Goethe lived in an age when Germany was split up into countless principalities and occupied by Napoleon. Michelangelo, Dante and Tasso would also contradict your theory."

"I don't know about Dante and Tasso, but Goethe thought of himself first and foremost as a German, and he said once that Germany's destiny has not yet been fulfilled, that the Germans have a great future. And he said: There should be no talk of home and abroad between German states. Don't you see? Now the time has come, we must follow our great destiny. Chosen by providence to carry out this great and unique task, we and our Führer

will succeed in bringing order to the crumbling construction that is Europe. Now the German destiny will be fulfilled! With Adolf Hitler, we Germans will reach our true potential and carry German culture and customs even into the furthest reaches of dissolute Polish dens. That's quite clear. We shall civilize the whole of Eastern Europe. What do you want, Herr Prannowitz?"

"I have the proofs, Herr Machatschek." Franz put the sheets on the table. He glanced from one to the other.

"Here, look", said the provisional administrator, pointing at the proofs. "An old engraving of Belgrade, from the time of Prince Eugene and here's Hermannstadt, Peterwardein and Neusatz." He ran through the papers with his fingers. "Kuttenberg, Prague, Thorn and Riga, are they not unique witnesses to the German culture which we brought far into the East. And believe me, it is going to be like that again."

The manager shook his head slightly. "Yes, Herr Machatschek, if you look at it that way, we Germans have a weighty task indeed, and I really do believe that we shall succeed. It's most impressive: the House of German Art and the new Reich's Chancellery, the, the - well I can't think of the names of everything, but those figures our sculptors have created, what are their names, one of them is called Bäcker, I believe."

"Breker", remarked the provisional administrator. "Arno Breker."

"Yes, of course, Breker. That's beautiful. They are wonderful human beings. Not the ugly things the so-called artists were presenting us with in the twenties and thirties. Expressionism! I can't even bear the name of it. I can tell you, I never cared for those things."

The provisional administrator looked through the proofs. He stopped on a sheet. "Here", he said to Prannowitz, who was still standing at the side of the desk, and pointed at a picture of the Barbara church of Kuttenberg, "this you will kindly delete. We don't need a desolate Bohemian hut like that." He continued thumbing through the proofs. "What's this?" He had a picture of a pietà in front of him. "Mary of Laschenitz." He shook his head. "It's unbelievable", he handed the sheet over to the manager. "Look at that. That's supposed to be a human body. A stiff plank,

that torso, much too flat, good Lord, there's no sense of proportion, any child could see that. No", he turned again to Franz, "we're not going to print that picture, we'll take it out."

"But the professor said it's an exceptionally beautiful example of the period", replied Franz.

"What do you mean, a beautiful example? That is supposed to be beautiful? No, it has to go. What is and is not included is up to me, is that understood?"

"But the professor seemed to think this picture was especially important. He asked me to make sure that all the details were well reproduced", Franz tried to counter the provisional administrator once more.

"Well, he thinks it important, does he now? I'll give him a ring. I think we'll have to take a closer look at this professor. What sort of a freak is he? He seemed to think it important!" He slapped his flat hand on the table so that all the papers flew about and shouted: "It is a distortion of the image of German man, a denigration of all things German! We will not condone it! Off you go, off you go, here it all is", he handed the proofs back to Franz, "and if I say it is not going to be included, then it is not going to be included. Is that understood?"

"Well, yes, it's just that the text has already been set up and the picture is mentioned and the professor..."

"To hell with the professor, the professor will kindly try and find a more suitable illustration for this old German landscape. Otherwise I shall deal with him."

The manager shook his head and said: "I admire your decisiveness, Herr Machatschek. That's what we need here in the East."

The provisional administrator waved it aside. It was supposed to look modest but it was so obvious that it had the effect of confirming what was said. "Well, never mind. It's quite clear that the German has always made good away from home. It's there that he displays his qualities. It's well known."

"The *Oberleutnant* isn't here", said the *Unteroffizier*, it was a different one from the day before and the two women weren't in the room. Franz remembered that Wohlleben had mentioned something about the weekends and skeleton staff. Of course,

today was Saturday. He hadn't given it a thought. That morning he'd hurried to fix his new sergeant's distinctions to his collar badge, had eaten his breakfast quickly.

"Are you the new sergeant?" asked the *Unteroffizier*. "The boss mentioned you." He moved a step towards him and offered his hand. "My name is Wolf. I served with his brother, down in Serbia. It was a good life, I can tell you, except for later, with the partisans!"

"When will he be back?" interrupted Franz.

"He isn't coming back, they massacred him." Then the *Unteroffizier* realised that he had misunderstood the question. "I see, the *Oberleutnant*? He won't be here till Monday." But then he continued on immediately with his story: "I tell you, his brother wasn't stuck up, just because he was a captain, was always joining us in the pubs, in the most incredible dives, a few planks nailed onto stakes served as tables and benches, timber so rough you could get a splinter in your arse, nothing more. But those devils served a mean Slibowitz, I can tell you, state of the art. Well we gulped a few down, drank it from water glasses and beer in between. The boss was a three-bottle man, the wogs couldn't believe their eyes. A few of them were still sitting around along the walls, but after a while they took themselves off." He laughed. "No, he was certainly no wet blanket, the captain, I mean; when we were blotto we arranged some fire-works. Great fun! Shot the light bulbs with our pistols. Well, the women shrieked. Or when we had to piss! What can I tell you, right under the table. Opened the fly and down with it, so as not to miss a shout, quite warm under the table, between the boots, and drinking a glass of beer at the same time to make sure you got the right pressure on your bladder, it ran off between the planks on the floor anyway. Well, the women giggled when one of us took out his prick. Splash! Splash! What can I tell you, we were as soaked as sponges, and Wohlleben had a cock, I think he'd have fucked the devil's grandmother!"

Franz looked past the *Unteroffizier* to the large gardens of the large castle of Prince Eugene. In the windows, a long row of them, the morning sky was reflected, red and apple-green. The emerald cupolas above them contrasted with the clear sky. There

was a slightly violet tinge lingering on the protruding cornices and the pilaster-strips of the building. "I only wanted to report my new address. *Oberleutnant* Wohlleben insisted on it", he said. "I was able to arrange something yesterday."

It was in the hospital: "That's Herr Prannowitz, you know, the woman with the grandchild, with Helmut, in the old house. And do you know what, he'd just taken shelter in our cellar and was almost buried under the rubble too. He dug me out with his own hands and saved me in between all the dead and wounded people. And this, Franz, is my husband." As she finished, Erna pointed towards the lance-corporal who was standing at the foot of the bed.

The men shook hands. Herr Fischl, built on the small side, round-faced, thanked Franz repeatedly for his self-sacrificing conduct.

"Don't mention it! Anyone would have done it, especially seeing as I've known your wife since she was a little girl. Really, don't mention it."

Erna laughed. It sounded somewhat out-of-place and Franz fell silent. Water everywhere, and the drops on the tiles and the laughter and Erna's hands and her smooth skin; he could see her body reflected in the shiny tap over the bathtub. Her nipples appeared narrow and long in the bend of the nickel-plated pipes. The small roundish man reported that only the windows were broken in their flat, well one cupboard door had been smashed by a stone, a lot of dust of course, dust everywhere, but Frau Blumauer from the ground floor had cleaned it all up, a piece of sausage, and then Herr Bojanowsky, the invalid from the Great War, he'd fixed up the windows with hardboard, a kilo of beef. The bathroom hadn't been damaged at all and he'd brought a tin of smoked meat for the doctor. She was to give it to him, a straight leg was worth more than a tin of meat. He talked rather a lot and when Erna finally got a word in, she asked Franz whether he had found some accommodation.

"No, not yet." It was already too late for today, he would have to go to the office and continue with his search tomorrow. Perhaps I'll try the nurse, he said.

"Come with me", said the lance-corporal, surprising Franz.

"Erna's bed is empty and perhaps you'll have found something by the time she gets out of here", he pointed to Erna.

Franz hesitated. Should he go back to Erna's flat? Now with her husband. What a situation! But why not?

"Erlachstraße 12, at Frau Erna Fischl's", said Franz to the *Unteroffizier* on duty. He saw the way the other man raised his eyebrows. "She's an old friend of mine, she was wounded during the last raid and now she's in hospital with a broken leg."

The *Unteroffizier* noted down the address. "All right, comrade. I'll put it on the boss's desk. I hope your friend gets out soon. If it's not too bad the doctors won't keep her there for long. There aren't enough beds. It's terrible. Bad luck for you. Your cock gets nothing for months and then when you get home this has to happen!"

Franz turned to the window for a moment. Over there, in the windows of the Belvedere, the reflected sky was changing colour rapidly. It turned reddish-violet, then steel-blue. Only traces were left of the collection of gilded ornaments on the building. The weather and the years had taken their toll. But the lively line of the roof-ridge still drew a crown over the rising hill into the sky.

"You know", said the *Unteroffizier,* "it's hard to believe they were brothers. I mean, the *Oberleutnant* is all right of course, you can't complain, well you'll see for yourself soon enough. But he's so distanced! When I think of what the captain was like."

Franz was still looking out through the window. The well-trimmed tree-tops drew a hard-lined barricade in front of the symmetrical surface of the gardens, a living wall, trimmed by the nurturing hands of gardeners for decades, a wall which had become more and more dense, and now towered over the brick wall of the park.

"One day we drove with him from Kosowska Mitrowitza to Pec...."

"I have to go", Franz interrupted him. "I have to move my belongings into the new flat. Bye for now." He turned around and left the room, without shaking hands with the *Unteroffizier.* He could see that the man was disappointed at not being able to tell his story.

Oberleutnant Wohlleben twirled the piece of paper between his fingers without looking at it. Temporary address: Franz Prannowitz. Temporary address. Temporary. Everything is temporary. They had to accept the situation and regard it as temporary. Wasn't that one of Dr Mayerhofer's formulations? This temporariness had lasted for quite a while now, and established itself quite firmly. And today's bulletin: Retreat into back-up position as part of the Front Correction. Successful Shortening of the Front. A temporary situation.

It was in June 1938. On the flat piece of ground in front of the wall, where day-trippers were usually sitting: some in uniform, girls in dirndl-dresses, they were standing in a circle around the flames. They had sung a couple of songs. He knew the melodies from the radio. Some of the young men shouted something he didn't understand. The burning logs crackled. Finally he climbed the wall and sat on the top with a view of the young people.

Solstice celebrations were nothing new. It was an old custom which some still kept alive. Generally they were societies who believed in the ideal of a Greater Germany, that much he knew. His legs dangled over the wall. The sky was dark above him. There were no stars to be seen, just the dark red sparks erupting from the red-hot logs every now and then, before collapsing down into embers. His parents had a large stack of firewood stored in the garden for the winter. Above all he wanted to make sure that nothing caught fire. But then he got side-tracked by the speech. It was the doctor. He knew him by sight only. He used to come to the student's drinking bouts. Now, by the fire, he spoke about the mountains, the Danube, the Babenberg dynasty, the Turkish siege, Prince Eugene and the Great Empress. He spoke of Andreas Hofer and the heroes of the twelve battles at the Isonzo river. Again and again the heels of Richard's dangling legs bumped against the wall. He watched the young men and women in the circle. They were listening to the doctor and looking into the flames. Some had joined hands. Now it's time for him to mention the Führer and his momentous history-making decision, thought Richard. How much longer is he going to keep on quoting from the past?

Over there, on the other side of the circle, a man in a brown uniform was standing and shuffling from one foot on to the other. The sparks flew, red spots into the dark sky.

The policeman leaned against the gate of the yard and next to him Richard saw the gleam of the fireman's silvery helmet. Every now and then, the little red spot of a cigarette flickered up underneath the helmet. The event had been reported, as required by law, and approved by the authorities. "My young friends", he heard the doctor say in a raised voice, "always remember, wherever you might be, that you are sons and daughters of your Homeland. It is good if the flame of enthusiasm is burning in your hearts. Nurture this flame. Nurture your faith in our beautiful Homeland. Keep it pure as these flames are pure. Keep it alive as these flames are alive!" Then the doctor who was standing one step in front of the others stepped back into the circle. For a moment it was very quiet. You could hear the crackling and spitting of the flames. Then someone started to sing a song and the rest joined in. Richard had never heard this song before. It didn't seem to be one of the favourite party songs. Then the man in the brown party uniform stepped up close to the fire and spoke loudly and incoherently about the bulwark against the East, about the deeds of the Führer and the struggle of the Party. Finally, he raised his hand and shouted: *"One People! One Reich! One Führer! Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil!"* At first, most of the people around the fire seemed undecided. They seemed surprised by the performance. But some had already joined in by the time he shouted *"One Reich!"* Most joined in with the *"Sieg Heil!"*. They sang another song. Richard noticed how the fireman talked to the policeman, who nodded approvingly with his head. He knew them both. He came down carefully from his lofty perch and joined the other two. "The doctor spoke very well", the fireman said to him. Obviously he had just shared this opinion with the policeman, because he nodded again with his head. "Well", he said, "he's an educated man, you know, he's learned how to do things like that, the other one was only a tailor before the *Anschluß.*"

Oberleutnant Wohlleben put the piece of paper back on the desk and lit a cigarette. Then he stared in front of him.

When he met the doctor again, the man looked quite different from the way he had looked that evening at the fire. His face had grown narrow, his suit hung loosely on his body. "What happened to you?" inquired Richard. He hardly ever spoke with the students who frequented the pub opposite the parent's house. But he didn't live with his parents any more now, he was only home on a short visit. There was more distance now, and at the same time, probably for that very reason, fewer inhibitions when they talked to each other. Perhaps it was a matter of the times they were living in as well. The general stress of the war made everyone take more notice of the individual needs of others. "You don't look well. Have you been ill?"

"No, no", said the other man, and looked at him searchingly. "You're the older son of the forester here, aren't you?"

"Yes, why?"

"Weren't you at the *Ravag* when it was raided by the SS, back in nineteen thirty-four?"

Richard was silent, he looked into the other's eyes as if trying to discover the reason for the question there.

The other man smiled slightly, explained further. "I mean, you were on the other side back then? There was talk that you were wounded by the SS."

Richard didn't move a muscle. Well, so he knew. He remembered. The publican over there knew too. The personnel had changed since. But the publican never mentioned it.

"Of course", said the doctor, as if he had received an answer, "it's better not to mention it nowadays. But I see it differently, Herr Wohlleben. You know, I spent a year in Dachau. That was my sickness."

"But how?" asked Richard, having regained some of his confidence. "Weren't you a member of one of the party affiliated organisations? I heard you speak at a Solstice celebration shortly after the annexation."

"You too?" The doctor's mouth seemed to twitch into a smile but soon became narrow and sombre again. "That's what I was accused of. I was supposed to have agitated against Germany and to have slandered the Führer."

Richard had long ago forgotten the content of the speech. But

now, the presence of the doctor reminded him and everything came back again, he even remembered the policeman's remark. "And now?" he asked, "what are you doing now?"

"I'm employed by a small publishing house. Religious literature, in Klosterneuburg. I wasn't called up due to a stomach complaint, and at present I am standing in for the boss who is in Norway."

Richard looked at his companion. Well then, standing in for the boss? He wasn't exactly dressed accordingly. The grey knickerbockers, the jacket with its worn edges and the raincoat thrown over his arm, it all made for a rather impoverished impression.

"And you?" asked the man.

"I'm with the Air-Command, intelligence."

"Do you happen to know Lieutenant-Colonel Perkal?" asked the doctor. "He's an acquaintance of mine, apparently he works there."

"Of course, he's my commander."

"Is that so?" said the other man. He seemed to want to add something more, but then he merely asked Richard to give his regards to the Lieutenant-Colonel if the occasion should ever arise.

Oberleutnant Wohlleben took a document from his desk, skimmed through it and put it with the other documents in the out-tray. He unfolded the next piece of paper, read it, wrote a few notes in the margins and put it down again. They were mechanical movements, his head remained erect. His eyes kept straying from the papers across the room. He hadn't expected it. At the next opportunity the commander had said: "Thank you, gentlemen, that will be all". The five officers had stood to attention and left the room one by one. Wohlleben was last. He had almost reached the corridor when he turned round and looked at the lieutenant-colonel. "Is something the matter?" he asked when he noticed Wohlleben's hesitation.

Richard stepped back into the room. He saw the smooth cloth of the uniform jacket, the glinting cord at the edges, the starched collar of the white shirt, the narrow face, clean-shaven, the manicured hands. Then he said: "Dr Mayerhofer sends his regards, Lieutenant-Colonel. I met with him last Sunday."

"Well, come then, come", said the lieutenant-colonel, "shut the door."

The two men faced each other.

"How do you know the doctor?" asked the lieutenant-colonel.

Richard looked into the other man's face. Behind him on the wall was a large map. The grey hair of the man contrasted sharply with the brown of the alpine regions and the green of the planes. "From a long time ago, Lieutenant-Colonel", said Richard carefully. That's non-committal enough, he thought, there's no need for him to know about the doctor's most recent past.

"I see, from a long time ago", said the lieutenant-colonel.

He doesn't know anything, as little as he did before, thought Richard.

"He's laid himself somewhat open in recent times", continued the other man, "do you know anything about that, Wohlleben?"

"I didn't know, but he told me just recently. I hadn't seen him in a long time. To be honest, I wouldn't have expected that from him at all. I had always thought he was a champion of a Greater Germany." Richard spoke slowly, observing his superior's facial expressions. But he was unable to conclude anything from them. This distance! This frozen stiffness! Had it been a mistake to mention the doctor?

"How wrong one can be", said the lieutenant-colonel. It sounded as if he wanted to say more with the expression. Then he continued: "But perhaps he really was like that back then." And now he raised his eyebrows slightly. "I haven't known him that long. But he seems to be a straightforward and honest sort of character."

That was a declaration. Not much, but still.

Wohlleben looked at his watch, got up and walked up and down the room a few times. Shortly after this discussion he had been appointed head of this section. This section, sometimes he found it almost unbearable. No-one made any clear decisions. Everything happened in a nebulous, in-between region. There's the war, and things happen there which are not in accordance with war, but nobody talks about them. Duty is performed according to regulation.

Fräulein Grazl will type her own transfer orders and Frau

Eichinger will ask what it's all about and *Unteroffizier* Rothensteiner will be disappointed that the young girl is being moved, or perhaps he will be pleased, hoping that her replacement will be one he can flirt with to greater advantage.

He stopped at the window. In the room diagonally opposite he saw a blond at a typewriter. All he could see of the officer doing the dictating were the grey-blue breeches and the shiny boots. The typewriter carriage shot back and forward.

On the 20th of July, the lieutenant-colonel had ordered him to come and see him. He was very careful. By the next day, two of their friends had disappeared without trace. Some had been arrested, but had to be released again because no treacherous act could be proven. After six weeks there was a communication from Captain Ettenreich in Italy. He wrote to a non-existent soldier in a non-existent anti-aircraft gun unit and the letter was intercepted at the censorship office. It was forwarded to the lieutenant-colonel. Ettenreich had written in a form of code, but Perkal had known Ettenreich for a long time and thought he could read and understand the letter fairly well. A blue flame. He could still see the blue flame which crumpled the paper when the lieutenant-colonel finally put the burning lighter beneath it. Nothing was heard of *Unteroffizier* Rainer. Not even the Secret Service seemed to know anything about his whereabouts, for his wife had already been questioned twice by the Gestapo and the flat searched thoroughly. All to no avail. Perkal remarked once that he suspected the soldier had gone to Hungary. But it wasn't mentioned any more.

The girl over there had arranged her legs side by side, they were a little too heavy for her under-developed torso. When the officer paused, the typist looked up; she had a pretty face. You could see the man's hands now. One of them was waving a piece of paper to and fro.

There were a lot of things you didn't talk about, although you knew about them. The lieutenant-colonel's position was unambiguous, those who knew him understood the significance of his orders. Formulation was all important. He was a most alert person, the general relied on him. Was he maybe...? No, surely not. Six weeks from Italy to Pomerania with all the vehicles and

instruments, then orders to go all the way back again. Wheels had to roll for victory. Six weeks out of action. It was quite clear that the unit was needed out there, but then the situation changed and that was something that nobody could be held responsible for. In the meantime, the army situation had changed to such an extent that combat was quite out of the question. The train with the fifty petrol tankers was certainly stopping far too long in one place. Right on the plains between Udine and Vicenza. Who could stop low-flying enemy planes attacking it and shooting it into flames? The line was blocked by terrorist attacks. The night attacks on the enemy's supply-bases in southern Italy had to be restricted because of lack of fuel. The flying personnel was reduced to playing skat.

He could see a female in the next window along as well. She was leaning over her desk so that all he could see was her back and the long blond hair which reached down to her shoulders. So, do they only employ blond ones over there? he thought for a moment. There was an elderly man in civilian clothing sitting opposite. He was adding up numbers in a long column. It's drizzling, observed Wohlleben. Single translucent lines shone brighter than the glass on the window panes. He turned away and sat down at his desk. He looked into the broad face of his commander-in-chief diagonally opposite as it smiled jovially at him out of a silver-plated frame. His eyes slid along the ribbons of the decorations, the blue star-like cross of the *Pour le mérite,* down to the fat fingers clutching the gold and blue marshall's baton. At the commander's there was only the large map on the wall, and in front the head, the head with its slightly greying hair, moving to and fro in front of the dark square of Bohemia and Moravia.

"You have a young girl in your section?" the boss had asked him yesterday. His eyes stared at him, without movement. He opened a drawer of his desk and took out a packet of cigarettes. It would have been difficult to make her understand. Wohlleben lit a cigarette. It was too stupid, such a negligible offence. The girl wasn't even aware of the consequences of her actions. He blew out the smoke. The Russian prisoners of war walked through the autumnal fog. The hand-cart filled with road-metal, the shovel

and pick-axe. The old reservist with the long rifle who guarded them lit a fire and baked himself a few potatoes. It was a harmless enough thing, there was no doubt about it. It couldn't do anyone any harm. But there is a law. They all knew it. On pain of death! On the track between Udine and Vicenza there was a train with fifty tanker carriages full of petrol. Only burnt-out, bent tin, wheels and rails remained. Even the mulberry trees in the vicinity were charred. There was nothing more to be done. Not even a law could be evoked. Who could be punished? On pain of death? It was the People's Court for the woman who helped hungry prisoners of war. And the very next day it was reported in German on English radio how much petrol had been burned and they knew exactly who the transport was intended for. But no-one could be blamed for the fact that the train had become stuck on a continuous line. The Todt Organization, whose job it was to repair the blown-up railway tracks, did their utmost. But how could you get people for that unit, if not without coercion? Italians, Slovens, who often as not destroyed by night what they had built by day.

The girl had to be sent to Ettenreich in Verona. The few cigarettes, the bread and bacon. It was absurd! Even the aircraft identification numbers and the exact extent of the damage were reported daily by the announcer of the enemies' broadcast for soldiers. They must have an excellent Intelligence Service. Her face had gone very red and her eyes had filled with tears. He exhaled the smoke. The lieutenant-colonel was right, they wouldn't have been able to explain the situation to her without endangering themselves or others. He had experience in such matters. She's too naive, too young, too inexperienced to respond to allusions and hints. He had to think up something else. She would almost certainly tell her mother where she was being moved to as well, even if it was forbidden. Officially it would have to be Brünn.

"Write your transfer orders, say good-bye to your colleagues and go home. Your train leaves at seventeen minutes past eight this evening."

"It's just Mother", said Inge, suppressing her tears.

"Yes, yes", he said. "I know. But that's just the way it is. I

myself am very sorry to lose such an able employee. I did ask the lieutenant-colonel to take someone else. But it's just not possible. You have to believe me."

That was it. She even thanked him. There had been a demand for a clerk in Brünn for a long time. They all knew it was important. They all knew she was going to Brünn. Her mother wasn't even allowed to go to the railway station with her.

Wohlleben stared into the air. Prannowitz? Was it too big a risk? But then: did he have a choice? Yes, Prannowitz is the best bet. He doesn't have much contact with the others. The copies of the orders are being duly filed. The Luftwaffe employee Inge Grazl has gone to Brünn. There are plenty of witnesses.

Before Franz drove to the railway station, he wanted to call in at the Red-Cross hall. Maybe he could see Nurse Poldi today. He didn't expect much of such a meeting, but he had to admit that he couldn't stay with Fischl for much longer. Erna had been in hospital for eight days and hoped to be released soon. He didn't much care for the friendliness of her husband either. Although he had helped him to repair the damage done to the flat by the bomb attack, he didn't feel quite comfortable in Erna's bed with her husband snoring next to him.

There was still some time before seventeen minutes past eight. The hall was noisy and lively again. When he opened the door, the usual fug hit him. At one of the tables they were playing cards and making a lot of noise. Poldi wasn't in the hall. He saw her young colleague at the counter, the girl she had been on duty with when he arrived.

"Good evening, Sister", said Franz. He made his way past the tables up to the front of the room.

"*Heil Hitler* - Sergeant! Congratulations on your promotion, it was all rather quick, wasn't it. You'd scarcely arrived here and they were putting the stars on your shoulder-badges."

"Well", grunted Franz, "it was arranged by my unit at the front, it took this long to get it approved." He looked around.

"Are you looking for someone?" The nurse frowned a little and tried to smile.

"Not exactly, Sister, I was just looking to see whether Sister

Poldi was here. Erna's going to be released from hospital fairly soon, and, well, I thought she might like to hear it." He was having second thoughts. There was no need for this silly girl, whose mind ran strictly along the party-line, to know about his problems. It was none of her business. And that Poldi? Wasn't she part of the same world as this one here? Damn her. But she'd said herself that she had a spare room. But there was some sort of a problem, I didn't listen to what it was.

"Well, I'll tell her - or", she smiled broadly, suggestively, "if you want to tell her yourself, she's on duty at the platform."

"Thank you", said Franz and turned back to the door. He just avoided bumping into Inge Grazl. "You're here already", he exclaimed. "Come with me, please. Are you by yourself?"

"Yes", the girl whispered. "What is it?" She put her suitcase down.

"Come with me", he said, and took the suitcase. "Come on." He led her to a parked duty car. "Didn't your mother come with you?"

"She couldn't. She's on duty at her railway station."

"I see. Well, please, jump in." He gestured with his arm towards the car.

"But my train", the girl objected, "You know that my train leaves at seventeen past eight."

"That's all right", said Franz. "Here", he produced some papers from his pocket and passed them on to her. "Your new orders. You'd hardly left the building when a telex arrived, ordering you to go to Verona. Come on, I'm to drive you to the *Westbahnhof*." He left the paper in her hands, put the suitcase in the boot and urged her to get in.

The girl was visibly surprised and didn't quite know what to do. She stared at the papers in her hands. In the darkness pervading the square in front of the Red-Cross hall, she was unable to read a single line.

"Why?" she asked, still unable to comprehend.

"I have no idea myself, a telex, that's all I was told", he repeated, opened the door of the car and let her in, then went around the car and took the wheel.

"And it really concerns me?" Inge Grazl asked again.

"Of course", he answered, trying to start the engine. It wouldn't start straight away. When it finally roared into life, Franz waited for it to warm up for a while before he started to drive. Now he passed the girl a torch.

She switched it on and convinced herself that the papers were in her name and signed by *Oberleutnant* Wohlleben.

"You should be happy", he said. "Verona is much more beautiful than Brünn."

"Yes", she whispered.

He looked across to the girl as he drove along the straight road of Gürtelstraße. It seemed to him that she was hiding in her coat as if she were about to freeze.

"Well, there's no need for you to eat little songbirds", he joked.

She remained silent. After a while she said: "But it's so far away from home."

"There are some who are even further away", he tried to console her.

The street was lit only dimly. He had to watch where he was driving. There were few other cars on the road but it still demanded his full attention, for sometimes the concrete was interrupted and the bomb craters only hastily filled in.

Strange, the way this girl reminded him of his dead sister, he didn't even know why. It wasn't just that she had the same slim, almost boyish build, or that she wore her hair in a similar fashion, it wasn't her way of walking or her way of speaking: There had to be something else.

He was pondering that same question on the platform of the *Westbahnhof*. He had found her a seat in a non-smoking compartment, put her suitcase away and said good-bye to her in the way one might say good-bye to an old friend. Like an uncle, he thought to himself. Although he had already fulfilled his brief, he remained on the platform until the train started moving. Her eyes were innocent, like those of his sister when she had said good-bye to him for the last time in 1934. She had extended her hand to him, a cool hand, which he pressed firmly and they waved to each other.

"Come on in", said Poldi, and led him through the entrance-way. "Here", she opened a door, "here's the kitchen, and here is the lounge", she opened another door, "and here's the bedroom where Mother and I sleep, and here's yours." She allowed Franz just a fleeting glimpse of the rooms. Now she left one of the doors open and they both went in. It was an oblong room with just one window, a triple one.

Well, now she had her soldier too. The fact that he was older than the soldiers the other girls had didn't matter to her, on the contrary, she liked it. It seemed to her to carry with it some form of security.

Security? What was she afraid of?

She didn't go into it.

"Good", said Franz. "I've got more space here than Mother and Helmut. They're in one tiny room half-filled with books. I wouldn't have minded it when I was Helmut's age. I would have read them all, but he..."

"Who's Helmut?" asked Poldi and thought, he's got a child.

"Of course, you couldn't have known", Franz noticed the Hitler portrait on the wall, looked to the wardrobe, "he's my nephew, the son of my late sister."

"Our clothes are still in the wardrobe there", said Poldi apologetically, "we'll have to wait till Mother comes back, a few more days, she'll make some room for you."

"Oh, it doesn't really matter", replied Franz, took off his coat and put it on the same hook as the portrait, covering it completely. "It's fine like this, thank you." He laughed. "I'll go and fetch my suitcase, I haven't got much anyway."

They both went to the entrance-hall where his suitcase was. Poldi showed Franz the bathroom and the toilet, handed him a set of keys and said she was in a hurry now, she had to be back on duty.

But she stopped at the door. Franz came right up to her. "Sister Poldi, you're simply marvellous", he said.

She looked into the brown eyes close to her own. They looked quite different from the evening when he'd come to the Red-Cross hall, more lively, more alert. He had probably been tired, she thought, and then: tired, but his hand was on my thigh in

spite of any tiredness. And now, his lively eyes on my breasts, of course, now he'll try and grab them. The other tenants opposite will see when he tries to feel me up, they'll tell Mother, that's the thanks you get. It'll serve me right, why did I have to start this in the first place. But where now? Back to his room, back to the bedroom, no, who does he think I am, I hardly know him, and he ought to be grateful, and behave like a gentleman.

The man put his hand on her arm. She had already raised and bent it, her hand resting on the door handle. She saw the cabinets in the entrance-hall reflected in his eyes. Up there, on the shelf you could only reach by a step-ladder, was the picture her mother had taken off her some time ago. It was there in a dusty box, among old letters, mementoes, postcards and other dusty things. Of course, her father, the artist who'd disappeared in good time, after her mother had become... But she must have known it, did she know him so little, if so how could she -. This hand, she could feel the warmth through the coat, a warmth which spread out, travelled through her body. This hand, here, right now, in the present, not dusty. Mother, who knows where she might be just now and with whom, she had never talked about it, but then, one doesn't talk about such things, at least not in our circles. But then there are some who do talk about it, Lizzi for example, in the course they'd taken, she'd told everybody how they'd done it, on her knees, with him behind her, his hands on her hips and her breasts swinging to and fro. No, a vulgar person like that, who cared what she had to say, I never listened to her. Petri, who was always with her, she looked the worse for it, she looked ten years older, nothing but affairs with men, well, what should I care.

"Thank you so very much!" said the man. "The other day in the hall, I didn't mean it like that. But that's how it is most of the time. Show me the person who's ready to put the "You ought to" into practice. All anybody can talk about is what you ought to do, and thinks the other fellow, the next one ought to and ought to and they see themselves as the exception, they have no obligation to do anything. That is why, Fräulein Poldi, you are wonderful. Many thanks that you yourself - well, you know what I mean." He paused.

He's not like that, she thought. He's a decent person, but then

on the other hand, in the hall, his hand on my thigh and then those remarks about the war and the Führer. But who knows what he meant by all of that, he probably just expressed himself badly. And as we all know, if you're upset about something, how often does Erna grumble, and her father is a party member.

Those of us back at home, we're prepared to make sacrifices too, was what she wanted to say, but suddenly she sensed it would be childish, she didn't quite know why, and she just said: "I hope we'll get along with each other."

As she went down the staircase a moment later, she was content. Or was she? It had to be like that, just like that. She hadn't imagined it any differently, she hadn't planned it to be any different. She didn't tell herself *"Have courage, young maiden"*, no, not this time, but she didn't need to, certainly, she'd had her doubts for a moment, for a moment she'd dwelt on the possibility that things could go differently, but she wasn't a child any more, she had her own will and the soldier could just be thankful he had somewhere to sleep! How often did we march from farm to farm with heavy rucksacks on our backs before we could find room to sleep in a hayloft. Oh, I know the feeling of not knowing where you're going to sleep!

As she passed the boarded-up windows she hummed the song *"Kein schöner Land in dieser Zeit als hier das unsre weit und breit."* But then in the end we always found someone who would let us use their hayloft and then, before we snuggled down in the hay, we'd sit with the farmers and sing songs, with Otto accompanying us on the guitar. And sometimes the farmers' children would join in, and sometimes even the farmers themselves. And then we'd step out into the night, the dark silhouettes of the fir trees contrasting silently with the sky. The moon standing over the mountain ridge, only half visible, countless stars twinkling from horizon to horizon, we joined hands and swore eternal friendship to one another. Everyone helped everyone else, we shared our food, we helped the weaker ones carry their rucksacks and in town we went to the theatre together, or attended concerts. But then Gerti went with Rainer and Steffi with Herbert and when Trude got engaged to Otto everything had already changed. She went through the lobby. The double glass door was open,

fastened to the wall, it had lost its purpose as an insulator, for all the glass had been broken. Even the door to the building sported rough timber in place of panes of glass. Poldi took no notice. *"Grant us and our sick neighbours a peaceful rest this night"*, they had sung, and then they went up to the hayloft. Sick? No, they were all young and healthy and her neighbour in the hay was Batschi with the strong teeth. He always had to hold the torch until they had all put their track-suits on and were covered up to their faces with hay. Because he held the torch away from him, the beam just touched her and she could slip into her bed unnoticed. Hilde was directly in the middle of the beam, her dark eyes sparkled in Batschi's direction, her thick black hair held together by a scarf. It was Hilde too, who introduced her to this circle, they knew each other from the commercial college, and one day Hilde asked her to come on an day-trip. They did some handicraft together on one of the following days, and on Saturdays they attended a course in folk-dancing at the German Gymnastics Association Hall. Her mother didn't object, she thought she might meet some nice people that way.

She went up Mommsengasse towards the railway station. Two stories of a building on the corner of Weyringergasse had been damaged by a bomb. In spite of that, there were people back living on the first two floors again. For the time being a few beams for support, covered with tar-board nailed to battens had to do. It was getting dark, here and there small light bulbs painted blue shone out from the protruding struts. *The Blue Light,* with Leni Riefenstahl, in the wonderful mountains of our homeland. The blue light of the firn and the snow-drifts in wintertime when they looked through the small windows of the skiing huts onto the moonlit landscape. The trails in the snow, the shadow of the roof, of the rising smoke and over there in the direction of the big mountain, untouched sheets of snow with only a few rugged pines grouped together. Icicles hung down from the roof of the hut in glittering rows, organ-pipes for the wind to play upon. But inside, in the hut, there was this smell of pancakes and stewed plums and the pot belly stove radiating comfortable heat. She would never forget those evenings in the light of the kerosene lamp. Those evenings that could go on for ever after an exhaus-

ting day's skiing. They would carry on singing and playing games till late, until finally, well after midnight, they rolled up in their blankets on the beds. One of them had to stay awake to feed to stove from time to time to stop the room cooling down too much. They took their turns each night and Herbert and Rainer or Otto and Georg made sure that plenty of firewood was chopped during the day. The world was pure and clear and unshakable, even in the second year of the war. Of course, it was a difficult time, soldiers were dying out at the front, sometimes you heard about the death of someone you knew. But the front was far away and she herself was still very young, death was a word in heroic epics. Each new day reflected a healthy well-proportioned face in the mirror, beautifully arched eyebrows, a fresh mouth and gently curling brown hair, dimples and strong white teeth. She liked seeing herself in the mirror. Of course, the weekly news-reels often showed dead soldiers, but most of the time they were the enemy. Of course sometimes they were Germans too, but the screen was cool and distanced; and there was the main feature following soon after, Kristina Söderbaum, who had to drown herself because of an evil Jew, and who caused her to weep hot streams of tears. But the next evening she met up with her friends again, danced and sang, and forgot the burning houses on the outskirts of Leningrad.

She hurried past the beams shoring up the houses towards the railway station. She couldn't quite understand the way that everything had changed within the space of a few months. Not everything, but enough for her to notice the bloody bandages of the soldiers being driven to hospital, for her to note the bombed houses in the district where she lived. When had it all started? she sometimes asked herself. She couldn't say exactly. Hadn't it all begun after that time when, ladle in hand, she'd followed an SS-man with her eyes and the soldier next in line had asked for his coffee?

Arriving at the Gürtel, that wide street lined with trees, she slowed down a little. The branches stood bare and stumpy against a cool, almost colourless sky. A long formation of crows came up from the direction of the Arsenal and moved with silent wing-beats towards the west, to the tree-covered banks of the Vienna

Woods. Every now and then, one of the animals croaked; scarcely noticed by anyone. Over there, the blue-brown clouds of steam-engine smoke puffed up from the skeleton of the gutted *Ostbahnhof.*

Poldi marched along the Gürtel towards the sorry remains of the Swiss Gardens, where the Red-Cross halls were. The lilac bushes along the fence, torn, broken and where a smaller bomb had hit, uprooted, tossed through the air and thrown to the ground upside down thirty, forty metres along, those lilac bushes looked like barricades, lattices covering the grey timber boxes of the Red-Cross halls, hiding them away.

How often had she come ambling this way when the roses were still blooming in the well-groomed beds, arm in arm with her friend Herta? They had been talking about the most recent production at the *Burgtheater*: You know in the third scene, Aslan, the way he got that movement of his hand, like that, just like that; oh did you see it too? Marvellous, wasn't it? The way he started speaking after that, it was ..., it sent shivers down my spine.

But I can't understand why Lessing was suddenly taken off the programme, when the production was so glorious! She didn't understand until Herta, who was slightly older, explained to her it was because of the Parable of the Rings. As she still didn't understand, Herta told her you couldn't buy books by Heinrich Heine any more. They continued talking about two young actors who were all the rage these days, Fred Liewehr and Ewald Balser, and strolled slowly home. At home she'd asked Mother why one shouldn't read poems by Heine any more, and Mother had explained to her that it was because he was a Jew. She hadn't been satisfied by this explanation of course; but now, now she understood, now she'd seen the film with Kristina Söderbaum and had heard so much more about the Jewish problem, now she knew what was going on. The roses used to be fastened to stakes and trained to grow tall, and beside each stake there was a little label with the name of the species. There were damask roses, the yellow tea rose, the Maréchal Nil for example or the Glorie de Dijon, and polyantha roses too, the hybrid teas. The bushes needed a lot of care, Poldi remembered the way that every year in

autumn, the shoots had been bent down and pushed into the soil and covered with straw to protect them from frostbite. When the wind gently caressed the blooms, the scent was wonderful and the two girls stopped and looked at the many-folded petals of the red, yellow, white and salmon-pink flowers. They talked about the poems by Friedrich von Bodenstedt; to them, the name of Mirza Schaffy had a scent like the roses of the Swiss Gardens. When Herta visited her, Poldi showed her her collection of autographs. For some actors she had a photograph with his signature.

What happened to that collection, she thought, as she crossed the square in front of the hall, as a small unshaven infantry man dressed in a dirty sweaty uniform with clanking mess tin, bayonet and gas-mask tin walked towards her, as a group of Hungarian Honveds in their yellow-brown coats approached her from the *Ostbahnhof*, as the rats scattered in leaps and bounds from the corners where the kitchen and the waiting-room joined. And now she could discern the smell of disinfectant coming from the door the infantry-man had just gone through. If she remembered correctly, the box with the autographs and the photos had to be on the shelf in the entrance-way, where Mother kept old letters and mementoes. The important hand-luggage was kept on the lower shelves, the ready packed suitcases and bags you took to the air-raid shelter when the siren sounded over the radio to announce the approach of hostile squadrons to the city.

While she was turned towards the back door, the door reserved for personnel and delivery-people, she pondered on the question whether she should tell her colleagues about her soldier. She decided at least for now to be silent; Ilse had called him a misery guts, and really, you had to close your ears to his comments about the war. The next morning, when she'd finished her duty and arrived home, she would make him breakfast. That would certainly surprise him, it would cheer him up.

Her colleagues were busying themselves in the large kitchen. It was already getting dark in the room with the low ceiling, the electric lights were switched on, the shutters already closed because of the blackout. Steam was rising from the large pots on the range. On the table where Franz Prannowitz had sat, there

was quite a collection of cartons filled with tins, and a heap of ration bread. A plump elderly nurse was trying to reduce the heap. Indefatigable, she cut slice after slice with a simple guillotine-like implement and threw them into a basket. On the shelf along the wall sat the shiny polished coffee pots and above them was the large, darkened Hitler portrait. Today Poldi noticed the irregular trails of the drops, probably caused by steam, which formed little beads everywhere, over the face of the Führer, from his forehead to his cheeks, his eyes, his mouth. Poldi thought of the hand which had rested on her arm in the entrance-way, she thought about what it must be like if this hand, like Tontschi's hand in the *Golden City* on Söderbaum, were to slide slowly down from her shoulder to her breast.

But nothing like that happened during the next few days. The man didn't seem to have noticed her when she came home in the morning. Only when he crossed the hallway to go to the bathroom and have a shave, and when she called to him from the kitchen did he open the door. Poldi was standing there next to a fully laid table, and she invited him to sit down and have breakfast.

He shaved hurriedly and came out to her in the kitchen. No, he wouldn't have had anything to eat otherwise, he'd have to buy something first, it would have done for this morning, he'd have got something at the office, or during a break he might have bought something, he assured her. He'd been given some food coupons, and even if he didn't quite know how to use them yet, he'd learn - you didn't have to worry about things like that at the front.

They sat opposite each other, Poldi poured the coffee. For her it was quite unreal, sitting opposite each other like this, his clean-shaven face, the smell of cigarettes, the eyes observing her. A different person. He asked whether she'd had a difficult night and she asked whether he had slept well. He repeated how surprised he was by this breakfast invitation and how sorry he was he couldn't stay, because he had to be at his office by eight o'clock. She'd thought that might be the case anyway, and he mustn't feel obliged to stay because of her. She wouldn't be home this evening either, she had a night-course she went to right before

work. They talked about rather mundane things. He needed to find out about shopping possibilities in the neighbourhood and she showed him where he could put his bread and other groceries. She felt as if she were acting in a film, as if she could see herself from the outside, as if she were a different person. She noticed today that Prannowitz always called her Fräulein Poldi and not Sister Poldi, and she noticed too that there was something going on between them which she couldn't pin down, and that a certain soft sense of well-being was taking possession of her.

She was still sitting at the table when he got up and, hesitating for a moment, put his hand on her shoulder and asked "tired?" before going into the entrance-hall to get ready to go.

Yes, she was tired, she was so tired that Prannowitz had scarcely left the house before she went to bed. That afternoon, before she went to her course, she wrote a letter to her mother. In child-like writing she wrote:

Dear Mother!

Don't worry, the recent attack passed us by. Our district was spared. I got to the shelter in good time.

There is a bit of news. You'll be surprised! The District Accommodation Office has billeted us with a lodger. I put him in the spare room. You don't have to worry about me. He's only at home during the night and I'm only here during the day because this week I'm only on night shifts. I hope you will be back on Saturday. He is a sergeant with the Regional Air Command.

Many kisses, Your daughter Poldi

"Come on in", said Nurse Poldi, and led Franz through the entrance-hall. "Here", she allowed him a quick glance into a roomy kitchen with a table which looked as if it were in constant use. It was covered by a table-cloth and there was a lone salt cellar on top. "And here's the living room", she said, and he scarcely had time to register a large room furnished with old German furniture. "And here's the bedroom where Mother and I sleep." There was only a fleeting glance permitted into this room as well. He caught a glimpse of a master bedroom with two beds and a picture of the Madonna with doves and little lambs. The room she finally let him enter wasn't all that small, it had a triple

window looking out onto the building opposite. There were windows there too, somebody was looking out of one of them. There was a bed against the wall, next to it a wardrobe, on the other side there was a table and two chairs and a small pot-belly stove in the corner. A basket of firewood and a tall bucket of coal were sitting beside it. It all gave the impression that it wasn't used much.

"Good", he said. "I've got more space here than Mother and Helmut. They're living in one tiny room half-filled with books. I wouldn't have minded it when I was Helmut's age, I would have read them all, but he..." He was troubled for a moment as he thought about the things the boy was interested in.

"Who's Helmut?" asked the nurse.

"Oh of course, you couldn't have known", his eyes met with the Hitler portrait hanging on a hook on the wall opposite the bed. "He's my nephew, the son of my late sister", he said. Of course, he has to be here too, by this he meant the Chancellor of the Reich. Someone should paint over his head, it would look pretty funny, paint animals's fangs or something like that. But I'd get thrown out immediately, we'll see, maybe I can get rid of him somehow. For the time being I'll just cover him up. He took off his coat and looked at the wardrobe.

"Our clothes are still in the wardrobe there", Poldi apologized, "we'll have to wait till Mother comes back, a few more days, she'll make some room for you."

"Oh it doesn't really matter", replied Franz and put his coat on the hook where the portrait was hanging, covering it up. While I'm here, there's no need for him to be here too, he thought. "It's fine like this", he said and laughed. "Thank you! I'll go and fetch my suitcase, I haven't got much anyway."

They returned to the entrance-hall, where the girl handed him a set of keys. He noticed that she was in a hurry now, she said she had to go to work.

"Sister Poldi, you're simply marvellous", he said, and put his hand on her arm. Peculiar, why is she running away now? Take off the coat, that stupid Red-Cross cap, back to the bedroom and onto the bed, beautiful breasts, she had to have beautiful breasts! Otherwise why had she bothered at all. Did she take me home out

of sheer philanthropy? Nonsense. She's well built. I'm sure she's just waiting for it. "Thank you so very much", he said. "The other day in the hall, I didn't mean it like that. But that's how it is most of the time. Show me the person who's ready to put the "You ought to" into practice." Or was that what had affected her so much? "All anybody can talk about is what you ought to do, and thinks the other fellow, the next one ought to and ought to and they see themselves as the exception, they have no obligation to do anything. That is why, Fräulein Poldi, you are wonderful. Many thanks that you yourself - well, you know what I mean."

There, now the subject had been flogged to death, done to death, nothing more he could do, and if it was really because of that, no, it would be unfair then to throw her down on the bed straight away. Of course, she's younger than Erna. Beautiful teeth and a fresh smell. It's getting dark, from across the street you can't see what's happening in the middle of the room any more, if I just push her towards the bedroom.

"I hope we'll get along with each other", said the girl. It sounded like an invitation, but an invitation to obey certain rules.

After he had closed the door behind her, his eyes followed her figure as she ran down the staircase. The ugly grey loden coat, the stupid cap. Her feet were covered in stout walking shoes. In spite of that: her easy jumps from step to step, her energetic movements, her brown bouncing hair. He turned back to the flat, carried his suitcase into his room and unpacked the things he needed most. "Just wait, my little bird", he muttered.

He hadn't heard her come home that morning. It was only when he went to the bathroom and the toilet that he noticed that she was busy in the kitchen. And then she was calling to him. He opened the kitchen door and saw the whole affair. It was like Christmas-time: a set table with table-cloth, steaming coffee pot, cups and saucers, margarine and jam, his landlady standing to one side behind the chair and looking at him expectantly. Well, really! And this at the end of the fifth year of war. His eyes wandered across all the things. It had been a long time since he'd sat at a table like that, not even before this damned war. At home they all had breakfast at different times, and anyway, after his sister wasn't there any more, there was hardly any occasion to sit

together round the table. Now he hurried, scratched his beard off quickly, got dressed and came into the kitchen.

I was sure you wouldn't have done your shopping yet", said the girl.

"Of course not, but I would have coped somehow. But this way, Fräulein Poldi, it's so much better, almost like Christmas." Then he explained that he had to learn how the ration coupons worked and as he sat down and she told him where in the neighbourhood he could do his shopping, he observed her.

She looks quite tired, he thought, black rings round her eyes, limp skin, well, a night in the stench of that Red-Cross hall or in the draughts of the bombed-out railway station, it's asking too much of such a young person. "You must have had a hard night?" he asked.

"Well, the usual, and then there was a hospital-train with wounded. We could help the ones who weren't too heavily wounded ones a little. But there were some - I don't think they'll survive. They've been driven to several hospitals, but they're all full, it was only yesterday that another whole trainload of wounded was unloaded."

Unloaded, thought Franz, like beasts to the slaughter; he thought of Erna too, she'll surely have to give up her hospital bed soon if there's such a high demand; he thought of Groß whom he was to meet at his mother's, to whom he had given his promise to help Frau Liebeneder. Erna's husband had given him a few tins of meat and he wanted to send them to her for the children. He wanted to hear too what else he could do for the widows and orphans of the executed men. He looked into the girl's face, watched the way she cut the bread and spread the margarine, followed the movement of her hand as she raised the cup to her mouth, noticed the dimples in her face, the strong teeth which left their imprints in the bread, and saw how with each movement of her head the brown hair flowed down her shoulder, and how she tossed it back with a quick flick of her hand, and he thought, why am I bothering with this Liebeneder, I don't know her, if I'd remained at the front I wouldn't have known anything about her. He thought that she wouldn't be as pretty as the girl sitting opposite him, he thought that almost none of the comrades he'd

known before this damned war would have had a breakfast-table set like this one. It's obviously the privilege of the middle-class, he thought. We didn't bother with things like this. We young ones had different interests from our parents. But what did unite us was the desire for a better life. And that better life? Was this it here? He looked into the light blue eyes of the girl opposite him. Strange mixture, he thought for a moment, the brown hair and the light eyes. Yes, and this opportunity to be able to sit together at a breakfast-table, was this what we were all fighting for?

The girl explained to him that she had an evening course that night and then she'd go straight on to work from there. He could hear a certain guardedness in her voice, he'd heard it in some of the things she'd said the previous day as well. But in spite of that, her conversation seemed helpless and irrelevant to him; if he wanted to, he would go to bed with her, and when she lay under him she would lie there under him like any other girl who had never sat at a breakfast-table like this one, and most likely she would feel more or less the same as any other girl would feel in that sort of situation. He looked at Poldi. She was sitting upright, her nipples pushing against the coarse blue and white striped linen of her dress.

But he couldn't stay any longer now. He had to be at Headquarters by eight o'clock. Wohlleben had asked to see him today.

Three days later, Franz was sitting in a corner of the room where his mother and Helmut lived and leafing through a book. The room was of course dominated by shelves of specialised literature. *History of Aesthetics*, read Franz, standing next to it were three volumes *A System of Aesthetics*, next to them *Aesthetics, Psychology of Beauty*, *Hermeneutical Logic* and *Treatise on the Phenomenology of Knowledge*. Of Sigmund Freud's works Franz could see the *Lectures on the Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, *Totem and Tabu* and *The Interpretations of Dreams*. Specialised literature, thought Franz. He could see some volumes by C. G. Jung on the upper shelves, he recognised that name as well. There were some books in foreign languages as well. And still further above them: Karl Marx, Ferdinand Lassalle.

Quite careless of the professor, thought Franz, he must assume he's dealing with a pack of illiterates. Well, maybe he's not so far wrong. But the fact that he's managed to display these books so openly all these years and nobody's made a fuss? he thought. He listened, his mother went off to unlock the door. He opened the book he was holding in his hands. "Do not insist that things should happen the way you want them to, but rather accept that what happens, happens: this is the road to inner peace!", he read. He shook his head. "Don't struggle against Fate!" read the heading. No, where would we be today, if we hadn't struggled against fate - as Epiktet demands -, what would life be like if we were content with everything just the way it happened! Wouldn't it mean opening the door to all the injustice, suppression and arbitrariness a privileged few might wish to wield? The long queue of unemployed in front of the employment office! These men would have a quiet life, a very quiet one indeed, until they and their children were starved to death, yes then they'd be even more peaceful, and certainly wouldn't struggle against fate. Wasn't this the logical conclusion? What is fate? A nebulous something? The providence of Herrn Hitler? Or the loving God of the priests? Or those who sent us and thousands of others daily into the battlefields of the world and into death. Or is it me, Franz, who has tried to go his own way, who is prepared to go his own way? "The stars of your fate are to be found in your own breast!" He looked along the bookshelves. One's own way? Sigmund Freud, he could read the words upside down when he held his head at an angle. Oh yes, dependent on the passing of a swinging hip, the unconscious, the experience of the womb. Wasn't this what the stoic wanted to say in the end: that we are bound by the causality of our birth? Was it causality of birth in the case of Karl Marx, the son of the Justice Councillor Heinrich Marx, of Bertolt Brecht, son of wealthy people, as he says himself in his poetry, of Lenin, son of an ennobled school inspector? He listened, he could hear steps outside. It had to be Mother with Groß. Josef Stalin came to mind, what had his father been, wasn't he some sort of petty tradesman? He alone. It's confusing.

The door was opened, Mother and Groß entered the room.

Mother remained at the door, Groß came towards Franz and offered him his hand.

"Hello", said Franz.

"Hello." Groß looked around. He seemed somehow oppressed by the bookshelves reaching up to the ceiling. "A lot of dust", he said finally.

"Do you know there are books here which can't be found anywhere else any more", asked Franz, and put the volume back in its place.

"Quite possible, I don't understand that sort of thing. It doesn't help us anyway, not in the slightest, we need different things entirely. Liebeneder is very hard up."

"I've brought a few tins of meat", said Franz.

"Your mother has already told me. Thank you." Groß was still looking around the room. "But that's not all." He went to the other door of the room. "Where does this lead?"

"To the living-room", said his mother, "and from there into the ante-room and the toilet. The professor had this door", she pointed to the one they'd just come through, "permanently locked. It's only since we've been here that he unlocked it. It's more practical for us that way, especially for the boy. And we don't bring in as much dirt for the professor's wife to clean either. We always put on slippers when we walk through the lounge." The woman was still standing near the door. She was small and delicate and had a pointed chin and two very restless grey eyes, which were shaded by a head-scarf that she wore pulled down to her forehead.

Groß opened the door and looked into the large room, but couldn't see much, for the windows were covered with the grey-green black-out paper and there was only a small ray of light falling into the room from the library. He saw covered-up armchairs, a grand piano and a glass cabinet, along the wall lay a large roll covered in packing paper and string. He closed the door, sat down on the chair which he drew up to the round table. Franz sat down too. He reached into the pocket of his uniform jacket, took out a packet of cigarettes and offered them to Groß. The men lit the cigarettes. Franz's mother moved a third chair to the door and sat down.

"Well, what's the matter?" asked Franz.

"The woman was arrested yesterday." Groß said it very quietly and looked across to Franz through his cigarette smoke.

Franz stared at the spines of the books. He saw the five boys and three girls on the large staircase of the *Südbahnhof*, all with their rucksacks, one had a mandoline, *merry is the gipsy's life, trala la la!* The engines of the trains to Rome and Belgrade and those that only went as far as Graz were already puffing on the upper level. The young people had sturdy climbing shoes on their feet, and one of the boys had a rope fastened to his rucksack. The ticket hall, the large ticket hall, boy scouts and convent schoolgirls with their nuns, farmer's wives from Styria wrapped in large embroidered shawls, and travellers with chequered sports caps and suitcases carried for them by porters. The smooth face, the smooth skin, the smooth hair, the strong solid teeth of one of the girls.

His mother sat motionless near the door. Groß must have told her already. She didn't even frown. It was Mother too, who had told Franz that Frau Liebeneder was Gretl Dvorak.

Why had she married this Liebeneder? Who knew him? Must have moved here from another district. She'd lain next to Braun in the hut on Mount Rax, and she'd been with him all the rest of the time too. But she must have changed over to Liebeneder before Braun's emigration. The oldest girl is eleven or twelve already. There was a rattling noise as they went up the large staircase in the *Südbahnhof*. The tops of their shoes tapped against the tin advertising signs some firm had set on the vertical parts of the steps. Which firm was it? Maggi? Schmoll? Gretl with her smooth firm calves and smooth firm thighs. She walked in front of me on the track in her dirndl-skirt, skin like all the other skin, flesh like all the other flesh. And then, as she sat on Braun's knee in the hut, showing her strong teeth: *tra la, tra la, tra la! No need to pay tribute to the emperor, tra la!* Laughing and singing. Her face shining and her eyes sparkling. Was that all? Yes, that was all he could remember. Soon afterwards, he'd been interned in Wöllersdorf and after that, he didn't mix with them any more. He didn't want to cause anyone any trouble!

"And? Will they be able to prove anything?" asked Franz. His eyes left the book spines and turned through the clouds of smoke

towards Groß's face.

"They can always find fault with the likes of us, if they want to", remarked the older man.

"Where is she?"

"Still in the District Court, as far as I know."

The two men gazed into the blue fog of their cigarettes, one of them raised his eyebrows, the other tapped lightly and inaudibly with the tip of his foot against the leg of the chair he was sitting on.

"It seems there's nothing we can do", observed Franz finally. "Why on earth didn't she disappear? She must have known that she was a suspect."

"Oh yes, why didn't she?" muttered Groß. "It's not so easy to disappear with three children, and a woman is not prepared to separate herself from them as easily as all that. They knew that as well as we did, and that's the reason they left her alone as long as they did."

"Well, it surprises me", said Franz.

"It doesn't surprise me. Most likely they were watching her to find out who she's in contact with. They know full well that there are lots of people who work against them. But Frau Liebeneder was careful. Well, it doesn't matter how she did it or who kept the contact going, it's of no concern here. I only want to know whether you'd be prepared to help us? You did know her." Groß now looked through the cigarette smoke into Franz's eyes. His foot had stopped tapping.

Just what I needed, thought Franz. What does he mean, I knew her? One glance up her skirt on the mountain track, that was all. The black knickers she was wearing and her bare thighs. Big deal! And it was Braun she disappeared into the bushes with. "I don't see there's much we can do", he said carefully.

"At the moment", remarked Groß, "at the moment, I don't know what we can do myself. But who knows, maybe someone else knows a way out of this dilemma." The withered old man spoke as if he was thinking of someone specific. "What we'd need, if we could get her out again, are papers she could disappear with. Do you understand? She'd have to leave the children with her mother and disappear from Vienna, preferably far away

where no-one would look for her. She'll understand that now. But you know: checkpoints! The best thing would be army papers. You understand me? Can you get them?"

Here we go, thought Franz. When I got into my plane I knew that a shot from an enemy fighter could blow me into the air. There was still the parachute if the explosion didn't blow me to pieces. But all the same, I knew every movement, I could control the engines, especially since the *Ju 88*s arrived, they behave like racing horses or a fast dog, no enemy could get me in his sights that easily with that one. But what do I do here?

"I can't say", he replied carefully. "I'd have to investigate it more closely. There are plenty of transfer orders lying about, but that's not all. They have to be signed and sealed. She'd need an army identification card as well. As I say, I'd have to see." It wasn't quite clear to him whether he even wanted to think about the possibility. Maybe he just wanted to gain some time, change the subject.

Groß put his hand into the breast-pocket of his jacket and brought out a tattered envelope. "Here", he said, and handed it to Franz, "here's a photo of her in case you need one. After all, you're a printer by trade, aren't you, or something like that. Telegraph operator would be quite good, you know. No-one would think of the District Court with a profession like that."

Why did I have to talk to him on the platform, thought Franz. This could get me in a lot of trouble: forgery of documents! Just what I needed. For a moment he thought about Inge Grazl. Then he opened the envelope and took out the small picture. Gretl Dvorak looked out at him. She hadn't changed much. Her hair was just as it had been on their outings, her skin was stretched firmly across her cheek-bones and her eyes were ever so slightly on an angle.

That was her. Now he heard her voice as well, her laughter. *Trala la, trala la, trala la.* The mandoline accompanied her, and the voices of the others joined in with the chorus. She was one you could rely on, climbing the rocks, the rope running over her right shoulder, she would prop herself against the rock like a cat and secure a path you could trust. Franz looked at the picture for a very long time. Are you still in contact with your old friends? You

understand, I mean your party friends. He remembered Wohlleben's words. He saw himself again, standing before his superior.

"Very well", said Franz, as he put the photograph back in the envelope and laid it on the table, "I'll see what I can do, no promises of course."

Groß extinguished the rest of his cigarette in the ash-tray. "Put it in your wallet, otherwise you might leave it here. It wouldn't be good if someone found it there."

"Who'd find it here?" asked Franz.

"You never know." He looked around. "You never know who might come by. A soldier carrying a picture of a woman is nothing out of the ordinary. Everyone's got one."

Franz took out his wallet and put the blue envelope inside. He hesitated a moment and looked at the picture of his sister which was there. No, there was no similarity at all with Inge Grazl. How had it ever occurred to him? Her posture perhaps? It must be something else. Her voice? It had been ten years now since she had crumpled under the fascist bullets. But the other one, the young girl, had gone to Verona. He was just carrying out an order, no more. Wohlleben. He was already wearing the same uniform as the others back then, but not behaving like them, in spite of it. It used to be a risk back in those days, but now it could cost him his head. The Secret Service had made inquiries. The warrant had arrived and had been passed on to the branch in Brünn, as well as to the military police controlling the trains on that route. Frau Eichinger couldn't believe such a thing was possible. She's still a child, she kept repeating. My God, what could such a child have done, and she moved her spectacles nervously to and fro as she spoke.

Groß seemed to interpret his companion's hesitation the wrong way: "It's the boy too. One can't be certain what he might say and where, stupid as he is. He doesn't need to see the photo."

Franz closed his wallet without a word, and put it back in his pocket. It was quite clear to him that if you wanted to issue a false paper, you had to know exactly what the right one looked like. If you wanted to send someone to a certain destination, you had to count on the fact that that person would arrive there. When they

arrived, they needed to be familiar with the situation there and to be able to cope. Gretl Dvorak most certainly would not know how to behave in an army complex. He took another pull on his cigarette and stubbed it out.

"She'll all right, as long as she's in the District Court", said Groß. "It'll get critical if she's moved."

The next morning Franz had his breakfast alone. His landlady was neither to be heard nor seen. He had woken up earlier then usual, got washed and dressed and had hoped to have a longer chat with the girl. He didn't quite know what he was expecting from it. But now that she was late, he was annoyed. He had just finished his bread and his coffee and begun to wash the dishes, when keys rattled in the door. The door was opened and shut, steps followed. He dried his hands and went to the entrance-hall. Now he was surprised to see not Poldi, but a woman of about forty. She had set a suitcase down, and was now trying to slide the straps of a rucksack over her shoulders.

Franz approached her: "May I help you?" he asked.

"By all means", said the woman. Together they lowered the heavy rucksack to the floor.

"So, you are our lodger?" The woman was out of breath.

"Yes, I am, my name is Prannowitz", Franz introduced himself and offered the woman his hand.

"Mihatsch", said the woman and kept his hand clutched in hers for a moment.

The two looked one another in the eye. Franz thought he glimpsed a wavering smile flickering in the corners of her eyes. So this was the mother, he thought, she looks pretty good. And after he had helped her off with her coat: everything still there!

"Careful", said the woman. He'd bumped into the suitcase as he put the piece of clothing on a hanger in the entrance-hall. "Careful, there are eggs in the suitcase."

Franz had noticed the small round objects protruding though the canvas when he helped her put down the rucksack. Of course, now he knew: potatoes. The woman had been to the country to get provisions.

Frau Mihatsch pushed a strand of hair from her face, Franz rolled down the sleeves of his shirt. He took his time, noticing

that the woman observed him, observed his dark hairy arms.

"Well", she asked, "how are you managing?"

"Very well thank you, your daughter was a great help".

"Indeed?"

He noticed that she looked at him with suspicion.

"Where did Poldi settle you down?" The woman turned towards Franz's little room. He followed her.

The windows were still closed and covered up. They had to switch on the light. The bed, still as Franz had left it, revealed a greasy sheet and a half folded back duvet. The air was bad. Cigarette smoke and a sweaty odour combined to produce a stuffy fug.

"Do you like it here? Yes? A bit small, isn't it? But very cosy, don't you think so? But look, you've buttoned your shirt up the wrong way." He looked down at himself and noticed his mistake. At the same time, he could smell the skin of the woman, and felt her hand at his chest. She fumbled with the uppermost button. He noticed immediately: she took pleasure in running the tops of her fingers through his chest hair.

"What a lot of hair you have", she said and laughed silently.

"Yes", he said, "from top to bottom."

She laughed again and bent forward, fumbling all the time at his shirt. He looked at her hair, it shone with a slight coppery tone and he wondered whether this was its natural colour. And this pointed nose, he thought, never having seen a pointed nose like that before. And these industrious restless hands. Mice, he thought. Mice everywhere, all through the barracks, they climbed up to the shelves in the lockers where the food was kept. The bread showed clear traces of their little teeth. One jumped at him from the soap box, in the evening the small animals rustled in the mattress when he was in bed. It was the year of the mouse. Grey-brown spots whisked continuously in front of them when they went to their aircraft, laden down with their parachutes, running from one hole in the ground to the next. They had beaten them to death, poisoned them, caught them in traps and squashed them by stepping on them. They didn't grow any fewer. They were everywhere, in uniform jackets, in the legs of trousers, in between sheets of writing paper. He smelled the foreign scent of the

woman's body as her hands pushed the wrongly placed buttons through the buttonholes. He felt the cool fingers on his skin, the breath of the head leaning towards him. You can't get on top of them, you can't eradicate them, they come back again and again in never-ending waves, with pointed snouts and cunning eyes. His eyes turned to the bed on his right, glided over the bent neck in front of him, over the arms of the woman.

"Its hereditary", he said, knowing very well that he only said it in order to say something and not to collapse into the chasm of silence. The woman remained silent, of course, she kept silent on purpose, she had to know that the silent handling of the buttons lent more importance to her presence than any utterance, however well phrased it might be, however calculated. He grabbed her arm right above the elbow, she stopped unbuttoning. The soft cushion of the palm of her hand touched his chest for a moment. Then he pushed her softly but firmly away from him and buttoned up his shirt.

Clanking and rattling at the door. There was the sound of opening and shutting. Franz turned towards the window and said in a loud voice: "I leave the windows open. Your daughter is kind enough to shut them at lunch-time." With that, he opened the windows noisily. The tips of his fingers bumped against the handle of the catch. He took no notice. He took no notice of the cool metal, the timber of the window frame, the smooth pane of glass, his hands carried out movements as if they were trained dogs, ready at the sound of a whistle to chase a hare or worry a fox out of its fox-hole, regardless of what their master was doing. He pressed his body against the window-sill, felt its edge, and when he leaned forward to look through the open window onto the street, it seemed to him as if he could break a beam with the weight of his body.

The cold morning air rushed into the room. The street which went up to the Gürtel was almost empty. A clattering cart passed the house, laden with milk-cans which banged constantly into each other. The broad backs of the horses shone, the cruppers swung to and fro in time with their even steps.

Franz turned around and witnessed a friendly but not overly affectionate greeting. The daughter had come straight into Franz's

little room. The two women kissed each other. The gesture seemed stiff and formal, the daughter performed the embrace as she might a ritual and the mother endured it, the way one might endure a moderate rain-fall. Franz noticed now that all the domes of the woman's skirt had come undone. Salmon-red gleamed out from the split. The sight embarrassed him. He turned back to the window.

"Did you have a good trip?" he heard the daughter ask.

"Well there were an awful lot of people and no progress, transport after transport, always transports, at one stage we almost thought there would be an air-raid warning."

"Everything was quiet here."

"I know, Herr, Herr..."

"Prannowitz", Franz filled in. He turned back again and looked into the girl's face.

"Yes, well, Herr Prannowitz has told me already." Frau Mihatsch concluded the sentence.

The words brought him back into the presence of the two women. The older one hadn't mention last night or air-raid warnings at all, but the way she included him in their conversation meant he belonged to them immediately.

Franz stepped towards the bed where he had thrown his uniform jacket a while ago and put it on.

The woman laughed. "His shirt, it was was done up wrongly."

Franz pushed his finger along the buttons of his shirt.

"What a jungle he has on his chest", said the woman to her daughter.

The daughter looked meaningfully out the window, into the sky above the house opposite, raising her eyebrows and frowning. She blushed from her neck upwards to her face. She was silent.

"Well, Frau Mihatsch", said Franz, "that's it. I have to go now."

Poldi turned her head with a sudden movement which made her hair twirl round her shoulders. Her features twisted into a smile. Then she turned towards the door and went out to the entrance-hall. "What did you bring this time", she asked.

Franz decided not to be home too early that evening.

There was an air-raid warning around about lunch-time. He met Wohlleben in the Central Command shelter, and the *Oberleutnant* asked him whether he had found his way round, and whether he had had an opportunity to replace the things he had lost during the recent attack.

It was a large shelter underneath the cellar of the building, the floor, the walls and the ceilings were made of concrete and a tightly packed row of concrete props secured the premises.

Franz noticed immediately, Wohlleben wanted something else. His talk was all about replacing clothing, about ration coupons and shops, but behind all that there was something waiting to come to the surface. Franz thought the man was about to ask him about his old party friends again. And this time he wouldn't have minded all that much. A good starting point, perhaps he could do something for Frau Liebeneder that way. He thought of Inge Grazl again. On the platform, waving for ages, as if she was an old friend, and he'd hardly known her, only known, known about the decision, known about life, more than the inexperienced girl at the carriage window.

They walked up and down in one of the concrete corridors, the *Oberleutnant* and the sergeant. There was no escape here. Even the view was restricted. Not in Verona any more! If everything went according to plan, the girl must have passed the narrow valleys of Southern Tyrol by now. Along the Etsch River, keep along the Etsch River. A wall of concrete to the left, a wall of concrete to the right. There was emergency lighting above the doors, light bulbs hung from the ceiling. Groups of two, three officers were standing here and there, a few girls, typists, were with them, conversing in muffled voices. When the southerly blew, the shimmering heat of the Po river-plains would hang over the city, something quite new for Inge Grazl. The smells. The noise. There was a rumbling above. But at the depth they were at, it was only faintly audible. Wohlleben stopped. Now he's going to ask me, thought Franz.

But the officer said: "How would you like to earn a bit on the side?" Franz looked at him in surprise. "It's in your area of expertise. An acquaintance of mine is managing a small publi-

shing house with a printing-press. He's got paper again now, after months of shortages, a small quantity of paper and a permit for printing too, but no type-setter. If you could perhaps spare a few hours after you finish with your duties here?"

Franz made a non-committal gesture. It could mean yes or no.

"I thought", the officer continued, "you could do with some extra cash. The texts, I gather, won't be to your taste. Liturgical pamphlets."

Franz smiled wryly. He could hear it all again: Kuttenberg, Prague, Thorn and Riga, are these not unique witnesses to German culture, which we have carried far into the East? And: What is and is not included in this book is my decision, do you understand? And: To hell with the professor, the professor. He will kindly try and find a more suitable illustration for this old German landscape. Otherwise I shall deal with him. Liturgical texts. No, they are all right. There's nothing they can fiddle with, the selections will stay the same, no-one will demand change, they're fixed like chemical formulae, certain, foreign to him, foreign just like chemical formulae, of no interest to the censor's office, none to him either, but good practice, practice for his trade which he'd had to leave that day in January 1940. "That doesn't matter at all", he said. "I'd be glad to have something to do in my line of work again."

Frau Liebeneder, said a voice inside him: Frau Liebeneder!

Painted phosphorescent arrows on the wall pointed in the direction of the exit. Phosphorescent arrows, phosphorous shells, incendiary shells lodged in the fuselage of the aircraft so that a thin strip of smoke, a bundle of flames, a whirl of vapour is left trailing across the blue of the sky, phosphorous, shining yellow-green, they stood in front of it, in front of this greenish yellow, and the *Oberleutnant* said something about a doctor he had known for some time and whom he'd misjudged, or who had misjudged his own situation, and was now managing this publishing house. About the students' fraternity which the doctor had headed, and that he'd been imprisoned at Dachau as well.

Dachau, that name, the name of a town in Bavaria, once known for its artists' colony. It was linked in Franz's mind with Wöllersdorf, a town in Lower Austria, it's earlier claim to fame a

munitions factory. His imagination connected both places with barracks and barbed wire and imprisonment and political terror. It gave him courage. He was familiar with it and it gave him courage, as perhaps did the ease with which the *Oberleutnant's* lips uttered the name Dachau.

Now the ground was shaking continuously. Heavy bombs must have fallen somewhere not all that far away. He asked: "What about Inge Grazl. Is she expected there?"

Now the detonations could be heard even closer, the ground beneath their feet shook more violently. Wohlleben looked Franz in the eye. He did not answer straight away. Franz noticed immediately the uneasiness in his gaze, noticed the way he was searching for what lay behind the question. Are you still in contact with your old friends? You know what I mean, your party friends? The question itself didn't mean much, was open-ended in both directions, it might be making sure of his loyalty. But Inge Grazl was something else, in her case a decision had been made.

Franz hastened to add: "I mean, is she safe in Verona?"

He watched the uneasy flicker in the eye of the other man disappear again. But in spite of that the *Oberleutnant* said: "As you know, the Intelligence Service is looking for her." He wanted to add something but Franz interrupted him.

"Exactly, that's just what I mean. Won't they find her in Verona?"

The *Oberleutnant* remained silent for a moment. The two men searched each other's faces. It seemed that the situation that had arisen between them in Wohlleben's office after Franz's first arrival was about to repeat itself here, but now with the roles reversed. Wohlleben didn't appear about to give in : "Do you know why they're after her?"

"No", said Franz. "I can't even begin to imagine. She made such a naive impression on me. They'll find her soon for sure. She wouldn't have the first clue on how to go underground."

Still the officer did not assume the tone Franz had introduced. He said: "Just think, she gave some food to some Russian prisoners of war. It couldn't have been much. We don't have much ourselves. And for that, they want to lock this child up."

Yes, a child, the way she stood at the carriage-window and

waved to him, slim, with a clear, smooth face, a strand of hair across her forehead. Franz nodded: "I'm afraid it will happen", he said. "I came across about ten check-points on my way up here."

The phosphorescent strip on the wall and the arrow pointing to the exit. Verona, what a beautiful name! But before you get there, there's Enns, Linz, Salzburg, Innsbruck. Aren't they all tangles of wire, fences, barriers to stop a fugitive? "But so far away from home", she had said in the car as he drove her to the *Westbahnhof*. A child! Frau Liebeneder wasn't a child, not even back then, when she'd climbed up that track in front of him. The ground was shaking again, but not so violently this time, the attack must have moved on. The arrows pointed to the exit but the All Clear had not yet been sounded, a second wave might yet approach, the four-engined flying fortresses came in formations of four or five and as they could start in middle Italy now, they were accompanied by fighters too. Verona, how much longer, and now they're already talking about the Alpine Fortress.

"She has proper papers and the warrant wasn't released until two days later. She will have arrived", said Wohlleben. He sounded so certain that Franz assumed the *Oberleutnant* knew something.

"And she's safe there?" he asked again, and continued immediately: "I'm asking because, I mean, I know someone, a young woman, mother of three children", otherwise he'll think I'm having an affair with her, "who might need to disappear urgently, not today perhaps, or tomorrow, but soon." And he observed the raised eyebrows, the lips, as if to say "well, at last", and he leaned closer to his companion. They'd been alone in the corridor ever since the bombing had become audible. Muffled voices could be heard from the large hall of the shelter. And now Franz knew that he had to tell him more, perhaps tell him everything.

They had looked down upon the city when they had met for the first time and the scar was still fresh and the city down there did not yet know that it was a pearl and about to receive a worthy setting from the greatest son ever to have lived there. Now Franz said slowly: "My sister knew her too, from outings we went on together in the mountains, from the youth club, and I've only been in contact with her since a couple of days ago. It's the way it

is when someone is in need, husband hanged, one looks for help wherever one can find it, and now she's been arrested herself, in the District Court and one ought to ...", he didn't finish his explanations, yes, one ought to, one ought to.

Wohlleben looked at the ground in front of him with a frown. "The wife of an executed prisoner? Why was he...?" He didn't continue, obviously the word "hanged" was difficult for him to say.

"Oh, you know, high treason, undermining the military effort, it's easy to be guilty of that."

"I mean specifically", Wohlleben interrupted. "What did he do specifically, what was he caught doing?"

"Leaflets. He operated a secret printing-press on the Laaer Berg. Exhortions to desert, sabotage, things like that."

"I see, then ... And the woman?"

"I don't know. Of course, she knew about it. Maybe she distributed the leaflets. I don't know. But they can't prove anything."

"Rubbish!" Wohlleben seemed annoyed. "They can always prove something. Witnesses can always be found, even if they're corrupt ones."

It had happened for the second time in the last few days: They can always find proof against the likes of us, he heard Groß say again. That was the world, his world, the world of the likes of us, which he, naive as he was, had thought he could escape on the day he glided for the first time in the fuselage covered in canvas and paint, as he was pushed across fields, river-meadows and forests by a small engine and a large wooden propeller. Again, the ground rolled under the mens' feet. A new wave seemed to be approaching. La Valetta, Tobruk, Nettuno. They can always find proof against the likes of us. And even Wohlleben who stood next to him, listening, seemed to belong to this world. The dust in Erna's cellar, the cries, the groaning, and the woman with the two children, now only one child left, and up there pushing a small button, they can always find proof, far off the ground, indicators, altimeter, oil temperatures, revolutions, speed. Numbers. Abstract numbers in a city in America, in England, sorted into a certain sequence by a specialist, engineer, a

professor, ordered a certain way, and then that mother with the small girl in her arms, pieces of brain in her bloody hair. Order. A long train of sleepless nights, brooding over numbers and formulae. This effort of the mind. The bookshelves up to the ceiling, all suspicious, all incriminating. The professor, what might he look like? The likes of us. Him too. The young woman with the dead child in her arms. They could feel the detonations as they leaned against the wall. At least they didn't seem to be coming so close any more.

"How old is she?" asked Wohlleben. He was listening closely.

"I don't know. Round about her thirties!"

"That's still all right." Wohlleben paused for a moment. "What have you got to do with it? Do you know that it could cost you your head?"

"But we can't let her be sent to a concentration camp. Not now, when it's five minutes to twelve already."

The other man fell silent. The two of them remained motionless, staring into each others' faces.

Yes, that's what it could cost me. I know. For a long time I really believed I could withdraw from my surroundings, live outside what was happening, just because I could glide hundreds or thousands of metres above the earth where it was all taking place. But no-one can escape. But then on leave, the first time, and Schmidt said *Heil Hitler,* when I greeted him, everybody said *Heil Hitler* when you greeted them, and then back with the squadron, planes to left and right, and the dive on La Valetta, the hot red points in the oncoming night, the familiar regular humming of the engines, the instruments, the clean cockpit, the smell of oil. And now: She can't be sent to a concentration camp. Even if there's nothing else but the memories of the climbing trips and tramping excursions to the *Schneeberg* and the *Hohe Wand.*

"So, she's safe in Verona", said Wohlleben at last.

"She's safe in Verona", repeated Franz. "And how...", he stopped and kept searching Wohlleben's face. He saw the bony face with the warm, dark eyes, with the big nose and a slight blue shadow around his chin and cheeks in spite of careful shaving, he saw the peaked cap above it, the well fitted shirt, the tie, but everything peeled away, piece by piece, like the skin of an

orange, and there in front of him stood the emaciated face of the unemployed man of days gone by, the face in which he, the harbinger of doom, bringing news of his sister's death, had been able to read just how much this woman had meant to him.

"It would be best", said Wohlleben, "if you could bring a photo of the woman and a document belonging to her as soon as possible", and, after he had thrown a cursory glance down the corridor, "you see, we should collaborate more."

Collaborate, collaborate. He didn't want to collaborate with anybody. True, he hated this regime and was convinced that it wouldn't last much longer, but collaborate? In the way Groß had told him about the arrested group on the Laaer Berg perhaps?

"I don't understand why he works such long hours every day", said Poldi's mother. "We've had a man in the house for months now and the bedside lamp still hasn't been fixed."

Poldi laughed. "You talk as if he was billeted with us because of your bedside lamp."

"Don't be so silly. But if he's looked after as well as he is by us, he could do something for us as well, you know. We do the washing and mend his socks, and then he was our guest for the holidays and we let him celebrate with us."

"You always say you prefer him to eat with us rather than in his little room. Because then he doesn't need extra heating and doesn't have the chance to be messy. And at Christmas he brought the wine, the schnaps and the coffee." Poldi was standing at the range, stirring the contents of a large pot over the flame.

"Just like you, always defending him. He could do anything he liked and you'd still defend him."

The mother was occupied with cleaning jam jars.

Poldi lifted the wooden spoon and let the yellow-brown liquid drip back into the pot. "Why? What's he done that I'd have to defend him for?" she asked. And she kept thinking: Where had she put the paper that they'd wiped away the drops with? Just as well he's careful. Later, yes later I'd like to have children, but not now. Air raids almost every day, and who knows what else, ... no, later!

"He must have done something, or maybe not done something he should have, or done something differently to what they wanted, otherwise they wouldn't have been asking after him. But it's all the same to me: just be careful that we don't get drawn into anything. We've always been known as good Germans and after all, I'm in the Women's Organisation and you're with the Society of German Girls, and especially now when you're making sacrifices day and night with the Red Cross. Anyway they can't find fault with us."

"What do you mean, find fault? Who was asking after him?" - the girl almost dropped her wooden spoon.

"Over at Frau Fischer's", replied her mother, "but she likes us. We don't need to worry. I've known her since before you were born. You do know that her husband is with the police."

"So what? Because of a few potatoes and a few eggs, she takes them too all right, when you give her some."

"No, no, not because of that. They wanted to know whether we know where the sergeant spends his evenings."

"So? Did you tell her?"

"Of course, I told her what he told us, that he works at a printing-press in Klosterneuburg."

"That's all right."

"Who knows what they're printing there, she said. The Intelligence Service isn't making inquiries for nothing."

"Well, didn't you tell her that they're printing those Catholic mass texts?"

"Of course, I said that he said something about mass texts, but we haven't seen them. I said that too. You know, just to be safe. And she asked me whether he's religious. Well, that just made me laugh and she asked well, why's he doing it in that case, and I said, money has no smell and he lost everything in the recent air raids. Yes, and then she showed me some forms with photos of women and asked me whether I knew the one or other and whether any of them had been visiting our soldier."

"Pretty ones?"

"One of them wasn't bad, roughly your age, maybe two or three years older, but the other two, I'm a spring chicken compared to them, thank you very much." She laughed.

"What did she look like? Blond?"

"Who?"

"The young one."

"Oh, I don't know, I'm not sure any more. One thing is for certain, none of them come from our circles. You could see that straight away. I told her straight off. We don't know people like that, and you know yourself, I said, that Herr Prannowitz doesn't receive any visitors here except his nephew. He was here two or three times. But he's a solid Hitler Youth boy. And then I think she was annoyed herself that they'd been questioned, or maybe it was more her husband."

"Wasn't it him that started it in the first place?" She saw the tall man, not so young any more, come up the stair case huffing and puffing. He'd always been friendly, his greeting was exclusively *Heil Hitler.*

"No, that's just it. The Intelligence Service visited her. If only we don't get into any trouble!"

"But isn't Herr Fischer himself...?"

"No, he's with the police. That's something different. I'm not so sure myself what the difference is. They all have green uniforms now. But the Intelligence Service reports to the SS. That's it."

Poldi was standing in the entrance way again, was dancing through the halls, was raising her eyes from the coffee urn. The skull on the cap, the eagle, the sovereign emblem on the arm, the boot legs, the shining boot legs were all there again. A fine fellow with good manners and a clean shirt, the whole of Greater Germany behind him, bright and radiant, like the new morning.

Not much over twenty and already so many memories. When does nostalgia start? Had she already been looking back to times gone by when she was at school? She wasn't quite sure any more. But when she thought hard, she seemed to remember that her holiday experiences had always been present and loyal companions throughout the following term.

But suddenly she was on to something else. Franz! What did he have to do with the SS? What did they want with him? It couldn't be anything shining and radiant. The whole of Greater

Germany wasn't standing behind him, not at all. He spoke of things which to her seemed to herald everything but a new morning. And she was suddenly afraid.

She was afraid and began to sweat. She propped herself up on her elbow and saw the way he took out his handkerchief and wiped her thigh with it, saw the way the white of the cloth became covered in red spots, saw the way milky drops fell to the floor. Franz, she said, and threw her arms around his neck, and he thrust himself into her, so that the kitchen table where she was lying creaked under her, he thrust himself upon her, so that for a few moments all she could feel were the hard edges under her legs, so that for a moment she could feel the ground under her feet and the table top under her body, but suddenly she didn't notice any of those things any more, didn't notice any more, didn't notice any more.

She didn't tell her mother anything about it, why should she, what could she have said, what would she have wanted to say, it was hers alone, that feeling which began with the man's hand touching her upper arm, which began slowly and migrated further and further into her innermost being, which separated her from her surroundings piece by piece, which, under the guidance of Franz's hand, glided down her spine, rumbled in her hips, contracted her nipples under.the attentions of his lips, thumped in her womb, stretched, toppled over and over, and obliterated any thought, any glance, everything, no, no part of that would ever be told, would it even be possible to speak of it? And Mother of all people. But her mother must have noticed, even without her saying anything. Because one day, when she returned from duty, she said, Poldi, I've had a word with our soldier today, she always said our soldier, I've had a word with our soldier, and as far as I'm concerned you can go out with him, just be careful that nothing happens. And from that day on, Mother had gone back to the country to get provisions and the two were often alone together for as long as a week.

But now her mother was saying: "The whole thing is suspicious anyway. I don't like being involved in things like this."

And suddenly Poldi felt nothing but fear. Looking into her mother's face across the large pot she felt an unknown danger.

But she didn't have the slightest clue what it was all about. Of course there were the SS, the police, the Intelligence Service, they were organisations like so many others, she never thought about their functions at all. Her images of them never went any further than Herr Fischer, the puffing, friendly neighbour who always greeted her, no further than the skull on the peaked cap in the entrance-way, than the man whose mess-tin she'd poured a ladle of coffee into. Here and there she'd met a small group of Jews led by a SS-man. She had never thought anything of it. All these things surely happened for a good reason. Innocent people don't get arrested. Loyal citizens will be left in peace. It's well-known that Pojanovsky was a prominent Red and he never had any trouble. And here and there you met people with the yellow star sewn on their coat.

"Just ask him", her mother was saying. "He'll tell you if there's something to it. I don't fancy being branded a traitor of the people ... and whatever else it's called and getting arrested just because I shared a roof with a person who prints some forbidden pamphlets. And you, believe you me, you could be accused of even more, that's for sure. They arrested an old man in Markersdorf just the other day, just because he'd given two marks to a widow and the children of an executed deserter. The poor mites, he said, and crossed himself when they led him away. No, I don't want that. Do you understand me? They're even stricter with forbidden texts. If he's involved with things like that, I'm telling you now, he'll have to leave our home. And I couldn't care less what happens to him!"

Poldi was still sweating. She hadn't the faintest idea what he printed out there in Klosterneuburg. Well, they were liturgical texts. That's what he'd said and she'd never brought it up again, never even thought about it. Why should she have? It didn't interest her. His hard thighs, his broad chest, the forest of hair. "Of course they're printing liturgical texts", she said now, just as if she knew for certain. "They can only print what they're allowed to print. Do you think they'd risk the press being closed down? And the church of all things, they support the defence of the Occident, of course they do, especially now, when the danger of Bolshevism is greater than ever before, they're more behind it

than they ever were."

Oh, yes, she believed what she'd just said, but she sweated nonetheless, she was afraid, was afraid that it might be different after all, that something might not turn out to be the way she'd described it, the way she'd imagined it.

She wanted victory. She wanted victory at any cost, she believed in it, could not imagine continuing to live without a German victory. Thought about it? About defeat? She had never ever thought about it before.

Before? What did before mean? Before she had met Franz. Setbacks, there were always setbacks. But the final victory, the final victory was certain. *Our flag is leading us, our flag is heralding in a new age.*

"You can turn off the gas now", said her mother. "We'll fill the jars. Lucky that I saved some vellum paper. It's almost impossible to get these days. It's soaking over there. Can you get the thin thread to seal the jars please."

Poldi went to the entrance-hall, went through the drawer of the tall dresser, took out a bundle of string and returned to the kitchen. She hummed as she spooned the jam from the large pot with a clean ladle and let it drip into the jars her mother had carefully set out on a hot cloth: *Our flag is leading us on to eternity, our flag means more to us than death.*

The flag? More than death? Well, the idea, of course. The Fatherland, Greater Germany, she told herself.

The idea? The Fatherland?

No land is finer in this Age! Was that it?

It had to be! The mountains, the Alpine meadows, the rustling forests, the quiet fir-woods. But Franz had told her of fir trees in the Tatras and the shepherds who still played their flutes, of the forests in Transylvania, of the magnificent song of the larks above a meadow of marguerites somewhere near the rivers Don and Donez, over there in the vastness of Russia, where all the marguerite-covered grasslands seem to have no end, where there is no path through the meadows, at the most the trail of a fleeing deer, where there is grass, and every now and then a bush, extending in gentle waves as far as the horizon.

She licked one of her fingers which was covered in hot jam.

"Hello there, are you dreaming?" asked her mother. "Don't spill it. Maybe they don't have anything on him. Maybe they're just asking, just to make sure. But it's unpleasant all the same, it draws people's attention to us."

"So what?"

"The best thing to do now is: don't be conspicuous, act as if we hardly exist at all. There's no way of knowing what to expect from one day to the next."

"What should we be expecting?"

"Well ..., the Russians are at the gates of Budapest."

Poldi looked at her mother in amazement: "They are not going to ..., You don't mean ...?"

"No way of knowing", said the woman, and left the kitchen. The girl heard her rummaging in a drawer of the sideboard in the dining room.

It can't be true, she thought. It can't be, that they should come here. It's completely impossible. The Führer promised. It's German soil! It is, it's quite out of the question that these ... you hear of the most terrible things, cruelties, massacres, rapes. What about the pure image of the German woman? No, the Führer had promised, it wouldn't happen, and after all, there's always the secret weapon, when is it going to be used? Death rays. Most likely death rays. One can't even begin to imagine them. But there were rumours that the Germans had things like that, even back when Czechoslovakia was taken. A whole lot of machines would be set up in a row, and whoever went past a certain point would drop down dead, The End! No blood, no shots, no noise. But then they brought out the *V1*. It made quite an impact, but negligible really, compared to death rays. And then the *V2*. Why, if the *V1* was so good? said Franz. And Mother says that the Russians are at the gates of Budapest, and Franz says better an end to terror than terror without end. What did he mean by that? Sometimes I really don't understand him.

The road was very slippery in places. It was drizzling quite heavily. There was a thick hoarfrost on the bushes. The higher you climbed, the longer the icy beards on the branches became. The wire-mesh fences of the gardens looked like the white

stitches of a piece of coarse woollen knitting. The city could not be seen. There, where they knew it lay, long stretched-out grey banks of clouds drifted above a tense mass of milky fog.

He was carrying a large securely-tied carton and she a shopping bag. Every now and then they stopped and looked around, admired the trees, bushes and wires which jingled softly when the slightest breath of wind embraced them. Each noise was clearly audible in the vast stillness, the take-off of a bird, the clinking of falling ice, the opening and closing of a door somewhere in the settlement. The hard earth cracked under their shoes with every step.

They didn't talk much. Sometimes Franz asked her whether the bag was too heavy for her. Sometimes Poldi pointed at a thistle which had been changed into a radiant flower by the hoar-frost, or at white cascades of weeping willows. A few shimmering blue crows sat on the pickets, heads tucked in, looking at them suspiciously. When they stopped, the animals flew off to one side. Their slow, swinging wing-beats were inaudible, only the clinking of the falling ice loosened by their talons made a sound. Here and there, thin threads rose from the chimneys into the hazy sky. It was a silvery light smoke which dissolved quickly. The clean smell of wood-fires was in the air.

They had stopped again.

Franz was amazed at the matter-of-fact way in which Steffi and Herbert had fostered the child, in spite of the fact that they didn't know whether they could get ration coupons for her. And then there were the neighbours. They couldn't be told the truth. They told them the father had been killed in the war, and the mother had to work for the war effort. Yes, that would be the best solution. They'd believe that. In this lightly settled area, where each small house was separated from the next one by a large garden, there were few opportunities to make contact with the occupants of the neighbouring houses. Especially during wintertime, when everyone was hiding inside their four walls. It was different during summertime, everyone worked outside, the fruit trees and the vegetable beds needed constant attention, then you could exchange the experiences you'd had with the one or other varieties. But there were still a few months to go until summer and then - it

couldn't last for that much longer. The ration coupons were obtained in the end, and every now and then Poldi and her sergeant brought something to eat. Everyone could understand it, no-one found fault with it. On the contrary, everybody was glad for the young couple. Ever since Herbert had been hopping about on crutches with only one leg left, they had been treated much more considerately by everyone in the settlement.

Poldi pointed to a cherry tree. Flags of glass were hanging on its knotted branches. "Look how far developed the flower buds were, and now it's all over for them already."

"As long as they're that small, they can stand it", said Franz. "They'll come out in their own good time. Everything in its own good time." Everything in its own good time? he asked himself immediately. Is it my time now? Has it arrived?

Hadn't it been his time back then, when he stood with Dozekal in front of the display cabinet of the German Labour Front? He and a thousand other comrades. All of them couldn't have developed "pneumonia". Or could they? He had work all of a sudden. And he was glad to have work. If only he hadn't been glad about it! If he could have seen what lay behind it! If only he had done something! Anything! Against it. But when this Machatschek, the provisional administrator of the printing-press, had his differences with the manager, he'd enjoyed it. They were both middle-class! And he obeyed, as he was expected to, without any question. He'd removed the Madonna of Laschenitz from the illustrations immediately, just as Herr Machatschek had ordered. Couldn't he have played the fool and left it in for printing? Couldn't he have blamed the professor and his instructions when the provisional administrator came to have words with him? In the end he would have been able to assume that the two of them had come to some arrangement. What could they have done, once the book was bound? Such things did happen, again and again. Once, in a "Reader for the German Family" there had been a quotation from Thomas Mann. No-one noticed for quite some time. But would it have been sensible to lose his job over the Madonna of Laschenitz? No, he wouldn't have lost it immediately, he was needed, but there would have been some trouble. It wouldn't have been worth it for the Madonna of Laschenitz. Time

and again it hadn't been worth it.

The fine edges of the ice undulated softly. It must have thawed during the day when the sun was shining on it and frozen again later when fog had covered the whole sky.

There were cabbages in the garden. One next to the other, lightly dusted with snow. The large blue-green leaves were sticking out like ears from a head. Then there was a row of roses packed in straw, and strawberry beds covered in stable manure. There was the sound of twittering in the dense top of the fir tree near the house. In the twilight beneath the disarranged branches, little birds fluttered around a feed-box.

Herbert opened the door. He made a wry face.

"What's the matter?" asked Poldi and Franz. "What happened?"

Blood was trickling from his eyelid, and there was a graze on his forehead above it.

"Come in. It's nothing", he said and gestured into the entrance-hall with his crutch. "It's cold. I'll tell you all about it in a minute. Close the door. It's windy."

They closed the door and put down their parcels, wiped their feet on the doormat and helped each other out of their coats. Meanwhile, Steffi had come out from the kitchen. She brought felt slippers.

"Hello. Just imagine, Herbert took a tumble. Yesterday, out on the black ice."

"Well", said the man. "It is not quite the same as with two legs. I have to get some more practice in. I'll be right as rain in a few months time."

The two guests took off their shoes, Franz followed the limping man into the living room, Poldi disappeared into the kitchen with Steffi.

The children were in the living room. The girl got up, the boy stretched both his little arms out towards them. They had divided a corner of the room up into several sections with wooden blocks. In each section were domestic animals made of papier maché.

Franz shook hands with the children and asked them what they were playing.

Farm-yards, was the answer. The girl explained to him where

the stables, the barn and the living quarters were. The wooden blocks served as walls and garden fences, but also as ditches and riverbanks. The girl explained everything to him exactly, being very careful all the while that the little boy didn't bring disharmony into this well-ordered husbandry through his clumsiness.

After Franz had duly admired everything, he sat down with Herbert on the old sofa near the stove. The children busied themselves again with the little cows, horses, pigs and geese. They had a farmer and his wife going to and fro as well. And as they didn't seem to have any farm-hands, they'd incorporated some chess-men. There were some buttons arranged in little groups as well. They stood in for the missing farm animals. Apparently they were chickens, brown, white and black chickens.

The Christmas tree was still standing on the sideboard along the wall, decorated with straw stars, red-cheeked apples and walnuts wrapped in aluminium foil.

Franz took a packet of cigarettes from his pocket and offered it to Herbert. The two men took a few silent drags.

"Does it hurt?" asked Franz.

"The weather makes it worse. But it's not too bad. I should get my artificial leg in a few weeks time."

Franz followed the course of the smoke rings with his eyes. "You'll have to see about getting a desk job afterwards."

"Afterwards", repeated Herbert. "I can't imagine it, even now."

"Why not?"

"Come on, do you think it's going to be like it was before thirty-eight, with all the different parties, *Schutzbund* and *Heimwehr* and Austria being independent?"

"Of course Austria will be independent. The Allies promised us that at Yalta. Did you know", Franz lowered his voice to a whisper, "we used to listen to the English broadcasting stations on our aircraft radios. All you had to do was put your leather helmet on and no-one could tell what you were listening to. Well, that was reported immediately, back then. And then later on, there was the commentator from Radio London as well."

"Who knows if they were telling the truth."

"When they've committed themselves to a written agreement?

The Russians and the others?"

"Oh God, an agreement. How many agreements have been broken so far. And the Russians of all people!" He adjusted his crutches as they began to slide away.

Franz looked across to the children. The girl was moving about on her knees, pushing the figures to and fro between the wooden blocks. The coloured paper chain on the Christmas tree fluttered above her head. "We were the first victims of Fascism. We'll get our old rights back."

"The first victims! Don't be absurd, we all stood on the Ringstraße and the Heldenplatz and shouted. One People, one Reich, one Führer, everyone shouted it. Do you think the others didn't notice. Do you think they're stupid?"

"But then they must have noticed that several thousand Austrians were arrested and transported to Dachau first thing in thirty-eight as well. They most probably know more about the ones who are against the Nazis than we'll ever find out."

"Come on, a few thousand! There were a few members of the former Austrian government and a few social democrats who were openly anti-Hitler. Most of them were left in peace. After all, you weren't imprisoned and you were a socialist. And you haven't done too badly up till now, you've even been decorated with the Iron Cross, haven't you? Of course, it is all coming to an end, there's no stopping the Russians now, but what you say about Austria as it used to be, no, I just can't see it happening. The state just wasn't capable of survival, too small!"

"Because everyone was against everyone else. Because we didn't work together. Because the Conservatives murdered democracy and the Social Democrats kept talking about the dictatorship of the proletariat. But even in thirty-eight the political parties could have got together, and could have worked together too."

"Do you think so? I can't really remember now the way it used to be before the war. I was too young back then. All I can remember is the constant fighting, the brawls, again and again. They painted slogans over our grocer's shop windows because he was a capitalist, or so they claimed. What they didn't realise, was that he and his wife were in that shop from six o'clock in the morning until nine o'clock in the evening, Saturday and Sunday mornings

too, and the man got up at four most mornings to go to the wholesale market for fresh vegetables. They worked so hard all year long and often they had more work than they could cope with. But it gave them pleasure to see satisfied customers. It was the ones who never liked their own work who scrawled over their windows."

"But it won't be like that again. We'd be happy to have your grocer working conscientiously."

"Who knows? Who knows where he'll be allowed to work. In Siberia perhaps. He was a Nazi you see."

The two men fell silent.

"Cock-a-doodle-do", crowed the girl, and put a coloured button on top of one of the wooden blocks. "Look", she said to the boy, "the rooster has jumped up onto the wall and is looking out for the farmer's wife with the corn."

"Is coming", said Rudi, and pushed a chessman along between the blocks.

"Yes", laughed the girl. "She's coming with a big knife and she's going to kill the rooster. Chop, chop."

"No, no, no!" shouted the child.

"Don't Hilde", said Herbert. "Don't tease him."

"I'm not teasing him", said the girl. "It's just that we need something for the soup and after that we're going to have a roast."

The men laughed and the little one cried.

The door to the kitchen opened and Steffi came in. "What's going on? Don't make such a racket! You're going to wake the baby next door. What have you been doing to the boy this time?"

The men laughed again.

"Hilde wants to slaughter the rooster and Rudi has taken pity on it", said Herbert.

"Which rooster?" asked Steffi.

"Oh, they're playing farm-yards."

"Cock-a-doodle-do, cock-a-doodle-do", crowed the girl, took the coloured button, jumped up and handed it to the woman.

Steffi took it and showed it to the boy: "Look, here he is, Rudi, here he is. She's not going to hurt him. No need to cry. Here he comes again." She bent down to the child, wiped his tears away and put the button in front of one of the chessmen. "Look here, here he is, and look how he raises his head when he crows, look, look,

Cock-a-doodle-do!"

Rudi grabbed the button with both hands and smiled.

"If he didn't do anything else, your grocer", said Franz, "apart from holding party membership, then nothing will happen to him."

"If he didn't do anything else ..., as if it were a crime, you know very well how many joined just to secure their livelihoods, civil servants, high-ranking officials and so on."

Franz watched the movements of the young woman as she squatted down beside the children and got the girl to explain the situation to her.

"That there is the meadow, and those are the stables, and here's a tram shed", said the girl.

"You mean a coach shed", the woman corrected her.

"We say tram shed in the Tenth District, it's where all the tram carriages are", insisted the little girl.

"But surely you only say that if it's a big building with lots of carriages. Farmers only have one or two vehicles and they are kept in a coach shed."

"Many people will lose their jobs", said Herbert.

"Have you ever been to a farmyard?" asked the woman.

The girl did not answer immediately, she seemed to be thinking about it.

"They can't sack all the good people", said Franz and listened as little Hilde said: "Once in Oberlaa, we went on a hike across the Laaer Berg, there were twenty cows in the barn."

"A dairy-farm maybe?" asked the woman .

"What's a dairy-farm?" asked the child.

"A dairy-farm is a place with lots of cows, that's where they sell the milk."

"Yes, it was a dairy-farm like that", said the child.

"You know that there are advantages to being a party member, don't you?" Herbert remarked.

"Of course, there used to be advantages, not so many any more nowadays and tomorrow nobody will want to have ever been a part of it. But it's the number of fellow travellers that lends the whole system its legitimacy, or at least the appearance of legitimacy. It's their silent acceptance that contributes to the system whereby Jews

and people with different views get arrested and deported. I've been here for a few weeks now and I've seen enough. You don't need to tell me about it."

"But that's nonsense, a few hundred fewer party members wouldn't have made any difference at all. The right time was missed, over there in thirty-three and in thirty-eight over here, and now everything's going to be over soon anyway."

Steffi's hair had fallen down over her face. Now she straightened up and pushed it back. "Keep on playing", she said and turned towards the men, got caught in the coloured paper chain dangling from the Christmas tree, had to free herself from it and threw it back over the branch. There she stood, with her hands on her hips in front of them. "Why did you laugh when Hilde wanted to slaughter the rooster? Children should get on with each other!"

"Yes, Steffi, they'll get on wonderfully, once the chicken soup is on the table and the rooster has been forgotten", said Franz.

"You're cruel", whispered Steffi. She stood close to the men and Franz looked at her hands. They were slightly fleshy, but her skin seemed very smooth.

"Cruel? How so? That's life. We have to ..."

"We don't have to talk about it", Steffi interrupted.

"Look", Franz pointed to the children. "They're already playing again. Even if the rooster had been slaughtered, they would have been playing together again fairly soon."

"Not Rudi. He's a very sensitive child. It would have been a big shock for him", returned Steffi.

"If that's the case, it's going to be hard for him later on", replied Franz. "Make sure he gets toughened up a bit. The times aren't favourable to sensitive souls at the moment."

"These damned politics", hissed the woman. "It's enough that Herbert had to pay for them with his leg. We don't want to have any more to do with them, do we?" With her last words she turned towards her husband.

He shook his head. "Rudi's going to have a better life."

"Exactly", returned the woman. "That's why it's much better to live quietly inside your own four walls and pay no attention to what the big shots are doing."

"So, you think we should just wait for them to send us here and

there for our legs to be shot off?" said Franz.

"Do you think you can change things?" asked Steffi angrily. "The law is always on the side of the powerful. There will always be those who get the others to do their dirty work for them. We can't change that."

"That's just it, it's the excuse everyone uses, that they are just little cogs in the machine, that they can't do anything, can't change anything, but it's just not true. The smallest cog is important, and if it doesn't do the work it's supposed to, then the big wheels can't do their job either. Twelve men from Palestine managed to change the whole world. We can do it too, if we want to."

"Well. Listen to that." The woman shook her head. "I didn't know that you were such a Christian." With that she went back to the door.

"Christian, my arse", said Franz.

Steffi had already disappeared into the kitchen.

"You're quite right", said Herbert. "But so is she. Look at this world. What did they really change, those twelve?"

Franz didn't quite know how to answer.

They sat on the side of the road and mothers picked the lice from the heads of their children, squashed them between their fingernails, and looked every now and then at the old men who went about begging between the soldiers. There was a Red Army petrol storage facility in the village church, and German tanks had shot it into flames. Now only sooty walls were left. Geese waddled along them and a skinny horse scratched its back on the door. Grass was already growing in clumps on the remaining walls. A wet summer had passed since the fire, and the rumbling of the artillery had been heard for a while. The women crossed themselves occasionally. Oil lamps were burning in the corners of the peasant huts, illuminating the little icons there. Christianity? Crossing yourself seemed a magic formula, for when your own strength was failing. The old people still slept on the porcelain stoves the way they had always done, the children on the new steel bedsteads. Achievements of the recent Five-Year-Plan. The walls in the tool shed were insulated with faded newspapers. Wallpaper from yesterday: Lenin in five different situations, and Stalin in ten. The People's Father soaked with rain, the Great Comrade as champion of youth, and then

visiting old workers with a bunch of roses, or in discussion with his miner comrades, snow and ice had chewed holes into the paper, the pictures of athletes were still well preserved, those of the sick in their white hospital beds were somewhat worn. A hook was fixed to the wall, a bundle of frayed string hung from it and next to it a cluster of garlic, swallows had built a nest and their droppings had fallen on the newspaper, on the steel works, on the face of Comrade Konjew. The sickle and hammer and the red star everywhere. But there were black crosses on the wings and fuselages and the low-flying aircraft which approached them, and the same symbols were on the turrets of the tanks which bulldozed the wood and mud-brick huts to the ground. A crusade against Bolshevism, a crusade against the heathens, a crusade to win back the Holy Land. Under this sign you will be victorious. The black cross of the Teutonic Order. The sword thrust into the throat of the enemy. He who lives by the sword. Conquest. Victory. The bloody clothes of the Knight Templar. What remained of the ideas of the Twelve? Katharians drowned in their own blood, one St. Bartholomew's night after another. The teachings of the first communities? Hadn't they already been adulterated under Constantine, used for the sake of power, twisted and falsified?

The icon in the corner showed, as icons usually did, the mother of Christ, the approachable one, a woman who was there for everyone. Twenty-five years of propaganda which had trumpeted the new truth here, there and everywhere, which had enlightened the people, shown them that all this was superstition, which had poked fun at all things religious, which had mocked everything not under the sign of the red star, which refused to accept anything you couldn't touch with your hands or see with your eyes. Opium, a dulling of the mind, empty promises. Anything which detracted from the great goal of the proletarian world-revolution, from any active changing of the world, no, the conditions, the systems! Only W. I. Lenin and his great successor and fulfiller of his plans, Josef Stalin, only the hammer and sickle counted for anything. Under this sign we shall be victorious. No sacrifice too great to reach the goal: machine gun salvos against dissidents, Trotzkiites and Bucharinites. Pogroms in all the republics of the great Fatherland of all workers. Hadn't they been sceptical, hadn't they just dismissed

these reports about the Soviet Union as propaganda of the bourgeois reaction. Hadn't there been many comrades in the years between Dollfuß and Hitler who thought that the direction the party was taking was too indecisive, not focused enough, and changed to the Communists, hadn't many of them fled to Russia? Brunner, he often remembered Brunner now, and he also remembered that his mother had shown him an official report: drowned while swimming. How many had there been, who drowned while swimming, fell while climbing or met with similar ends? He thought about Dozekal and the report that he died of pneumonia in Dachau. Giordano Bruno's fate was well known, but how many thousands of others were not?

"Murder and war, hunger and rape, same as before", said Herbert.

Franz could still see the walls papered with the large sheets of newspaper, and the narrow fragile shoulders of a Ukrainian girl next to the swinging cluster of garlic. He saw the shaven head with its two dark eyes staring at him, uncertain and afraid, and he saw the trembling hands which did not dare to grab the bread. "Of course, of course", he replied, and the image now blended itself with that of the two playing children in front of them, now peacefully playing children again, "but is that a reason to support murder and war?"

"No, it is not", said Herbert, "only, you know, I tend to think she's right: We're not going to make a difference."

"That's not true!" said Franz, annoyed at this stubbornness. "We've made a lot of difference. We'd still be living in caves if we hadn't changed anything. Appendicitis would still be deadly. And the things we achieved in 1848 or 1890 or 1918, rights for the workers and their families - not even the Nazis could take that away, or at least only partly during this war, and even then only with emergency clauses. The workers will get these rights back!"

"In Siberia?"

"Why do you keep going on about Siberia all the time? Austria is going to be free and independent. It's quite clear as far as I'm concerned." And again he saw the trembling hands of the girl as she grabbed the bread at last. "You know, I often think that nothing in this world ever gets lost. Everything is in a state of change,

like changes to different compounds in chemistry. What we have done unto others, shall be done unto us, the torture and the kindness. Granted, the compounds come in different groupings, have different names, and there are always the innocent ones who get hurt, both on our side and on theirs. But many of these 'innocent ones' - all of us, we're partly guilty too. Because we allowed injustice to happen."

"What about the children?" asked Herbert.

"Yes, the children", said Franz, and looked across to the two children playing.

The men were silent.

The men faced each other. It was a sparsely furnished room. A desk with telephone and some dossiers, behind it the *Sturmbannführer,* behind him his chair, pushed back, and then bare wall, with the inevitable Hitler portrait hanging high up.

"We know what's going on", said the *Sturmbannführer.* "We know all about the circumstances surrounding your head injury, *Herr Oberleutnant.* But times have changed. Believe me, when we shoot this time, you won't be getting up again."

"I don't understand", said *Oberleutnant* Wohlleben. "Do you want to hold me responsible for something which happened eight years ago in completely different circumstances? I did my duty then, just as I do today. And for the record, it wasn't me who shot someone, but rather me who was shot." Of course, he knew that since his brother's death his position had been weakened, that he'd lost his back-up so to speak. He thought of the door behind him, and of the ante-room behind the door where four SS-men were stationed, the two who'd brought him here and two who seemed to be permanent fixtures in the building. What did they want with him so suddenly? The Intelligence Service had known since 1938 that he had been a member of the *Heimwehr.*

"You, oh yes, you do your duty!" said the *Sturmbannführer* now. He had a somewhat guttural accent, Wohlleben guessed he was dealing with a Styrian or Carinthian. "Where is *Unteroffizier* Rainer, where's the ancillary staff-member Grazl? If you had been doing your duty, we would have arrested these people long ago, *Herr Oberleutnant!"*

"Herr Sturmbannführer, you seem to confuse my position with yours. I am an officer of the Military Intelligence Service and not an organ of", he hesitated, "of the police-force", he added. He had almost said party police, but bitten it back at the last moment.

But the other man exploded anyway: "Indeed, we'll show you just which body is responsible for keeping order in the state. Those who are not for us are against us. You know what to expect if you don't follow our instructions."

Richard shook his head. "I don't understand you, *Herr Sturmbannführer.* What instructions do you mean?"

Aha, he thought, they simply want to use you. They're looking for some starting point, in order to do whatever they want with you. And what is it they want?

The other one hooked his thumb into his belt and looked him up and down. *"Herr Oberleutnant,* you'll have to make up your mind."

In what way? thought Richard, but he said: "You know what my task is. Today it's more important than ever. The air-warning system is dependent on it, as are the supplies to the front and the working population. We've built up a fine network with a lot of care for the protection of the Fatherland. But you obviously don't know much about it. What is it you want of me?"

"You! You!" raged the *Sturmbannführer.* You and the Fatherland! What does it mean to you then, the Fatherland? This lousy city, everything higgledy-piggledy, right down to its architectural styles, this Vienna with its slimy population, brewing neither hot nor cold, enthusiasm yesterday and then today, when courage is called for, when it's necessary to prove yourself, you cop out. Just like in 1918! But it will stop. It will stop! Otherwise, you'll come to an arrangement with the enemy. But that's not on, not with us, gentlemen. I can guarantee you, that won't be on. Fatherland, my arse!"

"Herr Sturmbannführer, I would just like to point out that the Führer himself has referred to Vienna as a pearl, and promised to give this city a suitable setting. A pearl, *Herr Sturmbannführer.* I sincerely hope you are of the same opinion as your Commander-in-Chief and Führer."

"A pearl indeed", growled the other man, "she'll get her setting, just like Berlin and Hamburg did. Look here", and now he

was shouting again, "we're not here to discuss irrelevancies. We need a contact-man, someone from your department to co-operate with us. You are the right person for that job. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand", said Wohlleben. He thought: This is what this introduction was in aid of. They think they have a hold over me because of where I stood back in 1934. "Yes, I understand", he said again. And then in an ironic tone: "So, I have your confidence then." He thought again of the four men in the ante-room.

The *Sturmbannführer* laughed drily. "Ha, not yet, but I'm expecting you to earn it as soon as possible. So come on, tell us, where did the girl go. It wasn't to Brünn."

"Really, she didn't go to Brünn?" asked the *Oberleutnant*. "Hasn't she arrived there? The office did send a cable saying that she hadn't reported in, but that doesn't mean much. I really can't imagine that Grazl wouldn't have gone there. She's not the type to use her own initiative. I issued her with transfer-orders to Brünn in any case. My people will have confirmed that already. You've already sniffed about extensively, I see."

Take that, he thought.

"Silence!" snapped the *Sturmbannführer* immediately. "Kindly use a different tone if you want to co-operate with me." His hand reached for his pistol.

"It's you who want to co-operate with me", replied Wohlleben cooly, while he observed the other man. He got the impression the *Sturmbannführer* had lost a little of his confidence. "You mustn't forget", he added, "that it doesn't make sense to put questions to a dead man. What is it that you want of me then? You can't convince me that all this is because of Grazl. She's an insignificant little goose. Maybe she fell in love somewhere along the way and got sidetracked. It's not completely out of the question, given her age. She'll be arrested one of these days. So what is it you really want?"

The *Sturmbannführer* came round the table and stopped directly in front of him: "It's possible", he said, "that the disappearance of Grazl has nothing to do with it, but there are things going on that we don't like, and you're going to help us find out what they are. Understood?"

"What sort of things exactly?" asked the *Oberleutnant*, know-

ing full well the other man had expected an "Of course, *Herr Sturmbannführer*" in reply.

"*Herr Oberleutnant*", said the SS-leader in a threatening tone, "it would be very easy for us to portray your actions against the heroic men of the SS-group No. 89 in a most unfavourable light. A Peoples' Court will judge your behaviour. You know very well that you only hold the position you do thanks to your brother, whom we shall remember forever. In his memory, and in memory of his heroic death, I remind you again that it is your damned duty to support us in every possible way."

"I know my duty, *Herr Sturmbannführer.* Yes, I know very well what ... what I owe the memory of my brother."

"Very well!" The man stepped back and looked him up and down again. "And now tell me, how do you know this Dr Mayerhofer, and what is your sergeant doing there?"

So, thought Richard, that's it then. Of course, they watched all discharged concentration camp inmates; he'd known for a while that they had their eye on Mayerhofer. He also knew that he dare not hesitate with his answer, or else he would certainly appear suspicious to the other officer. His answer had to be swift and correct. "Which Mayerhofer do you mean, *Herr Sturmbannführer?* I know two. One is a dentist and the other one is manager of a publishing house or something like that. The dentist's name is Franz and the other one is called Georg."

The *Sturmbannführer* leaned slightly forward on his desk and drummed impatiently with his fingertips on the table-top: "We mean Georg, of course, the one that your sergeant's working with."

"I see", said Richard. "But he's also seeing the dentist for treatment."

"To hell with your dentist, we're not interested in him. You, of course, know Dr Georg Mayerhofer from before, but Prannowitz, that's the name of your sergeant, isn't it, he comes from the other side. We know that. We know everything. What does he have to do with Mayerhofer?"

"Well, for my part", Wohlleben replied, "I know Dr Mayerhofer from the student drinking-bouts. I was still living with my parents then, we were all unemployed before thirty-eight and Dr

Mayerhofer was the leader of a German national student group, which held its monthly meetings in the neighbourhood pub. I saw him quite often during that time. Then I hadn't heard from him in years. We assumed he'd got a good position in the old Reich because we all knew he was a closet Nazi. Yes, that's what we all assumed at the the time. And then I met him again a few months ago. He didn't look well, said he was ill. And he also said that he was working in the printing-press of a publishing house."

He saw Mayerhofer dressed in the shabby suit, raincoat over his arm in front of him. That was the second meeting and it wasn't quite as accidental as the first had been. Lost all my teeth, he'd said. Knocked out, he'd said. Not much more. He'd just made an unmistakable gesture and nodded with his head. His shoulders were drooping through lack of strength.

"And the sergeant?" The voice of the *Sturmbannführer* took on a dangerous edge.

"I recommended him. He needs the money. His flat was completely destroyed, and as the printing-press deals only with specialised literature....why not?"

"You, *Herr, Herr...*"

"*Oberleutnant*", said Wohlleben.

"Yes! *Oberleutnant!* You call that specialised literature? It's absurd. We're going to shut this speciality right down! You can be sure of that!"

"Liturgical texts for Catholic mass and other devotional texts, that's what Dr Mayerhofer told me anyway. And the sergeant has only ever mentioned that kind of thing as well."

"Liturgical texts indeed! You don't have a clue, do you! Devotional texts! Leaflets for Russian prisoners of war! Devotional texts. Inciting acts of sabotage. What do you think of that?"

Wohlleben's eyelids had narrowed, as if he were trying to see more clearly. If this was true and the Intelligence Service knew about it, he had a problem. But perhaps it was only guesswork and the *Sturmbannführer* was trying to bluff. No, they couldn't have any proof, otherwise the printing-press would have been closed down already, and Prannowitz, and especially Dr Mayerhofer would have been arrested long ago. He shook his head.

"And you allow these ... these traitors to carry on? *Herr Sturm-*

bannführer? If this is all true you can kiss your uniform goodbye."

The other man laughed loudly. "I see! Indeed, you'd have me arrested, would you?"

"It would be my duty to report your behaviour. It's encouraging the undermining of our fighting strength and perhaps more than that as well."

"Quite so, definitely more than that", said the *Sturmbannführer* and showed his teeth. He was a lot younger than Wohlleben. "It's reassuring that you know your duty so well and are prepared to carry it out, *Herr Oberleutnant,* very reassuring. But you can save yourself the trouble of a report, you know. Believe you me, everything will be all right, once we have taken things up, *Herr Oberleutnant."*

Suddenly Wohlleben remembered to ask: "Do you have some of these leaflets?"

"That's just it", exploded the *Sturmbannführer.* "You have to get hold of some for us! And another thing: In Switzerland there's an office or a person called Pakbo, there is also a captain in the Swiss army by the name of Waibel and in Upper Italy there's supposed to be a Luftwaffe officer by the name of Ettenhofen. We need more information on these men. Do you understand? Their exact whereabouts. Information on branches and people, codenames, who they're working for and so on. We know your office has contacts in Upper Italy and maybe even in neutral Switzerland, you'll find a way to see the secret papers. It's a golden opportunity for you, *Herr Oberleutnant!* If you can find what we need, we might be able to forget which side you were on in thirty-four."

Once again the *Oberleutnant* saw himself standing in front of his *Heimwehr* commander: Wohlleben, find out where the Reds have disappeared to. In two weeks time you'll be able to tell us their hide-out. It's for your own good, Wohlleben. We only want what's best for you, believe me! He saw Leni and her husband again, the *Schutzbündler,* and he saw Franz as he brought the news of their deaths.

Yes, they all wanted what was best for him. Time after time they had all wanted what was best for him, it was only he who time after time didn't seem to want it at all.

He'd thrown his medal at the captain, the same medal the Federal Leader of the *Heimwehr* had decorated him with that very day. They'd all excused him because of his recent head-injury. But it was clear that he had to resign. Of course, that had happened over ten years ago and he'd seen a lot and gained a fair bit of experience since. He knew that he wouldn't be able to get away with the same sort of thing so easily today. Would he be able to get away with anything at all?

"I understand, *Herr Sturmbannführer",* he decided to say. Of course, there's no other way, at least not now, perhaps not later either: they'll be watching me, I'll have to have some successes for them. "The names sound familiar, maybe I've heard them before at the office. But as for the Russian leaflets ... I really think that's stretching the bounds of credibility. Who knows what they're printing there. But I'll sound out the sergeant anyway."

"Very well", said the *Sturmbannführer.* It seemed he felt relieved as well. He reached into his pocket, pulled out a packet of cigarettes and offered one to Wohlleben.

The two of them took the fags in their mouths and the *Oberleutnant* offered a light.

"I can see already", remarked the SS-leader with an ironic smile playing about his lips, "that we shall work very well together."

"Quite possibly", Wohlleben remarked, and wondered where he could find Lieutenant-Colonel Perkal at this hour. He wanted to discuss the situation with him once he'd got out of here. "We have contacts in Milan, Verona, Udine and Venice. The most important is Milan, without a doubt. I think I might be able to find out a few things there. I'm not quite sure how it works with Switzerland. I'm sure it's not official. What is it you're after exactly? Zurich? Geneva? There's a Luftwaffe Contact Office in Zurich. That's right. But who's in charge ...?" He acted as if he were already thinking in the manner the Intelligence Service expected of him. Of course he had to mention Verona, if he left it out and the *Sturmbannführer* already knew what was going on, he'd get suspicious immediately. Obviously, the name of Captain Ettenreich hadn't registered properly. In any case, it was enough already.

"Perhaps it will be to our advantage in the end, having the sergeant out there, this way we can find out exactly what is going

on." Play along, he thought, just play along!

"Excellent!" said the *Sturmbannführer*, "just get on with it, get on with it!" He now moved back behind his desk, opened a drawer, leafed through a few papers. Then he pulled out a sheet and handed it to Wohlleben.

"Here is my telephone number and the telephone numbers of two of my men. One of us is always available. My comrades are to be informed, if by chance I am not available. And now, good luck!" He pressed a button fixed to the underside of the desk-top. The two men who had accompanied Wohlleben entered and clicked the heels of their boots. "Drive the *Oberleutnant* back to his Command", said the SS-leader.

The *Oberleutnant* had raised the arm to the salute, when the *Sturmbannführer* said: "One moment. Do you know where Field Post number three hundred and thirty-five thousand, five hundred and twenty-two is situated?"

"Three hundred and thirty-five thousand, five hundred and twenty-two? No, I'd have to run a check."

"It's also quite correct to call it thirty-three, fifty-five, twenty-two", offered the *Sturmbannführer*.

"Yes, yes", said Wohlleben, "but even so, I don't know it off the top of my head like that. Thirty-three, fifty-five, twenty-two, I'll look it up in the office and report the location to you by telephone."

"Thank you, that won't be necessary. I know already. It's in Berlin. It's the address that Grazl is using to write to her mother. What do you think of that?"

Wohlleben shook his head. "And we don't know about it! That's rich." He managed to act outraged. "How do you know?"

The SS-leader waved dismissively "We just know."

"You'll be able to arrest the girl in Berlin quite easily. Or have you already done so? Personally, I think that business with the Russian prisoners of war was simple stupidity rather than any manifestation of planned hostile activity. In all the time that Grazl was with me, I never once had occasion to observe any attitude contrary to the Party or the Reich."

"You are speaking on her behalf?"

"I was her superior. I had the impression she was still half a

child. When you court-marshal her, please take my testimony into account under extenuating circumstances." Just wait and see, you can't have me that easily. You haven't got her, can't get her, not if you turn the whole of Berlin upside down. You won't find her, because she's not there. But please, think I believe everything you say. Just go on thinking that. The longer you think that I believe you, the better. Of course, that's the Field Post number of a Berlin branch where one of us is stationed. If you don't know, it can only be good for us. I hope you'll never find out, or at least only when it's too late and this particular branch has been replaced by another one in a different location. Yes, of course, it's a huge detour. But preferable to a detour via the Intelligence Service. Just wait, I'll keep on making you feel secure: "Why didn't she go to Brünn?" he asked in a calm voice, "did she have a good reason?"

"She said, you had warned her."

It took a huge effort for Wohlleben to feign consternation: "That's quite impossible! And you believed her? Now I understand your questions about the girl when I arrived." How many lies are we going to dish out to each other, he thought. A dangerous game.

"Whether we believed her or not", said the other man, "we have to check everything out. But you've convinced me, *Herr Oberleutnant,* that the girl was lying. I trust you, *Herr Oberleutnant."*

The last sentence was heavily emphasised, perhaps it was spoken for the benefit of the two escorts. In any case, Wohlleben was now dismissed.

He trusts me, he thought. It was ridiculous. One watching the other. He trusts me to the same extent I trust him! How is it all going to end? It was a sentence which repeated itself over and over like an alarm bell in Wolleben's mind.

The car which was to bring him back was just passing along Marc-Aurel-Straße when the air-raid warning began to sound. "We'll get you there yet, *Herr Oberleutnant*", said the driver. But it was scarcely five minutes later, they had just turned into Augustinerstraße from Michaelerplatz, when the sirens started wailing again. Air-raid warning. The approaching bombers must be quite close. The sound of hammering anti-aircraft guns could be heard already.

Wohlleben asked the driver to stop. "Go on", he said, "get to a

shelter!"

They had just reached Lobkowitzplatz. He ran straight into the next doorway, it belonged to the Augustine monastery. The two SS-men, young fellows, hurried across the street to seek shelter in the cellar of the *Philipshof*, whose solid construction was favoured by many in the area. He could already hear the first bomb detonations as he felt his way down the steps to the cellar.

He didn't get far before the earth began to shake with a heavy rumbling, the impact of explosions, the sound of pattering mortar. Then the dim light, which up till now had illuminated the steep staircase down into the cellar and the corridor spreading into a labyrinth, went out. Wohlleben saw the flickering gleam of a lamp at the end of one of the tunnels. Three figures in front of him hurried towards the light, sometimes obscuring it completely. There was a smell of mould and mustiness. The walls that he occasionally brushed against were damp. And then a terrific noise, the earth trembled under his feet, pieces of mortar rained down from all sides. There was a continuous rumbling and rattling.

It must be quite close, thought Wohlleben. He too began to run towards the flickering emergency light.

Suddenly, it went out. He hesitated for a moment, but then felt his way along the wall. The regulation painted phosphorescent line on the wall, which was supposed to direct people to the shelter, was barely visible, even once his eyes had got used to the darkness. Wohlleben groped his way along and after a few steps he bumped into someone afraid to go on in the pitch darkness.

"Oh, oh", he heard the voice of an old woman.

"Are you all right?" asked Wohlleben. He felt a hand fumbling at his side, then fingers clinging onto the sleeve of his lower right arm. Again a rattling and a knocking, sand and rubble poured down onto the two people. "Come on, come on", he cried and tried to press on in the direction he had been heading. As he felt the resistance of the other body, as he felt the burden of the strange woman hanging from his arm like a sack blocking his way, he asked: "Are you all right? Can't you walk?" And when the woman only sighed softly and gasped: "What's the matter? What is it?"

"My heart, my heart", the woman was whispering now. "Oh, oh..."

Wohlleben, who until now had been somewhat impatient, thought suddenly of his mother. The large, strong woman, who had never before been ill, had in her last years of life suffered increasingly from angina, and sedatives had been her only relief. "Don't you carry any medicine with you?" he asked now. And when he received no answer, and could hear only an incomprehensible mumbling, he bent down towards the woman.

"Holy Mary, mother of Christ, pray for us poor sinners, now and in the hour ...", he heard the woman whisper - followed immediately by the falling of heavy bombs close by. More rubble fell on top of them. Wohlleben realised: There was no sense now in pressing on. He crouched next to the old woman by the wall of the tunnel, searched in his trouser pocket for his lighter, and recognised in its flickering flame a bundled-up figure next to him on the dirty ground. Damn it, he thought, your prayers aren't going to help us. This God doesn't care for poor dogs like us. What am I going to do with this old woman? I can't very well leave her. "Don't you have any medicine on you?" he asked again. And now he could feel the old woman pushing her handbag towards him. The hands were trembling so heavily that she was unable to open it. Wohlleben searched carefully through the bag. His fingers felt a little bottle. Could that be it? How on earth could he administer it to her, in this darkness, and without any liquid? "What is it?" he asked and bent down again to the woman, certain of hearing the litany of prayers again.

"Drops", the woman whispered instead. "Drops on a lump of sugar."

What bloody nonsense, Wohlleben thought. How can you put drops on a lump of sugar in the pitch dark? He rummaged further in the handbag and felt a paper bag with lumps of sugar. Well, here it is. He reached for his lighter. No, it's no good. He couldn't let the woman take anything in her trembling hands. It would fall straight to the ground and he wouldn't be able to find it again. Uncertain of what to do, he stood there and thought. Finally, he took a lump of sugar, uncorked the bottle, put the sugar to the mouth of the bottle and turned it upside down. He could smell the sweetish syrup of the medicine and felt a sticky liquid trickling along his fingers, even though he tipped it quickly back up the

right way again. He closed the little bottle and, sugar in hand, searched for the mouth of the old woman. He touched the head-scarf, felt along the cheeks and finally put the sugar between cold, trembling, soft lips. Only a few minutes ago, the young SS-leader, sinewy, tall and strong had been standing before him.

A handsome fellow, he spoke in a dark voice with clear vowels and a guttural scratching on some of the consonants. A young fellow, one who had shown with his reach for the pistol what he was prepared to do at any moment, and what he had perhaps done several times already. And now he was standing here in the darkness, next to this strange old woman who needed his help: shrivelled up and ugly, at the end of her life, yet in spite of that, clinging on with all her strength. In front of him, he could hear rattling and rumbling. It still sounded like falling pieces of mortar in between the shouting and whimpering. He could feel the bony hand of the woman on his arm.

He tried again to produce a little light with his lighter. What was the matter with the old woman? She couldn't stay here in the corridor forever. In the light of the little flame he saw a bony, pale face and a head-scarf, he noticed a drooping lower lip. "Shall we try it again?" he asked, urging her to go on.

"No, please no", she said.

"What if I help you?"

"Dear God, you don't know what you're doing. Let me die here. Leave me."

"It is not far to the shelter."

"No", it sounded like a cry of terror. "Not there, no. I, I ... It's not for me."

Not for her? What was that supposed to mean? Wohlleben asked himself. In the meantime, the little flame had gone out.

"Come on", he asked her again. "The shelter is for everyone."

"No, please don't", the voice of the woman sounded like the voice of a child now. "It's no good for me."

There's something wrong, he thought. Again he sparked his lighter and looked into the face beside him. Ah, yes, that could be it: A Jew! And now he understood too why the old woman hadn't wanted to go to the shelter. It was, of course, for Aryans only.

What should he do? Wouldn't it be best to free himself from the

fingers which clenched his sleeve, to go on and leave the woman behind?

Had she guessed his thoughts? The hand detached itself from his sleeve. As they stood in the darkness again, he heard the rustling of clothes, sand running down, a vague noise as if something was falling. It seemed that the woman, who up till now had been leaning against the wall, had now sunk right to the ground.

Pass on by! Pass on by! Keep passing on by. Wasn't that how it all started, with him and all those others like him who didn't agree, but passed on by? In Paris, the Secretary of the German Legation, Ernst vom Rath, was shot by a fanatical Jew. It must have been in November thirty-eight. He'd heard it on the radio that same evening and was gripped immediately by a sense of foreboding. It was the commentary and the tone of voice in which the incident was reported. When he went to Klosterneuburg the next morning to catch the bus, he could already see it. Hitler Youths standing in front of shops which belonged to Jews. Some of the windows were smashed and the shelves plundered. At Mayer's, where he bought his suits, two adolescent youths, with the shouted encouragement of ten to fifteen younger boys, forced the owner to paint the words JEW and DIRTY JEW on the still-intact panes of his shop-windows with some lime they had obviously brought with them for that very purpose. Mayer's eyes were swollen, the lid of his right eye was swollen blue and red, his clothes were dirty. The man was trembling throughout his entire body. One of the leaders - both of them wearing breeches with their brown shirts and armbands with the inscription *HY-patrol* - had a pistol in his hand, the other had a rubber truncheon. The one with the truncheon shouted "Sarah, where's Sarah! Sarah has to come out! We'll tattoo the star of David on her fat arse!" The younger boys laughed and shouted in a chorus: "Sarah! Sarah! Sarah!"

Wohlleben had to hurry, he had to catch his bus. But why? There was another one fifteen minutes later, and another fifteen minutes later again. He had a job which gave him a certain independence, he didn't have to clock in. No-one would say anything if he were half an hour late. He hesitated for a few seconds. "Sarah! Sarah! Sarah! Dirty Jew! Dirty Jew!" the sound floated across the road towards him.

A few passers-by stopped, shook their heads, others laughed. "It serves them right", Wohlleben heard a voice close by. "Those Jewish blood-suckers. Everyone knows how little they pay their workers. It's easy for them to sell things cheaper than our Aryan businessmen, the way they exploit our good German girls. They have to work for peanuts. Yes, and then of course the junior boss takes them to bed. Those who aren't willing can just look for another job! We know what it's like, we know very well!" It was a small man who was speaking like this to the passers-by. "There has to be an end to it. It's about time someone put an end to it." He looked all around him.

"Jew! Jew! Dirty Jew!" it sounded from across the road, and "Sarah! Sarah! Sarah!"

A few passers-by stole away. With bent heads, with hunched shoulders, they continued on their way. Others laughed. Others nodded in agreement with the little man's words. An old woman with a shopping bag said: "But it's not right to treat all of them this way. There are good people amongst them too, and by the way, Mayer doesn't even have a son." Why am I not saying anything, thought Wohlleben. The whole thing is a travesty. Old Mayer said something to the youth with the pistol. Wohlleben couldn't make it out. The rabble over there was shouting and yelling too loudly. He saw the tears trickling down the cheeks of the old man. He thought back to when he was a child, and how his mother had bought his first suit at Mayer's, the way Frau Mayer had given him a bar of chocolate, how Mother had haggled with Herr Mayer, how they had agreed on a good price and how Herr Mayer had said: "Because it's the young gentleman's first suit." It was the first time someone had called him a young gentleman.

"Jew! Jew! Dirty Jew!" they were shouting across the street.

He knew one of the tormentors. He was the son of one of the local secondary school teachers. His parents were nice people, known to be good Catholics, were in and out of the monastery. The bus! He had to catch his bus. He decided to walk on. But as he approached the corner, he saw a young Augustinian monk approach the group of rabble-rousers and speak to the ringleader, the son of the secondary school teacher. Wohlleben was already too far away to understand what was said. He only noticed that the youths

suddenly fell silent, the boy who had been spoken to, put the pistol in his trouser pocket, the small group dispersed and the priest and Herr Mayer went into the shop together. Why didn't I do it, why wasn't I the one? he asked himself. He missed his bus and had to wait for the next one, where he happened to sit opposite the old woman with the shopping bag. He was unable to look her in the eye. He was ashamed. And she probably hadn't even noticed him among all those people opposite Mayer's shop.

Pass on by, keep passing on by. It's not really any of one's business. It's always the others. One has one's own problems, one's own stresses, there is no need for one to interfere with other people. One ... Who is that? Me, always me! Always passing by, there, where someone might have needed me, because an injustice was being done to him, and where all I would have had to do was stand my ground like the Augustinian monk. I've always been against it, but never ever done anything about it, always let things pass on by.

The old woman next to him sighed softly. She must have slid down the wall of the tunnel to the ground, into the dirt, into the dust of the old walls. A suffocating surge of air swept by from the end of the tunnel, where the shelter was. It was oppressively quiet. At that moment, the smell of fire approached from the other end. He could clearly feel vapour and smoke funnelling past him like in a chimney. Back to the exit, back, Wohlleben thought in a flash. The attack must be over by now. He thought he could faintly hear the long wailing of the sirens to indicate the All-Clear, the departure of the hostile squadrons. He would tell them upstairs that there was a person in need of help. He wouldn't mention that she was Jewish. There was no reason he should have known. Well, back to Augustinerstraße! Augustiner... Augustinian monk. Prannowitz working there in the monastery. And it's possible, quite possible, that they print subversive texts there. They would that sort of thing. And again a soft sigh next to him. Subversive. Damn it, was he the Good Samaritan? And while he thought, and was annoyed that this was happening to him, that it had to be him, that it was happening now... - he grabbed the woman again. He grabbed her shoulder, put his hand under her arm and pulled her up and tried to carry her to the exit. And in that first moment, as the woman hung there like an impossibly heavy weight on him, it seemed that through his help,

perhaps even through his will to help, through his caring attitude, through him doing his part, a part of the weakness, of the heaviness of the powerlessness of the old woman had disappeared. If at first he had been under the impression that he was dragging her, he could now hear a shuffling and soon a tripping next to him.

"Please, please", said a voice next to him, finally. "Please stop for a moment, just a moment."

They had reached the staircase, stopped and leaned next to each other against the wall in the pitch darkness. Wohlleben could hear the heavy breathing of the other person.

"It's better now, it's better", the voice whispered again. She didn't seem so old any more. "Let's try it", she said.

They had to stop and rest twice on their way up the steep steps. The woman apologized each time. "It's my heart. It's my heart, you know", she said each time. "It's thumping, I can feel it, in my neck, in my head. It's too much. It's too much!"

It was clear to Wohlleben that she wasn't referring to her present condition, but to the wider picture of what might await her.

As they approached the exit, slowly enough, and the daylight started to seep in gradually, allowing her silhouette to emerge grey and ghost-like, the woman stopped again and said: "Thank you. I do thank you. But now you must leave me alone. Go. Go. I have to continue on alone now. I am much better too, much better." And as he showed no reaction: "Go on, please go!"

If a moment ago he had toyed with the idea of just propping her up against the wall and wishing her all the best - after all he had done his duty, had helped her to the exit, she had recovered and could continue by herself, he, an *Oberleutnant* of the Luftwaffe could not very well walk through the city with an old Jewess on his arm - if that's what he had been thinking, it now seemed impossible to him. Or was it obstinacy? Perhaps it was obstinacy as well. He gripped the woman even harder under her arm, pulled her along to the exit and said: "Do you think I hadn't noticed? I'd already noticed when we were down there."

And she knew what he meant.

When they arrived at the street, they realised that no-one noticed them at all. Rubble, mortar and beams were lying all over the place, smoke and fine dust still hung in the air. Every now and then,

pieces of mortar fell onto the street from the buildings in the direction of the Ringstraße. Of the vast *Philipshof* building, only a few cracked walls and some great heaps of rubble remained. The vehicle which had brought Wohlleben there must have been buried beneath the rubble and the collapsing walls. The two young SS-men? Would they still be alive under the rubble? Would anyone be alive? Thick black clouds of smoke gushed from the opera house. It must be a huge fire.

Now it was the woman who guided Wohlleben, not strongly or forcefully, but gently, for as he stood among the smoke and dust, not really knowing what to do, he began to walk towards the fire and the ruins. "Come", she said softly. She seemed to have recovered a little. "Here, into Bräunerstraße. I hope everything is all right."

They stepped over pieces of wall, climbed over beams, heaps of bricks. In Josefsplatz, two men lay in the curb, covered in blood. One was being attended to by an old man with a bag. Next to him, also bent over the bloody body, stood a woman wearing a white armband with a red cross painted on it. The clouds of smoke, blown across from the Ringstraße in gusts by the wind, grew darker and thicker. A few times, Wohlleben had the impression that the woman would be unable to continue. She leaned against the nearest wall and closed her eyes for a while. In the end, he took her arm again, to support her. He could see now that she couldn't be as old as he had thought in the darkness of the tunnel. She might be a little over fifty.

Then they were sitting opposite each other in a tiny, almost lightless room. The only window looked out onto a ventilation shaft which was scarcely three metres square. Dark pictures hung on the walls of the small room in three, four rows above one another. It was impossible to make out details. But they all appeared to be heads, faces which seemed animated by an inner light. There was an old wooden bed, a wardrobe with doors that wouldn't quite close, a rickety table with paint-pots and a few jam jars with brushes.

"I would still be lying there in that dark corridor, I wouldn't have been able to get up that staircase without you", said the woman.

Wohlleben waved it aside. "They would have found you."

"And would have left me there", she replied.

For a moment there was silence. Neither of them spoke a word. Richard stared at the dark paintings, icon-like in their uniform presentations. From outside, there came the sound of wailing ambulance and fire brigade sirens.

And here in this narrow room he heard about it for the first time: They weren't just being taken to concentration camps and held there for the duration of the war, they weren't just being locked up in a ghetto to torment each other, inadequately supplied and cut off from the outside world, they weren't put into labour camps to die slowly of malnutrition and physical exhaustion, they weren't given a trial, not even at a People's Court, they weren't even put in front of a firing squad. They were gassed, like vermin, in their thousands, in places built expressly for that purpose.

It was silent again in the room. Herr Mayer, Mayer, who sold ready-made clothing, his wife and his two daughters. Them too...? He had neither heard of, nor seen them, not since the autumn of thirty-eight. It didn't take long for the shop to be made Aryan, like so many others, like all of them. The words "Jew! Dirty Jew!" were cleaned off the windows. The door displayed a banner in black-white-and-red which read *Our Greeting is Heil Hitler!* And Herr and Frau Mayer? Who cared about them? He lived out there in the river meadow with his old housekeeper, he got his news of what happened in the city from the newspapers and the radio, and he was finally called up, in spite of his head injury. The Mayer family had certainly left Klosterneuburg by that time. No, no-one knew where they were. No-one cared. Maybe a few old people might have been able to help, had they been asked. But who would have asked about that sort of thing?

"But", said the woman finally, "I'd like to give you a picture, Officer. You helped me, and I have nothing else to repay you with." She pointed with her bony fingers to the wall, where the heads with the burning eyes stared at him.

Wohlleben was still silent. Concentration camps, ghettos, People's Courts, shootings. The man or woman who had known about those things and kept silent, could find no words when they learnt of the extermination camps. And when one is mentioned in the same breath as murderers, all one can do is remain silent.

He got up and walked along the walls. He looked at the pictures one by one. Those large eyes, looking at him as if they were challenging him! Were they good pictures? He didn't know anything about that. All he could see were the eyes, everything else was just vague outline against the background. Sometimes there were raised hands as well - pleading or praying? He stopped in front of a small picture. If any at all, then this one. It would fit into one of his large coat pockets.

The woman nodded, she admired his good taste. It really is an exceptionally successful work. No, they're not real people. Just attempts to capture the human being and show more than just the body. It's difficult to express, she said, that's why she painted it. That spiritual something, which makes a human being human. Her friends got the paints for her.

He had to go! He'd had enough. Each new word came as an accusation. To make a human being human! A human being who exterminates other human beings like vermin! How could she in such an era ... in this situation?

Then he was down in the courtyard of the building, climbing over a heap of rubble into the small street, he saw the thick, black clouds of smoke and noticed the smell of burning, he asked himself: Where was he going?

Wasn't this smell of burning everywhere? The burning smell of the crematoria. We gassed them and burned them and now it's our turn to be burned, he thought. Yet, somehow, he still couldn't believe it. Somewhere within him there remained a spark of doubt, a spark of hope that it wasn't really like that at all, that it was all just the product of minds so suppressed and tortured that they were capable of conjuring up such monstrous pictures. But the smell of burning was real, it intensified, wafted in his direction in thick black clouds of smoke from the Opernring. He backtracked back the way he had come with the woman. In Augustinerstraße he could see the smoke from the roof of the opera house, welling out in relentless waves from behind the heaps of rubble of the *Philipshof*. He wanted to talk it all over with Lieutenant-Colonel Perkal, yes, and that business with the Intelligence Service too. Lieutenant-Colonel Perkal, that would be the best plan!

But now he realised that it was impossible to get through in that

direction. The mountains of rubble were too high, and loose pieces of wall were falling down everywhere. Groups of men from the Todt Organisation and the fire brigade were beginning the struggle to secure things, others were trying to dig out the air-raid shelter's emergency exit. Trying to get through that way was hopeless. He turned around and tried a different direction. Wouldn't it be better all round if he paid the lieutenant-colonel a visit at home?

He knew that he lived in Döbling, and that if he started walking now, he would arrive at the same time his superior would be arriving home from the office by car.

But, of course, this assumption would prove to be wrong. He had to make a number of detours on his way, for he found street after street blocked by heaps of rubble from collapsed houses. The attack had caused casualties in other places too. Then he was standing in front of the gate to the house in Döbling. Through the fence he could see a pebbled path leading up to the front door, to his left and right the fence was covered in an evergreen hedge. After he had rung the bell, a girl of about ten appeared and told him that her father wasn't at home. His persistent questions as to whether the Lieutenant-Colonel had not yet returned from the office, or if he hadn't been there at all today, were all met with a shaking of the head. She seemed somewhat confused.

"Who is it, Melitta?" he heard a female voice call, and a moment later a boy came running. He seemed somewhat younger and shouted before the girl could answer: "An *Oberleutnant,* Mama!"

A pregnant woman appeared behind the children: *"Guten Tag"*, she said. Her choice of greeting surprised Wohlleben. And without waiting for his reply she added: "What can I do for you?"

As Wohlleben could not decide on any form of greeting - since the assassination attempt last year, all sections of the German military had adopted the Nazi-salute as their greeting - he said quickly: "I need to speak with the Lieutenant-Colonel urgently."

"He's not here", said the woman. Wohlleben was aware of the way she looked him up and down.

"Is he not back from Command yet?" he asked almost automatically. "Surely he should be here by now."

"Yes", said the woman. Her voice sounded troubled, "that's what we thought too. There were such heavy attacks today. The

telephone connection has been down since midday."

The children stood next to them and every now and then the boy whispered something in his sister's ear.

"I've come from his office, and have a confidential report for the Lieutenant-Colonel. Would it be possible to wait for him?" asked Wohlleben.

"From his office, really?" The voice of the woman sounded full of suspicion.

"Yes, I left earlier this morning and then I was caught up in the air-raid. It was fairly bad today. The opera house seems to have been hit, and the *Philipshof*. I thought I wouldn't be able to cross the Josefsplatz and then it was terrible in the Ninth District! I was counting on the Lieutenant-Colonel to leave Command early, and thought that this would be the only place I could catch up with him."

A lorry rattled down the street, a few hundred metres further towards the town an old woman stepped out of her garden gate, the shrieking sound of a circular saw could be heard from afar.

"Come in", said the woman, opened the gate and led Wohlleben past a few meagre beds of vegetables towards the house. "You must excuse me", she said, "I've already had two telephone calls today from people asking about my husband. I'm a little on edge."

After he had taken off his coat in a room filled with art nouveau furniture - he could see now that it was covered in dust and soil, obviously from the wall of the air-raid shelter - he found himself sitting in a light and airy study. The children had disappeared somewhere into the garden. The woman had taken his coat and shaken it, and now she stood at a large triple glass door which led out onto the veranda. She had put a silver box of cigarettes and an ash tray in front of Wohlleben and, half turned towards the garden, told him that the Gestapo had phoned twice and asked her peculiar questions. "You can understand that I have cause to worry. My husband ..., you must understand, we have two children and a third is on its way. He tends to forget that."

Wohlleben nodded. He understood the disjointed words. He could imagine what was troubling the woman. He looked around casually.

Bookshelves, a large dark desk, an old rug which covered most

of the floor, some pictures on the walls that remained free of books. Here was a watercolour of a landscape, Wohlleben had to look at it for a long time before he could find his way round, must be something modern, he thought. Then a female portrait, *Biedermeier*. He compared it with the woman at the glass door and could not detect any likeness. Two etchings, southern motifs, serious, sober forms, opposite the desk a cross with a thin twisted body. And then sitting on one of the bookshelves: a small wooden block with the large eyes, the pale face and two hands raised up to the head. It was clearly a picture painted by the old woman he had left just a few hours ago.

Wohlleben got up and stepped towards the picture. The hand of the artist was unmistakable.

The woman turned towards him: "Ah, that's a terrible picture. It's so oppressive. Don't you think so?"

"You find it oppressive?" asked the man. "Do you know the woman who painted it?"

"Do I? No, not really, perhaps my husband does. But you must know her, you know that it's a woman who painted it."

Wohlleben realised what he had said. "Yes, I met her a few hours ago, during the air-raid. I did her a small favour and she gave me one of her pictures. It's outside in the pocket of my coat. May I show it to you?"

"Oh, well", said the woman somewhat hesitantly. But Wohlleben had already stood up to go to the entrance-hall and fetch the picture. At that moment, the telephone rang. The woman ran ahead and picked up the receiver. It was a wall-mounted phone next to the study door. The woman answered. It was clear from her voice that she was talking to her husband.

Wohlleben listened to the conversation. But all he could hear were the woman's monosyllabic replies. There were pauses in between. The words spoken told him nothing, but he was seized suddenly by a feeling of tension, of anxiety, a feeling bordering on certainty that danger was close at hand. In a moment when the woman had her back towards him, Wohlleben quite irrationally did something completely inexplicable: He grabbed his belt which was hanging next to his coat in the cloak-room, took the pistol from the holster and put it in his trouser-pocket.

The woman now confessed that she was worried, that people had asked after him, the lieutenant-colonel, several times now, and that she had tried to phone him several times, but each time in vain. Finally she said: "There's an *Oberleutnant* waiting for you... His name? I didn't ask. I don't think he introduced himself. Just a moment, I'll put him on." She turned around and motioned Wohlleben to come closer.

Wohlleben answered: "*Oberleutnant* Wohlleben. I have a very important and confidential report to make, Lieutenant-Colonel."

For a few moments there was silence. He was about to ask "Are you there?" when he heard the voice of Lieutenant-Colonel Perkal: "Is that you, Wohlleben, you ... you! It can't be. You're supposed to be dead. You lost your life today during the air-raid. The Intelligence Service phoned me about half an hour ago and told me that the car which was to bring you back had been found, totally destroyed. The driver was found dead, you and the second man were thought to have been buried under the mountains of rubble.

"I was in a different shelter, thank God. Lucky, I suppose. But I don't know, Lieutenant-Colonel, I don't know whether it makes sense for me to come to the office. I wanted to talk to you. And it's precisely because of the Intelligence Service."

"Yes, yes", said the lieutenant-colonel. He seemed to be thinking. "I should be able to leave in about an hour. Can you wait that long?"

"I'll be waiting, Lieutenant-Colonel." Wohlleben put down the receiver and looked at the woman. She seemed relaxed. "You'll have to put up with me for a little longer, madam", he said. He now took the picture from his pocket and showed it to the woman. She shook her head and protested that she didn't like this picture any better than the other one. Finally Wohlleben carried the picture to the study, and put it next to the other one. It was a little smaller, but the hand of the painter was immediately recognisable.

"She has all her walls covered with pictures like these", he said.

The woman knew at once who he was referring to. "I couldn't bear it", she said. "I'd feel continuously under siege." She paused. Then she added: "Or perhaps continuously accused." She went to the door. "You must excuse me. I have work to do. If you want to look at a book, feel free." She pointed towards the book-

shelves and then disappeared. Wohlleben could hear her working in the kitchen.

He stood undecided in front of the many spines for some time, and thought about the woman's last sentence. Accused! She had found the right expression for it. Somehow it hadn't occurred to him. The paintings had touched him and he had reflected on the impression they had made on him. But that was it, these pictures accused. He felt exactly the same way.

He stood in front of the bookshelves, examined the spines, noted that there were quite a few books on jurisprudence, noticed it without looking any closer at any particular title. He thought he could decipher the words Roman Law from the gold lettering of one of the old volumes. But his eyes carried on, carried on to historical works. Mommsen stuck in his mind for a while. Roman history. Caesar, Augustus, the Roman Empire, the Holy Roman Empire. There was an uninterrupted chain of thoughts in him, a train of thoughts which was uncontrolled and unfettered, and this train led on from Empire: *Reich, Reichswehr, Reichsmarschall, Reichsführer, SS*. He turned towards another bookshelf. There was a collection of philosophical works. Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche. He hadn't concerned himself with them since he left school. Had he concerned himself with them back then? What did it mean to concern oneself with a philosophical idea? He remembered Plato's Ideal State, and then there were the imperatives of Immanuel Kant, Königsberg might have already been occupied by the Russians by now, and then there was Nietzsche's superman, and with a little turn of his thoughts he had arrived at the supermen of his age, those who declared everyone else to be subhuman, who degraded them to the level of animals, of objects for experiments, of suppliers of the basic ingredients for soap. He went a little further along the shelves. There was lyrical poetry. The poets of the nation. Here were their works, from Walther von der Vogelweide to Schiller, to Goethe, to Stefan George and Josef Weinheber. The high-priest of the chosen ones and the down-to-earth fellow who spoke with the voice of the people. The order with the skull and the healthy instinct of a people who knew exactly whose face one could spit in, and whose countenance one had to bow to. No, he realised, it was no good, looking for something to read. The eyes of the two

paintings as they sat next to each other on a shelf kept haunting him. Or was it just his own restlessness which had gripped him a while ago, the confusion and the knowledge of an impending decision of great importance which prevented him from taking out a book? He sat down again in an upholstered chair, smoked one cigarette after another and stared in front of him.

He didn't know how long he'd been sitting like that. Indistinctly, and in the distance, he heard the gate rattle. Voices in the house and finally in the entrance-hall, but it was only when he heard men's steps approaching the door that he became alarmed. He jumped up and moved quickly to the glass door which led to the veranda.

At that moment the door opened and Lieutenant-Colonel Perkal entered. He must have noticed Wohlleben's hasty movements, for he smiled and said: "Where are you off to then Wohlleben?"

"It was a reflex, an ill-considered one admittedly, Lieutenant-Colonel", replied the *Oberleutnant.*

"No good, no good, *Oberleutnant.* You're obviously still relying on your good luck." He laughed, offered Wohlleben his right hand. "Well, you indeed seem to be alive. Your voice on the telephone wasn't coming from the other world. What's so important that it couldn't wait?"

Wohlleben shook his hand and began to report on his interview with the *Sturmbannführer.*

Perkal motioned him to sit down and took a seat opposite him. He listened attentively. When Wohlleben ended his report, he got up and opened the door to the veranda. "You smoke too much, Wohlleben", he said. "Terribly thick air. In every respect." He walked up and down in front of the seated man. "Who were you expecting just before, when you were trying to escape?"

"I don't know. The Intelligence Service perhaps."

"At my place?"

"Your wife told me that the Gestapo has asked after you twice today already."

Perkal stopped walking up and down. "Yes, that's true. I see you don't just rely on your good luck after all."

He stood in front of the shelf where the two wooden blocks with the icon-like paintings were sitting. "What do you propose to do, Wohlleben? Thus far I have no official notification of your death.

But time is of the essence. Russian Army units have crossed the border of the Burgenland at several points." He stared at the two pictures. He seemed to notice the second one for the first time. "What's this? How did a second one get here?" he asked and was about to leave the room; clearly he wanted to ask his wife where the picture had come from.

"One is mine", said Wohlleben, "I put it there for a comparison."

"How did you come by it?" Perkal stopped at the door and looked at the two paintings.

"By chance. I met the painter today in the air-raid shelter during the attack, and I was able to do her a small favour. She gave me the painting. But ...". He stopped. "She told me terrible things, Lieutenant-Colonel, really terrible things. Are they true? Do you know whether ...?"

"Yes, I know. It's all true."

For a while it was silent in the room.

"And we've been taking part in it", said Wohlleben finally.

Perkal sat down in his chair again. "Wohlleben, we're not taking part!" He said this very firmly. "You and I, and many others too, we're not. You know that as well as I do."

"I know and I know now, only now, it's not enough, it's never been enough."

"Not enough, Wohlleben, that will always be the way of things. We'll never be able to do enough for the just course. Whatever we might achieve, we'll never be able to do what we ought to do."

"I thought that too, up till now, that what we've been doing is enough, that we can't expect more of ourselves, and that we mustn't use the same methods as the ones we oppose. But now ..."

Wohlleben jumped up and went to the glass door. He looked outside and signalled the lieutenant-colonel to come to him. "That's him", he said, when Perkal stood next to him.

"Who?"

"The *Sturmbannführer* who interrogated me. I recognised his voice immediately. What do they want here?"

At that moment the doorbell rang. They saw the SS-leader at the gate. He had spoken to two other SS-men. One of them stood next to the vehicle they had arrived in, the other one, the one with a

machine-gun round his shoulders, stood next to the *Sturmbannführer* at the gate.

"Quick, disappear", said the lieutenant-colonel, "up into the loft."

Wohlleben turned towards the entrance-way then he hesitated. He watched as the lieutenant-colonel opened the glass door and stepped outside. "What's the matter?" he heard him ask.

"We need to talk to you, Lieutenant-Colonel", he heard the *Sturmbannführer* shouting. The veranda was about five metres above street level and the narrow pebbled path led gently down to the gate.

"I'm coming", cried the lieutenant-colonel and stepped back into the room. He grabbed Wohlleben by his arm and pulled him into the entrance-hall, opened a door, pointed upstairs and whispered hastily: "Quick, up there, then the door at the end of the hall on the first floor."

A few moments later, Wohlleben found himself in a short hallway and hurried towards the designated door. It was locked. The key was not in the lock.

What to do now? In the meantime, he heard the steps of the men on the pebbled path, the opening of doors. He heard the voices in the entrance-way. He heard the voices of the woman and the children. Where had they come from so quickly, he thought. He heard the people downstairs going to and fro and finally assembling in the large study. Where should he go? Excluding the locked door, there were four other doors in the corridor. He opened one which had to lead to a room at the back of the house. A nursery. The window was open. He looked out. The garden lay before him, a few young fruit trees, some garden plots not yet dug over, it all made for a somewhat neglected impression. To the right and the left, the property was fenced off from the neighbours by hedges. They were dense and most likely impossible to climb through. There might be a wire fence too, thought Wohlleben. At the end of the long property was the blind wall of a large house. A row of bare poplars stood in front of it. How sickening it was. Only a few moments ago he had talked about resistance, and now he was a fugitive hiding in a nursery. What despicable behaviour! But what else could he do? Could he just draw his pistol and shoot the two

men? There was the pregnant woman, the boy, the girl! He couldn't hear the people downstairs any more. They all seemed to be in Perkal's study. He had time to think. Again he looked through the window. On the right corner of the house, there was a shed built onto the wall, in front of the open door was a wheelbarrow. A straw broom and a rake were in it. Was it five metres, was it seven down to the garden? But if he got caught, the lieutenant-colonel would be compromised to such an extent that he would be lost too. What did they want here anyway? Were they looking for him? Of course, they were! Who or what else? But how did they know? Wasn't he supposed to be dead? He was dead! A strip of concrete beneath him. A strip of concrete, about one metre wide, to allow the rain water to run off. The strip encircled the whole house. Hardly a soft landing! But if he could push himself off the wall, he might be able to land in one of the beds. The ground there was softer, but uneven. If he sprained his ankle he could forget about escape. It would all be in vain. Of course, they would arrest Perkal too. And the pregnant woman who was so afraid, whose face grew pale at the mere mention of the word Gestapo, she too would be interrogated.

And then, he didn't know himself how it was that everything happened so quickly, that all reasoning was forgotten. Had he heard a noise from the staircase? Was that the sound of a door opening? He lowered his legs out the window, slid his body down over the wall, held on to the window frame for a moment with his fingertips. And then, down! On to the hard strip of concrete. In a crouching position. The palms of his hands on the rough ground. But then up again, pain in his joints, but bearable. Into the shed. A tool shed. He saw shovels, spades, rakes, hoes. The wooden hut was small and its contents could be taken in at a glance. There was nowhere to hide here. Then Wohlleben noticed some grey overalls and a straw hat hanging on the wall. He looked up at the windows of the house once more. Obviously, he hadn't been spotted yet. Were they all in the study still? He put his pistol on the ground, quickly pulled the overalls on over his uniform, took off his tie and stuffed it in his breast pocket, opened the collar of his shirt, put on the straw hat. How did he look? He looked down at himself. Only the tips of his boots were visible. He felt for his collar. His uniform must not show. Now he put the unlocked pistol casually into one of

the large pockets, grabbed a rake and walked slowly towards the exit.

Further down by the gate he saw an SS-man, who every now and then looked up at the veranda. The other one was obviously in the house with the *Sturmbannführer*. It was impossible to pass this one without being seen. But he was willing to try. After all, he was only the gardener.

The man let him approach. He couldn't even be twenty yet. His machine-gun hung loosely round his shoulders but was nevertheless at the ready. Wohlleben had almost reached the gate, when the man said in a bright boy's voice: "Stop! You're not allowed out!"

"But I ..., I'm only the gardener", replied Wohlleben hesitantly, the rake in his left hand while his right grasped the pistol in his pocket.

The young man seemed to hesitate for a moment. "No", he said, and then: "No-one is allowed out here. Later. Go back!" And as Wohlleben kept on walking towards him, he made an unmistakable gesture with the machine gun.

Not even nineteen, thought Wohlleben, good God, not even nineteen, and as he thought that, he drew the pistol from his pocket and pulled the trigger.

The man reached into the air, the machine gun hit him in the face, then he collapsed, sprawled on the footpath next to the gate.

And now, run, thought Wohlleben.

He threw away the rake - there was the Intelligence Service car. I have to try it, thought Wohlleben, quickly opened the door, got behind the wheel and started the engine. It responded. Wohlleben accelerated and drove off. In the mirror he saw the two SS-men reach the street. One aimed the machine gun at him. Wohlleben didn't hear the shots by this stage, he was already too far away, and all he could see was the lieutenant-colonel coming out onto the street too, pointing at his car and the three of them getting in. But as the lieutenant-colonel had to reverse before he could take up the chase, Wohlleben had a good lead. He thought: What does Perkal think he's doing, chasing after me with those people. He turned down one of the next side streets, and after a block, turned back in the direction he'd come from. Not even nineteen, he thought! Then

he stopped behind a parked lorry, jumped out of the car and ran into the park opposite. There was a public urinal on the corner. He went in and looked out over the tin partition into the street. No, the other car hadn't followed him. It seemed to have gone straight ahead. Wohlleben remained there for a while. It was almost dark. A pair of lovers came out of the park as they made their way uphill. Not yet nineteen, thought Wohlleben. There was the usual graffiti on the tin wall in front of him. It smelled of oil and urine. An old woman with a prayer-book in her hand crossed the street and turned onto the path leading to the park. Wohlleben waited a little longer, watched the windows of the houses opposite. They were all closed and blacked out according to regulation.

There he stood, in the round little tin container, thinking: Where could he go? To his house in Klosterneuburg? If he had been recognised or been betrayed by Perkal, that's where they'd go to look for him first. His circle of friends was small. Neither did he think that any one of them would have the courage to hide him. Shit. Yes, now he could smell it. There was a large heap in one of the corners of the tin container. A few scraps of paper were stuck to it.

He went back to the parked vehicle. It had got dark in the meantime. He got into the car. Not yet nineteen? What could he possibly know other than the clichés he had been taught. Fourteen, maybe only thirteen when the hobnailed boots had marched along the Ringstraße, the masses cheering under a sea of swastikas. How could he decide? Why shouldn't he believe what he was told? Wasn't it exciting to belong to the strong side, to carry a weapon? At school he'd already heard about Siegfried, Hagen von Tronje, Gunther and the other knights of the *Nibelungenlied*. The real man's life is always the heroic life, a contest with the enemy and then finally victory. They had provided enemies for the young people, plenty of enemies. They had taught them total obedience. Humility and community service were the virtues of the *Untermenschen*. The ethics of slaves. Nietzsche. He fits into the concept! Had it been any different when he was young. Had he been taught different virtues? He remembered a single teacher who did things differently, Holzer was his name, he told the children about other heroes, about the engine driver who saved his train by

risking his own life. John Maynard had taken the place of the fierce Hagen, and the journey was not to the land of the Huns but across Lake Erie, the whole class had admired the helmsman. But in the very next class it was knights in their metal armour again, journeying to the Holy Land, fighting for truth and salvation with their sharp swords. For salvation then, and in the hereafter. It was shouted thousandfold: *Heil! Heil! Heil Hitler!*

He had left the door of the vehicle open and was listening. It was silent in the street. Only doctors and some of the government departments had cars. There was a petrol shortage. All he could hear was the tram in the distance, stopping and starting. No, in his improvised civilian clothing, he couldn't even consider the tram as a means of transport. It would be better to take the overalls off. As an officer, he still enjoyed some privileges. But he had left his cap at Perkal's. An officer without a cap, that would be even more obvious. He opened the car's first aid kit and took out a number of things.

About an hour later, he crossed the Josefsplatz. The smell of burning was still in the air, he could still hear the noise of the working parties from where the *Philipshof* had once stood. He turned into a side street he had gone down with the old Jewess. There, at the gap in the wall caused by a direct hit, they had come to a courtyard. He climbed over rubble and beams. It was dark. The only light to be seen shone out from below the blackout paper in a downstairs flat. Next to it was the staircase. He hesitated. No, this wasn't the staircase they'd used. He looked searchingly around the courtyard. The sky was a fire-red square above him, now darker, now brighter. This was the way they had come, through the ruined and disused stables, past feeding-troughs and behind the disused water-trough, up the steep staircase. Perhaps this had once been the exit for the stable-boys. Wohlleben stumbled a few times, felt his way along and finally found himself standing in front of the narrow door. He knocked, and as there was no reply, tried to open the door. It opened! He flicked on his lighter. A broom cupboard with brooms, shovels and buckets came into view. Now he remembered: to his right, behind a wardrobe which stood slightly out from the wall, there had to be another door. He groped his way along and knocked. As there was no immediate response he added:

"It's me, the officer from this afternoon."

The door opened and the frightened face of the old woman appeared. When she saw him, her expression changed into one of astonishment.

"What happened to you?" she asked, concerned, and looked at his head.

Wohlleben was covered in voluminous bandages. The dressings were new, but loosely and carelessly applied.

"Nothing", he said. "May I come in?"

They stood again in the small space. The only light came from a table-lamp, which cast a dim light over the room. Of all the many faces, only the whites of the eyes were recognisable.

"You have friends", he said, "maybe they could help me too."

"What happened to you?" the woman asked again. "Please, take a seat."

He sat down. "Nothing happened. The bandage is a disguise because I lost my cap - it might come in useful all round." And now he told the woman what had happened to him. He even told her about today's meeting with the Intelligence Service. He knew full well: she would not betray him.

"And now you don't know where to go?" asked the woman.

Wohlleben nodded.

"Don't you have anyone you can trust? Why do you come to me, of all people. I'm constantly afraid of being found out and arrested myself. When you knocked a while ago, I thought, now they've found you. Whenever anybody knocks unexpectedly, that's what I think." They looked at each other.

Wohlleben asked himself whether it was sensible to have come here. How could he expect her to help, when it was she who should have been helped! But isn't it always the way, that those who are in need of help themselves are often the most willing to help as well?

"Perhaps", said the woman, as if confirming his thoughts, "perhaps I could recommend you to someone who could hide you. But now, now it is almost dark, there's nothing I can do."

Wohlleben got up.

The woman looked up at him, shook her head and said: "What are you doing? Do you want to go? Where? You can't go back to your house, where your housekeeper would betray you if she saw

you, you're supposed to be dead! Don't forget that!"

Wohlleben stood undecided behind the chair, his hands resting on the back, and let his eyes wander from painting to painting.

"Well, sit down again", said the woman.

He sat down, with some hesitation.

"I'm sure you haven't had any dinner yet. If you would accept the little I can offer you." She went to the side-board where the collection of paint-pots and jars with brushes he had seen on the table that afternoon was now sitting. She opened the door, and as the boards rubbed together they emitted an extended squeaking sound. It sounded like the whining of a child.

But before she could take anything out of the cupboard, Wohlleben interrupted. "No, please, don't. I couldn't eat anything at all just now."

"Why? What's the matter?" The woman stood between the open doors of the cupboard. "It's quite all right to take a piece of bread from me. My friends will look after me. I'm lucky."

"Yes, of course, but..."

"What else?" asked the woman. She sounded almost suspicious. She took a quarter loaf of bread from a shelf.

"This young man. He wasn't yet nineteen. Can you understand! I'm very grateful, but I can't just now."

"Oh, I see", she said. "Well, I can understand that." She put the bread back on the shelf and closed the cupboard door. "I'm sure he would have enjoyed his dinner though, if he had shot you. Who knows how often he has already ..." She didn't finish the sentence.

Of course, he said to himself. Nevertheless. "Still, he was very young."

"Those are often the worst", she said, unrelentingly.

"They know not what they do!"

The woman sat down opposite him at the table. "That's easy to say." Her words sounded harsh. "But before that it reads: Father forgive them! Am I their father? Is it our job to play God? Can we possibly take his place? Perhaps he can. Perhaps. But what about us? And is that what he's doing? I'm asking you now: is that what he's doing? Judas would have needed forgiveness. And why did he weep? If it wasn't repentance that he was feeling. But they'll never feel repentance! They'll only be sorry that they didn't kill even

more!"

Wohlleben didn't quite know why he'd quoted those words. He wasn't that religious, and what's the difference between "that religious" and simply religious anyway? Who is the latter? Who isn't? Religious instruction! It was a long time ago. And just this afternoon, when the woman had whispered her prayers, he had said resentfully: Your God doesn't care for poor dogs like us.

For a while they were both silent.

Then she continued: "They killed my husband, my parents and almost all my friends. One after the other, they were all arrested. They would have arrested me too, if I hadn't been able to disappear with the help of some brave friends. And you, and the likes of you, didn't notice a thing. And now you've lost your appetite for the simple reason that you gunned down one of these murderers." Her voice sounded bitter. "Nobody sees anything. Nobody wants to see anything."

Of course the last sentence hit him. It was spot on. It burrowed into the same region of his consciousness which had registered the slogan-painting on the windows of Mayer's ready-made clothing shop in 1938.

"You're right", he said. "You're most certainly right. We've all noticed that something has been going on, that something wasn't right. We've been suppressing it. We didn't want to see or hear."

"Something going on! Something going on that wasn't right! Nonsense! You all agreed unanimously that we were to be killed!" The woman hissed these words. "You must have known it!"

For a moment Wohlleben tried to think of a way to make this woman understand the way it had been for him and most of his fellow-citizens. Make it comprehensible? But was it even comprehensible? The Jews were robbed of their businesses, they were excluded from all professional organisations, they were forbidden to work, and finally all those who hadn't emigrated to foreign countries in spite of all that had happened, were deported to the East. There was talk that in Poland, where - as everybody knew - all the Jews came from in the first place, they were locked up in a certain territory. Resettled. Where they could cheat and exploit each other. That was what had been talked about initially, in the years when the first large groups were herded together and taken to the

goods stations and sent off. And after all, they were Jews, different from us. And most likely - one thought to oneself - they're to some extent to blame for their fate. They always wanted to be different, the chosen people, wanted to be better than other people. Well then. And later on, when the war was on, it wasn't mentioned any more. Everyone had their own personal problems. Everyone knew someone else who was in danger, everyone was in danger themselves. There was Fritz who lost a leg, and Karl who has an artificial eye now, there was the party comrade Pomeisl from the house opposite who didn't come back from Stalingrad, and Aunt Mitzi who was killed with her three children in an air-raid, it was the very first or second one. To whom had she or her three children ever done anything?

"No", he said. "We didn't, I mean most people, they didn't know anything about what you told me today. The restrictions, the infringements on your rights, yes, everyone knew about them and that they were happening. But the things you told me about today, no, nobody knows about them here. - You have to believe me!"

"'Infringements'! Probably isolated incidents of people who just got carried away! No, no, my dear sir, you didn't have to wait for the 'infringements'. One only needed to have read *Mein Kampf* and one would have known what to expect."

He shook his head: "Who in the world has read that?"

"I have, of course!"

"You? You of all people?"

"It's important to be informed. Even if you have different opinions."

"You've read the book! But ask around, randomly, among the people, who has read that book, read it from cover to cover. Ask the little air-raid warden or ask the SS-officer. You won't find many who've done more than thumb through the pages or put it on their bookshelf, in the front row, for everyone to see."

"It is important to read. At home we read a lot. Old literature and new. My father adored Schiller."

"My father has never read a book", said Wohlleben. "I read. And I've always believed that many things are possible. Bloodshed and destruction. I had a brother who was ... well, he was an old comrade. I've noticed a lot of things, picked up a lot. But what you

told me today..."

"And the other things, the things you noticed and picked up, or maybe witnessed for yourself, that wasn't enough for you?"

Wohlleben made a helpless gesture with his shoulders: "Not enough, not enough! You don't think about it. Everyone thinks of himself first, of his relatives, and it's only when one meets someone like you, like I'm doing now, and is confronted with that person's story, that one starts to think. But who, I ask you now, who has any sort of contact with people like you?"

"Oh, I have friends."

"Yes, thank God that there are people like that in this city. I don't think there are many of them. And even those people who don't necessarily agree with the regime - there are many people today whose eyes have been opened - even they will avoid contact with you, in order not to endanger you and themselves."

"But my friends did know, and helped me regardless."

"I think", he concluded for himself and her, "let's be honest: We didn't know, because we didn't want to know, because, like all people at all times, we only react to the things which concern us directly, which we experience with our own body."

Wohlleben could see it was going to be a long night for him.

It didn't take long for Franz Prannowitz to notice the next day that something was wrong. *Oberleutnant* Wohlleben didn't turn up for work, and the head of the department, Lieutenant-Colonel Perkal, had also disappeared. As is always the case in such circumstances, diverse rumours circulated the offices of the Central Command. At about lunch-time it was said that the lieutenant-colonel had been arrested. A secretary, a Luftwaffe girl, who worked in the office of Major Reindorf told her friend during a cigarette break. The major had asked her to connect him with the Lieutenant-Colonel in his flat in Döbling, and when she had been put through, the mother-in-law of the Lieutenant-Colonel had answered and said with enormous loquacity but in a very disjointed and confused manner, that it had come as a great surprise to her, but she had come to look after the children only yesterday, because her daughter, the wife of the Lieutenant-Colonel, had needed to go to hospital immediately, apparently due to a premature birth. And it was only when the secretary had asked whether the Lieutenant-

Colonel was coming to the office, or whether he was with his wife in hospital, that the agitated old woman had revealed that he had been arrested yesterday evening. And so that was the reason as well, and it all came down to the son-in-law's stubbornness, and now this on top of it all... The girl reported all this to the major, who contacted the Intelligence Service immediately, and it was confirmed that the Lieutenant-Colonel had been arrested. He was helping them with their inquiries and it wouldn't take long.

Over the next few days, the news came through that *Oberleutnant* Wohlleben had died a hero's death for his People and his Fatherland during the air-raid of March twelfth, on his way back to the Central Command Office after a meeting. A sanitary brigade had found his identification disk under the rubble in Augustinerstraße. After a number of detours, this information arrived at the office ten days later. Franz Prannowitz felt as if he had heard of the death of a friend. He thought again of their first meeting in 1934:

It was on the plateau of the Leopoldsberg, on the side from where one had a view of the whole city. A young man sat dressed in old tattered clothes, his forehead covered with a dirty bandage. He was looking after a few goats, and carving ornaments on a stick. But he had to tell him. Had to tell him that Leni, his sister and her husband had been shot as they fled, and he knew that it would be a severe blow to this man, although it could well have been all the same to him, although it really needn't have been any of his business at all, although to him it might just as easily have been like one newspaper notice among others.

You're Herr Wohlleben? he had asked the man. Yes, he had said, how do you know me? I'm Leni's brother. And then the glimmer in the eyes of the gaunt man. You have some information? How is she? I don't think her husband needs to be afraid any more. At most, they'll imprison him.

He knew now that this objective phrase "At most they'll imprison him" had acted like a barrier. This sentence, with its unquestioning acceptance of imprisonment was what had kept him from closer contact with Wohlleben. At most they'll imprison him!

And then the collapse after he had informed him of Leni's death. He'd had to support him all the way back to the forester's house.

Only now, when he himself learned of Wohlleben's death, was he sorry that he hadn't opened up to him with more trust, more friendliness, last autumn, always. There had always been that thin wall between them: At most they'll imprison him.

Shortly after the news of *Oberleutnant* Wohlleben's death, Prannowitz was telephoned by Dr Mayerhofer one lunchtime. The small printing-press at Klosterneuburg was closing down, the paper was all used up, new paper impossible to get, he would therefore not be required any more in the evenings. The outstanding wages for services rendered would be posted to him. He was surprised, because he knew there was quite a lot of paper in store, and whenever he began to mention it, Dr Mayerhofer would cut him short. He learned also, that Dr Mayerhofer was being transferred to a publishing house in Linz.

He now went to his mother's, instead of Klosterneuburg, and asked her to send the boy to Groß with the message that Uncle couldn't bring him any more books, because the library had been closed down.

Again he sat in the room which had been allocated to the woman and her grandchild by the accommodation office ever since she had lost her own home in that air-raid, and where he and Groß had met again after they saw each other in the tram. The bookshelves were still stacked up to the ceiling, but today he took as little notice of them as his mother and nephew, who lived between these walls, did. The library was closed. The code-word had come to him because of the bookshelves in front of him. It occurred to him that the boy must have noticed something if he'd ever thought about the situation. He knew that the books were never returned.

But the boy noticed nothing. He never thought about the situation. Almost every day after work he went to the Hitler Youth pre-military training. Nowadays, the firm which employed him often had to let him go in the mornings as well. And as there was an air-raid almost every day, not a lot of work was done anyway. He told his uncle about rifle practice and the training with the panzer-fist they'd just started recently. A wounded Knight of the Iron Cross, a one-armed captain of the Greater German Regiment was training the sixteen year old youths. His grandmother swiftly convinced her son that there was no sense in trying to explain the situation to the

boy. It's sad, she said, he won't believe us. He won't believe us, until he experiences it for himself. Franz didn't like to think about Helmut. Because then he remembered: the way Wohlleben had sensed their mistrust then, when they had collected the boy from his parents'. To make sure he doesn't get corrupted, maybe even become a Conservative, he'd said with bitterness in his voice. His head had been bandaged still. And now this boy was learning to handle panzer-fists and would still be convinced of the German victory when the last German city was occupied.

It seemed to him that Poldi was more reasonable! Since they'd been sleeping together, they'd hardly ever spoken about politics. But once - when news came over the radio that, in the process of correcting the front, the fighting-lines near the border of Niederdonau had been taken back and the enemy had successfully crossed the Wechsel - she had asked whether he would shoot if they came. And he had just shrugged his shoulders and asked whether she would like him to. She had hugged him close and held him for a long time. He had said something about civilian clothes and she'd pressed herself against him. He'd talked about disappearing in time and she'd put her arms around his neck. Two days later, she and her mother had gone to the farm in Upper Austria where Frau Mihatsch used to help at harvest time, and where she got the produce from, to bring back to the city.

It was just in time. A week later, the noise of artillery fire could be clearly heard just south of the city. His department was to be quickly transferred to the West. There was talk of the Alpine Fortress. Some thought this meant the Salzkammergut, others thought it meant Tyrol. Many officers, and especially the female ancillary staff had already left as a vanguard. Lieutenant-Colonel Perkal was back again. His face was even more bony. He had black rings round his eyes. His left arm was in a plaster cast supported by a cloth sling. Some said it had happened in the course of the arrest. Of course, everyone had their own ideas about what "happened" meant. He and his considerably shrunken department made no preparations for a transfer to the West. There was talk of a rear-guard or something like that.

Fewer people showed up for duty every day. First the women who had remained, stayed away. Then the older civilian employees.

As there were frequent air-raids, only some of the tram-lines were operational and as they were irregular at best, it was impossible for some men to be on time for duty. Everyone knew that the end was near. Not even the superiors of the individual departments cared when some people didn't show up, it was acknowledged with a shrug of the shoulders. More remarkable was when a missing person showed up after two days and reported that he'd lost his flat because a bomb had hit the building. Telephone connections to some districts had been out of order for quite a while, but the weather was mild and spring-like as it hadn't been for a long time.

Two days before Easter, Groß awaited Prannowitz at his mother's lodgings. They were alone. His nephew was on duty with the People in Arms. He was guarding a bridge across the Donaukanal with two men and a few Hitler Youths.

Groß sat again at the small table and smoked a cigarette which he had rolled himself. It smelled of all kinds of things, except good tobacco. Franz sat down next to him and lit a cigarette as well. Both were silent for a while, then Franz asked: "Well, have you got something for me?"

Groß nodded. "You could join a small group. Two fire-fighters, a few foreign workers, Ukrainians, one Italian and some deserters."

Not exactly confidence-inspiring company, thought Franz.

"And where are these people?" he asked.

"You must remember", said Groß, "that the city is absolutely riddled with military police who catch everything with a head and two legs. They stopped even me, and it was only when they saw my ID-card and my date of birth that they let me go again. Well, you could hide with the fire brigade, it's not unusual there to find a man with two sound legs without a gun."

"Well, and what about those people there?" asked Franz. He didn't say any more, but the other man knew what he meant.

"Well, the two fire-fighters are old social democrats. Dolezal was one of the comrades in the headquarters in Floridsdorf in thirty-four. You can rely on him. He'll find a solution."

That evening, Franz went to the Fire Command Am Hof. Here too, the effects of bombing were evident, mountains of rubble, and, the thing he found most surprising, almost no personnel and only two engines. He asked after Dolezal. He was directed to a cellar

store. A Russian in the uniform of the fire brigade stared at him and greeted him several times with a nod of his head.

He met Dolezal in the cellar store. He had the feeling that they had met before. "Do I know you from somewhere?" he asked.

The other one frowned: "From roll-call, I think."

"How do you mean?" asked Prannowitz. "Which roll-call?" Like a film, the images from his basic military training, the flying school, the squadrons in the West and South and East ran before his eyes. He searched in vain for the face in front of him.

"The one in Wöllersdorf", said the other man.

And now it began to come back to Prannowitz. Under Dollfuß, in the detention camp. This man must have a very good memory for faces.

"I wouldn't have recognised you", he said.

"Well, I've gone white", said Dolezal, "but you're still young."

"Not all that..."

"You are, you are. And now, hurry up and see that you get rid of those clothes of yours. Go over there to the store and look for an overall. We'll dispose of your old things safely. Can you drive?"

"Yes."

"That's excellent. Maybe we'll get this old rust-bucket going."

"What? Which one?"

"The second truck. There's something wrong with it."

"Where are the others?"

"All gone. They took them to make their escape. On higher authority, the pigs! All gone. All they left, were these two broken-down ones. I've managed to repair one of them in the meantime. Now we'll be able to tinker with the other one when we're not out attending to fires. Anyway, now you might as well go and get Richard to show you what else we've got." He went over to the vehicles with him, waved to one of the Russians to join them, and told him to guide Franz to the store, and then on to Richard.

When he was alone with the man, the man said: "You good. You given us cigarettes."

"Me? What do you mean?" Prannowitz shook his head. What was the man talking about?

"You in station hall, given us cigarettes", repeated the Russian.

And now Prannowitz remembered. It was obviously one of the

Russians he'd met months ago in the Red-Cross hall at the *Südbahnhof* and long forgotten.

A few minutes later, he met someone else he hadn't expected to meet there.

The Russian continued to guide him through corridors and down staircases, led him through vaults, showed him the store with the uniforms, and after he had changed, went with him to the command room. There was a huge map of Vienna on the wall with the streets painted red and blue, some were thicker, some were thinner. There were also red and blue spots, larger ones and smaller ones, and red and blue crosses. There was a table with a number of telephones, two camp beds with blankets and a few chairs. On one of the camp beds, a man in full kit was lying with his face to the wall. He seemed to be sleeping. At the table, another man was sitting smoking a cigarette. Prannowitz thought he was seeing things: It was *Oberleutnant* Wohlleben. He was wearing the uniform of a fire-fighter and had his head bandaged, expertly done this time, but already somewhat dirty. It looked as if there were blood-stains on the bandage.

Prannowitz was stunned for a moment, then he stammered: "What, you? You, Herr *Oberleutnant?* I thought..."

"Of course", Wohlleben said, "you thought I was dead. But no! I'm alive!" They shook hands, he pushed a chair towards him and offered him a cigarette.

"But", he said and smiled, "Herr Prannowitz, we're not with the Luftwaffe here, we're with the fire-brigade now. And they're all on first name terms here. If you're agreeable...Franz. You know, the *Oberleutnant* is indeed dead, and I hope forever. By that I mean that none of us has to put on one of those uniforms any more, no-one has to touch a gun. I'm Richard here, you understand. And that one", he pointed behind him with his thumb to the camp bed, "his name is Gerhard, and the Russian who brought you here is called Stefan. Maybe it's pronounced differently in his language. That's what we call him here anyway, and he's never tried to get out of anything when we were able to help somewhere."

"Yes, but...", said Prannowitz.

"Your name is Franz, if I'm not mistaken", said Richard. "By the way, the one who got me here has helped others too, he's a man

Herr Dolezal - I mean Hans - can rely on, even though he knows I wasn't in Wöllersdorf." He smiled again.

"I think, said Franz, "that there were things I would have done differently as well." Again he saw London burning beneath him, Tobruk in smoke and vapour, next to him he saw the *Oberleutnant* who had got him home from the front, he saw the communist Dozekal in front of the German Labour Front notice-board and heard him ask: Did you see the tanks and the bombers?

"It's all over", said Richard.

At that moment, the telephone rang. Richard answered it. The man on the camp bed rolled over. Richard got up. "Emergency! We have to go." He pressed an alarm button. The man on the camp bed sat up. His hair was almost totally white. "Where?" was all he asked.

"Ballhausplatz", said Richard, grabbed Franz's arm and left the room with him.