

Sunday, May 6, 1945

I went around to Skocdopole's at about quarter to eight. It was drizzling and foggy outside. I'd hardly got out of the house before I could tell the revolution meant business. People in hiking clothes and berets were heading towards the brewery. They didn't have any weapons as far as I could see, but they had tricolours stitched on their berets and packs strapped to their backs.

I was wearing hiking clothes too, because it was raining and because I didn't want to ruin my best suit. I met Mr Mozo under the viaduct near Skocdopole's warehouse. He was limping along, looking very pale, as he heroically made his way towards the brewery. He had strapped on an old Austrian sabre and looked like something out of an American slapstick comedy. He had to act very heroic now because he hadn't been very heroic during the war. He'd worked his way up at the factory until finally he'd been made local construction supervisor of the German Air Transport Ministry. So now he had to act like a hero. I wondered whether the rest of that crowd would be down at the brewery. Probably. The poor saps would all have to be heroes now.

When I got to the warehouse, Prema was already sitting there on an empty crate, fully armed, wearing his corduroy hunting pants, and the rest of the boys were standing or sitting around. A dim light bulb, draped with cobwebs, shone down on them from the ceiling. They looked like Jesse James's gang. Prema had on high-laced hunting boots and an ammunition belt around his waist. A string of hand grenades was slung across his chest and a submachine gun over his shoulder. His face under the Masaryk cap was thin and with his gaunt cheeks he looked kind of Mongolian. Benda was wearing a shiny black fireman's helmet. They were talking things over.

'Shit,' said Prema. 'I'm against going over there.'

'Me, too. Once we get there, we're stuck,' said Perlik.

'But...' said Benda.

'Anyway, all Sabata wants to do is lock us all up in the brewery.'

'I still think it'd be better if we went over there,' said Benda.

'Because you're scared, maybe?' said Perlik.

'Hell no. But what can we do all by ourselves?'

'We collected all these guns by ourselves, didn't we?'

'Okay, but when the SS-men come, then what? How many people do we have anyway?'

'Enough, but if you're scared, stay home.'

'But...'

'Or else go over to the brewery.'

'Aw, come on, for Chrissake.'

'You're yellow.'

'I am not.'

'You are, too.'

'No, I'm not.'

'Shut up.'

'Don't argue, guys,' said Prema. 'The point is whether we ought to go over there or not.'

'I say we shouldn't,' said Perlik.

'I think it'd be better if we did,' said Vahar.

'You scared, too?' said Perlik.

'The fact is, we've got more guns than we know what to do with and it'd be a shame to let 'em go to waste,' said Vahar.

'And on account of that you want to go report at the brewery, huh?'

'Well, and what do you want to do with the guns?'

'Pass 'em out to other guys.'

'Yeah, but all the others are over at the brewery.'

'So what do you say, fellas?' said Prema.

'What say we go to the brewery?' said Jerry.

I looked at them. They were standing around the upturned packing crates like robbers in their den and, aside from Perlik, all of them wanted to go to the brewery. Only Prema was undecided. But he was their leader and he couldn't act hastily.

I watched him through the glass doors and heard what he said. Then I opened the door and walked in.

'Hi,' I said.

'Hiya. Come on in,' said Prema.

'Well, are we going over to the brewery?' I said.

'We're just talking it over.'

'And?'

'We can't make up our minds whether we ought to or not. Everybody's going.'

'Sure,' said Benda. 'We're going, too. Come on.'

'I'm not going,' said Perlik.

'So stay here, then.'

'I'd rather go over to the communists than sign up with Sabata.'

'So go on, who's stopping you?' said Benda.

'Don't be nuts, Perlik,' said Prema.

'So I'm the one who's nuts, am I? And how about the rest of you?'

'We'll wait and see how things look over there.'

'You still don't know Dr Sabata? You still don't know what a gutless bastard that guy is?'

'Aw, come off it.'

'You think he'll let you take off with those guns? Why, you might annoy the Germans.'

Perlik was angry and ironic. I knew him. The Germans sent him to a work camp once for being a chronic absentee. He was one of those people who are so brave they never show even a trace of fear. It was dangerous to be connected with a guy like that. But he was the only one. The rest were different.

'No, listen, fellas,' said Prema. 'The question is, can we get anywhere all by ourselves.'

'That's right,' said Jerry.

'The fact is that the German front's getting closer and closer and what can we do by ourselves against tanks?' said Benda.

'And what are you going to do against tanks together with Dr Sabata?' said Perlik.

Benda ignored him.

'The fact is, we've got twice as many guns as we can use.

Also, that there'll be guys over at the brewery who know how to use them.'

'If Dr Sabata'll let them use them, that is.'

'What the hell, you want us to let the guns just lie around here?'

'And you're really dumb enough to think Sabata'll let anybody shoot 'em?'

'What've you got against Sabata, anyway? What makes you so sure he's so yellow?' said Vahar.

'What makes you think he isn't?'

'All I know is that he got my dad out of a concentration camp,' said Vahar.

'That's right, he did,' said Benda.

'But how?' said Perlik.

'The fact is, he did it,' said Benda.

'Sure. By spending a lot of time drinking with the Gestapo down at headquarters.'

'Well, he got him out, didn't he? And that wasn't the only case.'

'All right now. Let's decide what we're going to do,' said Prema.

'I'm for going over to the brewery,' said Benda.

'Me, too,' said Vahar.

'Me, too,' said Jerry.

'All right,' said Prema and looked at the others. Vasek, Vostal and Prochazka were silent.

'How about it, you guys?'

'Oh, well, okay, let's go then,' said Vostal.

'What about you?' Prema said to Prochazka.

'Sure, I guess so,' Prochazka said.

'I'd rather not,' said Kocandrl.

'What about you?' Prema said to me. I was kind of surprised he was already counting me in. Also, I knew Perlik was right. But I wanted to go to the brewery anyway. I wanted to see the circus over there. The washing away of Protectorate sins. And besides, maybe Perlik was wrong after all. There'd be a lot of bloodthirsty guys over at the brewery, and once things got started not even Dr Sabata could hold them back. I knew a lot

of them personally. They didn't belong to any organization but they were crazy to have an uprising. Even at the brewery the pleasures would be provided for. And I wanted to see the others, too. I didn't want to miss Mr Mozol. Or Mr Moutel either. I looked at Prema.

'I suppose we'd better go over to the brewery,' I said. 'If you don't like it, we can always clear out.'

'That's right,' said Benda.

'You guys are as dumb as they come,' said Perlik.

'Shut up. The majority's for the brewery,' said Benda.

'Because you're dumb.'

'Quit arguing,' said Prema. 'Let's go.'

'Right,' said Benda, and they all got up.

'Morons,' said Perlik.

Benda turned sharply on him. 'Look, if you don't like it you don't have to come along!'

'Oh, shut up,' said Perlik and got up too. I waited until they filed out of the warehouse and then went over to Prema.

'Oh, I almost forgot. Come on,' said Prema. We went out.

In front of the warehouse stood a wagon whose load was covered up with a tarpaulin. The boys stood around it, silently huddled in a circle in the rain, holding or shouldering the submachine guns and rifles. Vahar held the flag furled around its staff. Prema flipped back the tarpaulin and pulled a polished submachine gun out by its barrel.

'You know how to work this?' he said to me.

'No.'

'Well, look. This is how you remove the safety. Here's where you load it and then this snaps down.' Prema shoved the magazine into the barrel. The bullet heads shone through the holes. 'Try it,' said Prema.

I took out the magazine and then I put it in again. It worked fine.

'And when you shoot, press the butt up against your shoulder.'

'Yeah.'

Prema turned back to the wagon and pulled four clips of ammunition out from under the tarpaulin.

'Put these in your pocket.'

'Thanks.'

I stick the clips in my coat pocket. They just fit.

'Let's go,' said Jerry.

'Let's go,' said Prema.

Jerry grabbed the wagon shaft and Prochazka and Kocandrle pushed from behind. I stood on one side and helped them push. Vahar unfurled the flag and we started off. The wheels of the little wagon squeaked. We went slowly over the foot bridge, past the Czech Brethren Church and past the Social Democrat Workers Sports Club towards the brewery. I knew how we must look. Pretty fine. We all walked along without saying a word. We acted very casual. People in hiking knickers with tricolours on their berets stared at us. You could tell they admired us. It was great.

We got to the bridge. I looked up at Irena's window and hoped she was watching, but she wasn't. Naturally. She should see me now. But no such luck. I could already imagine fighting the Germans off in the woods and Irena hiding down in the cellar or somewhere. The whole thing lost all its charm if Irena couldn't see me. Why in hell was I letting myself in for this? A bunch of people were heading along the path from the bridge towards the brewery. Like going to the cemetery on All Saints' Day. A big Czechoslovak flag was flying from the brewery tower. I noticed that some of the guys in the crowd had Czechoslovak Army service rifles over their shoulders. And some were wearing old army uniforms and puttees. They looked quaint. I'd already forgotten there was such a thing as puttees any more. Nobody wore them in this war. Silently we pushed our wagon slowly along with the crowd. People looked at us. You could tell some of them admired us, too. Or else they were just scared. There were a lot of them who didn't enjoy looking at a real honest-to-goodness gun. Probably deep down they'd hoped everything would blow over nice and quiet. But nevertheless they were going to the brewery. They were all patriots. And heroes. Mr Lobel was ahead of us. He used to be our landlord; he was Jewish but his wife was Aryan so he hadn't been sent to a concentration camp. He was carrying a

shotgun over his shoulder. He'd always been a big hunter. I kind of expected to see his hunting dog, Bonza, trotting along beside. Bonza would have been glad to come along, I knew. We steered the wagon through the gate. Mr Moutelik, wearing knickers and a ski cap, appeared with Berty beside him, his Leica on his chest. He beamed at me.

'Hi, Danny,' Berty said.

'Hi. Going to take some pictures?' I said.

'You bet.'

Better do it fast, I thought to myself. As we came through the gate, I noticed Mr Mozol with a policeman's sabre standing with a bunch of people from the Messerschmidt factory. They even stuck together here. They had it in their blood, the Messerschmidt people. Jerks! They stood in a bunch, chatting. Just three days ago, Mr Mozol was crawling around, licking Uippelt's boots. Everybody knew that. And now he was scared again. He was always scared of something. And he always had good reason to be scared. He stood there, pale and silly looking and scared. We turned towards the main building. A long queue stood on the steps leading to the open doors. They were waiting to sign up. An army first has to be enlisted. I saw Mr Stybl the barber, Dr Bohadlo, Mr Frinta the lawyer, the clerk from our bank, Mr Jungwirth from the loan association, and others. They stood there waiting their turn. Mr Jungwirth was eating a sandwich. We stopped the wagon. Prema turned.

'Wait here, fellows. I'm going to find Sabata.'

'Okay,' said Benda.

Prema went up the stairs and you could see how he was telling the guys at the door to let him through. I saw one guy at the door turn on him angrily, take one look at Prema's gun and grenades, then slip aside fast. Sure. We didn't have to waste our time like all the rest of those people lined up there. Their eyes were full of envy because we were somebody, we had weapons. I held my gun by the muzzle and set it on the ground. The steel felt cool and good.

'Danny,' I heard from behind me. There stood Berty with his Leica up to his eye.

'Stand over there and I'll take your picture.'

'Thanks,' I said. I didn't have any objection. I thought about Irena and how I'd show her my picture. I flashed my Gable smile and picked up my submachine gun so you couldn't miss it. Berty squinted at me through the finder and took two steps backward. I hoped Zdenek wasn't going to get a gun like mine. Or at least that nobody'd take Zdenek's picture with it. The camera clicked.

'Thanks. When can I get one, Berty?' I said.

'I'll develop it tonight.'

'Can you make a few extras?'

'Sure. How many copies can I make up for you?' said Berty. He'd learned those expressions from his father. Berty was a businessman. His father was, too. They were both businessmen and they owned an apartment house. Berty's hobby was photography. He was always awfully obliging about taking pictures, but he never did anything for nothing. He was always taking pictures, at high school, at the A. C. Kostelec Athletic Club, at little-theatre performances, and afterwards he sold each snapshot at cost, plus a small fee. I still remembered how in high school he used to have a list of how much people owed him and he always kept after us about paying up. When it came to getting paid he didn't have any friends. Only customers.

'Oh, about six,' I said, because I wanted to have plenty of copies. And I knew Mother would send one to Grandmother and another to Prague and another to my uncle in America, as soon as she could again.

'Can you save the negative, too?' I added as an afterthought.

'Certainly,' said Berty.

'Well, thanks.'

'You're quite welcome.' Berty smiled broadly and moved on along the line with his camera all wound and ready for action again. He was pleased I'd let him take my picture. And after the revolution, he'd display the pictures in their show window with stupid captions. '*Valiantly into the Fray*,' he'd write under my picture. But that'd be fine with me. That kind of nonsense didn't bother Irena the way it did me. I was the only one sensitive about things like that. And the group in the band, too, of course. It'd be a big laugh. I could just see the people crowd-

ing around Moutelik's show window and bragging about the pictures. And I'd be there, too. I remembered Mr Machacek. Of course. Berty would contribute the photographic illustration 'Photographs graciously donated by Mr Albert Moutelik, Jr' would say somewhere at the back of the book. And then there would be one coloured reproduction of an oil painting by No Leitner, 'May 6th in Kostelec.' I was already looking forward to that book. My picture would be in there, too. Mr Machacek would put it in as a favour to Father. So I'd be immortalized. Immortalized for all eternity in Kostelec. I glanced around at the crowd. More people kept coming in through the gate and the line moved slowly. Jirka Vit came out of the icehouse carrying two rifles over each shoulder. Behind him came Major Weiss in a major's uniform and behind him a bunch of fellows in Czech Army uniforms. One of them went up the steps of the main building and put up a sign next to the door. On it was written in black paint:

Order No. 1

ALL FIREARMS AND EXPLOSIVES ARE TO BE TURNED IN AT THE STOREROOM.

Col. Cemelik,

Commander

I immediately thought of Perlik. I turned to him. He was standing behind me, looking at the sign. Then he drew down his mouth and grimaced angrily.

'Well, isn't that nice,' he said in an icy voice.

'That's really crazy,' said Benda.

'So long, buddies,' said Perlik and turned.

'Where're you going?' said Benda, but Perlik said nothing and hurried through the crowd towards the gate. I lost sight of him a couple of times as he pushed his way through the people with his submachine gun slung over his back, and then he disappeared.

'That's nonsense. We'll hang on to our guns,' said Benda.

'Sure. Let everybody find his own,' said Prochazka.

'We'll only turn in what's left over. That'll be enough for them anyway.'

'You bet. Who else can give 'em so many?'

'So let's go to the storehouse and turn 'em in,' said Vahar.

'Wait a minute, we'd better wait till they come for 'em,' said Perlik.

'No, we'd better hand them in ourselves. They won't be able to hold it against us anyway.'

'That's right. They won't scold us,' said Benda. I could tell he was embarrassed now that he had seen in black and white that Perlik had probably been right all along.

'Aw, nuts, let's turn 'em in. That'll be better,' said Vahar nervously.

'Think so?'

'Sure.'

'Wait, let's wait for Prema,' said Prochazka.

Vahar looked towards the main building. 'All right,' he said.

'Bringing weapons, boys?' somebody said behind of us. I turned around. There stood Major Weiss, looking very pleasant.

'Yes,' said Benda.

'That's fine,' said Major Weiss and turned back the tarpaulin revealing the pile of rifles, German bazookas and two sub-machine guns.

'Well, well, you've outdone yourselves, boys,' said Major Weiss. 'Come along with me now. We'll take them over to the storeroom.'

'Yes, sir,' said Benda and turned to us. The boys looked at him uncertainly.

'Let's go,' said Benda, and didn't look at anybody. Major Weiss was already heading for the storeroom.

'I thought we were going to wait for Prema,' said Prochazka.

'But he's ordered us,' said Benda.

'But they're going to want us to turn in everything,' said Kocandrle.

'Aw, no. You saw the way he just glanced at the wagon.'

'I don't know.'

'Oh, sure.'

Major Weiss turned around. 'Follow me, boys,' he called to us.

'We're coming,' said Benda and started to push the wagon.

'I don't know,' repeated Kocandrle, but Vahar had already turned the shaft. The boys slowly began to push. It made me mad, too. I didn't want to part with my gun. Should I make a break for it? But it was probably too late now. Weiss had seen me. And what would I do with a gun all by myself, if the rest of the boys didn't have any weapons? But I could hide it somewhere. Sure, it wouldn't be a bad idea to have it in the storeroom. You could daydream a lot better that way. About gangsters and things like that. But Major Weiss was waiting for us and his assistants surrounded us. We were on the spot. Weiss slowly trundled the wagon towards the storeroom. It was around the corner from the icehouse. Hruska from Messerschmidt stood in front of the doorway wearing a uniform and a helmet strapped under his chin. He was holding a rifle with a bayonet on it and staring straight ahead. One wing of the door was closed and there was a sign on it reading: ARSENAL. Slowly we approached the doorway. Hruska drew himself up straight and tall.

'Hey! Open up!' called Major Weiss.

Some guy with a pipe looked out. I knew him. It was the stockroom man at the brewery. He'd always been here. The stock had changed a bit, but otherwise there was no difference. He looked at us and shoved back the bolt. Then he leaned against the door and pushed it open.

'Bring it in, boys,' said Major Weiss.

We pushed the wagon. The same kind of light fixture hung from the storeroom ceiling as in Skocdopole's warehouse. There was a table underneath and behind it sat the high-school janitor in his Czech Legion uniform with all his medals pinned on. He had a sheet of paper and a bottle of ink in front of him. There was somebody I knew by sight standing beside him, in a green cape and officer's cap. The man in the cape saluted. Major Weiss saluted, too.

'Another lot,' said Major Weiss. 'Boys, hand it over piece by piece to the lieutenant, and the sergeant will write it down.'

I looked around. A row of rifles stood stacked up along the wall. At the end of the row I saw light Czechoslovak Army machine guns with tripods. There were a couple of sacks on

the floor and on top, neat little pyramids of egg-shaped hand grenades. There were about twelve bazookas leaning against the other wall and a collection of all sorts of revolvers spread out on a table behind the janitor.

'Let's go,' said the janitor. 'First you'd better take off what you've got on so you can move around easier.'

'Oh, that doesn't bother us,' said Benda.

'You just take off those guns. You'll be more comfortable. You've got to do it sooner or later.'

Benda stood silently in front of the janitor. I could see he was feeling uncomfortable. Then he spoke up slowly. 'You want ... the stuff we're carrying, too?'

The janitor looked at him in surprise. 'Naturally.'

'Well, now, look, we liberated this stuff ourselves.'

'Yes, I know. Don't worry, we won't forget that.'

'But ...'

'I write down the name of the donor of every weapon, whenever there is one.'

'But we'd like to keep them.'

'Keep them?'

'Yes.'

'I'm sorry, but that's impossible. Didn't you read the order?'

'The one on the door?'

'Yes.'

'Well, yes ...'

'You read the order?'

'Yes.'

'Well, there you are.'

'But, look. We ...'

Major Weiss turned. 'Yes?'

'Major, this gentleman refuses to hand over his weapons.'

Major Weiss peered at Benda and assumed a military expression. 'Do you know the order?'

'Yes, Major, but -'

'Quiet! You know the order, therefore you also know your duty.'

'Yes -'

'Every soldier must obey without question orders given by superior officer.'

Benda flushed.

'I'm not a soldier!' he burst out.

'What's that?' said Major Weiss.

'I'm not a soldier,' Benda repeated.

'When were you born?'

'The twenty-second of March, 1924.'

'Then according to the proclamation of the chairman of the National Committee, you're mobilized.'

'This is the first I ever heard of any proclamation.'

'Well, I'm telling you now. Now turn in your weapons please.'

Benda didn't move.

'Are you going to hand them over? I'm giving you your last chance. Otherwise I'll have to regard this as a clear case of insubordination.' Major Weiss waited in silence and watched Benda. Then he added, slowly and significantly, 'And do you know what that means when a state is in extreme peril, as it is now?'

Benda stood in front of him, his face red, looking at the ground. The gun slung across his back looked silly now. He was whipped. He stood there in his black fireman's helmet and he'd been completely whipped. His round face burned. Major Weiss was watching him, icy and military. He was only doing his duty.

'Well?' he said. 'This is it.' I could hardly believe my own ears, but he really said it. 'This is it.' Probably it had popped up in his head from all those novels he'd consumed during the war when he'd worked in the municipal library. I looked at Benda. He was crushed. He stood there with his pants stretched tight over his big rump, in that funny-looking fireman's helmet with a silver seam down the middle. I felt sorry for him. I watched him and I would have helped him if I could. I thought about staging a mutiny. But it was just a thought. We had guns in our hands and they didn't have anything. We could easily have got out of there. But I put it out of my head right away. It'd be all over in a couple days and then they'd try us for

edition and we'd get sent to jail on account of it for God knows how long. There wasn't anything we could do. Slowly, Benda took off the string of hand grenades and laid them down on the table in front of the janitor. Then he took off the gun trapped over his shoulders and placed it on top of the grenades.

'Good. I see you've understood what your duty is,' said Major Weiss. 'And don't think we don't know what we're doing. These weapons will be distributed among experienced trained soldiers.'

Benda stepped back. I took his place in front of the janitor. Cautiously, Major Weiss picked up Benda's submachine gun.

'Write this down, sergeant,' he said to the janitor. 'One light machine gun, donated by Mr - what's your name?'

'Submachine gun,' I said quickly and casually.

'What?' said Major Weiss.

'That's a submachine gun.'

I'd taken him by surprise. He was off balance now. He looked at me in embarrassment and his face flushed a little around his nose.

'It's a submachine gun, not a light machine gun,' I repeated obligingly.

'Yes. I know, Mr Smiricky. You don't need to instruct me,' he said brusquely, to cover up.

'I thought maybe you didn't know,' I said. I was capable of all kinds of insolence at that moment. Major Weiss turned pale with anger, but he was smart enough not to go on any further. He turned to the janitor and continued. 'Have you got that? One submachine gun, donated by Mr - what's your name?'

'Benda,' Benda said.

'Mr Benda.'

The janitor wrote it down. When he wrote submachine gun you could see how his pen hesitated. It was probably the first time he'd ever heard the word.

'Also six hand grenades,' Major Weiss went on. The lieutenant took the grenades and Benda's submachine gun and put them aside. I laid my own submachine gun down on the table in front of the janitor and pulled the ammunition out of my

pockets. I felt a bit like a thief, but then the whole thing was a farce anyway. And that's how we were disarmed. And we hadn't even fired a shot. It was a real farce. I felt a bit sad about giving up my gun, but at least I'd have a snapshot of it. That would be enough. And so I was out of it. Out of the army. And out of the uprising. And nobody could say I didn't have guts. And I'd be able to show Irena my picture. And I wasn't going to get mixed up in anything else. Let somebody else get mixed up. I'd done my part. Yesterday they'd practically put me in front of a firing squad and now today this business with our guns. I'd certainly done my part. Now Mr Moutelik and Mr Machacek could play at being heroes. I'd just sit by and watch. I stepped away from the table and stood next to Benda. Vahar moved in front of the janitor and put down his flag and staff.

'One Czechoslovak flag,' Major Weiss dictated. 'Donated by Mr—?'

'Vahar,' said Vahar, and stepped back to join us.

Then all the rest of the boys stepped up to the janitor's table, one after another. The lieutenant, his collar unbuttoned, checked the weapons and carried them over to the wall. You could tell from the way he picked up our submachine guns that it was the first time he'd ever laid his hands on one. Benda watched sadly. I watched with interest. When they were through with us, Major Weiss said, 'Thank you. That's all. Now report to the office.' He spoke briskly and officially because he was mad at us. Especially at me. Well, I'd shown him up. I turned around and went out. The first thing I saw was Bertý Moutelik with his camera. He stood there with his camera up to his eye taking a picture of four gentlemen who were posing for him. I knew them all. They were from the Commercial Bank and they'd already been inducted because they had on red-and-white armbands with some kind of gold inscription. When I got closer, I could read it. *CS ARMY* stood out like the letters on a ribbon on a funeral wreath. I noticed that there were already a lot of groups standing around in the yard with armbands on. We went on towards the main building. I saw the boys from the band standing over by the icehouse. I left the others and went over to them.

'Hi,' I said. They turned to me.

'Hi,' said Haryk. Benno was wearing his sheepskin cap. He wore it pulled down low over his eyes and he looked a small-town hick. Benno was always good for a laugh. Day before yesterday he'd talked as if he was scared, but he hadn't lost his sense of humour. I remember him playing a hurdy-gurdy at a carnival once and the peasants, who didn't know who he was, threw money into his cap. We walked by him, too, and Haryk threw him a ten-crown note and Benno thanked him respectfully. He gave the guy who'd loaned him the hurdy-gurdy a thousand crowns for letting him use it half a day. But he could afford it. His dad's shop was doing good business.

'You're looking sharp, Benno,' I said.

'Hail to our homeland,' said Benno.

'All hail!' said Haryk.

'So you're in already?' I said, because I saw they were all wearing those mourning bands on their arms.

'You bet. Answering our country's call,' said Lexa.

'I'm going to get in line.'

'Go on, then come back here. We'll make up an exemplary body of fighting men.'

I laughed and went up to the door and took my place in line. Hrob, a red-headed kid I'd known in grade school, was just ahead of me. He looked at me with those great big eyes of his.

'Hello,' he said in a respectful voice.

'Hello,' I answered, very friendly. Hrob had mild blue eyes. I remembered him — how he'd excelled in two things in school. He'd been absolutely incapable of learning the multiplication tables so he'd dropped out of school in fourth grade, but he was always so quiet and mild that the teacher had a hard time before finally deciding to flunk him. He really didn't excel so much in the second thing. It just brought him fame. That was one time in second grade, I guess, when we were still just little kids and we used to have peeing contests in the john at recess. Who could sprinkle the wall most. Ponykl won. He got all the way up to the strip of black tar paint and made a gorgeous palm tree on the wall. Hrob just watched us, but then all of a

sudden he smiled, unbuttoned his fly, took out his little peter, bowed, and then a fine yellowish stream spurted out like a fountain and gradually went higher and higher up the wall. But still not as high as Ponykl's. Hrob leaned back a little bit more and he shouldn't have done that because the yellow stream dropped back from the wall and before the poor kid could duck, it fell back on his head, obeying the law of gravitation. The kids razzed him about it for the rest of his school career. Now there he stood in front of me, looking at me with those big, docile, respectful blue eyes. He had on a neat blue suit made of reject material by which you could always recognize the workers from Lewith's weaving mill on Sunday.

'You going to enlist too?' I said to him.

'Yes.'

'Me, too,' I said, and that was all.

Hrob said nothing. He never talked much. We stood there mutely and the line moved slowly into the building. We got into the hall and shuffled forward. The others who'd been through already came out, pulling on their armbands. Another guy in uniform stood by the office door with a fixed bayonet and whenever someone came out, he let in another one. The line was quiet. Nobody shoved. I was already nearly up to the door. They let Hrob go in and I stayed outside. The soldier with the bayonet was kidding around with some guy behind me. Then the door opened, Hrob emerged with a glowing face, reverently clutching his armband. I went in. Mr Kuratko sat at the desk wearing a captain's uniform and with a big ledger opened up in front of him. Four paper flags - Czechoslovak, Soviet, American, and British - stood on his desk in a little vase. There was no water in it. On one side of Captain Kuratko sat old Cemelik with colonel's stars on his epaulets and on the other side was Mr Manes with a blue armband with red trim and the inscription, NATIONAL COMMITTEE, in gold letters. Around a little table in the corner sat Dr Sabata, Mr Kaldoun, Mayor Prudivy, and Krocan the factory owner. So it wasn't Mr Kaldoun who'd hauled in the flag, I realized. All of them were wearing those blue armbands with the red trim. The men behind the desk were watching me.

'Good morning,' I said, but Mr Manes and old Cemelik acted as if they didn't recognize me. They were acting very grim, like men at war. There they all sat, staging an uprising. People were pushing and shoving to get in and lay down their lives for their country while these men, in their own way, were doing their bit for their country, too. Mr Kaldoun, Mr Krocan, Dr Sabata. They'd all got along pretty well with the Germans. Now they were running a revolution. Nobody could find any fault with them. Everybody was mobilized. Everybody had to obey. So everything was fine. And Colonel Cemelik was giving the orders.

'Name?' Captain Kuratko asked me.

'Daniel Smiricky.'

Mr Kuratko wrote my name down in the first column of his ledger and put a number in front of it. Then he went on.

'Occupation?'

'Student.'

'Date of birth?'

'Twenty-seventh of September, 1924.'

'Where?'

'In Kostelec.'

'Kostelec County. Address?'

'Kostelec.'

'Street?'

'123 Jirasek.'

'Religion?'

'Roman Catholic.'

'Inducted?'

'I beg your pardon?'

'Have you been inducted?'

'No.'

'Has not done his military service.'

Mr Kuratko wrote a long sentence in his ledger, then took a mimeographed sheet of paper from a pile beside him, wrote something on it and handed it to me.

'Read this and sign it.'

It read: '*I, Daniel Smiricky, which Mr Kuratko had written in by hand, 'pledge on my honour and conscience that I will*

loyally obey all orders given by the local commander of the Czechoslovak Army in Kostelec and that I am ready if necessary to lay down my life for my country, the Czechoslovak Republic. Kostelec, - May, 1945. I took a pen, wrote in the date, May 6th, and signed my name. Mr Kuratko gave the sheet of paper to Mr Manes and he put it into a file in front of him. Then Mr Kuratko shook hands with me.

'Thank you,' he said.

'You're quite welcome,' I said. Then old Cemelik shook hands with me, and Mr Manes, too. He gave me a red-and-white armband from the basket beside the table. The basket was full of them.

'Thank you,' I said and turned around. I opened the door and the soldier was already shoving somebody else inside. So now I was a private in the Czechoslovak Army. Now I belonged to the revolutionaries. I pulled on the armband and felt it looked silly. But nobody was looking at me any differently than usual. So this was an uprising. I went out of the building. The brewery yard was swarming with people. They were standing around in clusters, wearing all kinds of coats and jackets and raincoats, and they had knapsacks on their backs. They were smoking and talking. They looked more like a hiking club getting ready for an outing. But they were an army. These were revolutionaries. There wasn't much you could do about it. Colonel Cemelik was at the head of the army and the supreme commander was Dr Sabata. It was an army. And I was in it.

I went down the stairs and looked for the boys. It had started raining again. Coat collars were turned up in the courtyard and people ducked into various doorways and sheds. But a lot of them still stood out in the yard. I buttoned my jacket up to my neck. Hell, why hadn't I worn a raincoat? I headed across the yard towards the icehouse. I didn't see the boys there but I heard the signal. We'd used that signal for as long as I can remember. It had caught on in town; even kids who didn't have anything to do with the band used it. I looked around. The rain started pouring down on the worn cobblestone pavement that led to the stable. People stood pressed up against the sides of the buildings. I heard the signal again and looked

around to see where it came from. I saw Benno's red face under his sheepskin cap and Haryk in his green raincoat. They were standing under a woodshed over by the fence. I hurried over to them.

'Greetings, brother,' Haryk said to me.

'Greetings. Let me under,' I said and crept in under the roof. It was dark and chilly and there were lots of other people in there, but you could hardly make them out in the dark. I stood between Benno and Haryk and looked out at the rain. It swept in sheets over the pavement and the fine chilly mist cooled my face. It felt good, standing there in the dark shed looking out at the rain.

'All actions cancelled because of the weather,' said Benno.

'In its first attempt to seize the offensive, the First Army Company got its feet wet,' said Haryk.

'The offensive was repelled by Colonel Cemelik's unexpected attack of rheumatism,' said Benno.

'Shut up,' said Fonda from inside the shed. The boys stopped. I turned around and all I could make out in the darkness were a lot of pale faces and eyes. There was a little hole in the back wall of the shed that let in some light. We didn't say anything for a while. More people rushed over to the shed and pushed inside. But there was still plenty of room. By now all I could see was a patch of the courtyard over the dark heads of the people in front of me. Colonel Cemelik, wearing a green cape, walked across that little patch; the water trickled off his cap and down his face but he went on valiantly, taking his time. When he disappeared, the space was empty again. I leaned out and saw there was hardly anything left of the line now, just a handful of people up by the door. They must have been soaked to the skin by now. Then Cemelik appeared again and behind him came Hrob, his face glowing with enthusiasm, carrying a load of rifles on his back.

'Hey, look, reinforcements,' said Haryk. Cemelik, with Hrob at his heels, disappeared into the main building. The rain kept on falling. The revolution was called off. Couldn't go on in a downpour like this. I could just imagine how glad this rain must have made Dr Sabata feel. Sound the retreat and then

there goes the army into a shed. Above the brewery the sky was white and grey with rain.

'Danny, is that you?' I heard behind me. It was Rosta. I recognized his voice immediately.

'Yeah, where are you?'

'Here. Come on and sit down.'

I turned, but it was too dark to see. Somebody switched on a flashlight. The cone of light travelled over the ground. A pile of small logs was stacked up in the back of the shed. Some people were sitting on them, but there was still room. The flashlight gleamed from the top of the pile. Behind it I could see Rosta's face.

'Okay,' I said and started to scramble up over the logs. It wasn't easy, but I made it. I sat down beside Rosta. The logs were rough so you could feel them on your behind, but it was better to sit down than stand up.

The rain was falling steadily on the roof of the shed, making an awful racket. We sat there high up in the dark on a pile of wood, and now I couldn't see into the yard at all. All I could see were the dark silhouettes of people standing at the edge of the shed and the milky gloomy light beyond. I was overcome by a feeling of security. The drumming of the rain on the roof awoke all sorts of recollections. About the Giant Mountains and Ledecsky Rocks, about a shed like this one, only that one was for hay, at Ledec. And how I sat there that time with Irena and Zdenek and black clouds were scudding low and crooked across the sky, but there was still a narrow strip of blue sky at the horizon and the rays of the sun came through that strip of blue and shone on the tops of the rocks. And there in that strip of blue, birch trees swayed in the wind and a dead man was hanging from one of them and Irena screamed and clung to Zdenek. It was dark in that shed and I felt lonely and rejected and there were those black clouds and the light disappeared behind them and the rain streamed down over the cliffs. Irena's teeth were chattering and she clung to Zdenek and I crawled out of the shed and stood under the leaking eaves. Rain dripped on me as I stood out there looking down into the valley at the gilded tops of the cliffs and at the rainbow bulging above them

and at the birch trees and at the dead man hanging there and at the dark pine woods in the rain, and behind me in the cabin was Irena with Zdenek and I was all alone and alone and alone.

It was dark inside the shed and suddenly warm and then suddenly cool again. It was very nice and we sat on the damp logs and for a while said nothing.

'Listen,' said Rosta.

'What?'

'Aren't you fed up with this?'

'I'll say.'

'Me, too.'

'You look tired.'

'I am.'

'Why? What'd you do yesterday?'

'We had a binge up at the cabin.'

'With Honza?'

'Yeah.'

'And some girls?'

'Naturally.'

I didn't say anything. I knew Rosta pretty well and I knew what was on his mind.

'How's it going with Dagmar?' I asked.

'Don't ask me.'

'She still giving you a hard time?'

'I'll say.'

'And you're still crazy about her?'

'I sure am. How's it going with you?'

'What?'

'With Irena?'

'Oh. Well, I'm still in love with her.'

'So we're in the same boat, huh?'

'I guess we are.'

Rosta fell silent. Then, 'You know what we are?' he said.

'We're a couple of ...'

'Fools. I know.'

'But still, you know something?'

'What?'

'I don't know quite how to say it, but I just wish those dumb

girls had some idea how much a guy has to suffer on account of them.'

'Yeah. You're right. But it's all for nothing - all that suffering.'

'You think so?'

'I know so!'

'Listen, though, I'm still going to marry Dagmar someday.'

'Well, anything's possible.'

'No, honest.'

'Yeah, sure. You might do in a pinch.'

'What do you mean by that?'

'Just what I say.'

'Which is?'

'Well, I mean if she goes on horsing around.'

'You mean -'

'Yeah, with Kocandrle. If he knocks her up -'

'You know something? That wouldn't even bother me,' said Rosta.

'I know it wouldn't.'

'Honest. I'm so crazy about her she could be a whore if she wanted to and it wouldn't make any difference to me.'

'I know.'

'Anyway, everything I do is just for her sake anyway.'

I thought about my Last Will and Testament. That's what I'd written in it, too. Everything I've done has been for you only, Irena, or something to that effect.

'Rosta,' I said.

'What?'

'Did you know that I've already written my Last Will and Testament?'

'Really?'

'Yes.'

'And what'd you write in it?'

'Well, it's actually a letter to Irena, understand?'

'Yeah.'

'A farewell message.'

'Gee, I should have done that, too.'

'Well, you still can.'

'Who'd you give it to?'

'I've got it in my wallet. I addressed it to her.'

'What'd you write in it?'

'Everything. How much I love her and so on.'

'Hell, why didn't I write something like that, too?'

'It's not too late yet.'

'Yeah, but where?'

'When it stops raining.'

'I will, too,' said Rosta, and then he fell silent again, thinking. After a while he said, 'Just imagine how it'll be when the girls get them.'

'Boy how about that!'

'Just imagine how they'll bawl.'

'Or maybe not.'

'Yeah, maybe not. But at least it'll make them feel pretty strange.'

'Except it's never going to come to that.'

'What do you mean?'

'You don't really think anybody's going to get killed in this thing, do you?'

'Maybe.'

'Maybe. But I wouldn't count on it.' I was silent. I could tell that Rosta didn't really believe anyone would get killed either. We sat there in silence looking at the light outside the shed.

'Oh, well,' I said.

'Yeah, you said it,' said Rosta. It felt good to sit there and talk about girls and not to mean anything very seriously. And to go into this revolution as unhappy lovers. As I recalled, I was always most in love with Irena when I was in some kind of fix. That time with the sabotage at the factory. Or when they arrested Father and I was expecting them to arrest me, too. Still the trouble couldn't be too serious. When it was then I forgot all about Irena. Like yesterday when they were taking me off to be executed. Now, though, things weren't that bad. Now it was good, being in love with Irena and thinking about her.

'Listen,' I said.

'What?'

'What are you here for anyway?'

'What do you mean?'

'Why are you risking your neck here?'

'Well...'

'I'm here on account of Irena,' I said hurriedly so he couldn't get in ahead of me.

'Sure. Me, too. On account of Dagmar,' said Rosta. Then he went on. 'You think anything'll come of all this?'

'Could be.'

'It sure doesn't look that way, though, does it?'

'Well, nothing'll happen down here at the brewery. But the communists'll pull something.'

'You think so?'

'Absolutely.'

'Well, fine. It's all the same to me.'

'Me, too,' I said, and it was. Not quite, though. I wanted them to pull something since it was pretty clear this army here wouldn't do much. And something had to happen. If the revolution had already started, then something had better happen, and I thought about Irena. The rain eased up a little. It was just drizzling now. We sat there in silence, thinking our separate thoughts. Time passed. All of a sudden some of the guys in front rushed out of the shed.

'What is it?' I called.

'They're going to read a proclamation,' somebody yelled up in front.

'Should we go?' I said to Rosta.

'Okay,' said Rosta and got up.

We climbed down the pile of logs and brushed off our pants. Outside, the yard was full again. The crowd had gathered in front of the main building. There on the steps by the front door stood Colonel Cemelik, Major Weiss, and Dr Sabata. Colonel Cemelik wasn't wearing his cape any more and he was holding a sheaf of papers. The crowd, in their hiking outfits and raincoats, with their knapsacks strapped on their backs, pressed forward around the steps and stared up at the colonel. Cemelik started reading out something but we couldn't understand a

word. The crowd buzzed and there were yells of 'Quiet!' and 'Listen!' Cemelik stopped reading and looked out over the crowd and gradually it quieted down. Then Cemelik started reading again, but he had such a weak voice you could just barely hear him. He said something about all squads being divided up into six-man patrol squads, each under the command of an older, more experienced soldier and that, in order to assure order and security, these teams would conduct three-hour patrols through the town. That really made me sore. I'd thought this army would at least put up anti-tank traps or something and lie in wait for the enemy. But patrol? Then Cemelik raised his voice.

'First Lieutenant Dr Panozka!'

'Here!' somebody called out from the crowd.

'Lieutenant, you'll take charge of patrol team number one,' said Cemelik. Then he told him to stand over by the icehouse and read out the names of his squad. He held the list in front of him and his voice sounded very crisp and military. Lexa and Pedro were in it. I could see them working their way through the crowd towards Dr Panozka. He stood over by the icehouse in his hunting coat, his hands folded over his paunch, waiting for the members of his squad. I listened some more. They were all there. Mr Moutelik, Commissioner Machacek, Attorney Frinta, Mr Jungwirth. They were all older, more experienced soldiers and they each got their six picked privates. A magnificent army. And it was in good hands. Then all of a sudden Cemelik read out my name, too, and I belonged to Dr Bohadlo's patrol. I knew him, too. He was a lawyer. I saw him standing by the icehouse in his tight-fitting knickers, a plump guy with a big bottom, chubby legs, a pudgy face, and a blue beret on top of his head. Benno in his cap and Haryk were already standing beside him and three other guys I only knew by sight. I joined them.

'How do you do?' I said to Dr Bohadlo.

'Hello there. Welcome,' he said benignly, and his mouth stretched a little as if he were smiling.

'Hi,' said Haryk.

'Hi,' I said.

Then we all stood there silently and waited until the army had been divided up. It was already noon and I was hungry. I'd had about all I could take of this rain and this hunger and these patrols and this army. I wanted some food. I wondered what was going to happen now. Whether they'd dismiss us to go home for lunch or whether they had a field kitchen somewhere and were going to serve soup. I would rather have gone home because it was Sunday. But a soup kitchen had its attractions, too.

'Jesus, I'm hungry,' I said.

'Me, too,' said Haryk. 'Aren't you, Benno?'

'Shut up,' said Benno. He was mad. With his dimensions, it was no surprise. I was convinced you could have heard his stomach growling with hunger if it hadn't been for all the noise. We looked at Cemelik. The crowd around him had thinned out and broken up into small groups scattered around the yard. Then Cemelik stopped reading and announced that all patrol commanders should report to his office for further instructions.

'Well, I'll be going, boys,' said Dr Bohadlo. 'You'll wait here for me, right?'

'Yes,' said Haryk.

'Sure,' Benno and I said.

Dr Bohadlo left. He trotted off on his chubby little legs, bouncing along because he suffered from shortened tendons or something. We stood there. It started raining again so we got up next to the wall of the icehouse and looked around. Steam rose from the woods beyond the brewery. It was noon-time and quiet. I could imagine the fires crackling in kitchen stoves all over town and the pots on top of the stoves bubbling away and giving off good smells. But the menfolk wouldn't be coming home for lunch today because they'd patrol the town. It was like a county Sokol festival or something. And then I thought about Irena again. Christ, I thought about her all the time. A two-seat Aero roadster drove into the yard and Jirka Krocan jumped out. He had on a leather coat. A Czechoslovak flag fluttered from the radiator cap. I thought about Irena. God, maybe that was all I could think about. And I was supposed to

be one of the intelligentsia. I would have liked to know what the intelligentsia thinks about and if they really think about the things they say they do. Naturally, inventors and scientists and people like that think about their bacteria and electrodes and so on. But I meant the ordinary intelligentsia. Like me and Benno and Haryk. And Irena. Irena told me once that she went into the woods by herself with the dog to think. About literature and politics and I don't know what all. And I felt secretly embarrassed when she told me that, because when I'm alone usually all I ever think about is girls, and I felt inferior compared to her. But that had been a long time ago. An awfully long time ago. I wasn't like that any more. I didn't trouble my head with thoughts any more. I'd already caught on to what it was all about, to what really mattered. Nothing really mattered. Or, if anything did, then it was girls and having as much fun as you could with them. I wondered what Benno was thinking about and figured he was probably thinking about lunch now, and then once in a while about Helena and music, and Haryk was probably thinking about music, about 'Swingin' the Blues' and 'Sweet Sue' where he's got a big guitar solo, but you don't really think about music, you just get the whole band playing in your head and you play all the instruments simultaneously, getting dazzling effects from the trombone's lowest registers and letting the trumpet squeal away. That's how you think about music, and you don't need intellect for that either. In general, it seemed to me that intelligence was something awfully vague, even non-existent, and that probably the only intelligent people were Socrates and Einstein and people like that. But besides them nobody. And so, so what if I was thinking about Irena? I liked thinking about her, about her mouth and her breasts and her hips and about how it'd feel to have it all there under your hands and about what's under her skirt and my thoughts were as common as dirt and I felt fine all the same.

'Shit,' said Benno.

'What's wrong?' said Haryk.

'What're they shitting around for? They want us to sit around here all day without having lunch?'

'It looks that way.'

'You'd think they could at least set up a goddamn field kitchen!'

Benno was so mad he couldn't see straight. Rain dripped off his cap and his ruddy face looked dangerous. The gentlemen with the blue-and-red armbands emerged from the main building. Each carried a sheet of paper. As they stepped out into the rain, they started turning up their collars and stuffing their papers into their pockets. Then each walked off to his own squad. Dr Bohadlo, his face glowing and pompous, came over to us.

'Well, boys, let's form up and get going,' he said.

'Where?' said Benno.

'We've been assigned the centre of town as far as Pozner's factory, then down around the old Jewish Cemetery, through the ghetto, and then back here to the brewery.'

'And what're we going to do?'

'We'll make the rounds every three hours and then have three hours free.'

'And we're going right now?'

'Yes. It's half past twelve now, so this time we'll make an exception and patrol for only two and a half hours.'

'You mean we're not going to have any lunch?'

'You'll survive. This once,' smiled Dr Bohadlo.

'That's a lousy trick to pull. Without food I'm not going anywhere,' said Benno and he meant it.

Dr Bohadlo took it as a joke though and he laughed. 'Fine, then. A small sacrifice for the Fatherland,' he said. 'You're in the army now. Line up two by two behind me.' Then he turned his back on us and lifted his hand like they do in Sokol when you're supposed to fall in.

'Shit,' said Benno softly.

The three guys whose names I didn't know promptly fell in behind Dr Bohadlo. The third one looked around at us and Benno shoved Haryk up to stand next to him. Haryk struck his hands in his raincoat pockets. Meanwhile Dr Bohadlo still stood there with his arm up in the air and his knickers stretching across his fat behind. The two boys in the first row stood at

attention behind him. The guy next to Haryk did, too. Haryk stood hunched over, his collar turned up against the rain.

'In step now - hup!' said Dr Bohadlo and flung out his left leg. The three boys leaned suddenly to the left and started off on their left feet, too. Haryk lagged behind, but soon got in step. Benno and I brought up the rear. Before long we were pretty far behind the others.

'Damn,' I said.

'Jerks,' said Benno and then we hurried up to join the column. With Dr Bohadlo in the lead, we marched along over the cobblestone pavement towards the gate. It wasn't so bad, marching along in step. I looked around and saw nobody was looking at us. So it wasn't too bad. Anyway there were plenty of other centipedes just like us all following their red-and-blue armbanded leaders. As we neared the gate, I saw it was closed. A man in uniform stood in front of the gate, a sergeant's insignia on his epaulets. He held a rifle with a fixed bayonet. Dr Bohadlo headed straight for the gate. The sergeant raised his rifle, opened the gate, and we swung right through like the London Horse Guard. Dr Bohadlo executed a faultless left turn. We marched along the highway towards the bridge. I looked left, off towards the Fort Arthur. Then we crossed the bridge and I looked up at Irena's window. Nobody there. Not a face in sight. We marched quietly towards the station. Mrs Manesova was standing on the corner in front of the County Office Building. When she saw us, she hurried after us.

'When are you coming home, Benno?' she asked.

'I don't know.'

'When will they let you go?'

'I don't know.'

'Aren't you hungry? Don't you want something to eat?'

We kept marching along at an unslackened pace with Mrs Manesova trotting alongside.

'Got anything with you?' asked Benno eagerly.

'No. I thought you were coming home.'

'I don't know when I'll get back. No idea when they'll let us go.'

'Where are you going?'

'To Pozner's and back.'

'So then I . . . I'll pack you a lunch and wait here for you, all right?'

'Yes. Do that.'

'All right,' Mrs Manesova stopped. Benno turned.

'Or else, maybe . . . how about bringing it to the brewery for me.'

'Where?' said Mrs Manesova, hurrying after us again.

'To the brewery, by the gate.'

'All right. I'll wrap you up a piece of the rabbit. Would you like that?'

'Yeah. And some salami.'

'Yes. By the brewery gate, is that right?'

'Yeah. So long now.'

'Good-bye.'

Mrs Manesova stood there looking after us. I glanced over at Benno. He was satisfied. Haryk turned around.

'Then you'll be ready to fight - right, Benno?' he said.

'Right.'

'Quiet, boys. No talking on patrol,' said Dr Bohadlo.

We stopped talking. We crossed the tracks and turned up past the Messerschmidt plant on Jirasek Boulevard. There were only a few people out. Most of the men had gone to the brewery and the women were sitting at home. I saw my parents looking out the window. Father was an invalid from the First World War so he didn't have to take part in this. I pretended I hadn't seen them. I didn't know quite how I should have greeted them. We passed under our window and kept on going. Marching right out here on the street was the bad part. It was silly, marching around without any guns. Still, the few people we did come across looked at us respectfully. And it went right on raining. I was starting to feel cold. We marched across the square, around Sokol Hall, past the high school and down Kocanda Street to Pozner's factory. Pozner's house stood silent and the blinds were all down. I wondered what Blanka, Pozner's daughter, was doing. She always came to high school in a car driven by a chauffeur and I knew she must be scared now since she was hysterical anyway. Lucie had told me once

that Blanka got temper tantrums and rolled all over the floor, and that she gave the servants there a very rough time. Lucie and Blanka had been sort of half friends but not close at all since Blanka wasn't really friendly with any of the local girls. And last year she'd gone off to take dancing lessons in Prague every week by car. I thought about her, because she was really very pretty, a special kind of beauty that was all mixed up with those millions that were waiting for her. Actually, they weren't waiting for her now since old Pozner would be locked up. Not that anybody really wanted to lock him up since none of the local bigwigs had anything special against him. They'd more or less all gone along with him, at least until up to just recently. But he'd compromised himself too much. It couldn't be overlooked any more. And then there was young Pozner. Rene, with his gold rings and sports clothes. And his post as chief engineer out at the factory. And going hunting with Miss Arnostova who came all the way from Moravia as Rene's fiancée and went out with the family to chamber concerts and to banquets thrown for the German officers. A stupid family, the Pozners. Lada Serpon was a millionaire, too, but he was a great guy compared to Rene. Rene was a dunce. I didn't have anything against millionaires or feel any envy at all, but Rene was a stuck-up jackass. I really wanted those Pozners to be sitting in their living-room or somewhere trembling all over with fright. We turned back around the factory and into the ghetto, past the old Jewish Cemetery with its toppled grave-stones. There weren't any Jews in the ghetto any more. We passed the old Jewish school and I thought about Mr Katz, the cantor I used to go to for my German lessons, and it made me feel sad. On Jew Street, the rain came down in an even more melancholy way than before and the battered old school stood there. I remembered the evenings long ago in the cantor's kitchen when we'd forget about grammar and literature for a while, forget about Goethe and Schiller and Chamisso, and just talk about the Germans and grumble and the old cantor would lament. What we Jews have gone through, he said, that is something nobody knows - nobody. And from the corner where the stove was and where the embers glowed, the can-

tor's fat old wife would murmur her agreement and the cantor would start telling me what the Germans were planning to do to the Jews and I'd reassure him that it wasn't going to be like that, but knew it would be, so then I'd change the subject and talk about the cantor's little granddaughter Hannerle, and then the cantor would forget all about everything else and take out the Hebrew primer he'd already bought for when she'd start to school, but she never did because less than a year later they were all shipped off to the gas ovens. They never came back. I thought about grubby ugly little Hannerle and about her black-haired mother and about the matzohs the cantor always gave me on holidays and about the times I'd cautiously slip out of school so nobody – not even any of my best friends – would notice that I still went to the cantor's house. And then as we marched through the ghetto, I remembered Bondy who used to live farther on down the street and at whose house we first began to put our band together, and the old xylophone on which I used to play 'Donkey Serenade,' and Bondy's rotting old grandfather dying in the next room of paralysis, and Mr Bondy who hung on to his shop until the very last minute, and his pianist's fingers and his Mendelssohn, and as we passed the synagogue with its broken windows I remembered the cantor's daughter's wedding when the synagogue was full of hats and the rabbi's wedding sermon full of optimism and joy, and all the Kostelec Jews were there in all their finery, Mr Pick, a director at our bank, Dr Strass, all white and tiny, the Steins and the Goldsteins and the cantor's daughter and all the mystical talk about the prenuptial ceremonies for an Orthodox Jewish bride. I could imagine it all again, absolutely clear and distinct. I imagined her naked in the bath with all the Jewish women of Kostelec around, washing her and mumbling prayers. I didn't know whether that was the way they really did it or not but it was nice to think about and we kept on going, past the well with the Hebrew inscription at the end of the ghetto, and somehow it all made me feel terribly sad. Dr Bohadlo, stuffed into his silly-looking knickers, the back of his fat little neck all red, marched along briskly. But all those others were gone – the cantor and the rabbi and Hannerle and

all of them. Tears came to my eyes and my throat tightened up. Christ! I'm as sentimental as an old whore. But I felt sad. What did I care about the rabbi? What did I care about them? It was probably just all those memories. But they were nice memories. But then memories always were.

We were back on Jirasek Boulevard again and I didn't feel tears in my eyes any more. It disappointed me to feel there weren't tears in my eyes any more. We marched along the right side of the street. It was practically deserted and my feet were hurting me now and I was hungry and cold. The uprising wasn't fun at all any more. This whole damn uprising against the Germans and Dr Bohadlo's military games. If other people wanted to play war with him I didn't mind, but I was fed up with the whole thing. A platoon of Germans, armed to the teeth, came towards us. For a minute I felt tense and wondered what was going to happen. But they didn't pay any attention to us. They just passed by and I noticed them peering out at us curiously from under their iron helmets. Of course. Dr Sabata had arranged a truce. We marched down the street towards the station and past the County Office Building and over the bridge and back to the brewery. Mrs Manesova was standing by the gate with a package. Dr Bohadlo didn't even so much as glance at her, though normally he would have greeted her courteously. But now he was on patrol. He strode straight towards the gate. The sergeant opened it.

'Here you are, Benno,' said Mrs Manesova. 'You think it'll be enough for you?'

'Yeah. Thanks,' said Benno and took the package and then we were in the courtyard again. I turned around and saw Mrs Manesova standing at the gate looking at us through the bars. But Benno was already unwrapping the package.

'Company, halt!' said Dr Bohadlo and wheeled around to face us.

'All right, boys, there'll be fifteen minutes' rest and then we go out again.'

'What time is it, Doctor?' said Haryk.

'Quarter to two. Just time for one more round.'

'Thank you.'

'Wait here for me. I'll be right back,' said Dr Bohadlo and walked off. We leaned against the shed. My feet were hurting bad.

'You going to let us see what you got?' said Haryk.

Benno unwrapped the package and took out half a roast rabbit.

'I'll eat this myself,' he said. Then he pulled out a long hunk of salami and a couple of bread-and-butter sandwiches. He gave me one and one to Haryk and told us to cut the salami in three. We divided it up and started eating. The salami tasted wonderful. We stood there and watched what was going on in the yard. Apparently everything was running smoothly. The patrols came and went, wet and hungry. Men in officers' capes crossed the yard now and then, carrying sheets of paper, and guys in red-and-white armbands crowded under the eaves around the buildings and sheds. A stream from the main building's rainspout trickled along the pavement towards the gate.

'See anybody?' said Haryk.

'No,' I said. All the boys we knew were out on patrol apparently.

'I've got an ocean inside my shoes,' said Haryk.

'Me, too.'

We didn't say anything. After a while, Haryk said, 'Boy, this really pisses me off.'

'Me, too,' said Benno.

'They can stuff this whole business. I sure didn't think it was going to be like this.'

'Some fun,' I said. 'All we'll do is catch cold and then we won't even be around for the liberation.'

Dr Bohadlo reappeared. 'Well, boys, all rested up?' he said.

Benno growled.

'All right, let's go,' said Dr Bohadlo energetically, and he turned his rump towards us again. His fat hiker's calves got on my nerves. I was already aching all over from this marching around and I couldn't see any point in it. If we meet Irena, all wet and unarmed like this, I'd really look like a fool. Dr Bohadlo flung up his arm; we fell into formation behind him and started off on another silent tramp. It was an awful bore.

We went through town in a steady rain and finally tottered back to the brewery, half dead and soaked to the skin. Dr Bohadlo still looked fresh though.

'Can we go home now?' I asked him.

He smiled. 'Home? Why, no. You'll be staying in the barracks, boys.'

'Barracks? Where?'

'Here, in the brewery. Now you've got three hours' rest and at six we start off on patrol again.'

'Are we going to get something to eat?' said Benno.

'Go over to the warehouse. There's tea there. And everybody report back here by six. Right?'

'Right,' said the three boys we didn't know.

'Dismissed,' said Dr Bohadlo.

The boys clicked their heels and snapped to attention.

'Adieu,' said Benno.

Dr Bohadlo walked away.

'What say we go get some tea?' I said.

'Why not? But where?' said Benno.

'I don't know. At the warehouse.'

'Which warehouse?'

'Don't know. Let's ask.'

Jirka Vit was just going by with some kind of papers. They'd apparently made him a messenger boy.

'Hey, Jirka, where're they giving out tea?' I yelled after him.

'Over there,' he said and pointed to a big open door where a couple of guys were standing.

'Thanks,' I said, and we went over.

It was dark with just one dim light bulb in the ceiling, and in that dim light you could make out a few shadowy figures going out through another door in the back of the building. Some sort of machines were stored off to one side in the dark. We opened the back door and in the light ahead of us saw a big arched room crowded with guys in rain-drenched clothes holding steaming cups and plates. In the back, white steam rose to the ceiling. We elbowed our way through the mob and I saw Mrs Cemelikova in a white apron standing beside a big pot ladling out tea. There was another door in the back and two fat

women were just bringing in a big tray piled with bread. Then in came Dagmar Dreslerova, also wearing a white apron and a dish towel. She went over to Mrs Cemelikova and said something to her. Mrs Cemelikova nodded and Dagmar turned. She looked pretty good in the middle of all that kitchen crew. I looked around to see if Irena was around somewhere. But she wasn't. We stood in line for the tea and slowly moved up towards the pot. I picked up a cup and Mrs Cemelikova poured in a ladle of ersatz tea for me and I said hello and thank you and she gave me a nice smile and then I got a slice of dry bread from Mrs Skocdopolova who was standing next to her. I stuck the bread in my pocket and we went around the corner. Somebody called to us. I turned. It was Lexa and he was sitting by the wall with Pedro on an upturned crate. We went over to them.

'Hi,' said Haryk.

'Hi,' said Lexa. 'Well, have you already done your patriotic duty?'

'That's right. And now we're coming to fortify the inner man.'

'Not much to fortify yourself with here.'

'Well, here goes anyway,' said Haryk and sat down next to Lexa. The next crate was empty and we pulled it over. Benno and I sat down opposite them. New guys kept crowding around us, wet and steaming, clutching their steaming cups. It reminded me of when they used to butcher at Count Humprecht's big farm where I'd gone once on a work brigade during vacation. They'd done that in a cellar, too, all murky and dark just like this one. Beside me, Benno noisily slurped his tea and Pedro and Lexa gnawed at the dry bread. The tea was hot and I thought about the past and the feeling I'd had when I was a little kid in bed and used to make a snowy igloo out of my eiderdown quilt, or how I'd lie there while Mother and Father were still reading and pretend I was camping, but in a meadow, and the feeble light of Father's bedside lamp was the dying light of the campfire. So there we sat in the steamy half-light and one shadow after another flitted across the faces of the boys in front of me and shadows danced and flickered and

shifted on the wall beyond and I thought about the Countess Humprecht with her hawk-beak nose and the big dusty room in the castle and about me teaching her how to play the piano instead of working on the harvest and about her legs in her riding breeches, and my thoughts roamed out over the fields around Rounov with the girls in their bright-coloured dresses and to the pheasants and the tree-lined drive and I saw the Gestapo taking the young Count Humprecht away that night before I was supposed to leave and then I remembered the Queen of Württemberg and Irena and it started all over again, like always. Those thoughts and memories wouldn't leave me alone and none of them had anything to do with anything I'd ever learned in school.

'Not bad, if you want to vomit,' said Lexa and put his cup down on the floor.

'Boiled socks,' said Benno.

'Think your old man drinks this stuff, too.'

'Are you kidding?' said Pedro. 'The command gets black coffee.'

'What do they want with us anyway?' said Haryk.

'We're maintaining peace and order.'

'And who's disturbing it?'

'Communists,' said Pedro.

'I'd like to see 'em.'

'Yeah, but they are. Seriously,' said Lexa, 'this afternoon they tried to loot the munitions train down at the station.'

'Who said?'

'Dr Sabata was there and got into a hassle with them.'

'Well, did they finally loot it or not?'

'No. The guards wouldn't let them get in. They tried to talk the guards over and bribe them with booze but they wouldn't let them in.'

'Sabata told you that?'

'No. Old man Cemelik told me. Now they're scared shitless that the commies are going to try and pull something tonight. They say they're going to step up the patrols.'

'Are they going to give us guns?' I said.

'They don't give a shit about us,' said Lexa.

'But we're supposed to go fight the commies, right?'
'Sure. For the sake of the nation.'
'What a mess! What a goddamn stinking mess,' said Benno.
'I'll second that motion,' said Haryk.
'Nobody mentions the Germans any more, I guess.'
'No. They've pulled out already.'

'So what the hell are we still farting around for?'
Lexa grimaced. 'Because there haven't been enough heroic deeds performed yet, that's why.'

Suddenly people were shushing each other and the room quieted down and you could hear Mrs Cemelikova saying in her shrill voice that all those who'd finished their tea should kindly make room for others. We picked ourselves up and took our cups over to the table. The hungry feeling I'd had was gone. We went out through the dark room with the light bulb in the ceiling and found ourselves back out in the yard again. In the meantime it had stopped raining but the sky was still overcast and mist from the woods hung low over the brewery. Men were strolling around the yard in clusters, their hands in their pockets, looking as if they had nothing to do. There wasn't a gun in sight.

'What the hell do they want to do with us anyway, keep us on ice?' said Haryk.

'Looks that way,' said Lexa.

'Didn't old Cemelik say when he'd let us go home?' asked Benno.

'When the danger's over and everything's safe again.'

'And all we're going to get is tea?'

'Bread, too,' said Lexa.

'Look, I say we clear the hell out,' said Haryk.

'Yeah, but how?'

'Over the fence.'

'They got guards all over the place.'

'Just like in a concentration camp,' said Benno.

'Exactly.'

'You mean we're just supposed to hang around here all day until...'

'You're in the army now,' said Lexa.

'We got screwed,' said Benno.

'Jesus bloody Christ,' said Haryk.

'Shit. Just one big shit,' said Lexa.

None of us said anything for a while. Then Haryk said, 'Hell. Next time they send us out on patrol, I'm taking off.'

'And the next thing you know you're up in front of a court-martial for desertion,' said Lexa.

'Oh, don't feed me that.'

'You don't think they can?'

'But the whole thing's a farce!'

'Except they take it seriously.'

'Like hell.'

'Sure. Just ask old Cemelik.'

'What can they do to me?'

'They'll put you in jail so long you'll come out on crutches.'

'Nuts.'

'And you'll never be able to go to college either.'

'Old Cemelik said that?'

'Yeah. I asked him because I wanted to clear out, too.'

'To hell with the whole thing,' I said. 'Let's go over and sit in the shed.'

'All right,' said Lexa, and we started off. The shed where I'd sat that morning with Rosta was empty - except for Rosta, sitting on his old perch. We climbed up on a pile of logs and sat down. It was cold in there, but the darkness inside the shed and the bright view outside gave me the same good feeling I'd had before. I slid over next to Rosta.

'How's it going?' said Rosta.

'And with you?' I asked.

'Did you see Dagmar?'

'Yeah. She's looking fine.'

'I was talking to her.'

'Yeah? Well?'

'I told her again.'

'And what did she say?'

'The same as always.'

'What did you say?'

'That I hoped she'd remember me in case anything happened to me.'

'What'd she say to that?'

'She said I got on her nerves.'

'Huh?'

'That I got on her nerves.'

'Why?'

'Because there were more important things to think about now and because she was getting pretty fed up with that kind of talk.'

We didn't say anything for a while. Then I said, 'You know something? She's just stupid.'

'No, she isn't.'

'She is, too.'

'She is not.'

'She is. Or else she really doesn't give a damn about you and is just giving you a rough time.'

'That's more like it.'

'Girls are bitches,' I said.

'They sure are.'

'I know the sort of more important things she's thinking about these days.'

'Me, too. Kocandrlle.'

'She still going with him?'

'Yeah.'

'You think he's already laid her?'

'Sure. He was bragging about it over at the Port Arthur.'

'He talks big.'

'Yeah, but I know it for a fact.'

'How?'

'I ran into them at Habry on New Year's Eve. They were coming out of Kocandrlle's cabin.'

'Well, she's a tramp, that's all.'

'That doesn't keep me from loving her though.'

'I know.'

'I can't help it. I don't care how much of a tramp she is, I'm still crazy about her.'

'I know. It's the same with me,' I said.

'You think Zdenek's laid Irena, too?' Rosta asked interestedly.

'Sure. They spent three days together at Ledecsky Rocks.'

'And you're still crazy about her, right?'

'Sure. What would I do if I wasn't?'

'Anyway, it's nonsense the way so many guys get all worked up about whether a girl's a virgin or not.'

'I'll say. It doesn't make any difference to me.'

'Me neither.'

'Then what are you worrying about anyway?'

'What? Well, that she won't let me lay her, too.'

'And if she would, the fact that Kocandrlle had had her before wouldn't bother you?'

'No.'

'I'm not so sure, Rosta,' I said.

Rosta shook his head. 'Not a bit. I know it wouldn't.'

'I'm not so sure.'

'Absolutely. Wouldn't bother me at all.'

'I think you're just talking.'

'No, I'm not.'

'Well, I'm not so sure. I wouldn't find it all that easy myself,' I said.

'I would,' said Rosta.

'You're easy to please then.'

'I am.' Rosta just sat there for a minute and then suddenly went on in an anguished voice, 'Jesus, what I've had to take from that woman! If only she knew! If only she had any idea what I've gone through for her!'

'She'd still shit on you,' I said.

'Maybe.'

'Sure she would. Women get a real kick out of that kind of thing.'

'I know. So I've been told.'

'Told what?'

'That I shouldn't let her know how crazy I am about her.'

'That's stupid too,' I said.

'You think so?'

'Sure. If you stop showing how you feel about her, she'll warm up a little, but once she's got her hooks into you again

she'll ditch you again and you'll be worse off than you are now.'

'You're right.'

'Besides, don't you find it sort of fun to tell her how much you love her?'

'No. Not when she tells me to forget it, it isn't.'

'It does me,' I said.

'And when she tells you it's hopeless.'

'Even then.'

'Well, it doesn't me.'

'It doesn't bother me. Because I'll get her one of these days.'

'Are you sure?'

'Absolutely.'

The guys in front stood up. Their silhouettes were etched against the white background outside. A thin buzz sounded in the distance and grew steadily louder.

'A plane,' said Benno, and he sounded scared.

'Wait!' said Pedro and listened. The buzzing came closer. It was fast, but it sounded kind of funny. Pedro listened tensely. He was an expert when it came to aeroplane engines. Then he stood up quickly. 'It's a Storch!'

'Yeah?' said Benno with relief.

'Sure. I recognized it right away. Let's go.'

We all rushed out. In the yard some guys were staring up at the sky and others running for cover. People were hugging the walls all over the place. We looked off towards where the sound was coming from and it kept getting louder, and then all of a sudden a plane appeared over the woods, so low that it looked pretty big, wide-winged and fuzzy in the mist, but still you could pick out all the details – the sturdy-looking undercarriage, the little wheels, the glassed-in cockpit. At first I thought maybe it might start shooting, but then I thought, no it didn't look big enough to mount a machine gun on. The plane seemed to be flying sort of funny, as if it was bouncing around in a strong wind, and then all of a sudden a big bunch of little white pieces of paper dropped out and came fluttering down through the air. 'Leaflets!' somebody yelled. They fell slowly and the wind carried them off over the yard towards

the woods. We scrambled after them. Off they went, most of them settling down in the woods. They sidled down softly on to the earth. But the wind blew some back and the crowd lunged first one way and then the other as the wind played with the falling papers. Pedro jumped up and grabbed hold of one. The crowd was pressing in around the few guys who'd managed to catch a leaflet. Pedro looked at it.

'Read it!' said Benno.

We crowded around Pedro and more people crowded around behind us. Pedro smoothed the paper out and started to read:

To all units of the Schörner forces. All units and soldiers of the Greater German Army are hereby ordered to assist all Czech organizations whose purpose is *Ordnung zu erhalten* ... maintaining order ... and resisting the *Bolschewistischen Ordnungsstörer* ... order breakers. Signed: Generaloberst Kurt Scholze.

Pedro handed the leaflet to the guy standing beside him and told him to translate it. Then we worked our way out of the crowd.

'Also,' said Pedro when we got back to the woodshed.

'Lovely,' said Haryk.

'It's in the bag,' I said. 'They're going to look after us. Nothing can happen to us now.'

'So we can go home, right?' said Haryk.

'Home? And what about all those Bolsheviks who're disturbing the peace? Who's going to fight them?' said Lexa.

'That's right. I guess I'd forgotten about them,' said Haryk.

Then I saw Benda. He saw me and came over to the shed. He looked pale and worried.

'What's up?' I asked him.

'Prema,' he said.

'What about him?'

'They arrested him. He's locked up in the cellar.'

'What? Why?'

'For refusing to obey orders.'

Benda looked at me and didn't seem to want to say any

more about it. I'd have to pump him. The boys gathered around.

'Well, that's the story? What happened anyway?' I said.

'When they told him he had to hand over his weapons, he refused.'

'And they arrested him just for that?'

'They didn't much care for the way he talked to them either.'

'What are they planning to do with him anyway?'

'I don't know. They'll probably try him for insurrection.'

'Skocdopole?' said Lexa.

'Yeah.'

'Because he wouldn't give up his gun?'

'Yeah.'

'When's the trial going to be?'

'I don't know. Later on, I guess.'

'If they don't decide to make it a court-martial,' said Lexa.

'You think they will? They wouldn't do that,' said Benno soberly.

'They're just dumb enough,' said Lexa.

'What are we going to do?' I asked.

'I don't know. I'm going to round up the boys first.'

'You got anything in mind?'

'Maybe. We'll see.'

'Jesus, something ought to be done,' said Haryk.

'Yeah, but it won't be easy. They've got him locked up in the cellar and guards posted at the door.'

'How many?' I said.

'Two. And even if we could get them out of the way, we still don't have the key. Kuratko's got it.'

'Jesus, couldn't old Cemelik do something?' I said.

'We could give it a try,' said Lexa.

'Where's Fonda?'

'Probably inside with his old man.'

'Then let's go, shall we?'

'Let's go.'

Just then a guy appeared in one of the windows of the main building with a bugle. He put the bugle to his lips and, after a

couple of false starts, managed to blow a few notes. Everybody looked towards the window. The guy with the bugle stepped back and Kuratko appeared in the window, holding a sheet of paper. Everybody stopped talking and Kuratko started to read.

'Order number two,' he read. 'The military commander hereby proclaims the city to be under a state of martial law. No person may appear on the streets after eight o'clock in the evening. Patrol units are ordered to apprehend any such individuals and instruct them to return home immediately. In case of resistance to this order, members of the patrol platoons are authorized to use force. Signed: Colonel Cemelik, Military Commander.'

Kuratko folded the paper, announced that all patrols should prepare to report to their designated meeting places, and vanished. The crowd started chatting and laughing again.

'Let's go, huh?' I said.

'Yeah,' said Lexa. We started off.

'Can I go with you?' said Benda.

'Sure,' said Lexa. We went over to the main building. The guy posted in front of the entrance was wearing army pants and puttees but a civilian jacket. He had a rifle.

'We can't go in here?' asked Lexa.

'No,' said the soldier.

'Would you please ask Cemelik to come out in case he's in?'

'What do you want him for?'

'We want to talk to him about something.'

'In connection with what?'

'He doesn't mean the colonel. He means young Cemelik. Alphonse. Fonda. His son,' I said.

'Oh, him,' said the soldier. 'Yeah, he's inside. I'll call him.'

'If you would be so kind,' said Lexa.

The soldier turned and stuck his head into the hall.

'Jirka,' he yelled. 'Tell 'em in there that young Cemelik's wanted outside.'

'Okay,' a voice replied from inside and then you could hear a door creak and a feeble voice saying that young Mr Cemelik was wanted outside, and after a while Fonda appeared.

'What's up?' he asked when he saw us.

'Come on out,' said Lexa. Fonda came down the steps and joined us.

'What is it?' he said.

'Look,' I said to him. 'Your old man's locked up Prema Skocdopole for mutiny or insubordination or something because he didn't want to turn in his weapons to the arsenal. Tell him he should know better.'

'Who? The old man?'

'That's right. Tell him to let him out because otherwise he's going to have the whole town against him.'

'What did he do?'

'Hell, he didn't want to turn in his weapons. Your old man built it up into an insurrection.'

'Yeah, but he's nuts if he does that when ...'

'We know,' said Lexa.

'What?' said Fonda.

'That your old man's nuts.'

'But the Skocdopole kid's nuts, too, when he knows there's an order that all weapons have to be turned in.'

'Fine,' I said. 'All we want is to get him out of this somehow, so smooth it over with your old man, will you?'

Fonda pulled a sour face and told us to wait. Then he turned and went back inside.

'You think they'll let him go?' asked Benda.

'Sure. Fonda'll fix it up with his old man. Old Cemelik gives him anything he wants,' said Lexa.

'Yeah, an only child,' said Haryk.

'The family's pride and joy,' said Lexa.

'What time is it?' said Benno.

'Almost six,' said Haryk.

'Jesus, we've got to go out on patrol again.'

'That's right.'

Fonda came back.

'Well?' I said.

'The old man says Skocdopole's a fool and won't let anyone tell him anything. It looks like there's not much he can do about it now anyway. He'll have to stay put.'

'And will he let him go?'

'The old man says he'll fix it somehow later on, but he can't just now. It would enrage the people.'

'Which people?' asked Lexa.

Fonda ignored him.

'But afterwards he'll fix it up so they'll let him out, right?'

'Right.'

'We can count on that?'

'If Pop says something, he'll do it.'

'So Skocdopole's going to be locked up all through the revolution,' said Benno.

'That's the way it looks. He is. But we're going to fight,' said Haryk.

'Shit. We're going to be as locked up in this damn brewery as he is, except it's dry where he is and we'll be left out in the rain.'

'Let's go. Thanks,' I said to Fonda.

'Is it already six?' asked Benno.

'Yeah.'

'Christ Almighty, another three hours of knocking ourselves out!' said Benno.

'Yeah, but it's for the Fatherland, remember?' said Lexa.

'Up yours,' said Benno.

'Benno, what would Helena say?' said Haryk.

'Shit.'

'Boy, you really let go when she's not around.'

'Kiss my ass.'

'Things look bad. Benno's manners are starting to crack,' said Lexa.

'Why the hell shouldn't they?' said Benno.

'Easy, easy. Remember, only three hours to go until supper.'

'They'll feed us shit.'

'Come on, before we all catch whatever he's got,' said Haryk.

'Let's go,' said Lexa.

We tramped over to our assembly place. Dr Bohadlo was already standing there looking at his watch and shuffling his feet.

'Punctuality, boys. We've got to learn to be more punctual!'

he said. The other three boys were already standing there. We started off. I was so worn out I hardly knew what was going on. We circled the town three times and then Dr Bohadlo, as sickeningly brisk and fresh as ever, led us back to the brewery.

'When can we go home, Doctor?' Benno asked him.

'When we're all demobilized, boys.'

'You mean we have to stay here the whole time?'

'That's right.'

'They'll give us something to eat?'

'Certainly. Only today everything's a bit makeshift. Now have yourselves some tea, then you can catch up on your rest.'

'Where?'

'They've set up a lounge in the back of the main building. You go there and I'll come by for you at midnight.'

'We're going out on patrol again?'

'Of course. Every three hours.'

'Aha.'

'Well, see you later, boys. Sleep well.'

'See you,' said Benno.

We had our tea and then went to the lounge. You had to go through the main entrance of the administration building to get there. It was a triangular room with mattresses in the corner and benches along the wall and tables out in the middle where some guys were playing cards and others were sleeping, their heads on their arms. The air was thick with cigarette smoke and damp and steamy from the wet clothes and the light was lousy. From the corner, somebody whistled our signal. It was Lexa. We went over to him. Benno saw an empty mattress next to the wall and flopped down on it. He lay on his back and stretched out his legs, bent at the knees. He looked like a bloated frog. We sat down next to Lexa; Haryk lit a cigarette.

'Well, did you take the Germans' guns away from them?' asked Lexa.

'No. You?'

'Yeah, we did. Really. There was this bunch of sad-assed bastards – five of them – followed us from the power station all

the way to Sramova's whorehouse. They said they wanted to give up their guns. We didn't have the heart to turn them down.'

'You kidding?'

'No, honest. Boy, when I saw those poor Krauts – worn out and fed up and practically ready to lick your shoes – suddenly it seemed pretty crazy to me. Really weird.'

'What do you mean?'

'The whole thing,' said Lexa in a tone of voice I'd never heard before. Then he said, 'Hell, we make a big joke out of it, but actually the whole thing just makes you want to cry. I mean, I was really sorry for those guys.'

'They shot your old man, you jerk,' Benno said.

'Not those guys,' said Lexa. 'They really looked like they'd had it.'

'What's wrong with you, you moron? Next thing you know you'll be bawling your eyes out for Hitler,' said Benno.

I looked at Lexa. He'd always been pretty tough and ironic and a fast guy with women, but now he'd really been thrown off balance. He sat there, his eyes thoughtful, his coat collar turned up, the light bulb hanging from the ceiling shone into his face. With the light on him like that, you could see he had beautiful big dark eyes and all the lights around were reflected in his eyes.

'No, I won't do that,' he said. 'But I just remembered something that happened to me once in the war.'

'What?' I asked.

'Oh, something with a girl.'

'Naturally. No Lexa story without a woman in it,' said Haryk.

'And what's the connection?' I said.

'None, really. Only this thing was pretty different from the usual kind of story. You want to hear it?'

'Is it dirty?' asked Benno.

'No. It's pathetic,' said Lexa.

'Then skip it. My stomach's giving me trouble enough already,' said Benno.

'Don't listen to him. Go on. Tell it,' I said.

'Yeah? I'm warning you, though, it's not dirty, not even spicy.'

'Get on with it, Lexa. Just cut the crap and tell your story,' said Haryk.

'Okay,' said Lexa, and took out a cigarette, got a light from Haryk's, and as he took a deep drag to get his cigarette going the glow lit up their faces. I thought about all the crazy things I'd lived through with them – the band and girls and so on – and I felt a wave of affection for those guys. Something pretty close to love. Then it suddenly struck me that this was love, too, a different kind of love than what I felt for Irena. But if there was any love in the world at all then this was real love. I loved them, these friends of mine. Irena had a nice body and I was crazy about her, but I really liked being with Benno, with Haryk, with Lexa. I felt good with them. Lexa sat up straight and shivered from the cold.

'Goddamn it,' he said. 'I haven't been dry all day. Or warm either.' Then he started in on his story:

'Well, then. It was in May, 1943, in Kolin. One night – one of those nice, warm May nights when all the stars look wet – I was hanging around down by the railroad station when suddenly I see this woman standing there in the shadows. There was a great big suitcase and she must have just set it down because she was still catching her breath. In that light all I could see was that she had a nice figure and I was practically on my way over to gallantly offer to help her when the size of that suitcase sobered me up a little. Before lugging a thing like that I thought I'd better take a good look, so I walked past her first to see what she looked like from the front. She was standing under a blackout street light that was enough to see she was a real beauty. She was a blonde but not a peroxide blonde – I could see that – and there was something kind of exotic or strange about her, so I didn't care how big that suitcase was any more and I quickly sidled up towards her so nobody else'd try to beat me to it and politely asked if I could help her carry her suitcase. She looked at me suspiciously – I've never seen such obvious suspicion in a pair of eyes in my life – and then she said to me, '*Versteh nicht Tschechisch.*' So then I knew she

must be one of those *Mädchen* from the *Luftwaffenhilfefrauenfunkerschule* or whatever they called it, and I noticed she was wearing one of those dull brown coats of theirs. But instead of putting me off, it made me even more interested, because her powdered face, with those big mistrustful eyes blossoming out of that shabby uniform, was really something. Something very special. So anyway, I repeated my offer in German and Trudy – a dumb name, but then so what, she was a real beauty – Trudy smiled and said thank you and I picked up that suitcase and for a minute there I was sorry I'd ever offered to carry it, but that feeling was gone again in no time.

'*Wohin?*' I asked her, and she said to the *Luftwaffenhilfefrauenfunkerschule* and the way she said that awful word was very lovely – clear and smooth and distinct, without the usual kind of Kraut splutter, an intelligent kind of radio-announcer German. I liked the way she walked along next to me and I tried hard not to tilt way over to one side, but that suitcase was awfully damn heavy. I don't know what she had in it, maybe a transmitter or something; all I know is it weighed a ton. Then I asked her, '*Sie sind eine Luftwaffenhilfefrauenfunktionschülerin?*' only I couldn't pronounce it right and she laughed and said, '*Jawohl...*' and that was when I decided I'd make a pass at her.

'I don't know, maybe you'll think it was pretty strange and wrong maybe – me trying to make time with a German girl while people were dying in concentration camps but, for one thing, how was I to know who was guilty and who wasn't, and, for another thing, I'd never had anything to do with the Germans before, but this girl was a real beauty and besides what I had in mind was just to have her once and then off I'd go and in a certain way I guess you could say that was hurting the enemy too. I can talk about the whole thing casually and easy enough now, but when it was all actually happening it wasn't like it sounds now. I didn't even know she was German when I started talking to her, and then how could I leave her there at night with that suitcase once I'd offered to help her? Anyway, what the hell! There's no sense in explaining it all to you anyway since it's obvious I'm just trying to justify my

behaviour and maybe show how dumb it is, too, to generalize and to get trapped by your own prejudices and irrational feelings.

'So anyway, we talked as we walked along side by side. Trudy asked me about Kolin and I answered her as I puffed along swearing away inside at that damn suitcase and I thought, I'm going to get what's coming to me, I'm not carrying this just for the fun of it. Of course that really wasn't the real reason. Actually, like I said, the fact that this pretty girl beside me spoke a foreign language gave her a special kind of charm. A scholar would probably say that, in this case, language assumed a secondary erotic function, but no matter how you put it the fact was, that's the way it was. And just when a beautiful silver moon came out from behind the clouds and most of those wet-looking little stars dimmed out, we got to the corner from where you could see the *Luftwaffenhilfefrauen-funkerschule* and a Kraut was stomping back and forth in front of the gate in heavy boots with a bayonet and I stopped.

'So," I said, "*dort ist die Luftwaffe ... die Schule.*" Trudy laughed, then batted her eyes at me and said, "Could you help me up to the door with my suitcase?" "Sure," I said. "But first you've got to promise me something," and I looked deep into her eyes. "Me?" she asked, a little puzzled, and I told her she'd first have to promise to see me again. You ought to have seen what happened then! All at once her pretty face hardened up and everything she'd been indoctrinated to believe woke up in her and she said it was *unmöglich*. "Why?" I asked her, and I tried to look into her eyes but couldn't. She looked away and didn't answer. "*Warum?*" I said again, and then she said, without even looking at me, "*Schauen Sie*, I'm grateful to you for helping me with the suitcase but it's impossible, *Sie verstehen doch.*" "*Ich versteh nicht,*" I said, but she just shrugged her shoulders.

'And then I said something to her I probably wouldn't have dared say if I'd been in my right mind, and she reacted to it like a real Nazi. "*Is' es die Rasse?*" I said ironically, and smiled because I thought she'd look at the race business the same way I did, just so much bullshit, and I thought the whole situation

was sort of intriguing. I was naïve enough to believe she'd think all those race theories of theirs were just as dumb as I did. Besides, Czechs were officially classed as Aryans, too. So I asked her. "*Is' es die Rasse?*" She turned to me and snapped, "*Ja wenn Sie's wissen wollen,*" and snatched up her suitcase and spun half-way around under the weight of it, but then turned again and started off across the square towards that Kraut with the bayonet, dragging the suitcase over the ground more than really carrying it. "I'll help you," I said and tried to help her again. "*Danke,*" she said sharply and walked faster, but then so did I and I just had time to say, "*Aber, Fräulein,*" when something flashed a couple of yards ahead of us and I saw that it was that Kraut's bayonet and there he stood, legs widespread, watching us. Without saying a word and hardly even breaking my stride, I veered off to the left and disappeared into the darkness without even looking back. But when I'd got far enough away to feel safe, I started thinking about it.

'Dumb blonde, I thought to myself. So that kind of thing really exists. It really bothered her – me being so inferior – and I made up my mind I'd teach her a lesson. Maybe it sounds sort of strange, but I didn't have the slightest doubt that I'd get her sooner or later. For me the main thing was she was a pretty girl and I figured that for her, too, maybe the fact I was a boy was more important than anything else. That whole scene that night, right up to when I made my big pitch, seemed to point that way anyway. As soon as I got back to my room this whole race question seemed to add some kind of spice to the affair and I was already looking forward to making a pass at her. I was a sophomore then and had plenty of time to play around. Plenty of time and lots of interest in that kind of thing. Before going to sleep that night I cooked up all sorts of plans like you always do just before falling asleep. And when I finally fell asleep I dreamed about her – crazy dreams, all mixed up.

The next afternoon I went and sat down in the park across from the airforcewomenassistantnadioschool – a mouthful in any language. I was hoping she'd show up but I still didn't have any clear plan of attack. I'd given up trying to plan things in

detail a long time ago – back around my freshman year. I was so wet behind the ears even then that I always carried around a little black notebook in my back pocket, and whenever I fell in love with some girl I'd go out in the woods and write down a whole set of love dialogues and for each sentence I'd think up all sorts of answers. Then I'd memorize them instead of my Latin vocabulary or German history, which is probably why I flunked out that year. The trouble was, though, whenever a girl was really there, I could hardly get my mouth open. About all I could get out was to ask her very solemnly if maybe she'd like to go to a movie, and if she said no, that was that. I was finished and all I could say was, too bad, and then I'd just stand there. Like I say, there was this period when I was awfully dumb and inexperienced, but I picked up experience as time went on, so by the time I was a junior I was pretty much of a Don Juan with plenty of small talk to see me through and my conditioned reflexes in such good shape that nothing and nobody could shut me up. So there I sat that afternoon and I wasn't thinking about much in general – not of what I'd say to her in case she came by, anyway – just sort of daydreaming about her and looking forward to seeing her again.

'And then around five o'clock she came. There she was in the dark doorway practically blinding me with that blonde hair of hers, and she was walking arm in arm with some ugly, dumpy, freckle-faced redheaded girl who made her look even greater by comparison. When she saw me, she put her nose in the air and pretended I wasn't even there. I got up from the bench, stuck my hands in my pockets and sauntered off after them.

'One thing, by the way – I really looked great. There wasn't another zootsuiter in Kolin back in those days who could even touch me – except for Tom Hojer, naturally. Except the fact that Tom had the edge on me wasn't so much his own doing as it was due to the fact that Mr Buml had a real feud on with Tom's father. Mr Buml was trying to get even with Tom Hojer's dad for something Tom Hojer's dad had done to him, I guess, and what he did was to get an article about Tom Hojer published in the *Aryan Struggle*. He wrote in demanding to

know how, at a time when everyone was being called upon to make a supreme effort for the victory of the Reich, the nation could tolerate individuals who did nothing but loaf around in the Kolin square wearing a so-called Tatra hat and swinging a cane and whistling American hit tunes and adding that some of these young loafers had even been heard singing "Lili Marlene" in English at the Beranek Café. Mr Buml considered singing "Lili Marlene" in English a particularly grave offence because it was such a purely German song and, to clear things up once and for all, he said he'd decided it was high time to publish the name of this shameful gang's ringleader in *Aryan Struggle*. This ringleader's name was Hojer, he was ostensibly a student, and to his cronies he was known as "Tom" Hojer. Well, naturally, Tom couldn't have asked for any better publicity and there's no getting around it – he knew how to make the most of it. What he did was he sued Mr Buml for libel and won. He got a statement signed by his doctor saying that he had a double fracture of his leg, so naturally he had to use a cane, and that the doctor had ordered him to take walks to exercise his leg. Then the head waiter at Beranek's and a couple other guys committed perjury for him and swore that Tom had sung "Lili Marlene" in German, but in a Plattdeutsch dialect that Buml didn't understand, and then Mr Buml really made a fool of himself when he tried to spout some German and it turned out that Plattdeutsch wasn't all he didn't know – he didn't even know plain Deutsch. So Tom Hojer came out a hero and Mr Buml wound up as a first-class certified ass.

'Anyhow, so there I was sauntering along behind Trudy and the fat one and I was wearing a great pair of shoes with thick white rubber soles and my pants were so tight I could almost feel them stretching. On went the girls with me right behind them. They stopped in front of shop windows and I was biding my time, waiting for the fat one to finally go into some store so I could talk to Trudy. But they just kept going along arm in arm and didn't split up. Then all of a sudden, they turned and headed back towards me. Trudy frowned and looked stiff as a spinster when I said, "*Guten Tag*," and sailed right past me without a word. That cooled me off a bit. I didn't want to make

a big scene. So I decided I'd better just take it in my stride and so I walked on a little and then turned, too. I tailed them for about half an hour. Every once in a while Trudy would look back, spot me, scowl, and then face front again. I had a bad scare once when two officers suddenly came out of a store – big guys, with Iron Crosses, spiffy uniforms, super-Teutons. They stopped to chat with the girls and Trudy turned and gave me such a dirty look I thought, oh, oh, she's going to tell the officers, and I thought maybe I'd better take off fast. Nothing happened, though, and I was glad I hadn't run away because that must have impressed her. In fact, I think that was probably the main reason she finally talked to me after all.

'It was in front of the movie theatre. The two officers said good-bye to them, *heiled* Hitler, and clicked their heels. There was this big picture poster of Hans Albers in front of the theatre and I saw Trudy saying something to the fat one, who answered "*Gut*" and went into the lobby. As soon as she was gone, I headed straight over to Trudy, who spun around like she'd just been waiting for me to try. When I came up to her, before I could get a word out, she said, "Why are you following me?" in a funny tone of voice – not so much unfriendly as sort of sad or reproving. "*Ich liebe Sie*," I said promptly, but she didn't say a word. "*Ich liebe Sie*," I went on. "I'm madly in love with you and think of you all the time." And still she didn't say anything. It was getting kind of embarrassing for me because my German wasn't so great that it couldn't get worse, especially when there was only this one thing to talk about. Then, just when I'd run out of words and had stopped talking too, she looked at me and spoke in that patient voice of hers, using the same clichés as the night before. "*Schauen Sie*," she said, "*es hat wirklich keinen Zweck*. I believe you do really like me, but, really, there's just no point." I gave her a passionate look and stepped in closer and said, "*Sagen Sie mir, ist es wirklich die Rasse? Only die Rasse? Nur die Nation?*" but this time she didn't react like a fanatic Nazi the way she had the night before and she answered calmly, "*Ja*," and I said, "It's that important?" Again she said, "*Ja*," very short and sweet, looking at me patiently and sympathetically, as if she was sort

of sorry for me. I took her hand and said – and it seemed to me it sounded better in German than in Czech, or maybe this time I really meant it – I said, or rather sighed, as they say in novels, "*Ich muss Sie sehen! Ich muss Sie sprechen!*" She jerked her hand away fast and looked around and in a quick whisper said, "*Das ist unmöglich*," but I went right on. "*Ich muss, ich muss, bitte, bitte*, otherwise I'll go mad." She made a face and all of a sudden her eyes didn't look so sure any more; she kept on glancing around nervously and again, but even quieter this time, she said, "*Nein, es geht nicht, wirklich nicht*," which fired me up again and after I'd panted out a few more of those urgent *bitte, bitte's* all at once she said, "*Gut, ich komme*, but only once, we've got to get this cleared up." Then she glanced around again. The fat one was coming back now so she said quickly, "At the corner, tomorrow night at eight!" Then she turned around and called to her friend, "*Also, hast du's?*" and they linked arms. I knew which corner she meant.

I just stood there and watched them and I felt wonderful, that kind of conquering feeling you always get when a girl says she'll go out with you, when a girl you've made up your mind you really want to make says yes. It's always the same feeling and what comes of it all depends on how things turn out. And I admit I didn't have any idea how that date was going to turn out, a bad jolt to a guy's self-confidence. But that wasn't the only jolt, since that wasn't so serious. It was all my ideas about people and about the world that got knocked around, too. I mean, so once more I'd seen that basically everybody's pretty much the same. All right. But on the other hand, what do they do? They fall for something so dumb they let themselves be pushed around, they let their lives get so screwed up that, well, that a guy with feelings and ideas like mine simply couldn't believe it if he hadn't seen it for himself.

I waited at the corner for her. It was one of those starry nights again but pretty windy so the streets were nearly deserted. She appeared in the gate with typical German punctuality and the Kraut with the bayonet saluted, an unofficial flirt salute, I guess, because he grinned at her and she grinned back at him and then walked straight towards me, putting on

her gloves as she came. I stayed put. I didn't go out to meet her because I was pretty well hidden in the shadows and figured, with that Kraut around, maybe she wouldn't like me racing out to pick her up, letting everybody know I had a date with her. So I stood there waiting in the shadows, and when she got there I took off my hat and said, "*Guten Abend*," and she nodded and said, "*Na kommen Sie*," and stuck her hands in her coat pockets without even stopping and kept right on going. This sort of threw me off balance, but I put my hat back on and caught up with her. So there we were, walking along side by side. "Where're we going?" I asked, and when she said it was all the same to her I suggested the island. She said, "*Na gut*," and I was glad because there's no place like the island for the kind of thing I had in mind. And now – though I may have had my doubts before – I was absolutely convinced she'd have to not just surrender but completely capitulate. Then suddenly it struck me that I hadn't introduced myself yet and neither had she so I told her my name and naturally she absolutely couldn't get it straight so I had to repeat it three times. Then she told me hers was Trudy Krause. It probably sounds pretty awful to you, and there's no getting around it, it is one hell of a name. But that's only because German is such an awful language. If the Germans were all as dried up and full of belches as their names and language are they'd really be in sad shape. But this Trudy, she really made up for her horrible name and – objectively speaking and putting all prejudice aside – she was every bit as pretty as Deanna Durbin, for instance. As far as feminine beauty went, she had the very same quality. She was a woman, even though she was a Nazi. What's more, she was a German woman and I just couldn't believe, then anyway, that this could make her all that different from other girls, and from me. Instead, it seemed to me that her being a bit different only added to the fun, that being a foreigner she had an exotic charm, and even to this day I don't believe a German's really all that different or that this difference had to get in our way. I believe it didn't *have* to, but I also know it did.

'We crossed the iron bridge over to the island, a classic moon looking in through the trusses, the water below rushing over

the weir, and the willows on the island rustling and whispering.

"Trudy," I said when we were on the path with the black shadows changing to moonlight and then back to shadows again, "*Ich liebe Sie*," and I took hold of her arm. At first she didn't say anything so I went on, telling her in my broken German that I didn't know quite how to explain it but that as soon as I'd seen her I felt suddenly ... and all that junk you usually say in situations like that. Then we went over to a bench under a big weeping willow and the bench was almost hidden under the leaves and things were looking very promising. Trudy said we should sit down and so we sat down and I held Trudy's hand and then she started to talk.

"*Es ist schön, was Sie mir sagen*," she said, "and I believe you, but you must understand that it can't go on like this."

"Why?" I said.

"Because – well, for the reasons you mentioned yourself."

"But those aren't really reasons."

"So you say," she said mysteriously and fell silent.

"Trudy," I said, "do you really believe all that stuff?"

"Ja," she said.

"But it's all nonsense," I said bravely. Only it wasn't bravery so much as the fact that I felt I could really trust this girl, even though she was obviously one of those hundred-percent Nazis. Even if she actually did believe all that nonsense, I was sure she wouldn't let it come between us. "It's all crazy, can't you see that?" I said.

"So you say," Trudy said. "And that's what the Czechs think, and the Jews, too, because it's not very pleasant for them."

"But we don't even take it seriously!"

"No," she said, smiling slightly and shaking her head, "and I can understand why. It can't be very nice to know you belong to an inferior race."

'I must be dreaming, I thought. I couldn't believe my ears. And suddenly I had this weird feeling, she's actually sitting next to me and then, even weirder, I could feel how she must

be feeling, sitting there next to somebody who belonged to an inferior race, and I thought, what does it feel like anyway – as if you're sitting next to a chimpanzee? And I couldn't believe it. And before I knew it, I asked her straight out.

"*Sagen Sie mir*," I said, "how do I ... what do you see me as anyway?"

"How do you mean?" she asked innocently, and again I simply couldn't believe she'd been serious before. It seemed to me she must have been just pulling my leg.

"Well, I mean from a racial point of view."

"*Ach so!* Well, you're Czech, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Well then, that's how I see you – as a Czech."

"Fine, but then don't you have ... I mean, don't I disgust you or something?"

"You aren't a Jew, are you?"

"No."

"*Na also*. Then you're an Aryan, and the only difference is that your racial mixture is an inferior kind." She said this so innocently and in such a scholarly tone that it really floored me.

"Racial mixture?" I asked, stunned, and she started unreeling a whole slew of lunatic theories – theories that really sounded crazy when you heard them the first time, about the German race being some kind of mixture of Nordic and I don't know what all races and how everybody in Europe originally came from this race and how they all had blonde hair and blue eyes and she did too. Well, if that whole Nordic-German race looked as good as she did, it followed, I guess, that it really was a pretty noble race. The only trouble was that once she got started she couldn't stop talking all the nonsense about first-class Aryans and second-class Aryans and mixed races and hopelessly mixed-up races like the Jews, for instance, and I listened and I was shocked and I still couldn't believe she really meant it. Finally I stopped listening. I just couldn't figure out how she could go on sitting there next to me explaining all these theories if I was as awful as she made out I must be, or how she could find me anything but awful if she knew I was,

racially, such an inferior blend. And then I figured this whole race theory must be something like that coffee they used to sell at Meinl's before the war, where the best and most expensive kind was blended out of about twenty different kinds of coffee and then there were cheaper blends made out of fewer kinds until you got all the way down to the ordinary Brazilian kind that didn't even say what it was blended out of, so it probably wasn't blended at all. But I didn't tell her that and when she stopped talking for a minute, I asked her what she would do if I was a Jew?

"I wouldn't be sitting here."

"Why not?"

"I couldn't sit with a Jew."

"But why? You mean it would upset you physically or what?"

"Yes. Of course it would."

Then I thought I'd give her a hard time and make her ditch that racial junk once and for all.

"Look," I said in a fatherly tone. "You're about eighteen, right?"

"Going on eighteen."

"That means that ten years ago you weren't even eight."

"That's right."

"Then tell me – how many Jews have you seen anyway since you were eight years old?" I said as if that took care of that argument. She frowned again. I could tell I had her there.

"That has nothing to do with it," she said.

"It certainly does. How can you judge about something you don't know from your own experience?"

"*Schauen Sie*," she said again, using one of her favourite expressions, "you don't know from your own experience that the earth rotates around the sun and yet you believe that, don't you?"

That little Jesuit trick caught me off guard. All I could come up with right then was, "All right. But that has been scientifically proven."

"Well," she said, "so has this."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Have you read Rosenberg? Or Gobineau? Or Chamberlain? Or at least something by Streicher?"

"Well, no, but..."

"There, you see? And you talk about scientific proof. Well, these things have been proved just as scientifically as gravity and all those other things."

"This wasn't the way I'd wanted things to go - getting all tangled up like this. But, believe me, arguing with her wasn't easy. You couldn't allow yourself to forget, even for a second, that you were arguing with a fanatical Nazi. And I still couldn't quite believe she was. "You're right," I said.

"Na, sehen Sie!"

"Yes, you may be right. Still I don't think it would hurt you any to try some of your ideas out in practice and see how they hold up then."

"There's no need for that."

"But you could at least give it a try."

"There's no need for that and I don't even think it's possible today."

"Why not?"

"Why, all the Jews have already been isolated."

That really made me mad. It was the casual way she said it that really made me mad. And all at once it struck me how awful and absurd it was - her sitting there talking about it so casually and at the same time looking so pretty and sweet, and yet what was coming out of her mouth was something a beast like Streicher would say. And she didn't even notice. It didn't even faze her. Just then the moon came out and drifted slowly over the branches of the willow we were sitting under. Trudy looked beautiful and her face was still flushed with the excitement of explaining her theories to me, but suddenly she seemed revolting - or not so much that as she horrified me somehow - seemed abnormal, a kind of monster with that pretty little face and all those horrible ideas inside. I got terribly angry, furious at her. Suddenly I got an idea and I didn't even stop to think what might happen but barged right ahead, wanting to hurt her, to mess up and knock apart that tidy little stiff neat world of hers with all its orderly varieties

of racial mixtures like Meinl's blended coffees. Maybe it was stupid of me, maybe it wasn't, but I couldn't help it, I had to do it and I did. As that sentimental silvery moon drifted by and she said with godlike calm that all the Jews were isolated, as if they were lepers or something, and when I started thinking about what "isolation" really meant, and when it dawned on me that while I was sitting there calmly kidding around with a pretty Brunhilde, boys I knew - Quido Hirsch and Alik Karpeles and Pavel Polak - maybe weren't even alive any more or were going through God knows what kind of hell right then - then I couldn't hold it in any more and I blurted it out, and it was a real pleasure to feel that venom flow.

"It might still be possible, though - even today," I said.

"How do you mean?"

"Well, I mean there're still some *Mischlinge* left."

"Na ja. Aber..."

"I'm one," I said satanically and squeezed her hand and tried to put my arm around her waist; deep down I still couldn't believe it would make any difference to her, but I had a kind of devilish wish it would. And it did, too. I could feel her whole body go stiff. She stared at me, her eyes nearly popping out of her head.

"Was?" she gasped, and then for a second we both just sat there, motionless. I slid my right hand around her slim waist.

"I am a half-Jew - *ein Halbjude*," I said in that same satanic voice and then she shuddered. She really shuddered, as if she'd touched a toad, and then jerked away from me so violently that I was really surprised. A crazy thought about conditioned and basically unnatural reflexes flashed through my head and she jumped up and I just sat there and her lovely hair looked bleached in the moonlight. She stood there in front of me, her empty hands still pushing out in front of her, and she was staring at me and saying, in a voice full of dread as if she couldn't believe her ears, "*Sie sind...*"

"*Ein Halbjude*," I repeated in a murderously calm tone of voice. She just groaned in a funny unnatural way, turned and ran away. All I saw was that Nordic head of hers shining from time to time as she ran out of the shadows into the moonlight.

I sat there on the bench and didn't feel like ever getting up again. A real beauty, the picture of happiness and everything that makes life worth living – and that's what they'd done to her.'

His story over, Lexa lit another cigarette. I looked at my watch. It was 11.30.

'And you never saw her again?' asked Haryk.

'No.'

Haryk was silent for a minute and then he said, 'Well, you never can tell. Maybe she was just a bitch to begin with.'

'Maybe she wasn't,' said Lexa.

Nobody said anything. Then Lexa sneezed.

'Christ, the way I feel now, I'll never live to see morning.'

I looked over at Benno stretched out on the mattress and saw he was sound asleep with his mouth wide open. Then I looked around the room. The air was thick with smoke. A few guys were still playing cards; others were flopped out on mattresses, sleeping; others who'd fallen asleep at their tables were still pillowing their heads on their arms, sleeping. I watched a kid across from me fighting to keep awake. His eyelids kept drooping lower and lower over his eyes and his face began to look stupid, and then all of a sudden his head would sag down on his chest and he'd jerk it up again and you could see what an effort it was. Then for a minute he'd sort of pull himself together and then his eyelids began to droop again and his face slowly grew stupid again, and he'd go through the whole thing again, exactly the same each time. Lexa sat there leaning his head back against the wall, blowing out smoke rings and thinking. Haryk sat there, his knees drawn up under his chin, and was silent, too. So there we sat and this was the revolution. You could hear the snap of cards from the corner and Benno snoring loudly from the mattress. I wanted to fall asleep, too. That's all I wanted to do – just sleep. I was tired and fed up with everything. I could feel my head starting to droop and each time it slumped over onto my chest I felt it and knew how stupid my own face probably looked but didn't care because everybody looks dumb when they're sleeping and it

seemed to me that there wasn't anything either clever or decent in the whole wide world, that everything was a sham, a big bluff, and all I felt was this awful weariness and that chin of mine that kept dropping down and down and that kept getting harder and harder to lift up again.

It was Dr Bohadlo who woke me up. He looked as sickeningly fresh and pink as ever and was wearing a plaid scarf around his neck. He tapped me on the shoulder and when I turned and looked up, he grinned.

'Time to get up!' he said. 'We're on duty again.' I was convinced I'd never make it, never be able to get up. It was the same feeling I'd had lots of times when we were on forced labour and when I felt so lousy at five in the morning I thought I'd never be able to get up, that I'd stay in bed and talk my way out of it somehow, that I'd play sick and stay home, while all the time I knew that I couldn't, that I already had two absences that month and that I'd have to go to the factory and rivet all day in the freezing cold. I just did not want to believe I'd really get up. I did though. Haryk was up and ready to go and Lexa had already gone. They'd probably come for him while I was asleep. Dr Bohadlo took Benno by the shoulder and shook him. But Benno just grumbled something. Dr Bohadlo shook him again. Benno opened his eyes, and when he saw Dr Bohadlo he sat up.

'Time to get up! We're on duty again!' Dr Bohadlo sang out like a Scoutmaster. He behaved like one of those hikers or mushroom collectors that get such a kick out of getting up early though they could sleep till noon if they wanted to. I never got any kick out of that kind of thing. Neither did Benno, from the way he looked.

'Come on now, boys. Hurry up!' said Dr Bohadlo and moved towards the door.

Benno got up, rubbed his eyes, then shuffled after the doctor. Fat and sleepy, he stumbled between the sleeping figures to the door and said, 'Shit.'

We went out into the hall and buttoned our coats. A cold draught came in from outside. It was dark in the hall. I heard Dr Bohadlo saying that our route had been changed for the

night, that we'd be patrolling around the railroad station. Then I could hear him opening a door but still couldn't see any light. It was pitch dark outside. A cold wind swept into the hallway. Benno was swearing under his breath. We staggered out and the wind hit us hard.

Dr Bohadlo switched on his flashlight. 'Careful now, boys. Wouldn't want anyone to get lost,' he said. We lined up. My whole body was trembling from the cold. I could practically feel myself catching the flu. We lurched across the yard. A lantern was shining at the corner of the administration building and in its light you could see little raindrops being blown around the corner of the building. The fine rain chilled my face. We headed towards the gate over which another lit lantern hung. Under it stood two soldiers with fixed bayonets and turned-up coat collars.

'All in step now,' said Dr Bohadlo when we got out to the paved part. Benno grunted something. We fell in step with the other boys and clattered across the cobblestones towards the gate. The drizzle shone as it slanted across the lantern in the gateway. We passed the two soldiers who paid no attention to us – just stamped their feet and clumped back and forth – and then marched off into the deep and windy darkness between us and the town. All I could see were a few little blue blacked-out street lights – points of light that dimly showed the way to the station. We went more by memory than sight and it wasn't much fun in that dark. I felt the bridge under my feet and, under the bridge, the river, but couldn't see a thing. The wind and rain didn't let up for a minute. We got to the tracks and went past a red signal. The station was dark. Suddenly there was a bright wedge of light, a door opened, a guy carrying a gun slipped out, and then the door closed. There stood the German munitions train. We crossed the tracks. Dr Bohadlo halted.

'Hold it up, boys,' he said.

We halted.

'Now then,' said the doctor, 'from this point on we're going to spread out, forming a column from one side of the street to the other. A human chain. That way, nobody can get by us.'

'I thought we were only going to patrol around the station,' said Benno.

'Well, and so we will, too, Down Jirasek Boulevard to Novotny's, then past the station and over to Schroll's and back again.'

'Aha,' said Benno.

Dr Bohadlo switched his flashlight on again. The cone of light lit up a patch of the Messerschmidt factory wall.

'Let's go,' said Dr Bohadlo. We spread out across the width of the street and started off. We gradually all got into step again. Spread out like that we made a lot more noise than when we marched in a column. It was dark except for a thin band of feeble light where the rain clouds had torn, low on the horizon. From the distance you could hear the faint chatter of machine guns.

'Hear that?' said one of the other boys. We listened. The machine gun chattered in short bursts, and another machine gun chattered back.

'That's from the front,' the boy said. 'It's pretty close already. Somewhere around Ledecsky Rocks.'

As we went on, I thought of Ledecsky Rocks and of the Eagle's Nest where we'd been sitting a week ago, all worn out from the climb up through the cone-shaped Chimney, me and Zdenek and Irena and Vasek, and listening to all that wonderful news blowing in from Germany. You could hear everything from up there. Machine guns and Tiger and Panther cannons and those Soviet T-34's, and the sky above us was blue and beautiful and under that sky, just beyond the horizon, there was a war going on. It was great, sitting up there with the war almost over and I'd almost regretted that it was all going to end, those afternoons when they drove us out of the factory into the spring fields and then, far off on the horizon, white ribbons of smoke appeared and then those shiny American planes – things like that, everything. And naturally I was sad, too, on account of Irena and Zdenek who were sitting there side by side, and Zdenek fastened his safety rope to Irena so they were tied together and, like a fool, I saw that as a symbol and thought maybe I could just accidentally help him tumble

over the side of some cliff but naturally thinking about it was as far as I got. I didn't do a damn thing. As usual.

We marched east along the endless Messerschmidt wall.

'What's that?' said one of the boys. There was a light on in the nightwatchman's gatehouse. A weak watery splotch of light crept over puddles on the pavement. Dr Bohadlo said nothing. As we went by, we saw a helmeted German, his coat collar turned up, standing guard under the gateway. When we'd gone a little farther the kid said, 'I don't get it. What's a Kraut doing there anyway?'

'They're only quartering there for the night - a column retreating from the front,' said Dr Bohadlo.

'Shouldn't we disarm them?' the kid said.

'They want to surrender to the Americans with their weapons.'

'But maybe they'll go on to Prague,' the kid said. Dr Bohadlo didn't answer. 'We ought to disarm them,' the kid said again.

'They're far too well armed and trained for that. It would only lead to useless bloodshed,' said Dr Bohadlo. The kid didn't say anything. We marched on in silence to Shroll's factory, turned and headed back. It was raining harder now. Benno was grumbling under his breath and I was shivering all over again. Like a pack of robots back we went - from the Messerschmidt plant to the station again and all around it was pitch dark except for that light in the watchman's office and the little red-and-green lights at the station. We crossed the bridge and underneath the water roared as if the river was crowded with water now, and then we stepped into the canyon of tall buildings along Jirasek Boulevard. Our footsteps echoed here. We marched quickly down the deserted street. Benno and I were on the left wing, on the sidewalk. It was quiet. The only sound was the clump of our boots. The windows in the houses were dark. Only two blackout lights were on in the entire street. As we neared the one swinging above the anti-tank barrier, by its dim light, we suddenly saw a man.

'Careful!' said Dr Bohadlo and crossed quickly over to the righthand side of the street. We walked slower now. I could hear the man's fast footsteps. Dr Bohadlo switched on his flash-

light and I saw the iron shutter that covered Novotny's store window. The cone of light swiftly hunted on down the sidewalk, groping for the stranger. Then it caught him and he stopped. He was wearing a raincoat and shielding his eyes with his hands.

'Halt!' shouted Dr Bohadlo and rushed over, his flashlight aimed right into the man's eyes.

'What is all this?' said the man.

'Where are you going?'

'Home.'

'And where have you been?'

'What business is that of yours?'

I saw the silhouette of Dr Bohadlo in his knickers and beret and the man caught in the bright light streaming out of Dr Bohadlo's fist.

'Don't you know this city is under martial law now?'

'Under what?'

'Martial law.'

'So?'

'Don't you know no one is allowed out on the street after eight o'clock?'

'Why not?'

'Because this city is under martial law!'

The man dropped his hand from his face and blinked. Then he started to walk on. Dr Bohadlo grabbed his arm and the man tried to jerk away. The cone of light leaped up along the front of the house, then into the sky, and back on the man again. I saw the three other guys on our squad grab him. Dr Bohadlo turned the light on his face again.

'Damn it!' said the man. 'Get your hands off me!'

'Hold on to him, boys,' said Dr Bohadlo. 'Your identity card, please.'

'What the hell do you want now?'

'Your identity card.'

'What authority do you have to ask for that?'

'I'm not going to waste time discussing the issue. Just show me your papers, please.'

'What proof do you have that you have any right to ask?'

Dr Bohadlo turned the flashlight on his armband.
'Anybody could put one of those things on,' the man said.
'All right now, either produce your identity card and take the shortest way home or I'll be forced to arrest you.'
'You have no right to do that either,' the man muttered as he slowly reached into his pocket. Dr Bohadlo stuck out his hand, took the crumpled identity card, and shone his flashlight on it.

'Well, now, Mr Mracek,' he said, 'where are you coming from and where are you going?'

'I told you, I'm going home,' the man said angrily.

'And where've you been?'

'Why the hell do you have to know?'

'Just answer the question.'

'I told you, I'm going home, all right? What the hell, I'm not at confession, am I?'

'If you don't tell me where you've been, I'm going to have to arrest you. And I warn you, you'd better tell the truth. We'll check up.'

'Jesus Christ, what you'd ever want to know for is beyond me.'

'That's our business.'

The man again tried to get away.

'Let me go.'

'Answer the question.'

'Christ, don't make such a fuss about it, will you?' the man said.

'Are you going to answer my question?'

'Shit.'

'You're under arrest,' said Dr Bohadlo.

'Oh, take it easy. Don't get so goddamn worked up.'

'Hold on to him, boys!'

'What the hell are you going to do with me?'

'You'll be brought before a court-martial.'

'By what right?'

'As I said before, this city is under martial law now.'

'Take your goddamn hands off me.'

'Hold on to him, boys.'

In the light of the flashlight you could see him struggling to work loose but the three boys had a good professional grip on him.

'Let's go!' said Dr Bohadlo.

'All right, I'll tell you,' the man said quickly.

'You're under arrest.'

'Oh, forget all this junk about arrest. I'll tell you if you're so damn eager to know.'

'You should have told me sooner.'

'Well, sure, maybe I should have, but how was I supposed to know...? And it's not all that simple either. But, all right, I'll tell you.'

Dr Bohadlo said nothing. The boys were pulling the man on down the street and the man was giving them a hard time and then suddenly he said, 'All right. I was with a woman. There. Now you know. Now let go of me.'

The boys still held on to him.

'I was with a woman and now I'm going home to get some sleep.'

'Wait a minute,' said Dr Bohadlo. The boys stopped.

'And that's all there is to it,' the man said. 'I was with a woman and now I'm going home.'

'Tell us the woman's name.'

'But why?'

'How else can we check up on you?'

'Hell. I can't do that.'

'Why not?'

'I can't, that's all.'

'In that case, I won't be able to release you.'

'Oh, Jesus,' the fellow said. 'Can't you understand that there're some things you don't just go around telling people?'

'If you're afraid of an indiscretion, it's unnecessary. In an interrogation like this all information is held in the strictest confidence.'

'Like hell it is! With this bunch of squirts around the whole town'll know by morning.'

'I advise you to keep your personal opinions of these men to

yourself,' said Dr Bohadlo. 'Do you refuse to give this woman's name in order not to compromise her?'

'Naturally. She's married.'

'Nevertheless if you don't give me her name, I'll have to turn you in.'

'Oh, for Chrissake!' said the man and then whispered something to Dr Bohadlo but so loud we could all hear it. 'Listen, her husband's over at the brewery, too. Do you see now why...?'

'I'm sorry.' Dr Bohadlo shrugged his shoulders. 'Furthermore I might point out that such activities are illegal, too.'

'Well, sure. But it isn't *that* serious a crime, is it?' the man said.

'Let's go,' said Dr Bohadlo.

'All right, I'll tell you who,' the man yelled. We all stopped.

'But only you,' the man said to Dr Bohadlo. Dr Bohadlo stepped up close to him and the man whispered something into his ear and then Dr Bohadlo drew back sharply and stared at him.

'Really?' he said.

'That's right,' the man said.

'And the Mayor doesn't... ' Dr Bohadlo started to say.

'Shh!' the man said and Dr Bohadlo bent over and whispered something into his ear to which the man nodded. Then he grabbed the doctor's hand imploringly and Dr Bohadlo straightened up and said in a loud voice, 'And you're on your way home now?'

'That's right.'

Dr Bohadlo thought it over for a while and then he said, 'I'll make a note of your name and then you may go.'

'But you'll keep it strictly confidential, right?'

'Of course,' Dr Bohadlo replied and jotted something down in his little notebook. Then he handed the man's identity card back to him and cleared his throat.

'Ahem, well, come to my office next week. And now go straight home, please, and remember - next time I'll be obliged to detain you.'

'Yes. Thanks,' said the man.

'Let him go, boys.' I saw the boys suspiciously release the man and the man straightening his coat collar.

'Well, thanks,' he said and then turned and strode off down the street towards the station. We just stood there in silence. It was raining and in the steady patter of the rain Mracek's footsteps grew fainter and fainter. We all just stood there until Dr Bohadlo said, 'All right, on we go, boys,' and took his place in the lead and we stretched out in a line across the street again and as I passed Haryk, he said, 'Hot stuff, huh?'

'You said it,' I said and took my place on the left wing of the column. On we went, down Jirasek Boulevard, across the bridge, and then there we were back again between the station and Messerschmidt. You could hear a kind of humming roar coming from the direction of the frontier now. We went as far as Schroll's factory and the noise was getting louder now. Then a short string of lights appeared on the highway.

'We'll wait here,' said Dr Bohadlo. We lined up against the wall and waited. The lights came closer through the rain and the noise kept growing louder. It wasn't the usual kind of noise that cars or trucks make. As it came closer, I could feel the earth trembling but I still couldn't make out what it was. Until at last I heard a metallic clatter and then I knew it was a tank. Through the dark and the rain it was rapidly crawling towards us. We stood there, pressed up against the wall, waiting. The lights drew nearer and, above us, the blackout lamp danced in the wind. The rumbling got louder until it was almost deafening and then a huge dark tank lumbered out of the night into the dim circle of light, its armoured turret shiny from the rain and giving off a stink of gas and exhaust fumes as it clanked by. The racket completely deafened me. Behind the tank came trucks - one, two, three, four, five of them. As they moved under the canopy of light I could see the soldiers sitting inside in two rows, facing each other silently in their wet helmets. Then the column had passed us by and the howling and racket was muffled among the tall apartment houses on Jirasek Boulevard until it gradually died away completely.

'They're on their way to Prague,' one of the boys said glumly. Dr Bohadlo moved away from the wall. 'To Prague? No,' he

said, 'they're on their way to surrender to the Americans.' Then he pulled up his armband which had slipped all the way down to his wrist and said, 'All right now. Forward march, boys!'

We moved off, one after the other, and formed our line again. The rain was cold against our faces and you could hear Benno swearing away steadily under his breath. We marched back to town. From time to time we heard the receding rumble of a truck. We went along Jirasek Boulevard as far as Novotny's store, turned and headed back. It was getting kind of silly by now. The rain slanted across each street light as it poured down on the town and the little puddles glittered and splattered as the heavy drops fell into them. My shoes were sopping wet and I was shaking with a chill. We got to the Messerschmidt plant again, passed along it, then marched by the little park in front of the station. You could just barely make out the whitewashed fence of the railroad warehouse in front of us. It glimmered dimly through the dark. Suddenly a dark figure emerged from the darkness and started clambering up the white fence. All you could see was a kind of vague, four-legged shadow.

'Halt!' yelled Dr Bohadlo and turned on his flashlight. It made a nice, clear circle on the flat face of the white fence and in the middle of it hung a drenched black silhouette trying to pull itself up and over.

'Halt!' Dr Bohadlo yelled again and started running. We started running too. We raced up to the fence and Dr Bohadlo yelled 'Halt!' again but the guy paid no attention to him. You could see him pulling hard, then get one leg over and then the circle of light slid up over the fence and all I could see was the guy's back, a little bit lighter against the black sky, and then even that was gone as he jumped down on the other side and vanished. Dr Bohadlo stood there. We crowded around him.

'Who was it?' asked one of the boys.

'No idea. Probably another of those people who're trying to break into the munitions train,' said Dr Bohadlo dejectedly.

'Who do you mean?'

'Communists,' said Benno.

'No,' said Dr Bohadlo quickly. 'I don't know who. Probably just a bunch of hoodlums, that's all.'

'Communists,' Benno said again.

'No, Mr Manes. We have no cause to think so. But last night some gang or other tried to break into it, too.'

'I know. Communists,' said Benno.

For a minute nobody said anything. Then one kid said, 'We ought to go to the station.'

'No. Our orders are to patrol outside,' said Dr Bohadlo.

'Is anybody there now?'

'Well, there're some Germans, of course.'

'Ukrainians,' said Benno.

'Vlasov's men,' said Dr Bohadlo. 'No, we most definitely will not go inside.'

'But what if somebody's trying to get at the train?'

'That's none of our business. They do it at their own risk.'

'Who knows what's going on? Anyway, it was only one guy,' I said.

'No, we are not going inside,' said Dr Bohadlo, 'but we will keep watch on the station.'

'From here?' the kid asked.

'We'll conceal ourselves in the park.'

That sounded more like it to me. We aboutfaced, went into the park, and took our stand behind the hedge. Standing right up against it I could feel its wet branches scratching my coat. Water dribbled down my face. For a second I felt I was in London. Or in Madrid during the Civil War. It was like in the movies and when I looked off to the side I could see the other guys crouched behind the hedge, in the dark, watching. I felt great, in spite of the wet and cold. Keeping our heads down, we stared across at the wood enclosure that walled off the station. Then all at once a bright light clicked on and then off again somewhere off to our right. Everything dark again. It must have come from somewhere close to the station.

'It came from a window - a skylight up on the roof,' said one boy. I looked up at the roof of the stationhouse. The light went on, then off again. Then it went on again after a longer interval. Off, then on again.

'Morse code,' said Dr Bohadlo. 'Any of you boys know Morse code?'

'I do,' one of the boys said. 'M-R-L-B. Mrlb,' he said. 'I don't get it.'

We stared again, nobody saying a word.

'Who do you think it is?'

'Communists,' said Benno.

'Shh! Look! Over there!' said Dr Bohadlo.

'Where?' said Haryk.

I turned around. From the slope back of the Messerschmidt plant, from one of the workers' apartment buildings, you could see a light blinking on and off.

'The fools,' said Dr Bohadlo. 'They ought to know better than to play games like that, with all those Germans quartered at Messerschmidt.' None of us said anything. The light up on the hill stopped blinking. We turned again. Somebody was signalling all right. Then the other light started blinking again.

'We ought to go and have a look,' the boy said.

'Where?' said Benno.

'At the station.'

'No, boys. As I said before, our orders are to stand watch in front of the station.'

'And we're just going to stand here like this?'

'No. We'll send a report back to the brewery ... that is, to headquarters,' said Dr Bohadlo. 'Any volunteers?'

'I'll go.' It was one of the kids we didn't know.

'Fine. I'll just write up my report and then ...' Dr Bohadlo took out his notebook. 'Hold this flashlight for me, will you please?' The kid took the flashlight and turned it on. Dr Bohadlo wrote something in his notebook. I tried to look over his shoulder but couldn't see anything.

'There,' he said, ripped out the sheet of paper, and folded it.

'Deliver this to headquarters as quickly as possible and wait there for an answer.'

'Yes, sir,' said the kid.

'You may go.'

'Yes, sir.'

The kid turned and disappeared into the park. I turned to watch him but all I could see were the long branches of a weeping willow waving in the dark. It was raining. Then another figure appeared by the fence. He stood there for a moment, still as a statue.

'Careful now, boys!' whispered Dr Bohadlo. 'Follow me but keep quiet.' Then with a tremendous crash, he pushed his way through the hedge. Our column moved after him. Dr Bohadlo broke into a trot. You could hear him splashing through the mud puddles in front of the park.

'Quick!' said the figure by the fence in a low voice. He'd mistaken us, I suddenly realized, for somebody else. We ran up to him, surrounded him, and Dr Bohadlo flashed the light on his face. The guy was wearing a cap, no overcoat, and a scarf around his neck. He squinted, blinded by the flashlight.

'What are you doing here?' said Dr Bohadlo sharply.

'Turn that thing off!' said the fellow.

'What are you doing here?'

'What's it to you?'

'I asked you what you're doing here.'

'And I say kiss my ass.'

'It would be in your own interest if you'd show a little respect. Don't you know there's a curfew?'

'Why don't you just mind your own business. And turn that damn thing off.'

'Tell me what you're doing here!'

'And like I told you - kiss my ass.'

'You're under arrest. Take him, boys,' said Dr Bohadlo. The other two boys jumped him, but Benno and Haryk and I just stood there. He wasn't about to give himself up. First he punched one of the kids in the nose, then he jumped sideways, out of the light. The kid landed hard in the mud. There'd been a soft cracking noise when the guy hit him, then a little sigh. Dr Bohadlo flashed the light around, trying to keep up with the guy now and the light slid sharply along the white fence, then picked him up slogging his way through the mud towards the station.

'After him!' yelled Dr Bohadlo and started running. We all

took off after him. Along the fence the mud was awful. The cone of light bounced around through the dark as Dr Bohadlo ran and our feet sank and stuck in the mud, and then suddenly we heard a big splat in front of us and I saw the guy fall. The other kid jumped him and came down on his back. We ran up. Dr Bohadlo trained his flashlight on him.

'Get up!' he said.

The guy lay there on his stomach, the boy straddling his back, and it didn't look as if he was in any hurry to get up. He kept his face down and with his right hand started groping for something inside his jacket. Then all at once he stuck something in his mouth and before Dr Bohadlo could stop him a piercing whistle split the air. The kid on top of him grabbed his head and the whistling stopped but with a twist he threw the kid off and was up again. Dr Bohadlo grabbed him clumsily around the waist. Then I got into it, too, moving in and getting an armlock around his neck. He was struggling hard and he was very strong. Haryk had a hold on him now, too.

'You bastards!' the guy said savagely, breathing hard. 'A great bunch of patriots you are - you sons of bitches.'

'Quiet!' said Dr Bohadlo.

'Why don't you go ask the Krauts for some help, huh?'

'Hold him, boys. I'll see if he's armed,' said Dr Bohadlo. I could feel the guy starting to squirm again, trying to break loose. Haryk let out a yell and sat down on the ground. Dr Bohadlo grabbed the guy around the waist again.

'Jee-sus!' moaned Haryk.

'You hurt?' said Benno.

'He ... he kicked me,' said Haryk and moaned again. In the meantime the kid who'd landed in the mud before had taken over for Haryk and Benno was carefully holding on to one of his arms. The kid was clutching a bloody handkerchief.

'Are you bleeding?' said Dr Bohadlo.

'Nothing serious,' the boy said.

'Now hold him tight, boys,' said Dr Bohadlo. The guy tried to kick the first kid but he dodged to one side and then the kid told Haryk to help out so he could get the guy's legs.

Haryk got up, clutching his stomach.

'It hurts like hell,' he said.

'Come on, come on,' said the kid.

Haryk went over to the guy and got a hold on him.

'You sons of bitches! You're going to pay for this!' said the guy. The first boy knelt down and got a good grip on the guy's feet. Now we were all holding on somewhere. Dr Bohadlo started searching his pockets.

'Ah, there we are,' he said and pulled something out. He held it in the palm of his hand, then turned the light on it. It was a heavy German pistol.

'You sons of bitches! Traitors!'

Dr Bohadlo was just putting the pistol into his own pocket when two short whistles came from somewhere off in the dark and the guy jerked his head back and yelled, 'Over here! Here! Help!'

The kid with the bleeding nose quickly rammed his bloody handkerchief into the guy's mouth. The guy bit his hand. The kid howled. A light shone out of the darkness. It found us. I turned around. A couple of men were running towards us through the mud. I let go of the guy and got ready for a fight. I felt like pounding the hell out of somebody.

'Watch it, boys!' shouted Dr Bohadlo and flashed his light on the men running at us.

'Son of a bitch!' I heard behind me. I spun around and saw that the guy had wrenched himself free. Which was fine with me. I didn't want to get into any fight with him. He jumped Dr Bohadlo and knocked the flashlight out of his hand. It fell to the ground, rolled, and then lay there lighting up a long patch of mud. I saw the guy ram his knee into Dr Bohadlo's belly, then roll over on the ground with him, and Dr Bohadlo's knickered little legs churning around in the air, but that was all I saw because the guy's friends charged into us then. I went for one of them, but he got a leg behind me and over I went, but I didn't let go of him so we both went down. I could feel the soft, wet mud under me as I lay there on my back. I poked my fingers into the guy's eyes like we used to do when we were playing around with ju-jutsu. The guy let out a crazy howl and let go. I jumped up and kicked him in the belly. He doubled up

in the mud and moaned. I looked around. In the patch of light from Dr Bohadlo's flashlight I saw two bodies wrestling in the mud. A clumsy figure, splattering mud all over the place, tore by. It was Benno. A flashlight went on and I saw Haryk lying there on the ground, his face all bloody. The kid sitting next to him in the mud was holding a hanky to his nose. Then they both disappeared in the dark again because the guy with the flashlight was hunting around for something. The light slid over puddles and mud until it picked me out. The next thing I knew two figures leaped into the light and started barrelling towards me. I didn't wait for them but turned and lit out after Benno. I heard them sloshing along noisily behind me. Then somebody yelled, 'Let him go!' Though the footsteps stopped I kept right on going. I made a flying leap towards the hedge and burrowed through. The twigs slashed my face and I could hear my coat ripping. I went right on through.

'Danny?' said a voice out of the dark.

'Benno?' I said.

'Yeah. Where are you?'

'Here.'

I groped my way over towards Benno's voice. Then I felt him next to me.

'Anybody else here?' I said.

'I don't know. I guess not.'

'They still fighting?'

'Not any more. Look.'

I looked over towards the battlefield. By now, Dr Bohadlo's flashlight, half buried in mud, was only dimly shining on the back of the kid with the smashed-in nose. On the other hand, over by the wall, you could see a bunch of men helping each other over the fence one after the other.

'Well, that's that,' said Benno.

'You said it!'

The last guy swung himself up, dropped, and vanished on the other side of the fence.

'Shall we go back?' said Benno.

'Sure,' I said. We shoved our way back through the hedge. Somebody was picking the flashlight out of the mud and you

could see a red hand cleaning it off. Then the cone of light circled. It picked up Haryk holding his hanky up to his cheek. A relief to see nothing worse had happened to him. We hurried over to the light. Dr Bohadlo was standing there with his flashlight, staring off into the night. The two kids came up - one still clutching his nose, the other limping. We all crowded around Dr Bohadlo.

'Are you all here?' he asked.

'Yeah,' I said.

'I'll need one of you to run a report over to the brewery.'

Nobody volunteered.

'Hold my flashlight,' said Dr Bohadlo. One of the kids held the flashlight and Dr Bohadlo pulled out his notebook and I noticed that his sleeve was ripped all the way up to the elbow.

'What happened to you?' Benno asked Haryk.

'I got one right in the teeth.'

'Let's see.'

'Skip it. I checked. They're all still there.'

'And all that blood?'

'I guess I got that when he knocked me down. How about yourself?'

'Me? I'm okay,' said Benno.

'Were you in on the fight?'

'Are you kidding? I sure wasn't.'

'How about you?' Haryk asked me.

'Yeah.'

'You get hurt?'

'I won.'

'Oh, come on!'

'Really. I did.'

'You cleared out just like Benno.'

'Honest to God, I was fighting like crazy.'

'But you didn't win.'

'I did, too.'

'There,' said Dr Bohadlo and tore a page out of his notebook. Now, who's going to...'

Just then a submachine gun started chattering in short bursts from the station. We stiffened. The machine-gun fire died

down, then a few more shots cracked. Revolver shots this time.

'My God, that gang is going to get the whole city in trouble,' said Dr Bohadlo in a shocked tone of voice.

Behind the fence something flashed. Smoke rolled up. Somebody had thrown a hand grenade.

'Let's clear out of here,' Benno muttered.

'Wait,' stammered Dr Bohadlo.

'Why? What's the point in waiting around here anyway?'

Benno persisted. The submachine gun on the other side of the fence chattered again. Suddenly a floodlight blazed on over to the left. I turned. Germans armed with submachine guns and rifles came racing out around the corner of the warehouse. I heard a plop behind me. I turned and saw Benno stretched out flat in the mud. Dr Bohadlo didn't budge. The Germans rushed up to us and halted. An officer trained a flashlight on us.

'What are you doing here?' he demanded.

'We belong to the Czech Army,' said Dr Bohadlo quickly.

'Aha! Herr Doktor Sabata, was?'

'Exactly!'

'What's going on here?'

'We were attacked,' said Dr Bohadlo. 'A group of men ... armed men ...'

'Where are they now?' the officer asked impatiently.

'There. At the station,' said Dr Bohadlo.

'Gut,' said the officer and turned to the soldiers. 'Los! Gehn wir!' he barked and they all started running towards the station.

'Come on, let's get out of here!' said Benno.

'What the hell are we waiting for? Let's go, you guys,' said Haryk. Behind the fence there was another explosion, then three more, one right after the other. In the light of one blast I saw three figures scrambling down over the fence and taking off in the direction of the workers' district up on the hill. The submachine gun started chattering again.

'Let's go, boys. There's nothing we can do here anyway,' said Dr Bohadlo.

'Exactly,' said Benno.

We trotted past the park, heading for town. It was raining hard. Another explosion went off and the flash lit up one whole side of the buildings on Jirasek Boulevard.

'We'll go through the underpass,' panted Dr Bohadlo. We ran across the bridge, our footsteps booming, and switched left towards the underpass. Another long spatter of shots rang out from the station. We tramped through the underpass and came out on to a muddy path and then we all slowed down and I looked around and the railroad station was dark and silent again. Only the rain kept coming down.

'Boy, does that ever hurt!' said Haryk.

'What's wrong?' I asked.

'That guy really kicked me in the gut all right.'

'Is anybody injured?' asked Dr Bohadlo.

'Me,' said Haryk.

'Where?'

'In the stomach. It really hurts.'

'Can you walk?'

'Yes.'

'As soon as we get back to the brewery, report to the first-aid station.'

'I will.'

'Anyone else have any injuries?'

Nobody spoke up. We cut through the park in front of the County Office Building.

'Know what I'd like to do?' Benno whispered to me. 'Take off. Beat it.'

'Don't. Don't do it, Benno.'

'Do what?' said Haryk and slowed down for us. We let the others walk on ahead a little.

'I just said I'd like to take off,' said Benno.

'Me, too,' said Haryk.

'Don't. Stick around,' I said, 'for a while anyway.'

'Stick around? Hell, once we're back inside we'll never get out again,' Benno said.

'Sure we will.'

'Well, how?'

'Don't worry. We'll manage.'

'Yeah, but why crawl back in when we've got a perfect chance to take off now?'

I couldn't tell them that I wanted to be in on whatever was going on back at the brewery. That I wanted to see the army finally getting ready for action. And to see what Colonel Cemelik was up to. So all I said was, 'Look, you know how dumb they are. They're just dumb enough to lock us all up.'

'Shit,' said Benno. 'Anyway, we're already mixed up in this stupid business. And things can't get much worse for us than they are already.'

'How do you mean?' I asked.

'Well, I mean what's already happened.'

'What?'

'Jesus Christ! What happened with those communists.'

'Yeah, so what?'

'Oh, come on, stop playing so dumb.'

'I still don't get it.'

'I mean that when the Russians come, they'll wipe us out because of that - that's what I mean.'

'You kidding? Did you recognize any of those guys?'

'No. But they sure recognized us.'

'In the dark?'

'Everybody recognizes me, even in the dark,' said Benno.

'Yeah, but after all, all we did was obey orders. Anyway, the whole thing's crazy.'

'Like hell it is.'

'It is, too. The Russians'll have plenty of other worries.'

'Hurry up, boys,' a voice sang out from up front.

'Right,' I said.

'I don't even want to think about what's going to happen,' said Benno but he hurried up, too. We were nearing the gate now. It was closed and the lantern behind it turned the bars of the gate into long, fan-shaped shadows on the wet pavement. We got to the gate.

'Dr Bohadlo's patrol,' said Dr Bohadlo. The gate opened and we marched inside. The soldier closed it behind us as soon as we all passed through. Crowds came up from all sides. Everybody wanted to know what was going on outside.

'Let us through,' said Dr Bohadlo.

'But what's going on?' somebody asked.

'Where was the shooting?'

'What's happening?'

Silently we made our way through the crowd, but they followed us, asking us questions all the way over to the administration building. None of us said a word. It was only when we passed under the lantern at the corner of the building that I realized how we looked. We were all covered with mud. Dr Bohadlo's sleeve was torn and Haryk's face was bleeding. While we were standing there, Mr Jungwirth came up to me.

'What's going on out there, Danny? They won't let us out of this place.'

'The Germans are mixing it up with some communists at the railroad station,' I said.

'With communists?' I could see this news really knocked him for a loop.

'Yes,' I said.

'What's that? What'd he say?' voices called out behind Mr Jungwirth. I left him to take care of the questions. We went up the steps towards the door and into the hallway. There was a light on.

'Wait here. I'll go and report,' said Dr Bohadlo. We sat down on a bench along the wall and Dr Bohadlo went into the office.

'A nice mess,' said Benno.

'You're not kidding,' I said.

'Yeah, but this gut of mine has really had it!' said Haryk.

'It still hurts?' I asked.

'I'll say it does.'

'Whereabouts?'

'Right in the middle.'

'You ought to go to the first-aid station.'

'I'd rather go home.'

'We should have beat it,' said Benno.

'Wait a while. We will.'

'Yeah. Now all we can do is wait.'

'Oh, maybe they'll let us off.'

'Like hell they will.'

'Sure they will.'

'Yeah? When?'

'Oh, by morning at the latest.'

'I'll believe it when I see it,' said Benno.

It was quiet in the hallway. The light in the hall shone murkily. We sat there on the bench, bloody, bleeding, filthy, drenched, and exhausted. So this was a revolution. It wasn't just a big lark after all. And that was all right, too. I liked that. I'd forgotten all about my flu. I remembered everything that had happened. It was pleasant to remember kicking that guy in the stomach. And how he'd groaned. It worried me a bit, though – maybe I'd really hurt him. I'd never have thought I was capable of kicking anybody like that, that hard. Apparently I was, though. Obviously I was capable of even worse things, too. Too bad I hadn't had a gun with me. I could have picked off those Germans as they came running up to us with their guns and bayonets. I could just see myself behind that hedge, firing away with my submachine gun, the short flame shooting out of the muzzle, the rain pouring down, the brief bursts of light, and the Germans turning to flee in their wet helmets and flapping trenchcoats. These brewery battalion leaders made me mad. Why didn't they let us do anything? If they'd only passed out all those guns they had lying around in the arsenal, they could have taken the station. Well, sure. But what's the good of taking the station away from the Germans if it costs lives? True. I could see that. And this way the Germans could escape easier and then they'd be out of our way. The communists were making things rough enough for us as it was. Take on the Germans, too? I shuddered.

'What the hell are they doing in there?' said Benno.

'What time is it?' asked Haryk.

'Nearly three. Those guys'll be gabbing away in there until morning.'

I was trembling all over from the cold. I tried to think about shooting again but it didn't work. I was so cold my teeth were chattering.

'What's wrong with you?' said Benno.

'I'm cold.'

'You see, you jerk. You could already be home in bed by now.'

'Yeah, sure.'

The longer we sat there the worse I felt. I tried to warm up by thinking about Irena, but that didn't help much. The lightbulb in the ceiling looked as cold as ice and Dr Bohadlo didn't return. The minutes dragged by. At last Dr Bohadlo appeared. He came out looking very grave, his full-moon face still spattered with mud, and he told us to go to the lounge.

'When are you going to let us go home?' said Benno.

'I've already told you – only when things have quieted down. You're in the army now. Go and get some rest,' said Dr Bohadlo testily. We got up. Dr Bohadlo disappeared through another door.

'A great army,' said Benno.

'A great screw-up, that's for sure,' said Haryk.

'You coming?' said one of the other guys.

'Sure. You go on ahead. We'll be down in a while,' said Benno. They headed off for the lounge. Benno turned to us.

'Well, you want to stay here?'

'No,' said Haryk.

'How about you?' Benno turned to me.

'I'm for clearing out.'

'Okay. But how?'

'Come on, you guys. I know a place we can get over that fence in no time,' said Haryk. I opened the door. A bunch of guys were still standing under the lantern, arguing.

'Careful. Follow me,' said Haryk. We crept out, slipped quickly along the wall on the other side of the door and turned the corner. We found ourselves in complete darkness.

'Where are you?'

'Here,' I said.

'Hold on.'

I groped around until I felt Haryk's hand. Benno laid his hand on my shoulder. Slowly we picked our way through the darkness. It was still pouring and dark as the inside of your hat. Haryk stopped and let go of my hand.

'Well, here's the fence,' he said.

'Where does it bring us out?' said Benno.

'On the Bucina road.'

'I'll never make it over.'

'We'll boost you. Danny, come here.'

I stood next to Haryk.

'Come on, Benno.'

Benno stepped up to the fence. It was an ordinary board fence.

'Grab hold at the top and stick out your ass. We'll help you,' said Haryk.

'All right,' said Benno. Haryk and I caught hold of his rear and boosted him up. He was awfully heavy. He started grunting and groaning.

'You got a hold up there?' asked Haryk.

'Yeah.'

'Can we let go yet?'

'Wait, not yet.' You could hear him wheezing and I could feel him frantically pulling himself up. Finally he started growing a bit lighter. It felt like most of him anyway was already over the fence.

'Okay,' he said and we let go and I heard his shoes banging against the fence and then his body landing with a thud on the other side.

'You make it all right?' asked Haryk.

'Yeah. All banged up,' said Benno from behind the fence.

'Can you get up?'

'Yeah. To hell with everything.'

'Okay, Danny. Your turn,' said Haryk. I swung myself up on the fence and Haryk helped push. I got one leg over, then the other and sat on top. You couldn't see a thing beyond the fence.

'Where are you, Benno?'

'Here.' His voice came from right underneath me.

'Get out of the way so I don't land on top of you.'

I could hear branches cracking as Benno moved off to one side. Then I jumped. I landed on my hands and feet on the sopping wet ground.

'Okay?' Haryk called out from the other side.

'Yeah. You can jump,' I said and got up. Haryk jumped down behind me. We came out on the highway.

'Well, let's go,' said Benno. We hurried past the brewery. When we got near the gate we made a detour to keep out of the lantern light. The soldier was still patrolling behind the gate. We crossed the bridge and went past the County Office Building. All the windows were dark. Benno stopped at the corner.

'Well, so long.'

'See you,' said Haryk

'Good night,' I said.

'You coming over to our place this afternoon, aren't you?'

'We'll be there,' I said.

'Well, good night.'

'Good night.'

Haryk and I walked through the park and under the railroad underpass. It was wet and dark all around. We came out of the underpass and around the Hotel Granada on Jirasek Boulevard. We stopped in front of our building.

'See you at Benno's tomorrow?' I asked.

'Yeah.'

'Well ... good night.'

'Good night,' said Haryk, and vanished. I could hear his footsteps getting farther and farther away and then I unlocked the door. Then there I was in the hall and suddenly it was warm and dry. I shut the door and started shivering. I hurried up the stairs. It was dark at our place. I opened the door and closed it quietly behind me so as not to wake Mother. But I woke her up anyway or else she hadn't been asleep at all. A light went on in the bedroom and she rushed into the hall in her nightgown.

'Danny! Thank heavens! Are you all right?'

'Don't worry. I'm fine,' I said.

'What was all that shooting then? I've been so worried and frightened that something had happened to you!'

'It was some kind of incident at the station. It's all over now.'

'And they've let you go now?'

'No. But I caught cold so I came home.'

'A good idea. Now you get right into bed. You'd like some tea?'

'Please.'

Mother went into the kitchen and I slipped into the bathroom to wash up a bit and also so I wouldn't have to explain anything. She hadn't seen anything there in the dark hall, but when she saw my clothes she'd be in for quite a shock. But she wouldn't see them until morning. I stripped to the waist, washed, and rubbed myself dry with a Turkish towel. Then I went to my room, undressed, and crawled into bed. I was cold. Mother came in with a big mug of steaming hot tea and set it on the chair next to my bed.

'Well, the main thing is you're home again - thank God,' she said.

'Right. And tomorrow I'll take a sweat cure and get rid of this cold.'

'Of course. And we'll ask Dr Labsky to write you a certificate so that you can't go back there any more.'

'Well, we'll see,' I said and picked up the mug of tea.

'Yes . . . Would you like anything else? A sandwich or . . .'

'No, thanks. Go back to bed, Mother.'

'All right. Good night,' she said, and leaned over me.

'Good night,' I said and screwed up my mouth. She kissed me.

'And get a good long rest,' she said, and went back to her bedroom. She closed the door behind her.

I was alone in my room with the tea. I drank it and then crawled down under the eiderdown quilt and curled up. That same old, familiar, eternally recurring and always wonderful feeling swept over me. I closed my eyes and started saying my prayers. Dear Lord, help me to win Irena. Our Father Which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name, Thy kingdom come, and I thought about Irena and could see her the way she'd looked up in the mountains, edging her way across a narrow traverse near the Chimney and moving slowly around the overhanging rock towards the big crevasse, her arms bare and tan up to her shoulders and the safety rope between her breasts and Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us now and at the moment of our death, Amen, and Irena still sitting there in the sunshine

and I said, Dear God, help me to win Irena, and I crossed myself and started thinking about her up there on the mountain again and then about the brewery and how they were all locked up inside it like in a zoo behind bars, and about the bars, and about the explosions down at the station, and that hot, black, wet tank and us getting over that fence and then suddenly I was thinking of Prague where they were probably really fighting now and the barricades were blazing in the streets and the Germans were probably murdering people and raping pretty girls, girls like Irena, or maybe somewhere a girl, the girl I'd finally meet some day and marry, was going through hell right then, and then it astonished me, the thought that I probably hadn't even met the girl I would marry some day but that she must be living somewhere or that maybe she hadn't even been born yet, and that maybe I wouldn't get married until I was old and my bride would be young, except that I didn't believe I'd live to be very old, and suddenly I had a terrific desire to know her and I wondered what she was like and whether or not she really existed at all and I said to myself, that's all a lot of nonsense, I'll never meet one, and then I remembered I was supposed to be in love with Irena, but then there I was back again thinking about *her* again, that girl I was going to meet, and I tried to imagine how she looked but I couldn't, and all I knew was that she'd be pretty and I decided I could never love a girl who wasn't pretty and wondered how anybody ever could but then for a second that made me feel sort of ignoble, that all I thought about was physical beauty and not spiritual beauty, but I said to myself, skip the spirit, I don't believe in the spirit, I just believe in the body and only pretty ones at that and in all the pleasure you get out of looking and touching and I imagined myself embracing this girl I was going to meet and we were in bed together, both of us naked, and I was touching her breasts and kissing her and I went on dreaming it out in detail and then I felt worse than ever because it all wasn't real, and for a while I thought about Dr Bohadlo and about Irena and about that guy I'd kicked in the stomach and about the communists and that, maybe, instead of just waiting around, the thing to do was to get out

and do something. But why? And then back came the girl and I whispered I love you, I love you, and saw her in a pretty dress in Prague at the university and beside the river on a fall evening; so I went on and hardly knew any more quite what it was I was thinking about and what was real and what wasn't until I fell asleep with all these pleasant thoughts, without even knowing how.

Monday, May 7, 1945

I woke up drenched with sweat from head to foot. It was already one o'clock. I lay there with the covers drawn up to my chin, my chest and neck cool from a draught seeping in under the blankets. Still, it was good I was sweating like that. I called Mother and asked her to bring me a towel. She brought two plus a fresh pair of pyjamas.

'Should I call the doctor?' she asked.

'No,' I said. 'It's just an ordinary cold.'

'Would you like some tea?'

'Yes. And some lunch, too, if it's ready.'

Mother went out to the kitchen and I tossed off the covers and got out of my sweaty pyjamas and rubbed myself down with a towel. I could feel the blood pulsing through my veins. I put on the clean pyjamas, turned the quilt over and plumped it up, straightened the pillows, and climbed back into bed again. Then I rubbed my face and hair with the towel. I felt like I'd just had a bath. Mother brought lunch in on a tray and set it down in front of me. I finished it all off in no time and drank the tea. It warmed me up. Then I put the tray down next to the bed, crawled under the covers again, and closed my eyes. I felt fine. But then I started remembering again and the feeling started to fade. I remembered what had happened the night before, the explosion at the station, the whole thing, and wondered why they'd done it, what they got out of it, why they couldn't wait like everybody else until it all blew over, whether it was for glory or what, and for the life of me I couldn't see why and all it did was spoil that comfy feeling I had there in bed, so I switched over to thinking about Irena like I always did when I wanted to feel good, about all those evenings she'd left me feeling good, bad, or indifferent, though when I thought of her now it was only the good feelings that came to mind. I closed my eyes, listened to the clock tick, and