

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



thought about Irena, how once, the winter before, I'd gone with her from Stare Mesto by train and we'd sat there together in the dim compartment and I'd put my arm around her waist and told her I loved her and she'd pushed me away and started saying, as usual, that we were just good friends. I was back in my element then and went right on thinking about her. It seemed to me that my whole life was made up of only Irena and Vera and Eva and Jarinka, of what I'd had with them, and of nothing else really. And other people's lives were exactly the same. I thought about the other guys and was pretty sure that all they ever thought about was girls and that girls were all they talked about, too. Girls, and music. Yes. Music and girls. That was life. Music was great and, whether I was thinking about the past or about what the future would bring, it was always connected with either music or girls. Like, once we were rehearsing at the Lion Inn and the girls were sitting around a table, looking at us, and I sat there hunched over my saxophone and I could see Vera had her eye on me and I knew that with my sax to my lips and with that whole complicated array of valves working away under my fingertips I must look pretty terrific, and that made me feel good. And then there was that big graduation dance in 1940. It was in the big ballroom at the Lion. The chandeliers, high up, were all lit and the girls dressed up in their tulle evening gowns and then I got up in a white dinner jacket and played my fine, tender solo in 'I've Got a Guy' or that wild solo in 'Liza Likes Nobody' and I never felt so great in my whole life. Nobody feels better than when he's playing. I got up and Mr Flux turned the spotlight on me and there I stood, all in white, with my sideburns and glistening saxophone and Irena was down there in the darkened ballroom watching. That's the way it was with music. Something wonderful, maybe even more wonderful than girls, except wherever there's music, there're girls, too. It was all part of the same piece of happiness, it was life, maybe the best thing about life there was, and when I thought of the future, I could see notes in front of me on a music stand and a band up on the stage and me with a golden saxophone and beautiful girls wearing low-cut gowns and a lost look in their eyes from the music

and smiles on their lips when I looked their way and I could see myself out on my evening stroll through Prague and all those big, fancy, blasé houses and apartments and they were part of it, too, part of my jazz, and of life, and suddenly that kind of life scared me even though it looked as if that's just the way mine would turn out - full of jazz and girls, pretty, beautiful, sweet, gaudy girls I could look at as long as I lived, which probably wouldn't be very long, and then I thought about the others, about Fonda who wanted to be an architect and the only reason I could think of for him wanting to be an architect was that he could make a pile of money that way and live in a swanky house outside of Prague, because why else would a guy like Fonda want to be an architect? But that was life. Jazz and the girls and the memories. It couldn't be any other way, I thought. Because they were all that was worth living for. That business of working at the factory, of getting up at five in the morning and coming home at eight at night sure hadn't been living. No. This was life. Just this. And I couldn't help thinking how nice it would be if there was a God, and I thought to myself, too bad there isn't, at least not the kind you learn about in Sunday school and it's anybody's guess what He's really like and how it all began and maybe He's like they say in Sunday school after all, but I couldn't believe it and I couldn't believe He'd damn me to hell even if that was the kind of God He was, because I'd lived a pretty decent life and I had the feeling I'd never been very bad though I'd been pretty fresh a few times maybe and let a few girls down pretty hard when they thought I was serious and found out I wasn't, and I thought about, when I was little, that kid called Vocenil who sat right behind me in grade school, how he always smelled of bread and about those games we used to play in Bucina, the slingshots we had and the castles we built out of sticks and stones and it was all wrapped in a sort of autumnal haze and it was all so long ago, and after that came the winter evenings and high school and then the band and electric lights in the Manes' drawing room and the wine cellar at the Lion and the Port Arthur and the light on the sax and the trumpet and the way the moist reed tasted in my mouth and the swimming



pool with girls in their bathing suits and it got all mixed up and swirled and danced all around me and I was in it, too, watching how I lived, and I couldn't tell whether it was good or bad or why I was living at all, but lying there in bed it didn't seem to matter, because I felt comfy and warm and that's all that mattered to me. Those memories were enough for me, and daydreaming about the future. It was all so peculiar, I could hardly believe it myself, because I knew I was living in 1945 and that the biggest war of all time was just coming to an end, a war in which millions of people had been killed and millions more had been horribly wounded and had lived through hell in the mud and the hospitals and millions more had been tortured and killed by the Germans in concentration camps – I thought of all those deaths and wondered what life was about, what the point was, and it seemed to me it didn't have any, unless maybe just thinking about girls and music, and I wondered if that was enough to live for, but nothing else came to mind so I left it at that and quickly started thinking about Irena again, about one walk we'd taken through the woods one night and how awfully inferior I'd felt when she started talking about Victor Hugo and Byron and I got Byron mixed up with Balzac and Balzac with Barbusse and I hadn't read anything by any of them, and it seemed to me I was as dumb as ever and that what was really important was inventing new things and new medicines – obviously very important – but that even without them you could still get along but that without girls and music life wouldn't be worth living, and so my thoughts cruised through my head until I fell asleep and when I woke up I saw it was already evening. Outside my window the sky was red and the windows of the other houses shone with the setting sun. It was spring and the end of the German Protectorate.

Father came into the room and said he was going to turn on the radio. I lay there sprawled out in bed, listening to the news from Prague which was interesting and exciting, and I could see it all going on in my head, and Father said things were quiet in town, that the Germans hadn't made a fuss about the raid last night and that this afternoon the whole garrison had moved out. I asked him if they'd let the people at the brewery

go home and Father said yes, some, but that all the others were still there, and then I asked him if he knew anything about Prema but he didn't. Then they announced over the radio that Hradcany was on fire and Father clenched his fists and called the Germans beasts and vandals and I could see it, imagine it burning, and somehow it made me glad that it was and that now they'd have to build new buildings there and that now maybe everything would be new and better than it had been before and I looked forward to getting up the next morning and seeing Irena again and my friends and how we'd sit and play and I looked forward to playing my sax and to that unknown girl I'd meet in Prague. It was getting dark. Father switched off the radio and left. I was alone in my room. I turned off the light, looked out the window at the stars twinkling in the sky because the rain clouds had passed over and I thought about things and then my eyes wouldn't stay open and I fell asleep.