The GREAT MADNESS



from the Hebrew Original of AVIGDOR HAMEIRI

by JACOB FREEDMAN

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Authorized Translation

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THE GREAT MADNESS

HEBREW EDITIONS

First, 1930
Second, 1945
Third, 1951

Dedicated to the
Man of Olympian calm

ALBERT EINSTEIN

who did not obey the order of
my first sergeant

The Author

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

I SPENT about three years in that colossal madhouse which encompassed half the world and in which a billion distracted people went crazy. Its mad ecstasy manifested itself in weeping and hallowed exultation; in treachery and sincerity; in pain, love and resentment.

I witnessed the first stroke of this lunacy. I rubbed my eyes in amazement. In my bewilderment I, too, was swept into its midst by a certain character with a glittering uniform and a long, pointed mustache, who called himself by the strange name of "General First Sergeant."

Then I, too, found myself falling victim, prey to the violent, smashing waves of maddening confusion. I steeled myself to keep my brain from becoming benumbed, so that I could with sobriety observe the poor wretches about me as well as my own pitiful self.

Did my eyes see aright? Was my brain clear? Surely, I am not the one to answer this question. Not I, the madman who observed himself!

I have a faint recollection. Once I discussed with Maeterlinck his reason for not having obeyed his physician, Doctor Einstein.

Then even this recollection vanished.

Thus I survived my three years on the Eastern front during World War I, in the Austro-Hungarian-German line, which opposed the Russians. There it was that I noted down what I saw and felt as a sentient human being. I made my first notation within a few days after meeting the first sergeant. The final chapter I wrote in Tshortokov, where I spent the first part of my internment, in a Russian prisoner-of-war camp.

I have not embellished the facts. Neither have I made them uglier. I have added nothing. On the other hand, I have not withheld one iota of fact. I simply kept noting down my impressions and awaiting the end. I waited for the moment of recovery from this insanity of war.

At the same time, however, I also observed the Jew in our

midst. The Jew, who, though engulfed in that maddening confusion, remained a Jew; an inspired fool, a sacred clown, an aged youth, a despised lover of man.

Originally, I did not intend to pay heed to the Jew within me and my comrades in death. But so it turned out. And now that it is over, it is best that it did turn out that way.

AVIGDOR HAMEIRI

Tel-Aviv, Israel

This Translation Is Dedicated
To the Memory of My Lamented Brother

MARTIN

Called to his Maker long ere his prime

A Flaming Meteor in the Firmament of Knowledge,
Beautifully Brilliant, but, Alas, Too Brief.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

AMONG the books I took with me to read en route from New York to my first pulpit in Long Beach, California, was the Hebrew novel HASHIGAON HAGADOL. By the time the train arrived on the West Coast, I had become haunted by the episodes in this autobiographical account of World War I on the Austro-Hungarian-Russian front. Hameiri's book impressed me as being the Hebrew equivalent of Remarque's "All Quiet on the Western Front." Quite coincidentally, the motion-picture version of "All Quiet . . ." was being shown in the local theaters at that very time.

I saw the film possibilities of this book, too, and endeavored to interest some people in the motion-picture industry in it. However, I broke off my contacts when I returned to the East. Meanwhile, I began to translate the work, but then halted it while I attempted to locate Hameiri and obtain his authorization. But he was nowhere to be found. My letters did not reach him. Literary friends attempted to locate him while traveling abroad. The late Lewis Browne, whose tragic passing grieved me greatly, made special inquiry for me on one of his European tours, which included a visit to Palestine. Unfortunately, he, too, was unable to find Hameiri. I still treasure as a memento his "apologetic" card to this effect. Finally, I succeeded in making personal contact myself by letter and obtained Hameiri's authorization.

By this time Hameiri (who was born Feuerstein; Hameiri is the Hebrew equivalent) had become one of the most colorful personalities in modern Hebrew letters. There is scarcely a literary form which Hameiri has not employed to give expression to his varied talents. His effervescent feelings and thoughts have been poured into poem and novel, satire and drama, literary criticism and journalism. He has even tried his hand as a theatrical producer, having founded the short-lived comedy theater Ha-Kumkum (The Tea Kettle) in 1927. His writings, particularly those on Palestine, are character-

ized by a kind of exalted rhythm permeated by a sense of moral elevation. He portrayed the clash between the vision of redemption and its disillusioning and slow realization. However, unconquerable hope in growth and progress, which could neither be impeded nor deterred, has animated his characters and prevailed to light the way to the future.

While waiting for final clearance on THE GREAT MADNESS, I translated some of Hameiri's short stories and, together with one of the book's most interesting and powerful chapters, "Madame Pompadour," published them in several magazines.

In the translation of the present volume I have sought to capture the full flavor and style of the terse, often choppy and apocopated, Hebrew original. I am confident the reader will find my faith in the dramatic and emotional quality of the book vindicated, and my judgment of the literary value of this powerful presentation by a recognized, contemporary Israeli author amply justified. Such an introduction to Hameiri, in my view, should prove both a satisfying and rewarding experience.

The author has tried not only to depict the horror and madness of war, but to condemn the viciousness and ludicrousness of class distinction, particularly the insane, vindictive maliciousness of anti-Semitism in the ranks of men generally considered to be "comrades in arms." Parallel with this, he reveals the common, underlying humanity of the opposing belligerents, which innately rejects war and instinctively yearns for brotherhood and peace.

JACOB FREEDMAN

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THE GREAT MADNESS

CHAPTER I

Opium

SILENCE in the editorial rooms. The tense quiet of absorption. The silence of feverish activity. Everyone was engrossed in his own work, in poignant, nervous, antlike activity. Nerves were positive and negative electric wires. Brains—those finely tooled machines—emitted streams of mobile images onto white paper, without interruption.

And should one raise his head for a moment between paragraphs, he might hear the beehive of scratching pens and the cryptic beating of hearts. From one department to the other, he could see cigarette smoke, which seemed to blend with the *tick-tock* of watches on serried desks.

A soft rustling quiet, which continued constantly, unbrokenly.

Suddenly, the telephone.

"Hello! Stockholm. Yes."

As foreign news editor of the day, I raised the receiver to my ear.

"Hello!"

And I wrote: 1) Professor Brunner has proposed the establishment of an international university at the Hague, whose language of instruction is to be Esperanto. The proposal will be adopted tomorrow. 2) Professor Einstein's lecture on the theory of relativity in Leipzig brought tears to the eyes of the small audience. In Germany, it is planned to establish an ob-

servatory in his honor. 3) Edison is completing his electric screen, designed to prevent every kind of warfare. 4) Kaiser Wilhelm, at a court dinner last night, said that as long as he lives there will be no war in Europe. 5) In an interview, the Brahmin Lemundi gave his views on opium smoking. "For us, the true Hindus, opium is superfluous. But it is a necessity for the uncivilized Europeans—for this divine smoke will at least in dreams reveal to them the goal of life; namely, completely to abnegate the *I* and the *thou* in us and realize both in God." 6) Lieutenant Colonel Bulman, against whom there has been uncovered incontrovertible evidence of his having sold the plans of the fortifications of Przemysl to the Russians, today committed suicide with a revolver left him for that purpose by the commander in chief. End.

I made excellent stories out of these dull items. The day's work done, I rang.

The door opened and the girl from the composing room entered.

"These are the latest cables."

Simultaneously from the other desks came the requests: "Take this, too!"

All had finished.

A deep sigh of relief. Now we, too, heard the roar of the presses below.

We stretched and looked at our watches—half past three. We made ready to go. The boy brought us the paper.

Not one of us looked at it.

We went out for "breakfast." On that night, as we went out into the street, the din of the city's night life burst upon us. The street lights were already extinguished. The spacious mansions stood dormant like peaceful citizens; only the intimate coffee houses were filled.

We entered the Royal Orpheum and descended into the boisterous cellar. At the table, my friends asked me the latest news. I told them. An international university. Einstein. Edison. Kaiser Wilhelm. The Brahmin and opium. The treacherous colonel. Laughter. Kaiser Wilhelm has fallen into a trap. "As long as he lives, there won't be a war!" That means he is always thinking of war. Stupid—war in the twentieth century.

And Edison is ridiculous, too. Einstein, the university, Esperanto—and war. Let this Mr. Edison build himself a home with his electric screen.

Only the words of the Brahmin interested us. Especially, our friend the college instructor, pale, frail Doctor Goroyi.

"Perhaps the Brahmin will pay us a visit, too," said the doctor, his ashen face growing still paler. He lighted a cigar before eating, and inhaled the bitter-sweet smoke so deeply he seemed to be drawing it into his stomach. Then he gulped the beet soup, and afterwards alternately chewed on his cigar and sipped cherry brandy. After six or seven more gulps he requested the waiter to remove the soup and bring him a sausage pickled in lemon juice.

The music welled about us and the cabaret girls came over to our tables and sat down. Someone offered them drinks of tokay mixed with a dash of absinthe. They all drank.

Five young women—one from France, the others from Canada, Düsseldorf, Melbourne, and Worms. They all understood the international language of the Orpheum. It was the language of night, wine and love.

"Here's to Professor Brunner's university!" cried one of my companions, who then turned to the girls with, "Well, what will you do if war breaks out?"

They burst into a pleasant peal of laughter. Each suggested a remedy for war and its stupidity.

"I'll go out to dance to the tune of the firing on the front."

"I'll crawl into the muzzle of a cannon, then have them shoot me home."

"I'll get the entire front so drunk on Bordeaux that they'll forget that they are enemies and join in a frenzied cancan."

"And I'll sit between the enemy soldiers and make eyes at them," said the French girl, with pleasant coquetry. "First at one, then at the other. Then I'd like to see if they'll know what the war is all about!"

"Heaven protect us!" exclaimed one of my companions. "They would devour one another because of you!"

"And you?" Someone turned to the petite from Melbourne. "You marble image of Holy Mary, what will you do?"

The statue-like girl raised her deep melancholy eyes and

spoke, almost lyrically. "I'll join up as a nurse and kiss the bloody wounds on the stupid brows of the wounded men. Who knows how many sweethearts I shall have there? Who knows how many of the kisses which I planted upon the brows of my girlhood sweethearts will vanish with their last groans?"

And she began to sob softly.

We burst into resounding laughter. She seemed in all seriousness to believe in the possibility of war!

Our friend, the anemic Doctor Goroyi, arose, took her on his lap, kissed her, and said: "You're a fool, my sick sweetheart. The Brahmin, despite everything, is not right. You don't understand what he said. He said that Europe must take to opium in order to love, in order to forget herself, in order to reach the stage of the higher man, and in order to experience the actual physical sensation of Spinoza's *logos* in her blood. He, my sweet, doesn't understand us—he doesn't understand Europe. For them, the Hindus, opium smoking is indispensable to hearing the music of Bach in fancy, and to the contemplation of the supreme mystery of the fusion of the *I* and the *thou*—but we have attained that without smoking. Do you know, my wan darling, what our categorical imperative is?"

His wan darling stared at him as though he were drunk. What language was this? What was he talking about?

But he continued: "Our categorical imperative is, my dear, 'And thou shalt love thyself as thy neighbor.' In what involves you and a neighbor, your neighbor has preference. We are already, my saucy miss, fast approaching Mars and Alpha-Centauri—in a machine. And we are also fast drawing near to ourselves—to God—by the dynamics of our brain. And so . . ."

She suddenly interrupted him. "And do you love me, old-timer?"

"You, my little girl, I love distractedly, more even than myself. I have been told that you have a contagious disease and that you want to kiss me because it will give you pleasure. Well, then, here I am. Kiss me."

"And would you kill someone, one of your friends, for example, on my account? Out of jealousy?"

"Jealousy? What is jealousy? Is there any pleasure in the

world greater than that of giving a friend the woman we both love more than life itself?"

She sprang from his knees as though stung by an adder. "If that's the case, then go to the devil! Reprobate!"

Continuing unruffled, he added, as though in a trance, "And yet there isn't one of us who knows what is in his heart's blood. The great love of the denizens of the primordial planets, which bear the culture of life, has been residing within us, too; but Satan still lives within us, the shade of Cain to which we must give egress, swinging open for it the door of ultimate release."

"By perforating the brain," someone interjected, with derisive laughter.

"Of course," continued Doctor Goroyi, "*war* is a necessity. *A real war.* The primeval hate of the wild animal in the jungle of primitive days chafes in our blood, clamoring for complete release because it is stifled by being crowded in with *man.* Let the great war come—the blessed catharsis, the blazing surgery of the soul—and we shall come out from under its scalpel feeling like the patient after the pus has been drained from his appendix—vestige of the apeman, our revered forebear. How can the Martians visit us now? Whom can they visit? The Australian ape? You, dear Lilly of Melbourne? Does to be emancipated from the force of gravitation mean to conquer life? Yes, yes. 'To be emancipated from the gravitational force of *ourselves,* from the *dead weight within us*' means to 'conquer life'! To establish the neutral field between rebellious man and the crawling beast within us means to be united with God. Waiter! Justi! We're out of wine and absinthe again! Surely, you love me truly!"

For what must have been the tenth time the waiter served drinks. The music and the cabaret girls wafted us tenderly and pleasantly over the waves of our heartbeats. We sat and dozed, wide-eyed.

A feminine voice whispered in my ear, now dull with stupefaction. "With us, back in Worms, sitting up until dawn is taboo."

"With you? In Worms—Worms—Worms—that is the city Varmiza, Varmisha . . . Do you know, my dear, who lived in

your Varmisha? Rashi, Rashi—Rabbi Solomon Yitzchaki, that genial, astounding patriarch, whom I studied aloud in singsong . . ."

Suddenly someone sobered up and said, "Let's go. They want to sweep the hall."

The hall was empty, still, cold.

"Justi! The check!"

Each extended his open purse to the waiter, who took whatever money was due him, and bowing, said, "Good morning, brethren. *Au revoir.* Go home before the sun greets you. It's already about . . ."

Even he himself had no idea how late it was.

Outside we encountered a giddy procession of night owls reeling home, singing obstreperously and treading the light fantastic along the entire length of the street. They brushed close by a policeman standing at the street intersection, and tried to drag him along, too, with dances and kisses.

There was a pleasant snap in the air. One of the city clocks struck the morning hour, as I straggled home to bed.

In my dreams I spoke chaste, classical Hebrew with Flammarion; about the "categorical imperative" of Doctor Goroyi.

When I awoke in the dusk of evening, I noticed a pink slip of paper on my table—a call to the colors.

CHAPTER II

Mania

FOR about four years I had never seen the sunlight before noon. Newspaper offices close about three in the morning—and after work who goes to sleep? After work we used to go out together for amusement, which continued until dawn, talking of music, art, philosophy, women, dancing and science. We went to bed before sunup in order to avoid people. People are very strange creatures. Creatures who have economic wants and financial worries. Bewildered, wizened, stupid, very fine citizens—but to converse with them is a rather disgusting experience. "How are you?" "Fine, thanks, and you?" "Thanks for asking. Oh, so-so. With a thousand dollars I might still be salvaged." That was humor . . . "And what's the latest news?" "News?" All he wants is news. "The theory of relativity." And when all is said and done, he, the citizen, the dear reader, despised you in his heart. Indeed, everything you wrote you slaved away to write for *him*. And, in reality, what are you? A frivolous fellow who caroused his nights away with cabaret girls.

Being in dread of a citizen outranked all other fears. We rushed home early in the morning, switched on the light, read some book until about eight, and fell asleep.

When we awoke, it was five in the afternoon. We would sit in the coffee house and work for two hours or more. Poems,

stories, puzzles. After that we went to the editorial rooms. The routine assignment to a theater or concert. Until ten or later. And to top it all, the drudgery of getting out the paper until about three.

And so on, over and over again, in endless repetition.

It had been this way for about four years now. The life of a night owl.

The pink slip didn't sober me up very much. Go to the City Hall? Good. But when? Ten in the morning? That's bad. One is bound to run into people there. Surely one ought to be able to settle it by telephone.

I went to the editorial rooms and telephoned City Hall. "Please, miss, City Hall."

"City Hall."

"Hello! City Hall? Editorial office of the *People's Word* calling. Hello! I got a pink slip this morning. What is it for?"

"A pink slip? You must report for conscription."

"Conscription? What does that mean? Must I be a soldier?"

"It seems so."

"Can't you arrange that without my coming? I'm very busy. Especially before noon. Surely, sir, you appreciate what newspaper work is?"

Laughter on the telephone. And then, "We're very sorry. You can't die a hero on the telephone. Quite impossible." That was all.

They laughed. Evidently it was serious.

More of the staff men entered.

Now I laughed. "You can't die a hero on the telephone. You must appear among people."

"Have you been downtown? The city has gone mad."

From my home to the office was a two-minute walk. Across the street. I hadn't been downtown.

"Let's go downtown." It was jammed. There was a street parade. A soldier held a flag, followed by a crowd of young men uttering deafening cries.

"*Viva* the war!" "*Viva* the Fatherland!" "*Viva* Franz Joseph the First!" "*Viva* Kaiser Wilhelm, our noble friend!" "*Viva* King Emanuel!" "*Viva* beautiful Italy!"

To your fatherland firm be,
As a rock in your loyalty, O Magyar!

Quite strange. For some time we had not heard that pious refrain. Where had it been buried, to suddenly burst forth from the mouth of the rabble?

Fatherland! What did it mean?

"That is the song of our primitive forebear, the Australian ape," I heard from behind me.

I turned back. It was Doctor Goroyi speaking.

"What do you think, then?" I asked him.

"Oh, you know what I think."

"No more of your paradoxes, my friend . . . Oh, yes, did you get a pink slip?"

"Yes, I arranged it by messenger."

There was only one among us who did not break into a howl upon hearing of Doctor Goroyi's "arrangement"—and that was I. In that festive crowd I saw something which they did not happen to see. I could not believe my eyes. I gazed again, and rubbed my eyes.

"What's this? Don't you see? Look!"

By the side of the soldier carrying the flag, to his left, swelling with national pride, marched our dear friend, the well-known Italian anarchist, Signor Grapuligni.

"Hasn't he been in jail for the past six months?"

"What do you mean, jail?"

"Why, for the past few months we have left no stone unturned for him. We have enlisted all the influence of our prominent friends to make his prison life more comfortable and to obtain his release!"

"They must have forced him to do this," someone remarked, conscious of the fact that not even he believed his own words.

We all stared at him. What nonsense! Force someone to demonstrate against all his ideals? Why even in Russia they didn't do such things.

The crowd reached the Meteor coffee house. There it halted. Signor Grapuligni was the ringleader.

"Madness. Grapuligni? War?"

But facts are facts. Signor Grapuligni entered the coffee house and sternly ordered all the guests outside! And the order brooked neither refusal nor objection, because at his side there already stood several policemen and a young officer who drew his sword and brandished it.

"Outside! Outside!"

The assembled guests went out. Signor Grapuligni gathered the crowd about him, stationed the flag-bearer on a table in the outer terrace, and, standing beside him, began to speak.

He harangued without cessation, passionately, his face flushed crimson, the blood straining through his heart and lungs. "In the name of the modern United Kingdom of Italy, in the name of the countrymen of Michelangelo, of Machiavelli, and of the sainted Garibaldi . . ."

We forced our way forward. This was a fine thing! Grapuligni was orating in the name of the United Kingdom, in the name of Italy, and inciting men to war. In the name of Garibaldi! He was quite a fellow. He was making a huge joke of it all. We knew him, didn't we? He was full of jokes. There'd be a laugh in a moment.

Somebody in the crowd, an artless fellow who couldn't take a joke, shouted at the frothing speaker: "Well, who's stopping you from dying like a hero? Good luck!"

Someone laughed. And following the laughter—an outcry, a groan of pain. We looked and saw blood dripping from the face of the tactless heckler. He was already under arrest and was being led away.

The crowd raged. The entire street was a seething mass of excitement. "*Viva* the war!" "*Viva* our ally, Italy!" "*Viva* Kaiser Wilhelm, our kind and trusted friend!"

Someone laughed. And following the laughter was an outcry. His face also dripped blood.

"Let's go. It's dangerous."

"Why? We can stay here quietly and listen."

Doctor Goroyi bent over to me and whispered in my ear: "I want to see if there really isn't a single person in the entire crowd who is contrary-minded."

"You see that there is, don't you! And when he shows it, he is beaten!"

The speaker raged on: "The Fatherland is in danger. We

must break the teeth of the Serb dog, tear out the fangs of the French serpent, cut off the head of the British lion, and crush the skull of the Russian bear!"

Bravo! Bravo!

We surveyed the crowd. Every face was flushed. They all agreed! And at the close, the hymn:

To your Fatherland firm be,
As a rock in your loyalty, O Magyar!

There was not a mouth on the entire street which was not wide open in song.

"Whence all this enthusiasm?"

"They're all hirelings of war. Don't you see? The rabble."

Doctor Goroyi studied the unruly crowd, listening to the words of the speaker. Then, turning to me with half-shut eyes, he declared emphatically, "We're all wrong, my friend. We're super-intellectual. Did you hear what he was saying? The Serbs have crossed the Don. They're coming closer and closer."

"That's a lie!"

"And what if it is true?"

"We would all know it."

"You know everything, my friend. But do you know this? Do you know that the masses are ready to march to their death with a song on their lips?"

"So far, I don't see it. I do see that they are *shouting*."

Doctor Goroyi was provoked. "Don't be a sophist! They're all ready to go! All of them!"

I was mum.

Then he added, earnestly, "Do you know what it means to march to one's death?"

"No, I don't."

"To march to one's death means to search for a new life's content. Opium. Divine mania. We're rotting away."

He made off hurriedly and disappeared.

We laughed.

The fevered excitement of the masses blasted the laughter from our lips.

"The people. The people, blessed of God!"

The hymn subsided and immediately thereafter came a rasping announcement: "Who will enlist in the holy war to protect the Fatherland? Step forward!"

The crowd began to stream forward to the table with such pressure as to endanger their own lives.

They all volunteered.

"I'll sign up, too!"

I looked at the speaker and again did not believe my eyes—fragile, sallow Doctor Goroyi.

I laughed and blinked. What a joke!

Doctor Goroyi fastened his weary eyes upon me, indignantly. "Why do you laugh?"

I broke into a guffaw. I took his hand in mine and clasped it. "You're a splendid fellow, a war hero. Well, go! The Fatherland is in danger."

Doctor Goroyi shot a parting glance at me, withdrew his hand from mine, and rushed to the table. I hurried after him. I was still convinced that he was jesting.

And yet—no, he was really enlisting.

Doctor Goroyi, like one who had faithfully performed his duty, returned from the table, his face beaming. His frail body was erect.

I approached him.

"Congratulations!" I wanted to shake his hand.

He withdrew. He surveyed me critically, his features betraying suppressed hatred, and fury mixed with scorn. He left me. I chuckled. He walked on—then turned back toward me and spewed out one word:

"Jew!"

I remained standing, stricken dumb as a stone.

It had been an age since that word had been uttered in our circle and in such a tone. I could not make a proper reply. My throat was parched; my tongue mute.

"Goroyi!" His name, half stifled with tears, spurted from my mouth.

It seemed to have taken effect. He heard it. He turned back, came over to me and exclaimed with a stinging, sarcastic hiss, "How should *you* know what a Fatherland is?"

My head began to spin. I shut my eyes and leaned against a lamppost.

Someone jostled me. I came to and went to the editorial rooms.

They were deserted. I sat down and mopped the perspiration from my brow.

The emptiness was frightful.

On the desk—yesterday's cables. The Einstein observatory. The international university. Esperanto.

And from the street, an uproar.

I just couldn't sit there like that.

I went out into the street.

A battery of artillery passed by. On both sides of the street crowds of women distributed money and cigarettes to the hosts of marching soldiers. Some of them threw themselves on the necks of the soldiers and kissed them.

To your Fatherland firm be . . .

CHAPTER III

Fit

THE pink slip. Strange. I had to report to the government, by its order. It was the first time in my life that the government had *ordered* me to do anything. Heretofore, it had always turned to me, whenever it had occasion to, in the manner of a request; but now—it was an order.

Below, in the lower margin, was a footnote: "This slip does not subject you to immediate conscription, but you are ordered to report at headquarters."

I did not understand the footnote. I hadn't the remotest idea. It was late. I had to go back to the editorial rooms.

The editorial rooms were agog.

"My dear Mr. Stupid!" they welcomed me. "Sit down and get it into your superior brain that we are at war; and that on the one hand the Fatherland is in danger, while on the other, it is embarked on world conquest!"

"I don't understand."

"Tomorrow the Hussars enter Belgrade, the capital of the civilized Serbs, in order to change the name of King Karageorgevitch to the simple and pretty Karolyi. Why such an outlandish name as Kara-geor-ge-vitch? Phew! And on the other hand," continued my friend, the theater critic for the day, "on the other hand, the erudite Cossacks want to cross the Carpathians!"

"Let them cross. Why not?"

He was perplexed. He hadn't even thought of that. Truly, why shouldn't they cross? Whom will they disturb?

"Really, it will be a pity if they don't cross," came from the sports desk. "The Cossack dance is marvelous. But, just the same, I hope they don't get through."

"Why shouldn't they cross?"

"Why? While at school didn't you learn that the Carpathians are made of divine stuff, that they're the fortress of the Magyar gods who brook no enemy to cross them?"

"Oh, the Cossacks can't read or write!" interjected the young lady who edited the women's section. "They didn't learn that in school, and so they will surely cross," she concluded, rather gleefully.

The girl from the composing room had meanwhile come in for material.

We were all thrown into consternation. We had none.

Our work was renewed with its customary feverishness.

* * * * *

What occupied my attention chiefly was the footnote on the pink slip. My friends explained it to me. "When were you born? In the nineties? If so, then the draft doesn't apply to you yet. But since the Fatherland in the Carpathian sector is in danger, they want to know if you have any connections with that section of the country, and if you have, they will ask you to volunteer."

"I see."

We worked until three. And since there was no point in going to sleep until seven that same morning, we did not go to bed.

It was only when the work was finished that I realized that my friend, Doctor Goroyi, was not with us. Where was he? No one knew. That night he hadn't even been at his desk. I told my colleagues how he had acted on the street. No one believed it. "He is a bit cracked! Good."

But his parting words of the day before had given me no rest. There are many forms of insanity, but this one, in this direction—that of reminding one of his *Jewishness?* There must be something behind it all.

In the morning we went to headquarters.

There we also found Doctor Goroyi. Not one of us paid any attention to him. He was aware of it and seemed all aquiver. He was also a bit under the weather.

My turn came. The recruiting officer explained the slip and the footnote.

"If, sir, you have any connection with the Carpathian districts, then you can volunteer. One has to defend the Fatherland. The wild Cossacks are bound to get out of hand. Well?"

"Of course. I'll go."

The recruiting officer rose, clasped my hand, and enrolled me. He added, "Please undress. In the corner there. Stand naked."

"Naked!"

"Yes, of course. Naked."

"Can't we do without it?"

"No. Someone may be sickly. We must examine everyone."

"I'm not sickly."

Suddenly a tall soldier came over to me and shouted, "Undress! Understand?"

"Please don't talk to me in that tone."

The tall officer drew so close to me that our noses almost touched. His eyes bulged. He gritted his teeth and said, "What? Tone? Do you think this is a newspaper office? We talk in an entirely different tone here, my friend. You enlisted, so you are a soldier and must undress. Right away! Understand?"

A dark curtain seemed to fall from my brain. My heart was filled with regret. Why did I enlist? So that this clown, dressed like an idiot, should abuse me?

And while taking off my clothes, I reflected: "To die for one's country is understandable. But to endure such boorishness?"

And if this was so at the very outset, how would it be in another week or two? It was revolting.

The doctor examined me.

In the meantime several friends had also come in and were standing in line, naked. Doctor Goroyi was missing. Where was he?

The doctor asked me a few questions and then said in a firm voice: "Fit! Next!"

Some were unfit. One of them protested at the disgrace. He was healthy and fit!

We dressed. We returned to the recruiting officer. He gave me a new slip and said: "From now on you are in the army and you can't make a move without orders. Go into the room and wait."

"I must inform my office of this."

Again the tall officer come over to me.

"There's no informing and no office in the army!"

"I must say good-by to my sister and my family."

"Where does your sister live?"

"On her own homestead, in the district of Bereg."

"Bereg? Why, that's in the Carpathians! You'll be sent there tomorrow! You're going to protect your sister from the Cossacks, idiot!"

He suddenly offered me his hand and said, "You'll be a marvelous soldier, my friend. You'll chase the Cossacks back to Moscow! And when you return, you will be awarded a decoration of the highest rank! Before it's all over, we'll make a man of you. You'll no longer be smeared with ink and other such stuff!"

When we were alone in the other room, we learned that Doctor Goroyi *had not enlisted.* He had got out of it.

"We, too, can still be exempted as newspapermen," said one of my colleagues.

I was completely stunned by all that had happened to me. My head was heavy. I could not sleep. Only the word "fit" rattled through me, from my heart to my brain, and back again. Am I fit? I? Am I fit for a uniform like the officer's? What a travesty!

Before long someone who seemed to be an officer entered and ordered us to go along with him. I eyed him from the soles of his boots to his helmet. A boorish fellow, with a waxed mustache, whose points were twirled up toward his small eyes. He was a stumpy, powerfully built fellow who kept spitting with gusto, in constant punctuation of his racy words.

"Who are you?" I inquired.

"I?" he replied with scornful arrogance. "I am the first sergeant!"

"Oh," I said, and offered him my hand, as I politely introduced myself.

He did not extend his.

"Never mind, never mind!" he flashed back at me. There's plenty of time to become acquainted. You'll be fed up with me yet, men!"

Later, when we were in the courtyard, he announced, "Who wants to go home to get something?"

Of course, we all wanted to.

"I knew it," he spoke scornfully. "Well," he added, "let everyone go home and get whatever he wants, within two hours, to the minute! It's a quarter past eight now, so at a quarter past ten everyone must be waiting here in the courtyard all ready for travel! Understand?"

When we came out onto the street, we heaved sighs of relief.

I went home in a daze. When I entered my room, the furniture, too, was weeping. And I pouted at it. Fools, am I, then, going away for a long time? I could not yet understand what was going on. The streets were mad. The anarchist Grapuligni had harangued the crowd and screamed, *"Viva* the King of Italy!" Sickly Doctor Goroyi had taunted me with "contemptible Jew." I am fit. The officer had fumed at me and addressed me in the imperative: "Undress, understand?" And the churlish first sergeant had spurned my handshake and refused to return my greeting.

In the meantime, something stranger than all this had happened, something profoundly strange. When the tall officer patted me on the shoulder and commended me by shaking my hand and telling me that I would make a good soldier, *I was conscious of a feeling akin to pride.*

To whom should I deny it? To myself? The fact was, *I seemed to feel happy.* How account for it? *Only yesterday I wouldn't have sat at the same table with him.*

What was there about war?

I began to pack my things in my traveling bag.

The concierge came in.

"Where to, where to? Why so suddenly?"

"I'm fit, granny."

"What do you mean, fit?"

"I'm fit. Don't you understand? I'm fit."

She evidently caught the meaning immediately. For she began quietly to wipe first her nose, then her eyes, and finally burst into tears.

"Why do you cry? Foolish dear! If I'm fit, does that have to make you cry?"

She began to bawl bitterly, so loudly that it got under my skin. And intermittently she stammered, "Woe is me—fit! Alas, my only son was also fit! And he died a year ago in the barracks. Of pneumonia. He caught cold and died there. Oh, woe is me! And now you, sir!"

"I won't catch cold. I won't die of pneumonia."

But her bitter wailing got under my skin. I tried to calm her.

"You'll remain here, granny, dear, to take care of my library and everything, and I'll write you love letters, darling, as your son did. He was really smart. He died of pneumonia. Without fighting. And then I'll come back to you a hero on the battlefield, on the altar of my Fatherland!"

But the little old lady could not be quieted. She cried and cried, more and more, and as she sobbed softly she kept stuffing more things into my bag. Another shirt, another apple, another sausage, another handkerchief.

The vision of my dead mother floated up before me. For a good many years now I had not been conscious of being motherless.

"Oh, woe is me," the concierge continued to lament. "And what shall I tell your dear lady? What shall I tell Mansy, who loves you so dearly? Woe is me!"

"Tell her that I am fit, my dear. That I am fit. For the first time in my life someone has finally told me that I am fit! And do you know what that officer, that general in uniform, said? He told me that I would be an excellent soldier; that I would chase the Cossacks back to Moscow!"

And that very moment I was again conscious of a sort of pride.

The old lady suddenly seemed to recall something very important. She came over to me, her eyes beaming with precious hope, and said, "My dear boy! You have prominent and influential friends, haven't you? Friends who can get you out of this trouble? Why, there is a prominent general who is a close friend of yours!"

That was true. I recalled that the senior ranking general, Heinwald Schweitzer, a fine Jew, was my friend and quite fond of me. He was practically a Zionist.

She eagerly grasped this straw of hope.

"Please go to him, sir. I'll plead with him. Please go to him. He won't let you go. Woe is me—please go to him. I'll go to him."

"Don't you go, my dear. He won't see you."

"He won't see me? Me who has given an only son to the Emperor!" And she straightened with pride.

She had already determined to dress and go. But I prevented her.

"All right, all right, granny, I'll go. In any event I should say good-by to him."

"Swear that you'll go!"

"I swear."

But to go to the general, I had to don my jacket. I put it on and departed, leaving my maternal guardian to her sobs.

General Schweitzer, a Jew of humble parentage, a seminary student of seventy years ago, was deeply moved. Only two weeks before he had revealed to me and my fellow Zionists his warm Jewish heart and his keen regret that because of his advanced age he was unable to share in our great and ancient hope. And now, without warning, I appeared before him as one destined to die a hero. He began to cough. His eyes welled with tears.

"The Fatherland is cruel, my dear child," said the aged general. "Cruel, very cruel, because it knows we love it." Then he asked suddenly, "How old are you, my boy?"

"Twenty-four, sir!"

The tall patriarch trembled. He arose from his chair, and I followed suit. He came over to me, took my hands in his, and in a tone that betrayed his foreknowledge of the answer, he asked, "So—you are enlisting?"

"In a certain sense, yes, sir."

He took my temples in the palms of his hands, kissed me on the brow, and spoke with unconcealed emotion.

"May the God of Israel watch over you, even as He has watched over His people from generation to generation."

He gripped my hand firmly and continued.

"Go in peace and blessing, my dear son, and if God will be gracious to you and grant you the privilege of defending the walls of Jerusalem, please don't forget me there at the Wailing . . ."

His words broke; his voice cracked. He turned away and went into the adjoining room. As he did so, I noticed that his neck was twitching convulsively.

Was he weeping?

I left the room and went out.

There in the corridor my granny was standing in her holiday attire, anxiously waiting for me.

"Well?" she asked, her heart pounding, looking like a quivering human question mark. "Well, what did he say?"

"What did he say, darling? He requested me to pray for him on the site of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem."

She eyed me as though I were mad.

I went off, leaving her standing there, glued to the spot. But even I did not understand the request of the aged general.

What had the Carpathians to do with the walls of Jerusalem?

CHAPTER IV

A Lonely Soul

I SAT down and wrote these verses:

This is the path that I shall go—
A sad and glorious thoroughfare.
Good, that my feet are guided so,
And that no other way is there.
Good, that no bond can hold me here,
Nor future hope, nor heart beset:
No home, no wife, no vineyard near,
For which my soul might feel regret.
With cheering they have sped me on—
Vain clamorings of dubious worth:
My tears no soft cheek fall upon—
Only the breast of Mother Earth.
Strong grow my enervated arms;
My eyes send forth a lethal ray;
And in my heart, through war's alarms,
A flaming sunset lights the way.
My lips are foaming for the end;
The snowy fields my tread invite;
Soon shall I fall, and all will blend—
A crimson stain upon the white.

Why deny it? A sort of festive spirit sang within me during

this final leave-taking. Myriads of feelings struggled within me, wrestled, multiplied, conflicted, and finally compromised, fused and welded into one mighty, pleasant emotion which expressed itself in a single, all-embracing happy sigh. At last!

At last I'm going. To die.

Every day of my brief life flashed through me in swift procession, from the hazy memory of my mother, which brought the taste of the sweet, warm milk of her breast to my palate, to the terrible, scornful look of my friend, Doctor Goroyi, when he spat out the word: "Jew!"

My beautiful, romantic orphanhood, my stately-looking grandfather, my schoolday trials, the struggling but nonetheless happy students of the Talmudical academy, my wanderings, my first love for the nun who watched for me through the high, latticed window, all the deaths both in and out of the family, beautiful voluptuous women, Vienna, Berlin, Paris, Amsterdam, our homestead, my sister, the Latin declensions and conjugations, the martyred Rabbi Akiba, the blows I received and meted out, Professor Jehuda Blau, who hated me for not faithfully studying his lessons, my brilliant Bar Mitzvah (confirmation) address, the scrawled manuscript of the inebriate Adi Endra, whose first reader I had the good fortune to be, and again my departed mother, my little daughter who was born when I was about nineteen and whose whereabouts was unknown to me, and Mansy, my latest love, the young, vivacious cabaret girl whose grimaces bordered on the divinely tragic . . .

A film of stirring events, which some divine operator flashed upon the screen for an unseen audience, which both suffered and laughed.

And at the end of the film appeared the word—Jew!

How did he know I was a Jew? Who told him so? Not I. All our colleagues had been working in the same newspaper office for many years and not one of them knew who were Jews and who weren't. Who could be bothered with such things?

And suddenly: Jew!

Disdainfully!

Well, I'd go then. The big city and the burdensome world

were already oppressing me to the point of suffocation. Now I'd leave them. I'd go, yes, I'd go to my mother who was waiting for me. That would be very pleasant . . . At last.

I'd go. Alone, proudly, bravely, with a smile upon my lips.

I'd make one last mighty gesture of defiance at heaven and earth, and go.

All my friends and acquaintances would realize what I had meant to them. Up to then they had taken me and my friendship for granted. But when they took leave of me, as I departed for eternity, they'd feel the shudder of death pass through them.

Not through me. Through them.

And so I went to say good-by. In sequence.

Strange. Things took on an entirely different aspect from what I had anticipated. They smiled proudly and earnestly wished me an heroic death, with true affection, and with warm handclasps.

"That's the beautiful fate of the poet. All your poems will now be garlanded with blazing glory. A hero's death."

"I'll be happy the rest of my life. To think that I had a friend, that I had a comrade who died a hero. A hero's death!"

That was the refrain of every good-by—a hero's death.

They were all happy.

But I was silent. I reflected. Suddenly I became aware that in the expression there was also the word "death."

Not one of them realized it. Only I.

Death. And what a death! A shattered human corpse lying on the field; then the Medics would come and toss it into a big chalk pit. That was all. The Pantheon! Oh!

I wanted to break into a mighty, resounding cry.

"Harlots! Harlots! I am going to die in a chalk pit! And you'll remain to go to the theater and to the cabaret to drink, laugh, and live! Harlots!"

It was terrible! Friends!

Wasn't there really a solitary soul among all my comrades and friends with whom I had drunk and suffered—a single person who would say, or at least feel, the word? Wretch! A living person was going to die . . .

The streets were a seething cauldron.

On my way to City Hall I passed some acquaintances. Their faces were flushed with happy excitement. And they all laughed at me.

"Where in the world are you going in evening clothes?"

As a matter of fact, I *was* in evening clothes. A dinner jacket and stiff-bosomed shirt.

"Where? To the dance of death," I replied.

The retort soothed me without my even being aware of the harsh finality of the words.

And in the meantime—most intriguing reports, secrets upon secrets.

Had I heard? They had caught and arrested four spies. Among them Vera. The Russian dancer. Vera Radovskaya.

Who? Vera Radovskaya? They're stupid!

With his own eyes he had seen them leading her in chains.

In Segedin they had brought down a French airplane with four Serbian officers.

Our soldiers had entered Belgrade and were advancing farther.

Hindenburg, the German commander in chief, had ordered Moscow captured within a month.

The day before they had seen an enemy plane above the post office.

A Hussar had captured the Serbian crown prince that morning. He was already in the local barracks.

And more such reports.

Confused and excited, I reached City Hall.

I entered the barracks and reported to the first sergeant.

"Well, boy," he queried, "did they shed many tears over you?"

I was stunned by the condescending witticism of this rude fellow.

And he added: "Harlots, my friend, harlots. They're all harlots. You have only one friend left in the world—the gun. And even that will desert you when you die."

We made ready. We got into our uniforms. To the railroad station. Everyone scrambled. The Cossacks were in the Carpathians. We had to rout them without delay.

The first sergeant said apologetically. "At present we are in a hurry. That's why everything is in disorder—uniforms, marching, and instruction. We'll rout the enemy and return; then we'll begin all over again. We'll practice and prepare, and we'll be first-rate soldiers. But have no fear. You won't all die. Only don't be scared out of your wits. Make sure you don't dirty your pants, boys! You mustn't worry about life. It isn't worth it. They're all harlots—every single one of them! There isn't a true friend in the world. There are friends who'll join you in a glass of wine—but not to die. Harlots! Tfu!" He spat.

Then he ordered us all to expectorate in unison. And the entire company spat in unison. Tfu!

Suddenly we heard a terrifying noise near the gate. A woman's voice. And immediately thereafter a feminine bedlam, shouting, crying, arguing, struggling, jostling. And before we could make them out, the women, about eighteen in number, rushed in and assailed us with weeping, wailing and lamentations—each one encircling the neck of some member of the company; and before I could bat an eyelash I found someone hanging on my neck—my Mansy. She cried like a wounded, quivering beast, choking with bitter tears.

"You won't go—you'll stay! Woe and alas! Where are you going? I'll go with you! Woe is my soul. I won't leave you—won't leave you—won't l-e-a-v-e y-o-u!"

Their wailing seemed to rend the heavens. The barracks square was crowded with them. It was filled with a miserable hysteria.

The first sergeant stood there confounded, motionless.

The commissioned officers came out of the barracks and looked around.

"To the devil!" one of them yelled. "Chase them out!"

But the first sergeant did not stir. He observed how the women hung on the necks of their sweethearts, now in mute silence, with sniffling sobs and spasmodic caresses, clinging to them like fruit on a tree.

Another officer said. "Let them alone. Let them say goodby."

Silence now reigned in the barracks square. Only re-

strained, soft sobs, sobs that came from the abysses of the heart, were heard here and there among the ranks.

The officers walked down the steps, slowly made their way over to us and watched. One of them took a good look at the women and said to a fellow officer, "Just look. They're all harlots!"

"Quite so," he replied.

All the weeping women were either professional or non-professional prostitutes.

My Mansy—a cabaret girl.

And the officers stood there mute, touched to the quick.

One of them turned to the women courteously, softly, sympathetically, respectfully.

"Dear girls," he said, "please calm yourselves. For we now have a great and sacred duty to our Fatherland—therefore . . ."

They did not permit him to finish. The word "Fatherland" made them frantic.

"I spit upon your Fatherland, you rotter!" exploded one of them. She was instantly joined by the rest with furious cries, which gradually subsided into a terrifying, upsetting, synchronized lament.

"Throw them—the hell—into jail!" shouted an officer. But the other officers calmed him. "Never mind. Whores. Let them cry a bit."

And the harlots cried, moaned, whimpered, and finally subsided into soft sobs until they were completely hushed.

The first sergeant gave the order to march. The procession began, and the street women accompanied us, each one at the side of her sweetheart. They walked along with us in silence. When we left the grounds and went out into the streets, more women joined us, first one, then three, then two more, then six more. The policemen, dumfounded, merely stared.

"A parade of whores," they whispered.

The policemen knew them quite well.

When I bade Mansy farewell, I said to her: "Don't cry, little sister. What do you want? I'm going to die a hero, am I not? You'll be proud of me, sweetheart!"

"I spit upon you, idiot!" Mansy burst into a paroxysm, which turned into a bitter lament from the sanctuary of her heart. She was almost prostrated.

When she recovered, she stood in front of me, grasped my shoulders, looked straight into my eyes, and said dryly, fatalistically, "Don't die a hero. Don't be a hero, Avigdor. Come home a private, tattered and worn, without acclaim and without medals—but alive."

She gave me one last look, her eyes again welling with tears, and then spoke decisively.

"Well, go, I'll wait for you. I'll wait."

"You'll wait to drink a few toasts to my health, Mansy!"

I kissed her.

Her eyes flashed furiously. She did not return my kiss. But a moment later she replied, as dryly as before, "I'll never drink again. Not until you come back. This very day I'm going to leave the cabaret and enter the training school for nursing sisters."

She kissed me and cried. She did not wait for the train to start.

The only soulmate I had.

A common whore.

CHAPTER V

A Journey Among the Hottentots

FROM City Hall they led us to the barracks square. There the first sergeant turned us over to his assistant, who looked us over sardonically from head to toe.

"So-o-o-o! In evening clothes! Shall I find you a pretty young lady as a dancing partner?"

"No. Thanks very much."

"No? Too bad. I was going to suggest my dead grandmother. Fall in, gentlemen!"

We formed a rank. About sixty men, each one different from his fellow. Among us were a few newspapermen and all kinds of artists. The first sergeant examined us all and jested casually. He spoke of the degenerating intelligentsia whose turn had finally come to be turned into men useful to society. I took out a cigarette and was about to light it as I simultaneously held out the case to the first sergeant.

He nailed me with his round moon eyes and shrieked: "Get it out of sight, right away! I'll knock it out of your hand! Where do you think you are—in a saloon? Or back there in your newspaper office? Attention! Do you know where you are?"

"Yes. In Hottentotland," I replied, jesting like a person

drunk for lack of sleep, and hoping that he would not know what the word meant.

They all laughed.

The first sergeant was frantic. He turned in every direction in his anger, then searched for a word, and, not finding it because of his fury, turned to us, gnashed his teeth, spat violently, and entered City Hall.

Before we could give vent to our opinions and our deep-seated disgust with it all, he came out again.

"By order of the lieutenant colonel. For the present you'll all go home, but return tomorrow morning ready for travel. So—disperse!"

We did not disperse, but went on our way. Praise God! One more night without a first sergeant.

And the street—a boiling, steaming cauldron. Shouted military orders. A long line of artillery, and after it a battalion of infantry, war material, horses, commands, singing, shouts, weeping, the wailing of mothers, the national anthem, the Fatherland, women of beauty and refinement hugging and kissing plain privates, fragmentary harangues from the coffee-house cellars . . .

I hadn't the strength to stand on my feet. It seemed that the best thing to do was to snatch some sleep. Until tomorrow morning.

My concierge almost went out of her mind for sheer joy.

"You're free, sir?"

"Yes. Until morning."

She burst into tears.

"Don't cry, granny. I want to snatch some sleep. In a few minutes I shall be free."

"What?" she asked, her moist eyes brightening with renewed hope. "What? In a few minutes, sir, you will be . . ."

"Yes, granny, in our dreams we are entirely free of everything that oppresses our psyche in our daily lives. Professor Freud isn't right. Positively not. Dreams, on the contrary, give us exactly what we do *not* want in reality, even subconsciously. The subconscious is part of the divine on high, my dear, and God is absolutely good in contrast with our sentient nature, which is absolutely idiotic. The threshold of the subconscious

is not our doing, my dear, because if it were within our power, then . . ."

The last sentence I must have finished in my dream. The only thing I was conscious of was the hands of my concierge as she tucked me in so that I would not catch cold, and perhaps also her sobs, heard deep in the fastness of my slumbering soul.

"My poor, unfortunate dear. In his despair he drinks and babbles. Miserable boy. Woe is me . . ."

I did not sleep much. When evening came I was *forced* to get up, by habit. Sunset draws men out of bed. I got up, dressed, and went to the newspaper office. It was only when I crossed the threshold that I recalled that I had absolutely no business to be there. And, as a matter of fact, the editorial rooms were entirely strange to me. New men sat and sweated in our former places. My friend Doctor Goroyi was among them. And even he was new to me. Entirely new.

"*Servus!*" I said to him, as was my custom, and became immediately aware that I had no right to greet him in that intimate fashion. He turned his eyes toward me, nodded, and greeted me with reserve, as one does a chance acquaintance.

"Good evening."

A cold shiver raced through me. I wanted to cry.

I fled outside to the Orpheum cellar: *home.*

Even the cellar had changed somewhat. The dancing was about the same as usual, except that weeping, too, was heard in a corner here and there. And the drunkards smashed more glasses than usual. The strange reports were verified. They *had* captured Vera.

She had been a spy. That was most strange. Vera, the darling? That sweet Russian whose kiss was always mixed with her warm heart's blood? Who loved Budapest more than her own little girl? That angel of the Slavic gods, in whose tender, blue blood the wine of that tavern was even then fermenting? And that was the way she had decided us? *She* involved in politics? Such stupidity is born only in the heads of police officers, which echo in their hollowness.

And more. The waiter Debo had also been arrested with important political documents upon his person. He had trans-

mitted the topographical secrets of Budapest to France. This was the Everest-peak of suspicion. Why, Debo was of Hungarian stock. His wife and children didn't even know one word of French. *He* spoke Hungarian, while *they* knew no French.

And other such shocking reports. Madness ran riot among us like a drunken specter.

Suddenly two of my journalist friends entered, came over to me excitedly, and presented an announcement which they wanted me to sign.

"Read! And sign!"

"Why should I read it? Here's my signature. And then if you want to collect the money, get in touch with my granny, back in my flat. She has all my belongings in her possession."

I signed. They snatched up the sheet, solicited a few of our other literary friends, and left in a hurry.

The madness began to confuse my brain more and more. The strange reports began to bubble up from my champagne glass; they clouded my eyes and curtained my sadness, and gradually I began to feel that it was a stupendous joke. In another hour or two I should awake with an exultant shout . . .

As they began to sweep up the cellar, they asked me to go home. The morning was crisp. I went home distraught and melancholy. Granny was still sleeping innocently, as usual. I took my traveling bag, packed since the day before, and left my flat in despair.

The furniture looked back at me with sleepy eyes, and the clock ticked after me.

"Tick, tock, tick, tock, you're going on your last trip, *tick, tock . . ."*

When I went outside and passed by the bulletin board, I saw an announcement. A public statement from the "Association of Free Journalists." At the bottom *my name was also signed.*

Should I read it?

I passed by the board and walked on. But after taking a few steps a premonition of danger impelled me to return.

As I read, my heart became inflamed.

"The Free Journalists announce to the world that the peoples of Tolstoi, Pushkin, Gorky, Andreyev, Romain Rolland, Shakespeare, Barbusse, Bernard Shaw, Sinclair, Whitman, Anatole France, and many others have never become our enemies, and we will never raise a hand against them; and may the hand of everyone who does so be withered . . ."

And signed, among the other writers, was my name, too.

Good, bravo, very good.

Adjoining the announcement was another notice.

I read it and sobered up momentarily.

"And for anyone who dares to spread the lying spirit of pacifism and dampen the ardor of our patriots, I shall find the power to break him like a cracked reed . . ."

The signature of Count Tisa, Prime Minister.

Well, it was one against the other. *I* against *Tisa.* And Tisa against me. That was good, too. Very good. I went to the dear first sergeant . . .

And how fortunate that I did not understand even one word of what the first sergeant said. When he laughed, I laughed, too. But I did not let his anger get under my skin. On the contrary, I remembered the previous day's incident about the cigarette, and again extended my cigarette case to him. He struck it from my hand. I was just lazy enough not to pick it up.

"Follow me!"

We followed him. We reached the railroad station. There they thrust us into a long train compartment, jammed with men. It was with great difficulty that I got seated, or perhaps, more correctly, it was very easy to sit down on the bench because it was impossible *not* to be seated. The great pressure forced me down.

And the compartment raged and stormed—songs both vulgar and sad, curses, blasphemies, laughter, derision, drunken kisses.

When things quieted down a bit, my confusion really began. Not a single familiar person. All of them either drunk or half-drunk peasants and workers. I took a book out of my traveling bag and began to read. Metchnikoff, *An Optimistic View of the World,* translated by Doctor Liani Erford, pub-

lished by "Science," Budapest, 1908. I lighted a cigarette, smoked and read.

Suddenly, black spit, tobacco spit from above, fell right onto the book. I wiped the book with my handkerchief and blazed with fury. I looked up. A rookie, smoking and spitting. Oh, well. He hadn't meant to insult me. But such uncouthness. I continued to read and smoke.

"Who has a light?" someone asked.

Someone snatched the cigarette out of my mouth, lighted his own with it, and threw mine out of the window. And nonchalantly returned to his business.

What was this?

My wits returned although I was shocked. I wanted to call the conductor.

A few of the passengers got the drift of the situation, and mockingly cried out: "Mr. Conductor! Conductor! Where is the conductor?"

"He has died like a hero."

"Hush! He has been promoted to a general!"

"His Highness, Mr. Conductor!"

Laughter on all sides.

I continued to read. Now I understood the situation. I began to grasp what was behind all that was going on. It was better to be silent and suffer. It was better to read the book.

I scarcely had time to grasp the meaning of the sentence before my eyes when there was shoving all about us. Someone cried out: "Let me get out. Let me get out. I must go." The crowd surged, and again the same voice: "Who has paper? Who has paper?" Suddenly a rough hand seized my book and tore two or three pages out of it.

Then the man ran out into the vestibule, proclaiming in all seriousness: "Thank you very much! Good paper!"

I closed my eyes, like one drunk with pain, and my left temple began to throb painfully.

"*Servus,* comrade! Well? Don't you like the marvelous land of the Hottentots? Glorious, isn't it?"

A friendly tap roused me and opened my eyes.

My good friend the rookie was Count Cziraki, the young Bohemian, a boon companion of my night life. He was cov-

ered from head to foot with filth. I eyed him quizzically. But he laughed.

"Isn't this great? When were we ever able to go on such a democratic jaunt?"

CHAPTER VI

Lacrimae Risusque Rerum

ORDERS, ringing of bells, noises, shouts, kisses, whistles—the train moved.

And the drunken singing, mingled with the lamentations of tortured mothers, was the pleasant El Dorado of wormlike man, deranged by the mad scent of blood which filled the air.

In the meantime, there occurred a minor incident which, however, was not considered important enough even to halt the uproar. A soldier, one of the gay rounders of the wine cellars, in whom the depressing war excitement had set afire the liquor in his stomach, tried to cut capers. He mounted the top of the train to take leave of his dear city by waving his hat and throwing dribbling kisses to its gorgeous castles. The train passed beneath a bridge, and the wag was suddenly left without a head on his shoulders. The sharp bridge bottom had severed the drunken head as cleanly as though by a sword.

Someone wanted to crown the severed head with a hero's garland. "The first victim!" he gasped, awe-stricken.

"A plague on his gizzard!" another retorted, across the way. "Does, then, everyone who falls beneath the wheels of a troop train die a hero, a victim of war?"

And they continued to raise a rumpus.

They would not think of allowing the corpse to be canonized by the sacraments of war.

"Who will give him the last honors?" a voice asked.

"To whom? That contemptible slacker? That cowardly

blackguard who ran out on his Fatherland and preferred death by accident to death on the battlefield of honor? Let the dogs devour him!"

"Let the reverend holy father himself come from Rome and bury him," muttered a deep baritone voice from behind one of the crowded benches.

"The Pope?"

"Yes," the voice continued, "because the Pope is the apostle of peace on earth and accords great honor to the corpses of peace."

"Yes, the Pope," interjected a thin voice from beneath my bench, which then proceeded to sing the popular ballad, *The Gates of the Vatican.*

To the tune of that sprightly song we traveled for almost three days without interruption. Once, we would have covered the same distance in half a day.

And it was fortunate that I had a narcotic; the supreme optimism of Metchnikoff and a flask of Tirleyi cointreau.

On the evening of the third day they let us off in some town and loaded us into a tremendous van, hitched to four German horses.

The rain was coming down in torrents.

After traveling in the rain for about four hours, we heard a thundering voice.

"Fall out of the van!"

Fall out. Just that. Not, by any chance, climb down. The darkness actually blanketed vision.

We jumped from the wagon into the pitch blackness of the night, and fell right into a flood of deep gutter mud, which spattered clammy dirt into our faces. I sat in the mud. The van was very high. In the darkness I was unable to gauge its height—and the jump had bowled me over.

I was sitting above my hips in thick mud.

It was easier to remain sitting than to get up. But again came that same voice.

"Crawl!"

The voice was that of some first sergeant. The authoritative voice of a veteran first sergeant.

We crawled. We thrashed about in the mud. The sweat

dripped from my brow. My body was as heavy as lead. My lower extremities were mud-soaked, and the things in my bag were soggy, too.

And we crawled. In the broken light of the lantern in the hands of our leader, who tried to light up our faces, but not the way. The darkness of night was not sufficient for us; we had also the darkness in light.

At last the order came: "Get up!"

They brought us into some sort of ruin, through the top of which—for the building was wholly roofless—one might have looked at the beautiful stars of the night, if the stars had been visible through the clouds, and if the raindrops had not blinded our eyes.

The first sergeant circled and carefully surveyed the grimy walls with his lantern, then gave the order: "Break ranks!"

We broke ranks, each one in the place where he stood near the wall, with his bag under his weary head. Fatigue overwhelmed the cold in our bones and we fell asleep shriveled and cramped in both body and spirit—living corpses.

The morning light was blatant and cruel. It was only then that I became aware of what had happened to me, and of the condition I was in. Fearful cold had made my weary limbs quake, and I had no strength to budge from the spot to which I seemed hopelessly chained.

I observed and studied my buddies. Something seemed to have happened there. Everyone was anxious to exert every means to adapt himself to conditions. To be sure, there was nothing unusual about this. But each tried to show that he was a seasoned soldier and knew all the military usages and practices; and at the same time they tried to ridicule and deride the "softies" among us. There were among them those who in some way had snatched up, by hearsay, the words and expressions of veterans, in order to show that *that was the center of life, the sum total of the world and all that was in it, the end of human existence and the quintessential goal of culture,* and that outside of it everything was worthless, superfluous, evoking both pity and derision.

Yes. Up to that day, it seems, we had been living in great error, not knowing that the be-all and end-all of our lives were the army, war, the Fatherland, and the first sergeant.

One of us, an instructor in an Eastern academy, who all his life had never left his cloistered research in the Persian language and its poetry, a man famous for knowing the entire *Shah-Nahmah* of Firdusi by heart in the original, suddenly distinguished himself with pungent, blasphemous cursing, directed against those who complained of their lamentable and depressing situation.

"Perhaps," he asked angrily, "you want the *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel to turn his warm sleeping quarters over to you?"

I became curious to learn who the lieutenant colonel might really be, that college instructors should accord him such great respect.

"Who is he?" the Persian scholar snapped back. "What a question! Who is the *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel! Yes, my good man, *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel and *not just* Lieutenant colonel! You had better be a bit careful with your language. You're an intelligent person, I take it!"

"But still," I dared nonetheless, "who is the *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel?"

He glared at me furiously, but remained silent. Then he said with awe-inspiring deliberation: "The *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel is that man from whose collar three gold stars shine out upon us! It seems that an intelligent person should know that!"

My first impulse was to laugh in his face. But within a few seconds I felt keenly humiliated that, as an intelligent person, I was ignorant of this.

My head began to ache.

It was only then that I studied my person, and its present state.

I was a frightful sight.

An individual wearing a broad hat, a dinner jacket, pressed trousers, and polished shoes—lying down, soiled from the soles of his shoes to his white, stiff-bosomed dress shirt, ashamed because he was ignorant of what even a buck private knew. I scrutinized myself carefully and felt an exuberant impulse to laugh. To come right down to it, it was splendid. It was a successful comedy whose hero was by no means banal. To produce it on the stage would have been an artistic triumph.

But in my numb brain I seemed to hear at that very mo-

ment a profoundly tragic soft sobbing. I looked about me—no one there was crying. On the contrary, everyone was happy and exuberant and tried to give the impression that he understood the sanctity of the words: lieutenant colonel.

Who then was weeping? My brain became entirely confused, and before my eyes there stood granny, my concierge. But weeping so excessively—and to hear her crying with my own ears? Surely, fatigued and drenched, I must be ill. I felt warm. And immediately it became clear to me. I looked at my packet and saw it cry.

I remembered the Latin proverb: *Sunt lacrimae rerum.* Yes, inanimate objects possess tears, too. That cloak was crying, that garment was oozing with a paradise of thoughts, ideals, mighty longings, and Flammarion-like dreams. It was shedding tears. My head ached to the point of distraction. I turned my thoughts in another direction. I closed my eyes and saw the Philharmonic Hall with its grand orchestra. I heard the notes of the overture *1812,* and my jacket waxed more sorrowful; the whole symphony was nothing but a war march. Of course. The *Marseillaise* mingled with the sounding bells of the Muscovite Kremlin, which was in danger of destruction by the red flames. And the lieutenant colonel—a Napoleon with the gold stars on his collar.

I forced those thoughts out of my mind and saw Hamlet with the skull in his hand. I heard him speak.

> *Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay,*
> *Might stop a hole to keep the wind away.*

And my jacket actually sobbed incoherently! Hamlet, the young prince, who disregarded the ban to wage perilous warfare in honor of his father, and who lost his life at the hands of a cruel king; who wanted to rule his armies with the aid of his numerous first sergeants; and the lieutenant colonel, Julius Caesar, whose soldiers conquered the Pyramids, and the gold stars that sparkled on his collar in the Eastern sunlight. . . .

God in heaven, could it be true that all that mattered in the world were lieutenant colonels, wars, and first sergeants—and

why hadn't I realized it before? And so—there were no theaters, no books, no Rodin, no Isadora Duncan, no Tolstoi, no Adi Endra, and no Chassidic saint—author of the *Tania?*

A pleasant shudder warmed my quivering body. No—not that. The author of the *Tania* was not a lieutenant colonel and had no first sergeant. There was still a corner in the world where my jacket could rest and weave garlands of thought. . . .

A pleasant fever set me aquiver. I was intoxicated. Nevertheless, I could still distinctly hear my jacket weeping.

"Woe, woe, woe! Woe to this sanctity. The author of the *Tania* is no more. He is exiled somewhere and is awaiting the Messiah. Look at me—I am not your cloak, but rather your *inner self.* In mire and dirt. 'A scholar upon whose garment a speck of dirt is found is subject to the death penalty.' Woe, woe, woe. Who are you? Don't pretend to be a stranger. Don't forsake me, lest you be lost forever. . . ."

Someone seized me by the nape of the neck with a very rough hand.

"Snap out of it! If you don't, *I'll* snap you and strip your hide from you! Strip down right away and get into these!"

He was a soldier, evidently not a private. He handed me a uniform. I got up and began to undress. I took off my dinner jacket—but put it on again.

Such sentimentalism was out of place. The jacket wept? I let it weep. If I had got a beating, I'd have wept, too.

I took it off. Heartlessly, decisively, I cast it to the ground, and my head spun furiously.

Someone began to sing.

Good-by, stovepipe hat,
Good-by, Shakespeare,
Adieu, Max Linder,
Dance, thought, and song!
Good-by, nights with women!
All this is worthless, empty and vain,
Viva his high lordship!
Viva his excellency the first sergeant!

I took the new outfit and examined it. It was filthy through

and through. The trousers were soggy. Instead of being dry—they were putrid. The jacket was stiff with blood.

Terrible.

I put on the uniform. My stupefaction increased. Someone laughed at me. What sort of an appearance could I have made? What a sight I must have been. I quickly opened my bag and drank a little cointreau. Pleasant warmth. Calming and healing intoxication. And the suit laughed. What was this? The uniform mocked me. And the jacket lay there on the ground, weeping.

I put my jacket in the bag.

It even cried from there. I was very drunk. Why had I drunk? The situation had become worse—who said that things possessed tears? Some Roman. And why hadn't he realized that they also possessed laughter? The author of the *Tania* had known that as well. The congealed blood pressed against my heart. And the uniform laughed—ha, ha, ha! That was the reward for all my work. I had hopped from star to star, from constellation to constellation—and there I was.

Suddenly—a hoarse shriek: "Attention!"

That meant one had to stand at attention. They all stood at attention, motionless. The first sergeant entered. And the entire hall actually froze up. He walked along from man to man, eyeing each one with his sharp eyes, with satisfaction—good; good; good.

When he reached me he broke out into a guffaw. I realized immediately it was the laugh of my blood-soaked uniform.

"You're a fine fellow! Where is your dinner jacket? You certainly must have a stovepipe, too. And what do you think about the war?"

I did not understand. Why just me? Why did he address this important question to me only?

"About the war? War is a great paradox, sir," I answered cautiously, my brain spinning a bit.

"What's that? What 'dox'?"

"War is a great paradox. The problem of the *Ding an sich* (thing-in-itself) must be solved empirically and not logically. There is only one solitary reality within us which is the thing in itself, and that is that part of the divine on high which is

within us, which we see in the form of a wild animal, or of an uncouth beast which devours flesh with gold teeth and with a fork in the right hand. We thought that man was the crown of creation, but bread turns him into a worthless creature. And now comes the war to show us that man does not live by bread alone, but essentially upon the blood of the enemies of the Fatherland, whom it is a sacrament to destroy, root and stock. That is to say: we have no conception of the nature of that exalted creature named his excellency the first sergeant or his highness the lieutenant colonel! Kant is wrong."

The first sergeant laughed broadly in approbation.

"Heh, heh, heh! You're right. Who is this Kant?"

"He's a miserable hunchback, a war slacker, who wrote a book about everlasting peace. The idiot."

"Heh, heh, heh! You're a good soldier, my friend!" The first sergeant tapped me on my weary shoulder. "Some day you'll be an officer of the highest rank. Of course, you babble unintelligible nonsense, too, but here you'll learn enough to speak like a human being. Very good."

He looked at me and at my clothes and again broke into a chuckle.

And I—my heart suddenly grew faint without my knowing why.

Laughter and weeping. The uniform and the jacket were conducting a mad concert for me. Oh, my headache!

It was fortunate that the door was opened wide. Two soldiers brought in a tremendous basket reeking with the mixed odor of tobacco and black coffee.

"Black coffee," someone remarked with satisfaction.

Black coffee—*before* the meal and not after it? I became aware that something had really happened in this big world.

The first sergeant straightened up and rasped:

"Glut yourselves!"

CHAPTER VII

The Nightmare

MORE than a month had passed since I donned my bloody uniform—and still I could not fathom what had really been going on. All seemed like a sort of cinema, based upon an imperfect story of Theodore Amadeus Hoffman, entitled *The Nightmare*.

And just then, like a bolt from the blue—shocking and infuriating news.

The first sergeant explained to us that we hadn't time to study tactics much, because in reality we were already on the front and had to drive the Russian pigs out of the ancestral vineyards of the Fatherland. Meanwhile, there first came the sporadic thunder of cannon, followed by shrapnel shells, everyone of which was powerful enough to destroy a sizable house. The first sergeant had taught us the "Gospel of Patriotism" and the customs and usages of the good man who prayed not to God but to His Majesty the King. The first sergeant spread the gospel and the shrapnel fell incessantly, in quick succession and then in volleys, until one almost went mad.

The first sergeant was explaining the quality of a good soldier and the nature of death, when suddenly a shrapnel shot stifled the word "death" in his throat, and tore him to shreds. Yes—all that remained of the first sergeant were shreds of flesh and bone.

The second sergeant, who stepped into the place of the first,

was a soft, cowardly individual, who prayed constantly and urged us also to pray—each to his own God and in his own language; and while passing, with studied casualness, he asked the representatives of the various faiths to teach him one of their prayers. I taught him the Hebrew "prayer of the traveler." He was very pleased and promised me a citation in the near future. —The Russians drew nearer and nearer. We penetrated the very heart of the battlefront. A few fell dead. Two went mad because of the terrible noise of the cannon and shrapnel. Our officer shot them, killing them on the spot. It was impossible to see the Russians. The dead continued to fill the field between the two lines; the stretcher-bearers fell like flies; we were ordered to shoot in the air, far ahead into the distance, at the invisible enemy. Not one of us knew how to go about it. Some of us were beaten with butts. The rain began to pour down upon us; the muzzles of the guns became stopped up with thick mud, and the bullets that were fired exploded inside the guns and killed those who fired them. Somebody cried, and someone else shot and killed him. The roaring grew louder, ever louder. Someone shrieked that the Russians were fighting empty-handed, without guns. They were attacking us with clubs! —My companion, who was lying in the mud alongside of me, trying to fire, suddenly turned rigid and died. Blood trickled from his mouth. —Someone cried out, "Mother!" Two soldiers, engaged in hand-to-hand combat, attacked each other, clawing and biting, and the first sergeant shot both, instantly killing them. I asked for bullets, and the first sergeant tossed me some as he shouted: "Bravo! Bravo! Be pitiless! What an unusually clever fellow you are! A medal!" —Evening descended slowly; the rain drenched us to the marrow; the firing subsided; the heart became freer with hope. —Someone gasped with exhaustion: "Let's chase them! Let their bloody memory be blotted out as far back as their criminal ancestors!" —I looked at him; he understood me and added, "Fire and don't be afraid, son of the Maccabees! Shoot only at the head and not the feet, to spare them the misfortune of going home to Moscow lame!" —I was pleased with my fellow Jew, and laughingly shouted in Hebrew: *"Hedad! Hedad!* Come here, to me!" The Israelite

crawled toward me on all fours, lay down at my side without moving a muscle. He was dead. His head drooped on his shoulder. —The firing subsided and the command was given: Stop firing and clean the guns!

I searched the pockets of my dead companion, took out of them twenty-two *kronen,* turned them over to the stretcher-bearers, and then examined the identification tag around his neck. It read: Simon, son of Jacob Berger, infantryman, twenty-three years old, doctor of philosophy, native of Hatrag. —With my friends I dug a grave for him, gave him his last honors, briefly: "Go, dear friend; you did your duty, and when you reach the realm of truth, please send us a brief telegram, telling us what truth actually is." The good first sergeant joined the "funeral," and learning, upon inquiry, that the dead soldier was Jewish, recited aloud the "prayer of a traveler," with the mispronunciations natural to a non-Jew.

We drank black coffee, and again the firing and the noise began. We gulped the last mouthful, and once more started shooting. The skies cleared up and there, on one side, the gray, curtained moon rose. Slowly, as if in pledge of troth, it emerged to radiate its clear, white light of love. The battle waxed more furiously; men fell; one here, another there; a few received light wounds and were permitted to be carried behind the lines. It was turning more and more into a crazy affair; dripping sweat, gasping lungs, shouted commands, shrapnel bursting all about us, exhausted, groaning men, and somebody shouting and cursing: "You, up there, the devil take you. Why do you shine so peacefully?" I turned and looked. He was speaking to the moon, and added, "Look, how the dear moon makes sport of us! It's a good thing that it doesn't sing us a couplet!" The speaker kept on firing as he sang:

How fine is the moon!
Pure silver is the moon,
Piff, paff—boom!
A night-flower, of sweet aroma,
Piff, paff—boom!

The world is drunk with wine,
My blood, too, within me, all wine—
Piff, paff—boom!
My beauty, my cheeks,
And then my lips—
Piff, paff—boom!
Thus kiss me; quiet,
Hush! In the dear night a lullaby:
Piff, paff—boom!

We labored with every sinew in our bodies. The noise became maddeningly deafening. Someone shouted, "Hurrah! Again! Once again the tender lullaby!" The singer began anew:

How fine is the moon!
Pure silver is the moon,
Piff . . .

And was silent.

Someone cried, "He's dead; somebody else continue!"

I shouted to him while shooting: "Idiot! Good-for-nothing!" And he answered: "You know the song! Continue! 'Piff, paff—boom!' " Someone else fell. Another was wounded, crying and screaming with pain! A shot in the belly! —And suddenly a command: "Up! Forward! Attack!" And out there, men kept coming nearer; men, shadows in the light of the moon. We jumped up and ran towards the shadows, shooting as we ran. —They dropped one after another. —Terrifying cries: Hurrah! Hurrah! I, too, cried, "Hurrah!" And as I did so, I reflected—perhaps the poet Zalman Schneur was among them? Or my friend, Professor Peter Vasilyevitch? —Hurrah! Hurrah! Pitch blackness; rain. We penetrated the enemy line, which surged against us. We lunged at one another with our bayonets. I belabored the wind. I slashed the air. Cries. Stick'em! Stick'em! Cursing, profanity, reviling. —Strange languages. I didn't understand them. Strange men, strange beasts, wild animals. We had to wipe them out! I struggled in the mud and fell. I was kicked in the side—I was not dead yet. I

was alive. Feet stepped over me. A powerful bayonet was thrust into the ground, close by my left ear. I was terrified and choked. —I rose and thrashed about with my hands and feet, striking and thrusting in the air. Oh! I had bayoneted someone! I heard: "Don't drive it in! It's me!" —It was one of our men. The blade had passed under his armpit. —I heard shouting very close by and felt a fearful blow against my right leg, above the knee. Oh! —The bullet had shattered the bone. Terrible pain. —I cry out; *"Medics!* Stretcher-bearer! I'm wounded!" Someone dragged me by my torso; another came and helped him. They put me on a stretcher and carried me. One of them asked: "Where were you hit?" I had a pleasant sensation as I was leaving the "wild party," and answered him: "Where was I hit? On the field of honor, on the altar of my Fatherland!" My questioner got angry and wanted to drop me. "You're deceiving us! You aren't wounded! The devil with you!" I cried out: "I wish you and your children would have a wound like mine, my friend! O-oh!" And again he asked, "Where were you hit?" I answered, "In my right leg, the one upon which I do not wind the phylacteries! O-oh!" The wound really hurt so much that I felt the pain in my head! They brought me into some sort of a depot. They bandaged me and while they were about it I asked, "Where is the bullet?"

"Why should you care about the bullet?"

"O-oh, I don't know! What do you care about the bullet? His Highness Franz Joseph the First has enough bullets! Oh! The pain!"

"Did the bullet pass out?"

"I don't know! How should I know? Oh, dress my wound, it hurts such a lot!" My eyes watered, but I was happy.

One of them said: "The bullet passed out. Tough luck, my friend! You won't be laid up very long!"

I was panic-stricken.

"What? Am I going to die?"

"No. On the contrary. You'll get well quickly, and you'll come back here quickly! Tough luck!"

Meanwhile, they had dressed my leg and started to carry me farther. The pain became more intense; a sort of ague

passed through me. The motion of the stretcher as they carried me was very pleasant. I shut my eyes.

The cannon shots became more and more intense. In the distance, the wounded cried. I heard one of the bearers carrying me say: "Such luck! A leg wound!"

I felt that my wound was numbing my brain somewhat—fortunately for me. I fell asleep.

When I awoke, I found myself on a hospital train—*click-clack, click-clack,* the rails clicked—homeward bound.

What had happened there?

CHAPTER VIII

The High School for the Intelligentsia

FROM the hospital for the disabled, headquarters transferred me to the command of a non-com, in order to learn the particulars of standing, marching, shooting, and discipline. At the very outset they quizzed us to see if we knew where we were located. "We are located," the sergeant explained, "in the High School for the Intelligentsia."

"Back home in your cheap colleges," our new instructor went on, "you studied every science under the sun. Yes, I, too, learned to read and write just as you have. But that isn't everything. You must also acquire a little intelligence. Why, you don't even know how to stand properly. Just imagine! Suppose the *Herr* First Lieutenant should pay us a surprise visit today, and you did not even know how to greet him. Now, for example, let's take you," he turned to one of us. "How would you greet the *Herr* First Lieutenant? Well, how?"

"Hello, *Herr* First—Lieutenant!"

"A knife in your gizzard, my friend—I knew it! And, of course, you don't even know enough to be ashamed. A soldier who has already had the good fortune to be wounded, and still babbles hello and such! One doesn't greet the *Herr* First

Lieutenant, my friend, as one greets a professor, or a servant girl with whom one wishes to carry on a flirtation. One doesn't greet the *Herr* First Lieutenant at all! But what then? One stands before him like this—petrified, like a pillar of stone, limbs paralyzed, head erect, breath bated, eyes staring straight ahead, straight into his eyes without seeing anything at all, neither the surroundings, nor one's comrades, nor anything on earth—just nothing at all! Not even himself! Because the sense-organs of the body were not given to look with and wink with, like loose women! Man's body was created for one purpose only: to stand at attention before the *Herr* First Lieutenant and to listen to what he has to say, and to watch the thoughts which are in the innermost part of his brain. The entire body must be all eyes and ears without any subtlety or guile. And that's all! Come, let's test your stinking abilities! Let's say, for example, that the *Herr* First Lieutenant is at this very moment approaching us. I give the command: Attention! and you do what I told you. Now, ready—one, two three: *Attention!*"

I stretched myself and shut my eyes, and stood there petrified.

The subofficer burst into wild laughter, then screeched: "Y-o-k-e-l-s!"

I opened my eyes and noticed that all the others had shut their eyes as I had.

"What a crew!" said the instructor in deep despair. "I can see now that you'll never amount to anything. Why did you shut your eyes? Well? Why? Do you think this is a prayer service? When you pray you must shut your eyes, lest, heaven forbid, you see God himself! But here, the *Herr* First Lieutenant is no god! God will never give you a medal! Nor solitary confinement in pitch blackness for thirty days so you can go blind! So, once again!"

And not only once more, but fifty times and more. It was a gang that had not even a spark of intelligence. The *Herr* Subofficer was in a fit of despair and on the point of exhaustion. This shutting of the eyes!

And suddenly, a calamity. The *Herr* First Lieutenant arrived.

The instructor snorted like the chimney of a horsemeat sausage factory.

"Attention!"

The *Herr* First Lieutenant came over and stood facing us, as our instructor reported with steely words: *"Herr* First Lieutenant! I beg leave to report, sir, there is nothing to report!"

That was terrible. Nothing to report! But why the horrific shout?

The *Herr* First Lieutenant scrutinized us from our toes to the tops of our helmets, critically, solemnly, and silently. And then he said placidly: "At ease. Your hearts don't have to drop into your pants. I'm not the angel of death."

The weather was glorious. The autumn sun displayed its entire blinding golden treasure, and the pleasant breeze wafted to us the intoxicating odors of withering foliage from some happy far-off places. I recalled Naples, Sorrento, Zara, Monaco, the Riviera . . .

The first lieutenant discovered that our posture was imperfect.

He stood us up with our faces to the barracks. It was pure white and when the sun shone upon it, it was impossible to look at. The officer took a pencil, went up to the wall, drew a perpendicular line, and said: "Look at this line as I stand facing you. Look straight ahead. Without moving. Understand?"

We understood.

Our instructor gave the command.

"Attention!"

We stood there rigid, our eyes focused upon the blinding wall. Straight ahead. The light began to make our eyes smart. I shut my eyes, and remembered that no god stood before me but the *Herr* First Lieutenant—and then I opened my eyes. I kept right on looking. Come what might. . . .

The officer came up to the man at the head of the rank, scrutinized his face, and motioned disapprovingly to signify: "Fall out, to the devil!"

The disqualified soldier turned aside, to the left. After him went the second, and the third, and fourth. All disqualified. I kept staring, like one sentenced to blindness, with my last

ounce of energy. Tears streamed from my eyes. I felt myself going blind. No, I wouldn't shut my eyes. I heard the instructor telling the disqualified men: "Just wait, you epileptics, just wait. I'll tear the lashes from your eyes! I'll teach you etiquette!"

I heard this and summoned my ebbing strength. I looked directly at the bright wall.

The officer came over and gazed at me. My eyes watered large tears, which streamed down my cheeks; they saw nothing but the mighty, dancing sun. And the light was full of red pepper.

The officer gazed and gazed at me, calmly. He took a cigarette out of his pocket and lighted it—and continued to gaze. He inhaled deeply and blew the smoke right into my eyes.

Just because of that I would not close my eyes. For it was all the same to me then. Just for spite.

The officer kept puffing away. Finally he came over to me, tapped me on the shoulder, good-naturedly, and gripped my right hand.

"Bravo! That's a soldier for you! Dry your face."

I turned to the right, heaved a deep sigh of relief, and dried my tears.

An extraordinary feeling of pride passed through me.

What a triumph! All the literary triumphs of my entire life could not compare with that one? I was a real soldier! I rated a "bravo"!

And then for the first time I noticed that the *Herr* First Lieutenant limped a bit on one foot. I immediately recalled he was the one. He was the officer they reviled so shamelessly behind his back. They said that during his first military engagement he did everything in his power to escape actual combat, and when he failed he put his revolver in his trouser pocket and with his own hand shot himself in the leg.

And since that time he remained "at home," behind the battleline, and taught rookies military tactics.

"Phew!" I concluded inwardly. Such cowardice!

When he had finished the first examination, he went over to the disqualified men, stood in front of them contemptuously, and, with furrowed brow, said scornfully:

"You—want—to be—soldiers?"

"Who wants to? Do I want to?" The voice came from among the group. I could not make out who it was that had such terrible nerve.

Someone broke out into a sort of laugh.

The officer suddenly straightened up, flipped his cigarette away, folded his arms like a bear stalking its prey, went over to the impudent jester, and, grinding his teeth as he spoke, said:

"What did you say? What did *you* say?"

"I said—"

"Shut up! I didn't ask you! What did you say? What did you say to me?"

"I sai—"

"Not a sound from you! Sergeant!" He turned to our instructor. "Three days' solitary confinement; without food or water and without sunlight! Right away! Get him out of here!"

The unfortunate victim was seized firmly by the underofficer and led away.

"Without sunlight," he stammered. "That's marvelous—there you can shut your eyes."

The first lieutenant heard this and his face turned crimson.

"Stop!"

He drew so close to him that their noses almost touched.

"So you're wisecracking, are you? Sergeant! Put him against the wall for four hours at one stretch!"

To be put against the wall meant to be tethered to the wall while standing on one's toes, with arms held high above the head.

That was the joke, and that was its reward. Three days' solitary confinement, in darkness and without food.

The next day they informed us that we should be prepared to "take an intelligence test." There was a separate test for each man. The underofficer took out a sheet of paper and read the questions. One man was to explain in five seconds, a miraculously brief time, what the difference was between a buck private and his majesty, Kaiser Franz Joseph the First. The second was to tell what he would do if he were ordered to shoot his own mother, should she be standing in front of him. The third was to describe the Russians in one sentence.

The fourth was to demonstrate his prowess in swearing and cursing. The fifth (this was addressed to me because I was a writer) was to enumerate the ten virtues of war. And so on.

We sat down for a few minutes to write the answers. I summoned to my aid all the angels of thought and the nine muses, together with every evil spirit, and they helped me discern the following virtues: (1) War strengthens the muscles; (2) teaches endurance; (3) accustoms one to death; (4) teaches how to kill without any previous hatred; (5) teaches us to respect the *Herr* First Sergeant; (6) brings us to places through which we had never traveled; (7) employs jobless workers; (8) annihilates the poor who have no food; (9) transports us to the realm of truth; and (10) crowns our accidental death with the glory of heroism.

I handed my list of inspired ideas to the subofficer in expectation of an exceptionally enthusiastic reception. But I was sadly mistaken. He looked at the answers, studied and scrutinized them, and then said with classic simplicity:

"Drivel!"

And he added: "Too bad; you're such a capable fellow, but you lack the necessary intelligence. The ten virtues of war are: that it breaks, kills, murders, destroys, exterminates, uproots, overthrows, ruins, annihilates, and buries."

"Whom?"

"Whom? Whom do you suppose? The contemptible enemy! Well, smarty! You have failed, my friend. But to spare your humiliation before the *Herr* First Lieutenant, I'll give you an opportunity to take another test. Do you see that hill over there? It's half a kilometer away. On the summit there is a shelled fort, only one wall of which remains standing. You must run from here to there within twenty minutes without stopping to rest, climb up the wall, stand up on top of it, and sing the national anthem! So—one, two, three!"

I ran with all my might.

I observed the *Herr* First Lieutenant riding behind me on a horse. And then—the underofficer passing him, on the run.

When I climbed the wall, I sang *Hatikvah,** the national anthem of the Jewish people.

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* Now the national anthem of the State of Israel.

The underofficer motioned me to descend. When I came down, my instructor patted me on the shoulder and said with boundless compassion:

"Bravo, my friend. Your intention is good, but you haven't the ability. You have neither a good voice, nor an ear for music. You didn't sing the anthem well at all. You were very often off pitch. Too bad."

"Well? What will happen to me?" I inquired.

"What will happen? We shall see. You have a lot to learn."

After a while the entire company came. We executed a few maneuvers and then went back in march step. On the way there were many puddles, and one of them happened to be right in my path. To avoid soiling my shoes, I skirted it. Suddenly I heard a command. "Halt!" The entire company halted. The lieutenant rode over to me, ordered my comrades to step aside, and me to remain near the puddle.

"Now," said the officer, "do the floor dip seven times."

That meant stretching out my entire length in the midst of the puddle and getting up again. Seven times.

I obeyed the command—and came out as filthy as a pig.

"So," said the officer, satisfied. "Now answer my question—have you studied the Bible?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know the story of Gideon's three hundred water lappers?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can you explain to me the real reason why Gideon chose only the lappers?"

I was in a quandary. In truth, it had never occurred to me to explain that capricious act, even to myself. Even my distinguished teacher, Professor Bacher, had never explained it to me.

Suddenly a thought flashed through my brain.

"Yes, sir," I said gleefully, "I know! Gideon sifted out those who were meticulous and selected only those who weren't too fussy! A soldier who is finicky and is afraid of a little mud is no soldier, sir!"

The officer raised his hand aloft, and then extended it to me, gripping mine, as he said:

"Bravo! You'll go higher and higher. You'll amount to

something! And if it isn't your good fortune to receive a decoration while you live, I'll make it my business to see that you get it on your grave!"

All my comrades eyed me enviously.

I was happy.

Not a thing to be sneezed at—a decoration on your grave!

CHAPTER IX

His Majesty the Button

DURING all these confusing events, in the midst of that complete inner disturbance which had passed over and through me during the past weeks, I was gripped by a realization that became crystallized in an enigma to which I could find no solution. That was the genuine respect I increasingly came to feel toward people whom I had not previously considered of any more value than a shriveled lemon peel—the officers.

What had an officer meant to me before this?

I had always thought of an officer, if, indeed, I ever gave the matter a moment's thought, as a useless and unnecessary creature in a divine world; a sleek being that strutted about in a sort of wooden contraption, and consisted entirely of dry bones from pate to foot. And within the skull, instead of a brain, there was a sort of jellylike substance of congealed wine.

I ran across such a creature only rarely in my social life and had never paid any attention to it, even casually. It had no definite relationship to reality. If such a creature were to stand between me and some object, I would not have to disturb myself a bit in order to see the object. Glass, that was all. And I never wanted to sit at the same table with an officer, even inadvertently. Who sits with an officer? Either a charwoman or, worse than that, another officer.

And I never regarded it sufficiently important to reflect and inquire: Why do these creatures live, anyway? Only once did I stumble upon some such thought, quite accidentally. I read a book of Beulsche's on "purpose in creation," and it stimulated in me thoughts on the great "Wherefore." Then, amid other questions and associations, there arose in me this question: Why, in truth, were, for example, the locust, the frog, and the officer created?

Even after I understood the ordering of the world and of society, and had learned the secret of militarism and capitalism and all that pertains to them—even then I did not really understand to what purpose that creature strutted about in this stupid, ugly system. Even in this stupid, ugly system I did not find a place for that creature with the strangulating collar and the whip, with which he lashed the miserable husband who sought to avenge the honor of his stupid wife, who had been seduced into following this wooden post.

I recalled that those peculiar creatures moved about Bismarck, too, constantly surrounding him like the stone pillars which encircle the tall linden tree in the Gruenwald Garden in Berlin. And when Bismarck-the-linden-tree stirred, they, too, moved after him. When he halted, they stopped, too. But what did those posts do when Bismarck was thinking? Bismarck's thoughts might perhaps have been venomous, murderous, violent—but after all, what had *they* to do with thinking, anyway?

I remembered Werner Sombart's lecture on Judaism. Jews were not qualified to become officers. Very true—to be an officer you had to be definitely scatterbrained, and the Jew's qualifications are quite different from these. Such were Sombart's observations, and we all understood them as something taken for granted, self-evident. To be an officer, one must have a whip, a waxed mustache, a dog, and his own self.

These thoughts flashed through me in the High School for the Intelligentsia, in a lucid interval, when suddenly I realized that I was reckoning with the opinions of my first lieutenant and his fellow officers, *not merely in military affairs but in other connections,* and not only *that* but *in matters of culture, art, and literature!*

What had happened?

The first lieutenant, *Herr* Print, a native of Austria and really a fine fellow, was fond of cultural small talk, and sought to give the impression that he was a lover and connoisseur of art. And always after "work" he graciously condescended to talk with us about the nation and the individual. On such occasions he seemed to be an entirely different person. He liked an uproarious joke and engaged in friendly discussion with us.

It was from these discussions that I discovered a few of his ideas. For example:

Michelangelo was a titantic artist who had only one shortcoming—his women are neither esthetic-looking nor beautiful.

Marx was a contemptible careerist who couldn't find a way to rise to the top; therefore he hit upon a plan to flatter the poor people and confuse their minds with dangerous doctrines.

Haydn was the greatest of all German musicians. He composed the Austrian national anthem, and also all the military signals of the Austrian army.

Wagner was also a great artist. In his work, too, there are military motifs here and there, but Wagner was ensnared by the July Revolution and became a revolutionist himself. Because of this he received his artistic punishment—his revolutionary creation, the overture *Polonia,* is pitiful piffle.

The secret of Tolstoi's thoughts is concealed in this fact—that he was dropped from the officers' society because he lacked the ability to be a good soldier, and therefore became a preacher of peace and such. Truly, he was to be pitied. He could have brought a blessing to the world, had he remained an officer all his life.

The Bible is a record of war, but the Jewish people, lacking power and military prowess, turned it into a record of the ideals of peace.

"And Jesus of Nazareth?" one of us asked him.

"Jesus of Nazareth was a *Jew,* in truth. And the only bit of Christianity in him was his apothegm: 'I came not to send peace, but a sword.' Peace can be a compromise, but not an ideal. Too bad that Nietzsche was a bit late in arriving. He

should have been born before Jesus of Nazareth. The entire world could then have accepted his teaching; the teaching of war for the sake of war, for the sake of the knife. Nietzsche's day, too, will come. It will certainly come."

These opinions served to reaffirm my previous reactions to the first lieutenant, so it seemed to me; but despite this . . .

But despite this I found myself in the strangest predicament. It was not contempt that I felt toward him and his fellow possessors of shining buttons, not the contempt I had previously felt—but the very contrary. I began to be aware that in my every utterance, in every act and in every free moment, I endeavored to please them and to satisfy their desires and opinions.

The buds of this feeling blossomed within me even during my first examination, after I was declared "fit," when the commanding officer there at headquarters extended his hand and said, "You'll be a marvelous soldier, my friend. You'll chase the Russians back to Moscow, and when you return, you'll receive a decoration of the highest rank."

And after that, whenever I was similarly flattered, a feeling of pride passed through me.

Once, when a mounted officer held out his hand to me and said, "Bravo! You'll amount to something," it was *pleasant* to hear it.

It was in vain that I searched for the explanation of this phenomenon. I respected them. Why deny it?

Marx—a careerist. The women of Michelangelo—ugly. Wagner—deservedly punished. Tolstoi—an object of pity. The Bible—a war record. Jesus of Nazareth . . .

I was unable to resolve my predicament until a seeming triviality struck me between the eyes. I had written a letter to my sweetheart. After I had finished, upon rereading it, I came across these words: "Our first lieutenant is really an intelligent fellow—he will keep promoting me to an ever higher rank!"

I tore the letter into a thousand bits.

During such moments I was aware that this feeling had penetrated to my very innards and was resting there, weighing heavily upon me. Like a stone, thrown into the rotting hole

of a tree. The tree keeps on growing, encrusting the decay around the stone, but the stone itself does not disintegrate. Despair seized me. Had I, in truth, been condemned to destruction in the very flower of my youth, together with this stone buried in the trunk of my soul?

In place of Reb Pinchas of Koritz—*Herr* First Lieutenant Print. In place of two eyes gleaming with phenomenal wisdom—shining buttons, the buttons of His Majesty. And when His Majesty the Button appeared, I sprang to attention. Facing it, hands straight by my sides, body erect and rigid—I felt that I was doing my duty faithfully and honestly. I felt that there was a purpose in life. And that to be an officer was a supreme purpose. And as for the man who is awarded a medal posthumously—happy is he and the one who bore him.

That is how I actually felt. A week before, the day before, too, and that very morning.

Ye gods of Flammarion! What had happened to me!

To tell someone was impossible. Not because I was ashamed, but simply because they *all* lived with that feeling, all of them without exception!

And not only that. In the army, and especially in the academy for officers, there was a very strict rule which said: A student who has fallen into the slightest disrepute cannot be an officer.

This meant—not a pupil who *was known to have done something* wrong, but a pupil *about whom there had been spread the slightest accusation* was disqualified and had to go to the front as a private. So anyone who was angry with me and wished to take revenge upon me had only to spread a bad story about me. That was all. It did not matter whether or not there was a grain of truth in the accusation. Nobody investigated and nobody wanted to hear your defense and your wretched self-justification. If they spread a report about you to the effect that you had stolen as much as a silver teaspoon, it was all over with you. You went about like one condemned —waiting for the moment when they would send you with a guard of dishonor to the replacement camp, from which, within a few days, you would be dispatched to the front to serve as the dog of the beloved first sergeant. And until you

were packed off to hell, all your comrades knifed you with looks of contempt that could kill.

At first we were all stunned by the stupidity of this rule, but it so happened that one of my dear friends, an artist with a brilliant reputation as a painter, fell victim to just such a slander. The story reached headquarters, and the order came to send him to the replacement camp, as one disqualified to be a candidate for a commission.

The wretched man could not raise his eyes to look any of us in the face. He packed his things.

Universal contempt accompanied him as he left.

As he passed through the gate, I saw him turn his head back toward me, his eyes filled with the mute question, "You, too?"

And I—I did not even think it proper to run over and whisper in his ear that I was one with him in contemptuous loathing of that whole madhouse, and that to die and rot away you didn't need the respect of officers and the assent and eulogy of a drunken first sergeant!

No. I did *not* run to him and I did *not* tell him that.

I stood there among the scorners, and I, too, scorned.

I. A cultured person. The pupil of Rabbi Akiba, the Gaon of Vilna, of Professor Ze'ev Bacher, and of Camille Flammarion and Tolstoi.

I went to my room, took out my little mirror, looked at my contemptible reflection, and spat into it:

"Damn your soul!"

CHAPTER X

The Commander of the Muse

MY first examination in the academy for war officers, it appeared, went off well. I did not realize that in this drama, in which my unfortunate comrade had been disqualified on the basis of groundless slander, I too had been one of the motivating spirits. To be sure, my role had been passive, but a rather decisive one. This drama, as I learned presently, served us embryonic officers as the first test in acquiring the necessary intelligence of officialdom. At the very moment our condemned comrade left the courtyard, the cynosure of hundreds of derisive and pitying eyes, our great-hearted instructor, First Lieutenant Print, was standing off to one side, surveying us with a critical eye, to detect those of us who might be trapped into sympathizing with the departing comrade. Everyone thus detected was to be doomed to disqualification in the immediate future. To the genuine delight of the hard-boiled instructor, not one was trapped. We all eyed the departing comrade with contempt, thank God! Bravo! Very good! In a flash I realized that my own situation was somewhat more dangerous than I had supposed. The instructing officer paid much more attention to my humble self than to any of the others. After the condemned had left the courtyard, the first lieutenant came over to me, put his hand on my shoulder, and said inquiringly: "You write for the press under the pseudonym 'Albert Kova?' "

"I beg leave to report, yes, sir."

"You are also a Hebrew poet, writing in the language of the Bible?"

"I beg leave to report, yes, sir."

"I understand that you're the best friend of mad Adi Endro?"

"I beg leave to report, no, sir."

"What? You're not! I say you are! Do you deny it?"

"Yes, I deny that he is mad. Adi Endro is the greatest Hungarian poet that ever lived."

The instructor stared at me, removed his hand from my shoulder, and after a moment's pause, said: "We'll find out about that soon. It seems to me that he is opposed to war. We shall see if he'll come to his senses for a while and give us a fitting war poem. And if not—if not . . ."

At this point his face became as severe and harsh as a shrunken horse-radish.

"If not—then you must forget him like one who has died a villain. I hope you understand me. You had better understand me."

"Just as you say, sir."

The officer lighted a cigarette, and offered me one, too, which greatly tickled my ego. When I had lighted mine, with affected nonchalance and a half-derisive, half-solemn smile, he posed the question: "And what is your opinion about absolute right and justice?"

I realized immediately that this fellow knew all the circumstances of my life, including the detailed history of my literary endeavors. I decided not to humble myself, but also not to irritate this arsenal of vulgarity and corruption, either. I too spoke with an affected smile like his.

"I beg leave to say, sir—absolute right and justice do not exist."

"And there will never be any, either?"

"I beg leave to say, sir—they will come into being when the cutthroat epoch that breeds war has ended."

"And you must add," he said, "we will emerge from this epoch of warfare victorious."

"I beg leave to say, sir—yes, *all of us* will emerge victorious. The entire world."

The first lieutenant inhaled deeply and replied, his voice sounding like one who is momentarily nonplussed and has no positive answer to give: "Good. We'll discuss that the next time."

And then he ordered field drill.

He kept his promise. The discussion on absolute right and justice was continued between us on several occasions. This discussion was both annoying and boring. There were moments when I felt that I was about to collapse under the burden of these discussions, which developed into a duel between two unequal forces—between him with the revolver of absolute law in his hand, and me, empty-handed. A battle between brawn and brain.

If, among those of my friends who at times to some degree joined in these discussions, there had been at least one solitary soul who did not fawningly assent to the putrid opinions of this living lexicon of murder, it would have been possible to turn the entire discussion either into a logical victory or ironic quips. But there was no such person. On such occasions they all grinned disdainfully, like officers, a grin which betokened acquiescence in the words of the first liteutenant, and pity for my logic. So, in the course of time, I became the laughingstock of the regiment, and my great pains to distinguish myself went for naught.

"I'm sorry for you," our instructor once told me with true compassion and affection. "As a soldier you have a very good reputation, but as a person—it seems that education has unsettled you."

The result was, that while almost all my comrades could boast of their rank as corporal and even sergeant by the second month, I had not even won my first promotion to the lowly rank of lance corporal. I was still a rookie, even though I had already fought and been wounded at the front. I felt humiliated.

But unexpectedly a change occurred in my sad plight. It was the custom for every class in the military academy to arrange a big show upon the conclusion of their studies—which lasted about three months—just before leaving for the front. In this show all those participated who had any measure of talent, either literary or artistic. It so happened that our class

was liberally endowed with talent. There were among us writers, painters, actors, dancers and opera singers.

When the order came to prepare for the affair and to muster these talents, I found myself a rank outsider. First Lieutenant Print, a devotee of literature and art, could not bring himself to permit me to take part in this artistic endeavor. Participation in the performance was of great assistance in insuring promotion to the rank of commissioned officer—and since he suspected I might be a literary success on this occasion, he definitely did not want the opportunity to occur. A dangerous pacifist like myself ought to go to the front as a private, and if he has it in him to be worthy of note, then his heroism on the front will raise him to the rank of officer!

But it happened that in moments of artistic consciousness, the hearts of some of my comrades were humanly stirred for me, and they were not at all pleased by this boycott.

One of them, who had already had the good fortune to be promoted to the rank of corporal, approached me. He took me by the arm for a stroll. He was a handsome fellow, with blue eyes and the features of a real officer; his well-bred Christian appearance had furthered his success in the academy. In the city he too had been a young writer and an embryonic poet, a slim volume of whose work had already been published.

"I can't bear to see you suffer, my friend," he whispered confidentially. "You'll simply have to participate in the program."

"It doesn't bother me in the least," I pretended.

"That doesn't matter," he answered. "It can't be. We won't let you down."

Suddenly, he bent over still closer to me and whispered most confidentially. "To my great regret, I can't do anything personally—because I myself am—a Jew—but someone else . . ."

So even he, with the genteel features of a well-bred Christian officer, was a Jew. I was not unduly surprised. In Hungary that is not so very rare.

My friend continued: "I can't bear not having at least one Jewish strain in this entire program! You must participate!"

"Why should there be a Jewish strain?" I queried.

"Because he is antagonistic to Jews and forces us—me—to conceal our origin. That's why!"

I understood. I assured him that I would not give him away.

It appeared that he did try, through others. He was afraid to intervene directly with the first lieutenant in my behalf, lest he be suspected. For that a *genuine* Christian was needed.

The following day, upon our return from field drill in the afternoon, the first lieutenant's orderly called on me and announced: "*Herr* Volunteer! By order of the first lieutenant, you are to report immediately!"

Within a few minutes I reported.

"By your order, sir!"

He welcomed me with exceptional official aloofness. He did not employ the second person, customary among officers when addressing cadet aspirants, but the third person. This was an evidence of disparagement, almost vilification.

"We have decided that he must participate in the program, as poet and reader," he said.

"At your order, sir!"

"Is he desirous of writing a poem?" he asked. And immediately added, "Because even if he isn't, he'll still have to write it."

I reflected for a moment. It was the first time I had ever set eyes upon the commandant of the sacred muse.

He continued: "He must write a poem which he himself will read during our program. Its contents must be romantic, patriotic, sentimental, and definitely martial. Did he understand?"

"I understand! Romantic, patriotic, sentimental and definitely martial."

Yes, I understood, but gradually the ordinary person, the civilian, for whom it is impossible to hear such an order without smiling, came to life within me. Summoning my courage, I smiled.

He concluded: "The length of the poem—a quarter of an hour's public reading. Did he understand?"

"I understand, sir. Only may I ask one question, sir?"

"Let him ask!"

"What must its breadth be?" I immediately regretted the question.

The first lieutenant stared at me wide-eyed, his eyeballs bulging. He came over to me, officer-fashion, and gnashing his teeth, shrieked: "Attention! Miserable inklicker! About face! March!"

I obeyed the command. But at the door I again stood at attention, by his order.

"It is now three. And at seven this evening he must bring the poem!"

"By your order, sir, at seven!"

But this last order steeled me with sufficient courage to make a request.

"What is it?" he asked suspiciously.

"Will you please permit me, sir, to sit and write in the coffee house?"

He reflected for a moment, then said derisively, but good-naturedly: "Let him spend the evening at the coffee house. The cashier of the place is your muse. Of course! Well—all right!"

This was an extraordinary concession. Only officers had the right to sit in the coffee house. Enlisted men, officer candidates, only once a week, on Sunday afternoons.

I sat in the coffee house and determined to do something in revenge. And chance favored me. Among my companions there was a Jewish youth, a teacher, who by divine grace had been considered fit for the army. He was an emaciated fellow, almost hunchbacked, flat-chested, and with no neck to speak of. A clumsy fellow who fell all over himself. This object of my pity was happy beyond words to be a soldier, and, especially, to be an officer aspirant. When the first lieutenant would come over to him as he stood in the line and, out of inner derision mixed with sympathy, tap him on the shoulder as a sign of satisfaction, the eyes of this soldier would actually gush forth tears, hot tears of joy.

This extraordinary fellow actually wormed himself into my heart. To use him just once as the subject of a story! That hankering I had once confided to several of my friends. And now, as I sat in the coffee house and sweated to find a suitable

subject for the poem prescribed by official order—this man suddenly passed by my window, walking down the street as though to suggest himself!

I had found the subject for the romantic, patriotic, sentimental, and definitely martial poem!

But the rose was not without its thorn. A thorn, not to me, but to my commanding officer. *The subject was Jewish!*

What would happen?

Come what may. In any event, I had already been banished from the paradise of officialdom. The end of the second month still found me a rookie. Come what may. Very good!

A moment later my friend, the dashing officer of Christian mien, appeared, and when I disclosed my plan to him, he jumped with joy and fled.

At six o'clock the poem was finished. Its title: *A Letter to the Herr Lieutenant Colonel.* Its contents: an emaciated, weak Jewish lance corporal beyond medical assistance in a hospital, writes a letter to the *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel. In this letter he tells him that he was born in the ghetto of sickly, poverty-stricken parents. During his childhood the boys picked on him because of his wretched physique, and especially after the war broke out, when they taunted him with: "Emperor Franz Joseph is waiting for you!" But the Lord of Jacob had compassion upon him and performed a miracle—the doctor declared him fit for service! And now fortune began to smile graciously upon him. He tried hard, studied, made progress in his drills, and was in the good graces of the first sergeant. But he reached the pinnacle of his bliss when the *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel, who came to inspect the new men, walked over to him, patted him on the shoulder, and said, "You're a good soldier!" Then he swore a sacred oath by his very soul that he must die for the *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel! Providence granted this, too. When he entered the frontlines and the battle waxed furious, he suddenly noticed a Russian soldier in the distance aiming directly at the *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel. Whereupon he, the weak lance corporal, the loyal soldier, jumped up and stood like a protective shield in front of the *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel, and received the fatal bullet into his own body! And now, as he is about to die,

he has but one minor request to make—won't the *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel please come and say to him once again while he is still alive: "Good soldier!"

Here I had a poem at once romantic, patriotic, sentimental, and definitely martial.

I am a good soldier.

When I presented myself to the first lieutenant and my features betrayed that I had fulfilled his order—I was greeted in the second person and given permission to stand at ease.

Not only that—he offered me a cigarette and invited me to sit down.

Then I read the poem to him.

The effect was phenomenal. He kept puffing with his sacred martial emotion. He was altogether pleased that the hero was a Jew. This somewhat disturbed me, but I hoped that in time he would realize his blunder.

When I finished, he again offered me a cigarette; but when I hastened to give him a light, he declined it. On the contrary, he held out his lighted match to me. Then he said to me: "The *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel must hear this. He simply must. The *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel must. Tomorrow evening you will please be good enough to read it to the *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel, too. Here in my place."

When I visited his home the following evening, the *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel was not present. In his stead there was his wife, a simple Magyar woman, a peasant, whom the *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel had fallen in love with and married, a number of years ago. We all found her most congenial. She was a very beautiful, robust woman, and exceptionally good-natured.

As I read the poem, she broke into bitter weeping. She kept constantly drying her tears and muttering: "Poor fellow, my poor fellow! The poor Jewish lance corporal!"

At this point, that which I had both feared and hoped for occurred. The first lieutenant suddenly remembered, became rather embarrassed, and said; "Of course, that's rather a serious flaw. A Jew. He might just as well not have been a Jew. That's somewhat—well—how can one express it? We shall see what the *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel thinks about it."

"The *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel will not object to it," the beautiful lady interposed.

"Well, then, all right. Tomorrow you will read the poem to the *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel, too."

As I made ready to leave, I heard her saying to the first lieutenant: "How is it that he is still a rookie? And not even a lance corporal?"

"That, that—that's nothing, madame. That's absolutely nothing," he answered apologetically and guilelessly. "That's a minor matter; it's an oversight. Tomorrow he will be a lance corporal. Tomorrow."

And to me: "Tomorrow you will come to me and report that you have been promoted to the rank of lance corporal! Understand? Well, *Sevas!* Au revoir!"

The very next morning the order was issued that I was promoted to the rank of lance corporal. Joy reigned in the camp.

On the evening of that same day I again reported to the first lieutenant. The beautiful woman sat there again, with her young son, about thirteen years of age. A fine handsome lad. The *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel was still too busy to attend.

Again I read the poem. The boy jumped up, his eyes moist with tears, and began to plead with his mother to send him to the front. It was disgraceful that he should still stay home with his mother!

The lad came over to me with childlike affection and asked for a copy. He suddenly turned to the first lieutenant: "*Herr* First Lieutenant, why is the *Herr* Poet Lance Corporal only a lance corporal? Why isn't he at least a corporal? I saw corporals among the men!"

The first lieutenant was up against it a second time. "That—that—that's a minor matter—nothing at all! Really, very minor!"

And to me: "Tomorrow you will report to me that you have been promoted to the rank of corporal! Understand?"

The next morning the order was issued, and I became a corporal. The men were both amazed and envious. One day after the other!

In the afternoon I was ordered to appear again that eve-

ning to read the poem, at last, to the *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel himself.

The *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel was very pleased.

"Listen, inkslinger," he said to me affectionately, in a manner that can hardly be described, "how is it that you haven't acquired at least three ivory stars? What are you, Napoleon, that you are satisfied with the rank of corporal? If I ever see you again with your two stars, I'll put you back where you started from!"

And the *Herr* First Lieutenant: "That—that—that's a minor matter. Really nothing at all. Tomorrow the order will be issued that he has been promoted to the rank of sergeant!"

He continued to stammer deferentially: "And what is your opinion, sir, wouldn't it be better, if that lance corporal in the poem, if he were—a non-Jew? That is to say—I think . . ."

"What?" ejaculated the *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel in amazement. "On the contrary! The very contrary! That's very good. That's something different. Very good!"

And to me: "Now go back and sew on your third star—tonight! Understand?"

He extended a kindly hand, and I departed.

When I sewed on my third star, no one in my platoon believed his eyes—three promotions in three days!

That night I could not sleep. To this very day I do not know whether it was because of joy or because I kept reflecting on the singular occurrence that I had written a poem, and a fine poem at that—to order.

And this order I had received not from Georg Brandes, not from Ignatius, nor from David Frischmann.

But from First Lieutenant Print.

It was worthwhile for once to meet the muse face to face, just to see how official military dress becomes her.

About a week later, I received a letter from my dear friend, the poet and editor Joseph Patai.

"This is perhaps your best poem. But the theme is deplorable."

CHAPTER XI

The Great Reward

ALL the society and aristocracy of the city of Loshontz and of its environs came to our show. But when I went out on the stage to read the poem, my eyes could see nothing but glistening buttons and ivory stars. The entire audience appeared to me like an awe-inspiring military court, at whose head there sat, up there in his box, our chief commandant, the colonel, with his long, drooping mustache. I noticed him the moment I went out on the stage. I was panic-stricken. Fortunately, I also suddenly caught sight of the beautiful lady, the wife of our *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel, together with her husband. They sat in an adjacent box. As I approached the prompter's pit, I was appalled to feel two hands grasp me by my feet. From the prompter's pit there beamed at me the face of that sweet child, the son of the lieutenant colonel. This dissipated all my fears, and I read the poem with great success. I saw the beautiful lady in the box drying her eyes. Good. From the audience I heard a soft murmur, which I did not know how to interpret—whether as approval or disapproval. When I had finished, there was spontaneous applause, but someone seemed to stifle it immediately. Only four hands disregarded this hushing-up and continued to applaud in spite of everyone. They were the hands of the beautiful lady and the two little hands of the mischievous fellow seated at my feet in the pit.

At that moment the *Herr* Chief Commandant rose from

his place, a silent warrior, and in the strict silence of the large audience, he mounted the stage. My poem had been the last number on the program. The distinguished *Herr* came over to me, looked at me for a moment that seemed an eternity, then closed the program with brief remarks directed more to me than to the audience.

"A fine Jewish poem," he said unenthusiastically. "And the greatest reward you can receive," he added, more to the audience than to me, "is the kindness of the Supreme Commander in Chief, His Majesty Emperor Franz Joseph the First, who gives you the opportunity to die a hero for him."

Thunderous applause. The chief commandant continued, addressing the participants who stood behind me on the stage: "And that applies to all of you as well!"

Again thunderous applause as the distinguished *Herr* left the stage.

Within a few minutes his aide-de-camp came over to me, back stage, and informed me: "Report!"

Report? For what? The word "report" was synonymous with "trial."

But I calmed down immediately as I realized that military usage was not too precise in employing this expression, and that there were occasions when the commanding officer uses it not only as an order to stand trial before him, but also generally as a command to report to him on any matter.

But *Herr* First Lieutenant Print angrily informed me that in this case I really had to report for trial before the chief commandant. In his great kindness, when he noticed my stupefaction, he added (as though sympathizing with me in my distress) the friendly reproof: "You don't have to parade the fact that you're a Jew!"

In accordance with military rule, as my superior officer, he, too, went along with me to the commandant.

We walked in stony silence. I remembered the closing remarks—to die for Franz Joseph. It was the desire of Franz Joseph that I die for him. Who? King Franz Joseph? Strange. Franz Joseph had lived in me from my early youth as the symbol of a fine old man, a benign patriarch, whose life was filled with superhuman suffering, sorrow, family trouble, and un-

remitting, energetic labors of state. In my youth I had envisioned the old king as the crony of my aged grandfather, whom he used to receive in audience and with whom he discussed horses and the prayers of the synagogue. Whenever they built a synagogue in any large Hungarian city, they would construct a special seat in the eastern wing for Franz Joseph, adjoining the Holy Ark. And he, the affable old man, would be present at the dedication of the synagogue, occupying his seat, as he listened to the special prayer, "He who granteth salvation," and the psalm, "A song for the dedication of the Temple of David." Then he would answer, "Amen!" and leave, accompanied by the local rabbi and the lay head of the community.

That was Emperor Franz Joseph.

And more. The aged emperor was in the habit of spending a few days a year in Budapest, in the Buda section across the river Duno. There he used to pass the season in the palace, whose doors were opened wide for every human being. We journalists, when we had finished our work at the office at three in the morning, often strolled over to the courtyard of the palace, and, through the window, watch the old emperor arise every morning at exactly a quarter past four, dress, wash, drink tea, and immediately thereafter sit down to work at his desk. Morning after morning.

That was Franz Joseph. The Supreme Commander in Chief, His Majesty Emperor Franz Joseph the First!

We always envisioned him in tragic glory. The death of his beautiful wife, Queen Elizabeth, scintillating in the luminous romanticism of Heine's poems, an ivory cameo of whom she used to wear on her bosom; the tragic death of his young son Rudolph, the circumstances of which no one to this day knows; and, finally, the passing of his nephew, Crown Prince Ferdinand, whom some deluded Serbian political fanatic had assassinated to start the war. When the new crown prince, young Karl the Fifth, came before him to be anointed heir to the throne, the aged king raised his eyes to heaven and said, tearfully:

"Almighty God! I pray Thee—this time, I pray Thee— do not in Thine awful benevolence prolong my days so that I outlive this youth, too!"

That was Franz Joseph!

And even after that, when I became a fanatical socialist and it became my duty to bitterly hate all kings, even then I could not hate the aged emperor. At the most, I looked upon him as the beloved comic-opera king, wearing a papier-mâché crown, with a gilded wooden sword dangling from his belt.

So the Emperor Franz Joseph wanted me to die for him.

What an outlandish desire!

Perhaps his senile mind had become unbalanced.

If Mansy had known it, she would have gone to him and asked him if it were true.

In the meantime, we had reached the commandant.

To my great amazement, I saw the commandant dismiss the first lieutenant in order to talk to me in private. This was against army regulations. When one "reports," the officer should always be present, along with the soldier who stands accused, and remain until a verdict has been rendered. But he dismissed my lieutenant!

When we were alone, the commandant paced back and forth for a few minutes and then suddenly, as if bitten by a snake, snapped at me, as if to frighten me.

"You're a Jew!"

"I beg leave to say, sir—yes, sir!"

He looked at me for a moment.

"And why are you so proud of it?"

"I beg leave to say, sir, I am not proud, but when there is need to be ashamed of it, then I am proud."

"Ahem, ahem."

Suddenly: "They say that you are an excellent officer aspirant."

"I beg to say, yes, sir!"

"If that is so, then why do you compete with your comrades, and why do you glory so in your Jewishness?" And suddenly he added, smiling slightly, "Don't you want to be a general? General Kovatz was a Jew, too. But he accepted the Christian faith and became a general."

He looked closely at me.

I said decisively, "I beg leave to say, sir, I don't want to be a general."

"Are you so firm in your religious convictions?"

"I beg leave to say, sir, I am not much of a believer and therefore cannot accept any other religion, either."

"Ahem!" he again growled, beneath his drooping mustache.

I felt a strong desire to talk, and continued without waiting for a question.

"Exactly because I have no religion, I cannot change it for any other. No. A person can't exchange currency he doesn't possess!"

He came close to me, with smoldering anger. " I didn't ask you, *fratz* (insect)," he thundered at me, like a bolt from the sky.

I froze into a motionless column of flesh. The commandant continued to dress me down. "You fought on the front. You know what it is to suffer. You must still remain behind the front, in the city, for quite a long time—to become an officer and then march to the front. Understand?"

"I beg leave to say, yes, sir!"

"So."

His features suddenly turned into a terrifying monstrosity. "You'll have to throw that entire burdensome Jewish heritage into hell and not stir up the whole world while you're doing it! Understand?"

The devil knows how it happened. But I suddenly straightened up and said defiantly, "I beg leave to say, no, sir!"

"What?" he screamed at me, and without waiting for an answer, he blurted into my face; "About face! March! To the replacement camp! To the front, dog!"

"I beg leave to say, yes, sir! That's no punishment. That's my great reward! I want to die for the Supreme Commander in Chief, His Majesty Emperor Franz Joseph the First."

I left him, saluting as I went.

The next day he sent me to the replacement camp—without the rank of commissioned officer.

When we left the city for the railroad station, I went as a noncom in command of a platoon. For a parade of that kind the whole city turned out. The people knew almost all of the students in the officers' training school, and they were most anxious to see those who had succeeded in winning promotion to the rank of commissioned officer, as well as those who had failed.

As I approached the house of the commandant, I saw him standing at a distance, ready to review the parade. It was the duty of each platoon leader to give the command to salute as we passed the commandant on the pavement.

About a hundred paces beyond the house, I saw the beautiful lady standing with her little son, her eyes red, scrutinizing the marchers. As I drew closer, I noticed that she had covered her face with her handkerchief, while with her other hand she caressed the head of her little boy.

The sight of the commandant suddenly loosed a flood of hatred and loathing. And in one moment I settled with him all my accounts of all Israel, beginning with the exodus from Egypt to his last venomous order to send me to the front ahead of time, because of my loyalty to my faith. I'd pique him a little. Why not? What had I to lose! I decided and acted. When I passed him I did not give my platoon the order to salute.

My platoon was in a dilemma, but passed without according him the customary sign of respect. They did not understand the situation, but without the command no man made a move. What had I to lose?

The situation was both peculiar and terrible. The commandant stood there with his green eyes fastened upon me and my platoon. He stroked his mustache, looked first to one side, then to the other, and raised his arm toward me, as if to make me correct the oversight.

I just wouldn't notice him. What had I to lose?

But when we drew opposite the beautiful lady, to the amazement of all the men on parade, I thundered forth a rasping command.

"Eyes right!"

The platoon straightened up as they passed the beautiful lady, marching with exceptional respect.

Stormy applause broke out along the entire length of the crowded street. It seemed that the street itself was applauding.

The beautiful lady waved her handkerchief and burst into tears, her face torn between smiling and weeping.

When we reached the station, First Lieutenant Print came over to me and stared at me at length, expressing both anger and pity.

"What have you done? Now not even your *Jewish* lieutenant colonel will protect you!" he said, almost in a whisper. "Now you have no hope at all. Now you'll have to go to the front without delay."

Even he seemed to have forgotten the remarks of the commandant. I reminded him.

"I beg leave to say, sir, the front is the supreme reward and not a punishment!"

* * * * *

We sat in the train and rode on. On the way I learned that the lieutenant colonel, the husband of the beautiful woman and the father of that splendid lad, was also a Jew.

CHAPTER XII

The Identification Tag

OUR replacement camp was in the city of Satmar. My first visit in the city was to the local rabbi, Samuel Jordan. Rabbi Jordan was an enthusiastic Zionist, which was unusual for a Hungarian rabbi.

I received a sorrowful welcome. All eyes welled with tears. The war. The front. And especially the rabbi's youngest daughter Hannah, about fourteen. A dark girl, a gorgeous daughter of her people, whose eyes wounded and healed you at the same time. She studied the Bible with her father and knew Hebrew well.

In the eyes of this girl, I was, for the first time, deeply conscious of the horror of approaching death. I was going off, to die there in a clay pit, and she would remain here, grow up, mature, and be gloriously beautiful, without me, forever and ever. I began to feel keenly alive to the war and all its horrors. I had altogether forgotten that I had already been in danger of imminent death, and had been wounded. That seemed like a shadowy, passing event. Only now did the real thing begin. Now the war really began. Little Hannah.

In the replacement camp itself, life began anew for me. Almost all of my comrades appeared as officers, while I was the only idler, a miserable ill-starred wretch, a good-for-nothing. Headquarters turned a few rookies over to me for preliminary instruction in standing, marching, handling a gun and pre-

senting arms. The buck privates were peasants, laborers, and a few city fellows, and all of them looked upon me as a superior creature, to be feared and dreaded. They studied, listened to me reverentially, and were fond of me.

My superior officer, recently promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel, looked askance at the pleasant relationship between me and the soldiers. I was quite lenient with my pupils. Until he came over to me once and said softly, "Why did you collude with them in the chicken thefts? Spit in their faces right away!"

"Spit in their faces? That's a little hard."

But the commanding officer was insistent.

"Spit in their faces, I said! Understand?"

I looked into their faces. Simple fellows, with guileless, sober countenances, studying military tactics and preparing to leave their families behind to die—how could one spit in their faces for no reason at all?

So I did not spit in their faces. What had I to lose?

For that I stood trial and was sentenced to one day's solitary confinement. That meant a narrow, dark room and bread and water. Sleeping on the floor, without cot or pillow.

In prison I had leisure to reflect upon the concept of patriotism. All war fervor burns with love for the Fatherland. The orators preach it, the women seduce their husbands and lovers into dying for the Fatherland, the poets glorify it in verse, and the correspondents at the front report heroic exploits of love for the Fatherland—and they had ordered me to spit in the faces of the candidates for heroism and patriotism! Suppose I should spit into the face of one of them, while his wife and children were looking on?

As I left prison, one of the rookies came over to me before going on duty. A very young chap, strikingly handsome.

"*Herr* Sergeant, we beg of you, all of us, should you again be ordered to disgrace us—please don't hesitate. Disgrace us. An order is an order. It doesn't mean anything. It isn't worth suffering for on our account. Death is worse than disgrace."

"Go to your station, stupid!"

In the evening that same handsome youth, a Magyar about seventeen years old, who had enlisted out of true and simple

patriotism, came to me and said; "Will you please permit me, sir, to be your orderly?"

"When I am an officer, friend. Thanks, very much."

"It doesn't matter," the young tyro insisted, "because it is customary for even officer aspirants to permit themselves the service of an orderly. Unofficially. So. I shall be your orderly. Very gladly. Please."

And he immediately began to arrange my things.

I studied him. Large, deep-blue eyes that shone forth from beneath long black lashes, which shaded their brightness, like the sun rising within a thick forest. I became very fond of him. It was pleasant to be in his company.

From that day, he did not leave. He worked for me, tried hard, was always respectful and under strict discipline, and showed exceptional devotion. Whomsoever I loved, he loved, too, and whomsoever I hated, he, too, hated to the nth degree. Outwardly, he was most genteel, but inwardly I was aware of his strength—a pedigreed dog, faithful and handsome, but with the heart of a lion deep inside of him.

He was in the habit of calling the lieutenant colonel "wild boar" because of his exceptional vulgarity.

It so happened that on my second day in the replacement camp I learned that one basic principle of the army was vulgarity. Shamelessness and trenchant commonness of speech. Above all, one must know how to swear and blaspheme in language that no drunken prostitute had ever dreamed of. The loathsome reviling of everything dear and sacred to man, from his own virtuous mother to the crucifix—and among Jews, the "phylactery strap"—served as a sort of intoxicant, like alcohol, in the war-charged air. By swearing and blaspheming, their hapless suffering and anger were in large measure dissipated. The soul filled with bitterness was to some degree emptied, and the condition of the spirit was improved. Headquarters understood that very well, and it therefore extolled and showered favor upon those who spoke that way, although the *Herr* Lieutenant explained it somewhat differently. That manner of speech, according to his explanation, was necessitated by the urgency of brevity. Instead of searching for words, phrases, and expressions for certain common acts, which people usual-

ly do not mention in nice society, there would come a single word, a simple word, which required no time for reflection and left no room for error. Those instructions had got him into difficulty more than once. There had been occasions when an officer, one of the "four hundred," had gone home on furlough, and while seated with decent people would suddenly use some army expression that would humiliate everyone present. And he would finally flee posthaste back to the replacement camp.

But there was one among us who found it difficult to accustom himself to that manner of speech—a young seminary student, Jakob Margolis. He was a thin, emaciated, dark fellow, short of stature, who spoke Hungarian flawlessly, and patiently endured his afflictions because of his inability to adapt himself to the official swine language. But at the same time he was endowed with the gift of natural humor—an incomparable jester. It was his humor that saved him from suffering real punishment. No one ever saw him laugh—his face was always provokingly serious. But his acts, his gestures, his voice, and his speech made even the wildest beasts among the officers laugh. And that natural faculty lent itself, ultimately, to the manner of the officers, if not in speech, then better (or worse) in deeds. He stripped himself of all sense of shame, in accordance with the wish of the officers, and performed his every act as though desirous of accurately demonstrating what he had to say.

Before long Jakob Margolis was the darling of the entire regiment, and his fame spread throughout our division. Being aware of that, he endeavored to reduce his language to the absurd. As if to say—if you want vulgarity, I'll give it to you!

More than once he was the cause of ruining discipline while the men were on duty. And that was something which involved stiff punishment. To make the rookies laugh while they were on duty—there was no crime greater than that.

"Wait, wait," the captain once said to him angrily, with a forced smile, "just wait! Soon the *Herr* Division Commander will visit us, and just try to clown then! He'll knock your teeth out, you *mamzer!*" (He spoke the word in Hebrew.)

"Why a *mamzer*?" Margolis asked.

"All seminary students are *mamzers,* buttock-lickers, all of them!"

"What do you mean, buttock-lickers?"

"Don't ask questions, you piece of dung! The *Herr* Captain tells you so!"

Four days later the *Herr* Division Commander came to inspect our regiment. We went out into the field for drill, and we performed diligently, industriously, and in expectation of punishment. The commander appeared, stood to one side, and watched us. As we stopped to rest a bit he came over and closely scrutinized Margolis.

"What are you in civilian life?"

Margolis, who had learned the necessity of brevity, replied, "I beg leave to say, sir, a *mamzer*!"

"What is a *mamzer*?" the commander asked.

"I beg leave to say, sir, a buttock-licker!"

"What?" he thundered, storming furiously. "Do you know what you are saying?"

"I beg leave to say, sir, I don't know. A piece of dung like myself is forbidden to ask questions. So the *Herr* Captain tells me."

I looked with trepidation at my captain, and the captain reflected my panicky look, then turned and looked at the commander, who had his eyes fastened upon him. The commander stared for a moment, and then, as though sizing up the entire situation, gave the command: "Resume drilling!"

We resumed. As I lined up my platoon at attention, with my lieutenant in command at my side, the rasping voice of Jakob Margolis suddenly rang out: "*Herr* Captain, I must *go*!"

This was in accordance with orders about the use of military language—instead of speaking in a roundabout way, losing time while requesting permission to care for one's natural needs—one had to speak very briefly, in a single word. And that was the established word.

The captain looked at Margolis for a moment like one vanquished, and said, "Go!"

Margolis ran about one hundred paces and there took care of his needs.

A disguised smile played across the harsh features of the commander.

We continued our drill.

A long time passed, but Margolis did not stir from his place. Only his groans came across the field. The commander was now disgusted with the prank and motioned the captain to bring the rookie back.

"Margolis!" the captain shouted. "Run back!"

Margolis, who knew what discipline meant, suddenly ceased his operations and ran toward us with all his might. He resumed his place in line, his falling pants in one hand, and in the other an empty cornhusk, which he had just used.

This spectacle shocked the commander into a stance of deadly seriousness. Then he adjusted his camera and snapped Margolis in his incredible pose, turned, and left the field.

A few days later the photograph appeared in the army journal as an example of the marvelous regard for discipline displayed by an ordinary rookie.

Margolis was promoted to the rank of lance corporal.

Army language saturated the entire city in which the replacement camp was located, and even the women were not free of its taint. But the children, in particular, absorbed it, and no punishment either in school or at home was of any avail.

Afterwards, everyone became accustomed to it. So there came to be a number of cities in the country, in which the replacement camps had been located, where, should an outsider enter, he would find himself in an altogether different and strange environment.

One fine day I, too, discovered that I, a veteran soldier and a capable underofficer, had succumbed to my environment, despite the fact that I did everything to preserve my civilian character and was unaware of any change at all. The burdens of army life vanished. To drink from the same mug which dozens of gypsies had used, to finish half a cigarette which a friend had left for me, and to eat bread ravenously which had fallen into dirt, without even cleaning it—all of these things became second nature to me, and I did not give them a second thought.

So, too, we became accustomed to the thought of death,

without repining and without recalling the beautiful city, and our warm sweethearts far away.

Suddenly, a minor incident occurred which struck us between the eyes, and made us horribly panic-stricken. The first sergeant gave to each of us a little, hinged locket, made like two small book covers, in which there lay a piece of paper bearing the name, rank, date of birth, and date of joining the service.

This was the identification tag which every soldier hangs around his neck when he leaves for battle. If anyone should find a dead body on the field, he would be able to identify it, report the death to headquarters, and headquarters would inform the relatives.

The identification tags set our hearts a-thumping for a few minutes. The first sergeant distributed them and explained their import to us. We took them in our hands, read what was written in them, then hung them around our necks, under our shirts, with sad thoughts and ashen faces. In our hearts there suddenly rose and floated a panorama of our youthful lives, with all their joys and sorrows.

That moment I felt, for all practical purposes, like a corpse.

The noncom, too, realized how the boys felt.

"This is your diploma, fellows," he said, defiant of death. "All that you have learned and done in your lives up to now—you have done for this. So be careful, fellows. Guard this little tag. Don't cause your relatives any suffering after your death. Why should you be lost without identification?"

We reflected.

He added, severely: "If you should be suddenly searched and this tag is not found on you, you will get three days' hard labor without bread and water! Understand?"

We did not understand. Is it so important to headquarters that we avoid bringing sorrow to the survivors?

When the officer left, Margolis came over to me.

"I'll throw this the hell away. What good is it to me?"

"Why?"

"I have no relatives."

"No relatives at all?"

"No."

"Then what difference will it make to you, if you keep it?"

Margolis pondered for a moment, and then said, as though to himself: "It's worse if they report and there is no one to report to. They report to just an empty grave. Why? There won't even be anyone to say Kaddish for me."

"I'll say it for you," spoke up a middle-aged soldier, who had been put in my platoon a few days before. He was "Uncle" Oestreicher, a Jew about fifty, who had already been a soldier during peacetime and had been drafted as a reservist.

The two soldiers, young Margolis and the older Oestreicher, shook hands and made an agreement—that whoever survived would say Kaddish for the deceased.

"And your own son?" I asked Oestreicher.

"I have none. I had two and both fell in battle last week. Almost on the same day. I have daughters only. And a little grandson."

I was sorry that I had asked him.

* * * * *

The next day my orderly informed me with vengeful glee: "News. The *Herr* Colonel is here. And dressed for action."

I was interested to learn that someone's accusation had brought him there.

As punishment for his "debate" on religion and Judaism with me, he, too, had been ordered to the front before his turn.

He, too, had received the "great reward." In the next advance to come after ours, he, too, would go to the front.

When the *Herr* Colonel saw me, his face became terribly contorted and his mustache began to shake to and fro, like a locust. It was certainly clear to him that I was the cause of his coming there.

In the house of Rabbi Jordan there was a little gathering of friends who had come to say good-by to me. There were a few speeches, too. They spoke in a truly patriotic manner. They spoke of heroism, of courage, and of a hero's death. One lady raised her glass and said, with pathos: "This poet has an exalted fate—to die a hero. His name will be remembered

along with that of the poet Fatiufi (a classic Hungarian poet who fell in the War of the Redemption), and with all the poets who have fallen on the field of honor."

And she raised her glass.

All that time I sat there, listening, and looking at the faces of those people speaking about death, about my death, as if it were a beautiful drama. Finally, I raised my glass and said, "If my death will give you pleasure, I'll do my best to give it to you."

The rabbi, who had been sitting quietly, closed his eyes and leaned on his side. Little Hannah burst into tears and fled into the adjoining room. From there we heard her crying: "Enough! enough!"

They all arose, perplexed and silent. Each one took leave of me, silently ashamed. Withal, someone did express the hope that I would win special distinction. Then the rabbi came over, kissed me on my brow, and said with complete assurance: "You won't die. You will go to Palestine. Right after the war. They're waiting for you there. Remember."

When I was near the door, little Hannah came over to me and said, "You will return with neither decorations nor medals nor citations for heroism. You will come home an ordinary soldier tattered and worn and even—even wounded. But you will return; you will return alive."

She kissed me and again fled to her room.

When I went outside, all that remained in my memory of the speeches were the moist blue eyes of little Hannah and her sweet voice: "You will come home—tattered and worn—but alive."

And the touch of her sweet lips lingered on my cheek.

Suddenly, I recalled the words of the rabbi—to Palestine. Strange. The fine old general had also said something like that to me: "Pray for me at the Wailing Wall."

* * * * *

In the replacement camp everyone was prepared for the advance. The band began to blare, and we stood ready. My orderly gave me a letter—from Mansy. I remembered that I had

sent her a letter in which I had written, "I release you, Mansy, my darling. Live, love, drink, laugh, and forget."

I read the reply. Only two short lines.

Don't release me, idiot! Come home a ragged private, but return! Don't release me! I'm not your wife!

Mansy.

The advance began. I saw my *Herr* Colonel drawing nearer to me. He came over and whispered in my ear: "So! You denounced me? We'll meet again, Jew poet! You won't get away with it! You'll get yours!"

I shook violently, and shouted as loud as I could, to the amazement of everyone in the courtyard. What had I to lose?

"That's no punishment, kind sir! That's the great reward—to die for His Majesty Emperor Franz Joseph!"

Suddenly I heard a voice behind me, shouting in Hebrew.

"Go straight to hell!"

It was the voice of Lance Corporal Margolis, hurling defiance at the colonel.

CHAPTER XIII

The Leper Village

WE traveled towards Galicia. In turmoil and confusion. The noise continued for a day or two—and then the entire contingent seemed suddenly steeped in thought, reduced to silence.

During the journey, our commanding officer came over and showed us some photographs. I looked at the pictures and saw—feet, nothing but feet. Feet of marching soldiers. The officer explained angrily.

"They're cripples, that's what they are! The *Herr* Major photographed your feet while you were marching. You marched like the lame and the halt. It's a shame, a disgrace! Even when you're marching to your death you don't march like men!"

He turned to me. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself? This is the way your platoon marches to the battlefield! A terrible disgrace! Soldiers don't march like that, only ballet masters. I'll teach you men how to march!"

Outrageous! Men marching to their death without knowing the first thing about marching!

After a few days—I had no idea exactly how many—we debarked from the train and continued our journey on foot. Headquarters had ordered us to proceed quietly, cautiously. We drew nearer and nearer to the front. In the distance we heard the muffled roar of cannon and the earth rumbling.

The Galician cities and villages through which we passed were desolate. Everywhere we met pallid people, weary and exhausted by hunger, pleading for a morsel of bread. There were villages, even cities, in which not one house had been left standing whole. Where a house once reared its height, there now stood a stove from which a desolate chimney protruded, like a funneled finger pointing at the ashen sky. On the stove, generally, lay an emaciated cat, nothing but skin and bones, unable to stir from the spot. It either was breathing its last, meowing faintly, or else was stretched out dead.

My orderly came over to a dying, meowing cat and wanted to take it along, but the cat snorted and spat viciously, and scratched at him with all its ebbing strength.

"Don't you know that cats never want to leave a house?" Uncle Oestreicher explained. For this was his second experience on the Galician front.

The mud was ankle deep. The mud of Galicia's black, bleak earth.

The nearer we came to the front, the more numerous were the skeletons of horses, mingled with wrecked wagons and broken wheels.

Not far from the village of Zlato-Lippe we had the good fortune to be greeted by "guests"—bursting shells which missed their mark.

Near the route of our march, about two hundred paces distant, we saw a horse—very gaunt, a bag of bones. It stood motionless. Across the road a pitiful peasant was ploughing his land with the help of his wife and daughter, in place of horses. In the entire vast province there was not another living creature aside from these four.

We stopped a while to catch our breath. I walked over to the horse, bringing him a handful of barley from the ration of our officer's mount. The horse refused the offering. He merely stood there. With his eyes practically closed.

The farmer explained. "It is the horse of some Hussar who fell in battle not far from here and lay there for a few days. The horse would not leave him. I picked up the dead Hussar, brought him to burial—and the horse followed me. This is where I buried him. And since then it is impossible to get the horse away from here."

And he added: "That's a usual sight here. The horse of a Hungarian Hussar will not leave his master. He stands beside him until he drops dead from exhaustion and starvation. This one will also drop like that and die beside his master's grave."

Meanwhile a few more shells had fallen not far from us.

"Aren't you afraid?" I asked the farmer.

"Where can one go? Death lurks everywhere, and one has to die somewhere. This land is mine. Perhaps peace will be declared soon."

He begged us for a piece of bread. He kissed the hem of my coat and apportioned the bread among his wife, his daughter, and himself. As his daughter ate, she kept ogling me. She was ready to go to the village with me if I wanted her to. A peasant daughter of Galicia. Vestiges of beauty and robustness were still recognizable in her. But she was frightfully skinny. The picture of death.

The family ate the bread ravenously, the farmer and his wife denying themselves the luxury of their entire portion. They stored part of it away—the farmer in his pocket, his wife in her bosom. But the girl devoured all of hers and asked for more. With a smile. A horrible smile. Death was smiling and inviting a kiss. A persistent smile directed at me.

"Why didn't you go to war, too?"

"It was enough to have my only son, whom the Jews took to kill in battle."

"The Jews?"

"And who started this war, if not they?"

"I'm a Jew, too, my friend," I told him.

His wife looked at me with her round eyes and crossed herself as she mumbled a prayer. The girl suddenly wiped off her deathly smile and looked at me as though fearfully disappointed. And as the peasant resumed his labor, he said, "Go, in God's name, go!"

I left them and went off with Margolis, who had all this time served as interpreter between me and the peasant. He knew a little Ruthenian.

"Well," Margolis mumbled to himself, "even at the gates of hell, they hate us!"

Our glance fell upon the horse standing with head lowered

over the grave of his dead master, the Hussar. We could not take our eyes from him. A frightful sight. Suddenly, I noticed that the eyes of the entire platoon were fastened upon the horse. And even when we were a long distance away, a great many of us still looked back.

While on the march, field headquarters ordered us to circle to one side, toward the city of Butchatz. We turned off to the right. We marched on and on, fatigued, sweating, our arms dangling, our legs dragging.

On the way, we passed through villages which had lately experienced every phase of warfare. We camped in a large village, almost all of whose houses had gaping holes smashed in them.

Before two hours had passed, a bizarre scene of village life was unfolded before our eyes. The women, small, large and old, walked about, tattered and torn, like sacks of dried bones, constantly licking their lips with their white-coated tongues. Suddenly, we noticed that their dresses, in addition to their tatters, were all marked by a single sizable rent in a spot common to all of them—in front, where the pudenda were.

At first we only smiled.

"It's impossible to cross the street to bring them food, damn them!" my young orderly complained to me, his face flushing crimson with embarrassment.

Our commanding officer was of the opinion that the Russian soldiers had done this when they raped the women. We finally learned that they themselves had rent their garments, in order to ensnare the men. And when they passed a man they pretended to cover the torn spot with their hands with a smile of feigned embarrassment.

A strict order was given to shut the women up in their houses and not allow them to go about on the streets. It was impossible to enforce the order. The women disregarded every command. They feared neither whipping nor prison, nor even death.

As one woman said to me, unaffectedly: "What could be worse than famine? Death? We'll die of starvation in any event."

The only way we could shut them up in their houses was by giving them bread.

The next day headquarters informed us that every last one of them was in an advanced stage of syphilis, and that anyone having contact with them would die by court-martial.

One little girl, about ten, kept walking to and fro in the streets, muttering incessantly: "I'm healthy. I'm not syphilitic. I'm healthy. You can examine me."

Some soldiers and a few officers gathered about her and listened in amazement. Suddenly, one of the divisional under-officers appeared, listened to her for a few minutes, then took out his revolver and shot her, killing her on the spot.

"Miserable poison flower!" he said, and walked away to report his act to headquarters. The lieutenant colonel found the act no cause for punishment. On the contrary, he defended it.

"The entire village should be burned to the ground!" he said. "I'm going to take up this question immediately with general headquarters. They're bound to infect the entire battalion. Such a plague!"

As we stood gazing at the little corpse, a peasant came over to us, a decrepit dotard who muttered in Polish: "The accursed Jewish women began this. They taught our women to become whores. The filthy Jewesses!"

Margolis came over to us, looked at the aged peasant, shook his head, and spoke.

"The filthy Jewesses! Yes, old fellow. The Jewesses."

Then he turned to me.

"Ever since we came here I have been searching for a Jewish house where we could have a Sabbath meal. There isn't a single Jew to be found in the village, for love or money!"

That very day an order came to leave the village.

"A leper village," the lieutenant colonel grumbled with loathing. "Plague and pestilence!"

Margolis walked over to him, stood at attention, and added his comment.

"*Herr* Lieutenant Colonel, I beg leave to say, sir, not a leper village, but a city of whoredom according to Holy Writ."

Lance Corporal Margolis was happy. He had found the appropriate verse.

CHAPTER XIV

In Death's Vestibule

OUR nearest objective was the town Jaszlowietz, a large village near the city of Butchatz. As we passed through Butchatz, I stopped a Jew on the street and asked him where the writer S. I. Agnon lived.

The shriveled, famished Jew eyed me as though I were crazy, then said: "Something to worry about! S. I. Agnon! I wish I knew where I myself live!" And he went on his way, muttering, "S. I. Agnon, S. I. Agnon."

The synagogue was in ruins. I stood in the doorway and looked in. A few Jews were sitting there, studying the sacred texts.

Meanwhile, the cannon from the nearby front had become audible. Before long, shells landed and burst in the city. No panic ensued. People walked about in the streets, weary and steeped in despair, and it was only when they heard the whining of a shell in flight that they lowered their heads a bit, out of habit, and continued on their way.

Our rookies began to sense the wings of death above their heads. We went on, drawing constantly nearer to the town of Jaszlowietz, just behind the lines, which served as a replacement camp. There the soldiers who had completed their training were assembled to await orders.

The shells fell with increasing regularity, although not in great numbers, and without scoring a hit.

It was there that I saw "Uncle" Oestreicher for the first

time offering his devotions in prayer-shawl and phylacteries. I learned that he had never missed a single one of his daily prayers. Even on the march, he would don his prayer-shawl and phylacteries and pray—serenely and with devotion, as was his custom.

"And how will it be on the front, dear friend?"

"What does 'how will it be' mean?" he answered guilelessly. Then he added, cleverly, "Isn't that why our sages of blessed memory established the custom of putting the phylacteries on the left arm? Since we shoot with the right hand, there is obviously an understanding between our sages of blessed memory and His Majesty Franz Josef!"

In the town of Jaszlowietz something new occurred in our lives. To be very faithful to the facts, that something began while we were still en route, as we were marching toward Jaszlowietz. That was the most severe of all the army marches we had experienced. An order had come from headquarters to hurry to the town posthaste. Evidently, the fighting was growing bitter in that sector of the front, and we might be needed there in the immediate future. Hence the forced march. And a forced march was hell. There was no mercy. The entire battalion ran with all its might, not reckoning with anything else, neither with strength nor with distance. Only with time, hard and pressing. To the point of absolute exhaustion. The officers were mounted: we were on foot. And they urged us on just as they did the horses. If it had been permissible to make an outcry, then we, driven like cattle, would have screamed. Except that we were approaching the front. Thus the bitterness continued, stifled in our throats. We were impelled to still further action, shoved by the horses, prodded by the whips and gun butts in the hands of the underofficers, who were in a bad way themselves, barely dragging their legs along as they hurried on. But since it was impossible to accomplish anything of this arduous nature without some sort of outcry, we did venture to whisper hoarsely. We muttered violent curses in impotent wrath.

Amidst these acrid, hoarse whispers, I heard the savage voice of *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel Johann Figer, as he gnashed his teeth.

"Without mercy! Don't spare the men! Men don't cost anything! Only horses have value! Don't spare the rabble! Keep going!"

Herr Lieutenant Colonel Figer had attracted my attention a few days before. He was a handsome Austrian, tall and blond, with black eyes, very elegant; and what attracted my special interest was his exceptionally delicate hands. Ivory-sculptured hands, with thin shapely fingers which reminded me of figured Japanese art. And at times I was reminded of the marvelous, historic hands of the Magyar queen Elizabeth Batori of the Middle Ages, who slaughtered maidens in order to bathe in their "beautifying" blood. The manicure of *Herr* Figer would have taken the first prize in a Parisian art salon. His voice, too, was refined, soft, a resonant baritone, seeming constantly on the verge of bursting into song. His personality conjured up in my mind the image of the Roman Petronius, who charmed mad Nero with his beauty, refinement, and sycophancy. And especially when he was sitting quietly, or standing in an aristocratic, indolent posture discussing science, literature, art, philosophy and love, was he the symbol of a person of breeding and social standing, an exemplar for all men. The jaunty smile never left his lips.

That same smile remained visible even when he was mounted on his horse, speaking and giving commands in the language of the half-krone prostitute of Kertnerstrasse in Vienna. For, once on his horse, *Herr* Figer was metamorphosed into an entirely different person—one scarcely recognizable. That is to say, it was not *he* who changed, only his manner of speech. That very manner, which remained soft, refined, and musical, at such a time adopted a shocking, stunning content. He appeared to be a statue—the statue of *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel Figer, out of which some monstrous apache was speaking. He spoke gently, with an affable smile and incomparable elegance; and with that same gentleness, smile, and elegance he might say, for example, while pointing his whip at Jakob Margolis:

"You, Lance Corporal Margolis, why do you stand there and look at me all the time, as if you were looking lustfully at your own beautiful mother, desirous of infecting her with your Jewish syphilis? Why?"

Or to the lanky Tyrolean: "Listen, you limp phallus! I'll stick you into my mare's womb—perhaps that will make you stiffen up and stand straight, as His Majesty's soldiers should."

There were times when immediately after such talk he would dismount and join us in a discussion of the light that Bergson's philosophy sheds on the psychology of laughter.

Only one thing made us rather suspicious of him as a soldier. He, too, limped. An officer who limps is either a hero or the very opposite—he is suspected of having wounded himself in order to go to the hospital on furlough. And as fate would have it, it was the lanky Tyrolean, who had previously served on the front with Figer, who aroused this suspicion in us.

He would whisper to us: "He fears death even more than vulgarity. He, too, put his pistol in his pocket and shot himself in the leg. We know that."

Figer's outpourings would rile us more than anything else in our service. While the other officers always tried to temper the stringency of military rule and cover up its cruelty by pleading military justification for our hardships, *Herr* Figer did the very opposite. He elevated them to injunctions to be observed for their own sake—cruel orders for the sake of cruelty, and torture for the sake of torture.

"A soldier who doesn't suffer is no soldier," he used to say, with a saccharine smile. "I'll make you eat human dung to make you civilized, charming rabble!"

At that moment I recalled what I had forgotten during all my previous sufferings: *Herr* Figer was the officer in the replacement camp who ordered me to spit in the faces of my rookies while on duty.

As the danger of death drew nearer and nearer, *Herr* Figer became more and more cruel. I was reminded of the practice of the jungle, that during a thunderstorm wild animals huddle together for protection; the boa constrictor with the stag, the jackal with the parrot, and the leopard with all the rest. And now *Herr* Figer disproved this law. Every whining shell constricted his eyelids and contracted his thick lips into some cruel order, which he sought to back up by an order from headquarters. On the contrary, headquarters actually cau-

tioned the officers to be on good terms with the rank and file.

Nevertheless, this order, "not to spare the men because they have no cash value," he really inherited from his royal highness, the late Austro-Hungarian Crown Prince Franz Ferdinand, who had been killed in Bosnia shortly before the outbreak of war. The crown prince was notorious as the "iron general," and this order was truly in his spirit, but its practical realization under *Herr* Figer might have given pause even to a ruler of iron.

Above all, *Herr* Figer gave Uncle Oestreicher no respite. This veteran simply frightened him. To forbid Oestreicher his customary daily prayers in prayershawl and phylacteries either did not occur to him, or else he did not dare to go so far. On the front, and in the army in general, prayer was considered a great virtue. It was almost on the same plane with vulgarity. They both seem to have the same psychological basis —both act as a sort of stimulant. Instead of drinking to the point of intoxication, soldiers dispel their suffering and anger with vulgarity. And similarly with prayer. Nevertheless, the very praying of Oestreicher stirred *Herr* Figer to pay especial attention to the veteran. And during the terrible forced march, *Herr* Figer suddenly ordered the man to run before his horse. This did not seem to be much of a punishment, because the *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel's horse did not generally outrun the regiment, but would trot along abreast of us. But *Herr* Figer, nevertheless, would constantly trot back and forth to check up on the progress of the regiment en marche, and to see that no one surreptitiously threw something out of his knapsack in order to lighten the oppressive burden. On such occasions Oestreicher would run before the horse until he was on the point of dropping from sheer exhaustion. That was a really amusing sight—a veteran about fifty years old, a Jew with a little pot belly, with a goatlike beard and parchmentlike face, furrowed with worry over earning his daily bread, his knapsack dangling about him, his coat folded diagonally across his body, with gun and cartridge belt, running before the horse, puffing and groaning, bathed in sweat, his feet sinking into the ankle-deep mud and flopping loudly, like a dog lapping water. He ran and the horse snorted and

breathed upon him through its fine, steaming nostrils—onward, onward, Jew!

Not one of us understood how it was that this elderly, broken Jew, stumbling along in the slimy, sticky mud, did not fall from exhaustion. What mysterious power kept his soul in that body and prevented it from departing?

Herr Figer gradually also influenced the other officers for the worse. Those with whom we came in contact in the course of our duties were: Lieutenant Colonel *Herr* Figer; First Lieutenant *Herr* Stubniak, of a Slavic family in Hungary; and the commandant of the replacement camp, a manifest fool, who under no circumstances would permit anyone to speak with him about anything but women and dogs. And he had no real understanding of even these matters.

"A beautiful woman, what? A beast! *Canaille!* Like a beautiful bitch!" he used to say, smiling gravely, whenever they mentioned a woman.

And on the other hand:

"A pretty dog, what? A sacrament! Like a beautiful woman!"

Next to him, Lieutenant *Herr* Joni, an officer with Jewish features which filled us with genuine revulsion whenever they delineated cruelty. Ultimately we learned that he really was an apostate Jew.

"About such Jews as these," the scrawny Tyrolean said to me with sincerity, "it is truly possible to believe that they belong to that sect which slaughters Christian children for Passover."

Upon scrutinizing the arrogant, puffed up, dictatorial features of *Herr* Joni, I began to reflect; and then I replied to the thin, naive Tyrolean: "Right, my friend. If there ever were Jews whom priests could hire to do things like that, then they would have been of his ilk." And to this he nodded assent.

Among the rest of our officers was the color-bearer *Herr* Segedi, an intelligent, quiet Magyar who, having been graduated from the university and become a notary, had since then borne himself with provincial pride. He was accustomed to have the farmers address him deferentially with their dirty,

greasy hats in their gnarled old hands. Next was the dwarflike officer, the color-bearer *Herr* Sliezak, a young Czechoslovak with a chubby, rose-red face, spry as a Chinaman and always ready either to give an order or to obey one. The soldiers nicknamed him "Jumping Jack." He was really the most sympathetic officer of all and yet oddly enough he aroused suspicion simply because rumors had begun to circulate concerning "Czechoslovakian treachery," based on the movement for Czech freedom. That movement aroused great astonishment amongst us, because the Czech regiments boasted a tradition of loyalty to Austria and to Emperor Franz Josef, originating with Crown Prince Franz Ferdinand, who used to call those regiments "my Czechs." In truth, he had shown more confidence in them than in the Austrian regiments. But among journalists this favoritism was given a more human explanation. The wife of the Crown Prince, Countess Sophia Chotek, had been a Czech, and she had planted in his heart an affection for her people and its troops. But a person in an army uniform utterly despises journalists who prattle without any basis in fact, and especially such idle gossip as that. Then suddenly there came reports about the treason of "my Czechs." That was why we became rather suspicious of the dwarfed officer, who doubtlessly wanted to conceal his secret plots under the cloak of sympathetic attachment and affection.

There were still other officers and underofficers who learned from their superiors how to walk about haughtily, contemptuous of the plain soldiers. Slowly, we became accustomed to seeing them strut about with feet wide apart as though they suffered from a venereal disease, stepping haughtily, flexing their knees as they walked, striking their boots with their crops, and speaking through their noses.

"Rabble! Miserable rabble! Civilians!"

Referring to us as civilians was just about the worst of all insults. A civilian meant a defective, a good-for-nothing, a coward, a fool, a most worthless person.

Of course, among these officers there also strutted the main pillars of His Majesty's army, the first sergeants themselves. Their rule was much harsher than that of the officers. Indeed, they were there to see that the officers' orders were carried out. The soldiers used to call them "carcass strippers." One

of these first sergeants paid special attention to insignificant me. In this I was no exception. Every first sergeant naturally hates cadet officers, despite the fact that he knows the day will come when he will have to stand at attention before them and take their orders. Or, perhaps, just because of this, he avails himself of a final opportunity to display his authority and power. Nevertheless, the first sergeant is not afraid that within a short time this cadet officer will show him the pleasure of his authority. The first sergeant has a tried and tested system of defense—he diverts the anger and hatred of the cadet who has become an officer in another direction, toward the soldiers. In this he is almost completely successful, for there the field to show one's authority and act abusively is much greater, since he is only one and the soldiers are many.

But my first sergeant outdid the tradition in his hatred of me. Perhaps because I was a Jew, perhaps because he was certain that the *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel would not permit me to advance on account of my religion, and also because at bottom he felt that even if I should sometime or other become an officer, I would not pour my wrath upon the heads of the soldiers and make them the customary scapegoats.

The officers' whips behind the firing line in Jaszlowietz began pounding on their boots with still more pride and ambition. "In order to accustom the men to suffering on the front and toughen their hearts for war" they devised all sorts of schemes for military instruction. First Lieutenant Erich Stubniak, who happened to be a professional athlete, ordered some of his men to run a distance of about two hundred yards, back and forth. At either end of the course he placed a first sergeant, and as a runner reached one of the sergeants, he was required to pronouce all the titles of the king, clearly, seven times without a mistake:

"Allerhoest Kriegsherr, Seine Majestät Kaiser und Koenig Franz Joseph *der Erste!"*

That was the especial task of the Magyars who found it more difficult to pronounce the full German title than to eat frogs, and who hated him even without this linguistic ordeal. What is more, they hated the German language even more than the first sergeant.

Lieutenant *Herr* Joni made one of his soldiers eat five cig-

arettes because he had not thrown away his cigarette when the officer brusquely stopped to speak to him.

The shy color-bearer *Herr* Segedi made his orderly drink from a spittoon, as punishment for once spitting upon the floor of his room. The wretch vomited green sputum.

The officer called "Jumping Jack" caught a deserter who tried to escape during the night, but before he turned him over to the court-martial, he contrived his own punishment for the culprit. He bound and seated the unfortunate under a faucet which dripped, drop by drop, upon his head all night. The next day, when the man appeared before the court-martial, he was madly gnawing the skin of his hand.

This good-natured officer had altered his behavior out of fear, for he saw that cordial relations with his men aroused suspicion. Everyone thought him fearful lest his sympathy with the secret movement for the liberation of the Czech people be unexpectedly detected. Hence he began to imitate the other officers closely.

All this under the rule and authority of Lieutenant Colonel *Herr* Figer, who was Provisional Judge-Advocate-General behind the lines. In the end it was discovered that the unfortunate victim had never even dreamed of deserting to the enemy, but that color-bearer *Herr* Sliezak had made the charge according to the defending statement of *Herr* Figer, "as a cautious and conscientious officer, in order to prevent the occurrence of any possibility of such desertion."

And all this in death's vestibule, in the common danger, in the domain of imminent hell, where any minute anyone might be struck, pitch forward, stretch out, and die. One of us remarked in a whisper that he did not understand who had suddenly begot these wild animals for us. To this my young orderly replied: "Wild animals? What beast does such things? A beast does not hate for the sake of hating. A wild animal merely wants to eat."

My young orderly generally went about his business quietly, performing his duties in exemplary fashion. But meanwhile he would guard me like the apple of his eye, and would bring me all the news of what was going on among the officers. He got this information in the officers' kitchen, where he met the

other orderlies. Hence he bore in his bosom a deep-seated grudge and a hatred bitter as death toward anyone with an officer's insignia on his collar. Once he came and revealed a secret to me.

"*Herr* First Lieutenant Stubniak proclaims that you will never become an officer, sir!"

"That's not your concern, Pauli!" I replied.

He fumed with restrained anger. "Good! What concern is it of mine?" And he walked off sullenly.

I called after him: "Why are you so afraid? You'll find another officer to serve in place of me!"

At this he straightened up on the threshold, uncoiled and burst out with unrestrained fury: "Sir, don't pack me off to others! I'm not a whore!" And he turned to go. But again he stopped and added: "I won't serve hares who pretend to be wolves! There isn't one among them who deserves to have even the most insignificant medals pinned upon his cowardly breast. Why even his majesty the pig (a nickname for the lieutenant colonel) hasn't the cheap *signum ludis* for active service. Instead, he limps. A revolver shot in his pocket!"

The *signum ludis* (badge of honor) is made of bronze and is the commonest medal an officer can receive.

That very evening *Herr* First Lieutenant Stubniak hailed me before him and forbade me the use of an officer's orderly. In vain did I explain that my orderly did not, like the others, exempt himself from the regular military duties, but that he had volunteered to serve me without neglecting his regular duties. But he thundered in his crackling voice: "If he ever again cleans even one of your shoes, you'll get solitary confinement—and he'll be tethered to the wall!"

That would mean tying him to the wall on tiptoe for hours.

A few minutes later my orderly brought me my supper and, upon learning of the new order, stood at attention before me and shouted: "*Herr* Color-Bearer! I beg leave to say, sir, I will not leave you!"

"Come now, fool!" I said to him. "It is against the rules to address anyone by a title of rank that does not belong to him!"

"*Herr* Color-Bearer! I beg leave to say, sir, tomorrow we

shall enter the frontline, and there the authority will belong to us and not to these sons of rabbits!"

I scarcely had time to eat my supper when the order came: "To the front at four in the morning!"

They ordered us to lie down and sleep until that hour. Quietly. My platoon was quartered in a large granary with a shattered roof, through which the stars peeped down upon us. Stars twinkling, far away.

We lay down to sleep. My orderly had tucked me in tenderly like a devoted mother. With the approaching danger, this young Magyar became more and more attached to me.

There was stony silence. Then, suddenly, the rumbling of cannon in the distance. The noise kept drawing nearer and nearer. I arose and hurried to my commanding officer, Lieutenant Joni, to see if there was an order of any kind. He was sleeping in a bed. To my question he replied almost angrily.

"Go on! Go to sleep! What do you want of me? Things don't depend upon me, but upon the Russians!"

Strange. A genius of an officer. It depends upon the Russians! I could not contain myself.

"If it depends upon the Russians, then it's too bad for us!" When I was at the door I saw him raise his head from the pillow and stare angrily at me.

Upon my return I did not find my orderly. I had scarcely lain down—without undressing, of course—when he reappeared.

"Why are you prowling around at night?"

"I also wanted to learn a little strategy and find out upon whom this affair really depends, upon us or upon the Russians!"

He spit profusely. "Tfu!"

He had followed me and overheard my conversation with the officer.

He lay down again, muttering angrily.

"You are looking for trouble, sir. Why do you have to get up and go outside?"

"You're a fool, Pauli. Do you think that here in the granary the danger is less than on the outside or anywhere else?"

Again he was quiet. They were all asleep. Suddenly, the

muffled roar of a Russian cannon (the Russian guns sounded different from ours), was followed by a thunderous whine which nearly burst our eardrums. It grew constantly louder, and winging like the angel of death over our granary a shell exploded beyond.

The sleepy heads rose and stared at one another.

"Welcome!" said the simple, scrawny Tyrolean. *"Drastuteh!"* (A perversion of the Russian word *Zdrastvityeh,* meaning *hello.*)

"To hell with you!" someone answered. "They don't even let a fellow dream about the stars!"

After this first shell, another and still another. I looked about me. I noticed that every last man in the platoon had covered himself with his blanket, drawing himself together and rolling up under it like a porcupine—to hide from the exploding shells!

The lanky Tyrolean, looking like a bear rolled up into a ball, prepared for his winter sleep, exclaimed from beneath his covering: "There is nothing in the world that will protect you from a Russian shell like a blanket!"

CHAPTER XV

My Man Friday

AT three they woke us. To the front!

It was strange. This was my second time at the front. Yet, despite this, the feeling was new and the fear was new. Then everything had happened in a flash. Quickly, in haste and confusion, so that I had no time to learn what was actually happening. Then the entire affair, beginning with the "Hottentot trip" and the attack on the Cossacks in the Carpathians, to the time of my passing out and entering the hospital—all was like a bad dream, like a nightmare in a storm, ending with a tender-faced, blue-eyed nurse, who smiled at me and caressed me as they do in paradise.

But here was an entirely different situation. We entered a covered trench, its openings looking toward the covered trench of the enemy. It took me but a moment to estimate that this trench was hundreds of kilometers long. From Tchernowitz to Riga. That was all.

At exactly four o'clock we entered—by a deep path leading practically from the village to our trench—amid a hailstorm of deadly shot and shell.

After we got inside we looked at one another. Nothing had happened; we were all here. And our faces were happy and satisfied. As though we were safe in the fortress of Przemysl. We were already accustomed to the thunderous noise above our heads, as though there were an agreement between us

and the Russians to shoot only *above* the trench and *behind* our line.

For the present we did absolutely nothing. We waited for an order. In the meantime they divided us into squads, making me responsible for thirty men. I introduced myself to my new group and immediately recognized some fine fellows with whom one would gladly die. I do not know how it happened, but I suddenly found standing before me Uncle Oestreicher and Lance Corporal Margolis. I was happy with them. And I had more acquaintances to greet. There, too, was the tall, thin, ingenuous Tyrolean, who smilingly announced: "*Herr* Sergeant! Johan Maria Braedl, infantryman, begs leave to report, sir, that there is nothing to report!"

I shook his hand warmly and embraced him. My head came exactly up to his flat chest.

The screeching thunder above us did not cease. I examined the rest of the men. There was the stunted Serb, the half-Magyar and half-Serbian bastard from the province of Banat, whose face was full of scars made by human beings—cuts and bites. One of his ears had been snipped short by a bite. He was already famous in the press as one who in a bayonet encounter would throw his gun away and attack his enemy by biting, clawing and choking.

"*Herr* Sergeant! Laslo Kraytchan, infantryman, begs leave to report, sir, I am already an old fossil, twice wounded!"

"Good, my friend. I see."

Next I saw the giant Croatian with the gold medals on his chest. He spoke Hungarian ungrammatically, but under no conditions would he utter any other language. A Magyar at all costs! And he was peeved because he was not lucky enough to be conscripted with the "Army for the Defense of the Fatherland," consisting entirely of Magyars, but had to serve in the joint Austro-Hungarian army. If he were to die, he wanted to die as a Magyar only. He was the first to impress upon me the astounding, marvelous strength of the Magyar people, which is without peer anywhere.

He approached. "*Herr* Sergeant! Franz Rizitch, infantryman, begs leave to ask if it is possible to transfer me to the

32nd regiment of Honveds (those who defend the Fatherland)!"

"You don't want to die with me, Rizitch?"

"I beg leave to say, sir, I want to, but . . ."

"I know, I know, my friend. Good. If you should die, we'll bury you with your Magyar countrymen."

He lowered his thick nose, which resembled a trumpet.

And there was fat Rosenberger. He was built like a barrel, very young, about nineteen, and teeming with jokes. For every misfortune he had a joke or a proverb. And it was impossible to shut him up. He had enlisted for war service and had already advanced to the rank of corporal.

"*Herr* Sergeant! Corporal Bernat Rosenberger begs leave to report, sir, at your orders, sir!"

"Good. But don't bother us with your stories now."

Rosenberger's face broke into a broad smile.

"I beg leave to say, sir, it is difficult to renounce joking on the front. The hangman Bali once asked one of the victims what was his last wish. To this the latter answered that he wanted to hear a good joke! So the hangman told him this joke."

"Which joke?"

"I beg leave to say, sir, the one I have just told!"

A few shells whined their way over the trench and froze the mouths which were about to laugh into crooked molds.

Next, Lance Corporal Andrash Madi, infantryman—"Beg leave to say, sir, I am an artist of the National Theater in the city of Debretzin!"

"What roles have you played?"

"Butler parts."

Suddenly one heard the voice of rotund Rosenberger who, as corporal, ventured to speak without asking permission.

"He switched the lights on and off in *Hamlet!*"

This called forth a loud, vulgar, belly laugh. The actor reddened with anger. He ground his teeth.

"Who are you?" I asked the fellow who was laughing. He was a big, swarthy soldier.

"I beg leave to say sir, Benvenuto Ghalierghi, infantryman!"

"Italian?"

"Yes, from Fiume."

"Why did you laugh?"

"In *Hamlet* there is no electricity, sir. The entire play takes place during the daytime!"

"Aha! During the daytime! And if it should take place at night?"

The Italian had no answer.

"What is your occupation at home?"

"A shoemaker. But I am also an expert leather worker."

I had time to become acquainted with two more of this Austrian gathering of exiles. One of them was a student—a cadet-officer who, like myself, had not succeeded in attaining the rank of officer, not even that of lance corporal. He was a fop, coquettish as a woman, and might even have used lipstick. The other was a sculptor who already had his work on exhibition. His name was a familiar one. Scarcely had I begun to converse with him, when panic struck us—an attack!

The battle was bitter and cruel. For about two days the barrage continued, and then came the hand-to-hand encounter with bayonets. The Russians retreated and we captured a few of their trenches. On the fourth day we reached the city Tchenstochovo, which we captured after a bloody battle that cost us a heavy toll of men.

We put up fortifications around the city and prepared for a rest. I examined my squad. Six men had fallen and two were severely wounded. When I announced the names of the fallen, deep silence charged with terror reigned among the men. I kept walking back and forth during this oppressive silence, when I suddenly heard the simple Tyrolean say in a half-serious, half-jocular tone: "They're well off. They no longer have a first sergeant."

I suddenly noticed our own first sergeant standing at one side, listening attentively. He approached me with the cushioned steps of a leopard stalking its prey.

"You're spoiling the troops. Be careful!"

Then he went over to the Tyrolean, coming so close that his mustache fairly brushed the man's face. He gritted his teeth.

"You'll eat a few more rats before you get rid of the *Herr* First Sergeant!"

In the course of the account of this battle which I had to give headquarters, it was my duty to name a few men who had distinguished themselves by exceptional heroism and daring. Among them were Margolis, Oestreicher, and the Tyrolean. Margolis, the shriveled seminary student, kept bobbing up here and there in the midst of the turmoil like an angry, provoked bee whose hive has been attacked by hornets. Several times it was necessary to hold him back, to prevent him from plunging into the Russian lines all by himself, with nothing but his gun, which he kept reloading with marvelous speed.

Old Oestreicher, of course, did not forget to pray in his phylacteries, even though this time without his prayer shawl —but in the meantime he fought fearlessly. And he joined the "pagans" in shouting words of encouragement and triumph "for our people and for the cities of our God! In thy help do I trust, O Lord!"

I transmitted this information in my report in German translation.

The lean, simple Tyrolean had roved about in the thick of the battle like a tank, crossing every obstacle, every pit and broken fence, while he lighted cigarette after cigarette, and muttered angrily!

"*Verfluchtes Bis!* Accursed vermin!"

When I handed the report to my officer, *Herr* Joni, he looked at it, read it, and tore it to pieces.

"Don't be in such a hurry, my friend," he said with narrowed eyes. "Do you think that wars are fought only for medals?"

He thwacked his boots with his whip and left me. As he was departing he turned back and said, "Make a simple report without any frills or hero stories. And within half an hour, drill!"

So about a half hour later drill in military tactics began. Right on the front. That was something entirely new to me. I had never heard of such a thing in my life, that in the trenches, in the vestibule of death, they should continue drill-

ing, marching properly, standing at attention, reviewing the titles of "the supreme commander in chief, His Majesty Emperor Franz Josef the First," and everything else that had to do with it. And in truth these were not mere drills. For the cruel tricks and pranks employed behind the lines began all over again. The running back and forth, eating cigarettes, and all the other clever schemes in the jaws of death were made even more rigorous and ingenious. Except that the plain soldiers acted entirely differently here. A sort of jesting spirit reigned over the entire line. It was difficult for me to comprehend whence these good spirits originated. Evidently, the plain men bore the abuses of the officers with an inner smile in which there was more of scorn and contempt than pain. The wiry, naive Tyrolean was ordered to run back and forth twenty times in the trench, and, finally, when he had finished the twentieth lap, he did not stop but continued to run. The first sergeant shouted after him, but to no avail. He did not stop until the sergeant halted him forcibly. And when he stopped his lips continued to mumble innocently, "Fourteen, fourteen, fourteen!"

"Fourteen what, idiot?"

"Fourteen!" the Tyrolean answered with feigned naivete, "the fourteenth time! I have to run six more times, *Herr* First Sergeant," he lied, with a completely serious mien.

Whereupon all his mates dared to break into restrained laughter. This was poison to the "stripper of carcasses."

"Wait, wait!" he said, gritting his teeth. "I'll teach you military etiquette!" And he went off, looking back at me with an expression boding no good.

When he left, there was a rest period. All the men sat down. The stories began of the three-day battle in which Margolis, the Tyrolean, and Uncle Oestreicher had so distinguished themselves. The report of their heroism spread through the entire battalion. And they waited for the citations of merit and the awards for all three. Something else began to interest me. What had given these men the courage to fight like lions and with such self-abandon? In a private conversation with Margolis I questioned him about it. He answered me simply.

"How do I know? In such a panic we're forced to do some-

thing! What do you suppose? Stand and look? Or stand and order others about, like *Herr* First Lieutenant Stubniak?"

Oestreicher explained the situation to me as follows:

"I think that the main objective is Warsaw. If we capture Warsaw, we'll go home. My grandson will be Bar Mitzvah within a month, and I simply must be there. He is already learning a very fine speech. He's a lively and frolicsome lad!"

I asked the Tyrolean why he kept shouting constantly, *"Verfluchtes Bis!"* And with such rage. And did he really hate the Russians so much?

"The Russians?" he answered. "It was the first sergeant who got me angry. He is the accursed vermin *(Verfluchtes Bis),* the devil take his hide!"

Again I remembered that word with which they set off all wars—patriotism.

The actor Madi—who did not know that I was a Jew—poured out all his wrath upon the Jews.

"Even there in the theater they gave me butler parts," he said resentfully. "And here they are recommended for decorations. That rotten Jew,"—he was referring to Margolis—"kept jumping up all the time to perform deeds of valor in order to win a medal. And sir, you will see, he'll get one. He'll get one. He won't rest until they decorate him. Sir, you must have heard—for the Jews are already noising it abroad—that this latest victory of ours was due to the Jewish officers. Officer Schlesinger! I know him. He is a Jewish teacher who is afraid of his own shadow. And all of a sudden they speak of him as a hero. And Margolis," he again referred enviously to his companion, "that rotten Margolis, that *'ai-vai-vai!'* " He made a grimace, and spat.

"Why do you hate him so?" I asked.

"Hate that choleric dog? Who hates him? People like that you can't even hate. You can only loathe them!"

When I revealed to him the fact that I was also a Jew, he was not taken aback. Like a person who no longer has anything to lose, he showed his true colors and said with bold brevity: "I have no luck. Even here I have fallen into the hands of a Jew."

That same day he stood at the side of the first sergeant, who took him under his benevolent wing and thought up schemes of reprisal.

The first was to take away my orderly, who returned to me, much to the distress of my superior officer. That was really a rather hard nut to crack. Because this orderly was like an ordinary soldier in every particular, not like officers' orderlies, who are exempt from the customary military duties. And when the first sergeant ordered him to leave me, he replied: "*Herr* First Sergeant, I beg leave to say, sir, I volunteered to serve in the army, and I also volunteered to serve the *Herr* Sergeant of my own free will! I do this not at the expense of my military duties, but in addition to them!"

But *Herr* Lieutenant Joni found a way out. He took him as his own orderly.

Whereupon the Tyrolean appeared and announced to me: "Today I'll bring you your meals, sir."

I felt a bit strange to have this giant soldier, who was a head taller than myself, serve me. But this situation did not last very long. My orderly came and informed me, without making any secret about it, in fact, in a rather loud voice: "On the first night I'll dedicate one of His Majesty's bullets to him!"

"To whom, boy?"

"To that apostate Jew! Why do you have such contemptible Jews as these? I loathe him."

"Sh-sh-sh! Don't shout, fool! And if you ever let me hear words like these again, I'll knock your brains out! Understand? About face! March!"

The young soldier drew himself up to attention and left.

And just because he left me without saying a word, suspicion and fear arose in me. He'll keep his word. This young Magyar, faithful as a dog and courageous as a lion, doesn't beat around the bush. And especially lately, after he had had a taste of death, he had become completely emancipated from fear and hindrance. He guarded my honor like an intelligent Doberman-Pinscher dog, who even at a distance gets wind of the plots of his master's enemy. Every personal offense against me, the slightest hint of anything insulting, he absorbed like

poison, which continued to fester until upon occasion it burst forth. With him this rose to a mighty hatred of the officer Joni and of the enemies of Israel in general, so that I became rather suspicious of his own origin.

"Listen, Pauli, aren't there any Jews in your family?"

The youth looked at me and answered naively: "I am a pure Christian, sir. There is no Judas Iscariot in our family!"

"So?" I continued cautiously. "You think that all Jews are betrayers of your Messiah, and are thus to be despised?"

The youth did not know what to do with himself. He did not understand anything at all of what I had asked him. How could he know what I asked him? That's the way they taught him—"Judas Iscariot." And in particular he did not understand the connection between his underofficer and Judas Iscariot. His underofficer he loved more than the entire battalion. And he would not permit anyone to offend him with any improper language. I continued to question him.

"Do you hate Margolis?"

"I, sir? Why should I hate him?"

"And Uncle Oestreicher?"

"On the contrary, I love him. He prays for us all."

"And Corporal Rosenberger?"

At this point the youth finally grasped the reason for my questions.

"Do you think, sir, that I am an anti-Semite? No. My father is a tenant-farmer of *Herr* Baron Freund-Tosegi. Would that there were a man like him among the Christians. But, sir, if you suspect me of being an anti-Semite," he added confusedly, "then—then I'll leave you, if you wish it, sir."

I reassured him that I was very anxious to have him as my friend and orderly, but that the *Herr* Lieutenant wanted him for his own service only.

The youth reflected for a moment and then spoke, half to himself.

"It won't take long. Only," he added, "we must beware of that 'stripper of carcasses'! He is a foul snake. We have to be careful of him."

Then he went to his new master, Lieutenant Joni.

That very same evening an order came from the first lieu-

tenant appointing me quartermaster in charge of supplies for my entire platoon. I did not understand why they should have selected me, of all people. That is always the business of the first sergeant. And while I was reflecting, my orderly came in and whispered to me: "Sir, please don't accept this charge. It isn't clean."

"You're a fool!"

"I may be a fool, but this business isn't clean. Please find some reason for being excused from it, sir. I'm telling you."

I could find no reason for not obeying the order. I became the officer in charge of stores. Really not an easy job, but not the hardest work on the front. And the work was done in good order. My men were especially happy. They were "near the feedbag," they thought. And to a certain extent this was so. Two things are taken for granted in the army as proper. Just as it is a capital crime to steal on the front, to steal from the adjoining regiment is in the category of a meritorious deed. And secondly, if the appropriation of goods for one's own benefit involves a stiff penalty, the distribution of generous portions to one's own men is in the category of a good quality, self-evident and to be taken for granted.

But my orderly, who used to sneak over to me at every opportunity, was not satisfied with my new duties. It was in vain that I asked him for the reason. He knew nothing, but he had a premonition of something very bad, and this bad thing would come to me (or in his own words "to us") as a result of the new appointment.

Two days later hell broke loose again—the great offensive along the entire front. Scarcely had the tumult and the firing begun, when my orderly appeared and informed me, deferentially: "*Herr* Sergeant, I beg leave to say, sir, I have returned to you!"

"Go right back! Understand?"

"I beg leave to say, sir, I won't go, sir!" he shouted above the noise and confusion.

Behind me I heard a voice, the voice of the Tyrolean, shouting: "*Nicht lassen, nicht lassen, 'Freitag'!*" ("Don't leave him, don't leave him, 'Man Friday'!")

We crawled out of the trench—toward death.

CHAPTER XVI

The "Thief"—
Target in the Pit of Hell

THERE was nothing strange about the friendly feeling that the ordinary soldiers felt for me. For in addition to the spiritual community that existed under the black wings of death, I also established a sort of martial sodality. I turned over all my possessions—my entire pay and the many gifts (mostly chocolates, bonbons, and cigarettes, which I received from the city in great abundance) to my comrades in death. There were some among them who sent the chocolates to their sweethearts and the few pennies to their mothers. For a few pennies to send home to his mother, the simple Magyar would at the same time play the dog and the lion.

But gradually this relationship began to make all the officers hate me. A hatred which apparently was even mightier than death itself. And if this mutual esteem which existed between my soldiers and myself had already begun back there in the barracks—when I refused to obey the lieutenant colonel's order to spit in their faces—then here, in the very jaws of death, it was renewed and transformed into true affection. As for me, money had no value. For me death was so certain that I was conscious of only one feeling: When? One thing surprised me very much: How the officers spruced up in their

smartest, even at the front, whenever the slightest opportunity for rest presented itself. Their entire pay, whether large or small, they would spend for uniforms and personal gadgets. At their head was the genteel *Herr* Figer—who lacked nothing but earrings. He was completely ornamented with gold rings set with precious stones, while about each wrist was encircled a costly platinum-plated bracelet set with precious stones; while the plain solders used to send their wretched pay home, pennywise, one to his aged mother, another to his wife, a third to his sister, and a fourth to his sweetheart, probably waiting for him back there with eyes swollen with hope and sorrow.

Under these circumstances our communal acts were anathema to the officers, who could take no other steps than to transfer my men every week. This was efficiently supervised by the young lieutenant with the Jewish features, *Herr* Joni, who was constantly on the watch. As my superior officer, his hatred for me had another and special reason; everyone knew that I was a Jewish writer and a Zionist. And he actually trembled with fear lest his comrades discover that he was an apostate. His particular fear was that they might, God forbid, promote me to the rank of commissioned officer. And to avert this there was only one remedy—an excellent army remedy: to punish me for some act of carelessness. If the mere accusation was sufficient to hold me in my present rank, how much more effective would actual conviction be?

This battle lasted ten terrible days, ten shocking days that occasioned great casualties in the vicinity of Tchenstochov. But it brought much news to our regiment. The Jewish officers, almost without exception, had proved themselves to be men of incomparable daring. Every important gain, the capture of some important hill, some forest, village, or Russian battery, several cannon and the taking prisoner of high-ranking Russian officers—most of these valorous deeds had been accomplished by Jews and the rest by Hungarian officers. In no instance did the Austrians have a hand in them. It was a coincidence, but a fact, nonetheless. The devil's work. And because of this, the heretofore restrained, undercover hatred of the Austrian officers became an impetus to open demon-

stration. Things came to such a pass that one Jewish officer, Captain Neumann, was suddenly called up for court-martial after an exceptionally victorious sally, because when he was left with his orderly and six men, the last survivors of the encounter, the eight of them not only drove a Russian battalion from its entrenched position, but also brought back heavy cannon, together with the Russian lieutenant colonel. The charge was stupid, most ridiculous and shocking. "Wasting ammunition" (that is to say, the victory was not worth the bullets expended.) And more: "He used his orderly as a shield to protect himself."

The report spread through the camp like a swift wind. Captain Neumann had been a teacher in his home town, having completed his studies in the only Jewish teachers' institute in the country, in Budapest, as a pupil of both Professors Bacher and Banotzi. *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel Figer was to preside at the court-martial. But in the meantime, during this very battle, some insignificant thing occurred, to which no one except my young orderly paid any attention. Lieutenant Colonel Figer had selected the apostate, Lieutenant Joni, as his adjutant. And in this my orderly immediately discovered the clue to the entire situation. The devilish cabal which had brought charges against Neumann was the brain child of the apostate Joni.

The entire battalion awaited the decision with great impatience, some with hope and joy, others in helpless shame and irritation. My orderly paced back and forth nervously, but in stony silence, like someone hatching a terrible plot.

But before the court-martial could take place, we were again sharply attacked, and the trial was postponed until after the battle. In the meantime, I was given another superior officer in place of Joni, a Magyar lieutenant, a stubborn bull-necked Protestant, sullenly upright. Only the day before had he returned from the hospital, and when he learned what the court-martial was about, he said to me: "What kind of brothel have you turned the front into? What is the real charge?" And when I explained to him that it was wasting ammunition, his swarthy features grew even darker.

"What? Is His Majesty suffering for lack of ammunition?"

He reflected a moment, then suddenly queried: "You're a Jew?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Well, then, tell me the truth, straight and without any prejudice one way or another. How do the Jews in your platoon conduct themselves?"

"Sir, you will see with your own eyes and judge for yourself."

And in the battle he saw for himself and also judged. He had already recommended the three men for citation—the Tyrolean, Margolis, and the veteran Oestreicher. The Tyrolean to the rank of corporal; Margolis to the rank of sergeant; and Oestreicher for the gold medal. With this medal there was also a sum of money, which was by no means unwelcome to the veteran with a large family. And me he recommended for promotion to the rank of color-bearer.

Stammering, I remarked to him that I entertained no such high hope, since *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel Figer . . .

He riveted his eyes upon me murderously and thundered: "Shut up! I have recommended you! I won't be captain in a brothel! About face! March!"

Among the fallen in our regiment, whose number this time reached more than one hundred and fifty, there was also the apostate Jew, commissioned-officer Joni.

The autopsy disclosed that the shot had come from behind, which in fact was not so very infrequent an occurrence. At the front one does turn this way and that, forward and backward, and why would it not be possible for a bullet to strike him from behind?

The Tyrolese remarked, "A coward gets a bullet in the back when he turns it to the enemy."

Whereupon my orderly, who during all this commotion had not stirred from my side, looked at me and said, "Don't vilify him after his death. He was a good-for-nothing, but he didn't have his back to the bullets."

No one got the drift of his remark, put his words pierced my heart like an arrow. I was stunned. I called him aside, made him stand at attention, fixed my eyes upon his, and stared at him at length. He looked back directly into mine

for a few long minutes, and then, like one who can no longer control himself said; "I did, sir!"

"Wretch!" I said to him. "What have you done? Do you know what you can expect for something like that?"

"I know, sir. But please don't disturb yourself, sir. I myself shall turn myself over to the court-martial. At your service, sir!"

I stopped his mouth with my hand. Then I said to him, "Not a word from you, Infantryman Pauli! Not a word from you without my order! Understand? About face! March!"

He marched off.

Hardly had half an hour passed when I received an order to report to the lieutenant colonel. I was certain that I would return as an officer. But instead, his handsome grace, *Herr* Figer, informed me with icy nonchalance: "Do you want to be an officer? You? Well, you'll wait a while, until you shall have atoned for your sin. I have received a report that you have embezzled your soldiers' money and food, for your own profit."

"*Herr* Lieutenant Colonel . . ."

"Keep your mouth shut, you one-year volunteer sergeant! Go! Report to your first sergeant that you are to be given a punishment of two hours' detention!"

I left him like a doomed man. My head was spinning.

I—a thief! An ordinary thief!

I had embezzled the soldiers' money!

God in heaven!

Me, of all people!

And of all people, my own soldiers' money!

My orderly was as white as a sheet. His dark-blue eyes suddenly turned red, like those of a wolf stalking its prey in the dead of night. He uttered only three words, tearfully: "*Herr* Joni's heritage!"

Then he added, "And someone else's too, that actor, Madi. I saw him whispering all the time with the first sergeant."

The first sergeant obeyed the order. Within our trench, on a spot that was somewhat elevated, one of the officers had built for himself, very likely during the cycle of battles fought before we came, a sort of shelter. The hut was built in a very

bad spot, serving as a direct target not only for the enemy's rifle fire but also for the heavy guns. In this place the first sergeant made me lie down—me, who was in line to be an officer—on a cot, tied my right hand to my left foot, and said with the compassion of a first sergeant: "I'm sorry for you, sorry that you got into this scrape. Out of consideration for your position I am only tying one hand to one leg, and not both of your hands and feet together. For two hours. But you can lie there for about half an hour, untie yourself, and get up."

And while walking away he repeated his original words quite earnestly: "I'm sorry you got into this scrape."

"I defecate upon you, you red heifer!" (he was slightly red-headed) I said to him in his own language. "My forebears in ancient days used to throw this stuff which you accuse me of stealing to dogs like yourself. Get out of here before I spit in your face!"

He was thunderstruck. It was the first time in my life that I had seen a first sergeant stumped by someone of lower rank. He made no reply, but when he reached the door of the hut, his earnestness turned into a mocking sneer.

"Beware!" he snarled, as he walked off, a smile playing about his mustache.

I lay down like a leper on the bed of boards. I had time to reflect upon the entire situation. I found the punishment was a form of "an eye for an eye' retribution. I divided my food among my men, therefore they accused me of stealing their food.

Very logical.

Hardly had half an hour passed when my philosophizing was suddenly terminated.

The Russians began to shell us. At first at a wide range, all along our front, and then bit by bit the range was narrowed down until it was entirely centered about my hut. The act of the devil himself. The first instant a stupid thought entered my mind (what doesn't a man think about at a time like this?); the lieutenant colonel had staged this play with the Russians for my benefit. But the situation began to get terrifying. The shells landed all around my hut. It was not built

parallel with the enemy line, but one corner was at a right angle to them. I was lying in a corner to the left of this central point, which faced the north.

The shells kept falling incessantly. Some passed over the roof, others exploded before they reached me. I entrusted my earthly lot to the All Merciful.

The first sergeant had authorized me to disregard the order and lie down for only half an hour. But my stubbornness opposed itself. I wouldn't stir from that spot until the stipulated two hours had passed. Not I. Accept the kindness of the first sergeant? Not that. Die? What's the difference whether it is today or tomorrow? And suddenly the whine of a shell which would make your hair stand on end—and then—an explosion . . .

Evidently, I was still alive. I knew I was alive because I felt pain. The exploding shell had sliced off the right corner . . . Only three corners remained standing, with the small addition of the two walls which still constituted the eastern and western corners.

Suddenly my orderly appeared, his eyes streaming bloody tears, to help get me outside. He began to drag me by force, against my will. I struggled with all my might. I refused. No, I didn't want to go. When I explained to him that I did not want to accept the generosity of the first sergeant, he stopped pulling me, reflected for a moment, and said, "That's right, sir."

Without another word he lay down beside me on the cot. Then he muttered, "I won't leave either."

I did not try to drive him away. I knew the fellow. And then, too—why should I deny it?—it was pleasant to feel someone at my side in the gaping jaws of death. The devil only knows why this was so! Egoism? I had no time to think much about it, because the firing was renewed with even greater intensity. We embraced like two miserable insects, almost suffocating each other, and, with our bodies drawn up as much as possible, we awaited the end. The grenades flew, whistled, hummed and pulled my agony taut, as with burning tongs. My breathing was held back to the point of suffocation.

The shells shot away two more corners, the eastern and the

western, at one sweep. There now remained only our little corner. Like a "Hebrew booth of the harvest festival that was ritually unfit," because it had only two incomplete walls and a roof. The shooting did not stop, but it seemed that the Russians had also had quite enough of this target and had begun to direct their fire farther on, to the north.

Suddenly I saw the first sergeant standing and looking at us. He, too, was as pale as death. He wanted to speak, but could only stammer.

"What—what—w-w-wh-what are you—you doing here?" he asked my orderly.

The youth looked at him for a moment, and then answered calmly, "Here I am dreaming of the accidental death of the *Herr* First Sergeant!"

The first sergeant stood there stunned at this colossal impertinence. Certainly, in all his military service, no one had ever been so disrespectful. He stood there for a moment, then screamed: "March out of here!"

"Stay, Pauli!" I commanded him.

The orderly was not satisfied. He added, "My place is beside my *Herr* Color Bearer!"

Now a satanic smile streaked across the first sergeant's face; then he assumed a stance with his legs stretched wide and swayed with the assurance of complete victory.

"Perhaps you'll promote him to the rank of color-bearer, little boy?"

Then he suddenly shouted at the orderly: "Report!" And he went off.

We did not leave the cot until exactly two hours had passed. Then we appeared jointly before my new lieutenant, and I reported to him in accordance with the rules.

"*Herr* Lieutenant, I beg leave to report, sir, I have received my punishment for the crime of stealing food and embezzling money!"

The lieutenant did not understand me. For a moment he thought I had gone out of my mind.

"What?" he shrieked. "What?"

I repeated my report. He walked over to me, grasped my shoulders and shook me as he thundered, "You've gone crazy!"

"No, sir. At least, it isn't I who have gone crazy!"

And I explained the entire situation to him. He paced back and forth distractedly, like a caged lion. Suddenly he stopped and said half to himself: "I'll put a stop to these whoredoms!"

Then he turned to my orderly who all this time had been standing at attention with me.

"And what about you?"

"*Herr* Lieutenant! I beg leave to report, sir, I could not leave my superior officer in that bitch of a danger!"

He explained to him how matters had stood—the shelter, the raking gun fire—everything.

The lieutenant listened, reflected and said, "Come, show me the place!"

We showed him the spot. The fellow fumed and reeled with anger. He began to leave the spot and walk off, but he turned back again, looked, and turned away once more, then again returned.

"I'll put an end to it!" he cried, and looked at me as if he were examining me to see how it was that I had remained alive. Then he rebuked me for not leaving the place when the firing began. Not only was it permitted to do so, but it was my duty to have done so! The order had not sentenced me to a punishment that endangered my life. And when I explained to him why I did not do this, I detected in him a sort of terrible anger that was mixed with a certain degree of satisfaction. He took us along with him, gave us a drink of cognac, and sent my orderly about his duties.

We remained by ourselves, drinking. For about a quarter of an hour. In silence. He drank and said nothing. Suddenly he stood up, raised his glass, and exclaimed: "Raise your glasses! A toast to the *Herr* Color-Bearer! To your health!"

We drank, and he added, "Go and have your color-bearer collar sewed on! On my responsibility!"

When I reached my dugout and told my orderly about this, he did not jump for joy; but he removed my coat with a gravity that betokened inner elation and immediately sewed on the officer's collar.

The very next morning the order was issued, officially promoting me to the rank of color-bearer.

CHAPTER XVII

Hell

AT first I myself did not know how I felt when my orderly helped me on with my coat and its newly sewed-on officer's collar. In a general way, of course, joy. Satisfaction. And it is marvelous—this is already my fourth month in the army, a noncom on the front, giving orders, cursing and blaspheming like a first sergeant, eating all sorts of filthy things, drinking from what is both possible and impossible to drink, crawling on my belly in the mire and among dead bodies, eagerly hunting and capturing a man, and having even been made out a thief already, thank God: all this meant that I was a soldier in every respect and to the minutest detail.

Despite this, I was for a moment ashamed of becoming an officer. Yet this sense of shame, which persisted as a vestige of my pre-war thinking, was now completely confirmed here. To be a boon companion of *Herr* Stubniak or a friend of *Herr* Figer might not be such a great honor, at that. But, withal, I was a *soldier,* an entirely different sort of person. And sometimes when I was reminded that I should some day have to return to civilian life, I became truly perplexed. What would I do there among those people, among those civilians? And more, there was one strange thing I still had to account for: despite my loathing of *Herr* Figer, despite this—why deny it?—I was doing everything possible to *please* him! And not merely for reasons of discipline. Not at all. Strange, indeed—but a fact.

Notwithstanding, I continued to be aware of a sense of embarrassment because of my new officer status. But only for a fleeting moment. In another moment I became definitely contented. I looked into the mirror which my orderly proudly held up in front of me and I was pleased with myself. To be sure, I found a sort of justification for this satisfaction; the pack was lifted from off my back. No longer would I have to carry my knapsack and the heavy gun. I would not have to drag this burden along. A light, handsome revolver. A most pleasant weapon. One gets an exceptional kind of pleasure shooting with it. You shoot with one hand, as though in pleasant sport, at that head over there. *Biff!* The head hangs limp and the entire body falls its full length. It's a mistake; that isn't just shooting, not killing—no. It's a far deeper, far greater thing than that. Life and death are in one of my hands. Just as my own life lies in the hand of some fellow over there. And another thing—the comfort of an officer's life. Then, too, the joy of my orderly. Now he was an orderly among those who count. By right. And his joy of joys—that I had finally become an officer! Certainly that is a positively altruistic joy. My joy was but the reflection of his.

And he, my orderly, was suddenly changed. You could scarcely recognize him. His doglike fidelity took on an entirely different form. It became like that of a faithful wife. Yes, in truth, like a faithful and capricious woman. In the course of time he got into the habit of addressing me in the imperative. He actually ordered me about, in a complaining, fault-finding voice, cussing me out every other minute.

"Sir, again you haven't eaten the meal I brought you!" he would cry as he threw the plate of potatoes to the ground and roundly swore by all that is holy.

Or if I happened to stand in a place exposed to danger, he would expostulate: "And why are you sticking your rotten head out to the enemy! Get out of here!" And again a blasphemous curse.

Or I had but to put on my pants before he repaired and pressed them well, and I and my ancestors as far back as Moses himself were roundly abused. He was very faithful; he loved me; very much so; that was very good, very fine. But this was

just a little too much. He was getting under my skin. He gave me no peace. I didn't have a moment without his supervision. A young, handsome Xantippe who plagued me incessantly. It was in vain that I tried to reprove him, to dress him down.

"Pauli, don't be vulgar. Don't swear at me. It's bad manners."

Or, "Pauli, keep quiet, or else I'll give you such a smash in the face that you'll even forget the God who created you!"

It was of no use. He answered me in his own fashion, as was his custom.

"But if my good sir hasn't enough common sense to take care of himself!"

I suffered his impositions and persecutions to the point of sheer exhaustion, and more than once I decided to send him packing. Once his caprices irritated me beyond all human endurance. Then I suddenly remembered the only military means that I could employ.

After one of the officers had publicly humiliated Uncle Oestreicher I could not swallow a morsel of food, no matter how much I tried. I pushed the plate aside, lighted a cigarette, and sat down to write something. My domineering orderly looked at me for a second, then pounced upon me without restraint. He snatched the cigarette from my mouth, threw it upon the table, and stuck the plate under my nose.

"If you won't eat your meal, sir, I'll smash it all on your head! Understand?"

He held the plate ready.

I stared at him as though he were mad. What was there to do! And suddenly I recalled the only remedy.

"Attention!" I thundered at him with every ounce of energy I could muster.

The youth brought his feet together and was immediately petrified. With the plate in his hand. He froze up just as he was.

"That's the way you'll stand for half an hour!"

Thus I got rid of him for half an hour. He stood that way without moving. Mute, petrified, like a statue.

I went about my duties in peace.

Not more than fifteen minutes had elapsed when my friend,

the lieutenant, came in to see me. He noticed the soldier standing as rigid as a marble statue, plate in hand. As he observed him a smile stole across his solemn countenance.

"Leave!" I flashed at him as I noticed the lieutenant and rose to greet him.

The orderly departed.

I explained the entire situation to the officer. He laughed, then said to me: "Beware, my friend, lest you become a pupil of *Herr* Figer."

Now, as a result of our intimate conversation about the officers, I became aware of the interesting character of this lieutenant. Of a noble Protestant family, musically gifted, he himself could play the piano and the flute. He had a large, rare library. His family, the Smeretchani, maintained a democratic tradition going back many years.

We were still conversing when the orderly reappeared with a bowl of freshly made potato pudding. He stood at attention and said, almost in tears: "Please don't stand me up against the wall; please eat, sir, because, because" (here his handsome face became frightfully distorted), "because if you don't, I'll break this whole dog of a world into bits!"

I ate and he left. When he had gone, the lieutenant said to me: "Give me this young fellow. I'll give you an ancient manuscript. The original manuscript of Trismegistus!"

"How can the entire Trismegistus itself compare in value with such a young fellow!" I replied.

"You're right," he said, reflectively. "This is the terrible paradox of war, that this earth-shaking madness has at least one good quality. Through it, man is revealed to us in a clear fashion, such as would never have been possible for us to behold otherwise. God! What couldn't one make of such a fellow through culture and civilization! How handsome he is! By Allah! If I were Jupiter, I would appoint him as my Ganymede!"

During the course of our conversation he congratulated me upon my promotion and at the same time he gave me the news that along with my promotion had come an order from headquarters to have me and my platoon stand guard on hill Number 16. This was the most important point on our front. It

had cost us a great many men during the recent engagements. Once during the course of a single day, from seven until five, the hill had passed back and forth from our hands to the Russians eight times. It was a frightful battle. In the end we captured it and fortified it with a trench on the opposite side, facing the enemy.

Now I had the good fortune to receive this terrible "distinction" to stand on guard there. Beyond, on the other side of the hill.

"Now you'll be called the officer who has been on the firing line," the lieutenant said in a half-mocking, half-laudatory tone. "But at the same time," he continued, "you are permitted to request something special with reference to soldiers, food, and the like. Think it over until evening."

He went off.

"Think it over." What is there to think about? I recalled the joke of fat Rosenberger. I would ask *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel Figer to tell me a joke before leading me to that certain grave.

Suddenly the thought flashed through my brain: I have a request. I went to the captain. Let them permit me this time to choose the men with whom I am to stand guard. I told him that there had already been such a precedent in the 66th Regiment, and that they should also permit me to do likewise.

They did. I selected thirty men, half a platoon, from among all the platoons in the regiment. When my captain learned of my system of selection, he chuckled and was pleased with it. I chose all the chicken-livered and nitwits, together with all the light-headed and nervous fellows. Among them there were gypsies, seminary students, horse thieves, pickpockets, and notorious professional card sharks. And since Lance Corporal Margolis had in the meantime become a telephone operator (the devil knows how he did it—I learned later that this seminary student had never in his life spoken even a syllable over the telephone), I drafted him as the operator of my squad. He was willing, although for a moment he scratched the nape of his neck.

"I think that I'll attain great heights back there on the hill," he said. "I'll attain the rank of a telephone operator of

distinction." But he immediately added: "Never mind! I'll respectfully report all news from the Garden of Eden to you, sir."

"How are you so sure that it will be from the Garden of Eden?"

"After the hell of our first sergeant? Why, this is the only good quality of this 'carcass stripper'; he purifies and refines a person by ordeal so that he can enter the Garden of Eden."

I remembered that it was worth my while also to take along the stupid actor, Madi, "who switches on the lights in Hamlet." It would be proper to show him how Margolis, "the cowardly Jew," behaved in the line of fire. And just as I became interested in locating him, the appalling report came that Lance Corporal Madi had disappeared before the battle had begun and could not be found. Immediately thereafter the announcement came that Madi had not taken part in the battle, but had evaded his duty and had hidden in the town of Jaszolwietz; that he had already been apprehended, and that the court-martial had ordered him to be shot immediately.

Poor Madi. With what intensity this stupid actor hated the "cowardly Jews!" A bitter, silent hatred which he had not the strength to conceal, even in my presence. And now, the death sentence.

A death sentence at the front!

The readers who have never been at the front will never understand the effect of a death sentence in the trenches. For this, culture has not found adequate descriptive adjectives. Where death lurks every moment on all sides, where the chances are ninety-nine to one that you will be killed, and where you cling passionately with every atom of your being to this one chance to live—they suddenly come and rob you of this solitary chance and make it certain: death! Terrible! I shall not even try to transmit this feeling to the reader.

Faintness seized me, a sort of nausea.

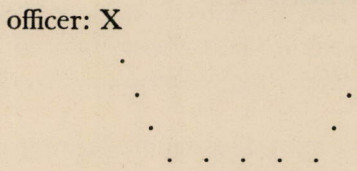
Not half an hour passed, when the order reached me. Me, of all people. It was I who had been selected to translate this sentence into action, with my platoon.

I immediately understood that this was the master stroke of *Herr* Figer.

A shiver shot through my veins. A thought flashed through me. I ought to let *Herr* Figer learn in some way that Madi was a great Jew-hater and that I was happy to take him out to be shot. Then he might deprive me of this pleasure, the pleasure of revenge.

Before I could do anything the special order came, and I had to execute it. The world turned black.

The arrangement for the death sentence on the front was as follows: They took the victim to a place back of the lines which was unexposed to the enemy view. There they stood him up and ranged the squad in the shape of a horseshoe about him. The victim did not stand within the open mouth of the shoe, but just beyond the center, in such a manner that if you joined the two ends of the horseshoe by straight lines to the point where the victim stood, you would get a pentagon with the victim at the intersecting point of the upper angle.



There he stood with his back to the squad. The commanding officer stood to one side of the last soldier on the left flank. He did not give the orders "ready" and "fire" by word of mouth, so that the victim would not become terror-stricken and move, or else in his dread try to escape. It was certain that he would not deliberately do this. "A soldier does not run away from a court-martial." Only in an insane fit might he so act. Therefore, the commanding officer gave the order by a movement of his hand. According to strict procedure one should blindfold the prisoner, but the braver ones chose to stand with eyes unbound. And it also happened once that one of the officers stood facing the squad, looking into the muzzles of the rifles trained upon him. In such a case it was possible for the commanding officer to give the order by word of mouth.

And I was the unfortunate officer to carry out the terrible deed.

And of all people to execute; an acquaintance, a comrade in arms.

And more, it should turn out to be the one person who was positive that I hated him, because he truly hated me and had given me a foretaste of suffering in hell.

When my orderly learned of this, he became so jittery that he did not know what to do with himself.

"This is also the work of his royal swinishness," he said. "The devil take that wretched artist-comedian! He couldn't be killed on the front; but must die by the hands of *mein Herr!* Of all people! Tfu!"

My head began to ache. My temples began to hammer dangerously. I thought I was going crazy.

Only one thing bolstered me up. The peremptory command. That is what an order does to you; it steels the nerves like cold water on molten white-hot iron.

When they turned Madi, the wretched actor of butler parts, over to me, and he looked at me, I almost fainted. I could see that he was convinced that I had volunteered to do this as an act of revenge.

If only I had been permitted to say something to him!

But that was absolutely forbidden.

On the way, as we were leading him to the place of execution, strange thoughts struggled within me. I decided that this was a sort of test on the part of the Supreme Mysterious Mind. He was testing the Jew within me and the feeling of revenge in my heart. To be sure, He, the Supreme Mind, knew that I had a very contrary opinion about revenge. He knew that I considered revenge the lowest characteristic of man, because it reduces man to a level below that of the wild animal. The wild animal knows no vengeance. Vengeance is the "civilized wisdom" of *homo sapiens,* of thinking man. I remembered the words of our master, Moses, who said, "Thou shalt bear neither grudge nor enmity!"

Thus I reflected, and felt inwardly happy because of the fact that instead of revenge I felt warm pity and great compassion for this stupid, miserable fellow, who had caused me

to spend two hours in the pit of hell, two hours which have left me with palsy to this very day.

In that terrible silence we reached the place of execution. There I arranged the soldiers in accordance with regulations.

It was at this point that I noticed that among the soldiers there was also fat Rosenberger. I withdrew him from the ranks and had him stand to one side.

"You're a Jew," I whispered. He understood.

No one heard it; only the victim caught the whisper. A sort of devil's miracle. Or perhaps he did not hear, but comprehended what I had whispered. He saluted, stood at attention and said, "*Herr* Color-Bearer, I beg leave to report, sir, I have one last request!"

"Speak, Lance Corporal Andrash Madi!"

"You took Corporal Rosenberger out of line because he is a Jew and you don't want him to commit any act of revenge."

"Yes, Lance Corporal Andrash Madi."

"Well, I'm a Jew, too. I was converted to Christianity only eight days ago."

My eyes sank into their sockets. Lance Corporal Madi, this bitter Jew hater—himself a Jew. For a moment I did not believe him. I thought that he might want to ask me, who was of the same racial stock and "religious confession," as they say in Hungary, for forgiveness. Nevertheless, I conquered that stupid notion. I remained quiet for a moment that seemed an eternity, swallowed my bitter saliva, and then established to my own satisfaction that I understood clearly what he wanted.

"Good, Lance Corporal Andrash Madi. Uncle Oestreicher will say Kaddish for you."

He, too, swallowed his saliva, made some strange meaningless motion, and said, "Thank you, but that isn't what I wanted to request. I wanted to request that the *Herr* Color-Bearer leave me my rank of lance corporal and shoot me without removing the insignia of my rank."

I stared at him, speechless. The soldiers looked at one another and at me, too. And I even noticed a slight smile, concealed and distorted, on the face of one of them.

In truth, how did it happen? According to regulations one

must reduce a man to the rank of a private before executing him. And if he has some military rank, one must tear it off and remove the stars from his collar. The law of degradation is strict in the case of traitors. But in this case neither the judge advocate nor I had received an order to degrade. Even though the *Herr* First Lieutenant had given me a lesson in conducting an execution. I took advantage of the oversight, which was not mine.

"Good. I have received no order for degrading Lance Corporal Andrash Madi."

Again he replied, "Thank you. And one minor request. Please give my pants to Infantryman Laslo Kritschan and my boots to Infantryman Benvenuto Ghalierghi. They asked for them."

"They asked for them? All right, Lance Corporal Andrash Madi."

He acknowledged my consent with a salute, faced about, and took the customary position. I went over to him, took my kerchief out of my pocket to blindfold him.

"I have one," he said and handed me his.

That "I have one" congealed my blood. Frightful! "I have one." My hands actually trembled. I had difficulty in blinding his eyes. Then I noticed that his cheeks were moist.

I hastened to do everything with dispatch.

Thirteen shots entered his head. He stood for a moment, tottered, and fell his full length to the earth.

I began to vomit. I slumped to the ground. One of the soldiers gave me a little cognac from my bag.

We returned in silence. Only one man's voice was heard, saying half to himself: "He didn't even cross himself!"

It was the voice of the scrawny Tyrolean. Not knowing Hungarian, he had not understood the words of the victim when he confessed himself an apostate Jew.

When I returned to my dugout, I was aware of a sort of feeling of gratitude toward *Herr* Figer for having provided me with this devastating experience. After this hellish deed, the watch on the hill would be in the nature of a Garden of Eden.

It is very hard to die. But it is a thousand times harder to kill deliberately, consciously.

CHAPTER XVIII

In the Name of the Virgin Mary

THE last request of Lance Corporal Madi traveled through the entire sector like wildfire and aroused wonder and respect.

"That's a soldier for you!" was on the lips of every officer on the staff. "That's a soldier; that's class!" they said enviously.

They turned to me. "How was it that he asked you? How did it happen?"

I explained to all of them how it happened. He requested me not to reduce his rank, not to remove him from the rank of lance corporal before his death. He wanted to die as lance corporal.

This did not satisfy them. They wanted me to explain in detail. That I should imitate his voice. Whether he pleaded or whether he spoke with me brusquely, complainingly, or appealingly. Just how was it?

And for the moment they forgot his treason, his cowardice, everything.

Herr Figer was visibly stirred. All the while he looked at his well-manicured nails and walked to and fro. That was a soldier!

But amid all this feeling of respect on the part of *Herr* Figer there was an envious feeling of an entirely different kind. For meanwhile it had become known that the lance corporal had been an apostate Jew. First of all: a Jew—and such

a soldier; and secondly (this particular envy was mightier than everything else) the Jew died without being degraded! The Jew died as a soldier of rank. This honor *Herr* Figer could not indulge in a Jew under any circumstances.

What is more, the wretch had deceived them all this time. Hadn't they considered him a Christian by birth? Why, his entire demeanor had been that of a true Christian all the time, without the slightest trace of suspicion. He was constantly repeating his catechism, and aloud at that. With fervor, with awe, and whenever danger was imminent, he was the only one in the entire battalion who would constantly mumble: "In the name of the Virgin Mary, in the name of the Virgin Mary."

Then he would kneel and with arms uplifted would pray: "Blessed art thou among the women of the earth, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus!"

Thus the phrase "in the name of the Virgin Mary" became a byword in camp. For every trouble that came and before every danger, little or great, that impended, there was an "in the name of the Virgin Mary." Until gradually this sacred phrase became part of the lexicon of brazen, vulgar cursing. "May every vestige of you be blotted out, in the name of the Virgin Mary!"

Or, "Would that the holy God had crushed your mother's belly even before it expelled you into this world, in the name of the Virgin Mary!"

There was one who angrily reproved the use of such language, Uncle Oestreicher. He never took it up. He suffered from it as a result. Because Uncle Oestreicher was the only one besides Madi who prayed constantly. The lance corporal, with "in the name of the Virgin Mary," and Uncle Oestreicher, with "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. Thou shalt not be afraid of the terror by night, nor the arrow that flieth by day. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; it shall not come nigh thee."

And these two devout soldiers were known higher up, in headquarters. There were two people at the front who prayed. This they noted back there with respect and affection. The

officers had looked upon Lance Corporal Madi with especial satisfaction. For here you also have a Christian who prays. He not only swears and blasphemes, but, in addition, he prays.

Then suddenly it was discovered that this Christian was also a Jew.

I recalled the remark of the gawky Tyrolese and repeated it to *Herr* Figer.

"Before his death he did not cross himself."

Herr Figer opened his eyes wide like one who had just plumbed the depths of the matter. "Of course, he did not cross himself. He didn't dare to lie before his death."

And suddenly, "Do you know? His last request came more out of cowardice than courage! That's evident!"

It was not entirely evident to me.

But what irked *Herr* Figer more than everything else was "the Jew's bequest"—the phrase "in the name of the Virgin Mary," which had become a byword all along the front in the sector occupied by our regiment and even beyond it. This phrase brought an entirely new spirit into our sector—the spirit of Christianity, previously not at all noticeable. This dictum served as an exceptional moral force, and also as a ritually proper prayer shawl in which Jew-hatred sanctimoniously cloaked itself.

There was, nevertheless, someone who discovered an entirely different basis for the situation outside of hatred for the Jew. A strange, thorny basis. To be sure it was impossible to escape its truth. It was—*eroticism*.

The one who discovered it was Lieutenant Adolph Meizing, a Freudian professor of psychology and pathology in Vienna. Lieutenant Meizing analyzed the matter with classic simplicity.

Young men strong as cedars had been living for months and even years without any sort of woman or the slightest suggestion of a woman. Their libidos sought different outlets. One of the outlets was violent cursing, in which you could always find erotic, pornographic expressions. Similarly, prayer served as an outlet for passion—prayer which sought to stifle that feeling, wrestle with it, and generally subdue it. But what outlet was there that was more unusual than a prayer

which is itself erotic? The prayer to Mary, the Virgin, of the Immaculate Conception! And if you want, the professor continued, to see and hear it, and meet it face to face, then listen sometimes to our gigantic Croat, Franz Rizitsch. Listen to him utter this holy prayer and with what emphasis and tenderness! For him this short prayer served as a real catharsis!

In truth, so it did. The gigantic Croat suffered more than anyone else among us for lack of sex expression, sometimes to the point of biting his skin. For him the entire misfortune of war lay in that and that only.

Whatever the reason, the phrase spread like wildfire throughout the entire sector. The officers used it and turned it into a slogan, a symbol for the hymn of hate for the Jews, to the point of mania. Until it became a maxim that there could be no valor without this prayer, and that a victory was not truly a victory unless it had been attained by virtue of crossing oneself while intoning "in the name of the Virgin Mary."

Therefore, it was obvious that no Jew could become a hero.

"It is obvious."

Bravery in general took on an entirely different meaning there at the front from its meaning in the city. In the light of cannon fire and flares and in the confusion of battles the concept "heroism" assumed a new aspect.

At first, heroism divested itself of its patriotic cloak. What sort of patriotism could there possibly be here! Nothing of the kind! When the order came to creep stealthily behind the Russian lines, why, then we crawled. Trembling with fear, on our stomachs, with bulging, blinking eyes, constantly tucking in our heads. We thrust them into the ground or behind a rock, while sometimes we hastily dug out a small hole, stuck our heads in and slept on our stomachs. Stretched prone, face forward, with buttocks sticking up, a good target for the Russians! Among those crawling men there were always a few who were impetuous, thoughtless, light-headed. Fellows who became disgusted with all this crawling and jumped up on their feet, erect, in desperation. And with a shriek of "You bastard!" or "Hit him—he isn't your father!"

Or even shouting the name "*Marusia!*" (That was the extent of our knowledge of Russian, the name of a Russian woman.) They ran like mad and attacked the terrible "en-

emy," and sometimes others followed them by inertia or out of sheer deviltry, like people who have nothing to lose.

Lately, they had also got into the habit of adding to these cries, "In the name of the Virgin Mary!"

Everyone who came out of that turmoil alive was a hero and received a decoration for bravery, or was promoted one rank, or merely received a pat on his shoulder.

Sometimes he received the honors on his grave, if fate had not chanced to smile upon him and he had fallen dead while cursing.

That's what heroism is.

"Heroism" has a thousand other forms similar to this one.

Citations for such heroism went, for the most part, to men who in the city (and even there at the front) were afraid of a black grasshopper or a rat.

Lately most of those heroes had been Jews.

For that, hatred had found a remedy. They were not heroes if they did not shout, "In the name of the Virgin Mary!"

But not one of the Christians realized in the least how blasphemous that was. Not one of them realized to what extent they were degrading their holiest of holies—the mother of God—and right there on the front in the shadow of death.

Until someone came and momentarily opened their eyes. It was Lance Corporal Margolis, who paraphrased the expression and suddenly shrieked, "In the name of the whore, Rahab!"

That made them perceive their blasphemy for the moment. But as the devil would have it, an important guest suddenly made his appearance in the camp, the chaplain in chief. And when he heard the name of the mother of God bandied about on the lips of the blasphemers, his ears pricked up. Only hatred found an outlet in this case, too. Instead of all of the rest, they had Margolis up for "court-martial" before his reverence. The priest was a very pleasant, sympathetic person—a clever, good-hearted fellow. When he asked Margolis to explain, the lance corporal simply declared that Rahab the harlot of Jericho served as a symbol of victory in the Bible, because it was she who helped Joshua capture Jericho and the Holy Land.

His reverence received the explanation with an understand-

ing smile, but after he had sent the little Jewish lance corporal away, he turned to the officers in indignation.

"Perhaps the lance corporal has succeeded in opening your eyes so that you can understand how low you have fallen, my good sirs. The little Jewish lance corporal guards even the sanctities of your religion for you! Thank him for having shown you the way to repentance."

* * * * *

There was not much hope that this incident would change the regiment for the better. Once a swear word has struck root, not all the Jewish lance corporals in the world can remove it. Instead, the chaplain's remark was sufficient excuse to raise the level of hatred against us and especially toward the dead corporal Madi. *Herr* Figer went about constantly as if he were poisoned, like a person hatching some terrible plot in order to appease his wrath. Finally, he found his revenge. He purposed to issue a special order to open the grave of Madi and remove the lance corporal's star from his coat!

Fate, however, had decreed that the dead lance corporal was not to be punished in this horrible fashion, because his coat had not been buried with him. The Serbian "bastard" was already strutting about in it, cocky as a general! Of course, without the star.

But this whole affair about Madi did not concern us very long. At least not those of us selected to defend that accursed hill. It was only when his two heirs, the Serbian and the Italian from Fiume, presented themselves to ask for the belongings of the dead man—the former for his good coat, and the latter for his fine boots—that the image of the unfortunate wretch again appeared before me.

"Why did he bequeath these things only to you two?" I asked.

"We asked him for them," they replied bluntly.

"Very fine boots," gloated the Italian Benvenuto.

"A tailor-made coat," added the venomous Serb, as he licked his mustache. ("Tailor-made" meant to have a tailor repair the garment one gets from the commissary.)

"How is it that you did not hesitate to make such a request of a man about to die, you scoundrels?"

"I beg leave to report, sir, yes, sir—it was definite that he was going to die," answered the Serb.

"It was all the same to him," the Italian immediately added, "and—I beg leave to say, sir, I noticed that he had offered them to a Jew."

"To which Jew?"

"To Uncle Oestreicher. Yes. To him. He asked the uncle to pray for him after his death, I beg leave to report, sir."

"And why didn't he give them to him?"

"I beg leave to say, sir, the Jew didn't want to take them. He promised to pray for him for nothing. What does a Jew know about boots?"

As I gave the things to them I recalled that in the squad which carried out the execution there had also been this Serb.

"Listen, Infantryman Kratschan, weren't you among those who fired upon him?"

The "bastard," caught unawares, was terror-stricken. His face turned white.

"I beg leave to report, yes, sir. I was, I beg leave to report, sir!"

"Don't you think that you're a scoundrel?"

"I beg leave to report, no, sir."

"Didn't your heart hammer and pound away? Tell the truth!"

"I beg leave to report, sir, no, sir. I fired by command."

"But while you were firing you saw the coat; isn't that so?"

The Serb was silent for a moment, then said, "I beg leave to report, sir, I did see it, sir. But I fired at his head."

"So as not to spoil the coat, wasn't it?"

Again the Serb was silent. Then he replied, "I beg leave to report, sir, yes, sir."

For a moment I hesitated whether to give him the coat. But, on second thought, I handed it to him. At least this fellow was truthful.

He took the coat, as a child takes a fine toy, put it under his arm, thanked me with a salute, and walked off with his comrade.

Some few steps away they both stopped to examine their treasures, carefully, with satisfaction and silent glee. Sud-

denly, I noticed that each one looked at the other, then at his article, then at his fellow again. First with suspicion, then with anger. Finally each broke into a violent oath.

"You bastard, in the name of the Virgin Mary! Ha-ha!"

My orderly afterward explained to me all that had occurred between the two. Each one had asked the victim for both articles, for both the coat and boots. The unfortunate had himself made the division between them. For that, they were angry with each other. And each suspected the other of deliberately ruining his article, even though neither of them said so. And now they were convinced that each had upset the other's plans. The coat and one of the boots had been riddled by bullets.

At the time of the disposal, the doctor had told me: "My friend, you can't boast that your men are exceptional marksmen. If any one of them had missed his aim and instead of the head had hit him in the back—well, that is understandable. But to shoot the foot instead of the head!"

I did not reveal to the doctor what had been behind it all.

How terrible! To shoot at the foot of a living person in order to spoil his boot out of jealousy!

"Tfu! Swine! In the name of the Virgin Mary!"

CHAPTER XIX

The Clenched Fist

AFTER the great, bitter victory, which we won through the tortures and agonies of hell in the Galician mud, just after the snow had thawed, we had a short respite.

Even so, they did not allow the Jews to enjoy their rest. Again a roll call; many of the heroes were Jews; and again a few of us earned limitless hatred. That is, those who won medals.

Now, I, too, entered the ranks of the select. The hatred of the officers, "in the name of the Virgin Mary," had heretofore not come out into the open, so far as I was concerned. Either it was my good fortune, or else I was in great measure successful in staving them off by discussions and frontline philosophizing, which it was difficult for the minds of my fellow officers to digest. At any rate, thus far I had been a sort of exception. Even *Herr* Figer did not give evidence of any revulsion when we engaged in our rather lengthy debates.

But now fate caught up with me. I was awarded a large gold medal. Through the recommendation of my lieutenant, the upright, gentlemanly Smertschani.

This medal Lieutenant Colonel Figer pinned on my breast with the following remarks:

"I have heard that there is Magyar blood in your veins. One of your grandmothers was a pure Magyar, the daughter of Bishop Kohani. It isn't ordinary Magyar blood, but Cal-

vinist blood, which has within it the traditional obstinacy and perseverance of John Calvin. That puts you under great obligation. This blood demands that you conquer the Jewish blood in you."

At that point he seemed to regret having revealed his inner feelings and remained silent for a moment. I took advantage of the moment and blurted, spontaneously: "The blood of the Maccabees, *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel?"

The entourage present at the time impelled me to this brazenness.

"Silence, Color-bearer! I did not ask you. I'm talking now!" said *Herr* Figer, after which he mastered himself. His face again became pleasant and affable as before. He began making concessions, as though in debate.

"The blood of the Maccabees? Perhaps you do have Maccabean blood in you. But as yet the heroism of the Maccabees isn't sufficiently clear. The nation they conquered was not of pure Greek stock. Antiochus, Epiphanes, Apollonius, Siron, Nicanor, Gorgias, none of them was Greek. Well, this is no time for debates. You have been decorated. His Majesty cites you among his heroes. It is up to you to show that you deserve it in the future."

He shook my hand.

That's a theory for you! Truly it is a pity that Judas Maccabeus had not provided himself with enemies of pure Greek stock for his victory.

* * * * *

Thenceforward my fate was sealed. In a flash all my friends turned into open enemies. Without the slightest shame or hesitancy.

It was marvelous to see how an officer could in one moment slough off his real self and suddenly appear as a completely different person. For many months he had gone about with you like a dear friend, like a true bosom companion, playing cards with you, getting drunk with you, joking with you (Jewish humor was generally well liked even among the most embittered officers), asking your advice, and even reading you his letters to his mother and sweetheart. And then suddenly

he amazed you by doing something that made your hair stand on end. Previously, it had never occurred to him to be particular about how you saluted and greeted him. On the contrary, he always greeted you first with "*Sevas! Sevas!*" (Argot for the Latin *servus,* "Your servant," and an intimate greeting among the officers.) And suddenly you passed by and he halted you with the cry, "Color-bearer! Don't you know that you're supposed to salute your superior?"

That confused a fellow and put him in a terrible pickle. Everything would go black.

Such things happened to me after my decoration. And the group of officers made a firm resolve to employ every artifice to prevent me from advancing to a higher rank. Also, that I should receive no further decoration!

Among all of them there was only one person whose friendly attitude had not changed—Lieutenant Smertschani.

"Spit upon them, my friend! What do you expect of heads bereft of all brains? Don't you know what an officer is? An officer is a stupid mechanism which walks about on gouty wooden pegs and mumbles sounds which have a striking resemblance to human speech. But one mustn't by mischance confuse him with human beings."

What especially bothered Lieutenant Smertschani was what happened to the fine fellow, Uncle Oestreicher. The old fellow had found among our fallen a Russian corpse whose features aroused in him the suspicion that it might be Jewish. And when he was convinced that he was not mistaken, he said Kaddish devotedly for his soul. This provided an excuse to make him report, and to give him one day in solitary without food.

Well, so far as the fast was concerned, it was no punishment for Uncle Oestreicher, who in any event was in the habit of faithfully observing every ritual fast day. And, moreover, the punishment did not bother him very much for still another reason. When Lance Corporal Margolis heard about it, he hastened to advise Oestreicher to report sick. That was not a difficult thing to do. For it so happened that Uncle coughed much as a result of the spring thaw and the rigors of battle. And, then, too, the surgeon himself was quite fond of him,

because he always prayed, whatever the circumstances, in his prayer shawl and phylacteries, in accordance with Jewish religious law. And whenever Uncle reported some symptoms of illness, the doctor would not even bother to examine him, but immediately ordered a furlough for a day or two. Hence Oestreicher took Margolis' advice, and as a result received a two-day furlough; and the third day, on which he was to have fasted, fell precisely on the Fast of Esther!

The clever resourcefulness of Margolis! If one must fast, then it must not be at the express order of *Herr* Figer!

Thus the painful humiliation which we felt because of Uncle Oestreicher's punishment was turned into hearty laughter among all the Jewish men.

Lieutenant Smertschani joined without restraint in this laughter.

As a result, a series of discussions about various religions was set in motion. The lieutenant displayed a surprisingly wide range of information about Judaism. Above all, he hit upon one quality in which the Jew is superior to the Christian. The Christian is full of senseless and meaningless superstitions, to the point of childish ingenuousness. It is surprising to see Christian men of great culture living under the influence of many senseless beliefs. Especially the Slavs, even the most intelligent among them, those who deny every form and manner of religion and religious belief, no matter how hard they strive, are unable to shake themselves loose from this stupidity.

I told him about the Russian who, when lighting his cigarette, made sure that no more than two men should use one match. The lieutenant was already acquainted with the three-on-a-match superstition.

"Why, even if you should grind a Russian to bits, you couldn't get that stupid idea out of his system!"

The discussion of religion was quite timely. For, among the various plagues to which the army at the front was addicted, that of stupid superstition was paramount. There was not a moment in which some purely accidental occurrence did not affect a person so deeply and permanently as to make him do something positively stupid. Among the superstitions cur-

rent both in the city and the village were: finding a horseshoe on the way, sneezing while eating, breaking a mirror, lending a pin or a needle without first pricking the borrower with it, and many more. At the front, hundreds of others were added. And all without exception had assumed a sort of religious sanctity among us. There was nothing unusual about this. It had a very human psychological basis—fear. Everyone living in fear believes in both the possible and the impossible. The subconscious reason is, why shouldn't I do it, if they say it will help? What difference does it make; perhaps it will really help. At any rate, it will do no harm.

So he will do some stupid thing. Or, on the contrary, he will refrain from doing something which his pet superstition forbids him to do.

It is clear to me that this is at bottom the reason for the strong religious feeling which possesses the very wealthy person. Fate has been kind to him, but he is panicked by the constant dread that Dame Fortune will forsake him. Have you ever heard of a millionaire who is an unbeliever?

Similarly, gamblers and great actors are filled with superstition. Every time that Caruso went before the footlights he would first kneel backstage and say his *Mia Cara Madre* with real fervor. Every prima donna carries some sort of an amulet in her bosom. An airplane pilot takes along some animal "to prevent an accident." And on and on.

The soldier at the front, who is ever at the mercy of toying fate, soaks up nonsensical beliefs like a sponge. He may, indeed, laugh at himself—but he certainly won't renounce his stupid superstitions in time of danger.

I noticed it in myself—and was quite embarrassed.

Indeed, I was ashamed, but in conduct I did not refute these superstitions. The reason: What difference would it make if I did believe? Even though it might not help, it certainly would not do any harm! So I capitulated to superstition.

Because of this, my discussions with the cultured Lieutenant Smertschani became really unpleasant. We realized that we, too, were not free of this accursed plague. He, of course, protested vigorously when I brought this to his attention.

Yet he interrupted the discussion and changed the subject.

Not many days passed before an ugly occurrence struck us both, almost literally, between the eyes. Especially him, my boon companion.

This is how it happened.

I was sent as the officer on duty on the front line to reconnoiter the adjacent woods in order to prepare for an attack. I went with ten of my men. On the way, we were detected by the enemy, who blasted us with gunfire. Cannon are not adapted to firing on ten men, but the Russians apparently thought that an entire regiment was advancing against them.

Something unusual happened, something that occurs once in a thousand years. One shell struck my underofficer squarely, and he disappeared as completely as though he had never been in existence. Only by gathering together small bits here and there could one with difficulty establish his identity. This underofficer happened to have been lying down beside me, to my left.

When the firing ceased and I arose, my left sleeve was stained with blood. One button of my coat was in the wrong hole, and the peak of my hat, over my right temple, was missing.

My luck in coming out unscathed from the very shadow of death when my companion was torn to shreds, seemed too good for a Jew. I offered up a special prayer of thanks for my deliverance.

But I did not change the position of my coat button. And likewise I did not adjust my hat, which made me look like a drunkard. It was "certain" that I had been saved because of these irregularities.

Good. Just the same, I had to appear before my commanding officer and report the progress of my detail. And it was impossible to appear before him with my uniform in bad order. One was punished for that. And especially an officer who is supposed to be a model for others.

But I was not going to "endanger my life." And I would not toy with fate by changing the position of the button and the hat, come what may!

I appeared before my officer, looking somewhat like an in-

ebriate, my coat buttoned like a German professor's and my hat looking as if I had just received a sound box on the ear.

When I entered and stood at attention near the door, he addressed me in his customary friendly manner. But when he had scrutinized the absurd manner of my dress, he cast a look of warning at me, as though he were hinting that I should make the necessary adjustments.

I did not take the hint.

He turned aside so as not to look at me, in order to give me an opportunity to adjust my uniform.

I did not take advantage of his gracious gesture.

He hinted again, this time in no uncertain manner.

It was no use.

When he realized that this was not an ordinary oversight, but intentional and stubbornly so, he immediately changed his attitude and pretended to notice nothing.

"Let's have the report!" he said.

I handed him the report and he signed it.

I noticed something new. He was signing with his left hand. It was difficult and awkward, but he persisted in writing with his left hand.

What was this? When had he been wounded in his right arm? A thing like that does not remain a secret in the army.

Not only that. He came over to me and shook my hand with his left. By this time he was smiling knowingly as he said to me, almost laughing out loud: "About face! March!"

That very evening I uncovered the mystery of his right hand. Upon surviving the previous battle he made the startling discovery that his right fist was clenched tight.

Since that time there was no power in the world which could force him to open his clenched fist. At least, no power had succeeded for the past seven days.

Herr Lieutenant, Doctor Smertschani—the civilized, the cultured gentleman!

CHAPTER XX

Woman! Woman!

SPRING'S harbingers kept growing more numerous, Not outwardly, however. Not in the ashen-gray skies of Galicia. And not in its forlorn, black, muddy earth; but inside, within the miserable inhabitants of the trenches.

We gradually became accustomed to regard ourselves as a unique species of people, in no way comparable to those human beings who dwell in cities and villages. Everyone of us had someone back there, a father, mother, friend, relative, or acquaintance. But in the course of time we had become ridiculously distant. What connection had I, for example, I, Infantryman Avigdor Feuerstein, living in this trench for two years, sleeping quite soundly in mud, eating dirt-soaked bread, exposed to an unnatural and untimely death at every instant, and smoking a cigarette taken from the mouth of an infantryman who strips dogs—what connection had I with my brother or my friend over there, who at the moment might be dozing in a cabaret or laughing at some fat mother-in-law joke? Yes, I did have something to do with him. If only I could appear unexpectedly and give them a resounding blow on his laughing head, pick him up by his feet, and swing him broom-fashion as I rained murderous blows upon all the other gay people there, and then burn up the entire cabaret together with all those accursed people performing on the stage! That's the connection I had with them!

How terrible it was! For the past two years I had been dragging along in constant dread of death, when I was stand-

ing, sitting, lying down, sleeping, eating, and even when smoking a cigarette. Any second a bullet might come along to penetrate my skull and pack me off to burial in a common grave without a eulogy, without shroud, and without anyone even knowing where I was buried.

Myriads go mad around me,
And my mind cannot forget:
Soon my destiny will have found me;
Soon oblivion make its threat.

Z-z-z, the song of dying—
In my throat a sudden clod:
Mother—grandsire—life is flying:
Save me—oh, my Lord, my God!

Drugged, my mind is sweating, craven:
Z-z-z, I close my eyes.
But a moment—and the raven
Will be pouncing on its prize.

Heart's blood clotting now so thickly;
Rotting flesh, once strong and proud:
Z-z-z, life goes so quickly—
Dead!—sans eulogy or shroud!

Over there in the city there were people like me who were sitting under peaceful blue skies, without airplanes spitting bombs down upon them, and without grapeshot and shrapnel raining upon them, as on us. They sat there, people like myself, and laughed at some joke about a fat mother-in-law. And that was not all. There they enjoyed a spectacle of "pure art" which demonstrated how a man makes love to his sweetheart. His greatest worry was lest the pretty harlot become angry with him and put on a provocative crepe-de-Chine dress and net panties. Why should he be sitting there and not I? On what basis does His Majesty favor him more than me?

Why should I have to be the one to eat filthy eggs and have a constant rendezvous with death?

Why shouldn't he?

"This is the most terribly sad thing that constantly gnaws at us here," my friend, the unfortunate Color-bearer Dubinski, wrote to one of his friends in the city. "Three or four of us sit under a wet thicket on a cold, damp night; we sit and lie in wait for death, which lies in wait for us. Silence. For a few hours there is silence. Someone there opposite us stirs. He fires. The bullet whistles in my ear as it skims by my temple, while he, back there in the city, lies in his silken bedclothes and kisses a warm woman.

"That's it!

"Woman!

"We have become accustomed to everything, to every kind of misfortune. If the mud doesn't permit the quartermaster corps to bring up our food, then we remain as hungry as leprous dogs who keep scratching themselves because their large boils itch so; we remain hungry and wait three days before we are allowed to open our tins of reserves, and that by special permission. Poor Infantryman Guilani! In his terrible hunger he stealthily opened his reserve tin without permission, and paid with his life. On the spot. Why? Let us suppose that some citizen is sitting in a restaurant eating good beefsteak at a dinner party and washing it down with red wine. What would happen if suddenly and without warning an armistice were declared and we should return home? The very first thing I would do would be to go directly to that restaurant, rip off his gluttonous head, and finish his meal with relish!

"Oh, if only the King should suddenly declare a truce!

"But, we have gradually become accustomed even to this. Food? What difference does it make to me whether my stomach is full of frogs or roasted rats, so long as it is full? Yes, I see that even in this way you can sate your appetite.

"But there is one thing to which it is impossible to accustom oneself—the lack of a woman!

"How beautiful a woman is! By heaven, how beautiful she is!

"You sit down to eat—and facing you there sits a woman with her mouth and hands.

"You sit and smoke—and opposite you sits a laughing woman with her white teeth and her voluptuous breasts.

"I lie down on the damp ground to sleep, and at my side there is a woman who warms me with her warm, kittenish body, and purrs softly. Alas, it is my own body that I embrace, my own self that I press to my cold breast, my own hairy arm that I lick. I gnash my teeth. My entire body yearns irresistibly for a woman! A woman!

"Oh, Bella!

"Bella, Margot, Emma, Mansy, Ilonka, Sara, Netta, Aranka, Maria, Jophi, Clara, Anna, Rebecca, Cleopatra!

"Woman! Woman! Woman!

"The entire front yearns for a woman, something which is not to be had. The body is broken by all sorts of sufferings and deadly pains, the heart becomes petrified by the thousands of bullets and shells, the muscles knotted steel—but there is no woman in whom one can sow fecundating virility . . .

"Woman, there at home, in the city. And she disports herself with some good-for-nothing who, instead of being with me here, awaiting death, takes especial pains to make a good knot in his tie and wax his mustache in order to kiss some woman there, a woman!"

Thus my friend, Color-bearer Dubinski, wrote to his friend, as his face turned all colors.

* * * * *

My men sat still in quiet yearning. The spring air struck their swarthy, trembling bodies. All were silent. Spring tantalized them. Suddenly, one of them sprang up most unexpectedly, moaning and complaining, almost in tears.

"Why are we forbidden to kiss a woman? Is it so difficult for headquarters to bring a few women to us here, at least once a month?"

Then he sat down again and continued to moan: "What difference does it make to His Majesty?"

Whereupon another got up, flipped away his half-smoked cigarette, and said, "In the name of the Virgin Mary! If there were one, he himself would kiss her!"

The gigantic Croat, Franz Rizitsch, in particular, could

find no rest. He roamed back and forth like a wild bull, his muscles taut and his trumpetlike nose snorting like a wild ox, as he swore away by the Virgin Mary.

"I would tear a woman apart like a fish and eat her flesh without salt!" he said, his moist eyes flashing passionately. He aroused great pity and compassion in me. Suddenly, he stopped walking and said with deathlike calm:

"Oh! How I would chase those Russians back to Moscow, if I could first sleep with my buxom Rosa!"

Then, "I'll go crazy here. I'll go out of my mind. My brain is growing darker. I can see already nothing but thighs and buttocks."

"And the head, pig? What about the head of your pretty Rosa?"

"The head? Her head I would swallow in any event!"

His bulging eyes, turning my way, welled with tears.

"What a pity!"

Spring continued to herald its arrival. The sun gradually dissipated the clouds.

Above ground, on all sides of the trenches, sprouted green patches of grass. Here and there some sort of blue-and-red flower.

From some distant height a bird's trill reached us.

And there was a butterfly!

We were forbidden to stick our heads outside to catch a glimpse of the earth, which exuded spring everywhere.

My young orderly caught the butterfly in flight, crushed it in his hand, and trampled upon it, as he cried, "That's for you, worm!"

"You beast!" I fumed at him.

The handsome young fellow looked at me angrily and said, "Am I a beast? God is a beast! He is a beast, in the name of the Virgin Mary!"

He lay down on the damp ground, flat on his back. His face and belly faced the blue sky; he breathed heavily.

A songbird began to trill a melody nearby.

The gigantic Croat snatched up a clod of earth and threw it in the direction of the bird with a mighty heave. "Get out of here before I make you nest in the midst of that seven-fold

holy God, up there in the skyey heights of his hermitage, by the Virgin Mary!"

First Lieutenant Stubniak, who had previously spoken constantly of women and dogs, now talked so vulgarly that we were shocked to hear such words, even from such a person as himself.

One fine day one of the men was up for court-martial. He had stolen away to the neighboring village, Zlato-Lippo, where he had raped an old woman.

He was sentenced to twenty-five lashes on the soles of his feet.

It was not long before the crime was repeated by another. He was punished even more severely. He was demoted from corporal to private.

And likewise a third one.

Headquarters issued an order to the effect that in the case of rape and absence without leave in the village, both violations would be punished with death, and by hanging only!

Hanging at the front is a horrible punishment that involves more than just death.

But all this was of no avail.

Spring mocked both us and headquarters.

I was constantly worried about the safety of my giant Croat; and I had a hard time keeping him out of mischief. He bit his flesh, but stayed all right. Instead, a veritable plague broke out in the entire corps. They stole off to the village and brought disgrace upon the army. And above all, they were undermining discipline! Demoralization!

Headquarters found no other means of combatting this plague except by ordering an advance, an attack!

That was truly a punishment. You cannot compare offense with defense. If a defensive battle is a soul-searing experience, then an attack is hell. You have to leave your trench, where you are concealed and can protect yourself, and go out to meet the enemy, who is concealed and protects himself while hurling thousands of kinds of death upon you.

But the men accepted their punishment with satisfaction.

We had never had an attack that could compare with this one. All the energy that was buried and held in leash by the

soldiers, all the sexual passion which seethed and rankled within them, all of this suddenly broke loose upon the enemy. The Russian officers who were captured asked us what had suddenly irritated us to such wrath?

It was a ferocious attack, like a pack of wild animals that do not find their quarry. The Russians had retreated in full flight, seventy kilometers deeper to the rear.

Headquarters rubbed their hands gleefully. That's the logic behind forbidding women at the front! Women consume the army's energy. Quite right.

In truth, the giant Croat, who had already won a few important decorations, this time displayed exceptional bravery. Deaf, dumb, and blind to everything, he plunged into the enemy lines without even firing. He struck to the right and left with the butt of his gun. He led us into a bayonet encounter without orders, and we all followed him like a pack of madmen.

I seemed to feel that the curse of the woman-chaser was hounding my giant Croat to his doom. Instead of becoming wilder, he became much calmer, but this quiet was filled with sadness and suffering. The calm before the storm. This giant generally did not eat very much, anyway. (Margolis, the little lance corporal, ate seven times as much as he. One could not understand what he did with all this food!) Sometimes he shared his meal with a comrade. But of late he had practically stopped eating altogether. Except for a pot of black coffee, which he emptied with one gulp, he tasted nothing until noon. At noon, his soup; and that was all. The rest he left for Margolis. For Margolis only, and under no circumstances for anyone else. Some quip of fate had established a bond between these two creatures, the seven-foot giant, Franz Rizitsch, and the pigmy, lance corporal, who scarcely reached his chest. That was our only amusement in the trenches, watching them walk arm in arm, the Croat blowing Margolis down with one sneeze as a storm does the chaff.

But lately this jocosity had deserted the good-natured Croat, and he stopped doing it. He wanted a woman. Badly! Even his hulk seemed to have shrunk. I had a foreboding of impending calamity. His frame shrank—only to straighten out

suddenly to meet the fate which was laughing tauntingly in his face.

During our swift advance we reached the little village of Zeshinenko. There we were ordered to rest. We were dying for lack of sleep. And we slept.

The next morning my orderly Pauli brought me the news, as was customary under the circumstances. And among other things he told me that in one of the houses they had found a solitary Jewish girl who was insane.

The town was entirely deserted. No living creature was left in it. Except the one girl, and she, insane.

"Why don't they arrest her? They should tie her up and send her back behind the lines!"

"She is very calm and composed," Pauli answered. "She sits by the window and looks outside towards the forest, without stirring. If you talk to her, she doesn't answer. She merely sits there, stares with protruding eyes, and remains silent. She is pretty, very pretty, but emaciated, and her face has a death-like pallor. Sir, you ought to take a look at her. It's worth it!"

I went.

The house was on the very edge of the town, on its boundary. Not far away the thick forest began. Through this forest the Russian army had fled before us.

I entered. The house was smashed to pieces. There was some broken furniture, and on the table a half loaf of bread, Russian bread, army bread. And there was a bed that had been used. As if someone had just got up out of it. A real Jewish home.

In this room there was not a soul. I entered the second room. A girl's room. Quite clean and neat. The white room of a Galician Jewish maiden. The white bed was also ruffled, and there at the window she sat, the insane one. She faced the forest. She was unaware of my presence. I tried to speak to her. It was as though I were not even present. She sat and gazed ahead, frozenly. Towards the forest. I tried to touch her; take her hand. She turned her face towards me. She looked at me for a moment with glassy eyes. Then they closed, automatically. When I dropped her hand, her head turned automatically towards the forest. I gave her something to

drink; she would not touch it. I offered her food; but she heard no word.

She was beautiful. Blond. A Galician Jewess, and blond. But a typical Jewess, none the less. The image of a Jewish Madonna. Only very thin, emaciated, tubercular-looking.

I tried to remove her by force. At first she seemed to permit this, but then, after I had stood her up and had begun to lead her, she thrust me off, with herculean strength. Her thrust almost felled me.

I decided to report the matter to the army surgeon.

Before I finished writing the report, Pauli appeared and informed me that there was yet another soul in the village. A fabulously old woman. And she was now standing outside. He had brought her to me. I went out and asked her in. I gave her a little cognac. The old lady gulped it greedily, and asked for a chaser. I gave her a white biscuit, which officers eat. She munched a bit, and became tired. She was very old.

"How old are you, grandma?"

"Last week I was ninety-three."

"May you live to be one hundred and twenty," I immediately added.

The old lady shook her head.

"It isn't necessary. Who needs a long life nowadays? Now the young people die, and I drag myself around. Who needs me? Why does the Almighty keep me here? As if in spite, no form of death overwhelms me. As if in spite."

"Why did they leave you in the village?"

"They didn't leave me, my dove. I remained of my own accord. How was I to go? Why? Where was I to go?"

I diverted the conversation to the demented girl. She revealed the mystery to me. It sounded like a legend, difficult to believe. The Cossacks had occupied the town and just about destroyed it. They killed, slaughtered, abused, and persecuted everyone. Only those who fled were saved . . . One of the Cossacks killed this girl's parents before her very eyes. He wanted to kill her, too, but she fell at his feet, pleading, and the Cossack took pity upon her. Only a few days later the girl was seen strolling the village streets arm in arm with the Cossack. Strolling with him, nestling against him, like a bride against

a newly wedded groom, laughing, exultant, happy. Those Jews, and even gentiles, who were left in the city were amazed and did not believe their eyes. If only she would give the impression of being crazy. But no, she seemed to be entirely in her right mind. Sanely and soberly she strolled with the murderer of her parents. Their only daughter. And when the Cossacks drove out all the inhabitants of the village, she remained with her Cossack. And when our army approached, the Cossacks beat a hasty retreat and she was left behind.

"The Cossack cast her from him like a sack of rags," said the old lady. "I happened to be in the house at the time, because the unfortunate young girl loves me. He cast her off and fled."

"And ever since," she concluded, "she has been sitting at the window, gazing after him. Toward the forest. She has been sitting in this fashion for more than a week. She sees nothing. She hears nothing. She doesn't eat and she doesn't sleep. She merely sits and looks. Sometimes she dozes off where she is sitting. She sits until she is exhausted and falls asleep. Then she wakes up again and continues to gaze. Without stirring from the spot. I gave her something to eat and drink, but she would have none of it. And her soul in some miraculous way continues to dwell in her body. Who can understand it? To fall in love with a murderer—who can understand that? Mysterious are the ways of the Almighty."

The army doctor examined her and found it necessary to send her to the hospital. She would die in a day or two. I had no time to question him and inquire into the scientific basis of this "sad marvel," as the soldiers called the unfortunate girl, because the Russians began a sharp counterattack with artillery fire. We prepared to resist stubbornly. But while this was being done, something very strange and terrible happened. A shell, a twenty-eight, fell directly into the young girl's house, and in the debris they found her torn to shreds together with my giant Croat.

Investigation disclosed that the wretched fellow had appeased his sexual hunger with this pretty, young, half-dead girl.

The hand of fate had overtaken him. Woman.

I succeeded in saving my dear dead friend from a dishonorable burial. I managed to arrange a decent burial for both him and the girl.

During the exercises, which occurred during a hail of Russian shells, even the eyes of shorty Margolis dripped tears.

The old woman also participated in the funeral. She did not cry. The fount of her tears had long since been dried up.

* * * * *

And something else happened in the meantime. Lieutenant Stubniak, demoted because he had gone berserk, received a very odd wound. A piece of shrapnel castrated him.

Margolis spoke, wildly.

"From now on," said the little lance corporal, "the order of women and dogs has ceased! This is a double demotion for having gone mad—from man to eunuch!"

"What luck!" said one of the soldiers, enviously. "What luck! Now he'll live peacefully without the curse of lusting for woman!"

And this the unfortunate fellow said with tragic earnestness, with great inner pain, with genuine envy.

CHAPTER XXI

Sublime

A RESPLENDENT August. Enough to drive one mad.

I received a letter from Mansy. A very brief one. For weeks she hadn't written me at all. She was working in a hospital as a nurse. She was noted for her efficiency. As soon as I left for the front, she entered a hospital. She left the stage, applause, and the night life, and devoted herself to the sick and the wounded.

She wrote three brief sentences.

Avigdor:

I have been having terrible dreams lately—mad nightmares. I see you dead already. I'm just about going out of my mind.

Mansy.

A terrifying letter.

Terrifying not because she was suffering, but because such letters brought death in their wake. Lately, back there in the city, a sort of prophetic spirit seemed to be abroad among the women who had sweethearts at the front. They saw "clearly before their eyes" the death of the man they loved. It was a shame to talk about it—but facts were facts. Lance Corporal Tzizick, a fine Slovakian soldier, was both a farmer and a shoemaker in his village. He received a letter from his fiancée in which she wrote him that she had seen him in her dream with a gaping hole in his head. We laughed at the letter. But

before long the lance corporal fell dead while eating. A bullet had passed straight through from his left to his right temple.

This incident was not unique. The prophecies of the women were fulfilled more than once. True, we witnessed only the prophecies that came true and not those which were not fulfilled. But only in the beginning did we think so. Within a few months the prophetic letters caused a furore among us. The great anguish and the mighty yearnings of the heart of a woman attached to her mate stretched and refined their nerves and senses to the point of prophetic epilepsy. Anyone who hasn't spent at least one year at the front ought not to ridicule this. If it is at all ridiculous, then only we who have experienced these things have a right to ridicule them. The commander of our third battalion, Major Berger, was torn to pieces by a shell, and in his pocket they found a letter from his sweetheart, who wrote that she had made peace with his wife. (What torture it must be that forces a sweetheart to make peace with a wife. And what torture it must be for the wife to extend a hand of welcome to her husband's sweetheart!) She had done so because she dreamed that he, the major, had been torn to pieces and that while dying he had begged her to go see his wife and make peace with her!

General Guthagen received a very strange letter from his daughter, in which she wrote: "Dear Father, our maid always says that some terrible smell has been distressing her lately. And the foul odor has been coming, forgive me, darling Father mine!—from you, from your body. I understand that you men there wallow in all sorts of filth when you are forced to. I know that. I beg you, Father dear, take care of yourself. Bathe as much as you can even there, for I know how you like your daily cold bath even in winter."

The general was amazed, but not without smiling to think that his dear, sweet daughter, a young girl of exceptional intelligence, did not know that a general does not wallow in filth. The general, after all, is domiciled in quite a fine building, even in wartime. And why does she pay attention to the babbling of a stupid servant?

The death of General Guthagen was nevertheless in strict

accord with the maid's strange description. His orderly went insane (perhaps he hadn't, but headquarters deemed it advisable to report that he had), murdered the general, and buried his body in the toilet in the town of Lazarovko, in the court of the palace Von Wilitzki.

What was this? Telepathy? Prophecy?

Who is there who knows what constitutes prophecy, telepathy, epilepsy, insanity, sense of the future, and the like?

"The maid on the ocean saw what prophets failed to see."

* * * * *

But if in the city suffering and yearning sensitized the soul to fatalistic yearning for its beloved, the soul of the soldier on the battlefront, who in addition to his own yearnings suffered the very pangs of death, became more finely drawn, refined and sensitive to a really miraculous degree. A person's nerves, clarified in the fires of war, became a fine weblike net, radiating to great distances and picking up images, sounds, and movements. The newspapers have been discussing some marvelous technical discovery, capable of picking up sounds from all corners of the world and transmitting them to our ears. They also have been discussing a television machine which would soon succeed in gathering images from great distances to pass before our eyes.

Who knows? Perhaps we'll really succeed in attaining these miracles, too? When I am alone I have unshaken confidence in man's achievement of wonders even greater than these. But if we are capable of making such a machine, then I also believe in "prophecy" in simple physical form, which once accomplished wonders which science has never been able to fathom. I have more faith in that marvelous machine known as *homo sapiens,* which is able to radiate waves from itself to great distances. And if the hypothesis of Professor Einstein, to whom the newspapers have of late been devoting a great deal of space, is correct, that space and time are not separate and distinct, but that time is only the fourth dimension of space, then why should it be impossible for the machine we call our soul to gather up not only what is distant in space, but also what is far removed in time? Both in the past and in the fu-

ture? Why not? For, according to this theory, there is no past or future, just as there is no past or future in space. Why not?

In any event, our nerves in that hell-hole were already far from being merely somatic threads. In the measure that I studied our own selves, my men and myself—I observed that neither in speech nor in actions did we resemble the individuals we were back in the city. We conversed by allusions. One understood his fellow without any words at all. And at times words were entirely superfluous. Not only were they superfluous; somtimes they did more harm than good. Who was it who said that speech was given only to conceal our thoughts? Right. I observed one of my men, Infantryman Gabor Balkoni, and felt such an affection for him as I had never felt towards any other man. The youth fairly oozed with cordial respect for me. But instead of letting him know about it, I employed all sorts of words, circumlocutions and subterfuges—yet he was aware of the affection I had for him. *Despite* my words! Another of my men, constantly trembling with fear lest I endanger my life, performed all sorts of tricks during the confusion of battle, in order to shield my body and "cover" me. Finally, when I emerged from danger unscathed, he stood or sat opposite me and rolled his eyes affectionately, muttered, told stupid stories, and I understood from his look that was not at all what he wanted to say. Positively not. He wanted to tell me how happy he was that I had remained alive with him and that now he could see me and live with me. And my young orderly, he who cursed me out like a dog when I didn't take care of myself, always told me the opposite of what he really wanted to say.

More important than all was the fact that almost everyone of us always sensed the thoughts of his fellow. One dreamed of the secret hopes of his fellow; the latter read the thoughts of a third; and he in turn saw, as if in a dream, the approaching death of the fourth—and all that fused us into one grand, marvelous harmony, into love such as no Greek philosopher or Hebrew prophet had ever dreamed of. That love often appeared in the open, unexpectedly, without premeditation, and without our speaking of it.

An August day. Resplendent in its blinding brilliance. Fall

clothed all nature with a cosmic cloak of unsubstantiality. The setting sun was a lambent flame, and we lay supine with our eyes fixed upon it. I seemed to hear the sound of the sun's substance—the swish of the mighty protuberances one hundred and fifty million kilometers away. I am certain I heard it. And as we lay there, a cosmic sadness spread its black wings over us all and merged us into one titanic soul, which ached without being wounded and was tormented without knowing why. And which yearned without any specific object in view.

Absolute silence. Among us and among the Russians, too.

They, too, were daydreaming. Even as we. We were merged with them, and only one solitary yearning still separated us—the mighty longing to be with them in person, too! Together, in the sunlight.

How much we loved them, those people over there, who suffered in common with us, who yearned for the sun, love, women, and God!

Suddenly corpulent Rosenberger spoke up: "I would give five years of my life to be the first to run across there and give them a warm, fraternal greeting!"

"To do that, and then die!" the gaunt Tyrolese said, as though continuing Rosenberger's thought, without interruption.

"I'm keeping a box of Memphis cigarettes, which my Ada sent me, for the first Russian I meet," added Borki, the angular apache.

And I became aware that my thoughts, too, were now taken up with the probability of meeting the Russians. After a few silent reflections, I presumed upon the strikingly unusual fact that everyone was occupied with this single common thought. And I experimented.

"What were you just thinking about?" I surprised Margolis, who was lying there humming.

"I was thinking of arranging a service in a *minyan* (assemblage for worship of not less than ten men) with those Jewish fellows there," he replied without hesitation. "The first will be the *gomel* prayer, the blessing for deliverance!"

"How do you know what I was thinking about, Jew?"

Uncle Oestreicher, whom I had thought to be asleep, stormed at him. Then he himself added: "I won't die unless and until I utter at least one prayer in a *minyan* with them, whether peace comes in the meantime or not. By my life!"

"You took an oath, Uncle Oestreicher?" I asked him angrily.

"Yes, I did!"

"A righteous man decrees and the Holy-One-Blessed-Be-He fulfills," Margolis added. He reflected for a moment and continued, "I should like just once to embrace a big, strong, Russian gentile and tell him, 'You're a good *pan!*' Embrace him, lift him high, throw him down, and wrestle with him."

"They're good people," said the stubby Magyar, who had spent several years in jail for a murder committed while he was drunk on his wedding day. "Simple people, who like a little liquor, a good woman, and fine horses. Quite like us. It would be good to meet them once and have a drink with them."

"When peace comes, the first thing I shall do is to make a trip to Russia," the Serbian "bastard" said, half to himself. "To take a trip and spend about a month among them and love them."

That's just the way he said it—"and love them."

* * * * *

The sun kept sinking lower and lower. It filled our hearts with unbounded happiness and love such as we had never before thought possible. I recalled the city, and felt a unique joy in recognizing the marvelous feeling I had in lying here, suffering all sorts of tortures—in order to defend the city, protect her borders, and prevent the enemy from attacking and disrupting the joys and pleasures of her people. For a moment there stole through my heart a flash of hatred and envy toward the city, whose inhabitants sat in the theater and laughed at some mother-in-law joke. But in another, I was filled with a sort of pity mixed with love and great compassion. Let them be happy there, let them exult, laugh and enjoy themselves; I was happy to guard their lives and shield them from danger —yes, die a thousand unnatural deaths for them.

I was happy. . . .

It was a marvelous mission—to die for others.

Only one thing grieved me. Mansy didn't know that at that moment I was thinking of her.

I lighted the lamp and wrote:

BLOODY ROSE

It is all one to us, wherever we may be.
Each kiss will bring its fruit, of a bloody crimson hue.
Come to my grave; we shall be coupled in our last embrace.

Be not fearful, for there you shall find me;
There will your glowing flesh fall upon my turf;
Thence will my blood-sap still bring you fragrant flowers.

For still my sacred longing is rooted in this earth.
Come, kiss me for the last time with your trembling body.
Let the Creator look down, and rejoice in His handiwork.

And let the maggots, boring through these crypts,
Mark how hallowed is the love of flesh for flesh,
That they too multiply and find blessing in ecstasy.

And when we have, for eternity, been joined anew,
May you, O bloody rose, blossom from my grave,
And, stemmed from my marrow, glisten in the sun.

The night was warmly mild and pleasant. Silence. The Russians were sending no "presents" over to us.

We were lying down, reading their thoughts over there.

* * * * *

Protracted silence—so agreeable.

Suddenly Infantryman Jzigo sprang up as if from a nightmare and cried out.

"Tonight they'll attack! They'll attack, I tell you!"

"They won't attack. Not tonight!" I said.

"They'll attack, sir. You'll see. I had a dream. Some scoundrel has just entered their position—some great scoundrel, and

he himself brought the order. You'll see. And also, you ought to be careful, sir," he said with a smile. "Really. I had a bad dream. You ought to be careful, sir."

"You bastard!" my orderly yelled as he leaped to his feet. "You'll die, and not our *Herr* Color-bearer!"

The conversation was held entirely in that tone in which dreams are described, and yet, despite that, Jzigo arose, dressed, and added:

"I simply can't sleep—by the Virgin Mary!"

* * * * *

Before an hour had passed, the Russian offensive began.

CHAPTER XXII

In the City of Whoredom

DURING the attack I received an unpleasant visitor. The demoted Lieutenant Stubniak returned from his sick leave, after having spent some time in the hospital because of his unique wound.

When he entered our trench, someone broke into a laugh. All the others joined in, although they did their best to restrain themselves. The laughter was due to our common realization that the lieutenant had returned as a eunuch.

In other times, the lieutenant would have angrily meted out stiff punishment to the entire platoon. But during an attack, with danger lurking overhead, every private towered head and shoulders above him.

"He is already drawing in his tail like a dog," I heard Corporal Margolis whisper in the ear of my orderly.

Lieutenant Stubniak did not interfere with me in the slightest. His notorious cowardice had risen a few degrees, or more properly, his courage had dropped a few more degrees since he had left the front line—or perhaps since his castration. He sat and drank, on and on. Despite the fact that we were beneath a constant hail of shells, we all centered our attention upon the officer. We sought to discover any changes occasioned by his wound.

In truth, he no longer cursed either women or dogs— or jested about them. He merely sat and drank. Pale and trem-

bling. And every time a shell whistled overhead, he seemed to cringe.

I had a stronge desire to irritate him. To ask him for orders. He was my commanding officer, wasn't he?

He tried to get out of it with bravado.

"He-he—you—you're really—really the commander—the commander here—here I'm—I—for some time I haven't—haven't been here—here," he stammered, smiled, and patted me on the shoulder. "I—I have again become a-a-a rookie, my friend; please—thanks, very much—please—please . . ."

"*Herr* Lieutenant, I beg leave to report, sir, without an order I won't do a thing, sir!"

He stammered even more, cringing with timidity and obsequiousness. His servile language disgusted the entire platoon.

The telephone rang. An order to send an underofficer and five men over the top.

As he gave me the order, he added generously, "My friend, send—a-a that fellow there, the corporal with five men. Please."

I announced: "Five men must go over with me. Who volunteers."

The lieutenant interrupted me. "You—please don't go. Only he. And they. You don't have to go."

"*Herr* Lieutenant, I beg leave to report, sir, I never *send* men out on such a mission; I always *call* my men to go with me!"

"Why?" he stammered. "What for? There is no such order. I'm not ordering you to. It's unnecessary. Sit down and take a drink."

Meanwhile, I organized a patrol of five men and a sergeant, and we went over the top.

"You're—you're—a good soldier, my friend," he stammered. "Good—good—I—good luck—godspeed . . ."

We had not gone twenty paces when I heard a loud cannon report, followed by a whining noise. A terrible blow hurled me to the ground—excruciating pain—

When I came to, a surgeon was standing by my side, giving stringent orders to carry me away quickly. He offered me a drink of brandy, and shouted at the top of his voice: "Hurry,

and you'll get there in twenty minutes! Hurry! Hurry! If he dies on the way, I'll slit your necks like . . ."

More I did not hear. The burning pain overcame me again and I fell asleep. (Afterwards I learned that I had fainted a second time.)

I awoke in the hospital at chief headquarters.

The wound was enervating and dangerous. The pain was near the heart. A ragged splinter of shrapnel. Its uppertooth, about the size of half an egg in circumference, had entered my chest about three finger-breadths above my heart. The pain was sawing at me. I had not the strength to groan or make even the slightest sound. I heard nothing and saw nothing. Only the voice of the nurse kept entering my ear.

"*Herr* Color-bearer will get well, with the help of God. It is nothing. You'll get well. Only be quiet. The main thing is quiet. Be at ease, be at ease, the danger has passed; the danger was really great, but it has passed, thank God. The operation was successful."

After I had rested a few days, the young surgeon explained things to me.

"The devil! It was the wound of your evil spirit. Exactly around the heart. Of course, poets are wounded in the heart. How did you arrange it just so? Hard by the heart. Right near it, but not in the heart itself."

He explained: "Do you know? Just above the heart there are two arteries which are actually one. Understand?"

I blinked my eyes, as if to say that I did. For the present, I still had not the strength to make any other kind of reply.

"So right between those two arteries the Russians shot their shrapnel filing, damn their souls! The splinter, half a tooth of shrapnel, wedged in between both arteries. The arteries receded graciously, and allowed it ingress. It entered, but they remained uninjured. They weren't harmed in the slightest degree. If even one of them had been damaged, why then, *kaput!* You would be lying here a dead hero."

I blinked my eyes: No.

"And why not?" he protested authoritatively. "I tell you, yes!"

I blinked again. Again he protested.

"You don't understand this! What do you know about medicine and anatomy, my friend? You know poetry."

Only the nurse understood. "*Herr* Color-bearer says no. If the shrapnel had injured the arteries, then he wouldn't be lying here a half-dead hero, but in the common grave over there!

I blinked my eyes: Correct.

But the pain overwhelmed me again.

* * * * *

They transported me far back into the interior of Hungary. In the hospital there I was informed that in reality I was just as dangerously ill as before. Spells of fever came and passed, rising and falling very sharply and suddenly.

In the course of a few weeks, it became impossible to make my illness obey normal physical law. The surgeons tried their level best; they strove by every known means to assuage the pain and heal the wound—but they were unsuccessful. They could not fathom the case. The wound was a bad one, deep and dangerous, yet, after the removal of the jagged piece of shrapnel, convalescence should have begun, and I should have begun to improve in a perfectly normal way.

Me, of course, they did not ask. What surgeon asks his patient for advice? At the front, upon the slightest suspicion of illness, the surgeon gave a soldier one of two remedies—aspirin or castor oil. A headache or stomach ache? Aspirin or castor oil. A bad heart attack? Aspirin or castor oil. Rheumatism as a result of lying on the damp ground an entire week? Aspirin or castor oil. Two remedies to heal every conceiveable ailment. Really manna from heaven!

That was the fate of every soldier at the front, until he was wounded.

Yet there were also some cases of minor wounds which they "treated" with aspirin and castor oil. They treated them until they had to carry slightly wounded men on stretchers to the hospital, dangerously ill with blood poisoning.

Why all this? Not by any chance because of ignorance or indolence. But to weed out the damnable fellows who simulated illness, those cowards and sluggards who wanted to evade active combat and work, and rest up a while instead.

And every patient who wasn't wounded and wasn't bleeding, they considered to be a goldbricker, and sentenced him to aspirin and castor oil.

Thus it happened more than once that such a goldbricker breathed his last with castor oil.

But Lance Corporal Margolis instituted a slight reform. Margolis, with the "help" of the division surgeon. The little corporal was aware of the hatred the men felt for our young surgeon at the front. He was a young bore, without any talent at all. Even before completing his medical studies, he had been commissioned surgeon officer, and hence insisted on "strict discipline" in his relations with the soldiers.

Margolis had a slight wound on his elbow, which he himself was treating in order to avoid reporting it to the surgeon. When he learned that the division surgeon himself had condescended to visit our first-aid station, he decided to play sick. He timed his arrival exactly with that of the surgeon-major and stood first in line. The surgeon-major sat and watched the young surgeon at work.

"What's the matter, Lance Corporal Margolis?" the young surgeon inquired.

"I respectfully request, sir, that you please give me some aspirin and castor oil!"

For a moment there was silent amazement. Then the surgeon-major himself rose and walked over to Margolis, and in a cordial voice asked him, "What are you at home?"

"Your excellency, I beg leave to say, sir, an assistant rabbi!"

The young surgeon took pains to explain to his superior: "A seminary student."

"Aha," he said and again turned to Margolis. "So how do you know which medicine you need? Did you study medicine, too? What's the nature of your illness?"

"Your excellency, I beg leave to say, sir, I have a slight wound on my elbow."

He showed his hurt to the surgeon-major. The veteran doctor looked at the wound, stared and gazed, then cast an angry look at the young surgeon, but said nothing. Instead he turned again to Margolis. The little lance corporal continued to answer the questions put to him.

"Your excellency, I beg leave to report, sir, I didn't study

medicine at home, but here at the front. Here I got to know that there are only two remedies in existence; aspirin and castor oil!"

The chief surgeon immediately grasped the situation. Again he examined the wound and found it serious, already somewhat infected.

"Come here!" he said to the young surgeon in a voice that was menacingly furious. "What is this?"

"A slight wound," the subordinate answered, quaking with excitement, as he turned to Margolis. "How were you hurt?"

The veteran surgeon gnashed his teeth.

"Why do you ask him, ignoramus? I'm asking you! What kind of wound is this?"

"It is apparent that the slight wound is the result of a fall in which the skin was torn and the flesh gashed to the bone by a rock. The slight wound gradually became infected."

"And why didn't you come sooner?" The elderly officer asked Margolis.

"Your excellency, I beg leave to say, sir, a year ago I had a toothache and was given castor oil. I had about half of it left over. And about three months ago some small insect got into my eye. For this I received two aspirin tablets. I had one left over. And now that I hurt myself, I didn't want to waste any time leaving the front, so I used both medicines for this injury, too. But now that I am out of them, I was forced to come and ask for more!"

The surgeon-major listened and observed Margolis. A restrained smile lighted up his wrinkled face. He patted him affectionately upon the back and then turned to the young surgeon.

"The lance corporal will receive two weeks' sick leave. Write it down and make it official. In the meantime let them give especial attention to his injury. Because he may lose his arm! Do you understand? And the aspirin and castor oil you can now keep for yourself!"

(All these particulars Color-bearer Sliezak, stationed in that sector, later transmitted to me.)

Because of this incident a stop was put to the slavish use of aspirin and castor oil for a long time. The young surgeon was banished to service in the thick of battle.

Although they did not give you aspirin and castor oil in the army hospital, the relationship between doctor and patient was far from being what it was in normal times, in times of peace. They, too, asked the patient few questions about his pains and suspicions. It was for that reason that the doctors were puzzled to find that my wound was not healing properly.

For, had they questioned me, I would have solved the mystery for them: the terrible revulsion and deep-seated nausea which I felt toward everything about me in the hospital, the inconsideration for the men in the trenches, the lack of personal relationship between the city people, the coffee house, theater, and joyousness here, and the thousands upon thousands of men condemned to die for them back there.

Here smoldering hatred for the city and its masses was rekindled within me. How they strutted about—the doctors, nurses, and orderlies, and even those who came to visit the wounded, brought in out of hell!

The young doctors were always dressed gaily, as at a masquerade ball. To them the patient was an object, material for study, for experiment, a guinea pig.

And the nurses were daughters of nobles and counts, or just home girls with nothing to do. For them the entire affair was only an opportunity to preen themselves, to show off in their white hospital uniforms.

A soldier lay dying. His groans were heart-rending. Nearby a lieutenant-surgeon, with sleek hair, was ogling a nurse, who smiled back reassuringly. As she turned to walk to her patient, her rhythmic buttocks swung brazenly in seductive waltz time.

Such things kept my wound from healing. I remembered my men over there.

How pitiful for these heroes and their valor!

* * * * *

There was only one nurse in the entire hospital who went about as though she were moonstruck. Her eyes expressed a deep *weltschmertz*—Nurse Therese. Her relationship with a patient, the manner in which she approached a wounded man, the way she nursed him and spoke to him, were by themselves sufficient to ease their pains.

I asked the doctor to have Therese take care of me.

Piecemeal, I learned that the good Therese had been a professional prostitute for a few years before the war.

Hers was the only soul to experience the agony of war and sympathize with its unfortunate heroes.

Later I learned many other things which I hadn't even imagined. I learned that the faithlessness of the wives of the men in that hell back there was a customary and natural thing in the city. They lusted especially after any kind of Russian prisoner: the aristocratic women for the Russian privates; the plainer women of the lower classes for the Russian officers.

And I also learned that only one class of women remained faithful, faithful to the very end—the prostitutes, the cabaret girls, and the frivolous dancing girls. At the outbreak of the war, they had volunteered for jobs in hospitals and had been working devotedly, in sacrifice and fidelity. And they were waiting patiently for their unfortunate sweethearts, and for world peace.

Those united in sacred wedlock had become prostitutes, and the prostitutes had become truly sacred!

* * * * *

Good Nurse Therese healed my wound. I recovered and left the hospital. Only my left hand was still bandaged and in a sling, to prevent it from pressing too much against me.

I received a two months' furlough. So I went to "the city," to lively, beautiful, dear Budapest.

There I found revealed to me the staggering worthlessness of man in his stinking cesspool of corruption.

Budapest is second in gaiety only to Vienna. Its night life is quite notorious. The society of the gay rounders is a world by itself. A sort of country within a country. More than five thousand people constitute this society of fast livers. Most of them are artists of various kinds, with whom are associated all kinds of frivolous people, playboys, spendthrifts, and wastrels. Budapest does not have to apply to others for new forms of merrymaking.

But what was being done in wartime was not merrymaking. It was murder. The murder of every trace of human feeling

and respect for the millions suffering for these merrymakers, enduring fiendish tortures of hell, meeting all sorts of horrible, unnatural deaths, in order to guard their peace and happiness and preserve them in their drunken orgies.

I had long been thoroughly familiar with night life, but now I began to discover new people, altogether different creatures. Human parasites, who took pleasure in considering everyone from the front as legitimate prey. At the beginning of the war, the opposite had been the case. A soldier was aware of his superiority, the superiority of the sacrifices laid upon the altar of the city. And those worms of people, the dregs and scum of war, who had bribed their way out of war service, dragged their tails between their legs and respected those who were suffering in the muddy trenches, where death lurked. But now, it seemed that they had become accustomed to war. Hence, when they saw that there was no longer any imminent personal danger, and that the gay life continued its normal course, they got up on their hind feet and rebelled against their "slavish subjection" to righteousness, honor, and love for us.

What stunned me more than anything else was this most horrible fact—the total absence of loyalty on the part of soldiers' wives to their husbands at the front. And the satisfaction they got out of it. The only connection one could ascribe or conceive to exist between them and their husbands was their vaunting of "my husband's valor on the field of honor."

The native city woman strolled arm in arm with her prisoner, whom she had had set free on her assurance that she needed him for "housework." She lived a gay life with him, tasting the sweets of forbidden living, and in the meantime boasting, as she sighed lecherously, "Why, yes, of course, my husband is bravely defending the Fatherland. He already has three gold medals!"

And she continued to lust after her prisoner.

But with us who had come out of that hell alive, they comported themselves far better. On rare occasions they even preferred us to their Russian captives, and this, too, they sanctimoniously garbed in the cloak of untainted patriotism.

"I hate the Russians," one woman acquaintance of mine

said one night in a coffee house, as she ogled me with her beautiful eyes. "And I hate their whores, too, because they haven't an iota of patriotism; instead of 'taking care' (that is the expression she used) of our wounded heroes while they are convalescing and giving them"—and she smiled at me with the sweetness of both her mouth and breasts—"their love, they cuddle up with the enemy! Phew! Well, how do you feel? How did you get your wound?"

I ate and suffered—and remained silent.

She helped me carve the cutlet on my plate.

I suffered and kept quiet.

She tried to put a piece in my mouth with the fork.

I could not endure it any longer. I sprang up and shouted: "Waiter! Get this whore away from my table!"

Everyone present was shocked. Even the dancing stopped for the moment.

I paid my bill and departed.

The city no longer understood such resentment.

* * * * *

I took a stroll through the city but was afraid to visit my friends. Even my very good and intimate friends.

I looked up my Mansy and paid her a surprise visit. She was a nurse in a hospital. She fainted dead away. The doctors told me nice things about her. They had always marveled at her devotion to the wounded soldiers. She refused to attend any other class of patients. When they tried to transfer her to a civilian hospital, she threatened to resign.

She was working under an assumed name. For her real name was notorious as that of a light-headed dancer. More than one doctor had tried to seduce her. But she was very dangerous. She immediately reported these men to the chief surgeon.

"Sacred serpent" they called her.

My Mansy—the "harlot."

"Why didn't you write me oftener, Mansy?"

"Why? So that you should yearn for me there in passionate helplessness? Is that all you men need there?"

"You men!" she said. How she understood the soul of the unfortunate soldier!

She received an indefinite furlough on my account. As long as I would be there.

She was always crying. Her eyes were constantly tear-filled.

"What shall I give you? What do you wish of me? Ask me for something."

"What shall I ask of you, silly?"

"Take what you want of me. Take my body, my soul, my life. I have tried constantly to be pretty and healthy just for you, using no paint, powder, or cream. No. I ate a lot and worked hard, even though I had no taste for such things; but I tried my best to eat, so as to be healthy and pretty. Everything for you. Everything. Tell the truth—do I look pretty to you?"

"Very pretty, Mansy."

"Tell the truth. For if you don't, if I don't please you, then I'll get you another woman, a very pretty one. Tell the truth."

"You're stupid, Mansy. There isn't another woman as pretty as you in this entire accursed city."

She wept.

"Why don't you declare peace? It's about time. I'm tired of it all. I'll go mad."

"If you love me, Mansy, calm yourself and continue to live a healthy, good life. Eat, drink, and be pretty, Mansy. If you really love me."

She reflected for a moment and said, "Love you? I don't know. I love not only you alone, but all you men over there. Why do you suffer there? For whom? To what end? Why? Wherefore? It's horrible!"

"Come, Mansy. Let's a have a drink. Let's drink your favorite liqueur, cherry brandy mixed with cointreau. Come on."

"I won't drink. Since you entered that hell, I haven't had even a thimbleful. It isn't necessary."

That was the most sacred of all sacrifices.

And they called her a harlot.

A few days ago, the upright woman, the pure native-born citizen. And today it is she, the frivolous dancer.

The next day, I paid a duty call. I visited the wife of my friend, Color-bearer Diula Kerack. He was a sculptor and painter. Once we had agreed that whoever got a furlough first

should visit the other's relatives back home. I sent her a note. I wanted to bring regards from her young husband.

She waited for me impatiently. But as soon as I had entered and was seated near her for a few minutes, I was amazed to discover her attitude toward her husband. It was not particularly warm. And I knew how ardent her passion had been for this man with whom she had been living not more than a few months when the war came and tore him out of her arms.

And now she was more interested in me than in him.

I told her how her husband was getting on. I carefully avoided describing all the misfortunes in detail, so as not to cause her undue suffering.

But she persisted in making me the center of her attention.

As a last resort, I unfolded the entire book of our sufferings at the front, and especially those of her husband. I took especial pains to explain that submerged and hidden in that hell was the greatest anguish of all—woman, and a husband's jealousy of his wife, the fear and the terrifying thought that she might be interested in some other man. "Jealousy at the front," I explained, "isn't ordinary jealousy. It is the inquisition of the soul in which all torments are centralized at one and the same time; passionate longing, sexual suffering, and the mortification of a male. Especially the feeling of humiliation. The terrible mortification that she might be kissing some wastrel, some good-for-nothing, who had evaded war service.

"And especially for your husband, an able artist," I explained to her, "the realization that his young wife might betray him through some stupid fellow with a wax-pointed mustache—that was the most terrible of all suffering."

She listened, suddenly rose, and sent off the maid. She closed the door, returned to me, sat down directly opposite, and looked into my eyes as her knees touched mine, as though undesignedly.

"Then you are an artist, too . . ."

I jumped to my feet, my brain dizzy and confused with pain, anger, and shame. I shut my eyes for a moment. Then I said, "What shall I tell Diula for you?"

"What shall you tell him?" she stammered. "What shall

you tell him? Tell him—that I am waiting for him. That his *objets d'art* are in good order. And what else? Nothing at all. I am waiting for him."

"Good," I said, and departed with deep revulsion.

Everything went black. What should I tell that miserable fellow?

I would lie to him with every fiber of my being.

I decided that it was impossible to spend more time there. I simply had not the strength to endure it. The city of whoredom had stripped off its clothes, including its filthy chemise, and cavorted wantonly like a shameless bawd. I had to leave.

But what would Mansy say about this pure soul of mine in the midst of a city of harlots?

Yet to remain there meant undergoing the tortures of a captive in exile.

* * * * *

A few days later I determined to return to the front and not take full advantage of my furlough.

I drank until I was drunk.

I boarded an electric streetcar, somewhat under the weather, and rode on. Suddenly I noticed a young woman smiling at me. Soon she came over to introduce herself. She said she knew me, although I did not know her. Her husband was at the front. For some time she had been wanting to make my acquaintance. Even before the war.

"This time you won't get away from me!"

I got off the tramcar. She did, too.

She invited me to her home. She was all alone.

At first I had wanted to ask her in which sector her husband was fighting. But upon second thought I changed my mind. Why should I? It was best that I knew nothing.

"How long has your husband been at the front?"

"About two years."

"Well, does he know that his wife is unfaithful to him?" I asked point-blank.

"What difference does it make to me whether or not he knows it? Suppose he should die? Suppose he were dead already?"

I left her without saying good-by.

But as the devil would have it, I met her again the next day. She greeted me disdainfully.

"I didn't believe you were such a coward."

She examined my collar for a minute and said, "So you belong to the 65th Regiment too! I have a friend in that regiment, Color-bearer Segedi. He is here now. He was wounded and has recovered."

"Who? Color-bearer Segedi? Where is he? When was he wounded?"

"Two weeks ago. A slight wound. If you want to see him, please come to my home tonight. He boards with me."

And she added, smilingly, "He isn't as romantic as you are. He is a soldier. And an officer!"

There was a bitter taste in my mouth.

"And he? He knows that your husband is at the front?"

"Does he know? He's my husband's best friend. My husband is in the 66th. That's in your sector."

I was determined to see my comrade in arms, Color-bearer Segedi, so I was forced to visit her that night. I found him there. He was actually living with her.

I said nothing to him, but in my heart I was convinced that he was a doomed man.

The next morning I requested headquarters to send me back to the front.

CHAPTER XXIII

"Madame Pompadour"

AFTER that last battle the question of heroism in general and of Jewish heroism in particular again became the order of the day. Only now it was in a different form, in an improved form, although the questioners did not consciously intend to improve it.

"What is it that makes the Jews indifferent about their lives, and carefree; that turns them into people to whom nothing makes any difference and who have nothing to lose?"

Such was the form of the question. That the Jews distinguished themselves in valor more than all the rest, even more than the pure Magyar peasants, no one any longer had the slightest doubt. Many recent instances would not permit the eradication of this unpleasant reality. Since it was impossible to doubt the fact, then one must, at least, find the reason for it. To find the reason meant to remove the aura of glory from the incidents. Analysis is fundamentally unsuited to displaying the object analyzed in its finer condition. On the contrary, analysis reveals things as through a microscope, and through a microscope the face of the most beautiful woman in the world becomes nothing but perforated and hairy goose flesh.

At first they said that the Magyar Jew learned valor from his Magyar countrymen. That would have been a reasonable explanation were it not for the fact that the despised Galician

Jews had also of late performed deeds of valor a bit out of the ordinary.

Afterwards they said that it was not really bravery that brought them out on top, but cunning. They tricked the enemy at the psychological moment, just as they tricked the *goy* back home in business.

In this there was evidenced the popular logic, except for those victories into which no amount of logical effort could drag the factor of cunning. Even so, unvarnished deceit was not held cheaply at the front. The work of the generals was mostly trickery. Of course, it was called "strategy." But the bravery of the Jewish Captain Schlesinger (at home he had been a physician, but in the army he volunteered for front-line service only) certainly was not trickery, when it saved the Fifteenth Division from annihilation. It was sheer manly heroism. In the battle for the village of Tolna on the Dniester, after the entire division had been forced to retreat, he remained in the village alone with his company as though quartered in a fortress; and until the division sent him reinforcements at the end of about a week, with his "fortress" as a base, he made constant sallies against the enemy, who surrounded him like locusts about a little garden. For an entire week this action prevented the capture of the town and the bridge—until the division began seriously to doubt that his company had been wiped out and to believe instead that the men were still alive, so that they finally sent the urgently needed reinforcements.

We crossed the Dniester, the largest and most important river on the entire front.

In Captain Schlesinger's company most of those who distinguished themselves and won decorations were also Jews. And proudest of the Jews were their Magyar comrades, who could not praise them enough.

There were many, many more similar victories.

There was our little Jew, Lance Corporal Margolis, the emaciated telephone operator. He certainly was as sly as a serpent, and yet it was impossible to state positively that cunning alone played the chief role in his most recent performance of duty. The ingenious idea to connect our tele-

phone wire with that of the enemy did not require cunning. Every rookie knew that. The main thing was to bring this cunning into active realization. To crawl forward on all fours for about four hundred yards right under the enemy's nose, and go about his business there as unconcernedly as though he were among his own men: that was something else again.

And there was the report in the official army weekly that the members of the Hungarian student organization, Maccabee, had enlisted. They did not scatter to join up with the various regiments constituted according to the districts of their birth. Instead they did a very fine thing. They organized themselves into one regiment and went forth as a unit to do battle with the Cossacks in the Carpathians, where they really performed marvelously heroic deeds. And, of course, it was to be taken for granted that, massed in a single unit, they were bound to lose more men, incomparably more, than if they had broken up and each had become one of hundreds in a different regiment.

They were the fellows known as Zionists, whose patriotism was questioned, sometimes even by non-Zionist Jews.

The question again became a subject for discussion, despite the desires of those who participated. It reached such a stage that one of the officers thought it quite all right to turn to me with a silly, frank question.

"You already have three important decorations. Now you're a philosopher. Tell me . . ."

What he asked was a mere mumble of words, which it was impossible even to repeat in logical sequence.

Suddenly I said to him: "Do you know the secret behind it all? Your hatred for us. Nothing more. You have the power to hate us, but we have only one means to avenge ourselves upon you—our bravery. Engulfed as we are in such bestial hatred, there isn't really much to lose. Sometimes we are seized by the feeling and the realization that it is better to die like a dog than to live amidst such hatred, for which there is neither rhyme nor reason!"

It was the first time that truth had escaped my lips without equivocation.

And it helped us to a considerable degree. He repeated my

words to his fellow officers, and after lengthy discussion a campaign was launched to desist from hating the Jews.

"Destroy the cause and you'll destroy the effect"—bravery.

That's quite an interesting process. The struggle of envy with hatred. And what is even more interesting is the fact that envy and hatred have conflicting and diametrically opposed interests.

Whichever way it was, the citation of the Jews established peace and quiet among the various "pure races" in the Austro-Hungarian-Serb-Ruthenian-Bosnian-gypsy army. In this army of Babel, composed of about twenty different peoples who for many generations had been living within indistinct boundaries that were now rapidly disappearing—in this army of Babel they spoke of race purity! A pure Magyar, a pure Italian, a pure Rumanian, and, above all, a pure Austrian! What wonder then, if as a consequence, the gypsy corporal, Lotzi Gentsche, prided himself on being a *pure gypsy!*

As a matter of fact, he might really have been the only one among them all who had the right to boast of his pure stock.

Whatever the case might be, however, Jewish daring was "Jewish impudence." Their bravery was similarly dubbed "Jewish panic." But there were many who objected to this vilification. To call an onslaught against the enemy "panic"? Panic makes one flee in retreat and not storm forward.

Only First Lieutenant Smertschani, tongue in cheek, kept smiling at these philosophical discussions. Until once he lost his temper. "You're traveling in circles, beating around the bush, and sometimes you appear to be doing it deliberately to keep from seeing the simple truth and the only possible explanation: the Jews have been yearning for the past two thousand years for a national life, for a life of bravery, heroism, epic achievement, in which their pristine historic splendor and glory would return to them. For two thousand years they have been yearning for a homeland in thousands of different ways: now in prayer, now in the land of Israel, now in the setting up of some mystic, some chassidic *rebbe* as king to make obeisance to. I would go so far as to say that the Magyar patriotism of our Hungarian Jews is but a single consuming desire to be absorbed in the glory of Hungary, to share in its

beauty, and in this way satisfy their yearning for a country of their own, which they no longer believe can be realized. Who among us likes to wrap himself in the cloak of our nationalism, don the helmet, the *Tzacho* with the tail, and the patriotic hipboots, more than the Jews who have been successfully assimilated?

"And," continued Smertschani, who was the center of attention, "as soon as they were given a taste of national affiliation in the way of a military uniform, beginning with the single star of the lance corporal to the red stripe, the *lampas* on the general's trouser leg, as soon as they got the taste of nationhood, their innate bravery burst forth like a dammed up stream! Why all this sophistry? The Jew is brave because people have bottled up his valor for the past two thousand years."

He paused for a moment amidst silence, and then suddenly affirmed, with finality: "Well, just try for once to give them their land for a while, and you'll see how Jewish cowardice will spontaneously become Jewish heroism!"

This "speech" was the longest talk we had ever heard from the laconic peasant officer.

Then all was silent again for a considerable time. Everyone drained his glass and continued to smoke his cigarette without a word.

Without warning, Color-bearer Sliezak, the Czech pigmy, spoke up cautiously. "I heard that the supreme commander in chief has some such plan."

They looked at him quizzically. He answered their unexpressed question.

"I have heard that they plan to give the Jews Palestine so that they can establish their homeland and government there."

"Who is it who wants to give it away?" the Austrian Captain Walter asked, plainly irritated. "The English want to fool the Jews with some such plan; that is what I heard."

"Correct," Sliezak chimed in. "But in this respect our Entente intends to do likewise. Perhaps this is an answer to England's treachery. I heard so. There is also a declaration to this

effect. So I heard. They are distributing it among the Jewish soldiers."

"And who signed the declaration?" First Lieutenant Smertschani inquired, with cautious stolidity.

"I haven't seen the declaration," was the reply. "Only yesterday one of my friends from the Franco-German front passed through here on his way to the 66th Regiment, and he told me about it. According to him, the following are the signatories: Kaiser Wilhelm, His Majesty Emperor Franz Joseph, and the Sultan of Turkey. So he says."

I sat and listened and my mouth became parched. What was this? An ugly jest? Yes. That was evident. I noticed how that runt, the color-bearer, was eyeing me as he spoke. They had made it up between them to rib me. I felt my face flaming red and the blood rising to my brain. But I controlled myself and with superficial calm, smilingly posed, "Perhaps his majesty, the color-bearer, has his signature on the declaration?"

He raised his eyes to mine. "You think I'm joking with you, don't you? I'm speaking seriously. That's what my comrade, the one who came from over there, told me. There they have already distributed copies of the declaration."

I finished my cigarette and decided to go to my dugout. It was hard for me to remain here, flushing in embarrassment.

I positively did not believe this "duck," nevertheless the report stirred me deeply. Who knows? Lately many peculiar things had been happening. Why not? That England was considering some such plan had in some way trickled across to our lines. But it was clear that this was a glaring bit of English deception. But perhaps it is impossible to meet deception except by similar deception? Perhaps our "grand old man" and his two cronies would reply not with trickery but with a truly historic act?

I walked around like someone poisoned by a powerful, sweet drug.

I could not control myself. I went to Color-bearer Sliezak and questioned him cautiously. When we were alone, Sliezak spoke in an entirely different tone. He was somewhat excited. Suddenly he asked me: "Would you be pleased with it?"

"With what? Palestine? You know that I am a Zionist."

He reflected for a moment and then replied, his voice betraying his common interest in the matter, "Be careful, my friend. Here it is dangerous to show sympathy for things like that."

"Why? If the three rulers have signed the declaration?"

"Yes, yes, but just the same don't make a public display of your joy before you actually see and know the truth. Don't dance before the wedding has taken place!"

These words were said with genuine and sympathetic understanding. At first, the suspicion was aroused within me that he might also be a Jew, perhaps a Zionist. Yet not infrequently had I been disabused of similar misapprehensions there at the front. But before a day had passed, I discovered the secret. He was a Czech, and the Czechs—well, one mustn't even think about it. The mere thought dooms you to "hanging upon the nearest tree."

* * * * *

But in the meantime the rumor sprouted wings and kept fluttering among us more and more constantly. A few more men from the Franco-German front passed through our lines and they mentioned it. Openly, I behaved like a person who was really sick. My appetite vanished. I drank more than usual.

Once Margolis and Uncle Oestreicher came over to me. They wanted to talk with me for a while. To "take counsel" about the situation.

"I have some news for *Herr* Color-bearer," Margolis spoke secretively, trembling with excitement.

"The harbinger of the Messianic era," Uncle Oestreicher added immediately.

"What news, Margolis?"

Margolis looked cautiously about; then dug his hand into the breast pocket of his shirt, removed a folded paper, which he opened carefully, and, unrolling it like a scroll, showed me the declaration. It was an official document addressed to the Jewish soldiers in the armies of Germany, Austria, Hungary, Turkey, and all their possessions, and in unequivocal words and without coloring, qualification, or provisos made public

the plan for the establishment of a Jewish government in the Holy Land. And, of course, the plan depended upon our winning the war.

The signatories were: Emperor Franz Joseph the First, Kaiser Wilhelm the Second, and Abdul Hamid, Sultan of Turkey.

I stood there with eyes bulging like a calf's, staring at the declaration, which was printed in Hebrew and Yiddish, as well as all the languages of the European countries wherein Jews were subjects.

Immediately thereafter he handed me the newspaper *Mult és Jövö* (Past and Future) in which I read the editorial written by Joseph Patai, the editor.

The world press lately has been devoting a great deal of attention to Palestine and Zionism. According to one English daily, upon the suggestion of Israel Zangwill, no less, Great Britain intends to establish a neutral Palestine government. According to a German newspaper, Germany wants to dedicate a billion marks to the Hebrew commonwealth which is to be established there under her auspices. In the meantime, they keep writing about Palestine, about its fauna and flora, about its climate and inhabitants. The Hungarian press has added its national tenor voice to this universal chorus. It devotes long articles to the Holy Land and with exceptional earnestness discusses its past, present and future, and the work which the Zionists have been doing there in developing business and industry with such outstanding success. In brief: the war has made Palestine and the Zionists fit for the salons: that war which so many ardent Zionists, as well as the press generally, crowned with the garland of heroic death. Only, with the help of God, let peace come to suffering humanity, and neither England, Germany, nor yet Turkey will make a Hebrew country out of Palestine. In their stead, the Jews themselves, the Jews who have been driven from the lands of the Diaspora (all countries outside of Palestine) and those who shall have escaped to the land of their fathers to continue the ancient conquest and till the sacred soil with the sweat of their brow, will establish the land. Then will people again begin to speak of the settlement of Palestine as building a modern ghetto? Or as being unpatriotic and disloyal to the country of one's adoption? Because what is permissible in war is not permissible in peace.

I finished reading the editorial, and rubbed my eyes.

I read the declaration a second time. Line by line, word by word, syllable by syllable.

The signatories were: Emperor Franz Joseph the First; Kaiser Wilhelm the Second; and Sultan Abdul Hamid.

Uncle Oestreicher, who had come over to us, repeated, "This is the harbinger of the the Messianic era."

Margolis remembered our "Jewish impudence" and declared in the singsong fashion of one studying the Talmud: "As it is written, 'Colossal impudence will usher in the Messianic era!' And as it is further written, 'Blessed is he who waits and succeeds in attaining the end of days . . .' "

"Give me that declaration, Margolis."

For the first time Margolis stood there as though refusing to do my bidding. He smiled perplexedly, and did not know what to say.

"Corporal Jacob Margolis! *Attention!* By the Virgin . . ."

Margolis stood at attention, his hands at his sides, and his eyes glued on mine. He was really frightened. I noticed that a shadow of a suspicion passed through him—that I intended to hand him over to the court-martial on the charge of disloyalty.

A complete about-face of this kind is common among officers and may well be believed about any officer.

"Well, very good, Margolis. As you were!" I patted him on the shoulder.

"I'll return it to you shortly."

Margolis breathed deeply and said, "I was frightened."

"You're stupid, Margolis. Aren't the names of the three kings of the East signed to it? May your lot ever be among 'traitors' such as they are."

"I—I—" stammered Margolis. "Perhaps this is only a trap, designed to test us."

"Donner und Blitzen! That seems reasonable. Perhaps it's really so? At any rate it's wise to be cautious."

Be cautious? You can beware of others, but how can you beware of your inner self? Of your own self? 'And yet, whatever happened—wasn't there truly an element of treachery to one's country involved?' I reflected. I asked myself, "Didn't it amount to this? To think of another country, even for a

moment, of other possibilities— Granted, I was a Zionist; but *not in time of war,* by heaven! In wartime, and there at the front to think of another country—of—of another fatherland—!"

"What an idiot I am!" I eased my fretful thoughts. "Why, the king himself wishes it. Isn't he addressing himself to us, to the Jews? And if he himself turns to us, then it certainly is permitted to think about it. Isn't that so?"

"But if this is a trap?"

"It can't be! Why, even Joseph Patai writes . . ."

"If Patai writes about it," Margolis added, "then you can believe the three kings!"

* * * * *

That night I did not sleep at all. I tossed on my bunk, from right to left, from left to my back, from my back to my belly, and so far into the night. Myriads of thoughts struggled within me. I began to curse the entire situation.

"What bliss!" "How terrible it is!" "Palestine!" "Disloyalty!"

* * * * *

Meanwhile, additional rumors on all phases of this matter reached us. From the other side. From over there. From Russia. From England. How did the rumors get to us? Via Russian Jewish prisoners. And all these rumors centered about a single subject: "Madame Pompadour."

Again evening came.

It was such a bright, moonlit night that we were panicky with dread of the Circassians. The Circassians were our especial fear, the nemesis of the Fifteenth Division, which had the special privilege of facing the most deadly marksmen in the entire Russian army. We had a special name for them—"nose hunters." All along that section of our line opposite the Circassians, it was forbidden even to stick a finger above the trench; they shot straight as an arrow, with hairbreadth accuracy, at a distance of three to four hundred meters. Exceptional markmanship. If one of our men was careless enough to show his entire head, he immediately got a "snap in the nose." A Circassian bullet would enter through the point of

his nose and leave through the nape of his neck. That accounted for our dread of the moonlight, for our "Circassian horror."

Through the entire length of the frontline trenches there was absolute silence. All along the trenches there were muted tunes played by various musicians on all sorts of small instruments. But pianissimo. Those small instruments were fused in a wonderful yet hated symphony, which everyone of us felt to be his own swan song. Because the air was filled with great expectations of a mighty offensive by the Russians, of a sudden attack "which must end the war before winter." Either we'd win or they would. We had been waiting for that offensive for about a month, hopefully, fearfully, with *weltschmertz* and fear of death.

All about us—silence. The moon shone with that romantic light under which sweethearts everywhere nestle against each other in bliss. And there in the trenches, one sad, all-embracing tune, a quiet, final symphony of death, whose finale would be one more mighty roar of cannon along the entire length and breadth of the front—and then, who knew?

The melody kept growing softer and deeper yet more intense, like a secret serenade, filled with the mystery of life's final leave-taking, of one's dear mother, of one's capricious sweetheart, crying back there in the city, of music, the flowering field, and the boisterous dear city, lecherous and gay, so far, far away.

Why did the fear of death overwhelm us then more than ever before?

Because in that silence there was concealed another fundamental emotion which had begun to disturb us of late, and which finally saturated us with terrifying foreboding—the foreboding of certain death. It was the black secrecy in which the entire Russian front had been wrapped. For more than a year we had been accustomed always to have definite information about what was going on on the other side. We always knew when the Russians would attack. We discovered it well in advance and were well prepared. Where did we get this information? No one knew. There were only conjectures and varying legends about the source. They spoke of spies of high

station, of a certain Polish countess, who was living in Moscow, and who was in love with one of the Kaiser's sons. And more. And they also told of something that was positively absurd. They spoke of the Queen herself, Her Majesty, the Czarina, to the effect that she, no less, always informed our high command of what was going on in the General Staff in Moscow.

This secret connection had been broken. There was no information. Not even a murmur. Not even an inkling of a plan of battle.

That filled us with a panic such as we had never before experienced.

It was this strain which buzzed in muted tremolo through the whole accursed symphony, pouring out, in pain and despair, a last farewell.

Suddenly—the telephone.

"Hello! *Herr* Colonel? My respects!"

The *Herr* Colonel spoke. "Boy! There's no news. The devil take the god of the Cossacks! Not a murmur. And because of that, *we* must attack. Do you understand? They mustn't attack us. Understand?"

"My respects, *Herr* Colonel!"

He continued, "Everything is ready. How about you?"

"My respects, *Herr* Colonel! All the artillery and munition dumps of the Circassians are as clearly before us as my desk. I even know where their general's cognac is stored."

"You're a fine young fellow, my friend, thank you. And what about Madame Pompadour and her circle?"

"Mere poppycock, *Herr* Colonel!"

"Well, good! *Sevas!*"

"Respect, *Herr* Colonel!"

When I put the receiver down, I bit my lower lip and reflected that it was the first time that the *Herr* Colonel had asked me about Madame Pompadour and her circle.

Because no one ever mentioned Madame Pompadour aloud. They whispered, smiled, jested, and again whispered about her. But to speak about her publicly—never. Especially the *Herr* Colonel! And now he of all people had inquired about her!

Madame Pompadour. That was the only "information" which for some time had been filtering through the lines from across the border. The news about "Madame Pompadour and her circle." And about that situation, which was definitely Jewish, they had been whispering incessantly for the past few days. The whispering was intriguing, strange, enigmatic.

To this effect. In Russia there was occurring something new and strange, something both interesting and terrible, which only England with its cold, clever, calculating machine could have planned. Some enigmatic woman, Madame Pompadour, evidently a French woman, yet Jewish, a woman who had engaged in actual warfare and had lost one of her arms in an encounter, had now organized a Jewish legion among the Zionists for the purpose of conquering Palestine. Madame Pompadour—a mighty Amazon. And a Jewess. A modern one-armed Judith. She had three comrades to help her. Each one was from a different allied country. One, a Russian, whose name was Shavosinski or Sabbatinski. Of course, a Jew. His name came from the root of the Hebrew word *Shabbas* (Sabbath). He was her commander in chief. He was mobilizing the Jewish youth for the conquest of Palestine. He had already gathered together one hundred thousand Jewish soldiers—Zionists, of course. The second was Belfer. The name of an outstanding Jew. Belfer—a Russian Jew, fabulously wealthy, who had become an English subject and been given the title of lord. He was a general, too. He had furnished the money to feed and equip the Jewish legion. And the third, a terrifying man, who, with the help of the Jewish legion, would destroy the entire world, the entire German-Austro-Turkish front in one day. His name was Wessmann. A professor of chemistry. He had discovered some sort of horrible gas which had but to touch a person and *presto!* his flesh would instantly drop off, though the man remained alive. Horrible.

The living spirit which animated them all was the woman, Madame Pompadour.

Such things were whispered among us more and more frequently. Partly in jest and partly in fear, which set your teeth chattering. A terrible war. A legion of Jews. That was ridiculous. Seminary students, dreamy Talmudists? And the com-

mander Sabbatinski, whom the Jewish legion followed as though bewitched. He didn't give orders. He gave them a short speech, and they ran after him like mad.

We all whispered. Meanwhile, we said that it was a fantasy, like the fantasies that were usual in the frontline trenches, always depressed and subject to nightmares.

There were also a few Zionists among us. Of course, secretly, but not with questionable intent. The Zionists were by no means suspected of harboring any evil thoughts. The Zionists of Budapest had achieved much in the war, and had earned the unqualified confidence of general headquarters. Not only did the Zionists of Budapest enlist without waiting for conscription, they did even more than that. They established a special regiment, a Zionist regiment, with the leader of all the Zionist sport clubs in the country, with the red-haired Goldosch, whom Max Nordau had dubbed "the bull's neck," as chief and organizer. This regiment entered the frontline fire, two thousand young Zionists strong, and in a single day lost almost all of them. They succeeded in dislodging the Cossacks from the Carpathians, but in so doing only a pitiful remnant came out alive. So rumor had it. And because of this they did not suspect us Zionists of the slightest inclination to believe those legends about Madame Pompadour and her circle. On the contrary, let Madame Pompadour and her legion come. "The Zionists will take them in and destroy every last one of them." This was the belief current among the whisperers, who nonetheless accepted a little of the legend about Madame Pompadour.

The rumor did take effect. Some strange magic passed among the few Zionists in the Fifteenth Division. Gradually our curiosity was turned into a mighty yearning to learn how much truth there was in it. Perhaps, after all, there might be some basis of fact in these tales? Who knew?

Under such circumstances, one's heart began to beat violently. It was the Jewish heart, which had been still for many generations. But the face suddenly blanched. It was terrible. For one's features might betray such a titillating inner folly.

A Jewish Legion. The idea had, withal, some strange magic. A Jewish Legion conquering Jerusalem—God in heaven! Was it true? That would be marvelous and terrible. Terrible, be-

cause of what might happen if we should be fated to engage in battle with this legion? God in heaven! In actual combat—in pitched battle!

Of course, of course. There was no question about it. If they came, we knew our duty to our country. Not one of us would commit the folly of even for a moment considering desertion at the front. Such a thought mustn't even be breathed. Only—but—God! Well, it was stupid! No such situation could ever possibly exist.

After whispering, we laughed.

"The harbinger of the Messiah!" Uncle Oestreicher repeated, a smile lighting up his face. "The harbinger of the Messiah."

What harbinger of the Messiah? What do you mean, Messiah? Nothing of the kind. Rank folly!

Thus we all spoke, but no sooner had we spoken when there again stole into our hearts the doubt, the suspicion, and the shadowy hope mixed with fear: What would happen if we should be forced to meet them in battle? God in heaven! What an encounter! It was frightful even to think of.

Finally, we concluded with conviction: It *is* folly, no more and no less!

Yes, folly, if something had not occurred in the meantime!

A new Jewish officer joined our regiment. We learned that they had transferred him from the regiment which had been "annihilated"—the "Zionist regiment."

When he came to report that he had been assigned to my company, after his customary official report, he informed me almost in a whisper, unofficially, that *he himself had requested* to be assigned to my company.

I was not surprised. Such incidents were not rare.

"Do you have any friends here?" I asked him, as is usual in such a case.

He blanched a little, after which he smiled in slight confusion, and after looking about to make sure that no one else was listening, he whispered in my ear: "Madame Pompadour."

Without waiting to observe the impression this made upon me, he added, "Doctor."

The word "doctor" instantly cleared up everything for me.

Because the information had already reached me that the Zionists at the front were the only ones who would not brook insults against the Jews on the part of anti-Semitic officers, for they had a word which marked them off and which united and rallied them in this ethical-national battle whenever necessary. That word was "doctor." At first there were two words, "Doctor Herzl," but in order to keep the password entirely secret, they had dropped the name.

That word, together with "Pompadour," was enough to send through my brain a blinding, blazing lightning flash, which momentarily stopped my heartbeat.

Within a few hours the entire riddle of Madame Pompadour became completely clear to me. The new officer had come from a different division and had also been in a hospital in Budapest, and later in the city itself. There they knew more than we. Madame Pompadour was by no means a woman, but a Russian Jewish officer, Joseph Trumpeldor. General Sabbatinski was the Russian-Jewish writer, Ze'ev Jabotinski, who had translated Bialik's poetry into Russian. "Lord Belfer" was Lord Balfour, a British Cabinet minister. And the "terrible" Mr. Wessmann was Professor Chaim Weizmann, one of the Zionist leaders living in England.

"Tell me, all the stories about the Jewish Legion. Is there any truth in them?" I asked.

"What a question." My new colleague smiled. Motioning me to withdraw to one side, he took a sheet printed by the high command out of his pocket and showed me a duplicate copy of the declaration which I had taken from Margolis and now kept in my pocket. That copy of the declaration was not in Hebrew but in Yiddish.

My comrade explained.

"God set one off against the other. This declaration was aimed at another one similar to it. The Entente says that the English have published a declaration similar to theirs. Now do you understand? It's very simple."

"Well. So far as its being simple goes there is still room for debate."

But my blood froze in my veins.

My comrade continued. "Is it still a secret among you people here? Back there we spoke of it quite confidently, openly

and without fear. Of course, if the high command openly takes up this problem, why should it be taboo to speak of it?"

"Perhaps it's a trap?"

"I should say not. In some regiments meetings have already been arranged to discuss the declaration. That is to say, to discuss the idea. And the meetings have been officially permitted by headquarters. They're already talking about a separate flag."

"And perhaps also of military orders in Hebrew."

"You think it's a joke, but this is by no means a joking matter. The only trouble is that not enough people know Hebrew."

I became rather warm.

As I stood there like a dunce in a corner, the telephone rang.

"Hello! *Herr* Colonel? My respects, *Herr* Colonel!"

He spoke. "We won't attack. Not for the present. The devil knows."

"Perhaps there's some news, *Herr* Colonel?"

"News? From over there? The devil take them, no. Not even a murmur. It's enough to drive you mad. But just the same, for the present let us wait. Something may happen yet. Understand?"

"Respects, *Herr* Colonel."

He continued: "And what about the beautiful Madame Pompadour?"

The blood rushed to my brain.

"Heh, heh, heh! The beautiful Madame Pompadour, *Herr* Colonel? I wish she would come. A beautiful woman does no harm, *Herr* Colonel; a beautiful woman never does any harm. What do you think?"

"Well, not exactly—ha, ha, ha! Not exactly. Beautiful women—some of them turn the world upside down. Ha, ha, ha! At any rate, there have been beautiful women who have caused minor revolutions. Madame Pompadour was also that sort of woman. Ho, ho! Madame Pompadour! All of France was in her hands!"

"In her hands. Yes, *Herr* Colonel. But our Madame Pompadour has only one hand! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" he laughed. "Well, *Sevas!*"

"Respects, *Herr* Colonel!"

"Ah-h-fu!" A cold sweat broke out on my burning brow. Beautiful women cause revolutions. Madame Pompadour. That sot had made a prophecy without knowing it.

My comrade, who had overheard this strange conversation, stood there, wide-eyed, as though stunned.

"What? Is that all you know about the Jewish Legion?"

"Yes."

"Not much. The harbingers of the Messiah seem to be noiseless and remote among you people, my friend. But when those gases reach us over here, then we'll certainly know more about them."

At these words my head began to spin. I was forced to sit down for a while.

So that's the harbinger of the Messiah!

I was trembling. Trembling and stuttering. Again I looked at the strange declaration. Yes, it was a fact. Kaiser Wilhelm promised us Palestine.

Nevertheless, something seemed to be turning into an actuality here, and my imagination kept working. It joined image to image, fancy to fancy, and form to form, until I became as truly intoxicated as though I had imbibed too freely.

So we sat for a few long-drawn-out minutes. We were both silent.

"What will happen?" I asked him.

"What will happen?" He laughed, then came over to me, embraced me and kissed me, a sensation that neither of us had ever before experienced.

Then he pressed his hands upon my shoulders, looked into my eyes with exultant earnestness and said, "Give me your hand!" He extended his hand to me. I extended mine. He pressed it between both of his and said, "By this act we are giving our dear spouse, Madame Hungary, a bill of divorcement. And by this same act we are taking Madame Pompadour to wife. Repeat: 'Behold, Madame Pompadour, thou art betrothed unto me according to the law of Moses and Israel!' "

I began: "Behold, thou art betrothed to me, Madame . . ."

Suddenly, the telephone.

Again the *Herr* Colonel.

After an inconsequential talk with the *Herr* Colonel, he again asked me, "Well, how is Madame Pompadour, my friend?"

I was taken aback for a moment, but doing my very best to compose myself, I replied, laughing, "Madame Pompadour? Ha, ha, ha! I have just been betrothed to her, *Herr* Colonel! And I have the honor to invite you, sir, to the wedding! We'll drink a toast!"

The *Herr* Colonel laughed like someone slightly inebriated. "Ha, ha, ha! Congratulations! *Sevas!*"

When I put the receiver down, my friend was already standing there with liquor-filled glasses. He offered me one as he said, "Congratulations! To the health of Madame Pompadour!"

"Congratulations! But we really should have invited all our fellow officers who are of pure racial stock. They above all others should share the joy of our betrothal. Yet even more than their joy in our betrothal, let them rejoice in our bill of divorcement."

The latent Jewish energy began to ferment.

It was fortunate that in the midst of all this came the attack which provided this energy the opportunity to burst forth.

CHAPTER XXIV

The Dugout

FROM the very moment First Lieutenant Smertschani read the royal decree concerning a Jewish government in Palestine, he began to develop the theory of such a government on so magnificent a scale that even the proudest of the pure Magyars would not have been ashamed to become one of its citizens. He seemed to concentrate his broad knowledge upon the problem of building a Jewish country down to the last detail of national life. The remarkable thing was that in all his theorizing there was not the slightest trace of the "mission" idea, that is, that "the mission of Israel is to bring light unto the gentiles," in accordance with the famous Mendelsohnian concept. In his imagination he constructed a simple country, in all respects like others, except that he added one idea of his own—his "gentile" brain child; the source and center of peace among the three rival religions would be in Palestine, and would constitute, as he put it, "the third covenant."

"The first covenant," he spoke reflectively, "the Old Testament, is the covenant of the unity of God, or the covenant of the human God; the second is that of Jesus of Nazareth, or the covenant of the divine man, similar to which is also the covenant of Mohammed, the Koran; and you must create the third covenant, the covenant of peace. There is only one way to achieve this covenant—through Mother Earth, to whom you must return, since Heaven has torn you from her breast."

My young orderly heard all this and gave me no rest until I had explained the words of the *Herr* First Lieutenant, 'who isn't at all like an officer, judging from the way he speaks.' I explained it to him every day and at every opportunity. The young Magyar listened, absorbed, reviewed, and digested the words until they became part of his bloodstream. And having digested them, his soul began to sprout flowers of the imagination which were astounding in their ingenuousness. It is notorious that a Magyar is not reverent in the sense accepted by Christians. He is not overfond of either prayer or symbols. The cross appears not on the exterior of his church, but only within. On its belfry is perched a cock that heralds the coming of dawn. The Magyar talks with his God as with a father, or more accurately still, as with his best friend. He argues with him and swears at him in the manner of an angry, loving friend. The God of the Magyars, despite the fact that in the course of generations they have clothed him in the garb of the new Rome, has remained the same Hun-Turanian-Mongolian "Eleveh," in whom there is more of human heroism than of the divine mystery resident in heaven. "My Lord is a man of war." There is no people which can more intimately understand this human concept than the Magyar people.

Through this prism, my young orderly viewed the land of Israel, which "the patriarch Franz Joseph by virtue of his long life has been privileged, as destined instrument of prophetic divination, to establish at the close of this horrible war," which in his opinion was the war of Gog and Magog.

Thus these two, the commissioned officer and the plain soldier, spun the astonishing veil of futurity here in the pit of death.

By that time it had already become difficult for me to accept death with resignation. Die now? Now, after this declaration?

At times I mused on forbidden thoughts. Now? After what is being achieved over there by that officer, Trumpeldor, by Jabotinsky, Weizmann, and Balfour?

Eh! Whatever happens, all roads lead to Jerusalem! Uncle Oestreicher is right. It *is* the harbinger of the Messiah!

Now I was no longer aware of that bitter, mordant animosity which surrounded me. What difference did it make to me? Of what significance was all this stupid hatred, now that this declaration had been made?

* * * * *

The last attack cost me the lives of several of my boys. The Serb "bastard" was torn to pieces by a shell. He was wearing the "tailored coat" which he had inherited from the unfortunate lance-corporal Madi. What suddenly possessed him to wear it in battle? He must have sensed his end and wanted to appear before his Maker as on dress parade. In a tailored coat.

The next one to leave us was the sculptor Kerack. How fortunate he was to have been denied the terrible privilege of learning how his faithless wife had betrayed him. Sometimes death is an end devoutly to be wished.

Young, fat Corporal Barnet Rosenberger followed them. He was twenty-one when he died. Who will now tell us the banal anecdote for the thousandth time? How terrible it is to recall the ancedote of one of our comrades. I see his joke fluttering over our orphaned heads.

So they went—one after the other.

I paid much too high a price for the insignificant victory in this last attack.

* * * * *

The simple, elongated Tyrolean returned from his furlough. A pleasant surprise awaited him. He was promoted from private to corporal at one stroke, but his joy was mixed with keen grief. He was overwhelmed by the deaths of Kretschani, Rosenberger, and Kerack.

It was terrible to watch him weep silently for his lost comrades.

I tried to console him, but he paid no attention. Only after protracted silence he arose and cried, fatalistically, "I'm next!"

After that how could I hand him the letter from his bride? Yet he said, inquiringly, "I know I have a letter from my Maria Anna. I met her. I even know the contents of the letter. She told me."

I handed him the letter. He read it and sank into deep reflection.

"It's clear that my turn has come now. I know. But what difference does it make? I told her, too, that I free her of her love for me. I gave her a divorce without a priest. Our wedding was also without benefit of clergy. She cried. The fool. What is there to cry about when a person dies?"

As he said that his eyes were still wet and red, lamenting the death of his comrades.

How much love there was among us here, among the plain people.

And contrariwise, how much hatred there was "up above," up there among the officers!

* * * * *

After the attack we hoped for a long rest. Bitter winter came and brought an exceptionally heavy snowfall. The snow buried the earth completely as far as eye could see.

Each one of us began to repair, improve, and even beautify his individual dugout.

The dugout. That word most aptly describes the hole in which every soldier in the frontline trenches settled himself. The entire company lived and slept in one large "hall," in a wide dark cavern, which even in the daytime was lighted by lanterns. But the officers, and even the noncoms, "built" a special dwelling for themselves in the sides of the cavern. That was the dugout. The cell of twentieth-century man who has accustomed himself to the life of the cave-dwellers of seventeen million years ago.

My orderly determined to construct a "regal palace" for me there. For my poem had stirred him profoundly.

"*Herr* Color-bearer is a prince—a prince of Biblical descent."

"We're all princes, Pauli."

"No, sir. Our kings were once the servants of the Eastern kings, your ancestors. Jerusalem is the first city in world history. Previous to it, there were only large and small predatory villages."

"And Rome?"

"The Romans were marauders. I know. I read. And what were they? Respectable people? What sort of people are they whose gods are drunkards, libertines, and murderers! And the Greeks likewise. Marauders all. And Jerusalem—I know King Solomon's prayer by heart."

He began to recite the prayer Solomon offered up when he dedicated the Temple.

"I have builded thee a habitation, a dwelling for thy resting place for all generations."

In Hungarian, of course.

Almost all the Magyars in my platoon had small Bibles in their knapsacks.

The construction proceeded. We improved the walls, sinking shafts in them for various articles. Then we made a table and suspended two bunks one above the other—the upper for me and the lower for him.

That leisure in the midst of a white, snow-covered world created in us a unique mood. Far away from all society and the clamorous civilization of the city, we dwelt in a cave and warmed ourselves by a "stove," which we had to employ various strategems to ignite.

But constructing a dugout is a job that is never finished. There is always something to improve and repair. If you find a splinter of wood, a piece of tin, a broken piece of glass, a nail, a potsherd—everything is useful and necessary. Everything can be utilized; everything is beneficial.

The dugout becomes more and more improved and more and more pleasant. And you become attached, body and soul, to your dwelling-place, with the bond of idolatry, sad and eternal.

I was invited to drink with the captain. He lived at a "swell number." The craftsmen and locksmiths in the army had built him a princely dwelling. Tapestries, paintings, books—everything.

But when I returned to my own dugout, I disdained the inutilities of his wealth. I had built my stove with my own hands. Likewise my bed.

The dugout was my own. In it I lived, sat, and thought, and in it I awaited death.

For two months now we had been living like that. The snow kept falling, and we sat in our dugouts. Our only duty was to keep constantly examining the holes through which we might have to shoot, "the windows of death," as my orderly called them. To clean them, and clear off the snow around them, so that we could always have an unobstructed view of the sector between us and the Russian lines.

After such an inspection, we returned to our dugout, sat down, and warmed ourselves by the stove, to dream under the blanket of snow.

But it sometimes happened that one of the officers came through to inspect all the dugouts, in order to requisition one of them. "The noncom's dugout is a very fine one," they would report to the commissioned officer, and the latter, now envious, would become anxious to move in and take over.

He would enter, the noncom would arise hastily in bewilderment, stand at attention, and report: "*Herr* Lieutenant! I beg leave to report, sir, there is nothing to report, sir!"

The officer would brace himself, legs wide apart, chew his cigar with his gold false teeth, thwack his whip against his boots, and say, "Very fine, corporal. Very fine. It's a dwelling fit for officers. Today you'll clear out and change your address for mine. Without delay."

"Yes, sir!" And the officer would depart.

The miserable noncom would stand there, his eyes popping with anguish and humiliation, hurl his half-smoked pipe onto the floor, roundly curse the officer's swinish behavior, and begin to clear out.

That dugout to which he had given so much personal care, dug with his own nails, improved with his heart, his blood, and to which he was so desperately attached.

One can gradually become accustomed to anything, to endure the mud, a snatched meal, to go days without sleeping, to starve, to eat roasted rats, to run for hours on end without stopping to catch your breath, and to hate as you run, to stand all sorts of abuse in the form of punishment, but with one thing it is absolutely impossible to compromise and resign yourself to—being robbed of your dugout.

After such an occurrence even the singing was stilled.

As a noncom, it was my lot to suffer this way more than once. It seemed that my dugout in particular had excited the cupidity of the commissioned officers.

Only the day before the gawky, simple-minded Tyrolean had been robbed of his dugout in just such a manner. As a corporal he had built himself a separate lodging, and after his simple, wholesome taste and his ingenuity had improved and made it comfortable, Color-bearer Sliezak, the little "Jumping Jack," had robbed him of it.

I hastened to report the matter to First Lieutenant Smertschani.

He did not think very long.

No sooner had the marauding color-bearer comfortably ensconced himself in his new finely appointed abode, than the lieutenant informed him that he himself needed it. He simply needed it, that was all.

Nothing could be done about it.

The *Herr* Color-bearer, having to comply, was thus put through the trouble of hunting for another dugout. In some strange way, he discovered that his own original dugout was much better than all the rest.

That modicum of respect which Color-bearer Sliezack had aroused in me during the discussion of the declaration had now entirely disappeared. I felt prejudice, even hatred for him.

Only Lance Corporal Margolis (I mean *Herr* Corporal Margolis) knew how to save his dugout from the plunderers. He kept two or three dead rats hidden just outside, and when he suspected that a marauder might come, he brought them in and threw them under his bunk. When the officer pronouced the dugout nice enough to be his, Margolis informed him: "Sir, I beg leave to report, sir, this is really a terrible hole. You'd find it nice and comfortable here, sir. Only, the devil take them," (and he would point under the bunk) "these rats here, without exaggeration, they eat me up alive. At night they give me no rest. And they come right up on the bunk, no less. Last night I caught three of them. They were taking a stroll right over me. Right on my belly. Phew! The devil take them! But that doesn't matter. You can poison them. If you wish, I have some good poison."

While speaking he would take out a sort of reddish powder (just plain brick dust) and show it, playing the game to the hilt.

By the time he had finished, the intruder was generally outside.

Plundering gentlemen don't like to battle with rats.

In that battle there was no chance to win a medal.

CHAPTER XXV

Mene, Mene . . .

THE idleness and boredom of the long wintry days and nights were bound to produce strange dispositions and living conditions. The officers gradually stripped themselves of their civilian garb and revealed themselves in all their loathesome repulsiveness. What were those intelligent fellows occupied with all that time? Eating, drink, smoking, joking, and vulgarity.

In addition to all that, pent-up hatred which had neither rhyme nor reason. At first, hatred towards us Jews; later, hatred for everything, that is to say, for the weak, the inferior, the privates. This hatred, originating about two years before, increasing and spreading instead of being obliterated by the awareness of a common danger, soon began to reveal itself as a bacchanalian orgy.

The temper among the officers can best be defined as a physical orgy accompanied by a spiritual one. The orgy of body manifested itself in the usual way, intemperate drinking of all sorts of mixed liquors; and if women were missing, sexual desire found another outlet—inquisitorial persecution of human beings. If the hypothesis be correct that one of the basic factors of sex is sadism, then there at the front that single factor completely displaced sex experience itself.

The very first victims were the orderlies of the perverted officers. The punishment was not some ordinary thing, but something that involved one's daily life—something that came

within the range of the routine experience of those irrational and deluded men. Their sole pleasure was to discover a unique punishment for each minor infraction, for an improper word, for the slightest unnecessary movement.

Chief among these maestros was Lieutenant Colonel *Herr* Figer. The refined *Herr* Figer, he of the marvelous manicure and esthetic philosophy, was very punctilious in his punishments, to the end that both basic factors should be present simultaneously, physical *and* spiritual torture. In his opinion a punishment was not worthy of the name, if, for example, one of the officers had his orderly merely drink out of the spittoon. He added that the one so punished must also raise the spittoon aloft and say, "To your health!" to those present, and then drink the toast. And after drinking it, to express his enjoyment by saying, "Ah, that was fine; may I have another?"

There seemed to be a rivalry among the officers in discovering new forms of punishment. Soon they seemed to have lost their reason altogether. For they established the principle that each one must be punished in accordance with his occupation as a civilian. The carpenter they made eat wood shavings; the locksmith was forced to eat nails; and the shoemaker, his glue, if he chanced to make a pair of shoes that did not strike the officer's fancy. And so on.

While such punishment was being meted out, they made merry in a hilarious drinking bout.

There was one poor soldier who had made the mistake of addressing his lieutenant as "*Herr* Color-bearer"—to which salutation he had been accustomed for two years, for his superior had only that very day been promoted to a lieutenancy. Whereupon the officer asked him, "What were you back home?" And when he replied that he was a gardener, his judge advocate punished him by making him stand outside and above the trench, a perfect target for Russian bullets. He was ordered to stand in that position for an entire hour, to the horror of all of us, who stood there all the while, watching him turn his head quickly from side to side in order to avoid the bullets which were whistling by him. A lone tree in a storm.

The gods of all nations must have watched over this miser-

able fellow, because not a bullet entered his head, and he came off with only an arm wound. Because of this he was "released" from standing there any longer.

One of the drunken officers thought it was quite the thing to bathe his wound in wine. Only after he had done this, did he permit the surgeon to treat it.

This abusive treatment, this bacchanalian action, became second nature to them—wine, vulgarity, torturing the privates, and "getting plastered."

And in between, philosophical discussions about God, art, religion and psychology.

All lumped together.

An orgy which continued without interruption along the front, instead of a battle "on the field of valor and honor."

There were only two who did not participate in all this—First Lieutenant Smertschani, who was always engrossed in his books and who had recently been granted a furlough; and Lieutenant Stubniak, for the notorious reason that he had no sexual desire to stimulate him in that way.

Headquarters knew absolutely nothing about what was going on. For who would report it to them?

The fact was that hundreds of men knew of this moral leprosy. They suffered the tortures of hell, both physically and mentally, to the point of melancholia, but not one of them dared to burst his bonds and raise a hue and cry of protest that would reach headquarters, which occasionally did send staff officers to inspect the battalion.

Is the theory which says that the people, the masses, make a revolution, a correct one? I doubt it. Why, there were millions of men there in distress, suffering like dogs, sick for the past two and a half years; men from all walks of life, plain fellows, educated men, business people, and illiterates, all together, and one little cabal among the "higher-ups" kept them tethered to a single iron chain and bent them to its slightest whim!

Only a select few can initiate a revolution from among those higher-ups. If a general should give an order for demobilization or for a march against the regal palace, we would all either disband or march upon the palace!

No, certainly not. If a revolution should come, it could be

only from above. With the help of a few generals. After that it would continue even without them. Only the first order is important, the order which liberates. The other processes continue of their own momentum, even against the wishes of those who gave the initial order.

Yes, a few generals would be able to bring about the great change, the cataclysm, the great redemption; but they, of course, are the ones who do not suffer.

If only such a general would once drink from a spittoon.

On the contrary. The war had made prima donnas of the field marshals. Before the war who knew that a Ludendorff or a Mackensen even existed?

As a matter of fact, who ever paid any attention to those creatures, except prostitutes, or they themselves?

And now their names were suddenly on every lip and the newspapers were filled with their praise!

Why should they, of all people, introduce a change? Are they crazy?

* * * * *

Sliezak, the Czech color-bearer, went completely crazy. His mania was to catch traitors trying to desert to the enemy, as prisoners of war. And he always caught someone, in that way bringing "spiritual food" to the officers.

Margolis explained it to me in a way that seemed neither unreasonable nor illogical.

"The only one who wants to desert to the Russians—is he himself, *Herr* Sliezak. How that fellow hates the Magyars! And I know something else," Margolis continued. "Almost everyone now knows that the leader of the Czechs, some professor whose name I don't know, is now in Russia preparing the revolution which is to liberate Czechoslovakia from our grand old man. So! 'Everyone who declares another unfit, uses his own shortcomings as the basis!' He goes out of his way to unearth traitors so that we won't suspect him of being anxious to take a stroll across there."

Then there were various rumors about Jewish soldiers who deserted to the Russian lines and there betrayed all our secrets.

They had to be Jews, of course.

Not Czechs, not even Ruthenians, who referred to themselves almost openly as kinsmen of the Russians, only Jews. It was common knowledge that the Ruthenians in the Carpathians told their children stories and sang to them of the *Matzkali* who would come some day and redeem the "world." They awaited the *Matzkali* as eagerly as the Jews await the Messiah.

Yet the rumors always mentioned "Jewish traitors."

In the meantime, we became genuinely good soldiers.

The snow was beginning to melt, and we saw that the Russians were beginning to fix the "roof" of their frontline trench. It was customary, when both sides were doing similar things, such as clearing the field of the dead, for everyone to refrain from firing. And since we, too, were repairing our position after the thaw, the Russians were not afraid to go about their business in the open.

But the sport of "hunting" had broken out among us. The men stood at the "window of death" and fired at the "points" over there. If a fellow made a direct hit, he was overjoyed.

"Zip!—one!"

"Zip!—two!"

"Zip!—three!"

That every "zip" meant a family man, a living, suffering person, who had his ambitions and wanted to live just as much as we, did not even enter our minds.

The life of a man is only a "zip!"

If, in addition, we also heard the death rattle of the fellow who had fallen, that was an even greater achievement!

I observed with what calm satisfaction and amusement the boys shot at a "fox" or "hare" over there.

In the end we paid for all this with the life of a fellow who was very dear to us. The lanky Tyrolean had gone up on the roof to make some repairs. He was certain that the Russians would not fire, because four days before I had stopped the hunting game. But the Russians evidently had not forgotten our violation of the tacit agreement, and the Tyrolean fell head forward—dead.

So he, too, left us.

How difficult it was for us to lower him into the trench!

And to get the simple, lanky soldier into the rotting hole that was his grave.

I recalled his words, "My turn next!"

We were overcome as we stood before his body, now rigid in death. Margolis sobbed softly.

Uncle Oestreicher kept walking about in circles, as if he were hesitating about something. Then he whispered to Margolis for a moment, and finally stood up and recited Kaddish, the prayer for the dead.

The simple Christian Tyrolean was privileged to have what thousands of Jewish soldiers were fated to miss.

The last words of the prayer were stifled in the tearful spasms and hoarse coughs of advancing age.

The veteran was weeping.

* * * * *

Among the higher-ups the orgy went on uninterrupted, having now boldly come out from behind barred doors. The officers had been dressing recently as though for a wedding. Finery piled on resplendent uniforms. Gold, silver, and precious stones glistening in the trenches like the treasures of Satan in hell. Exactly. They strutted about like puffed-up peacocks that some drunken maharajah had adorned with gems and pearls, and, for greater debauchery, had them drink of his own cup of wine, so that they went about in circles, stumbling and cackling strangely. The officers were beginning to change even their manner of speaking. They all spoke through their noses. With them this was a sign of superior indifference, of lofty nonchalance, which prided itself, so to speak, on lack of both energy and desire to do anything. There are several letters which aren't pronounced by officers. Especially the letter "r," which no officer enunciates sharply. Something akin to a German "ch" takes its place, as it is ordinarily heard among the sons of counts in their clubs.

Still Margolis had a different explanation. He said that they simply imitated the Galician Jew, who pronounces the "r" like that!

On the basis of this scientific explanation, the "little corporal" became angry with one of the Jewish officers who was

strutting about with the affectation of nobility, puffing himself up and pronouncing the "r" with marvelous artistry. While discussing guard duty near the telephone, Margolis suddenly asked him, "Is it natural for the *Herr* Color-bearer to pronounce the "r" like that, or did you learn it from somebody?"

The stupid Jewish color-bearer for the moment became even more stupid in the face of the corporal, restrained his temper, and for the moment replied calmly; "Yes, Corporal Margolis, it is natural."

"Ah," said Margolis, matter-of-factly, "the *Herr* Color-bearer is a Galician Jew."

Instantly the officer was as enraged as a bull at a bullfight. In his terrible anger he could find no words to express himself. Margolis, with teeth gritted, drew so close to him that their noses almost touched. He roared threateningly.

"You just wait, you stinking seminary student! I'll teach you respect!"

To call an assimilated Hungarian Jew a Galician—that is perhaps the most terrible insult he can receive. Especially when he preens himself and takes special pains to be a noble officer, and to nasalize and puff up like the "pure blooded" officers.

"What did you do, wretch?" I asked Margolis, when he told me about it. "He'll have your life!"

"When?" Margolis asked. "Not just now. For the general attack is due, that great spring offensive which heralds the arrival of the Messiah!"

* * * * *

That was the belief current among us. The war couldn't last any longer. Impossible. Under no circumstances. How could it? More than two and a half years? Where will they get the strength and the men?

Strength had given out, and so had patience—likewise the willingness to go on living like that. Everything had given out. There was only one thing more that was bound to come—and after that, peace. It was the day of reckoning. "The day of reckoning and revenge." The great and mighty offensive had

yet to come, both on our part and on the part of the enemy. And in that offensive "all accounts would be settled."

This settling of accounts meant the great revenge upon the officers.

There was only one person who did not believe in this "final day of judgment." That was Infantryman Johann Kretschri, whose origin and race no one had succeeded in discovering all this time. He was a very thin fellow, with red eyes and hair. He had given his nationality on the official records as "Austrian." But can the word "Austrian" exactly define the nationality of a man? How many different kinds of Austrians there were! "Austria, thy peoples are as numerous as thy people!" a deputy from the upper house of the Hungarian Parliament once exclaimed.

In fact, Kretschri displayed the characteristics of many different nationalities. In the first place, he understood all the languages of the monarchy. Even in Hungarian, the most difficult of all European tongues to speak, he was as fluent as a native. Similarly German, Czechoslovak, and the other languages.

We asked him: "Kretschri, tell the truth; aren't you a Jew?" He answered dryly, "When I die, Uncle Oestreicher will surely say Kaddish for me."

That was truly a hint as to his Jewishness. But once, during a conversation, which was spiced with sharp and sarcastic jests, he said that he had been born circumcised.

Thereafter we despaired of ever learning the racial origin of Infantryman Kretschri.

"And do you like *tscholnt*?" Margolis once took him by surprise.

"Who doesn't like *tscholnt*?" the redhead replied. "The person who doesn't like that dish is no friend to me!"

Again we could not definitely determine his nationality.

What a name! Kretschri!

This fellow Kretschri was a nonbeliever, at that. Not in God, nor in Satan; neither in Jupiter nor in Jahveh. That is to say, he had but one belief, which he had evidently developed there in the trenches during the war. That belief he delighted in demonstrating with all sorts of logical theorems.

The outline of Kretschri's religious doctrine ran somewhat as follows:

"God is not pure spirit and not even the most refined matter, nor dynamic energy, either, as you suppose. The dynamo itself is subject to man. But what then? God is nothing but a creature, mightiest of the mighty, a creature with an intelligence much superior to ours, but a creature, nonetheless. God is a wicked creature, very cruel. A cruelty without comparison in human life. This creature has dominion over all that exists which is both within and beyond the grasp of our finite brain. Its rule is cruel and unlimited. And if you understand this, you understand everything. You will understand why ninety-nine and ninety-nine hundredths per cent of life in this world is one great mass of cruelty, one mighty program of abuse against all of us—against mankind in general, as well as against all the varied species of living creatures. Suffering, misfortune, affliction, and pain. One doesn't have to be a philosopher to figure out the preponderance of suffering and the minimum of happiness. That person who first uttered the stupid thought, "My Lord is a merciful and compassionate God," wished to deceive both himself and that wicked creature to whom he prayed. For lack of any other means, he wanted to cajole it. It is natural to cajole a murderer when his ax is posed over us. For what is our entire life, if not one sadistic molestation by someone or other?

"And I say to you," Kretschri would conclude, "everyone who desires to rise to his God must be cruel and murderous, must bait his victim and laugh at him; he must make every effort to be like God himself."

That was the catechism of Infantryman Johann Kretschri.

His doctrine struck a responsive chord among our officers. They burst out in loud laughter at his words; only while doing so they were aware that his ideas spoke to their sottish hearts. At any rate, they now received firm support for the deeds which they had been performing without philosophic backing.

The officers decided to arrange a "philosophical evening" for the week end, in honor of Infantryman Johann Kretschri.

When they informed Kretschri about the character of the event, he was silent, at first. Then he spoke: "Let them hang themselves without me! Why do they need me? They are wild enough animals without me! I won't go!"

He did not want to appear, even though there were many who greatly envied him, because he was a plain infantryman, who was accorded the privilege of having officers arrange an evening in his honor. Certainly that went beyond the limits of military etiquette.

In the end, they forced him to appear.

Well, as far as drinking goes even Kretschri did not decline to do his share. But he uttered not a single word. They could not get a sound out of him.

When the officers noticed this, they decided to bait him. "Let the reader of the letter be its bearer!" (Let him who suggests it, carry it out.)

The orgy raged all night.

The soldiers in the trenches sat and waited for the approaching great day of judgment, for the "war of Gog and Magog" which would finally arrive and bring on the devastating cataclysm, foretold in Isaiah and in the New Testament.

That was the apocalypse common to all the privates; during the long wintry days and nights they were coming to the "end of days." Everything kept drawing closer to it. Everything proceeded in good order. Everything.

During the night, at the banquet of the officers, there had been a sudden panic—my orderly told me the very next morning. He himself had heard it from his friends, the officers' orderlies, when they met in the kitchen. Something terrible had happened, some astounding miracle, the like of which had not been heard of since Biblical days.

He recounted the occurrence, genuinely awe-stricken.

"About three in the morning, in the midst of the symposium, amid the singing, hilarity, and drunken carousing, an inscription suddenly appeared on the wall, an exact duplicate of what was written in the days of the Bible, sir! They say it was terrifying. Lieutenant Colonel *Herr* Figer almost went out of his mind, sir!"

"Who saw it?"

"*Herr* Lieutenant Stubniak's orderly was there, too, and he also saw it. Exactly as in Biblical days, sir!" he added with awe, yet with inner joy, too.

I was intrigued. The inscription had really appeared upon the wall. In shining letters: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.

I wasn't puzzled very long. There immediately flashed through my mind the conjecture that this had been Margolis' doing.

It proved to be so. Margolis, who had become an expert in telephony, had also branched out into the field of electrography. It was he who had performed that terrifying miracle there, by electrography. The drunken officers saw, were amazed, went out of their minds, and fled for their lives.

As a result of this occurrence the officers were tamed down for a considerable time thereafter.

It was only after a long while that Margolis' trick was discovered.

The marvel was that, even after they discovered the deception, they did not punish the little corporal. On the contrary.

The inscription had made such an impression upon them that they were even afraid of the stratagem!

Great is the power of "belief," especially in the heart of a sot who goes berserk in the courtyard of death.

The privates felt and believed that Margolis' trick was of no consequence, but rather the proof itself that the "end of days" had really arrived. Thereafter, everyone of us, whether asleep or awake, constantly saw before his eyes the inscription:

MENE, MENE . . .

CHAPTER XXVI

Diomedes and Glaucus

ANOTHER spring had arrived.

We cleaned, repaired, and improved our trench city. Everything was orderly, in good repair, and pleasing.

Outside, above us, a flaming spring. As though for once, with a final supreme effort, the Galician sun were trying to rival Italy's. Birds were heard singing here and there. A lark passed over our heads in full flight, trilling exultantly. And there were butterflies also.

But this time we felt differently about spring than we had the year before. Now our hearts were calm, the calm before a storm, before the end. The yearning for life, freedom, the city, for a woman and a simple trade no longer excited us to resentment and the gnashing of teeth. All those yearnings were turned into one deep-seated pain which enjoined us all to repose. We waited, restfully, calmly, in a pleasant state of inner enervation, containing within itself a new element: the clear prospect—peace.

It was evident that similar calm reigned over there, too.

Yet within this calm was implicit a single assured and terrible expectation. We all knew that before long the general spring offensive would come; but the worst of it was that during the entire winter we had gotten no information about what was going on on the other side. That secret thread which used to keep us in constant contact with them, and which would transmit information to us, general news, plans, sketches of positions—that thread had been snapped. Though it was almost common knowledge that the other end of the

thread was in the hands of the Czarina herself, if one might say so. How did we know this? The devil knows. But so it was said and believed among us.

It was terrible, because we now had to keep on making general preparations, without letup and without any definite objective.

Despite all this, we reckoned that the offensive would not begin earlier than June. And it was only April now.

"We'll be able to arrange our Seder (Passover Supper) right here at the front," Uncle Oestreicher said to me with perfect confidence. "And then will come the Day of Judgment."

We strengthened our positions. We devoted special attention to the concrete trench behind our frontline, about thirty paces to the rear. It was in the concrete trench that we were to await the attack. As soon as the Russian artillery opened up, we were immediately to withdraw to our concrete fortified position and wait for the infantry attack.

Meanwhile, there was quiet and yearning, even yearning concerning the enemy.

There were some among us who had never seen a Russian in person, not even at a distance. A Russian took on a fantastic shape in the eyes of the plain soldier, which excited his curiosity and lured him on, as though by some hidden, inner force.

At any rate, there was in this fascination a feeling which one could undeniably call love.

Our most intense yearning was concentrated upon a single stretch of soil, not more than about three hundred paces wide —no man's land.

For several months there had been no encounters between the frontlines. We sat there and daydreamed, singing, hoping—and so they on the other side must have, too.

Now that the snow had melted and the earth had again become visible, marvelous green grass began to sprout. Here and there in the grass, variegated flowers. Flitting above the flowers, butterflies. And high above them all, the lark, trilling pleasantly.

All this we observed from the trenches, and a mighty agonizing longing gripped us. Oh, but once to step out of the trench and stroll out there in the "Garden of Eden" (as we called no man's land); to walk, run, hop, jump, and roll around like a colt in the soft fragrant grass, in company with the shadowy, distant Russians! Like mischievous children.

The most beautiful of all our dreams thus far.

I vowed that if I survived the war, the first thing I would do would be to return to this spot with Mansy and my sister, and sit down in the grass with them. And then bury my face in the grass and just cry and cry, cry my heart out, at length, without cessation, until my joyous soul would depart.

* * * * *

Uncle Oestreicher received his phylacteries from Lvov. And with what inner joy!

"I won't leave this world," he said to me, when he was garbed in his phylacteries and praying shawl, "until I pray in a *minyan* with them over there!"

"Uncle Oestreicher! You're making a vow while in your praying garb!"

"Yes, sir. I want to obligate the Almighty to grant me this privilege! It is the only thing I want the privilege of experiencing just once in my life—to pray with them! They certainly pray, even as we do, and very likely they use the very same ritual. Don't you think so? For prayer is identical all over the world," he continued, meditatively. Finally, he again said, with conviction, "In a *minyan!* With them! In peace!"

"The Lord grant it!" the Italian Benvenuto Ghalierghi answered. "For once in my life I, too, want to take a drink with them! Only one drink, by the Virgin Mary!"

* * * * *

The order came to go out to reconnoiter the thick woods, stretching to our left between the opposing lines. The Russians had spent the previous fall there, and then deserted the spot.

Now, before the spring offensive, one must reconnoiter it.

And, as a matter of fact, wasn't there the possibility of bringing back some information?

I had the privilege not to go myself, but to send my men instead. But now not only my customary procedure impelled me to go along with my men, as always, but more especially the powerful and unconquerable longing to leave the trench and take a short stroll through the "Garden of Eden."

I took seven men with me. All had volunteered to go.

Among them was also Uncle Oestreicher. I did not want to take him, but he actually pleaded with me. Never before had he pleaded like that.

What was I to do? I took our old man along with us for this "stroll."

And, of course, Margolis, too. He understood Russian.

At night, exactly at three, we went over the top.

It was a moonlit night, except that the moon was most of the time entirely concealed behind the dark clouds.

As we crawled forward, we rolled around in the soft, wet grass, like colts that had come out of the mire after an idle, sluggish winter.

"Too bad we can't shout!" whispered Adam Ballah, the expert horse thief. "I have an unconquerable desire to give a loud, exultant neigh! Oh!"

"Shut up, you ass!"

We continued to crawl toward the woods.

We reached our objective, drenched from head to foot.

Once in the woods we straightened up and advanced cautiously.

We had made our way about fifty yards into the forest when I was startled. A human figure of some kind!

On such an occasion one should shout: "Halt!" Yet here, now, under these circumstances!

We stopped in a long wide-spread line, each man about five yards apart.

We all saw the figure. It was standing behind a thick tree.

Each one of us also was stationed behind a tree.

Suddenly, like the devil's spitework, the moon emerged from behind the dark clouds and bathed us in a lustrous stream of light!

Now I saw clearly. Russians! Not just one. Eleven of them.

We stood behind the trees without stirring. Silent, petrified, our rifles trained upon them. Not aimed, precisely, but at the ready, with butts resting against our waists.

They stood in similar position.

Two rows of guns, trained against one another, standing petrified.

Who would be the first to move?

The instant one of them stirred, I'd shoot.

But they evidently were thinking of that, too; the instant one of us moved, they'd fire upon us.

Hence they just stood there, without stirring.

They stood for a few minutes. And then a few minutes more. Our hearts pounded furiously. The moon shone on.

Accidentally, one of our men coughed.

Whereupon one of their men also coughed.

What was this? A reply?

I, too, experimented with a cough.

Again a cough from the other side.

Now we were certain that it was a reply. I decided to try again. But before I was able to, Uncle Oestreicher had anticipated me.

Again an answering cough.

We took it for granted that it was a reply.

If that was the case, then we were the initiators. And as such we were the ones in a commanding position. That was most important in such a situation. This was the law of rencounter: he who began always had a much better chance of victory, even though he was much weaker than the other.

I stood there for a few moments, and a forbidden thought flashed through my brain: a truce. I knew the severe penalty which such a thought entailed, but I could not subdue it. For a moment an internal conflict burst forth from within me; finally the thought conquered.

I decided to slacken my grip on the gun, and point it toward the ground.

The Russian opposite me did the same.

I experimented. I raised my rifle to its previous position.

So did he. So did our men. That being so, I slackened my grip again. Whereupon he did, too.

Good.

After me, my men did the same. So did the Russians.

Now the two rows of men were standing with their rifle muzzles pointing downward. The die was cast! For better or worse, I thrust my bayonetted gun into the ground. Uh! Come what may! So!

My answer seemed to be the proper one, for they also did the same.

I whispered, *"Pan* (Mister)," and was frightened by my own voice.

Immediately the answer came back, *"Pan!"*

At that point I came out from behind the tree and stood facing the spot where the voice came from, ordering my men, in the meantime, to keep under cover just where they were.

The Russian came out, too. I stood still for a moment, but he had already started walking and was approaching me.

That was fine. It augured well.

The Russian came over to me, stopped, and again said, *"Pan!"*

I offered my hand, and in the meanwhile ordered my Italian to walk toward the enemy lines, beyond them—to see if enemy reinforcements had been planted there. Perhaps it was a trap!

Ghalierghi took his gun along for protection. Margolis came over to us, by my order, and engaged in conversation with the Russian. He asked him if there weren't more men back there. The Russian, a noncom, answered.

"What did he say?" I asked.

He said, "God forbid!"

Good. Tell him that we have no reinforcements planted, either.

Meanwhile Ghalierghi returned and reported. Not a soul back there.

We breathed a sigh of relief. Margolis jested with them. Then we sat down on the ground.

I kept in mind that the death penalty could await us for our conduct.

What was the difference? The devil with it!

We talked a bit. Of course, barely audibly.

They give us some peculiar tobacco. Chips of cut stems mixed with shredded green and yellow leaves. The Russian explained that it was *machorka!* Whereupon he rolled himself a cigarette. He made a very small tube out of tough paper, stuffed some of the scraps into it, then sealed it, and presto! he had a cigarette!

Strange.

I took the gift and waited. He was about to roll another cigarette, but I didn't let him. I offered him one of mine. He thanked me: *"Spasibo, Pan!"*

I distributed cigarettes among all the men.

We lighted our cigarettes with the utmost caution, inside our helmets, which screened the light on all sides, and smoked.

Then we offered them some of our liquor.

They enjoyed it very much.

Unexpectedly, the Russian in command of the patrol made some sort of suggestion. Margolis explained it to me.

He proposed the exchange of a few prisoners.

"What does it mean?"

"He will give us a few of his men as prisoners and we'll give him a few of ours in exchange."

I reflected upon the offer for a moment. A peculiar idea.

"Well, boys," I turned to my men as a sort of experiment, "which one of you wants to make peace with the Czar, may the devil take him?"

"With the Czar, the devil take him, no; but with these fellows, yes!" said the Italian.

The Russian continued to explain at length, with Margolis interpreting for me: "We have an abundance of food. White bread and meat. Everything. But you haven't."

Whereupon my orderly flared up furiously, yet contained himself for the moment. "Let the *Herr* Corporal tell them, in a pig's neck. You have no more than we! Among us they can eat until it comes up on them! Please tell them that, *Herr* Corporal!"

"Be quiet, Pauli!"

"Madjar," said the Russian, *"Madjar!"*

He realized that the man was a Magyar.

"Musco!" my orderly replied to him, *"Musco!"* (Muscovite.)

The Russian offered him his hand in friendship. My orderly hesitated for a moment, then, despite what he had said, decided to shake his hand.

I decided to send Uncle Oestreicher to take a needed rest. Let this veteran who had a large family go off to live out his remaining days as a prisoner, and there await the Messiah. Why should he perish in the spring offensive?

At first he protested. Why single him out? Later, however, when the Italian had consented to go over, he began to waver.

"Why are you wavering, Uncle? The phylacteries are in your pocket. There you'll pray with a *minyan*. Go. Why should you lose your life only a few days before the armistice? Isn't it so?"

Uncle Oestreicher turned to Margolis to have him ask the Russian whether they'd kill him once they had him back there.

The Russian gesticulated in vigorous protest.

" 'God forbid!' he says," Margolis explained.

Finally we came to a barter understanding. I gave him four men and he gave me five, one as "profit."

I trembled all over. The death penalty.

Oh, the devil take me! Come what may. The Italian still wanted to live. Uncle Oestreicher was an elderly Jew with a large family. What difference would it make to our "grandpa" back in Vienna, if I exchanged those men for a few Russians? I was certain that "grandpa" would consent. And if he consented, I'd be on top of the world. Those sots back there!

"We won't bring our guns along for them, the devil take them!" said our four men, almost in unison. "Please take our guns."

With embraces and kisses, we parted. Uncle Oestreicher wept. So did one of the Magyars. Just previous to our taking leave of one another, I advised firing a few shots into the air before parting, to signalize an encounter between us.

When I returned, remorse preyed on me so that I became ill.

But I suddenly recalled the Trojan War and the two opposing heroes, Diomedes and Glaucus, who became fast friends on the field of battle—and made a truce openly, in the sight of the warring hosts. If the Greeks could indulge in such an action, how much more so could we! *

* When I wrote this chapter I was a prisoner of war in Tschortokov. I learned that both the Italian and Uncle Oestreicher had died there in Tschortokov even before they could enter Russian territory. Their two companions remained alive, but I then could not, of course, give their names. They would be subject to the death penalty.

CHAPTER XXVII

The End of Days

BY the beginning of June our expectation of the great general offensive turned into silent hysteria. The concrete support trench was completed in every particular.

The spring, as if in spite, was so glorious that it stirred the heart and soul to tears.

In the evening, when my orderly prepared my bunk, he spoke up unexpectedly. "I'll be a raving dog if the big party doesn't begin at dawn tomorrow!"

"How do you reckon it exactly tomorrow?"

"How? How? Just like that, that's how. You'll see if I have lied!"

"You surely must have heard some rumor."

"Heard? Heard? Of course, I have heard, but who pays any attention to rumors. I know of a certainty. Tomorrow morning. At dawn."

And because of this he had everything prepared, all packed and ready.

We went to sleep.

Never before had I slept so soundly and well when a tremendous shell, it seemed like a thirty-two, violently agitated the entire surrounding area with its shriek, and then exploded about fifty yards off to our right. It had been aimed directly at our frontline position.

The noise had instantly roused me from my sleep. After the explosion we immediately rushed into our concrete support

trench and abandoned our first-line trench to the withering barrage, which all but burst our eardrums.

My dugout was the target of this annihilating fire.

I recall even the most insignificant details of my dugout. The window made of a piece of molten broken glass—I had no tool to make it square—the sofa, the bunk, the hook, the "bureau" that had been chiseled shaftwise in the wall, and the pictures. And among the pictures, the one of the forty most brilliant rabbis in Israel, from Maimonides, in the twelfth century, up to and including K'sav Sopher, in the nineteenth.

* * * * *

In the concrete support position, a hellish racket. The trench was about five meters deep. The roof, which was flush with the ground, was about three meters thick. And it was constructed as follows: a layer of boards, each of which was more than half a meter thick; upon this a layer of concrete; and on top of everything—earth.

Under this roof we sat tightly pressed against one another and listened to the humming shells which rent the heavens and ploughed up our entire front line.

When one of these shells wedged into our roof and exploded, we all choked for a few minutes; and with mouths agape and choking breath that resembled a protracted, stifled sneeze, we waited for the air to come up out of our smothered lungs. The sneezing lasted several minutes.

Thus we sat in two long lines, facing one another, awaiting the order to abandon the position.

To abandon it, after the enemy had wiped out our first position and was preparing to direct his shells at the positions behind us and at our artillery, while his infantry launched an attack upon us.

To go forth, while on the outside a shell was dropping on every square meter, at least one shell in each meter! A shell which could raze a three-story building without leaving one brick in its original position.

To go forth in such a deadly hail of shells! It is fortunate that military tactics teach us not to go into the open until

the enemy has ceased hailing death upon us, but only when his troops begin to approach. But suddenly the order came by telephone: "Send out a patrol."

That meant to leave the trenches and arrange the men in ranks, twenty-five yards apart. Those men must lie down in the midst of this terrible hail of bullets and watch for the oncoming wave of the enemy infantry attack.

This time *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel Figer himself received the order. He had been sent to our support position by headquarters and also because with us there was a little better chance to survive than back in his fine quarters. He transmitted the order to me.

"Send twenty men as lookouts and tell them that everyone who volunteers to go will receive a decoration, if he hasn't one already. The ones who have decorations will receive even higher ones. Those who further distinguish themselves will be promoted."

I announced: "Everyone who wants to go out with me . . ."

The lieutenant colonel interrupted. "You don't have to go, color-bearer; why should you!"

Lieutenant Colonel *Herr* Figer had suddenly become kind-hearted. He was now considerate of the life of someone else besides his own. However, this was not an exceptional occurrence among us. Alas, it is a frequent thing that in time of danger the officers suddenly become kind and pleasant, courteous and affable, actually like sisters . . .

Like sisters, but not like brothers. A brother is a man. But these gentlemen suddenly become women; nice, tender women.

"Won't you sit down a while? You're tired."

Or, "Please don't bother, I'll do it myself."

Or, "Don't endanger your life; the army needs men like you."

And now *Herr* Figer was concerned about my own life. I mustn't go myself, but send a noncom in my place into that hell, into that certain death out there above us.

"*Herr* Lieutenant Colonel, I beg leave to say, sir, I never *send* my men; I always *rally* my men to meet the danger."

I continued my announcement of the horrible order.

Sixteen men volunteered.

"Any more? Who else? Well, what do you say, boys!"

With difficulty we got another volunteer.

In the meanwhile, the air, made oppresive by the explosions above, was stifling us.

"Hic!" We stood for a few moments with gaping mouths, smothered lungs and eyes bursting from their sockets.

"Well, any more! Who else?"

Not another man volunteered. We still needed three.

Now came the hellish job. I had personally to select the three men to go.

There is only one other thing at all comparable to this volcanic upheaval of one's moral life—to take out a fellow soldier and shoot him by order of court-martial.

Those who volunteered had at least the moral satisfaction which eliminated about seventy-five per cent of the fear of death. This autosuggestion is of precious value on such occasions, for one who endangers his life of his own accord pulls himself together and goes forth courageously.

But the man whom it is my duty to order to go is a most unfortunate wretch. Especially since he has not volunteered like his comrades. And this miserable fellow, who in the final analysis has held back solely out of fear, I must now send forth to certain death.

He is the one I must single out among all his fellows.

For him I must become cruel—horrible Fate itself.

I actually implored them to volunteer. I pleaded in every way I knew.

So I played "Babel" with them. That is to say, I ordered all those who were left, those who did not volunteer, to get together in a group. Then I shut my eyes, and walked the entire length of that row of men. Upon my return trip, my eyes still shut, I picked out three men, in broken order, "You! —you!—you!"

Only when I had thus picked them did I open my eyes to see whom I had chosen for the "burnt offering."

The three men selected stood in a line, sad, dejected, miserable. They hadn't even the satisfaction which the courageous act of volunteering gives.

I whispered to each one, separately: "The fact that you did not volunteer makes no difference to me, my friend. You'll be cited like all the rest."

Now—to go out!

The concussions of the roaring bombshells made everything in sight quake, but still we advanced. The enemy had only too well noticed us leaving the trench. On such occasions he added his "little devils" to the cannon fire, and trained his machine guns directly upon us.

I crawled toward them, my men after me.

We were all outside, on the roof of the concrete support trench.

Hell broke loose. The machine guns crackled at us, right into our faces.

We crawled along, and before I could space four of them in a prone position as we crawled forward, two were missing. They had simply disappeared.

Soon I could not tell of a certainty that I myself was alive. Who knew? In such roaring confusion!

I arranged the rest of them as we crawled on. In a line. Ten paces apart. At first, I still kept jerking my head from side to side, cautiously, flat on my belly, head in the dirt, terrified and gasping for breath. I continued to wait, doggedly now, without stirring, for a bullet or a shell to blow me to hell.

But a considerable period passed and death, spitefully, did not come. I threw all precaution to the winds and got up! On my feet. Truly, what can happen worse than death itself?

Thus I stood and encouraged my men.

But in that moment I thought: What is this? Bravery?

Bravery, hell! It was the omega of desperation. It was the sole means of keeping my nerves, so frightfully taut, from cracking.

Suddenly I saw my Pauli leave the support trench and crawl towards us.

He was not present when I formed the patrol, but when he returned and found me gone, he came after me.

I leveled my pistol at him. "Get back! Right away!"

He ignored both me and my pistol.

He crawled straight at me, gingerly, with eyes flashing;

when he reached me, he tackled me about my feet and dragged me down to the ground. I fell flat, and remained lying there.

I distributed cigarettes among the men and lay down.

In order to bring back my damned orderly, I myself had to return.

I began to crawl back to the trench, and two or three of them began to crawl after me.

"Back, swine!" I leveled my pistol at them.

It is a rule, without exception, that without his officer, even a loyal soldier loses his courage. So I stayed. As did my orderly.

Finally the order came to bring them back. For the present they weren't needed. The enemy wouldn't storm us yet.

Bring them back? Already there were but fourteen men left.

The others had been torn to pieces, had died of wounds, or had simply disappeared without a trace.

When I returned and faced Lieutenant Colonel Figer, I boiled with fury and hatred. It was as though an acute attack of nausea has seized me upon sight of that drunken coward. And when my eyes chanced upon his finely manicured nails, I almost shot him with my revolver.

From that moment a feeling of hatred and loathing kept growing stronger and stronger within me. Especially when he tried to be nice and pleasant to me.

My Pauli had really gone mad. He laughed right in his face. He actually derided him.

"Pauli, later he'll drive you crazy with the punishment he has waiting for you," I whispered in his ear.

"When? When, sir? Tomorrow? Or the next day? There isn't any more tomorrow or the next day. There's only today, sir. And he won't escape this day—by the Virgin Mary, sir!"

* * * * *

So the Russians shelled our positions all that day and night, and the next day and the next night, too, incessantly, without stopping for a second. It was only on the morning of the third day that there was a sudden silence.

I immediately went outside to see what was doing.

The enemy was not yet approaching.

That silence following two nights and two and a half days of bedlam, coursed through my body like warm, healing nectar.

And after all this hellish shelling, we could still telephone to every point for news.

Yes, only there was no telephone. The shells had ripped up the wires.

Where in the world was Margolis?

Margolis was nowhere to be found.

But within an hour the roar of the cannon commenced again.

With renewed vigor, if it were within the realm of possibility to renew and add to that titanic force!

It was impossible to establish telephonic communication with even the nearest field headquarters.

Suddenly the telephone rang.

Superhuman joy.

"Hello! Respects, your excellency!" said Lieutenant Colonel Figer. "What? Who? Who repaired the telephone wires? I haven't any idea, your excellency! What? I didn't even send a man to repair it. How could you send anyone out at such a time? What? Yes, I'll transmit the message! Respects, your excellency!"

And he gave me the mesage. It was the division commander himself. He sent me, as an officer who had seen active service, his personal congratulations as well as those of the entire division. He had a great deal of confidence in me. Thank you, very much. He wanted to know who had repaired the telephone in this hellhole. And all along the entire front of our regiment.

I was convinced that Margolis was responsible. That devil was capable of doing it. And the proof? He was absent and no one knew where he was.

Deathly panic suddenly stirred within me. Who knew what had happened to him?

Only let the little fellow remain alive with me, dear God! Don't take that young boy from me now!

I felt that I would gladly give my life for his safety.

But I did not have to worry very long before he reappeared. "God Almigthy! What a face! How you look, Margolis!"

He was completely covered with mire, his hair wildly tousled, his clothes ripped to shreds and smeared with blood. I hastily examined every part of his body. "Where were you wounded, wretch? What have you done?"

He stood erect before me and reported: "*Herr* Colorbearer! I beg leave to report, sir, all the telephone wires are in good order. Now the Muscovite can shoot over even the Czar himself. He'll never snap our telephone connections again! A plague on his head!"

"Where is your wound?"

"Here!"

He pointed to his ankle. A slight scratch, a tear in the skin, which would not have frightened even a child. That was his wound.

"That's not mine, sir," he said, pointing to the blood. "It's my comrade's, the telephonist of the adjoining regiment. He was killed and belched blood upon me."

I embraced him and gave him some cognac.

Only then did I become aware of the fact that instead of reporting to the *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel, he had reported to me.

I pinched his side. "Go report to him! Do you hear?"

"To whom?" he replied, almost aloud. "To that female with a whore's manicure? Let the devil talk to him! I won't! What have I in common with him? Have I ever stolen chickens with him?"

Again the telephone rang. "The division commander wants our 'rescuer repair man' in person on the telephone." To his surprise, Margolis answered, "Your excellency, I beg leave to report, sir, all my life, I have had telephonic communications with God!"

* * * * *

That very night, at two, the Russians came out of their holes and began to descend upon us in hordes.

The battle was very bitter. My men were wild beasts, lions set for a kill.

My orderly kept singing all the while. He sang a song during this convulsive uproar.

A sort of jesting spirit broke out among us in the very midst of the hellish business. Everyone was shouting, jesting, singing. They all sang. The Russians must surely have thought we had gone crazy.

At three-thirty, after an hour and a half's firing, we ran out of ammunition!

My first sergeant came and reported, "There's no ammunition, sir!"

"I'll put a bullet through your brain! Why didn't you prepare for such an emergency?"

"For the past half hour I have been requesting the *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel to issue the order. He's sitting down there below, all at sea. He justs keep drinking, without saying a word, scared to death."

"Ammunition! Bring ammunition, immediately!"

I myself descended into the trench.

The lieutenant colonel was sitting there drinking, teetering on his seat. That very moment all the evil spirits in the universe entered my soul and rekindled my loathing and hatred for him. In a flash I recalled the filth, cruelty, and impurity of that creature. I had nothing to lose. This was the real, the irrevocable end.

He was aware of the situation, and began to stammer. "Why, you—you know that I trust you—I have always had confidence in—in your courage—why, you—you—" (he rose and tried to grasp my shoulder)—"you . . ."

I brushed off his hand.

"What am I? What am I?" I screamed at him with all my might, as I felt that I was freed from every tie and bond of authority in existence. "What am I, *Herr* Lieutenant Colonel? I demand ammunition! Ammunition! Ammunition is what I demand, you damned bastard! Why do you stand there like an idiot? Why? Get out! Get out! To the battle! *Get out!*"

And I leveled my revolver at him. "You'll die right here, filthy dog!"

Behind me stood my orderly, shouting, "Put a bullet in his belly, *Herr* Color-bearer! A bullet in his swinish belly!"

I'll never forget that miserable scene. He stood before me, a wretched, quaking creature, half drunk and half dead of fright, and when I screamed at him, he stammered, "Please don't! Please don't! Aren't you—you—you—a hero—?"

I spat in his face and went to get ammunition.

But when I returned I found an astounding change. On both flanks of my company, absolute silence. No one in sight. My company had occupied about one hundred and fifty yards of the trench. That was the entire length of our remaining front. Beyond that, all had been captured.

How had it happened?

I do not know.

The Russians kept pouring in upon us by the thousands. One wave fell, the second, behind it—and after it the third, the fourth, fifth, sixth—endlessly. And all we had were three ranks, that was all. Not a soldier more than that. And they came twenty, thirty ranks at a time.

"Who in the world produced them in such crazy numbers?" my orderly shouted as he fired away without intermission.

"That they know well!" Margolis retorted. "They know how to reproduce, damn them!"

"It seems to me that today they also know how to win!" I said, and encouraged my company, whose men kept dropping off, one by one, as it shrank with each passing moment.

Our artillery wasn't doing us any good, either.

What had happened?

Had the artillery been captured too?

I fired rockets of all colors as an S.O.S. There was no answer.

We were isolated.

Suddenly my first sergeant reported, "Sir, the Muscovites are behind us, too!"

"What? Behind us?"

I snapped the order: *"Gendarmerie!"*

It meant that the company must divide into two sections, one facing the front, and the other, back to back with their comrades, facing forward and firing from that position.

Suddenly I heard cries from behind. "Avigdor! Don't shoot! Don't shoot! We're all lost!"

The voice was that of my dear friend, First Lieutenant Smertschani.

He was a prisoner. The Russians were accompanying him from behind the parapet of our battleline. He was coming straight at us. There were a large number of our men with him.

I immediately surmised that the Russians had broken through our front, either on the right or the left flank, through one of our regiments, and in that way had been able to penetrate to our rear, from which vantage ground they had captured our entire division.

But in the meanwhile the Russians kept surging against us from their own front. I mustered the ebbing forces of my company and we defended ourselves against those who were attacking our van. All told there were twenty of us left.

Before I had finished, four men fell at one burst of gunfire.

And after them, three more.

And yet another.

Then two more.

And from behind I heard, "Don't fight! It's useless! All is lost!"

But, after all, is it the man who shoots? It is the gun that shoots; the gun shoots, and not the man!

Opposite me a Russian officer, flanked by a few soldiers, came toward us.

I fired my revolver—I fired and fired, but I failed to hit him.

What was this? Was I drunk? Or blind?

But he did not shoot. He walked toward me without saying a word. He seemed to be smiling.

A tall man, strikingly handsome, with sincere, kind features. He smiled as he approached me, with his arm held aloft.

"Nie nada, Pan! Nie nada!"

"It's all over! The game's up, old fellow!"

He pointed behind me. "There go your men, all prisoners of war."

I saw that it was a fact. I gave the order—lower arms!

My men—six in number—thrust their bayonetted guns into the earth. We stood and waited.

The handsome officer came over to me.

I handed him my pistol.

He emptied it in the air, and put it in his pocket.

Again he smiled, slapped me on the shoulder, and said something.

Margolis translated it for me. "He says you're a good soldier."

Then he produced a cigarette case and offered me a smoke.

I took out mine and offered him one.

We both lighted up.

He suggested that we exchange cases. We did.

Margolis was sorry about mine. It was gold, while the Russian's was only silver.

He gave me a warm handclasp—almost embraced me, as he again addressed me with the word which meant "good soldier." He added several words which I did not understand. *"Yeh, Bogu! Molodyetz!"* (By God, what a man!)

He turned me over to a sergeant who had been assigned to take me to headquarters, warning him to guard me carefully so that no harm would befall me on the way.

On the way we stumbled across Russian dead and also a few of our own.

Margolis looked at them, and then, after a protracted silence, said, as he continued on his way:

"So tell me, sir, what is this entire game about? Couldn't I have bought a ticket to tour Russia by train? Was it worthwhile to start all this racket—merely for that? Was it, sir?"

THE END

PIERRE VAN PAASSEN says:

"The story moves swiftly, the characters are genuine, the satire is merciless. I am grateful to Jacob Freedman for having given us access to the work of Avigdor Hameiri. Translating this book from the Hebrew must have been a tour de force. If there are more works like THE GREAT MADNESS *published in the Holy Land, we ought to have them brought to America quickly."*

THE GREAT MADNESS is an autobiographical war novel, laid mainly in Austrian Galicia on the Eastern front during the first three years of World War I.

The hero, a sensitive, warm-natured intellectual of Hungarian-Jewish extraction, wakes one morning to find himself summoned "to the colors." His experience with the war-crazed mob in Budapest; with officials in training camps and under fire; his struggles to rise superior to the inflamed prejudice against his race; the anguish, mental, spiritual and physical, with which he sees the lives around him being degraded by war: these trials of sanity, depicted with an ironic and even humorous touch, fill the body of the book. It ends when the hero's sector is captured by the Russians and he is taken prisoner.

The story is a kind of Hebrew ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT. The material is of great interest, partly because this particular location of war activity has rarely, if ever, been used before in this connection, and partly because the book is written from a Jewish point of view. THE CASE OF SERGEANT GRISCHA, by Stefan Zweig, showed the Russian side of the Eastern front. Hameiri presents the side of the Central Powers.

But the book is powerful in its own right. It is written in a terse and simple style, which the translator has admirably maintained. The translator has also made excellent use of colloquial language, which makes for an easy, familiar approach for the reader. The story contains many episodes that will horrify and disgust a reader, while at the same time hold his interest. This power to shock and disgust is an unavoidable part of a war novel and here it is fully exhibited in such incidents as the shooting of the actor Madi, the conference with the Russian soldiers in the wood, and the unveiling of the abnormal, vicious civilian life in Budapest.

In short, THE GREAT MADNESS is a frank and extremely powerful book about an unfamiliar battle area in World War I, written by a man who knows his material intimately.

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