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DUCK LANE

BY THE AUTHORS

Angry Harvest
Duck Lane

Hermann Field

Stanislaw Mierzenski

DUCK LANE

THOMAS Y. CROWELL COMPANY

New York · Established 1834

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It is a source of deep satisfaction to the authors that their collaboration has been able to transcend its unfortunate origins and mature into a positive expression of cultural interchange between their two countries. Thus they feel it a special achievement that *Duck Lane*—as *Angry Harvest* before it—is appearing simultaneously in America and in a Polish edition published at Warsaw.

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Those who live on the lane . . .

in the Green House

OGOREK, *the owner of the Green House, a black marketeer. He runs a kiosk near the station.*

PELAGIA, *his wife*

GENIA, *his daughter*

KAROL, *his son*

KOZIK, *the handyman of the Lane. He rents two rooms on the second floor of the Green House.*

ANNA, *his wife*

MADEY, *a railway worker who also rents a room in the Green House*

MARTHA, *his wife*

HELENA KOS, *a prostitute, known derisively as "The Quail." She also rents a room on the second floor of the Green House.*

in a small cottage opposite the Green House

PROFESSOR TURYN, *a part-time teacher who lives mainly by his wits*

MRS. TURYN, *his wife*

in a sumptuous villa at the end of the Lane

ALEXANDER ORLOWSKI, *chairman of the Board of the powerful Masowia Insurance Company, forced by the war into retirement*
MARIE, *his wife*
ROMAN, *their older son*
IRENA, *their daughter*
WLADEK, *their younger son*

as caretakers of Vice-Minister Rybak's villa

SIGMUNT MALINKA, *cashier of a Warsaw co-operative store on the East Bank*
MATYLDA, *his wife*

Those who come to the Lane later . . .

to live in Rybak's villa

HENRYK MODLIBOG, *a once wealthy dilettante landowner whose estate has been confiscated*
WITOLD, *his son*

TADEUSZ RAKOWICZ, *a handsome, opportunistic young man, close friend of both Modlibog and his son*
RYBAK, *prewar government vice-minister and owner of the villa*
ZOSIA, *his wife*

to live in the Green House

MIECESLAW STORK, *a weaver of horsehair*
GIZA, *his wife*
POLDI, *their son*

MRS. KORF, *the wife of a Polish officer, a German prisoner of war*
EVA, *her older daughter*
KRISHA, *her younger daughter*

DUCK LANE

PROLOGUE

DUCK LANE—what is there to say about a short, sandy byway on the outskirts of an undistinguished Warsaw suburb? The suburb is called Jutrosin, a ramshackle settlement scattered among the scrub pines on both sides of the railway embankment that bisects it. There's a row of brick tenements across from the station shelter, a few down-at-the-heel stores, Mrs. Leokadia's dingy bar and restaurant, the church, and an outdoor cafe called The Arbor which serves pastries and ice cream, and that's Jutrosin. There's a main street, too, of sorts—broad, potholed, with concrete walks on either side—rising to a grade crossing just beyond the platform. This was once called *Third of May Avenue* in honor of the 1791 Constitution. Just recently the *Third* was painted out and *First* painted in. But that made little difference locally, it had always been known as simply *May Avenue* and *May Avenue* it remains.

To reach Duck Lane you turn left at the crossing, just opposite Ogorek's kiosk, and then bend back on yourself and follow Long Street which parallels the tracks. A few minutes walk and Long Street gives way to a waste of sand. And that is Duck Lane!

A certain Jan Wrobel was once the owner of the land up the middle of which Duck Lane now runs. An impoverished peasant, Wrobel had thirteen acres of sandy soil, a horse, two cows and a goat. Once times had been a little better for him, but that was before the suburban trains and the electrification of the line, before there was even a local stop at Jutrosin. As the sole owner of a horse and cart in the vicinity he had moved all of the summer vacationists from the city and business had been fairly good.

It was the electric that had ground him down, and he hated it with all his guts. After it came, all that was left was his milk route. And who could live off two cows and some grassy sand? If it hadn't been for one Dudak, his brother-in-law, he would no doubt have continued struggling on the edge of hunger right down to the present. Dudak was an official connected with the Parish office, a man of affairs. Even so, Wrobel never trusted him, and with good reason, as events were to prove.

One morning Dudak appeared at Wrobel's tumbledown cottage with a business proposition. He could arrange for Wrobel's fields to be drawn into the Parish development plan. A street would be staked out and the land subdivided into building lots, and Wrobel would be able to buy himself a good fertile farm elsewhere with his share of the proceeds. The old man shook his head stubbornly. Coming from Dudak, no! A half hour later, however, with the help of alcohol and Wrobel's wife, the matter was settled. Wrobel was to get the first twenty-eight thousand zlotys from the sale of his land; only after this had been paid off would anything go to his brother-in-law.

Soon a surveyor and his assistant set up their tripods, driving pegs while Wrobel's plow made furrows to mark the future lane. Two lines started at Long Street and ended abruptly at the small meadow and a pond overgrown with swamp willows, an old clay pit which blocked any continuation of the way.

The work done and the lots marked down on the planning board, the surveying team retreated into Wrobel's cottage. Of course, Dudak was there too, to help baptize the event.

"Gentlemen," the surveyor announced, "we've got to have a name." He turned to the old peasant. "You're the owner. What would you suggest?"

Several glasses of vodka had already gone their way and Wrobel's head was buzzing. He blinked; the question was quite beyond him.

"How about Independence Avenue?" Dudak spoke up with the self-assurance of an expert.

"Already have one."

"All right then—Washington Avenue—or Pilsudski Boulevard."

The surveyor scowled. "No, no, too pretentious." Again, he turned to Wrobel. "Hasn't your place ever had a name?"

Wrobel was still baffled. His wife came to his help. "Folks call all this round here—" she made a sweeping gesture with her

hands—" 'at the ducks.' Because of the pond and the wild ducks that come every spring."

Dudak grinned wryly. "There's real brains for you—Duck Lane." He slapped his leg and sneered. "Or how about Pig Alley?"

The surveyor ignored him. "Duck Lane," he said thoughtfully, "not bad. Just what I was looking for. What do you say, Mr. Wrobel—agreed?"

Wrobel nodded. What did he care? The surveyor leaned over his board and wrote the name in big letters. Duck Lane was an established fact.

But sales were slow in the beginning. The first lots to go were the corner ones. After a while Ogorek, who owned the kiosk at the station, bought the big piece with Wrobel's buildings. Then nothing more was sold for a long time until finally Professor Turyn came to Dudak. He had a buyer for all the remaining lots if Dudak would meet his terms, namely one free lot for himself, the lumber from Wrobel's barn and two thousand zlotys commission. They bickered a bit, agreed to drop the commission and the bargain was sealed.

Soon the first car turned into Duck Lane, a big black limousine churning through the sand. In the back seat sat Professor Turyn and a well-dressed gentleman in a bowler hat, none other than Board Chairman Orlowski of Warsaw's Masowia Insurance Company. Orlowski glanced around the site, concealing his satisfaction with difficulty. Between Wrobel's fields and the long bank of the Jutrosin forest lay a sandy strip of wasteland that had been dumped on Masowia in a foreclosure. It had turned out to be completely worthless because it had no means of access anywhere. On one side was the forest, on the other the tracks. The only remaining approach was blocked by Wrobel's place, but now, fortunately, this was up for sale.

The deal was quickly closed and all the remaining lots went to Masowia.

Dudak did very well by himself; his share was considerably more than his brother-in-law's twenty-eight thousand zlotys. Of course, Wrobel didn't know this. But just as he was getting ready to move out, he heard that Masowia was offering fifty thousand for Ogorek's lot, and had bought back the two corner ones at fifteen thousand each. The old man almost went crazy. He beat up his dog, his children and his wife, and finally decided to hang himself in his former barn. At the last moment his wife restrained him.

And that was how Duck Lane came into existence. In 1936, Ogorek, who had turned down Masowia's offer, hoping for a better price, built himself a two-story frame house on the site of Wrobel's cottage. He painted it green (a bargain lot of paint he had come upon) and ever since it has been known as the "Green House." He moved into the first floor with his family. The second story he divided into three small rental units. One two-room unit was taken by Kozik, who had been employed as a carpenter when the house was built, the other by a railway worker who had had the attic room at Wrobel's. The remaining room stayed empty for some time.

By the end of 1938, Professor Turyn had begun putting up his own cottage, unfinished to the present day. At the end of the lane Board Chairman Orlowski built a fine modern villa. It was supposed to be a summer home for himself, but until the war forced him out of Warsaw, he hadn't stayed there one night. Soon a second villa, quite similar to Orlowski's, went up close by. Into it moved none other than Vice-Minister Rybak. Duck Lane's status seemed assured. Now it was advertised by a big sign facing the tracks—"Jutrosin Garden Suburb." Below the lettering there was a panoramic picture of the community of the future with asphalt-surfaced streets, gardens and fountains, and cars parked in front of sprawling villas. Unfortunately, the Germans came before the plans could be realized.

Kozik was the source of the story of Wrobel and the birth of the lane. He told it, of course, in much greater detail because that is his way—long-winded and repetitious.

"Yes, that's how it was, Mr. Kozik," his neighbor on the second floor, old Madey, agreed. "And what's ahead for our little lane will be as God commands. Got started with a human wrong. But one man's hurt is another's luck. Ain't that so? . . ." In his usual deliberate way he raised his old-fashioned pipe with its looped stem to his mouth and puffed thoughtfully. "But it's a quiet place. Nice people who mind their own business and don't go lookin' for trouble like folks in the city. You come home from your shift and can count on its always being the same. Nothing really ever happens here and that's all right by me. . . ."

1

A DAY ON DUCK LANE

KOZIK SLIPPED out of bed, careful not to waken Anna, and pulled on his pants. The gray of dawn filtered through the edges of the black-out paper. Tiptoeing down the creaky stairs, he removed the bar noiselessly from the door and as quietly turned the key. He was not being particularly considerate; it was simply that he wanted nothing to disturb his early morning privacy.

The sky was clear, cool, silent. The world was still asleep. He stepped out and walked around the house to the brick shed with its row of wooden doors. These were the storage lockers, two for Ogorek since he was the owner, and one for each tenant. Kozik glanced at the padlocks; all were in place. In times like this you couldn't be too careful.

He took his usual position at the side wall; while he relieved himself the electric from Warsaw went by on the embankment. The whistle blew as it began to slow down. Perfect timing. It meant he'd gotten up right on the button and everything would go today as it should. He watched the empty carriages roll into the station. The train stopped, the conductor's voice called, "All aboard!" As Kozik buttoned his fly, it began to move again.

Kozik was only thirty-five, but his routine was as fixed as that of a man twice his age. By nature cautious, he had found his small place in the world and was content to stay there, observing the restless ambition of others with bland eyes and an occasional quirk of amusement on his lips. When you came down to it what good did all their sweating and straining, their fussing and fuming do them? Ninety-nine times out of a hundred they ended up no better off than when they started.

Next, in accordance with his early morning ritual, he headed for the well. Leisurely he turned the wheel bringing up the battered pail. The water was clear and cool. When he had drunk his fill, he tossed what remained in the dirt near by. A group of sparrows fluttered out of the way, at once returning to peck busily at the damp and softened earth.

Then it was time for the first cigarette.

In his section of the storage bins he kept chickens, rabbits, and a goat. He could hear them routing around, trying to attract his attention, but they'd have to wait. Feeding belonged to duties. The early morning solitude was reserved exclusively for pleasure.

When he had savored his cigarette until it was only a stub, he clambered up the rickety ladder to his pigeon coop on the roof of the shed. How many clashes Kozik had had with Ogorek over his birds, one of his greatest passions and joys. He picked up a long pole with a rag on one end, driving them out, waving it back and forth whenever they tried to return. Presently, fighting one another for room, they settled down on the ridge of the Green House instead. Kozik threw bits of earth and pebbles at them, and swung his pole until at last they soared up into the sky again, their feathers luminous in the rising sun. Round and round they flew. He smiled triumphantly.

As always, the first to break into his ritual was Madey, trudging up the Lane from his night shift at the barrier. His hooked pipe was in the corner of his mouth, a lantern bounced at his side. He waved and came around to exchange a few words. But what could Madey possibly know about pigeons? What did anyone on the Lane know about them?

Kozik clambered down, resigned. In the fenced-in corner lot he had his vegetable garden. He pushed aside a loose board and squeezed through. Again he was alone. He looked around; everything was coming along nicely. He picked up the watering can and sprinkled the new radishes he'd set out the day before. Outside the fence he could hear the chain rattling at the well, and then Ogorek muttering to himself. His landlord was a man to avoid the first thing in the morning. He always got out of bed with the wrong foot and had it in for whoever was around. One morning it would be the battered pail. (If people thought he was going to buy a new one, they were crazy. The trouble with people was they didn't take care of things.) The next day he would complain about getting chicken droppings on his shoes—Kozik's

chickens, of course. But Kozik didn't let him get away with that —didn't Mr. Ogorek have some chickens too, and had he taught them to use the latrine? And what about those two pigs last year? The stink had almost knocked you flat, but had anyone made a fuss?

Over the top of the fence, Kozik could see Genia, Ogorek's daughter, her green dressing gown wrapped around her, on the way to the backhouse. Clever one, she always got there first. Next her brother, Karol, appeared to queue up (as if he didn't know a simpler way). Behind him was his mother, Ogorek's wife, in her usual disarray, pretending not to be in a hurry and poking around in her vegetable garden. She must be feeling better. On her bad days, she never stuck her head outside the door.

And there was his own Anna, neatly dressed with a kerchief over her head. He could tell she was looking for him. "I'm over here, Anna." She beckoned to him—"Jan—Jan—" holding up their key. As he came through the fence to take it, she grumbled that she was late and rushed off. Anna was maid and cook at the Orlowski's up the lane, and was on her way to make breakfast for her masters. She thought highly of her job and was satisfied with her pay. Free meals for herself went with the job and almost every day there were some leftovers to bring home. But Kozik didn't really like her working. Why should everyone make use of his wife, and leave him to look after himself? A man's wife belonged in a man's home.

By then the yard was quieting down again. There was only one more person unaccounted for, the Quail. And she always made it a point to come late.

Across the lane at Professor Turyn's patchwork cottage a woman could usually be seen quite early puttering around the garden. But with the burst of activity at the Green House, she retreated indoors, apparently ashamed of her shabby clothes, her decaying teeth, and gray hair. And in truth, anyone looking at Turyn's wife would imagine she was older than he—but it wasn't so.

The upper end of the lane was almost deserted in the early morning hours. For one thing Minister Rybak's villa was closed up except for two rooms on the second floor. The Malinkas were allowed to live there in exchange for looking after the place, though exactly what their responsibilities were was not very clear. Sigmunt, a spidery little man with soft brown eyes and a soft,

silky mustache, took the 7:30 every morning and always emerged from the house precisely ten minutes earlier. As for Mrs. Malinka —Matylda—Kozik was thankful he didn't have her to warm his bed. A big slovenly creature with a hairy mole on her right cheek, she was at least a dozen years older than her husband. She was friendly with no one on the lane, but then, no one was friendly with her.

By contrast the Orlowski villa was very much alive. How else could it be with a family of five? But it was the younger generation who created most of the activity, naturally. There were no board meetings for Chairman Orlowski to attend these days, no place for him to clip his coupons, in fact, nothing for him to do but dream about the past and plan for the future. The first up and about was usually Wladek, the youngest boy, a lad of about fifteen. Anna reported lots of friction between him and his father. Of course this was true of Roman, and his father, too, but he wasn't around very much. Almost every day you could see him on his way to the city, swaggering along in his high military boots and leather jacket. And that bulge in his pocket; Kozik knew the shape of a pistol when he saw it. Besides, it was inevitable he would be armed if it was true, as they said it was, that he belonged to the underground.

Miss Irena, Orlowski's daughter, was eighteen, two years younger than Roman. She was a tall, haughty girl with hair the color of summer straw and disdainful blue eyes. Anna said Irena's only trouble was that she was bored—with herself, with Duck Lane, with her family. And who could blame her? What could she do with herself in this forgotten corner where nothing ever happened. On sunny days she spent her time lying for hours in the garden in nothing but brief shorts and a narrow band around her chest. No wonder Kozik caught Skowronek's boys from Long Street peeking through the fence. Who wouldn't? He gave them a hiding just the same, and that was the end of it. But Anna—she was a wise one!—shook her finger at him. "Never mind the Skowroneks, you look out for yourself!"

Kozik grinned. Anna had nothing to fear; he wasn't looking for trouble like that. But just the same, if he had a chance to plug the uppety Miss Irena, she'd never be bored again!

2

Wiping his mouth with his handkerchief and stroking his coarse mustache, Professor Turyn emerged from his cottage. He glanced

at the sky. It would be a fine day—no coat necessary. He scratched the shiny dome of his head, planning—first, Ogorek, then Malinka. He started across the Lane. Lane? It was nothing more than a sandy track without even a sidewalk. Well, it wasn't his money. Approaching the Green House, he gingerly avoided a wet circle of fresh slops. He looked around with disgust—eggshells, bits of paper. It was always the same, always filthy. If the landlord has no eye for cleanliness, why should his tenants?

The old railway worker, Madey, came around from the back with two pails of water. Turyn nodded to him. "How do you do, Mr. Engineer? Meeting with full pails is a good omen."

"The best of luck to you, Professor."

"Anything new?"

"Not that I would know. Always bad, and can't see it gettin' better."

"Not so gloomy, Madey. Just keep hanging on till spring. The Germans can't last any longer. That's what I tell everyone." He let him pass ahead through the door.

The hall was narrow, as black as Hades after the bright sun outside. He felt his way to the door at the further end, knocked, and entered without waiting. Ogorek was standing by the living room table. Cap on head, he glanced casually in the direction of Turyn, and continued sipping coffee noisily from a mug. A tall angular man with an impenetrable sour face, Ogorek always awed Turyn a little in spite of himself. He was a boor, no question about that, but what a nose for bringing in the cash!

"Good morning, Mr. Chairman. Good morning."

Chairman—Ogorek's lips thinned with irritation. Always giving him names, and you never know what's behind it. Better not make fun of him, the lousy upstart. He set down his mug, his pale blue gaze steadily on Turyn. "What can I do for you, Professor?"

"Not for me, Chairman . . . But there is a little something—you know, everything takes money. Isn't that so?"

"For what? . . ."

"Come now, Chairman. If you're set on making a scientist of Karol, we'd better get busy right away. The fall term's started." Ogorek kept staring at him, without expression. "And what does that mean?"

Turyn was becoming impatient. "Oh nothing at all—just a little money. Or good-by."

"Hm . . . How much?"

"Fifteen hundred on the line. You know as well as anyone it's

all under the counter these days." He couldn't resist that dig. "If it's a doctor son you want, there's no way without laying down the cash."

"Mm . . . But what guarantee have I that such teaching will be recognized after the war?" He threw it right back at him. "What kind of a university'll credit courses given secretly in some rooms? They'll say—to hell, it don't count for nothing. Start him all over again, by Jesus."

Turyn shrugged and turned toward the door. "If you're not interested, it's quite all right by me, Mr. Chairman. Karol's not my problem, that's certain."

"I wasn't saying no. Only . . ." He gave up. What was the use? He pulled out his bulging wallet and counted out the bills.

Turyn checked the amount before he bowed ironically. "Good day to you, Mr. Chairman."

Outside he again circled the patch of slops and paused to look toward the upper end of the lane. Minister Rybak's tenant, Malinka, was approaching with his arms swinging as if on parade. A slight, almost adolescent figure, his mustache was so fair it was barely visible against his pale face.

Turyn waited till he was a few yards from him, still unaware of his presence, then boomed, "Good morning, Director, good morning."

Malinka jumped and looked up from under his cap, nervously adjusting his thick-lensed glasses.

"There's something I want to ask you, Director," Turyn continued. "I'll just get my hat and stick, and we'll go to the train together."

3

They managed to get seats.

"There's a little favor you could do for me," Turyn began. "In your co-op store you get ration cigarettes for your customers, right?" Malinka nodded. "I have to buy mine from that black marketeer, Ogorek, at fancy prices. Now instead, couldn't you slip me ten a day at the official price?"

Malinka hesitated, but the moment he glanced at Turyn he hastened to agree. "Yes . . . I'll try. Yes, that could be arranged." But he was obviously reluctant. He squirmed; why did he never have the courage to say no to people?

"Any difficulty? I don't want to cause any trouble."

"Why, no. But . . ."

"Fine, fine. Thanks a lot. The money right on the line each time. Make it Egyptian's if you can, though Sport will do in a pinch. Can't be too fussy these days, can we now?"

"All right . . . I'll have ten for you each day."

"That's the spirit, Director. Better to me, than have them go to some nobody. Right?"

A couple of itinerant musicians entered from the next car, and stopped almost in front of them. Turyn grumbled, "God damn racket! Impossible to talk." When the cup was passed to them, he said, "Director, any change?" Malinka fumbled in his pockets and dropped in a zloty note.

The accordion players worked their way to the other end, played once more and went on. Turyn's mood improved. He turned to Malinka: "Just had an idea, Director. What would you say to a little fun?"

"Fun?" Malinka repeated uncertainly. "Well, yes . . . but I don't understand."

"Life gets so boring it's enough to drive a man nuts—isn't that so? We've got a right to relax once in a while too. Wouldn't a little sylvan frolic be just the thing?"

"I'm sorry, Professor, I still don't follow you."

"All right, let me put it this way. Our old ones at home are very good women—that is, good for everything except what's most important."

"And what's that?"

"Really Director, you're . . . Tell me—what counts for most in every woman?"

Malinka looked at him blankly.

"Well then—her tail, Director. Tail. When will I manage to educate you? You make me lose confidence in myself."

Malinka glanced around, his face burning. He whispered, "Please Professor, someone might hear."

"Let them! What's so secret about a tail? Even Germans have them."

Malinka ran his finger under his collar. "All right, Professor, all right. But what about your idea?"

"Get some for ourselves, that's it. Laid on to order. Do you understand at last? Good weather still. Later it will be impossible. How about Sunday afternoon?"

"Well—maybe."

"Fine . . . We'll each be responsible for a part. You'll see to the needs of our stomachs and spirit—you can get sausage and a pint of vodka from your store at official prices. I'll deal with our more basic needs. We'll have some first-class fun, my friend." Turyn smoothed his mustache with satisfaction.

"But . . . and where?"

"What a question! Obviously not in your place or mine. Beautiful weather—grass. What could go better together? And a little forest for privacy—what more do you want?"

"Of course, yes . . ."

"Well then, Director, agreed?"

". . . Yes . . . Only could I speak with you sometime? I've got some difficult problems."

Turyn looked at him, amused by his serious tone: "As always at your service, my friend. Tell me what's on your mind."

"No, not here. It's very involved."

"Any time. I'll be coming back on the seven o'clock. Want to meet at Jutrosin when we get off or at Leokadia's? You'll treat me to a round of beer and brandy, and pour out your heart, no holds barred . . . But, mind, don't forget about Sunday."

The train pulled into the East Station. Turyn reached out his hand to say good-by, and boomed, "So it's a date, Director. Remember now."

4

Sigmunt Malinka hurried along the platform to the underpass. He was upset and nervous. Now what had he blundered into? From the way Turyn talked there was no telling what he had in mind. And to agree to spend money on a thing like that, when he had none anyway! As if he hadn't enough worries. What if Matylda got wind of it? And the cigarettes—why in heaven's name had he promised to provide them. Just because he didn't know how to say no.

Beyond the ticket barrier, there was an uneasy stir in the crowd leaving the station. People whispered, craned their necks, jostled each other nervously. Malinka at first didn't notice. He was short-sighted, and too absorbed in his own troubles to pay attention anyway.

Then someone nudged him. He turned to see young Orlowski, trim and assertive as usual in his leather jacket, britches, and riding boots. Malinka knew Roman only by sight and usually

avoided him because his air of arrogant confidence made him feel inferior.

"Something wrong up ahead," Roman said. "Probably Germans."

"Germans? . . ." Malinka's heart began to pound.

Roman frowned. "Can't go back—too conspicuous. Come on."

But as they approached the exit their suspicions were confirmed. Black S.S.-uniformed men were herding a group of people toward a row of covered trucks. The approaches were blocked. Malinka looked around desperately.

Roman swore under his breath. "I've got incriminating stuff on me. And my pistol. I haven't a chance if I get caught."

Malinka was terrified. Instinctively, he began to pull away; but then, ashamed, he paused, hoping that Roman hadn't noticed. Suddenly he had an inspiration. "Come . . . Hurry." He turned back to the station and opened a side door.

"Hey there—where you goin'? No public way through here." The watchman stood up to block their path. "Only offices here."

"But that's what I want," Malinka said grimly. "I'm from the Ogniwo Co-op. There's a freight car come in for us. Here's my identification." He waved a card in front of the man's face. "This young man was sent to help me."

The watchman eyed them distrustfully. "All right, go on. More than I can sort out. When there's a German raid, everyone suddenly gotta freight car here."

Malinka led the way along the corridor. Behind them others were already besieging the guard. A door at the end of the corridor led to the unloading docks. The two men ducked through between two freight cars, crossed the tracks and quickly found themselves on a deserted street on the other side of the station.

"Got out of that, thanks to you," Roman said.

"I know my way around here," Malinka acknowledged. For once he felt satisfied with himself. He added authoritatively, "The East Station's a good place to watch one's step." And to himself he added, ought to know better than to walk around with a pistol in his pocket.

They parted. Malinka hurried to the Co-op; too often he was late with one feeble excuse or another. And, as he feared, Nowak was already serving customers. Passing him, Malinka whispered, "A German roundup at the station. Just missed it."

Nowak said nothing. Malinka hung his cap on the rack and

sat down behind the cash drawer. There was already someone with a chit from Nowak. He took the money and gave back the change.

"Next please?" he said, settling down. His mind began to wander.

Why had he let himself in for all these complications with Turyn? He didn't really like the man, and yet Turyn's self-assurance, his very size, his aggressive humor, and above all his easygoing adjustment to wartime life impressed him. As a result now he would have to deprive himself of most of the cigarettes available to him. What else could he do but dig into his own ration? And the money for the picnic supplies, where was that to come from? Worries without end: money, Matylda, other people. Nothing but troubles.

When the noon break came he and Nowak ate in silence, each preoccupied with his own affairs. But when they finished and it was almost time to reopen, Nowak handed him a package. "Study this carefully, Malinka. We're setting up a noncommissioned officer's course. When you've mastered this material, I'll propose you as an instructor."

Malinka nodded nervously. He had known about Nowak's activity in the underground and had often hinted he would like to join. But now that the opportunity was offered to him, he felt himself cringe. Did he have the guts? That's what it came down to. Still, he couldn't say no now, and at least he'd be somebody. For once others would have to listen to him instead of being on his neck all the time.

5

As usual, Ogorek made several false starts before leaving for the kiosk. Once out in the hall, he turned back again. By Jesus, when Pelagia got a bee in her bonnet, nothing could stop her. She'd made up her mind to do the laundry and, without checking with him first, she'd engaged Madey's wife, put the clothes in to soak, and no matter what—tomorrow there'd have to be coal. She was enough to drive a man crazy.

Through the door he called irritably: "If Kozik brings coal, you'll have it. If he don't, that's that. Do you hear? I can't pull it out of my hat."

He slammed the door and slowly made his way toward the kiosk. Genia would be growing impatient. But let her. It wouldn't hurt her to wait a little.

There was no way around it: he'd have to give notice to the Quail. Another day and there'd be real trouble with Pelagia. But how the hell had she caught on? She hardly talked to a soul outside the house, and even when Madey's Martha was around cleaning and helping with the laundry, Pelagia never had time for gossip. Chatter and work don't mix, she would say. And yet someone must have told her. Only a week ago she'd cornered him and said: "Haven't you got no conscience, Josef? Keeping a whore upstairs. You got a daughter—it's time to be looking for a husband for her. What if it gets around she's living under the same roof with that kind of a woman? Haven't you got no eyes or sense?"

He had answered right back that it didn't sound likely to him but, if there was any truth to it, why naturally he'd get rid of her, give her notice. But you couldn't just throw someone out from one day to the next. He thought he had quieted her and figured she'd forget about it. But not Pelagia! The day before yesterday she brought it up again. "Well, did you give her notice?" She sputtered and shook her finger in his face. "If you don't right away, I'll tell her myself." And again today, the first thing in the morning, all over again. He'd lied—yes, yes. What else could he say? But now there was no way out of it—the Quail would have to go.

Above him, on the embankment, the electric rattled by, slowing down for the station. Absently, he watched the passing carriages. Pelagia had a point, it was time to think about Genia marrying. But where could they find someone suitable? A son-in-law should be another step upward, not down. He hadn't worked like a dog all his life just to give some good-for-nothing the chance to run through his money on drink and cards. Genia's dowry was an investment; in return he expected a son-in-law who would be a credit to him.

And Genia was ready for a husband, too. You could tell that by the way that Malinka was always sniffing around the kiosk. When Ogorek was there himself, he knew enough to keep away, but if Genia was behind the counter, he was always thirsty. More than once Ogorek had been tempted to tell him to beat it, to threaten to tell his wife. But it wasn't worth the bother. Better Malinka than some wise guy with a smooth line who might really turn the girl's head.

Genia was waiting impatiently at the kiosk door. Quickly she began to report the business she had transacted. He was still too

preoccupied to pay attention. "Father, you're not listening . . ." and she began all over again. She'd sold the last bit of ham. The butter was almost gone. Someone ordered twenty quarts of vodka. For a wedding. She told him to come back later. Ogorek nodded and gave her a number of errands to do in Warsaw. A train was approaching. She ran off toward the platform.

He settled down behind the counter, again alone with his thoughts. The fact was that everything seemed to be falling apart at home. Genia and Karol still called him father, still accepted his authority, but he knew very well by the way they looked at him that they had no real respect for him.

Genia wasn't too bad. She didn't do well in school and, whenever he bawled her out, she got saucy and fresh; but when it came to trade, she was shrewd and practical. It was in her blood, just as it was in his. The real trouble was Karol. Silent and sullen, keeping to himself all day reading books, refusing to help out at the kiosk. Sometimes he mumbled a civil word, but what stood out a mile was that he didn't consider his parents as a son should.

The trouble with both Genia and Karol was that they were spoiled. He worked and slaved so they could have an education, and now they looked down on him because he never had time to learn anything more than to read and write. They had no loyalty or gratitude, just took it all for granted and were ashamed of their parents because they had to work to give them a good living. If they'd had to go barefoot and live off black bread as he had done, they'd be more appreciative.

Genia and Karol, himself and Pelagia—they gave the appearance of a family, and yet they were not. He and Pelagia were two people, Genia and Karol again two; two sets of people without a common thought.

A suburban train from Otwock slowed down to a stop. Instinctively his eyes settled on the end of the platform. Krupa? Would he ever get that swine off his back?

The train went on. Nobody disembarked. He sighed with relief.

"Good morning, Mr. Ogorek."

Startled, he jumped up but then greeted Mrs. Orlowska with exaggerated courtesy.

"I'm all out of coffee, Mr. Ogorek. I'm going to town now but on my return I'd like to take along a pound—but raw please . . . You haven't seen Professor Turyn by chance? I wanted to speak to him. It's high time to organize Wladek's school arrangements.

The term should be starting. A nuisance, all this secrecy. It's the sort of thing I don't know how to go about myself." She was speaking hastily, even a little chaotically, her eyes darting around the interior of the kiosk. She was smartly dressed, always carried an aura of expensive perfume, but he didn't like her. He had no use for anything but quiet, steady, hard-working women. Though of course moneyed persons deserved respect.

Mrs. Orlowska continued to chatter until, hearing the signal of another train, she hurried on to the platform.

A flat cart drawn by a single horse stopped in front of the kiosk. It was piled high with bottle cases. The stack of empties beside the door was exchanged for full ones. He watched the operation in silence. And what about Karol's studies? Turyn took fifteen hundred zlotys. It was probably all money down the drain. Where would a fellow like that be without the Germans turning everything upside down? There was no place anywhere any more for hard-working, honest people.

6

Malinka hurried over to Turyn. "Good evening, Professor. You haven't forgotten our beer together, have you?"

Turyn, busy observing someone, didn't seem to hear. Malinka followed his gaze. Miss Orlowska and young Ogorek.

"Look at that, Director." He stroked his mustache. "If old Orlowski knew of this, she'd get a good hiding on her bottom. Associating with that black marketeer's son in front of everyone!"

His almost vehement tone surprised Malinka. He shrugged. "What's that to us? You're coming with me to Leokadia's, aren't you?"

"Leokadia's? . . . Oh yes, yes . . . Did you bring the cigarettes?"

Malinka blushed as he pulled a tiny package from his pocket. "Excuse the newspaper. They're from a big carton."

"Quite all right. Quite all right . . . And how much do I owe you?"

Mrs. Leokadia's was almost empty. Madame was drowsily officiating behind the bar, two workers were drinking beer. They sat down at a table. Without waiting for his host, Turyn boomed: "Two lagers, Mr. Jan—large ones—and two vodkas."

Malinka gulped. Vodka—he hadn't counted on that.

Turyn raised the glass tankard. His moustache sank deep into the white foam.

"Professor . . . I told you I'd appreciate your help with something . . ."

"At your service as always. I'm all ears."

"It's about speaking to Matylda. You see, it can't go on this way . . ."

"What way?"

"Everything. To put it shortly—I want to get divorced. That's what I want you to speak to her about."

"Are you crazy?"

"Please listen and you'll agree."

"No no—that's sheer nonsense, my friend. No need to go into details. Even with the best of arguments, this is no time for such things. Think a moment, Director."

"You don't understand me."

"Of course I do. Only too well. Do I have to remind you there's a war on? You know there's a time for everything."

"But what has the war got to do with it? My own life is still the most important thing to me, war or no war. Tell me, if you've got a hole in your roof or a clogged drain, do you just leave it now? No, you make sure Kozik fixes it because it's just as important to you now as always, in spite of the Germans, the war or anything else. No, please let me finish—I'm ready for sacrifices when there's no other way and it serves a useful purpose, but I don't see why that means ignoring my personal needs meanwhile."

"And I'm telling you that just this sort of compromise is what the present demands. In fact not only now—the art of living, my friend, is compromise day in day out."

"But why?"

"Because that's the way life is. I'm not the helpless sort; I know my way around. I've had to learn all the more to cut my losses when it had to be. What counts is keeping things on an even keel. Look at me, Director. I've got just one aim—survive the war. My advice to you is to do the same. Nothing more."

"Easy for you to say, but in my place you wouldn't hold out for long either."

"Mr. Tragedy, try to be serious. It's time to grow up. I'm well aware of your problems. I know your wife is no great shakes, but you should have thought about that originally."

"I couldn't think about it originally. She trapped me."

"All women trap their men."

"But don't you see—she was living with us when my mother died—really she's almost old enough to be my mother, you know—"

Turyn rubbed his hand over his mouth. "And when your mother died, she persuaded the little boy that she was indispensable, hey?"

Malinka's eyes widened. "But how did you know that?"

The Professor drained his glass. "Just a wild guess, my innocent young friend." He yawned. "But now it's done—done. There's nothing to do but bear her. You can't just throw her out in the street. Now be sensible and fetch some more beer. The waiter's vanished. Then we'll head home and an end with all this twaddle."

Meekly Malinka brought the beer. They drank it down. He just squeaked through on his money. For a while they walked in silence.

Suddenly Malinka remembered something else. "Oh I wanted to ask you another favor." He drew a package wrapped in newspaper from his jacket pocket. "Could you keep this for a while at your place?"

"But what is it?"

"Books."

"Books?"

"My boss gave them to me today at the Co-op to study. But you know Matylda. She's likely to make a scene and then burn them or throw them away. Anything's possible with her."

Turyn took the package and opened it: *One Hundred Recipes for Potatoes.* The second, *Juices, Jams, and Jellies.* "What the hell? Are you playing a joke on me?"

"Intentional. Look inside."

The book fell open on a chapter heading, *Principles of Street Fighting.* Quickly Turyn snapped it shut and pushed the package back into Malinka's hands. "You're a dangerous individual, Director. Carrying stuff like that around and then trying to park it on innocent friends. You really must be crazy. We all value our life, in case you didn't know. In the future don't let me see you with anything like that. If there have to be fools who dream of beating Hitler singlehandedly, that's too bad. But why get mixed up in it?"

"It's a patriotic duty to take . . ."

"Mr. Hero! So you think without you the war will never end?

The only thing America and England are waiting for is your help? Where's your head, Director?"

"But . . ."

"No buts. Take your example from people cleverer than you. Ever been told not to put your finger in the crack of the door?"

They'd reached Turyn's gate. Turyn held out his hand. "Enough of this. We'll go to sleep now. Sunday will cure you, Director. That's just what you need. Three o'clock here."

Malinka said good-by. Everything had gone wrong. All he had accomplished was to make a fool of himself. And still these books —what could he do with them? Entering the villa he stood in the half dark of the hallway. He heard Matylda above him; quickly he bent down and shoved the package under the big sculptured cupboard in the corner.

7

Genia was restless. Every evening it was the same. To get her father to come home at once after closing the kiosk was impossible. Left to himself, he'd probably stay all night doing his figures.

The cramped space and the hot glare of the lamp became oppressive to her. She slipped outside. The night was impenetrable —moonless, still, sultry, not the smallest breath in the pines, not even a trace of the station, nothing except the two colored lights of the semaphore, floating disembodied. It was eerie; instinctively she held her breath.

Somewhere across the tracks she heard the sound of a door. A gash of light skimmed across the rails.

"Good night."

"Good night, Mr. Jan. Good night."

Again there was complete darkness, the sound of steps on concrete. They stopped. Another door—opened . . . closed. Again breathless silence. But not for long. The sudden furious bark of a dog rose out of the night. Somewhere else, far away, a second dog replied. Then close by a third joined the chorus. One by one they dropped out until there was only a high plaintive bark, far, far away, and then nothing at all. Again impenetrable silence, impenetrable night. Genia shivered. She drew back and felt along the crack of light for the door handle. She slipped inside, shielding her eyes against the sudden glare.

"Do come, Father. Let's go."

Ogorek nodded without looking up. "And what's this chit for eighty-six zlotys?"

"From Dr. Motyl's. They bought some ham, butter, sugar, and something else—I've forgotten."

He slipped the worn notebook in his pocket. Genia pulled a large laundry basket in through the door and quickly piled in the goods too valuable to risk leaving in the kiosk overnight. He put the bar across the door and fastened it with a big padlock. Carrying the basket between them, they plodded silently toward the lane.

Pelagia looked up indifferently when they entered.

"Confound it, couldn't you hear us coming? Why doesn't someone open up and give us some light?"

"All you need do is put a bulb back in the hall socket. What's it there for?" She was shelling, squeezing the pods between her fingers and dropping the white beans into a basin in her broad lap. The glaring light from the table lamp, its shade removed, emphasized the yellow blotches on her face, the result of a liver ailment of long duration.

Ignoring her comment, he asked, "No supper yet? All right, I'll go up to Kozik now about that damned coal."

Leaving the door ajar, he went into the hall again. He put the night bar across the door and then felt his way up the stairs. He struck a match—a short narrow landing with three doors. He went to the further one, knocked, and entered without waiting. By the window covered with black-out paper sat Kozik, his long underpants rolled back over his knees, his feet in a basin of water.

"Oh Mr. landlord . . . excuse me. My corns were stinging something awful today. You'll see—change of weather."

Ogorek wasn't in a conversational mood. "I came to remind you about the coal. The laundry's already down to soak for tomorrow."

"Yes, yes . . . I'll see to it . . . Anything else?"

"Nothing, no. Good night then." He went out.

Again he struck a match. He stopped at the middle door and knocked. He heard the shuffle of slippered feet, then the key turned in the lock. The Quail's head appeared in the slightly open door.

"Oh Mr. Ogorek, please come in." She stepped aside, holding her dressing gown together. He looked at her curiously. In spite of a certain coarseness of features—broad cheek bones and a snub nose—she had a healthy, almost girlish vitality enhanced

by her rich blonde hair. How did she manage to look that way with the life she led?

"I've come about the room," he said gruffly.

Her eyes clouded with alarm. "But I have already paid my rent."

"It's not that. I need the room. A cousin of my wife is coming to stay with us, and I've got to have it for him. Not right away, not tomorrow. But you'll have to vacate the first of October."

"But Mr. Ogorek, what'll I do?" She looked at him pleadingly.

"You'll find another room somewhere. You're not a stranger in these parts."

She sank down on the bed. He hesitated uncomfortably. He knew very well it wasn't easy to find a room these days, and least of all for a girl like her. But it wasn't his idea.

"Good night. I must be going to supper."

"Mr. Ogorek . . ."

He pretended not to hear, quickly closing the door behind him and feeling his way back down the dark stairs.

2

THE FOREST CLEARING

AFTER HIS TALK with Turyn, Malinka reluctantly came to the conclusion that for the present he could do nothing more in regard to seeking a divorce. For one thing he was afraid of approaching Matylda himself. During the past year she had become increasingly irritable and suspicious—almost continually nagging and complaining. It wasn't that she loved him—Malinka was convinced of that—only that she was afraid of losing him. Now, Malinka realized there never had been any genuine love between them. Matylda had married him for security and, though he had once taken great delight in her vast rolling breasts and her broad, comfortable body, he knew now what she actually represented was security for him, too. The security a small boy receives from his mother, though in Malinka's case he had the added pleasure of sexual consummation.

But now, however belatedly, Malinka had grown up, and he longed for the firm and solid flesh of youth, not the worn and tired body of a mother. In fact, he could no longer bear to touch Matylda, let alone caress her. Night after night he would lie beside her, tense and rigid, pretending to sleep when she muttered and grumbled, restless with inarticulate desire. And if in her sleep she rolled over, he would slip out of bed rather than touch her. In the morning when she found him dozing in a chair, she pretended to believe his explanation—that his head was stopped up, his sinuses clogged. But Matylda knew or at least suspected the truth.

And because she could see that he was still a young and vital man—what privacy could you have in two unlocked rooms with a woman who had no respect for privacy?—she was suspicious of

every moment he was out of her sight. She seemed to think he could walk out of the Co-op any time a pretty face caught his fancy or that somehow he could meet and somehow sleep with all kinds of women from the time he left the house at 7:20 in the morning until he was due at the store at 8:00, or again between 6:45 in the evening when he was through with work and 7:30 when he arrived home.

But apparently it never occurred to her that he was attracted to Genia Ogorek. Of course, Malinka had been most circumspect —he hadn't even told Turyn that his interest in Genia was what had really prompted his desire to get a divorce—but still it amazed Malinka that Matylda, suspecting everyone, did not wonder about the fresh, young girl who so often served behind the counter at her father's kiosk.

At least this was one blessing, though the truth of the matter was that as yet Matylda could have no real reason to complain. Malinka had had the courage to do nothing but exchange a few words with Genia. He even doubted that she was aware he found her attractive—or were pretty girls always aware when men were interested in them?

Poor Malinka, he was really too innocent to know.

On Sunday morning—the day of Turyn's picnic—to humor Matylda, who was in an even more waspish mood than usual, he suggested that she accompany him to Mass. He knew she would refuse—curiously enough for a woman of her age and lower middle-class background, Matylda was completely indifferent to the obligations of her faith. Intellectually she was simply too flabby to concern herself with something as intangible as her soul.

"No thanks," she said bluntly, and then, observing him brisking his shoes, she added, "and I'm sure you'll be much happier alone. The dapper Sigmunt Malinka!"

At church, he couldn't settle down until he found Genia. All through the service he watched her longingly, praying because she prayed, kneeling because she knelt, crossing himself because she did. Once, briefly, he thought of Turyn's plans for that afternoon and he felt himself blush, exactly as if he had promised himself to Genia and was being unfaithful to that promise.

He resolved that no matter how attractive the companion Turyn brought for him might be, he would do nothing more than hold her hand as they strolled through the forest. His heart swelled with righteousness and he smiled with tender intimacy at

Genia's oblivious, averted profile, a little way down from him.

Returning home after the service, he gulped his lunch with distaste. Ever since the doctor had put Matylda on a salt-free diet, salt had disappeared not only from her cooking but from the house. Because of the war, their fare was monotonous enough, but without salt, it was almost unpalatable.

With the meal out of the way, he rose and said casually that he was going over to visit Turyn for a while.

"Turyn?" Her beady eyes glinted with sharp and spiteful curiosity in the folds of her slack face. "What's a man like Turyn have in common with the likes of you?"

He left without replying, hearing her call behind him, "At least he has some respect for his wife, not that I expect you to notice things like that."

Turyn, his pockets bulging with the supplies Malinka had given him the previous evening, was waiting for him. He took Malinka's arm companionably. "I told the old lady that we planned this siesta so you could teach me some bookkeeping." He winked. "Which in a manner of speaking might be the truth, heh?"

They walked along the embankment for about a quarter of a mile before taking a path into the forest. Malinka was full of questions but he restrained himself until he saw a woman in a bright colored print strolling ahead of them through the pines.

"Is she waiting for us?" he whispered.

"Sure thing. Flawless planning."

"But only one?"

"Really, Director—you'd invite a whole dozen at once, is that it? Sorry, a poor man like me can't allow himself such luxury. For me one's enough of a work-out, quite enough."

As they drew nearer, Malinka looked curiously at the woman. Young, blonde, not unattractive. There was something almost familiar about the face. He hung behind as Turyn went up to her. The Professor's instant informality jarred him. And anyway, wasn't he in on this too? The first thing Turyn should have done was to introduce him instead of leaving him out in the cold as if he were a child.

"Well, let's get going," Turyn beckoned him. "What are we waiting for?"

Malinka approached. "But maybe you'd introduce me first, Professor."

Turyn guffawed: "Why of course—our Director here is all

gallantry always. All right then—this is Don Juan Casanova. And this . . . this is the Princess of the Green Palace." Again he guffawed.

Malinka bowed.

Turyn was shaking with laughter. "Really you're priceless, Director . . . I could die . . . Well, ladies and gentlemen, let's not tarry here. We must move on in our worthy search for a suitable camping ground. Let us advance." He caught the girl's arm, and drew her along with him, leaving Malinka to trail behind.

From time to time she glanced back at him curiously. Turyn was in a jovial mood; his arm was around her waist, he kept laughing and whispering in her ear. Malinka began to sulk; Turyn was acting as if he were of no importance at all.

They went deeper into the forest, their path often obstructed by a low growth of bushes through which they had to force their way. Finally they came to a small clearing surrounded by spruces and birches. Turyn stopped. "An ideal spot for action," he called out. "Grass, bushes, and complete quiet. Ladies and gentlemen, be seated." He spread a newspaper on the grass. Then he unloaded his pockets, laying everything on the paper.

The girl smiled at Malinka. "You live in Jutrosin?" Her voice was harsh, almost guttural, but her clear, vividly blue eyes and her fresh glowing complexion appealed to him.

"Yes."

"And you don't know me?"

"No. How should I?"

She tilted her head, smiling. "But I know everything about you. About your living at Number 15, and . . ." She hesitated a moment. "I know you take the 7:30 every morning."

"But how do you know?" He was surprised. "I think I've seen you somewhere too. Perhaps on the train?"

"Maybe . . . ," she laughed mysteriously.

Really, she was a very attractive and wholesome girl. She couldn't possibly be "that kind." Malinka began to bristle. Obviously Turyn's quick familiarity was offensive to her. She was simply too inexperienced to fend him off.

"Ladies and gentlemen—take your places, take your places. Everything laid on—wine, woman, and song. Hey, how's that for a poet? The song we can dispense with—what's the point of hurting our ears? But sit down, please." Catching her around the waist, Turyn pushed the girl down and sat on the grass beside

her. "Only one glass, so ladies first. Don't rush now." He handed her the bottle. "Your health, princess."

She made a face. "I don't like vodka, especially not this bootleg stuff." She sniffed at it dubiously. "All right then, to your health Mr. . . . Director."

Confused, but also gratified, Malinka turned round; she had toasted him, not Turyn. The glass was filled again. It was his turn. He gulped down the vodka with difficulty.

"And now please help yourselves," Turyn continued, playing host. "Please, Director—eat, eat." He cut a big chunk of sausage for himself and took a slice of bread. Malinka took a pastry. She did the same.

"What—begin with pastry? What an idea! Anyway, here's a second round. No aqua vitae, no vitality—right? Your turn, princess."

Hesitantly she drank it, but Malinka was afraid to. If he had too much, Matylda would smell it afterwards and there could be frightful trouble. Without pressing him further, Turyn took two instead. He became ever more boisterous.

"Hey, you . . ." the girl beckoned. "Come over here beside me." She reached for another pastry. "We'll share it and drink together."

Malinka approached her shyly. She held up the glass.

"No, you drink first." He sat down beside her.

She sipped a little, then handed the glass to him. She had left a red smudge on the rim. She laughed, "Watch out or there'll be trouble at home." He was annoyed that she should tease him, but he swallowed the vodka left, and handed the empty glass to Turyn.

"And now the pastry—half and half. She held one end of it between her teeth and, pointing, mumbled, "You start at this end, a half each, but don't you touch my lips! So come now." She brought her face close to his.

Malinka looked uncertainly at Turyn. There was an indulgent grin on his face and, seeing Malinka's hesitation, he nodded encouragingly. Malinka bit into the pastry, at great pains not to touch her. Then, munching, he quickly sat back.

"Drink, drink and be merry," Turyn intoned, filling the glass again.

"But I don't want to get tight," she said, "and I gotta go to town still today. You and me, we'll go halves again." She beckoned

to him, again leaning forward with a pastry between her teeth. This time as he bit into it, she suddenly pushed her lips against his mouth. He pulled back, startled. She laughed, "You scared?"

Turyn chose this moment for a diversion of his own, making a pass at her blouse. She turned on him. "Keep your hands to yourself, do you hear? . . ." And then as he desisted, she said in a quieter tone, "And what's your friend's name?"

"Fra Angelico."

"Go on, I never know when to believe you . . . Mr. . . . Mr. Angelico, tell me, what are you called really?"

"Sigmunt," he answered with dignity, though he was seething. Turyn was making him look like a fool.

"Mr. Sigmunt Angelico, let's have another drink together."

He shook his head. "I don't feel so well today, I've had enough." He wanted Turyn to know he was annoyed. Childishly, he shifted to one side, with his back to them both. But they paid no attention to him; instead he heard a sudden squeal and scuffle. As he turned, the girl was pushing Turyn away. Her skirt was above her knees. Malinka was startled by her naked thighs, but still more by the fact that she was laughing, evidently not at all upset.

"Gentlemen—a secret: no underpants!" said Turyn. "The approaches are cleared for action. To the attack, to the attack!" Again she had to fight him off.

Malinka sat stiffly, poking the ground with a stick. Why didn't she get up and go away?

Turyn was indefatigable. "Look everybody—a spider running into his housie," he called out, his hand disappearing under her skirt.

This time she protested sharply, "Professor, you behave like a pig." She wriggled from his reach and, smoothing her skirt, stretched out on her back on the grass.

In a moment, she looked lazily at Malinka. "Hey there, Angelico, come to me . . ." And then reproachfully to Turyn, "You didn't give your friend enough to drink . . . You, come on over here to me."

Hesitantly, he got up and approached. She caught his hand and pulled him down beside her. He sat rigidly, aware of Turyn's mocking eyes. She tugged at his arm. He gave in and stretched out on his back, staring at the sky. She bent over him and touched his lips with the tip of her tongue. He lay motionless, his eyes closed, not knowing how to behave.

"Really, a sweet boy." She turned to Turyn. "Hey Professor, let me have a cigarette." When she had it lit, she put it gently between Malinka's lips, and began stroking his hair.

Turyn became impatient. "Listen, princess—ever seen a bear?"

"A bear?"

"Yes, roaring to go."

"No . . ."

"Want to see one that'll really scare you?" He stood up facing her.

"I know, I know . . ." she said, hastily screening her eyes. "You're a real swine of a professor. Go to the devil with your worn-out bear. Know him too well already . . ." She laughed, amused in spite of herself. "So lock him up now . . . And look, you scared Angelico away again," she added in a disappointed tone. Malinka had in fact escaped to his old spot, utterly confused by Turyn's antics. She shrugged. "Professor, give me another drink. By now I'm feeling an urge for it. It's just the first that's hard."

Turyn refilled the glass and handed it to her. Then he went over to where Malinka was sitting, and said in a low voice: "Director, it's clear it's for you the princess is pining. I'll wait my turn. So go ahead."

Shocked to the core, Malinka wouldn't even look at him.

"What's eating you?"

He shrugged irritably.

"Well, if you don't want to go in first, it's all right by me. You'll get an appetite by and by. Sometimes I like to warm up watching a little first too."

The girl was lying stretched out on her back, singing to herself in a high nasal tone. She broke off for a moment and called: "Come to me, Angelico. Come, sweet boy . . ."

"Me? . . ." Turyn responded. "I'm rushing to my angel."

"No, not you—you old billy goat . . . Go away . . . No, cut it out."

Again Malinka heard a scuffle. The woman tittered: "No, him . . . I want him . . ."

Malinka tried to feign indifference, lying down on his back, his hands under his head. But in spite of his efforts his whole attention was focused on them. He turned his head just enough to see. Then quickly he turned away, flushing. He glanced briefly again—she too? He felt keenly disappointed, cheated. She had seemed so sym-

pathetic, but wasn't it clear now what sort she was? Even though he wasn't watching, he could hear them; his groin throbbed painfully. And finally he turned and stared, hating them and himself.

At one point she opened her eyes and noticed him. "Shame," she called over to him, and then pummelled Turyn's back. "You—Angelico's watching."

Humiliated, he rolled on his stomach, pressing his face in his arm but no more able to ignore what he heard than before.

Finally it was over. Turyn approached. He closed his eyes and pretended to be drowsing.

"Director."

He didn't reply.

"Get up, man, and stop acting like a kid."

Malinka rose slowly, tired and depressed. He'd made a fool of himself all around. He should have had the courage to tell this boor to his face what he thought. He glanced at where the girl had been lying. The imprint of her body remained in the flattened grass, but she had disappeared. He picked a leaf from the bush beside him and rolled it back and forth between his fingers, feeling more awkward than ever.

In a few moments the girl reappeared. She sat down in her old place, took a mirror from her bag, and fixed her lips and hair. Then she held up her hand toward Turyn: "Please, a cigarette."

Turyn handed her one and then, holding the bottle to the sky, said: "Ladies and gentlemen, there's still some aqua vitae. For you, Director. Now's the moment for a good swig. Will fix you up fine—headache gone and a lot of push, you'll see." He turned to the girl: "And you, too." He filled the glass and first handed it to her. She made a face but drank it down.

Malinka refused.

"Princess, you urge him. Play a little to stiffen him up. Director, another secret:—tits like a dream." He emptied the bottle into the glass and once more held it out. "Damn it, Director, drink," and when he again shook his head, he came over and whispered: "If it's my being around that bothers you, I'll go away. I'll wait at the edge of the forest for you. All right?"

Malinka shook his head sullenly.

"As you want . . . Princess, how about sharing this glass with me?"

"If you want. But I think your friend's sore at me." She drank a few sips and passed the glass back to him. She munched down

the two remaining pastries, then rose and brushed off her skirt. "It's getting late—I have to get to town."

Turyn looked over to Malinka who had stooped to examine some mushrooms. "Director, did you hear? The princess would like to return to her castle."

"All right," he said without looking up. "I'm not stopping her."

She put on her hat and again glanced into her mirror. Several times she looked over to Malinka, an amused smile on her face. "Bye-bye then," she said, holding her hand out to Turyn. Then she approached Malinka. Hesitantly he shook her hand.

"Don't be sore with me. I know you're a sweet boy. Next time you'll feel different."

He stood stiffly, his eyes averted, not saying a word.

2

On Monday, at the Co-op, Malinka found it difficult to concentrate and make the proper change. His mind kept drifting to Genia. Ogorek had gone to town for the day. She would be alone in the kiosk all afternoon . . .

As they were clearing away their lunch things, with a temerity that surprised himself, he asked Nowak, "Could I leave a little early this evening? There are some kitchen repairs I should take care of at home."

How easily lying too came to him these days! Formerly he would never have been capable of such easy excuses. Nowak agreed.

At five he hurried to the station. Getting off the train, he glanced around on the unlikely chance of seeing Matylda somewhere. Genia smiled as he came up to the kiosk. He ordered a beer and again looked around. Just like a rabbit, he thought dismally, constantly on the lookout for danger. In the city, frightened of the Germans; out here, of Matylda. What a life!

"You came on an earlier train," Genia said.

He blushed. "Yes . . . there was so little business this afternoon, I decided my assistant could handle it by himself." Cheek, but if she knew how it really was in the store, she wouldn't have any respect for him.

Genia smiled but said nothing.

He sipped at his beer. "You work so hard, Miss Ogorek. It must be trying sitting all day in a small kiosk."

"Oh no. It's rather fun. Always someone coming. I see so many people."

He was disappointed. Did that mean she was friendly this way with everyone? He went on doggedly. "But in such lovely fall weather it's nice to be able to go places and take walks."

"I haven't anyone to walk with."

Again he blushed and quickly began to talk about the latest news from the city. He finished his beer and asked for a second bottle. Finally he screwed up his courage. "Miss Ogorek, what do you do on Sundays?"

She looked surprised. "Sundays? Nothing special. Church and then as usual."

"Perhaps we could meet after church sometime."

She smiled dubiously. "Oh, I don't know . . ."

"Why? We could go to the Arbor for an ice cream, and then . . . walk back together."

"Maybe . . . but what Sunday?"

"How about this coming one? I know you attend the nine o'clock Mass. I could wait out front for you afterwards. All right?"

"Yes . . . I guess so."

3

"Again trying to draw attention with your shoes?"

He shrugged: "You're really strange. What's wrong in wanting to look as neat as possible? Would you really like seeing me go round in scuffed-up shoes?"

"All right, all right . . . And I suppose there'll be some more of this after-dinner siesta with Professor Turyn?"

"Not siesta. He asked me to teach him bookkeeping. He thought it would come in handy. Everybody these days is looking for a chance to earn a little extra on the side . . ."

"Everyone except you. How can you teach others when you don't even know how to look after yourself?"

He ignored the dig. "Yes, Turyn did ask me to come after lunch like last week, but I thought you'd like me to be here. So I said I'd stop in briefly instead on my way back from church. An hour at the most."

"And you'll again go somewhere together?"

"No, no. All I'll do is quickly check last week's exercises. That's all."

"Don't think I don't know you're making things up. I can see it from your face. I have eyes and know very well what's got into you. You're after some woman."

"You're ridiculous."

He hurried out of the house before she could berate him further. He felt his jacket. His money was there under the lining where he had hidden it. Matylda had a way of inspecting his pockets.

As he passed Turyn's cottage, he hesitated, wondering whether to warn him that he was using him as his alibi. But in the end he decided not to, Turyn would only make some vulgar remark about his interest in Genia.

The church was crowded. The service had begun. Nonetheless he worked his way forward, ignoring the annoyed glances and grumbles. He strained to spot Genia at her usual place. Neither she nor her brother were there. He opened his prayer book, but his eyes kept wandering. He couldn't see Genia anywhere. She hadn't come. Nothing would happen. She had made a fool of him.

At last the Mass was over. Out in front of the church, he wiped his glasses with his handkerchief. Unhappily, he watched the passing people. The same old story: for Sigmunt Malinka nothing ever turned out right.

Suddenly he saw her. She was standing at the gate as if about to go, but glancing once more over the crowd. She was wearing a blue suit and white blouse, a small white hat that fitted snugly on the back of her head.

He hurried over. "Miss Genia . . ."

She turned, smiling with evident relief.

"I thought you hadn't come," he said. "Weren't you at church?"

"Yes I was."

"But where?"

"Here beside the entrance. I was very late."

"But I thought—I looked everywhere." It was silly however to go on about this. And here where everyone could notice them was no place to stand. "Shall we go, Miss Genia?" he said nervously.

"But where?"

"For a stroll. Or maybe it would be nicer to go direct to the Arbor. It's shady and quiet there."

"Yes, let's."

He walked on her left in the correct way, a little stiffly, at a loss suddenly for conversation. Their eyes met a moment, and he blushed. She smiled.

"So you were late today," he tried.

"Yes . . ." she hesitated. "I had to shake off Karol."

A thrill went through him—clearly she wanted to be alone with

him and even let him know it. "I am very happy you have come," he said bravely.

Again, she only smiled. They walked down May Avenue and, as their distance from the church increased, people thinned out to a scattered few here and there disappearing down side streets or crossing to the other side. Somehow he felt more exposed than ever. Had anyone noticed them? He walked uncertainly at her side. At last they reached the vine-covered fence. A few more steps and they'd be out of sight.

The gate was narrow and embellished with an arch of bent pipe. A semicircular board was fitted into it with an exposed electric bulb at the top and below it the painted words Arbor Cafe. In the shade of pine trees, there were a number of circular metal tables with chairs, all freshly painted in brilliant red. From a wooden building at the further end came the sound of women's voices and the clatter of dishes. The outdoor area was deserted.

"Where would you like to sit?" he said, looking around for a good spot. "How about there?" He pointed to a table at the farthest corner.

"Any place is fine . . . But there's not a soul here." Her voice sounded a little disappointed.

He offered her a chair and himself sat down so as to have the gate under constant surveillance—like a rabbit, he thought wearily, always on the watch. A waitress appeared and came over to the table. "Today we have vanilla, strawberry, and raspberry."

They ordered a mixture of all three for Genia, a half of vanilla for him. "And perhaps some pastries?" he asked.

She nodded.

He added to the order: "Please three pastries—two with apple filling and one Fedora." Instinctively he felt his pocket. Would there be enough for a Fedora? The waitress left. They were alone.

"I am very happy you're with me, Miss Genia."

She smiled.

The waitress brought their order. He turned the plate with the pastries so that the Fedora was nearest her.

"That one's especially for you."

"Oh? Why?"

"Because Fedoras are always reserved for beautiful women."

Again, she smiled. "You do have a line, don't you?"

"No, not at all! I only say what I think."

Genia shook her head dubiously. Then, laying down her spoon, she glanced around. "It's very pleasant here."

"Especially the shade, when it's so warm . . . But the pleasantest is—your being here with me."

"Now, you are trying to flatter me."

"No, it's true. I could stay here all day with you. Then I'd be . . ." He stopped abruptly, his eyes fixed on the entrance. In the gate stood Matylda.

She saw them almost at the same moment he noticed her. Incredulously she brushed her hand over her forehead, pushing back her old straw hat. Malinka moistened his lips, glanced fleetingly at Genia. But her back was to the gate and she had noticed nothing.

Frantically he tried to collect himself. He rose, intending to rush over to Matylda, seize her arm, and lead her out onto the street. Then, somehow, he would explain. But already she was descending on them. She hung over the table, her pale face contorted, her eyes burning, her hat hanging lopsided from her disheveled hair.

Startled, Genia dropped her spoon and pushed back her chair. "Who—what do you want?" she stammered.

Matylda glared at her husband. "So . . . so . . . now at last . . . finally I know how it is. You wretched cheat . . . liar . . ." She burst into tears.

"Matylda, go home at once," he said firmly. "We'll discuss this later."

Genia got up. "Sigmunt—Mr. Malinka, will you take me home? Please."

"Sigmunt, Mr. Malinka . . ." Matylda mimicked nastily, dabbing at her tears. "Shameless little hussy, seducing married men! I could spit in your face."

"Matylda, go home—do you hear? If you don't . . ."

"If I don't—what? Out with it? Are you threatening your own wife? To protect a greedy, cheap little . . ." she turned on Genia and tried to grab her hair ". . . whore!"

Genia ducked around to the other side of the table. "What are you talking about? Mr. Malinka, what does this woman want?"

"This woman! I'm his wife, do you hear? A respectable woman, not a whore. I'll teach you to chase after married men, you gutter slut. And where did you get that?" She pointed to Genia's blue jacket. "Did he give it to you? The blouse and skirt, too? I'll teach

you a lesson you'll never forget." She lunged around the table, and before Genia could duck again she was upon her. Grabbing her jacket, she began to yank it off, muttering and cursing.

Genia began to yell. "My God, stop her, stop her."

Her cries finally spurred Malinka into action. Until then, he had been almost paralyzed with embarrassment. He grabbed Matylda around the waist, trying to pull her away. "Matylda, stop it. You're making a fool out of yourself. Matylda, let go, let go."

But by now she was beyond reason. She swung around and struck his face, knocking off his glasses. He staggered back, terrified that the glasses would be stepped on in the scuffle. Freed, Matylda lunged back on Genia, catching her by her hair and pummeling her with her fist wherever she could strike. They fell against the table, it teetered and went over, the dishes crashing to the ground. Matylda lost her balance and dragged Genia down with her. They fought on, rolling on the ground, yanking each other's hair and hitting each other in the face.

On his hands and knees, Malinka groped for his glasses. By the time he found them, he became aware of voices over by the gate. People had been attracted by the commotion and stood laughing and making rude remarks.

"Gave him a couple too, she did."

"Only one cure—water, like with dogs. No other way to separate 'em."

Malinka cringed. Whatever he did would only make matters worse. And then the woman who owned the cafe came charging out of the door with the waitress close behind her. Malinka instinctively drew back, slipping in among the spectators.

In the gate appeared the tall figure of the local policeman. "What's going on here? Get moving! Break it up now!" He stood over Matylda and Genia, still struggling furiously. "Now, ain't this nice? A couple of real ladies."

Malinka slunk back still further with visions of depositions, investigations. . . . Then he found he was through the gate. Blindly he began to run in the direction of Long Street and the Lane.

4

Malinka staggered into his room and dropped on the sofa, oblivious to everything except that he was compromised beyond recall. Before the day was over everyone would know. He would be pointed at, laughed at whenever he showed his face. And Ogorek

—what would happen when he heard? Malinka shuddered. It was perfectly plain that he couldn't stay another day on the Lane.

But even worse, he would never dare to speak to Genia again, or even look her in the eye.

He began to pace the room. It was after two. Why wasn't Matylda back? He became a little uneasy.

But then abruptly his mood shifted. Why should he care where Matylda was or what had happened to her? What was she to him? Nothing. Worse than nothing. In fact how could he ever stand the sight of her again?

He thought again of the necessity of leaving the Lane. He had to, yet where could he go? There was not a friend anywhere—not one—with whom he could find shelter. Nor did he have a single zloty toward a room even if he knew where there was one available. So what did that mean? That he was trapped. He had to remain with Matylda. But he couldn't, he just couldn't.

The door opened slowly and Matylda limped into the room. Seeing him, she hesitated, avoiding his eyes. And as he stared at her, all of his hatred and bitterness welled up in his throat.

"What have you done to me, you stupid cow," he screamed.

She winced. "But Sigmunt, listen, I didn't mean . . ."

"So you just dropped in for a cup of tea, I suppose." Her abject air fanned his temper. "So it was all an accident, you vicious, meddling old woman—"

"Sigmunt," she whimpered, "don't talk like that—please."

"Listen to me, and listen carefully. I love Genia Ogorek. So now you know. I love her as much as I hate and despise you. You may have ruined any chance I had with her, but I'm leaving you and leaving here—now."

He yanked a blanket off the bed and began piling his possessions on it. When he had grabbed everything he could see, he tied the ends of the blanket together and swung the bundle over his shoulder. He headed for the door, pausing to snarl: "And if you try to follow me, if you get in my way again, I think I'll kill you."

But out in front of the house he had to stop to steady himself. He was trembling and only partially aware of what he was doing. He dropped the bundle and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. His mouth was so dry he could move his tongue only with difficulty.

And now what? Where could he go, a man without friends or money? Then he thought of Turyn. He was the only possibility.

He couldn't refuse him just for a night or two until he could make other plans.

5

"Heavens alive, Director, what are you up to now? Returning from a robbery?" Turyn laughed. But then, noticing Malinka's extreme nervousness as he picked up his bundle to carry it indoors, Turyn became alarmed. "Damn it all, what are you bringing all this suddenly to me for? What the hell does all this mean?"

"Professor, I'll explain right away," Malinka said miserably. "But first let me in and close the door."

"Well then, drop it here." He shut the door behind him. "Come along anyway to the dining room."

The lunch dishes were still on the table; Mrs. Turyn's chair was pushed out with a half-full glass of tea at her place. Turyn indicated the sofa and they both sat down.

"So tell me, Director, what the hell is all this?" In a more conciliatory tone, he added, "My old one has gone to fix something for you, I'm sure. When an unexpected guest turns up in the middle of a meal, no choice but to provide him a bite too. But tell me."

Malinka protested that he didn't want anything, and then awkwardly began telling Turyn about taking Genia to the Arbor. Almost at once Turyn interrupted, "So Sunday whetted your appetite, and now you have to try to lay the first girl that comes along."

Malinka blushed. "No, not at all. I'm very serious about her."

"Don't talk nonsense, Director. How could it be serious? You've got a wife, or is it your idea to have a couple of them?"

"I don't have a wife anymore."

"What do you mean—'I don't have'? Has she died or something?"

"No, but I'm all through with Matylda."

Turyn looked really worried as he began to understand the meaning of the bundle. "And you've already cleared out with your things?"

"Yes."

"And what do you propose to do now?"

"I don't know yet. I had to put an end to it."

"Yes, yes. I heard all that. But where in hell are you going to live?"

"I'll move to Warsaw . . . I have a friend there who promised

to rent me a room . . ." he lied in an effort to pacify Turyn. "The only difficulty is that he went away yesterday for a few days. Tuesday, or Wednesday for sure, he'll be back . . . All I ask is for you to let me stay a few nights with you."

"Let me tell you—I don't like getting involved in such things," Turyn said brusquely. "The surest way of burning one's fingers. Today at each other's throats and tomorrow both against him who took sides. No thank you, that's not for me."

"But I'm through with her for good. I don't want to set eyes on her again. A crazy irresponsible woman . . . It's only a night or two."

"I guess I have no choice. You know, I'm a hospitable sort, but there's a limit to that too. You've put me in a highly embarrassing situation. All right, so it has to be . . . But what made you clear out so suddenly?"

Malinka picked up his account, describing what happened at the Arbor and later in his room. When he finished, Turyn grabbed his head: "Holy Mary, to commit such stupidities! If it had at least been for something worthwhile! But what a stupid mess, and all on account of that silly girl."

Malinka bristled. "I wish you wouldn't talk about her that way. I told you I love her."

"Love her, love her—all the worse for you. After that scene, do you imagine she'll speak to you again? And not just she—do you think Papa will let you near her? I wouldn't want to be in your shoes if you run into him."

Malinka was frightened. "You really think . . . he would hold me responsible? But what happened wasn't my doing."

"What a childish way to talk. Didn't you know the kind of wife you had to reckon with? Really, Director."

Mrs. Turyn entered with a glass of tea and slices of cake on a plate. Malinka jumped up to greet her, relieved to be released from this painful and humiliating conversation.

6

Matylda listened to his departing steps. The hall door slammed. Silence. The slightest movement seemed beyond her strength, beyond her will. It's never easy to take stock of one's actions, still less to admit defeat.

He had left her. He had taken his things and gone. A dull inertia settled over her. Even to concentrate on what had happened

seemed an impossible effort. Yet it wasn't the sort of thing that could be evaded for long. She should be doing something right now, quickly, before it was irrevocable and he was gone for good. Run after him? Catch up with him? Dissuade him? But she couldn't. Something held her back. Reality? Tears rolled down her face. She staggered over to the sofa and dropped down on it.

Slowly the events of this terrible day came back to her. The beginning of it all had been her sudden notion to go to Ogorek's kiosk for a paper. The rest had been a chain of unfortunate coincidences. First, Mrs. Turyn happened to be out in her garden at the time. How could she have gone by without saying something? And the first thing that had come to her mind was to ask whether her husband was already there with the professor. It was really Mrs. Turyn's fault. She could have avoided looking so surprised. Since he wasn't there, it was quite natural for her to have wandered on afterwards toward the church. Just for a short prayer—so she had said to herself—but of course there had been more to it than that. Not that her intentions had been bad. If she had found him there she wouldn't have berated him. It had been on her way back that she had suddenly heard his voice on the other side of a thick high hedge. She had stopped and listened, and then become aware of the little entrance with the sign. Only when she saw the two of them had she lost control of herself. But who would have accepted such a thing calmly? Even the policeman, who made her go along to the station and took down the report, ended by saying he could understand very well how she felt. Perhaps he was only being polite, but in any case that's what he said.

She recalled the policeman's sudden appearance and the way he had pulled her off of the girl. How solicitous he had become toward the little bitch the moment he learned she was Ogorek's daughter. Maybe Miss Ogorek would like to wash up a bit? He had given the proprietress instructions to take care of her. And she, Matylda? Simply a brusque—Come with me to the police station for questioning. And there? Of course it's up to Mr. Ogorek—if he wants to sue . . .

Slowly she raised herself from the sofa. It must be an hour or more since Sigmunt had slammed out and, if he hadn't returned by now, it was clear he wouldn't. She had been deserted and couldn't expect the slightest help from him. She was destitute with no way of keeping herself alive out here. She would have to go to Warsaw at once and try to find a job, any job.

She approached the window and peered out. Already it was almost dark. She turned away and dropped weakly onto the sofa again. She shivered—what a strange quiet pervaded the house. A dead dark shell. Who could imagine there was a person in it whose life had been destroyed today, who still acted as if alive, though everything had lost its meaning.

She awoke the next morning momentarily surprised to find herself fully dressed without even a blanket over her. Then it all came back. She dragged herself to her feet, her body a mass of pain. She looked in the mirror at the scratches, the dark bruises. She thought of Ogorek. Was it possible that he would really press charges?

She glanced about the room, at the dust, the unwashed dishes and pots, the bedding pulled apart. Let it remain that way. Of what concern was all this to her now? This very day she'd get the second-hand dealer over and sell what he would take, and then clear out. She would simply lock up, drop the key next door, and go to her sister in the city.

This was the end.

3

THE DOWNFALL

"TIME TO GET UP, Director. And my advice is to be well out of the way before the Ogorek family is up and around. Better not tangle with Papa."

It was barely light outside. Malinka looked at his watch; it was not yet six. "But what will I do in the city at this hour?"

Turyn shrugged. "Search me. Scratch your balls or do gymnastics—all the same to me. But hustle now. Let me tell you: I have no intention of having our gracious neighbors on my tail too. You can wash in the kitchen."

As he was ready to leave, Turyn warned: "Better stay away till after dark, and don't use Long Street but come along on the other side and then climb over the tracks. Better go that way too—less chance of running into someone. And my considered advice—in town watch out for roundups and out here don't let Chairman Ogorek catch sight of you. Neither would be good for your health."

Malinka nodded miserably, giving a furtive glance at the Green House as he turned to hurry down the lane. Only in the anonymity of the almost-deserted train did he relax.

In spite of his hunger—he hadn't had a bit of breakfast and hardly anything the day before—his spirits improved steadily as the train carried him toward the city. He even began to feel a certain satisfaction: he was free, no longer under constant surveillance, no longer forced to fit himself continually to someone else's whims. Of one thing he was sure, he would never return to Matylda.

In the city however as the day advanced he became more and more aware that he had no home to return to, and his self-assur-

ance soon disappeared. Without money there would be no room, and no prospect of one, and no amount of thinking would help. All he could do was let happen what may and hope for a miracle.

And so inevitably in the evening he found himself standing in the dark at Turyn's door, facing the Professor's mocking scorn: "Oh you Director, didn't you get your room?" As if he hadn't told him it couldn't be before Tuesday or Wednesday. "I thought this friend of yours was already back . . . All right then, but you know, you can't stay here too long."

2

Ogorek could seldom recall having been so upset. Never would he forget this Sunday.

For most of the day he had sat behind the counter, bored and completely unaware. Sundays there never were many customers. Pelagia had brought his lunch with the laconic remark, "Genia's not feeling well, so I came instead." He might never have known if it hadn't been for Sergeant Wrona's turning up at the kiosk later that afternoon.

"Took down a full report, Mr. Ogorek. Plenty of evidence to haul her into court if you want."

"Who?" he asked surprised.

"Her—Malinka's wife, of course."

"But for what?"

"What do you mean? For what she did to your daughter . . ." and then he reported the whole story. Even before he had finished, Ogorek was already closing up, and ignoring the startled policeman, rushing for home. What an incredible disgrace! Who would consider marrying Genia after this? She was done for, all his dreams for her were shattered, everything he had struggled for all his life. He could kill her for that alone.

And it was not only Genia, what about Karol? His secret hopes for him, they, too, were down the drain. He had noticed how often recently he had seen his son in wealthy Miss Orlowska's company. Of course, he scoffed at Pelagia when she mentioned—hopefully—the same thing to him, but he had given Karol money for a new suit. He had even decided to furnish one of their rooms presentably, and had already paid down one thousand zlotys in Warsaw on a nice ensemble. Pelagia had been outraged at the extravagance. "Have you gone crazy? For what?" she said.

Now she would be triumphant. Everyone would make fun of

them. All on account of this bitch daughter of his and this worm of a man who had smelled her itch like a clever dog. If he could only lay his hands on him!

He had stormed into the apartment and gone straight to Genia's room. She was lying in bed. Without a word he had shaken her by the arm and given her mauled face a sharp slap. He would have gone on slapping and shaking her if Pelagia hadn't rushed at him and intervened.

"What do you think you're doing—beating up a sick child?" And she dragged him from the bed. "Can't you see her condition? For the smallest thing you'd be capable of tormenting your children to death . . . Get out of here, or I'll call for help."

"Smallest thing? Are you out of your mind?" he shouted, trying to shake her off. "Goddamn it, don't you understand what this dirty little bitch has done to all of us? Don't you look so shocked —yes, just like a bitch in heat, our daughter—"

"But how could she know what he was like, the scum—married too. Why don't you go after him and leave her alone?"

"Yes, married . . . The shame, the shame. Nothing left but pack up the family and leave . . . Do you hear, you . . ." Again his anger flared up out of control, and lunging toward the bed, he pulled off the covers to strike her again.

Pelagia threw herself on his back. "Get off, you brute, or by the Mother of God I'll open the window and call! You of all people, behaving so shocked. How about it—what you used to do was all right and no cause for shame? You think I forgot about when you worked at the hotel long before there was any Genia to worry about. Yes, yes—bringing whores up for the guests. That was all right, I suppose. Well—speak up."

For a moment he could hardly restrain himself from hitting her too, just to shut her up. But no, he wouldn't use violence against his wife. Genia was cowering under the covers, wailing. He looked helplessly from one to the other. To hell with all women. He pushed himself clear of Pelagia, and without another word rushed from the house.

It took all of two days before he began to calm down a little. What helped a lot was that both of the Malinkas seemed to have vanished from the scene. Cautiously he asked Kozik about them, but if he knew anything he wasn't talking. Mrs. Orlowska had a good deal to say about them when she stopped by the kiosk. She complained they had vacated the house without warning, simply

leaving the key in the door. And now she had the place on her hands, and what could she do? It was such a headache, so much unnecessary trouble. People had become utterly unreliable. But to his relief she didn't say a word about the Arbor incident.

Turyn too stopped by at the kiosk. "Chairman," he asked, "have you seen Mr. Malinka by any chance?"

"No," he said shortly.

"Can't find him anywhere, and I have an important arrangement with him. Until Sunday he always provided me with a daily box of cigarettes at the official price—excuse me, Chairman, but I can't afford what you charge . . . Haven't you seen him at all the last few days?"

"I told you I haven't . . ." he snapped and then, to atone for his irritability, he said, more mildly, ". . . But with the cigarettes, that's no trouble. I can manage a box for you the same as he did. How's that for a friend?" The devil with this professor! But it was better to give him the cigarettes and put an end to his interest in Malinka.

And so gradually Ogorek began to regain a certain equanimity.

3

Orlowski ushered Turyn into the hall. His guests fitted into a special hierarchy: for some the hall, others his study, and still others the inner sanctum of the elegant dining room. There were those too of course to whom he only spoke at the front door or standing in the entry.

Turyn belonged to the hall category, but as they settled down in two comfortable armchairs Orlowski ordered coffee served. He always made a point of showing a kind of jovial neighborliness toward Turyn. First he questioned him about the progress of Wladek's studies.

Yes, the boy was making headway, Turyn told him, though he'd do better if his mind was on his work. It was not surprising of course—the war. What could you expect? Youth matured so early and looked at things quite differently from their elders. So many influences—not all good. The boy needed suitable friends, company his own age . . . Turyn noticed a slight impatience in Orlowski's face. He pulled back and limited himself strictly to the area of studies.

As the coffee came, they turned to news from the war fronts and then to local Warsaw gossip. Orlowski warmed up and brought

out a bottle of liqueur of which he regarded himself a connoisseur. With a show of appreciation Turyn sipped from the narrow glass, commenting on the superb bouquet and flavor. He enjoyed visiting here: the depth of the armchair, the soft pile of the carpet, the sense of luxury that prevailed.

It was Orlowski who raised the subject of Malinka. "I've had a lot of trouble with the house next door. Imagine this so-called lady just leaving the key and clearing out without warning. Incredible what war does to people."

Turyn nodded, but felt it wiser not to get involved in this subject. "Have you anyone in mind to look after the place?"

"Not yet. In any case, I'll be more careful this time. I can't forgive myself ever having allowed the Malinkas to move in. Such messy people—you should see their room now. And Rybak even wanted to make the whole villa available to them. Lucky I wouldn't agree. Politicians are complete fools when it comes to everyday life. It takes a cataclysm like this war to show them as they really are. Only now do we get a true picture of the sort of people who used to run things. No wonder we're where we are. And imagine, this Rybak not showing the slightest interest in this property which on paper at least belongs to him."

"What's the ex-minister doing now?"

"He's in Warsaw—so scared of his skin he changes his name at least once a month. He's convinced himself the Germans have nothing better to think about than to look for him. He's persuaded himself he was a key prewar figure and he's destined for some historic role: the savior of the nation or some such thing. But Rybak is all show, like a man you see carefully posed in a studio portrait, the kind that makes anyone look impressive. It's all right until you come upon an ordinary snapshot. That's the real picture, that's where the mediocrity shows up. Our Rybak all over. There were times when I was fooled by appearances, too, but now I can't help seeing there was less to him even than to the average person. Chance and the political maneuvering of others—that's what pushed him out front. I'm sure at first he was as surprised at his easy rise as anyone."

Turyn listened with an attentive air. In fact, however, he was thinking about Orlowski. What would he look like without the backing of his millions? What would the snapshot say, deprived of his own particular brand of power? Who would take account of him then? He was so absorbed with this fascinating notion that

Orlowski had finished speaking for a moment before he realized it. Quickly he smiled and said, "Of course it's easy to give commands when power is in one's own hands."

"Precisely, precisely . . . And you should know the villa is actually mine. It's a fact—all built with my money. In Rybak's name but he hasn't paid a single zloty against the principal."

"You certainly have had a lot of trouble over this villa, but you must admit too, sir, that buying up all this land was a very good venture. Now all that remains is to buy out Ogorek."

"Of course it was, certainly . . . And I haven't forgotten that you brought it to my attention. But I have something much more important to discuss with you." He began to outline an idea that he had been working on recently. He had a lot of idle money. After the outbreak of war, like everyone else, he had steadily converted his assets into dollars, but by now changed circumstances demanded a change of tactics. The defeat of Germany was already beyond doubt and the moment had come to plan ahead. At the moment all Polish shares were dirt cheap, just about worthless with the German seizure of all productive resources. But this was the time to buy them up, for this situation was bound to change very soon. Would Mr. Turyn be interested in undertaking this assignment on his behalf? Of course not a word could be whispered to anyone who was behind this move. He might suggest he was buying for some fool war profiteer who had suddenly made several hundred thousand zlotys and didn't know what to do with them. He should concentrate on sugar refinery stocks, locomotives, chemicals, heavy industrials. His general policy should be to pay a zloty or two above the general price, that was all. ". . . And as my agent I offer you 1 per cent not of the purchase price, but of the nominal value. That way you'll have an incentive to buy a lot for little, and we'll both be satisfied."

Turyn was delighted by this unexpected proposition and the financial perspectives it held out. He nodded with great deference. "I am always at your service, sir. I am confident I can fulfill this commission to your complete satisfaction."

"Very well, I intend to buy a great deal and will use all my liquid assets eventually for this purpose . . ." He went on to give Turyn detailed instructions on procedure.

As he listened, the deep-seated envy he always felt in the presence of great wealth changed to gratitude for the opportunity he was being given and admiration for the man himself. He wanted

to bring himself closer to the Orlowski family, prove his concern and interest. And so when he was at the door, ready to leave, he suddenly said: "Sir, I wanted to mention one more thing to you . . . Excuse me for even touching on such a matter, but I regard it as my duty, even as an indication of my appreciation for your confidence in me."

"Yes? What is it?"

"Nothing very important at the moment, but often a thing that seems trivial at the time takes on significance later. To my mind this young Ogorek is not fit company for Miss Irena."

"Oh . . . you mean they walk together?"

"Exactly, sir, and you know how easily gossip starts here, and—"

"Yes . . . yes, of course. Yes, thank you," and not waiting for Turyn to continue, he shook his hand and closed the door.

4

As he sat at the cash drawer endlessly collecting chits, making change, Malinka tried in vain not to think about the night ahead, when the store closed. He would again be faced with returning to Turyn's cottage or . . . That was it, there was no alternative.

Only once before had the future ever looked so bleak. That was during the early 30's when his sweet and self-sacrificing mother came to him and admitted that she had no more money. He would have to give up the university and find a job. In the meantime, she had found a boarder who would help pay the rent at least. The boarder, a woman called Matylda Katowska, was destined to be Malinka's future wife, though, mercifully, he had never suspected it then.

Eventually, Malinka had found a job as an apprentice clerk in a co-op not very different from the one he found himself in today. He had been paid only a pittance—but in the early 30's, as now, a pittance was better than nothing.

At the Co-op, Malinka had made his first real friend, Jan Surak. Jan had no more than Malinka, but he didn't care, because he had a vision of the future—a Peoples' Paradise in Poland—and the Socialist Party would make it possible. Naturally, Malinka had joined the Party, too. He had little of Jan's enthusiasm, few of his ideals, none of his convictions, but how wonderfully exciting it was to belong—to be accepted and welcomed by young people his own age!

But even this pleasure had been short-lived, for the first time Malinka had participated in a demonstration—on May 1, 1934—he had been caught in a tangle with the police and had ended up in jail for a week.

The disgrace had almost killed his ailing mother. She had taken to her bed and never really got out of it again. When he had been released, his job was gone. And the truth was if it hadn't been for Matylda, there to care for his mother, to produce a few zlotys from her meager savings, he had no idea what he would have done. When his mother passed away, Malinka had taken her bit of insurance and gone into business for himself, setting up a stamp store. And by then, he had begun to imagine Matylda was indispensable and had asked her to become his wife.

For several years, they had struggled along, just about breaking even, and then came the war and Malinka's business literally vanished in a direct hit by a German bomb.

But Malinka still saw Jan occasionally and it had been Jan who came to his rescue. He had remained with the Co-operative and had risen to the position of supervisor of all the branch stores. Jan found him the job he now held, found him the room in Rybak's villa in return for acting as caretaker. Then he had said: "It's up to you now, my lad—if you have any wits at all, you can make something of yourself—" He had winked mysteriously. "It's everyone on his own now."

That was all very fine for Jan, who shortly thereafter disappeared into the underground. But what had Malinka been supposed to make of himself, trapped behind this infernal cash register and even more unbearably trapped at home, chained to Matylda?

Malinka unconsciously groaned, banging his fist on the counter. A customer for whom he had been making change, gave him a frightened look.

When evening came, inevitably he found himself once more heading up the dark deserted lane toward the Turyn cottage. He stopped. There was the door. He would knock. Again the pointed question: your friend not back yet? Another sermon, more humiliation.

His eyes shifted imperceptibly toward the upper end of the lane. But what was he looking for there? A sudden yearning—his lost home. With all that had been wrong, at least he had had a roof over his head. He felt an irresistible impulse just to discern the

house . . . Or perhaps go in and forgive her? Anyway he would go and take a look, look up at the window. At least it would postpone a little longer the moment of facing Turyn.

He trudged through the wet sand, stopping occasionally to listen, enveloped in his loneliness. Not one soul to turn to, not one corner anywhere he could call his own. At last, the familiar gate. He stared up at the house—utterly dark. Already asleep? He felt uneasy. But surely a person who continually threatened suicide never actually did it. His alarm persisted, however. Almost with dread he stared at the dead window, trying to make out the usual crack of light along the edges. The house remained impenetrably dark and still. He turned and slowly headed back toward Turyn's door.

"Oh, Director, it's you . . . it's so late I thought you had your room at last. But since you're here, come in." They went into the living room. "My old one's already retiring. But sit down and listen—yesterday your wife left Jutrosin."

"What?"

"Yes, she's gone, and my advice is for you to locate her and patch things up somehow. But don't have any illusions Orlowski will give back the room. You see my friend, you've made a mountain of trouble for yourself—and was it worth it really?"

Malinka ignored the question. "Do you know for sure she left?"

"Why, of course—everyone here knows."

"And what about the contents of the room?"

"Sold it, and she acted completely logically in that. And your own things here—will you be taking them along tomorrow?"

"I can't in the morning. I'll come back later to fetch them. First I have to get a suitcase somewhere. I can't go on the train with a bundle like that. If only I could count on my friend being back."

"Look—I don't know how it is with this friend of yours, but you can't stay here any longer. You must see our side of it. We've got to continue living here. And besides we haven't built our guest wing yet. The walls are like paper—I tell you frankly my wife's ashamed to go to the pot at night. She's got bladder trouble as it is, and if this set-up goes on any longer she'll get really sick. When it comes down to it, a person should feel free to fart in his own place. Else it isn't home—right?"

Malinka blushed, acutely embarrassed. "Oh I understand. You can count on this being my last night here." He knew he didn't sound convincing and stared guiltily at the floor. But no, he would never return here, no matter what happened.

"Why in hell did you have to get into this mess?"

"It wasn't my doing. I suffered a long time."

"Not my doing, not my doing. So I suppose Saint Dominic is guilty. You know, I used to think of you as a person of delicacy, even subtlety, but—"

"I behaved as honesty compelled me to."

"What a master at rationalizing!"

"You, too."

"Me?"

"Yes. That picnic—was that honest?"

"So that's what you're getting at. Well then, I'll answer—yes. Was anyone injured by it? Come on, tell me. That's what counts."

"Perhaps in your sense it does. But just the fact of a relationship with a woman from the gutter—"

"There is no need for such hackneyed expressions. She's not a bad girl, not even dumb like some others we both know. Why this superior tone? The oldest trade in the world. She's not to blame for it. Only bad conditions—"

"But everyone knows what she is."

"Well?"

"Well, relations with a prostitute are dishonest in themselves," Malinka said doggedly. "You're not going to convince me otherwise. And it's not my problem anyway. All I ask for is the right to love—"

"I might point out—if you haven't guessed it yourself—that you shouldn't be counting any longer on the object of your great love. I met Karol today—her brother. He told me—"

"I have no illusions. She's got a right to speak badly of me." He paused. "Well what did Miss Ogorek's brother say?"

"What do you imagine? She's sore as blazes at you. Used some mighty uncomplimentary words, and called you a coward for running away instead of defending her."

"I don't believe it."

Turyn shrugged.

The kitchen door suddenly opened a crack. "Some refreshments for our guest," Mrs. Turyn's voice announced from the other side. "Excuse me for not showing myself, but I'm ready for bed."

Malinka got up quickly and took the plate and glass proffered through the door. Turyn stretched himself and said good night. Sitting alone at the table, Malinka wolfed down the bread and sausage and sipped the hot tea. And then just as he was, he lay down on the sofa and turned off the light.

In the morning Turyn awoke him at dawn. Wearing only the bottom of his pajamas, scratching his hairy chest, he said: "Please be quick, Director. People will soon be getting up across the lane. Kozik caught sight of you yesterday, but at least he's a decent fellow."

As Malinka was leaving, he softened a little: "Don't think too badly of me, Director. I always try to do what I can, but you see yourself it's impossible for all concerned to go on this way, as much as I'd like to keep you longer . . . But aren't you going to wear your coat? It's raining. You can't just go that way." He took it off the hook and handed it to Malinka.

Malinka hadn't noticed the rain. But what did he care anyway? Let it rain, he thought. Let me get soaked through, catch cold, get sick and die, and who would care?

5

Whenever he was crossed, Orlowski withdrew, nursing his frustration until he found a way of retaliating, often in a completely unrelated direction. His family was thoroughly familiar with this pattern, and in earlier years his children as well as his wife waited with varying degrees of dread for the blow to fall. Until the war the general public esteem associated with his name and person had its reflection within his home too, and it was accompanied by a certain deference and fear. This was no longer true, for with the German occupation his financial empire vanished. All that remained was the world of his house, and when the authority and power of the outside world disappeared, his prestige at home was correspondingly diminished. While his wife, Marie, was often concerned about the effect of his enforced inactivity on his health, she took him more casually and was no longer afraid to challenge him. More than that, all their married life he had drummed respect for money into her, especially respect due those who knew how to multiply it without limit. Now, however, when she thought of those who had the ability to accumulate wealth, she always thought of Ogorek—and look at the business *he* did! Luckily, they still had a good bit of cash on hand. Without it, it was difficult to imagine how things might be now. She had no illusion about his ever making another zloty, and had lost all faith in his famous business acumen. She found it difficult to believe it had ever existed. Where would he have been on his own without his underlings?

She watched the increasing clashes between him and the chil-

dren, but seldom interfered. Alexander's career was over and the future lay with the next generation. When the war ended it would fall on Roman, as the eldest, to take over firmly and bring things back to a semblance of what they had been. In any case Alexander would never be capable of active business life again.

Even so, out of long habit, she still reacted with a nervous flinch whenever she became aware of the familiar spots of angry color high on his cheeks. She noticed them immediately when, one evening as they were going to bed, he suddenly said in a cold formal voice, "My dear, I can't tear myself in a hundred directions and watch over everything. I naturally assumed the care of our daughter was your department, but I see I was mistaken."

Marie quickly recovered her equanimity. "First, tell me what's the matter," she said wearily. "But I might remind you, as you know very well, you always insist on having the last word in regard to the children, and I'm never able to assert my own point of view. They are as you brought them up to be."

"Rubbish," he snapped. "But let me tell you that Irena is getting involved in an affair with that Ogorek youth. Delightful company, what? And everyone's already talking about it." He looked at her almost in triumph.

And Marie was troubled. "If that's how it is, we'll obviously have to do something about it. But I don't see why you're so surprised. You know as well as I do that she lacks the company she needs. I don't like her going into the city, and out here who is there for her to be with?"

"Is it my fault? What can I do? Drag people out here by the nape of their necks because Irena needs company?"

"Don't be so impatient, Alexander. Bickering won't get us anywhere. We have to think of what we can do."

"Go ahead and think, but in the future, see to it that people have no reason to come to me with such gossip."

"You know, I have an idea," Marie said after a moment's thought. "Rybak's villa is empty. He certainly won't move a finger, judging by the past. So it's still our responsibility."

"Obviously I'm aware of that. But what are you driving at?"

"Simply that Modlibog and his son are living in Warsaw. How about proposing to them that they move out here?"

"What on earth makes you think he'd consider that?"

"Maybe he wouldn't. You've neglected him so completely he may never want to see you again. How often I begged you to keep in

touch with him! But when you don't need someone you promptly forget he exists."

"Oh, stop nagging. I know what I do and don't need to be taught."

"You don't have to become belligerent, Alexander. It won't hurt to look him up and invite him out here overnight, and then we can try to persuade him. We've known him dozens of years and can talk frankly with him. He's a cheerful and sociable sort and should liven us all up a bit. Witold is a pleasant young man and probably has friends like himself. Irena would have plenty of company, and there would be no reason to fuss if she should happen to say hello to young Ogorek."

Alexander's mouth curled. "I have my doubts nonetheless. Modlibog is much too fond of his comforts to move out here."

"But don't forget he's living as a refugee at the moment on very limited resources. I doubt if he has many comforts. And you know, I remember when he was out here two years ago he mentioned that a young man was staying with them—an evacuee from the Poznan area, too. He spoke very enthusiastically of him."

"Henryk is enthusiastic about everyone without exception. I've never met a more unrealistic man."

"If you don't want even to ask him, that's up to you. Only please don't blame me if Irena takes up with people you don't think are suitable." Actually, Marie was very pleased with her idea. If it worked out and the Modlibogs moved out to the Lane, life would become much less drab. She was bored too, and the monotony of this Godforsaken waste got on her nerves. "It's entirely up to you, Alexander. But at least consider the idea. There's nothing to lose. And we shouldn't delay. It might even be best for you to go in to see Henryk in the morning and have him come out tomorrow."

Orlowski was silent for a moment. As much as he hated to admit it, Marie's suggestion was very reasonable. It galled him that he hadn't been able to think of as sound a solution himself. "It's a pretty far-fetched idea," he said grudgingly, "but I suppose it's worth trying. But as far as their lodger is concerned, why do you suppose he's still with them after all this time? And if he is, do you think that he'd want to move out here with them? Still, I'm willing to invite Henryk out for dinner." He began to undress to indicate it was time to end the conversation.

6

Malinka walked the drizzled streets until, fagged out, miserably damp, and wretchedly hungry, he found himself passing once more through the swinging doors of the East Station.

Spend the night in the waiting room? But the police might pick him up or, worse still, a German patrol. So why was he here? Aimlessly he looked at the timetables and the German propaganda posters. ALLE RAEDER ROLLEN FUER DEN SIEG.

Sieg—victory. Victory for whom? Was there any bigger misfortune than to be homeless?

Perhaps simply go out and knock at a random door and ask for shelter for the night—and have it close in his face.

The loudspeaker: "Train for Otwock, Track 2"—the last train. Curfew soon. The streets would be closed to him too. The last train —quickly. As if sleepwalking, he headed for the passage to the platform. Spend the night in the station shelter at Jutrosin? Safer anyway than here. In the dim glow of the blacked-out bulbs, he made his way toward the end of the almost empty carriage and sat down in the corner. He huddled, chilled and tired, hardly aware of the solitary figure opposite him.

"Excuse me, Mister . . ."

He raised his head, peering in the direction of the woman's voice.

"Excuse me. You aren't sick? You were groaning so."

There was something familiar about her voice, but he was too exhausted to care. "No, I'm not sick," he said listlessly. "Just a headache."

"And you've got enough on your mind to give anyone a headache! Where you living now?"

"I beg your pardon?" he said straightening up. And at the same moment he recognized her. The girl in the forest! What a time and place to run into her. Was she by any chance, he wondered, trying to pick him up? If he had had a drop of energy to spare he would have laughed at the idea.

He stared across the aisle. In the gloomy car the two things that he could see at all distinctly were her full, painted lips and the flash of her eyes. In her lap she was holding—he presently made out—a bag and an umbrella.

"How do you know so much about me?" he asked finally.

"Because I live close by—" she laughed. "Close by where you used to live, that is."

"Where?"

"The Green House."

"Oh?" He was surprised. "But I never saw you around—or did I once?" Uneasily he became aware that the next stop was Jutrosin. He didn't know what he was going to do or where he was going to go, but of one thing he was sure: he had to shake this woman off.

"Ogorek was real sore, but now he's calmed down a bit, mostly because first you disappeared and then your wife moved away. Everyone thinks you cleared out for good, and here you are." Again she laughed. "Where you staying?"

"At Professor Turyn's," he said curtly.

"Now I should have guessed that. You clear out early in the morning before anyone's about and then come back only when everyone's in for the night?"

He grunted.

"And you'll stay on in Jutrosin?"

"No."

"Then you're going back to your wife? To live in Warsaw?"

"No." He turned abruptly. "Would you please shut up!"

The conductor's head appeared in the door. He called: "Jutrosin." The train lurched to a stop. The girl rose, and glancing at him as she passed, stepped by him toward the door. He waited until she had disembarked and then followed. The platform was so dark, when he stepped off the train, he walked right into her.

She took his arm and fell into step beside him. "Would you do me a favor," she said brightly. "I owe the Professor a hundred zlotys—" She began fumbling with her purse. "If you would give them to him for me."

"No, I can't."

She stopped and, involuntarily, he stopped too. "Why ever not?"

He stepped away, freeing his arm. "I can't explain." He bowed stiffly. "Good night."

But as he turned and started across the deserted platform, she hurried after him. "But I promised I'd return it to him—"

"If you must know I am not going to the Professor's."

She was bobbing along beside him, bending forward, her head twisted to look up into his face. "Then where are you going?"

"I'm not going anywhere," he said grittily.

"You have to be going somewhere, you silly man—in this weather, at this hour."

"I always speak the truth and I'm not going anywhere, because, if you must know, I have no place to go."

"Well, that *is* a headache—a headache and a half, in fact. Hey—" Unceremoniously, she stepped out in front of him and held out her hand. "There's nothing for it, you'll have to come with me."

"What," he said, obviously horrified. "Are you crazy?"

"Not so's you notice," she said with a hint of cold temper.

"It's very kind of you, I don't mean that," he said less sharply. "But surely you see it's not possible."

"Not possible? Why?" He saw her teeth flash, but was well aware her smile was without humor. "You wouldn't be the first, dearie. But don't worry about that end of it; I'm off duty, as the saying goes." Briskly, she opened her umbrella. "Come, ain't no reason for getting soaked, or at least more soaked." When he still hung back, she took his arm. "There's nothing to worry about," she said, almost gently. "It's quite dark, everyone's in bed. You can creep up the stairs in your stocking feet and in the morning be gone before anyone is the wiser." He found himself shuffling beside her, awkwardly hunched under the shelter of her umbrella. "The only one you could possibly run into is Kozik, but even if you did, he wouldn't say a word. He's quite a decent guy, really."

7

The door of the girl's room closed behind him at last. Malinka stood, shivering helplessly in the dark, while she fussed with the black-out curtain at the window. And then a match flared and she deftly lit a kerosene lamp on the table. A yellow puddle of light gradually spread out to illuminate the small cluttered room.

"The fuse is out," she whispered cheerfully, "and I don't dare ask Ogorek to fix it. Make yourself at home."

He glanced around. Beside the door there was a small built-in kitchen range, next to it a cupboard and some shelves with kitchen utensils and groceries. On the other side of the room was a wooden bedstead with a large doll sprawled on the neat and clean spread. Malinka looked quickly for another place to sleep; there was none, except on the floor. The most pretentious bit of furniture was a commode, dominated by a mirror and crowded with an assortment of toilet articles, bottles and jugs, pots and boxes. Undoubtedly, this was the source of the cloying mixture of scents he had noticed the moment he entered.

"Take your coat off—" She motioned to a hook on the back of the door.

Awkwardly, he did as he was told and then he sat on the edge of the bed and lit his last cigarette. What a fool he had been to come here. But now there wasn't much he could do about it except get through the night somehow.

She lit a small primus on top of the range and put a kettle of water on. Then she set two places at the table and put out some bread, a piece of sausage, and a little lard in some paper. "Not much variety," she said, "but then I didn't expect company. But I've been hoarding a bit of real tea that will brighten things up a little." Suddenly she stopped and pointed at his shoes. "They're soaked! Off with them. And your socks." She poured some warm water from the kettle into a washbasin and placed it on the floor beside him. "Wash your feet. Nothing better for the morale. I'll rinse out your socks."

Resigned, he did everything he was told. The water felt wonderful on his feet and the warmth came up to diffuse through his whole body. Gradually he stopped shivering. For the first time he appreciated her efforts. Whatever else she was, she was being good to him.

They ate their supper in silence. It was meager, but the sausage was highly seasoned, the bread substantial, the tea delicious. When the dishes were cleared away, she suggested that they go to bed. It was late and the night would be short.

"You on that side," she pointed, "and me here."

Slowly he undid his shirt, and when she dimmed the light, he slipped out of his trousers and crawled under the covers. He heard her undressing, the soft splash of water as she washed. The frame of the bed groaned, the mattress rustled as she slipped in beside him. He turned on his side with his back to her, squeezing as close to the wall as he could.

For a moment, thinking of himself, Sigmunt Malinka, in the room of a prostitute eating her food, sharing her bed and with not one zloty to offer as compensation, his mind reeled.

But only for a moment, because by the next he was sound asleep.

4

THE NEWS

THE NEXT MORNING in the store, Malinka was hardly aware of what was going on around him. The night before was like a nightmare. Was it possible that he, Sigmunt Malinka, who had always had such firm ideals, who had been revolted by the Professor's bestiality, could have sunk so low? In the name of heaven, what did they call a man who lived off a prostitute. A pimp?

He turned pale, swayed over his cash register. Just the thought of the word made him feel like retching.

But never again! Why, why hadn't he made that clear to her? As he had slipped out of her room just before the break of dawn, she had whispered, "I'll be waiting—the last train!" And when he had been about to protest, she had pushed him gently through the door. "Hurry! Kozik's stirring." In a panic, he had bolted down the stairs without another word.

Yet, wasn't it only thanks to this girl that he wasn't famished now, that his socks were washed and his shoes dried out, and his appearance such that he didn't have to be ashamed to be seen in public? If he hadn't run across her, what would he have done?

She had been good to him. The only decent thing he could do was to meet her that evening, thank her for her kindness and explain that he had been able to make other arrangements. And if she didn't believe him (she had a way of looking right through him), if she insisted that he come back to her room again, well, then perhaps he would. It would be unkind to hurt her feelings, but at the same time he would make her understand that it was absolutely for the last time.

That settled in his mind, he felt a little better.

2

Kozik was on the shed roof waving his long pole as the pigeons circled leisurely against the late afternoon sky.

"Hey there, Captain—who are the visitors at the Orlowskis?" Turyn called up to him.

"From Warsaw. Came right after lunch—three gents. Anna says they're family friends or relatives or something. Might be a father and his sons."

"Maybe someone to look at the empty villa."

"Could be. Anyway they're stayin' the night. Anna's over there working like a horse getting a big dinner ready for them. Jellied fish, turkey, the works. The war doesn't bother *them* much."

"And you're not in on it, Captain?" Turyn laughed.

"I ain't about to kiss anyone's ass for anything. Rather do without."

"By the way—Malinka is gone."

"No kidding—where to?"

The Professor shrugged. "He just didn't show up last night, though his things are still with me. When he comes for them, I'll find out."

"He had a tough break, all things considered. Not a bad little guy. And I'd sure hate being in his shoes now."

"It's his own fault . . . Well, I've got to get some cigarettes at the kiosk. I'll be going to town first thing in the morning. Anything I can bring you?"

"No thanks. What do I need? Live on air out here."

Turyn went on his way. The Professor had hardly turned the corner at Long Street when Kozik noticed Anna running down the lane, waving to draw his attention.

She stood below him panting. "Holy Mary . . . I wave and wave . . . It's like you were blind . . . Come down quick . . . The new folks . . . They want to speak to you . . . They're looking at the villa . . . It's about cleaning it . . . Hurry, 'cause they're waiting."

"Let 'em wait. Nobody's telling *me* to run."

Her zeal annoyed him. Why should he drop everything just because the high and mighty Orlowskis wanted something done? He took his own sweet time closing up the coop.

Tired of waiting, Anna started back: "You'll sing a different tune the next time you need a package of cigarettes. 'Now, Anna,

please Anna,' " she mimicked him angrily. "But when you have a chance to earn an honest zloty, you can't be bothered to put yourself out."

Kozik still took his time. He stopped to light a cigarette, then went up to his room to change to a better jacket. And only when he was good and ready did he follow her up the Lane.

The closed-up villa had come to life. Its doors and windows were open wide; from inside came a babble of voices. Kozik stopped in the hall and waited for someone to notice him. "Oh there's Kozik," Orlowski called from the adjoining room. "Mr. Kozik, Mr. Modlibog wants to speak to you."

Modlibog—what a funny sounding name. "God-worshiper," that's what it means. Kozik wanted to laugh but restrained himself. Modlibog was a white-haired gentleman with a ruddy, amiable face and bright, alert eyes. He was tall and straight in spite of his age, well-groomed in an old-fashioned way, with a bearing that was both elegant and cordial.

Smiling, he said: "Mr. Orlowski told me you might be able to help me out here. The house needs a thorough going-over from top to bottom, to make it liveable . . ."

Kozik could see it was filthy. No wonder—the rooms hadn't been touched for several years, and thick dust lay on everything. And the whole place had the musty odor that comes with neglect and disuse.

". . . It must all be dusted and swept, the upholstery beaten, and all the rooms thoroughly aired."

"And the stoves checked carefully," Orlowski added.

Kozik nodded. The others appeared—Mrs. Orlowska, Miss Irena, Mr. Roman and the two new gentlemen. One of them, a rather dashing and handsome man with a touch of gray in his hair, was speaking animatedly with Irena.

Modlibog took him to one side. "A part of the furniture we'll have to put away. There's too much and I've got some of my own coming. We'll turn one room upstairs into a storage space . . . Oh yes, and before I forget, Mr. Orlowski told me you could supply coal. Is that right?"

"Yes sir, I could. Though it isn't easy to get these days, I'll do it somehow."

"Fine. Actually, I need a supply for the whole winter. But to get back to the house—clean it thoroughly and go over the kitchen stove especially. It looks in bad shape."

"It'll all be done, sir, just as you want."

"And the garden." They walked over to the window. "It should at least be cleaned up and given a superficial trimming. Really it's a shame how the place has been neglected."

"I'll take care of it."

"And tell me, what will you charge?"

"It depends upon the time. There's several days' work. You'll be the judge yourself."

"And when can you start?"

"Maybe tomorrow. For me it's better finishing up quick and get started on the next job."

Mrs. Orlowska was approaching. Anxious to avoid a lot of talk, Kozik nodded good-by to Modlibog and withdrew. Pretending to be inspecting the other rooms, he slipped out through the back door into the garden and cut across it toward the Green House.

3

When Malinka arrived in Jutrosin on the last train, he quickly spotted the girl, standing to one side in the shadows of the deserted platform.

Almost shyly he went over to her. "Good evening—" Then he blurted, "I almost didn't come."

"Why ever not?" She frowned. "I was here for the train before this one. I thought you might decide to come earlier." She glanced around. "We'll go around the back way. Ogorek is still at the kiosk and Mrs. Madey has just gone to help him back with the basket."

"Please." He caught her arm, but when she looked up at him inquiringly, all he could find to say was, "I don't even know your name."

She giggled. "Is that what's troubling you? Helena, Helena Kus. Come."

This time the stairs seemed much less menacing. They took each step in unison so if anyone was listening, it would sound as if only one person was climbing them. And when they reached her room safely and she lit the lamp he found supper was spread on the table and ready to eat.

"I was afraid it would get cold," she whispered, putting the dish of cheese noodles before him. "Help yourself—unless you

don't like them? Don't be afraid to say so." She stood watching him anxiously.

"But I do, really. You must sit down too. There's no need for you to wait on me." He pulled a fifty zloty note from his wallet. "That's all I can manage at the moment." He blushed. "But it might help a little."

"No, keep it. I still have some cash." But when he insisted she gave in. "All right, if it will make you feel better. I'll use it to buy our supper tomorrow. You must tell me what you like."

They ate in silence, but presently she began to tell him in a hushed voice of the day's developments on the Lane. "Director Orlowski has some visitors for the night. Kozik says they're going to move into your old place. Three men."

He sat smoking a cigarette, watching her wash up the dishes. She moved gracefully, with brisk efficiency. Involuntarily he found his eyes following the curve of her hips, plainly visible under the thin material of her dress. An image came to him out of the past —her laughing face almost touching his, "You scared?"

She hung up the dish towel, then turning with a smile she said: "Dawn comes awful early."

She turned off the lamp. Silently they undressed. He kept glancing in her direction, but he couldn't see a thing. Then she rolled up the blackout paper. From his side of the bed, he stared at her approaching silhouette. When she sat down and slipped her legs under the covers, he hesitated for only a minute before he reached out to draw her into his arms. She came to him naturally without a murmur of surprise or protest. Just before he sealed her lips with his, she whispered: "I knew you were a man if you gave yourself a chance."

4

Early in the afternoon, a two-horse flat cart loaded high with household goods made its way slowly up the Lane. In front beside the driver sat an old woman clutching a potted oleander bush, and so wrapped up she looked like a bundle herself. This was Mr. Modlibog's faithful cook, Kateryna. As soon as the cart reached Rybak's villa and she was helped down by the driver, she began to grumble. Who could live in such a wasteland? Sand dunes, that was all. Inside the house, she complained about everything she saw. Who was going to polish the parquet floors? Maybe Mr.

Modlibog would be hiring a butler. How would she manage cooking without gas? And certainly no one was going to find her running a mile every day for groceries. Mr. Modlibog had landed them all out here without rhyme or reason.

Accustomed to her nature, Modlibog tried to humor her, pointing out that if nothing else they would be much safer than in the city. Finally, she calmed down enough to busy herself seeing that everything in her kitchen found its right place.

Some of the furniture and boxes were stored in the garage, the rest was distributed around the house. The rooms had already been assigned: the big middle one would be their dining room, the one beside it on the left, Modlibog's. The two young men would go upstairs. Modlibog expected them both out later with the rest of the things.

In the evening after Witold Modlibog and Tadeusz Rakowicz had arrived, the Orlowskis came over to welcome them, and at once a little housewarming party was improvised.

The next morning Modlibog, wearing sporty knickers and a green hat, dragged Kozik from his cleaning to an inspection trip of the local stores and especially the market. "I like going there and picking things out myself. The only sure way if it's really to taste good." Kozik was surprised. Why would a cultivated man like that demean himself with such things? What did he have a cook for?

As they walked down the Lane, Mrs. Turyn wearing her morning wrap appeared in front of her cottage. "Mr. Kozik, just a moment," she called out in an agitated voice. They stopped. "Mr. Kozik, my husband . . . He hasn't returned from the city."

"What's that?"

"He went in yesterday morning and still isn't back. I've waited and waited. I thought maybe he'd been delayed and curfew overtook him, and he'd be back early this morning. But there have been three or four trains and he wasn't on any of them. Mr. Kozik—"

Modlibog approached her. "Allow me to present myself. I am Henryk Modlibog, your neighbor up the road. Don't be nervous, madam. As you say, something probably detained your husband. That can always happen . . . You are Mrs. Turyn, I believe?"

Mrs. Turyn was so agitated she had hardly noticed him until then. She passed her hand over her hair and pulled her gown more closely together. She took his extended hand timidly. "How do

you do, sir . . . But I don't know what to think. It's quite unlike him to stay in overnight." Her mouth trembled. "Do you know whether there were any big roundups in Warsaw yesterday?"

"No, I was out here most of the day. But we would have heard if there was anything unusual."

"And even if the Germans did grab him," Kozik said, "I'm sure the Professor would find a way of getting out from under. He's too smart for them. You'll see—he'll turn up any time now."

Momentarily she looked relieved. "Do you really think so? It's so hard not knowing. Maybe I should go in myself?"

"But how would that help? Where would you look for him?"

"That's just it—I'm so helpless. And meanwhile something terrible may have happened."

"It's too soon to be looking at it like that. If he don't show up in a day or two, then it'll be time to do something. You'll go first to Ogorek. He should have ways of being able to smell something out and help."

"And who is Ogorek?" asked Modlibog.

Kozik explained who he was, adding, "He's in good with the German post at Otwock. Hands them sausage and butter and booze every so often, and in return they close their eyes to his black marketeering. If he slipped them some money, they'd find out about the Professor soon enough."

Mrs. Turyn asked hopefully. "Do you really think he would be willing to help?"

"Why sure. But you'll see it won't be necessary. The Professor's too quick for them."

5

That night when Malinka stepped out onto the dark platform, Helena ran to greet him. "You know what's happened?"

"What?" he said, his stomach fluttering nervously. Had Ogorek discovered he was still living on the Lane?

"Turyn's disappeared. He went to the city yesterday morning and still isn't back. His wife says she's sure the Germans caught him."

For a moment, Malinka was relieved; at least her news did not involve him. But if Turyn had been arrested, the Germans might raid the cottage and find his own things there. That in turn could lead directly to him. Suddenly he felt very insecure.

"Why don't you say anything?"

"I'm thinking about Turyn. He always boasted he'd never get caught."

Helena told him the various theories on the Lane about the disappearance, but he was too absorbed with himself to listen. What if he should get caught similarly—who would bother to worry about him? No one—no one except possibly this girl.

When the Green House loomed in front of them, he found he was even more apprehensive than he had been for the past two nights. What if Ogorek happened to appear in the door as they entered? And, once safely inside, he felt trapped, as if each creaking step was bringing him closer to his doom. In her room he sank limply down on the bed, his heart pounding.

As soon as Helena lit the lamp, she whispered, "What's happened to you? You're so pale!" Quickly, she filled a mug with warm milk. "Drink this. You're not getting proper food in town, that's easy to see. I could bring some lunch in to you. Honestly, I'd like to. Some nourishing soup? I have a commuter's ticket so it wouldn't mean any extra fare."

"No, no," he protested. "It's not hunger. It was just that some trouble in the store today upset me and made me nervous. That happens sometimes."

He fell back on the bed, moodily covering his face. The truth was that he hadn't a soul in the world who cared about him. Even Helena—what was he to her but a passing adventure? In a few days it would be October first—she would go her way, he his. And one day if he should suddenly disappear, as Turyn had, no one would ever know because, except at the store, no one would ever be expecting him—or waiting for him.

Helena served supper and beckoned him to the table. He ate for a while in silence. Then he said, "Did you say you had to give up this room at the end of the month?"

"Yes." She shrugged. "Ogorek gave notice."

"And then where will you go?"

"I don't know. I'll look around in town. It won't be easy—it's awful expensive." Her eyes narrowed, as if in defiance. "And there are other difficulties, you might imagine."

But he was completely preoccupied with an idea that was taking shape in his mind. They were both alone. Why should they part? What if they moved together to Warsaw? No one would know them there. He was already about as low as he could get, what

was there to lose? Besides, what difference did it make? He no longer cared.

"Listen, Helena," he began in a determined voice. "After the first I'll be renting a room in the city. Move in with me. We'll share things and manage somehow."

She looked up, amused. "Nice boy . . ." But then when she realized he was serious, she added almost crossly, "You're being funny, I hope."

"I'm not joking. We'll live together." He was suddenly afraid. "Or maybe you don't want to?"

"Me not want to?" She stopped a moment uncertainly. "You couldn't be serious. What would you want me around for?"

"It's up to you. I want it."

"Oh now, stop it." She blinked her eyes. "I'm not saying we can't meet sometimes. That's all right. In fact, I'd like it." She stared at him. "You weren't serious, not really—were you?"

"Yes completely. I want you to come with me. We'll live in Warsaw, we'll arrange things somehow together. But naturally you understand . . . you'll never . . ." He flushed. "You'll always be just home and won't go around anywhere."

"I understand. I mean I haven't this week either."

"So it's all right. Well?"

"I don't know," she said bleakly. "Naturally I'd like to . . . but after a while maybe you'll feel different about it, and then you'll just throw me out. It would be better not starting than that. At least now I know how it is and don't expect anything else. It's all right. That's the way it is." She paused, twisting her fingers, looking at him intently. "I'm not saying I'd expect it to last forever. Just as long as it was for a real while, not just a couple of months and then out in the street again."

"I'm not like . . . I'm not that sort of person. All I want is peace and not being alone, don't you see? But I must tell you —I earn very little."

"That don't matter. I can help too . . . I mean I could go in service somewhere or do laundry. I could work in a store too. I learned to once." She shook her head as if she were coming out of a daze. "But you know what would be best? Black market. That's the best money."

"We'll see," he said dubiously. "The job now is to find a room. Is all this stuff here yours?"

"Only the bed and the commode. The rest belongs to Ogorek."

"We'll sell those two. It wouldn't pay to move them. I'll rent a furnished room."

"All right . . ." She looked uncertain, even suspicious. "You're sure you won't change your mind?"

"No. My mind's completely made up."

6

Malinka lay awake a long time. Now he was committed. His arrangement with Helena was no longer a necessary interlude to be forgotten as soon as possible. What excuse did he have now for living with a whore—he who only a week ago had been dreaming of Genia, who valued above all the purity of womanhood? He would never be able to look a decent woman in the face again.

Should he tell her in the morning that he hadn't really meant it? She hadn't seemed too keen about it herself. He'd even been a little put out by her lack of gratitude—no word of appreciation, no tears of thanks for having reached out a helping hand, only suspicion. Maybe she had simply misunderstood his motives. What else could you expect from that sort of woman? Her way of life was too primitive to value such a gesture properly.

He thought again of Turyn's disappearance. He must do something quickly about his things over in his house, even if it meant taking them to town just as they were. But how could he manage it without revealing his presence out here?

In the morning, it was Helena who suggested a solution: he should leave now, as usual, and wait around somewhere until seven. Then he could openly return to the Lane, and if someone saw him they would think he had just come in from Warsaw.

Mrs. Turyn welcomed him warmly: "I'm so happy to see you. Come in and sit down. I'll fix some breakfast."

He protested that he had just eaten in the city, that he was in a hurry and just wanted to pick up his things. But obviously, he had to say something about Turyn. "I heard about your husband's absence. I don't think it's serious. He might have been seized for forced labor in Germany, but they usually don't take them over forty. When they discover his age, they'll let him go."

He hoped he had been reassuring. Above all he wanted to avoid an emotional scene. But somehow his words had exactly the opposite effect from that which he had intended. As he spoke of Turyn, her calm dissolved in tears and she hurried from the room.

After a while she returned, again controlled, her face freshly powdered.

Quickly he went to the bundle in the hall and pulled out all his most important belongings, particularly anything that might identify him. Of these things, he made a less conspicuous package. He explained he would pick up the rest another time. He sensed she wanted to talk with him, but with so much trouble of his own how could he be attentive to the troubles of another? He knew he should show sympathy and offer his help, but of this he was completely incapable. Instead he hurried for the door—"I've got to catch the 7:30. I'll visit longer next time."

At the gate he stopped dead. Opposite, in the open door of the Green House, stood Ogorek, more austere and leaner than ever. Malinka was so surprised to see him, he wasn't even afraid. Ogorek stared at him, clearly startled himself. For a moment both of them remained motionless, looking at each other. Then Ogorek turned and went indoors.

Malinka was dumfounded. Nothing had happened! He felt a sudden flow of courage. What could Ogorek do to him anyway? Almost casually, he sauntered on down the Lane toward the station.

7

Normally Kozik took great care to keep away from the city. In such dangerous times it was wiser to stay home. But who else around could deal with Mr. Modlibog's unexpected crisis? He'd invited the Orlowskis for Sunday dinner only to find that the oven unit in the kitchen range was rusted through and full of holes. In the old days it could have been fixed in an hour with a new unit from the local hardware store. But now the only chance was picking up an odd one in some junk store in the city.

Of course he had hedged and shaken his head at first. People shouldn't get the idea he was simply an errand boy. Actually he wouldn't have done it for anyone else, but from the first moment he had taken a liking to this elderly gentleman. About this stove for example—Mr. Modlibog hadn't simply sent for him the way Director Orlowski was in the habit of doing. No, he came on his two feet down to see him at the Green House. And that wasn't all. Kozik had been up on the shed roof at the time with his pigeons, and Mr. Modlibog had shown a lively interest in them, and asked a lot of questions. When he had told him they were bothered by

mites, Mr. Modlibog had been very sympathetic and taken the trouble to advise him exactly how to get rid of them. For this alone he would have been willing to deal with the stove for nothing more than his fare in and out of town.

So he had gone in in the morning and by the time he was back it was already dark. He was lugging a new unit under his arm, but that was the last thing he was thinking of. Little did anyone suspect what news he was bringing back! He dropped his load beside the front door of the Green House. The Ogoreks were eating their supper. They looked up in surprise at his unexpected entrance.

"Good evening, folks. Excuse me . . ." he said breathlessly.

"Good evening," Ogorek mumbled. "What's up? Been in the city?"

"That's just it. I went in for Mr. Modlibog—but you have no idea. You know what?" He paused to catch his breath. "Some news—the kind it's better not to come upon—"

"But what?" Ogorek broke in impatiently. "Hell, I haven't heard anything out here."

"All right then. Professor Turyn isn't alive anymore—" He looked at each in turn. They were all obviously shocked. Even Pelagia's usually expressionless face was filled with dismay.

Kozik continued, all eyes on him now: "I go in to buy this oven. It didn't look too hopeful at first, but I don't give up easy and finally I find one. A good price too, almost new. Well, I'm going along the street with it—Basket Street, that's where it was—when I notice a crowd standing looking at a poster. Figure it's some new order. So I go over too. Better to know and not get into trouble. But no—I see it's one of them red posters with lots of names. Some more executions announced. So I begin to read too. Yeah—hostages for this and that. All of 'em shot. Well, I'm reading and I get down to T, and suddenly it hits me—'Josef Turyn, teacher, born 1892.' That's exactly the way it was written. Jesus, I say to myself, that's him. Couldn't be no one else, could it now?" Again he paused and waited for their reaction.

"Oh my God, oh my God," Pelagia groaned, her hands against her forehead.

"It just don't seem possible," Ogorek said, "a clever dog like him. A real shame. He always knew what he wanted and didn't seem to have a worry in the world. And now look. Well, the only way to help him now is with a collection for his missus and a

special mass. That's how it is." He picked up his spoon and turned to his soup again.

"That's right. His widow's got to be told, Mr. Ogorek. You'll be doing that?"

Ogorek grimaced. "Why in hell should it be me? You read it, didn't you? Well—so you go. That's right—she should know right away. Here she's waiting and waiting for him, and he's already under ground. Yeah, you go tell her how. That'll give her the night to cry it out and then it'll be over. Best way."

Actually Kozik wasn't averse to telling Mrs. Turyn. It was he who had found out, so why shouldn't he get the credit for it? "If there's no other way, I'll do it. Someone has to." He turned. "So good night now." And he went.

He knocked at the cottage. Mrs. Turyn opened the door. Seeing Kozik, she smiled, but almost at once her expression changed, becoming tense and fearful. "Please come in. But what is it?"

He closed the door behind him. "Let's go on to the living room, Mrs. Turyn," he said solemnly. There he told her the bad news. He was surprised how quietly she seemed to accept it. She simply bowed her head as she stood by the table. "Yes," she said almost inaudibly. "I knew it would be something like this."

"It's a terrible tragedy, Mrs. Turyn. War . . . there must have been almost a hundred names on that poster. They did in a lot of good people. I heard they were shot near the station. I don't know for sure, but that's what people were saying—"

As he spoke she suddenly sat down at the table and buried her face in her arms. She groaned and her shoulders trembled. He waited awkwardly, wondering what to do. When she raised her head again her face was so blanched he was alarmed. Where could he get a doctor at this hour? He touched her arm lightly: "Mrs. Turyn, why don't you lie down for a bit, huh?"

She shook her head, and standing up, made no attempt to hide her tears. "I thought I was prepared. But when it actually comes, it's hard to accept it, even so. You're so completely helpless. All you can say is that it was God's will."

Kozik decided to leave: it would be best for her to be alone now. There was nothing more he could do. But he wanted somehow to express his sympathy. "Tomorrow morning I'll bring over some goat's milk. The best thing to make you feel stronger." Seeing her shake her head, he added: "It's real good, Mrs. Turyn, and just the thing you need. That's what they give to sick people.

Anyway, if you need anything, just let me know. I'm at your service anytime. It ain't easy for a lone woman and you can count on me and Anna—" He broke off, aware that she was finding it more and more difficult to control herself. Perhaps it would be best to let her cry it out by herself. He said good-by softly and tiptoed out through the hall.

8

Turyn's death had a disturbing effect upon Malinka. Suddenly the horror of war had brushed close to his own life. Only a few days ago this man had made him feel like a whipped dog, and now he no longer existed. Malinka regretted the bitter things he had thought about Turyn. He was ready to forgive all his faults—his lack of generosity, his vulgar behavior. But with Helena sitting opposite him at the table, it was difficult not to keep seeing—and remembering—the Professor at his worst.

"Why are you so quiet?"

"That was very upsetting news—Turyn was my friend," he said without glancing up.

"I'm sorry, too. He could be a swine, but he wasn't a bad guy —as men go."

He didn't answer. But by the time they had finished supper, he decided to get the rest of his belongings from across the Lane the first thing in the morning and tell Mrs. Turyn how badly he felt. That was the least he could do.

He was startled by how old she looked; her eyes were sunk, bloodshot, her nose more peaked than ever. He bowed formally. "Please accept my condolences. I was terribly sorry to hear the awful news about your husband."

"So you already know?"

"Yes. Bad news always flies fast." He didn't know how to go on, but after an interval he added: "I came to take the rest of my things. They probably disturb you."

"No, not at all. But please do come and sit down a moment. I feel frightfully alone . . ." She started to cry but quickly controlled herself. "I'm sorry. I'm afraid I'm at the end of my rope. It's not until something like this happens that we realize how close to the edge we are in times like these. But tell me—where are you living now?"

Malinka flushed. "Temporarily with a friend. After the first I'll have my own room."

"I'm completely at my wit's end, Mr. Malinka. What am I to do? We had no savings. He didn't have a steady income. I can't stay on here."

He nodded with a troubled expression. But what advice could he give?

"I couldn't sleep a moment all night. It's all so sudden. I know I have to start all over. What is gone . . ." She began to cry again. After a pause she managed to go on: "Whatever people may say, he was a good husband to me. He concerned himself a lot about his home and me . . . oh God . . ." Again, she broke down.

He shifted awkwardly. The conversation was becoming intolerable. He glanced surreptitiously at his watch. If only he could find the right moment to say good-by and leave. Again she was speaking: "I have a brother in Radom, and I thought of going to live with him. That would seem logical, but what about this house? I can't just leave it unoccupied. Do you think you could try to find a tenant for me? I'd rent it very cheaply just for the sake of knowing it was being cared for. All I ask is that they are honest and responsible people, because I'll have to leave most of my personal things behind—and all the furnishings of course. Don't you know anyone?"

"No—no, I don't. I'd have to ask around. Maybe through the store in town. I'll tell Nowak anyway."

"What about you? Have you actually rented the room in town yet? Why couldn't you live here instead? If it was you I wouldn't even want any rent."

"Thank you, it's very kind of you. But, really, I couldn't." But, even as he refused, he was thinking, what an incredible opportunity —the solution to all his problems! And yet it was impossible. How could he stay on the Lane after all that had happened? "No, Mrs. Turyn," he said again, more wistfully than he realized, "there are a number of reasons why I couldn't."

"Do consider it carefully. It would be a great relief to me."

"Oh it's not that I wouldn't like to. I never even dreamed of such a home, but I just can't at present . . ." He noticed that she wasn't listening, but was staring absently through the window.

And then she said in a remote and distant voice that was somehow even beyond sadness, "I was thinking how strange life is. It goes on quietly day after day year after year, and it seems it will always be just the same. Then—a bolt out of the sky—and

everything is gone beyond recall. The strange thing is that we see it striking all around us, but we close our eyes and convince ourselves that to us it will never happen. Maybe that's our most precious weakness. Do you think so?"

Malinka was touched, but even more embarrassed. "Yes," he mumbled. "I'm sure you're right. I never thought of it just that way."

"I know you're in a hurry, but you're the only one here I can talk to. You were his friend. And you probably realized that I wasn't the most fortunate of women in my marriage. But I felt grateful to him nonetheless. He gave me a reasonably good life. I couldn't really complain . . . Oh I know very well about his weaknesses, but who is without any? He was unfaithful to me. You probably were aware of that too—don't feel you have to deny it. It was never really important. I never tried to know what he did or whose company he kept. What counted was that he always managed to give me a feeling he would never let me down. That was a lot. I lived like a person who closes her eyes and imagines herself in a lovely garden. He always took great care not to disturb that image, and for me it was better to leave it that way, too. Even now . . ."

Malinka could bear no more. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Turyn, but I must go. But I'll ask around at the store today, and I'll come by tomorrow to let you know if I've heard of someone."

"But see if you can't possibly take it yourself. I would be so relieved—"

Her persistence irritated him for the simple reason that her proposal was so impossible, but so tempting! "I'll see. I just don't know. I'll come by tomorrow for sure anyway."

9

That evening when Malinka casually mentioned Mrs. Turyn's offer, Helena was beside herself with excitement. "She was serious, you're sure? A real house! How soon can we move? Imagine, a whole house—and we didn't even have a room!" Suddenly she became aware of his apathy. "But what's the matter?"

Malinka felt cornered. During the day he had begun to question his out-of-hand rejection of Mrs. Turyn's offer. He couldn't let such an opportunity go by in circumstances such as his. Ogorek? To hell with him. He wasn't afraid of him anymore. He had as much right to live on the Lane as anyone else. Of course without

Helena. She would understand that, and he'd help her find something in town.

But he hadn't been quick enough, and before he knew it, it had all gone differently. How could he tell her to her face now that he was moving in, but she was not? Sulkily, he realized that again his entire future was slipping from his grasp.

After searching his face for a moment, Helena said, "You worry too much. You've got to accept, and quick!" Her eyes narrowed a bit. "If it's me that bothers you, you can always say you're simply renting one of the rooms to me. If Ogorek can, why can't you? No one will know how it really is."

"They'd soon know," he said childishly. "They'd keep snooping until they did know."

"So what. What do you care about them? Everyone has a right to live like he wants."

Actually, wasn't she right? Why should he care what people thought? He didn't owe them a thing. They laughed at him, treated him like an outcast, ignored him. Yet what had he ever done wrong? To hell with you all, he thought with mounting anger. I don't need you and never will. And this is the way I'll prove it.

He made up his mind. Not only would he accept Mrs. Turyn's offer, but he would openly live there with Helena. He nodded: "Yes, you're right, and I'll go over first thing tomorrow and tell her."

Later, when he tried to embrace her, he couldn't understand why she rebuffed him.

10

Mrs. Turyn was greatly relieved at his decision, and again said he could live there free of rent. He wouldn't agree, however, and in the end they settled on a nominal sixty zlotys a month. Then and there they made an inventory and established his responsibilities, and formalized it in a written agreement between them. Of course he didn't say a word about Helena. It was arranged he would take over on the following day by which time she hoped to be packed and ready to go.

At the store he arranged with Nowak to take two days off—"My wife and I are moving to a new house"—and the next morning he went quite openly across to the Turyn cottage without the pretense of coming from Warsaw. Mrs. Turyn was busy in the last stages of packing; a big basket and two old-fashioned trunks

stood ready in the dining room. She asked him to give her a hand at storing away the rest of her personal things. It was noon by the time they finished. He went off to the station and returned with a man and pushcart.

At last everything was ready. She put on her hat and coat, and struggled for some time getting on her gloves. "They've shrunk, and I guess my hands aren't what they used to be," she said apologetically. She even forced a smile, but as she started toward the door, tears suddenly ran down her face. She began to pull off the gloves she had put on with such difficulty and, holding her handkerchief against her eyes, cried softly.

Malinka stood beside her, embarrassed and vaguely ashamed. Here he was profiting from another's misfortune, and on top of that burning with impatience to be master of his own house at last. With her, despair; with him, anticipation. With her, the end of what had been her life; with him, a wonderful new beginning. If only she would go, and he could forget how all this had come about.

At last she pulled herself together. She refused his offer to accompany her to the station. "No—thank you just the same—let's say good-by here."

He didn't insist. Politely he remained standing at the door until she had disappeared around the corner. Then he hurried inside and went from room to room, just to get the feel of it: his own place, ready to live in, fully furnished, a real home. He sprawled in a chair for a few minutes, happy as a child.

Then he hurried across the Lane to get Helena. Proudly he led her around the house as she examined everything with delight. They decided to move her things over immediately.

Kozik appeared and stared at what was going on, almost unable to believe his eyes. When Malinka passed him with a load, he tugged at his sleeve. "Hey—what's up here? You come out from the city just now? And she . . ." He nodded in the direction of Helena disappearing into the cottage.

"No. I was living on the Lane all the time," Malinka said, with something of a swagger.

"Here—all the time? But where?"

"In the room next to yours."

Kozik pushed his cap back incredulously, an admiring grin spread over his face. "Pretty smart! Right in the hole of the tooth

in the dragon's mouth." He shook his head, laughing. "Boy, wait till the old bastard gets wind of this!"

11

Ogorek tried hard to appear indifferent. "To hell with Malinka. What's it to me where people live?" But he couldn't resist asking, "He moved back out here together with that old battle-ax of his?"

This was just what Kozik had been waiting for. "No—with Helena." He waited gleefully for the impact.

"Helena?"

"The Quail—none other."

"Jesus!" Ogorek's simulated indifference vanished. In a voice tight with anger he fired one question at Kozik after another. But Kozik would say little, only that without doubt Malinka had moved into Turyn's house with Helena.

The moment he was alone, he found sitting behind the counter unbearable. He came out and paced back and forth in front of the kiosk. Finally, without even waiting for the evening trains, not even bothering to take the more valuable items home overnight, he closed up and headed for the Lane.

Pelagia confirmed what had happened. She had seen the move through the window with her own eyes. "Do you know where he's been hiding all this time? Right under our nose here, in this house, with that woman!" She had been on the point of saying "whore" but restrained herself out of deference to Genia in the next room. The girl was lying there, wailing.

This was too much for Ogorek. They'd all be the laughingstock of the neighborhood. In his rage, he again turned on Genia as the cause of everything. Not only had she been caught publicly chasing after a married man, but now it turned out he was nothing more than a pimp living off whores. How had she dared! He started for her room. But Pelagia barred the way, and when he tried to push past her began screaming stridently. Karol rushed from his own room, unable to understand what the scene was all about. His mother had to explain. Ogorek gave in and dropped sullenly into the chair by the table.

Actually, Pelagia was as outraged by the latest development as her husband was, only her first concern had been to protect Genia. Alone in their bedroom later that evening, however, she began hectoring him: "Mr. Malinka is a disgrace to our Lane—

trying to take advantage of our daughter, driving out his wife, moving in with a whore. He must of known her all along, that's sure. How else would he have slipped so suddenly to her upstairs? No, Josef, it can't go on this way. Either he has to go or we must, I'm telling you. Go talk to them over at the police station. Maybe they'll find some excuse to make them vacate, both of them. Or if that doesn't work, give them two or three thousand to clear out themselves. That's cheaper than us having to go. All right, Genia brought it on herself, but we can't just leave it this way. He's the sort that needs every zloty he can lay his hands on, and with a little money they'll move away. It's up to you, Josef."

12

The next morning when Helena stopped at the kiosk to hand in her key, Ogorek snarled, "Listen here young lady, you ought to be ashamed hanging around with such a little shit—excuse the word but that's just what he is. Don't you see he's only out to use you? I've known about him a long time and you better watch your step. He's always after some woman to use. All you'll do is work for him till you're done in and then he'll throw you out. Why the hell, when you've managed on your own so long, do you pick up with a pimp like him?"

Helena quietly listened, her contempt growing more visible. "Thank you so much, Mr. Ogorek, for your advice," she said sarcastically. "Just what I was looking for. I could give you some too, but I won't waste my breath." She turned abruptly, and flounced on across the tracks.

He watched her angrily. A whore, and I just bet she thinks she's in love. He closed the kiosk and walked briskly over to the police station. Sergeant Wrona was on duty. Only after he had presented him with a small bottle of vodka and a box of cigarettes did Ogorek complain about the new tenants in the Turyn cottage.

Sergeant Wrona shrugged his shoulders. "What can we do, Mr. Ogorek? Can't sign him up as unemployed for forced labor in Germany. He's got a steady job at his Co-op. And her—there's no regulation against her living where she wants. If there'd been a break—something stolen—on the Lane, it would be different. We could claim one of them did it, but this way I'm helpless."

Thoroughly frustrated, Ogorek returned to the kiosk. Wrona was right—that was the worst of it. There was no way of forcing

him out. The only solution was to try to make a deal with him. But a dog as clever as he seemed to be couldn't be bribed with a few zlotys.

Later that morning Kozik stopped by to report how Malinka and the girl were fixing up the cottage inside. "Doing more than the Professor did in all these years. Guess they're planning on staying there a nice little while." Ogorek almost smacked him in the face. Was everyone trying to rub his nose in it? Somehow, one way or another, that swine had to be driven from the neighborhood.

Toward evening Inspector Krupa sauntered up to the kiosk. It was the beginning of the month and time for his cut—two thousand zlotys for Krupa himself and an array of groceries for his German masters, Golke and Weber at Otwock. Ogorek paid willingly enough; it was a small tribute in return for being left in peace.

Krupa leaned on the counter, jovial and intimate as usual. "How's business, friend Ogorek? Everything quiet as a Sunday in Jutrosin, what? Not a thing of interest to anyone?"

"No, Mr. Krupa—dull as ever." Ogorek poured him his customary glass of vodka, and put a thick slice of ham on a slice of bread.

Agent Krupa emptied the glass and settled down to eat as Ogorek poured him a second vodka. "Important to keep your eyes open all the time, friend Ogorek." As he again downed the liquor, the wart on his nose reddened perceptibly. "Fine vodka! You know me—always vodka or cognac. Got no use for anything else—isn't that so?" Ogorek took the hint and refilled the glass. Krupa shifted to a new tack. "You know—I'll tell you something. It's still a great secret—the Germans let me in on it. The Fuehrer has a new weapon all set to go. A lot of fools thought they could beat him, and look where it's gotten us. If they'd listened to me instead and co-operated, we'd all be in on the ground floor now—isn't that so? All the troublemakers, we'll catch them. They hurt all of us—right? You know better. You know where the future lies, who holds the cards, and so you're able to do business undisturbed—isn't that so?" Again he drank happily. "But tell me, heard of any Jews around?"

"No."

"Oh friend Ogorek, you never know anything. That's not good either. Golke could get the idea you're both this way and that. I say, always stick with the Fuehrer. It won't be so long and you'll

feel fine that the Germans took over here. You'll see how smooth it goes . . ." He launched into a long eulogy on German orderliness and stability.

Ogorek pretended to listen, but in fact his mind was on something else. He fixed another sandwich and poured more vodka. He hated this man, but he was also afraid of him. Everyone knew whom he worked for and he fooled no one. Yet if you wanted to be left in peace, make a living, you had to pay his price. Even though he chattered like a fool and no one believed him, there was no other way.

In spite of all this, it had occurred to Ogorek that Krupa could be used. If he should drop just a single hint about Malinka to this man, everything could be cleared up once and for all. It was a great temptation, but Ogorek hesitated. What if Krupa began to talk with a few drinks under his belt and it got out that he was the one who had put the agent on Malinka's track. But was there any other chance to get rid of him? Otherwise they'd be stuck with the pair for good. He kept on vacillating, refilling Krupa's glass and drawing him out to gain time. Finally he made up his mind.

"There is one small thing, Mr. Krupa, I want to draw your attention to. There's kind of a suspicious fellow right on our Lane. People come to him after dark for no good reason. They whisper and do things and behave kind of suspiciously. Maybe there's nothing to it, but one never can tell. I'd keep an eye on him anyway if I was you. His name is Sigmunt Malinka, and he lives opposite me—Number 4."

Krupa took out a soiled notebook and started jotting down: "How was that? Ma . . . lin . . . ka, did you say? All right, we'll fix him. Maybe Jewish too?"

Ogorek was alarmed. "No, no. I just think it's no good for a neighborhood to have anyone at all suspicious in times like this."

"And you don't have anything more on him?" Krupa was clearly disappointed.

"What more could I know? I don't hide under people's beds. All I'm saying is it might be better for him to go and work in Germany for a while instead of hanging around here. Make himself useful —that's all. They need workers there."

"We'll know how to deal with him, friend Ogorek. That's our job. Meanwhile keep your eyes and ears open. If you should hear of any Jews, let me know quick. That's my special job now."

5

THE MAN WITH THE RAISED COLLAR

EVERY DAY Malinka waited impatiently for closing time at the Co-op, anxious to hurry home to help Helena fix up the cottage. She was indefatigable. Wearing a cap made of newspaper and her skirt tied above her knees, she met him at the door and proudly showed him what she had accomplished that day. The whole kitchen was soon whitewashed. Then the dining room re-emerged in light green, and the bedroom, she insisted, could only be pink. Dubiously he submitted to her enthusiasm, while he himself concentrated on what seemed much more important: painting the badly worn floors and repairing the leaking roof.

About this time two pleasant surprises made him feel sure that at long last his luck had finally changed. One morning when he arrived at the store Nowak reported: "We've accumulated some extra stock and a cash bonus here. Keep it to yourself of course." He handed him six hundred zlotys and told him there'd be some flour, bacon, sugar, grain, coffee, and even lard to take home the next day. Malinka was mystified how this had come to pass, but accepted the windfall gladly without further questions. The second bit of news was that his instructorship in the underground had come through and with it an unofficial commission as a second lieutenant. At first he was a little frightened, but this quickly gave way to pride and a sense of pleasure in his increased stature.

The next morning Helena accompanied him into the city to help carry home the grocery bonus. He had planned for her to wait on the corner while he brought the things to her, but as they left the train at the East Station he changed his mind. Nowak had

never seen Matylda and knew nothing about his personal life. So he took Helena right to the store and introduced her as his wife. After she had gone, Nowak shook his head in admiration: "Quite a dish, Malinka, quite a dish. How long have you been married?"

Malinka stammered, about to give his and Matylda's wedding date, but fortunately he caught himself in time, realizing that Helena was much too young. "Just before the war," he muttered lamely.

This incident helped a little in easing his recurrent sense of degradation. Of what real significance was her past, even her obvious low origin, compared to the fact that she was good and young and attractive, and that he felt contented with her? He even tried to persuade himself that they had a common bond: both were victims of evil people. It didn't work entirely, however. There were moments—especially out on the Lane—when he winced at the thought that everyone knew what she was and snickered behind his back. He tried to argue that it didn't matter what people thought, but it did matter; he couldn't bear the sense of being an outcast.

He tried to conceal his sense of inferiority by aggressive self-assertion. I spit at all of you with your smugness, he said to himself. Who of you would have had it in you to reach a helping hand to a fallen woman and pull her out of the gutter? But usually his effort to force contempt for others in the end gave way to contempt for himself: leading two lives, professing two moralities. He should be ashamed to impose himself on the store, fooling Nowak and the customers with his mild air, his courtesy and deference.

Thus he swung from one extreme to the other. Whenever he seemed to have reached a certain contentment, some small encounter—imagined or real—threw him off balance again. Generally, he tried to avoid people from the Lane. If he saw one of them on the train he pretended not to notice them. If this was impossible, he simply stared without a sign of recognition, all the time trembling inwardly with humiliation.

One day on the way back from the city, he saw Genia for the first time since that fatal afternoon. She was standing beside the kiosk talking to someone. She noticed him as he passed and flushed deeply, quickly turning away. He was painfully aware of his old yearning for her. How infinitely happy he would be now if it were

Genia living with him instead of Helena. The encounter continued to oppress him even back at the house. Maybe he should break with everything even now. Leave the place to Helena and start a new life elsewhere, without all the constant reminders, the endless self-reproach. Yet a few hours later in their bedroom, he turned to Helena with renewed warmth. Young, pretty, good—what more could he want? And beyond that, had he ever had a place like this and been cared for with such devotion? To hell with all of them.

2

Ogorek prided himself on his practical nose and his quick adaptability to any situation. It was inevitable that he should gradually come to accept Malinka's continued presence on the Lane. He had done what he could, and now the most important thing was to have the whole affair forgotten. When someone touched upon it nonetheless, he firmly shifted the conversation.

He got Karol to write out an advertisement in duplicate: ROOM TO RENT. INFORMATION AT KIOSK AT THE CROSSING. One he posted at the station, the other on the side of the kiosk itself. He also tackled the question of Genia. It was time she pulled herself together and got back to work. She didn't want to go back, but finally even her mother agreed she had sulked in her room long enough.

Actually it wasn't as bad as Genia had feared. For an hour or two she had felt miserably self-conscious, but when no one seemed to be amused at her expense or even paid any special attention to her, she felt reassured. By the second day she was back in her old routine.

A fresh element of interest for her was the newcomers up the Lane. Every time any of them went by, she watched them curiously. The one who impressed her most was the elegant gentleman who often accompanied Roman Orlowski to town. Handsome, self-possessed, dashing, he reminded her of a movie star. Whenever he stopped for some cigarettes, she felt shy and expectant. On one occasion as she served him she felt his eyes upon her and blushed. He smiled and said, "I had no idea there were any women as lovely as this in Jutrosin," and again his gaze lingered upon her.

As she watched him continue on his way to the platform, she felt a shiver of delight run up her spine. Had he meant what he

said? Would he speak again to her, and was it possible for such a man to be interested in her, a girl selling cigarettes?

The days took on new meaning. She hurried to the kiosk after breakfast to be sure to be there when Mr. Rakowicz went by. His interest was unmistakable. Increasingly he made a point of stopping and exchanging a few words with her. As a result her hours at the kiosk turned into a world of dreams. She saw herself at the side of this handsome and mature man in a palace—servants, elaborate furniture, cars. But what about her family? They could never be a part of that world. To try to fit them in destroyed the whole illusion. She felt a pang of regret—it would mean turning her back on her mother, never seeing her again. But there would be no other way . . .

"Good morning, Miss Genia. More charming than ever." It was he. Only yesterday he had asked her Christian name and said how nice it sounded.

She blushed. "Good morning."

"A box of cigarettes, please. Good. I've been thinking about you. Tomorrow is Sunday. Could you get away? Make an expedition into the city with me?"

She was completely overcome, thrilled, confused, alarmed. But obviously she couldn't. There would be a terrible scene if her father discovered, and he was bound to. "No . . . I'm sorry but I can't. My father isn't well and I have to help out. Maybe another time."

"I see you're a conscientious woman," he said with a little grin. "Usually pretty girls are anything but."

"I like doing my bit, and there's no hardship for me in that," Genia said primly.

"But there must be time for fun too. Perhaps we could go to Leokadia's sometime. It would be a change at least. It's even possible to dance a little in the back room."

"Yes, that would be nice . . . but today I really can't."

Rakowicz went on his way. She felt a little let down—why hadn't he stayed longer? But the world was a wonderful place nonetheless.

It was that same evening that Malinka walked past her as she was talking to a customer out beside the kiosk—their first encounter since that awful Sunday. Seeing him pass, casual and indifferent, she began to tremble with anger and frustration. Tears came to her eyes. Every night from now on she would pray to God to punish him.

3

Ogorek was alone at the kiosk when at last a potential tenant for his empty room showed up. It was getting dark and the platform was practically deserted. The man came close to the window and asked for the address of the person who was renting the room.

With a practised eye Ogorek looked at the threadbare coat with its upturned collar, the worn hat pulled down over a pale broad face, at the nose flattened as if the bridge had been crushed by a blow. And the eyes? Dark, shifting, frightened. All in all, hardly prepossessing. And yet after four years of war you had to make allowances. A lot of people had fear in their eyes these days.

"For yourself?"

"Yes, for me."

"Single?"

"No, I have a family—wife and child."

"It's just one room, the kitchen stove right in it. Water from a well in the yard. Latrine. We're out in the country here."

"I don't need more. That sounds all right. Is it far from here?"

"What are you, a dealer?"

"No, I'm a weaver—horsehair weaving."

"Good occupation—only now you have to watch out not to get caught. Hair weaving's forbidden."

"What isn't?"

"Do you work for yourself?"

"No, not at present. I'm in a workshop in the city."

"Is there good money in horse weaving?"

"Oh yes. Only like everything else, it takes capital. Horsehair is high, and then there's the loom. All of it needs money to be on your own."

"When did you want the room?"

"I could move in this evening."

"Now, right away?" Ogorek was amazed.

"Yes, there's still time to go in and get back on the last train. This evening would be fine."

"No place at the moment?"

"Actually—no. We were staying at friends', but yesterday relatives turned up. From the East, with no place to go. So I had to give up our room."

"And your things?"

"I haven't much. I can bring it all along."

"Been bombed out?"

"No—I'm from Lodz. The Germans made us leave everything behind."

"Out here we're lucky. Rarely catch sight of a German."

"Really? You're very fortunate."

"Sure thing . . . Well, would you like to see it?"

"Yes, I would . . ." He looked at his watch. "I have twenty minutes before the next train."

"I don't know if the rent'll suit you."

"How much are you asking?"

"Though it's only one room, it's comfortable and can be had furnished."

"It's something furnished I'm looking for."

"It comes a little more that way of course. I'll let it go for a hundred and fifty a month."

"That's a lot, but we'll see."

"I'd also want three months' advance."

"I can pay in advance."

"And what's your name?"

"Stork . . . Mieceslaw Stork."

"Hm . . . with a name like that you'll be scarin' off all the girls. Your documents all right?"

"Yes, of course."

"All right then. Come and take a look. I've got to close up here first. It's not far."

4

The new tenant moved in that same evening. He knocked so softly on Ogorek's door that Ogorek at first didn't hear him. But then, key in hand, he led the way up the stairs with a candle. He was curious, but there was not much to see: a woman with a small boy, both so wrapped up that even their faces were hardly visible, a battered suitcase, and a big bundle.

As he unlocked the door he asked: "Is that all you have?" He was suspicious on principle of anyone with few possessions.

"I only brought essential things now," the new tenant answered almost defensively. "Tomorrow I'll fetch the rest."

Leaving the woman and boy in the room, the two men went downstairs again to get a metal bedstead from the storage shed.

In the attic Ogorek found a worn old mattress. He rather expected grumblings, but the newcomers seemed quite indifferent.

Kozik appeared and offered to lend a hand setting up the bed. Ogorek, after one last appraising look around, went back downstairs. Obviously some poor wretches, he thought. The devil knew whether he'd ever get the rent out of them regularly. He should have been more careful. There were enough headaches without adding further ones gratuitously.

Kozik continued to be helpful, using the occasion to learn a little about the newcomers—where they were from, Stork's trade, why they had moved out to Jutrosin. He always liked to be well informed, and the new tenant's evident reticence didn't faze him in the least. And what about coal—would he be needing any? Yes, certainly. He hurried out to his shed compartment and returned with a bucketful. "For tonight that should do. Tomorrow I'll bring more."

Madey stopped in the door on his way to his night shift. Seeing Kozik, he ventured in, too, and looked around. He glanced briefly at the man, but the thing that struck him was the woman. Instead of bustling around and getting settled she was sitting passively near the blacked-out window, her back to them. She might at least have gone to get some water. Instead it was her husband who borrowed a pail from Kozik and went down in the yard himself.

For a while Madey and Kozik stood their ground. The new tenant asked about various things, but it was clear it was mainly not to seem unneighborly. Probably the move had tired them all. Madey tugged at Kozik's sleeve. They said good night and left.

They stopped a moment at Kozik's door. "Kind of strange," Madey commented in a low voice.

"Bound to feel a little lost at first in a new place."

"What about the wife—is she sick or something?"

Kozik nodded: "Yeah, he said she and the kid ain't well. It don't take much to see they got nothing. But he says he's a weaver—horsehair. Should be money in that."

"Yeah, that always sells. Probably it's her. If a wife don't know how to look after things and be thrifty, the whole family goes without shoes, no matter what. That's how it is."

"To hell with it." Kozik wanted to turn in. "There's every sort of person in the world, and there's no way to make them all the same."

6

FEAR

PELAGIA heard the truck first. Sleepily she wondered what it was doing out this way so late at night. Before she could decide to awaken Josef, she realized it was stopping directly in front of their house. Voices . . . German . . . She felt paralyzed, afraid to move, even to breathe. Then she shook her husband frantically.

"What? What the hell's the matter?"

"Ssssh! Quiet! Don't you hear? Germans!"

"What Germans? Don't talk nonsense."

"Ssssh, not so loud, Josef. Listen. They're right below the window. They came in a truck," she whispered.

Ogorek sprang out of bed. There was no telling what trouble these young people could bring on everyone with their stupid underground activities. What if Karol were involved in something? He wouldn't put it past him.

"Get up," he whispered hoarsely.

"But why?"

"Get up, woman, for God's sake. I've got a wad of bills to hide. If they find it, it'll be gone. Quick."

Awkwardly she scrambled to her feet. She heard the bed being pushed. A floor board creaked in the corner as it was removed. She sagged into a chair, trembling all over. "Mother of God . . ." she groaned, and then whispered, "Look through the window, Josef."

At this moment the motor started up again. Ogorek pulled aside a corner of the black-out paper. "They're heading on up the Lane. Probably after young Orlowski. He's up to his neck in that damn underground."

"Mother of God . . . Mother of God."

"No sense groaning that way." Ogorek began to relax. "Go back to bed. Go . . . go. I'll watch a bit still—maybe I'll notice something on their way out."

But Pelagia was too unnerved to lie down. She began to pray. After a while she asked: "Are they still up there?"

"Yeah. The devil knows what they're up to. Maybe making a search."

"Mother of God, Mother of God . . . Maybe they're goin' to do all the houses. Maybe you better run to the forest?"

He was becoming nervous again, too, in spite of himself. "Listen, Pelagia. If they should nab me, you go to Otwock, find that German—Golke's his name, don't forget, Golke. The one who gets a cut every month from me. Tell him what happened. Maybe he could help."

"But I don't know a word of German. Mother of God . . ."

"Not a sound up there. And can't see a thing either." He was cold and tired. There was nothing to do but wait and hope. He felt his way back to sit on the edge of the bed.

2

The new tenant, Mieceslaw Stork, never got to bed until very late. There were always some outdoor chores to be done—the things Giza should avoid—the daily load of water and coal to bring up, garbage and slops to be emptied, kindling wood to be cut. When everyone else had already retired, his steps could still be heard on the creaky stairs. "My wife is ailing," he explained to the others who were surprised never to see her around. "She is too weak, and so I have to do everything myself. The boy isn't well either. It's been quite a struggle with him."

This particular night Stork was in bed, but he was still wide awake. He always had difficulty these days getting to sleep. No wonder. He almost envied the other two whose heavy breathing he could hear in the dark beside him. He lay near the outer edge, trying not to move. Giza slept fitfully, and if she once woke up it took her a long time to drop off again. And invariably she would discover he was awake and start to ply him with the same senseless speculations: wouldn't it have been better this way or that?

She could go on tormenting him and herself for hours before he was able to get her to sleep once more. He had to be careful and patient—the smallest thing made her cry, and then it took ages to calm her. Poor Giza. He wasn't blaming her. Who wouldn't be

unnerved in such circumstances. How often his own thoughts had taken him to the edge of despair.

He was wondering how much longer he could lie in this position without having to move when he heard something. He held his breath. A motor . . . a truck—he was sure of it. He could hear the gears shift as it was driven through the sand.

A truck on a sandy road, ever louder—it could only be coming here. There was no other place to go. A twinge near his heart made him jerk, he could hear himself panting.

The drone became increasingly distinct. Cautiously he let his legs down over the side. His hands were trembling. His mouth was dry. He tiptoed, feeling his way, to the window. He pulled back the black-out paper a little . . . There—two tiny beams from the slits of obscured headlights.

Time was running out: quickly, what should he do? Unable to think, he felt for his trousers and pulled them on. In his haste he had forgotten his underpants. So what. He felt his way back to the bed and gently shook Giza's shoulder.

"What's happened?"

"A car, Giza. Don't be afraid." How much easier it was this way when she couldn't see him. "I thought it was better to wake you. But I'm sure it's nothing dangerous. Listen."

They both held their breath. The truck seemed almost under their window. Suddenly it stopped, the motor idling. She felt for his hands and her fingernails dug into his flesh. In his absorption he hardly felt the pain. Both were straining for every sound. Any moment there would be banging on the house door. Then the rush of hobnailed boots up the stairs. Then . . .

What was the delay? Above the idling motor they could hear voices. Again they held their breath; but the voices were receding. A scraping of gears, a sharp rising whine. Then leveling off, softer, farther away . . .

She jerked at his hand. "Have they gone?"

"Yes. Yes, they've gone." The sound of his hushed voice seemed far away to him, as if it weren't his at all.

She moaned. He sat down on the edge of the bed and covered his face with his hands. How lucky she couldn't see him. His sense of relief was almost unbearable. He mustn't let go. So they hadn't been interested in this house. So they hadn't . . . an uncontrollable trembling seized his body . . . No, no—don't give in. She mustn't notice.

"Giza, you see . . ." he said softly. "You see I was right. I told you it was nothing."

3

Kozik was a light sleeper and the sound of the motor awoke him at once. He listened a moment, then jumped out of bed. He peeked out through a crack in the window covering, and immediately realized that they were Germans. Someone on the Lane was going to get it, that was sure. Or maybe they'd haul in all of them? Feverishly he began to dress.

"Anna."

"What?"

"Germans." He could hear her sitting up quickly. "No, don't get up. Pretend you're sleeping. I'll climb out on the roof beside the chimney. If something happens, just say I'm not home. Pretend to be awful dumb, that's the best. Lock the door behind me and pretend you hear nothing. Understand?"

"Yes . . . but, Jan, I'm scared."

Without bothering to answer he felt for his cap and softly opened the door. He was barefoot and moved soundlessly along the hall. He found the ladder, and raising the hatch, clambered into the attic. There he felt for the chimney and the sweep's rickety ladder. Climbing it carefully, he undid the hatch and crept into the crotch between the chimney and roof. A long time ago Kozik had planned this hiding place in case of an emergency.

A cool October wind was blowing. For a while he huddled down, afraid to look over the ridge. Then he slowly raised himself. The dark outline of a military vehicle was already almost abreast of the house. It came to a stop. He ducked; no question about it—a raid of some sort. Now he could hear the short abrupt exclamations in German. They seemed to be spreading around the house, waving flashlights and calling to each other.

It became quieter. Probably they'd gone round to the door. Suddenly the truck started up again. Surprised, he looked over the side. The truck was slowly weaving on up the Lane. He watched curiously—which villa?

As he stared he suddenly felt a draining relaxation, and with it awareness of an uncontrollable need. Quickly he let down his trousers and squatted on the flat piece of roof.

4

They had turned off the light, and were lying in the dark embracing each other silently. His hand moved down the smooth arch of her back as she pressed her mouth hard against his.

Suddenly he pulled away from her. "Stop, Helena," he whispered.

For several moments he had been vaguely aware of some intruding sound, before it dominated his consciousness and drove everything else away. Now as he listened, it was unmistakable. "Do you hear? . . . A truck."

She let go of him and sprang from the bed. "My God, they're coming up the Lane," she whispered from the window.

He scrambled to his feet too. A truck could only mean Germans. He stared out. "Yes, they're coming this way."

"Get dressed, Sigmunt."

"But why? It's unlikely to be for us."

"It's better to be dressed anyway."

He slipped into his pants and then went back to the window. Helena sat down on the bed.

"They're going to the Green House." He returned from the window and sat down beside her. He felt quite calm again. Noticing her trembling, he reassured her: "Don't be afraid. It's not for us. Probably Ogorek, for his black marketing."

"No, no that can't be it. They wouldn't touch him. They know each other too well. It must be someone else."

"Well anyway, it's not for us."

The gears rasped, the motor accelerated. He ran back to the window. "They've gone. They're heading toward the villas."

He stripped off his pants again and climbed back into bed.

"Don't lie down yet, Sigmunt. I'm still scared."

"There's no reason." His hand found her thighs and he tried to draw her down. "Come here beside me," he whispered. "They've gone."

"Wait . . . Maybe so, but I'm still scared."

He gave up and lay back. Something was now happening up at that end—something unpleasant. It couldn't be otherwise. All the more reason to appreciate their own good luck.

5

Irena and Roman Orlowski, Witold Modlibog, and Tadeusz Rakowicz had been playing bridge for over an hour. Modlibog was reading, happily aware of the young people and pleased with their company.

"Pass."

"One no trump."

"Two clubs."

"Stop . . . do you hear?"

"What?"

"Stop. Quiet, quiet." Roman jumped up and hurried out into the hall. He opened the window and peered down the lane, listening. Quickly he returned. "A truck."

"What truck?"

"Who knows? It's standing in front of the Green House, the motor running. I'm going to beat it. It's serious—Germans." Without another word he opened the window on the garden side, jumped out through it and vanished into the night.

Tadeusz got up in such a hurry that he knocked over his chair, but paying no attention to this or to the startled faces of the others, he followed Roman through the window.

Modlibog had laid down his book and looked uncomprehendingly from Witold to Irena and again to Witold. The cold night air spread into the room as the curtains swayed. Suddenly they all turned toward the window. A motor starting up, persisting, growing clearer.

"The Germans are coming here," Witold said hastily. He scooped up the cards and shoved them into a drawer. Then he went over to the window and closed it. "Sit down, both of you. We've got to give the impression of doing something together." Now they could hear the motor through the closed window.

Suddenly Modlibog remembered something. He rushed out to the hall. There in his coat pocket was a copy of the underground newspaper he had borrowed from his barber, Mr. Stefan. How could he have been so careless? He ran over to the Dutch cupboard across from the stairs, and kneeling down pushed the paper under as far as he could reach. As he extricated his arm he felt an object which turned out to be a small dusty package, loosely wrapped. Returning to the drawing room, he opened it almost mechanically: booklets. He looked closer: *One Hundred Recipes for Potatoes.*

The second one was about making jams. How in the world had they gotten under there?

Irena and Witold were sitting at the table. He joined them, tremendously relieved at having rid himself of the incriminating material. He indicated the two booklets. "Look, of all things I found these under the cupboard."

Witold paid no attention. "You know, I think the Germans have gone to your parents' house. Otherwise they'd already be at the door."

Modlibog had an idea. He pushed one of the booklets to Irena. "Take it. I'll open this one. We'll pretend we're studying cooking recipes. Maybe I'll read one out loud." He turned to a random page and was about to start when he looked up and stared at the other two in horror.

6

When the doorbell rang, the senior Orlowskis had already retired. "Don't tell me they've forgotten the key again! It's really the limit, Marie. If they want to play cards, all right, but to haul us out of bed . . ."

Again the bell rang, more insistently this time, and it was quickly followed by loud banging. They exchanged a look of alarm. He slipped on his dressing gown, and in his slippers went out into the hall. "Wait, Alexander, I'm coming too." She jumped out of bed and went to the cupboard for her wrapper.

He turned on the hall light. The pounding was louder, more terrifying and—he could hear now—was accompanied by loud cursing in German. He was as frightened as he had ever been in his life, but he had no choice. Mechanically he approached the door and unlocked it, his hands trembling.

The Germans piled in, shouting and stamping. He fell back, staring at the rifles and pistols pointing at him. A sharp blow on the side of his face sent him reeling back against the wall. "*Hände hoch!*"

"*Hände hoch, du Schweinehund. Verstanden?*"

Two of the Germans were frisking his pockets. The rest spread out through the hall, driving Mrs. Orlowska, who had just appeared, back into the dining room. A moment later he had been pushed in there too with the butt of a rifle. They found themselves standing side by side facing the wall, their hands over their heads, afraid to glance at each other, even to whisper a word. Meanwhile

the Germans were roaming about the house, shouting to each other, picking up things and inspecting them, opening doors and pulling out drawers.

An officer came over. "*Ihr Name?*"

"Alexander Orlowski."

"*Ist das Ihre Frau?*" He nodded toward Marie.

"*Ja.*"

The officer looked puzzled and withdrew to consult one of his colleagues. From the drawing room the grand piano suddenly burst into a delicate Mozart minuet.

The officer again approached. "Mr. Orlowski, please come over and sit down." His voice had lost its menacing bark, and sounded almost apologetic. "Your wife may also drop her hands . . . Please excuse the mistake. It's very disagreeable for me. War, sir. It appears our directives were incorrect. I hope you will excuse the inconvenience. I would just like to rest my men a moment, and then we will leave. Is he disturbing you there in the other room? He's a musician at home. Can never resist getting his hands on a keyboard when he sees one. But please be reassured. There's no longer any reason to feel nervous, either of you."

Orlowski started unsteadily for the nearest chair and sank onto it. His complexion was gray. He looked flabby, shrunken, and palsied, without will; his only response to the German was a dull nod.

Mrs. Orlowska recovered first. It was as if she had taken her cue from the strains of music coming from the other room. She heard herself saying to the officer, "Please sit down, all of you." Without being aware of the transition she had somehow become the hostess, rather than the victim. Graciously she indicated chairs to the soldiers. Actually, she was dazed with relief. She had been so sure they had come for Roman!

"Excuse me a moment." She turned to her husband slouched in the chair: "Talk with the gentlemen, Alexander. I'll make some coffee."

The Germans took off their helmets and, leaning their rifles against the wall, sat down around the long dining-room table. Orlowski slowly turned his head toward the drawing room, an expression of recognition passing across his lined face: the "Moonlight Sonata." He stared in surprise. He hadn't been aware of the playing before.

"Do you like Viennese waltzes?"

He jumped, startled. It was the officer who had noticed his gaze. Did he like waltzes? He couldn't make the effort to answer; instead, he nodded. At a word from the officer a soldier went into the other room. "Obermeister Golke says to play a Viennese waltz, Helmuth." There was an abrupt pause in the music and then a lilting tune broke into the silence. The soldiers at the table swayed with delight.

Mrs. Orlowska entered with the coffee. With trembling hands that belied her calm appearance, she filled the small cups. The Germans thanked her and passed the sugar. She glanced at her husband. Two of the Germans were explaining something to him. Occasionally he nodded and answered briefly. The side of his chin was already swollen, and a bluish bruise marked where the blow had landed. For the first time she began to falter in her role. She felt an impulse to turn and yell at them to stop this comedy and get out at once. But fear held her back. She pulled herself together and, smiling, sat down beside her husband.

"*Aufstehen.*" Presently the troopers began to collect their gear and wander toward the entry. The music died out. Obermeister Golke apologized once more. The men filed out into the night and clambered onto their truck. The motor started, drowning out the voices.

"They are looking for that Mr. Malinka," Orlowski said dully, "and got mixed up as to the house."

"You told them where he lives?"

"Yes, otherwise they would have gone next door to the Modlibogs."

He rose and went to the door, following the slow course of the vehicle back down the lane. Visible only as a dark mass now, it stopped again. Vaguely he could sense the forms of the troopers jumping down and running toward the Turyn cottage, and then the unmistakable sound of blows on a door.

He turned and urgently pushed her toward the entry. "I must close the door." Back in the hall he looked around silently—toward the chairs in disarray in the dining room, at the piano in the drawing room. Then he staggered toward the nearest armchair, and sinking into it, burst into tears. "I thought the end had come, Marie—the end. They would torture us—torture us and then kill us." He stopped and looked toward the entry as if trying to listen, to penetrate the night. "Can you hear anything, Marie?"

7

They were lying beside each other absorbed in their own thoughts. Both were relieved but still tense, wondering what might be happening up at the villas, waiting for the sound of the truck passing by on its way out with its as yet unknown new passenger.

"They're on their way out," Sigmunt whispered, hearing the truck start up again. They both listened . . .

Helena caught his arm. "They've stopped here again."

"Yes," he muttered, "but why?" He tried to keep calm—they had done the same thing before and then gone on. Could it possibly be a general roundup—everyone?

There was a clatter of boots outside. Someone rattled the handle of the front door, and almost simultaneously began pounding against it, obviously breaking it down.

Sigmunt and Helena sprang from the bed, both feeling around in the dark for their clothes, afraid to turn on the light.

He hardly knew what he was doing. His teeth began to chatter uncontrollably. The pounding and shouting became still more insistent. He felt for the light switch, found it. He couldn't recall where he had laid his glasses. He wanted to put on his shoes but where were his socks? He gave up and ran barefoot to the hall, Helena close behind him.

The Germans burst through the narrow door. Sigmunt tried to back into the bedroom, but already they were swinging their rifle butts at his head. He tried to shield himself. He found himself sprawling on the floor, hardly aware of how it had happened, being kicked and shouted at to get up. His shirt tightened around his neck as one of them tried to drag him to his feet. Vaguely he was aware of helmeted troopers everywhere, of things being turned upside down, of cupboards and drawers disgorging their contents over the floor, of Helena in her wrapper standing motionless facing the wall, her hands above her head.

"*Name.*"

"Sigmunt Malinka."

"*Kennkarte.*"

He pointed to his jacket hanging over the chair. A trooper dumped the contents of the pockets on the bed and picked out the identity card. It passed from hand to hand.

"*Anziehen.*"

On the floor beside the bed he saw his glasses. He put them on. He found his socks. Only now his mind was beginning to function a little. So he was being taken. Probably all the men on the Lane. But they would let him go again tomorrow. All their ransacking would turn up nothing against him here. He even wanted to tell them it was pointless, but the sentence was beyond him in German. As he tied his shoes and put on his jacket he kept on trying to reassure himself that it was all a mistake. Or if it was a roundup, they would all be victims equally. He felt a little better: at least he wouldn't be alone. But Helena—he had quite forgotten about her. Instinctively, he turned toward where she was still standing against the wall.

"*Schneller.*" One of the troopers started shoving him toward the door. He wanted to get his coat and cap, but his attempt to turn back was misunderstood and led to amused jeers as he was hustled at the double toward the door. On the threshold his arms were suddenly wrenched behind him. He winced as the metal edges of the handcuffs closed and cut into his wrists. In a daze he staggered out to the Lane, surrounded by the Germans.

He stopped in front of the truck. They shouted at him to climb up, but how could he without his hands? He tried, but fell helplessly to the ground. Frantically he got himself back on his feet. Several troopers were up on the truck by now, and reaching down pulled him roughly up over the side. Suddenly a rifle butt struck the side of his face, sending his glasses clattering to the floor of the truck. He gave in to a loud uncontrolled wail of pain. A second blow struck his face. And then he was still only because at that moment he lost consciousness.

8

"Owwh . . . Owwh!"

The piercing cry resounded in the night above the drone of the idling motor and the shouts of the troopers. Pelagia grabbed her head in both hands. "Oh Jesus," she groaned. "Jesus, have mercy on us."

Ogorek was sitting in the dark beside her on the edge of the bed. He put his hands over his face, breathing heavily. He didn't dare move, didn't dare look through the window. Pelagia was praying. Outside the truck began to move away. Ogorek went over and peered out.

"It must have been Malinka. I think they took him. Maybe both

of 'em—the house door's wide open and the light's on inside." For a moment, he even forgot his grudge against the man.

"Maybe someone denounced him because . . ." Pelagia broke off, and then in a changed voice asked sharply: "Maybe you said something to that German of yours? Tell the truth, Josef—did you?"

"Me? I—I mentioned him once to Krupa, but not for anything like this."

"You did it! Jesus! You monster, you'll bring God's punishment on all our heads for this." She began to wail, "Mother of God . . ."

"You gone crazy, woman? All I did was to say once that a stretch of labor in Germany wouldn't hurt him. My word of honor, nothing more. It was you yourself who told me to do something about him. You! I figured all they'd do is make him sign up to go there, that's all."

"No use talking that way, Josef. I know you very well."

"Just shut up a minute. I can't hear a thing outside." He listened a moment. "They've gone." He closed the inner shutters and switched on the light. "And mind you go to bed now. Enough of this stupid talk, you hear?"

"You got no conscience, Josef. You gone and murdered another man. All right, maybe he hurt our daughter, but not in a way to justify something like this. Holy Mary—where's your conscience? God will see that you pay for this."

"Will you shut up? Have you lost your mind? Nobody's murdering anyone, and it was you yourself said I was to go to the police to get this Malinka off the Lane. Forgotten about that, have you? And now it's me that takes the blame—huh? You're the one without conscience, if anyone is. Why are you staring at me like that? Isn't it the truth?"

"Yes, I did. And God, he'll punish me too for my tongue that day. Nothing goes unpunished, Josef."

"You're a goddam fool, that's what you are. Nobody was wanting anything like this to happen, and no one was suggesting it to anyone. Once when Krupa was at the kiosk I said to him: there's a good-for-nothing here on the Lane. Called Malinka. You're always picking decent folk to cart off to Germany—how about taking him instead? We'll have peace round here, and it'll do him good to do some real work for a change, instead of sitting around on his ass and causing trouble. So Krupa says all right, and that's all there was to it."

"You can talk all you want, but if it wasn't more than that they wouldn't have beaten him up that way. You told them more than that—that's sure."

The door of their room creaked. They both turned. It was Karol.

"What do you want? Why aren't you asleep, Karol?" Ogorek said nervously. "Some Germans came this way—so what. They've been and gone—so what. Go to sleep now." Seeing Karol hesitate, he burst out violently: "Did you hear me? I said go to sleep." Pelagia turned and looked at him strangely.

For a moment Karol too stared at his father. Then he backed out and closed the door without a word.

Ogorek turned toward Pelagia. In a hushed but tense voice he said, "And you too, woman, go to sleep." He felt he couldn't stand much more. He didn't want a scene. What he needed was reassurance, to be consoled against the void he felt growing inside him. He wanted above all to have quiet, to be able to lie down in the dark unseen and not speak to a soul. "Sleep, Pelagia," he whispered almost gently. "It's awful what happens in the world. It's enough to make a man lose his grip and want to run away from everything."

Pelagia seemed not to hear at first, fussing on aimlessly around the bed. Then she lay down abruptly and pulled the eiderdown up around her. "Turn off the light, Josef, and pray. Pray hard, there on your knees. Ask God to forgive you, and never speak to me about this again. I know how it was, and don't need none of your explanations. I know you only too well . . ."

7

NEW THREADS

GRADUALLY the Green House settled back to its usual nighttime quiet. Kozik returned from his perch on the roof. A door banged downstairs at the Ogoreks'. Then it became completely still, a night like any other on the Lane.

"There's no sense sitting here, Giza," Stork whispered. "Let's go to sleep." She paid no attention, so he spoke more sharply. She lay down. Then he added more gently: "There's nothing to worry about anymore." She didn't answer—why had he been so sharp? Didn't she always mind him and believe blindly everything he said? He lay down beside her and gently stroked her arm.

Finally she fell asleep. He began to shiver; how completely helpless and dependent on him the two were! If something happened to him, that would be the end of them too. Giza knew this very well.

The worst were the nights, lying awake alone hour after hour with his thoughts. He had to go on fighting because of them—two helpless people, the only ones who mattered, whose continued existence depended upon him as an infant upon his mother. Because of them, he had to decide what he should do next.

After tonight was it wise to remain on this lane? Maybe it was dangerous, but would some other place be better? After all, when he moved here he had been convinced he had found a quiet spot at last where they could hide out to the end of the war. All he could really hope for was luck.

Daybreak—the savior—began to show around the edges of the black-out paper. Cautiously he slipped off the bed. He put on his clothes and sat down on the chair. Repeatedly he looked toward his wife and child to make sure he hadn't disturbed them. A huddled

bundle, only the tops of their heads showing above the blanket. Again and in agony he wondered what would be their fate if the Germans happened to nab him in the city today—any day?

The door of Kozik's apartment squeaked. Stork picked up his pail to go for water, but then stopped. If he went earlier than usual it would be conspicuous. He sat down again. It was almost half an hour before he dared to follow Kozik out into the yard. He drew water and then, seeing his neighbor feeding his animals, approached him. "Good morning. Why aren't you flying your pigeons today?"

"Good morning," Kozik was puzzled by his off-hand manner. "After what happened here during the night?"

Stork feigned surprise. "Something happened? I wasn't aware of anything special." Kozik should think they slept heavily and unconcerned, the way people did who had no special reason to be afraid.

Excitedly Kozik drew him out onto the lane and pointed to the wide deep tracks in the sand. "There you are—that was them. Yes sir, I saw them like no one else. From up there," and he turned and indicated the roof. "Could almost have counted the buttons on their uniforms in the dark." And he embarked on a blow by blow account from the moment of the arrival of the truck to its final departure.

Stork listened, watching Kozik enviously. What did it mean to him? A little fear, a lot of excitement, but, above all, satisfaction at being the eyewitness who had seen everything.

Old Madey appeared on the lane, returning from his night shift. He had seen the Germans go by, but that was all he knew. So Kozik latched onto him and went over the whole story again.

How lucky they were. It was simply an exciting piece of news; there was no reason for them to pull out and run away.

The door of the Turyn cottage opened. Helena appeared completely dressed with coat and kerchief. She was very pale and her eyes were swollen and red. As she turned to go down the lane, Kozik intercepted her. "I want to say how bad I feel, Miss Helena, about them taking him. Can't figure out why."

"How would anyone know? They didn't say a word, they never do. I'm going out to Otwock now. Golke and his gang—that's who was behind it. I'm going to ask them to free him. He's done nothing."

Kozik shook his head dubiously. "If there was money in it for

them, they'd listen. If Ogorek wanted to, he could settle it with a couple of hams and some vodka. But it wouldn't surprise me if he likes the looks of it just this way. No point even going to him."

"I wouldn't think of going near him. Not him . . . so all I can do is try Golke myself. I've got to save him somehow." She turned abruptly and hurried on without even saying good-by.

As they watched her, Madey shook his head. "No matter what she was doing before, she ain't a bad woman. Look how she's thinking all the time only about him. Another woman like her kind would have just sold everything and started looking for a new sucker instead of crying herself sick."

"She's got good reason to," Kozik said. "Thought she'd landed a steady one at last, and then he's suddenly gone. But that Malinka, could there be anyone as unlucky as he is. One thing after another."

2

By midday Helena was back. As usual at this hour the lane was almost deserted. She glanced angrily at the Green House and then at the two villas beyond. What fortunate people to be able to go on as if this were just another day. At Otwock the Germans had made fun of her—"There's a shortage of your kind up at the front. Want us to send you there?"—and told her she'd better keep out of sight if she wanted to keep out of trouble. But as she left in tears, one of them had softened a little: "What's all the fuss, Fräulein? Lots of others are in concentration camps. When the Führer has won we'll let him out again."

These words were her only hope and by now they were almost a conviction. If the Germans said that themselves, it must be so. Sigmunt would be back, and her job was to wait for him.

As she entered the cottage she suddenly wondered how she could stay on here now meanwhile? She walked from room to room. Everything was in frightful disorder—cupboards open, drawers pulled out, things scattered and trampled on. She hung her coat over a chair and mechanically began clearing up. First the Turyn things, then Sigmunt's, finally her own. She brushed his coat carefully and hung it in the cupboard. Perhaps the war really would be over by spring? That's what people said, so why shouldn't it be true? If only there were a way of holding on until then.

When she had finished straightening up, she sat down to rest. And immediately she was again overcome with despair. She had lost everything; she had nothing left to cling to. This feeling was

so overwhelming that for the moment she even lost sight of her conviction that Malinka would eventually return. She was afraid of herself, she doubted in her ability to hold out, not to give in to the habits of her past. But how could she keep herself alive? Where could she go?

Her life had never been easy, but somehow this blow seemed more crushing than anything she had endured before. It had brought the whole structure of her new-found dreams crashing in ruins, and it seemed beyond her strength to do anything about it.

However, Helena was nothing if not a realist. She knew despair would get her nowhere. She tried to pull herself together. The one thing she had to pin her hopes on was that the German had said he would return. All right, then—if he was bound to come back her duty was to hang onto this cottage for him, look after his things, and herself live beyond reproach. She considered her situation soberly: no money, no acceptable way of earning any, no one to help her, only herself.

Suddenly, she had an idea. Why not go to Sigmunt's Co-op store and ask for a job there? He'd introduced her once to the manager as his wife, hadn't he? And they should take a wife into consideration in such circumstances. The idea had hardly taken shape when she made up her mind: she would go in the very next morning.

Nowak listened with intent concern to her account of the raid. When she finished, he asked: "What are you planning to do now?"

She didn't dare come out frankly with what she had in mind. Instead, she bit her lips, shaking her head sadly.

"Have you anything to live on?"

"No," she whispered.

He considered for a moment. "I suppose you could work here for the time being. I'll need someone, and we can't just leave you high and dry."

Her heart thumped but she was afraid to say a word.

"Have you ever worked in a store, Mrs. Malinka?"

She lied boldly. "Yes."

"And where?"

Without hesitation she gave the address of a bombed-out store.

"Was this before you were married?"

"Yes, that's when I stopped working."

He was observing her closely, but then to her relief he rose, and going to the cash drawer, got out a piece of paper, scribbled on it and sealed it in an envelope. "Take this to our head office. I'll

phone and tell them you're coming." Then he added with a smile: "For you it shouldn't be difficult."

"Why?"

He smiled again. "It's always easy for a pretty woman to get her own way."

3

Invariably on his way to and from town, Rakowicz stopped at the kiosk for cigarettes or a glass of beer. The real reason, of course, was Genia. She had not been mistaken about his interest in her. From the first day when he had spotted her behind the counter, her youth and naive charm had caught his eye. The fact was that he had a weakness for women, especially young ones.

Genia reacted so obviously whenever he stopped and exchanged a few pleasantries, that it didn't take long for him to decide she could be easily had.

On one occasion when Genia was alone at the kiosk and the area was deserted, Rakowicz slipped inside and promptly kissed her. She resisted a little but he knew it was only a pose. When he became more impetuous, she drove him out—but coquettishly, not with anger. This was the moment that he made up his mind to get her into his room in Warsaw.

Back at home he began to have second thoughts. She was *too* young and *too* naive. She might take it all seriously and there'd be no end of trouble. There was nothing he disliked more than reproaches, and he tried avoiding situations that might lead to such. It was always better to have ten friends than one enemy. His first principle of conduct was to be on a good footing with everyone.

But once the seduction of Genia had become a conscious objective, he couldn't get it out of his mind. He even raised the subject indirectly with Roman one morning on their way to the station. "Quite a dish—ready for plucking," he nodded toward the kiosk.

Roman snorted. "Not my type. She's the one I told you about—the mess with Malinka."

"Ought to be a pushover then."

"Looks that way from what happened. But don't forget—a good thief never steals in his neighbor's back yard."

Rakowicz's interest was only whetted. In view of what Roman said, she couldn't be as innocent as she seemed.

He invited her again to Leokadia's. She came along readily

enough, but he got no further than at the kiosk. Of course, even in the back room there was always the possibility of being seen and she could hardly feel at ease. In the dark of a moonless night as they headed back toward the Lane, he suddenly pressed her against the fence and kissed her impetuously. This time she responded to his caresses and lingered over their good-bys. Now nothing would hold him back. His scruples were gone. He assured himself there was experience hidden behind her ways, and all that was required was to provide the proper setting for it.

His only remaining worry was her father. He didn't want any trouble there. But Ogorek was always courteous to him, and even responded with a friendly nod when Rakowicz suggested taking Genia to Leokadia's, saying to her he could manage closing up by himself. But how the old bear would react to his daughter's going to the city with him was another matter.

Actually it was not only her father; he was also concerned about the others on the Lane. He wouldn't want anyone to know he was embarking upon an affair with a simple girl. Rakowicz was always meticulous about appearances, and couldn't tolerate the thought of becoming the object of gossip. By nature he was unassuming, unsure of himself, always afraid some incautious step could destroy his standing in the eyes of others. This same insecurity was at the root of his efforts to be seen always on the periphery of the wealthy and respected. He was convinced that by doing so some of their esteem would fall on him. He firmly believed that a man was judged by the company he kept.

This was the real reason for his caution with Genia, and his eagerness to transfer any future encounters to the anonymity of the city.

4

Helena could hardly believe her luck. Something like this had never happened before. On her way to the Co-op office she had really expected to be turned down. But they had spoken very courteously to her. The director himself had asked her in detail about Sigmunt's arrest, and reading Nowak's letter said of course she should take her husband's place in the store. He dictated an answer to that effect and told her to give it to Nowak. Excited and happy, she had hurried back at once. "So it's all settled," Nowak had commented as if there was nothing to it. "If you want, you can have a couple of days at home to get straightened out."

But she announced she would be in the first thing in the morning.

At the end of the first week Nowak said: "You're doing as well as your husband did. Maybe even a little quicker with the customers." She was tremendously pleased. Had anyone ever praised her before? But it also increased her uneasiness with her responsibility as cashier. She felt too unsure of herself with numbers. Sooner or later she would make a mistake, and then what would happen? And yet she couldn't admit her doubts to him. Finally one day she suggested: "Couldn't we try it once the other way round—you cut the coupons and take the cash, and I serve in your place? That might work better yet." It turned out she was right. She proved highly efficient and quick behind the counter, and so he let the new set-up become permanent. Actually it was more to his liking and less exhausting.

In her anxiety to prove herself, she made herself useful in many other ways—receiving deliveries, sweeping the store out in the morning, and taking over the making of their noon-break lunches. This brought her increasingly in contact with the supply room in back, and it wasn't long before she noticed certain excess stock which she couldn't account for. She said nothing, however, deciding it was some aspect she didn't understand. Nowak, who had not seemed very happy about her being around the supply room and had tried to discourage it at first, finally called her in there one noon hour. "There's something I want to say in confidence, Mrs. Malinka. We've accumulated some surpluses here which aren't recorded and we can sell on our own. Naturally what we get we'll go halves on."

She was very surprised. "Thank you very much, but I don't see why there should be anything more coming to me."

"Why not? It's just between us, something I worked up myself." He smiled secretively. Then, as if to seal the partnership, he invited her to join him for coffee at a nearby restaurant. She was still more astonished—was it suitable for Malinka's wife to accept such an invitation? She made no objection, however. Good relations with Nowak were a cornerstone of her existence now.

Sitting across from him, chatting and sipping at the coffee, she couldn't help reflecting what a different world she suddenly found herself in. And how strange—all this had come about as a result of a chance session in a forest clearing. How could she have guessed that day what it would lead to?

8

THE REFUSAL

"Excuse me, Mr. Ogorek. Have you got a moment?"

Ogorek looked up from his place behind the counter. He noticed Stork's worried face, his almost pleading eyes. "Sure, what's the trouble?"

"I'd like to have a few words with you confidentially. It's very important. It won't take long."

Genia, sitting beside her father, said in a sulky tone, "If I disturb you, I can leave."

"Please excuse me, Miss. Excuse me, but there is something I have to discuss with your father."

Ogorek was very curious. He came out and they walked off a little way. "What's on your mind?" he asked.

"I've got a very good business proposition. You would earn handsomely at very little cost."

"What sort of business?"

"Weaving."

"What kind of weaving?"

"Horsehair—my trade. You have no idea how much money there's in it at present . . ." He elaborated on the bulk cost of the hair, the quantity used, and the current price of the finished weave.

"There's a good market?"

"Very. Always in short supply."

"Then why don't you do it on your own? Shouldn't take much capital."

"No. But let me explain, sir. It's rather complicated . . . I would make the hair weave myself for you. All we'd need is to order

a loom—I could even make one in a pinch. You'd pay me no more than a normal wage, and I guarantee you a net daily profit of at least a thousand zlotys. I doubt if two such kiosks as yours could bring in that much together."

"But I don't get it. Why d'you need me? Why make me such a gift?"

"I'm coming to that, Mr. Ogorek. It's in return for helping me out. I need money, and right away."

"How much?"

"I'm afraid, a lot. But I'll pay back every bit. And I already showed you what good business it is. I'll tell you exactly where to buy the hair, and give you all the sales contacts. You'll have the buyers begging on your doorstep. All I want to do is the weaving and not get involved in going around selling."

"But why not? It don't make much sense from your point of view."

Stork didn't answer for a moment, glancing at the man before him uncertainly. Then he made up his mind. "I know you are a decent person, Mr. Ogorek. I will tell you why not. Only I beg you earnestly not to breathe a word to anyone . . . I am a Jew."

"You're Jewish?"

"Yes, perhaps it's not noticeable. That's on account of my nose getting broken in a childhood accident. My mother was always unhappy about it, but you see now how lucky it was. Sometimes misfortunes happen which you'd never guess would turn out handy some day . . ."

Ogorek's face had darkened. He immediately thought of Krupa, of his warning to notify him if he heard of any Jews in the vicinity. And to have lived unsuspectingly these weeks with such danger right about his head. He was horrified. He had to get these people out of there before they brought disaster on them all. Only recently not far from Otwock, hadn't a whole Polish family been shot to death for harboring a Jew?

". . . Now you see my problem, Mr. Ogorek, and why I can't do it on my own. Really, if it weren't for that, I could be a wealthy man in no time at all. But life is more valuable than money. In addition, as I told you, I'm in urgent need of cash. I have to have twenty-five thousand zlotys right away. It's a debt that can't wait any longer. And that's why in return for such an advance, I would make this business available to you virtually for nothing. You should clear more than this sum in a single month, Mr. Ogorek."

He had been speaking ever more desperately as his eyes searched Ogorek's face. Suddenly he broke off. What was the use? How well he knew that expression, that clamming up. Probably now, on top of everything, they'd be asked to leave. But he couldn't afford to give up. It was a matter of life and death. Giza and the boy . . .

Trying to conceal the growing urgency in his voice, he went on. "And what do you feel about it? Really, there's no financial risk in it for you, and I think you can see I'm the sort you can expect hard work from. You'll earn handsomely. And sir, my identity card is in order, not forged at all. You see yourself, I don't look Jewish, and my wife and son never leave the house. We live very inconspicuously. There's no danger for you. It's just these twenty-five thousand zlotys. They're really frightfully necessary to me . . ." He stopped again.

Ogorek stood in silence, not even listening any more, too frightened, too absorbed in thinking how to get out of this dangerous situation. At last he spoke: "No, that's not my line. And anyway I haven't got that much money—twenty-five thousand's a lot. I'm sorry. Better try someone else."

"You don't have that much? What a pity. You see how difficult my situation is too, don't you? And here I have this invaluable opportunity but no money, sir. So you couldn't do a thing, you're sure?"

"That's what I said. Sorry. If I had it, I'd loan it to you. But it just isn't there." He nodded good-by and abruptly turned back toward the kiosk. At the door he stopped a moment, and instead of going in headed straight for home.

He was too disturbed to keep his secret in front of Pelagia. Her reaction, when he told her, took him completely by surprise.

"So what if they are Jewish?" she said.

"Woman—how can you be so stupid? Don't you know what the Germans do with Jews and with those caught hiding them? Holy Mary!"

"But you're just the landlord. It's no matter of hiding. What can you know about your tenants? One's as good as another so long as he pays. And he says there's a lot of money in it?"

"His saying don't make it so. Who the devil knows if it's true. And you'd be willing to hand him twenty-five thousand just like that?"

"If it's really that good, why not? Probably he'd settle for less too."

"Listen, Pelagia, even if it were the best business in the world, you think I'd go risk my head for it?"

"Why risk your head?"

"Can't you see beyond your nose? Want the Germans to shoot us all dead and burn the house down?"

"How would they know? Seems dumb to me to throw away a good business like that, when it comes right to you almost free."

"Why keep on and on about that? To hell with it. The question now is what to do about them?"

"Who?"

"For God's sake, Pelagia—the people upstairs, those Jews. Use your head."

"But what? If you don't want to, you've already said no to him, and that's that."

"Woman—stop. You don't seem to understand anything. Listen to me now—it's necessary to get 'em out of here. You understand?"

"But why? Why are you so scared? You think Kozik or Madey would go and turn them in? They could stay here and you don't need to know any different from before. They're quiet and decent, and they got plenty enough trouble without you adding to it."

"So you want us to go take a risk like that?"

"If everything stays quiet and you keep your mouth shut, seems no harm in them staying. But if you're going to be scared all the time and making a fuss, better tell them to leave. It's only a pity about that business. I like the looks of it better than all this below-the-counter stuff at the kiosk. People would stop whispering around."

"What whispering around?"

"That's what Karol says—he's always complaining about feeling ashamed. About people calling us black marketeers."

"Karol's a goddam fool—and you too. All of you make me sick with your talk! Jesus, what's the use?" He slammed the door and left the house again.

2

Genia didn't know what to make of Rakowicz's behavior toward her. Somehow she hadn't imagined love would be this way. But maybe it was so different in books because it wasn't proper to write the truth. Anyway, she felt disappointed. If at least he spoke beautifully to her and whispered romantic things, it would make all the difference, and she wouldn't feel so confused. None-

theless she found herself more and more preoccupied with him, living in expectation of seeing him, elated with the wonder of being courted by such a handsome, pleasant gentleman, even impatient and curious to learn what the next encounter might bring.

On one occasion he suggested again an afternoon expedition to a Warsaw cafe. She was immediately dubious. If he was that bold out here, how would he behave in town? No, she was afraid—afraid of him, afraid of her father right here beside her whom she didn't even dare look at. She shook her head: she didn't have time and couldn't leave the kiosk that long.

"Don't worry about that, Genia." She turned surprised. It was her father. "I'll manage. Only don't be late getting back. Your mother will fuss."

The cafe was crowded. There was a floor show with singing and dancing and an orchestra. Genia was entranced. To her surprise Rakowicz behaved very circumspectly, and even suggested himself when it was time to return.

As they were walking along the street toward the station, he suddenly stopped and said, "Let's go in here for a few moments. There's plenty of time before the last train." She nodded—why not? Only in the stair hall did she realize it was an apartment house and not another cafe. But by then they had reached the landing and he was opening a door, urging her in ahead of him.

She tried not to show how nervous she was. Timidly she reminded him about not wanting to miss the train. But with disarming unconcern, he was busy preparing coffee in an electric percolator, setting out cups, a plate of cookies, even a bottle of brandy. As she watched she became less worried. If he had had bad intentions he would have seized the opportunity by now and he hadn't even kissed her. As he bustled around he told her about the room, about its belonging to a friend who was away and left it available to him. "And when I'm late sometimes, I sleep here. It's very convenient."

She looked at the room more closely. There was a couch in a sort of niche, a bookcase along one wall, a console phonograph, a big easy chair. She peeked through an inner door—a small bathroom. She noted each detail with satisfaction. If they were to marry, this would do very nicely for them in the beginning.

The coffee was poured, the glasses filled with brandy. Rakowicz put on a record. As they sat at the table he said nicer things to her

than he ever had before—about her eyes, her dimples, about his never having been so charmed by any woman.

"Why aren't you married yet?" she asked.

"It's not so simple." He smiled, a little constrained. "There are people who aren't suited to marriage."

"And you're like that?"

"How can I tell? I've never been married, and now in wartime I don't think about it."

"Why not?"

"There are more important things. Now all we can allow ourselves is just love, that's all."

"But how's that possible? I don't understand."

"You mean love without marriage?"

"Yes."

"Why not? Love flowers best in freedom. Only then can it reach its greatest height. Marriage doesn't provide such conditions, and for me love stands above everything else."

She felt extremely uneasy. Even if there was something in what he said, she couldn't go along with it. She wanted to love openly, the way you could when you were engaged. And that meant marriage, not just expeditions to cafes with furtive kissing, or even sitting here in his room. And she didn't want to have to be afraid some other woman would come and take him away. She felt sad and depressed.

"My charming young friend has become so quiet," he said. "What's happened to her? Maybe our discussion about marriage and great love?"

She didn't answer. If only she had a way of knowing what he really felt about her. Was it at all the way she felt about him?

"Really I'd like to stay on here a long time with you, my dear"—How wonderful to hear him call her that—"but it's time to go."

She hated to leave. It was so homey here, and somehow he seemed more her own in this place than anywhere else. Again she felt a little let down.

He came over and held her coat for her. As she slipped into it, he pressed her to him and kissed her. This time she submitted readily and even threw her arms around him herself in a sudden upsurge of happiness. If only he really belonged to her and would always be hers!

He disengaged himself, "Come we must get going."

She was so dazed she had to support herself on the arm of the chair. "Wait a moment, Tadeusz . . . really, it's awful to go just now."

"It's high time. Please, Genia," he said almost impatiently, "or else we'll be late."

"But it's awful. Tadeusz, I'd like so much to stay."

He looked at her a moment but didn't answer. Opening the door, he took her arm and led her from the room.

3

It didn't take long for Helena to make herself quite indispensable in the store, and Nowak was able to settle back, leaving much of the actual management to her. "You have much more of a knack at this than your husband," he would say at every opportunity. She always pointed out that everything she knew she had learned from Sigmunt. At the same time her success was very gratifying, especially when Nowak told the Co-op director that Mrs. Malinka was such a competent assistant that there would be no need for any further help.

In the beginning she had hoped only to earn enough to keep herself solvent. With the extra money from the sale of the surplus which Nowak shared with her, however, she found that she had considerably more. By the end of the first month she was even able to buy herself a new coat and shoes. Still, the origin of this money troubled her. Of course as manager Nowak was responsible, and he made more out of it than she, but nevertheless she did worry. She would rather not have it than run the risk of being fired. Timidly, she mentioned her concern.

Nowak laughed. "What *is* legal these days? Tell me what isn't *verboten* under the Germans? Just for selling a ham you can be sentenced to death if that's what they're after. Everyone finds a way around, that's the way of the world. The underground even regards it our patriotic duty. Consider a moment—could you really survive on your official pay here? We live in times when stealing itself has become a virtue—as long, of course, as we steal from our enemies."

"But it isn't only the Germans who get their ration allotments here in the store."

"That can't be helped. We're working for our customers, so they have to contribute something too. They know we can't just sit back and die of hunger."

That was how the conversation ended, but in spite of his reasoning she couldn't shake off her uneasiness.

In the midst of these problems with her new Warsaw career, a very important development clarified her situation on Duck Lane. The moment she had gotten her job she had written to Mrs. Turyn. Her first impulse was not to admit who she really was, but finally she changed her mind. Suppose Mrs. Turyn happened to come for a visit and discovered the truth? So instead she wrote quite openly to her, stating she had turned her back on her old life and now regarded herself engaged to Malinka, and as evidence citing how she had been given his job at the store. For weeks she had been waiting nervously for a reply fearing that her frankness had been a mistake.

Now at last the answer had come; Mrs. Turyn wrote briefly that she had no objection to her living in the cottage as long as she gave her at least a month's notice in case she planned to move elsewhere. She even was willing to forego any rent in return for Helena's taking care of the house furnishings and property.

In some ways Mrs. Turyn's letter meant more to her than her job. Now, she belonged on the Lane, and no one could throw her out. When Sigmunt returned he would find everything just as it had been.

4

Modlibog shook his head mockingly. "I see you're in very well with the old shark. Take care—he only pays for value received."

Tadeusz had just been asked over to Orlowski's. It was Roman who had brought the note from his father: "I would be glad if you could join me here at four o'clock. I wish to discuss some financial matters and make a proposition which I'm confident you'll find interesting."

Orlowski greeted him warmly, ushering him into his study, serving coffee and liqueur and even treating him to a cigar.

"If you don't mind," he said, when they had settled down, "I'll come directly to the point. I'm a man who knows what he wants and how to get it, and if I judge you correctly you are too. I understand you live at present by various small business activities, the way most people do now. I am prepared to consider entrusting you with some substantial transactions on my behalf. Please listen carefully. . . ." And he began detailing the plan for buying up stocks and bonds which Turyn's death had ended. He spoke with

great care and deliberation, observing Rakowicz closely. He concluded by saying, "I trust you have a precise picture of what I am after and what is involved. It is a major undertaking requiring skill and finesse. You understand me clearly?"

"Yes, sir, I do." Tadeusz had, in fact, followed him with careful attention; he found his ideas immensely stimulating. Up to this time, under Roman's influence, he had been sceptical of the old man's acumen, but now he looked at him with admiration—he had the touch of the master in spite of his age, the sure mind that could still conceive on a grand scale. Tremendous! If everything went well, the man before him would without doubt emerge from the war with all of Poland's industry firmly in his hands. And Tadeusz himself would be his right-hand man. Already he could see himself as a director of some of Orlowski's far-flung enterprises, closely involved in the world of big business, of huge capital transactions, of the stock market, of power. Fantastic images piled up in his mind. And not the least important were the very considerable commissions available in the meantime.

"It's a breath-taking concept," he said with sober respect. "Really wonderful. I must say I had wondered about this sort of thing too, but of course I didn't have the means even to consider it."

"That's just it—very few have. Mainly the wartime get-rich-quick speculators who don't understand real business. Fellows like this Ogorek. I imagine they have a lot salted away, but have no idea how to put it to use. But as far as my proposal is concerned you are prepared to accept my offer and undertake this responsibility?"

"Certainly. I feel very honored, Mr. Orlowski, for your confidence in me." He hesitated thoughtfully. "I might add that perhaps I see some gaps which need clarifying. Not so much in the idea as in how it might best be realized."

"Indeed?" Orlowski nodded. "I'm most curious. I'm very pleased when men younger than myself have the initiative to present their own point of view. Tell me."

"With the stock market in the slump it is now under the occupation, even with the most discreet buying, how can we avoid pushing up the prices?"

"To a degree that can't be helped. The last time I invested heavily, this did happen. It's a matter of knowing when to stop, take a breather, and wait for them to settle back again."

"I see. But how about inserting an article in the underground paper about the need to nationalize heavy industry after the war? Wouldn't that have a salutary effect?"

"Would it be possible to plant such an article?"

"I think I could arrange for that," Tadeusz said slowly. "The subject is very much in the air, and I must tell you there's a lot of talk that this is the direction we must go."

Orlowski impatiently waved his hand. "Childish twaddle! Do you think England would stand for such a thing here?"

"Yes of course, you're right. I raised the point only because of the possibility of playing up this angle for our own ends."

"Even so, I am afraid that the moment you start heavy buying, the automatic reaction will be that nationalization is an unlikely possibility."

"It will be necessary to leak out some story about who's doing the buying, create some useful legend."

"Like what?"

"We will have to consider . . . perhaps suggest it's some fool Germans. Or Spanish. First we would offer only very low prices. Then there'd be the article to offset our buying. Then as needed we'd offer a little higher."

"Very well. I am very pleased to see you can use your head. There are all too few like that. Most of them never have an original idea. Like that Turyn who used to live here. There was nothing the matter with his intelligence, but he had no knack for business. For that a special talent is needed, an inspirational spark, something you're born with, that can't be acquired."

5

From early in the morning it had been a gloomy day with low clouds and a steady fine drizzle. But it was not only the weather that oppressed Genia. Ever since she woke up she had been vacillating about going through with her date in the city. She wasn't sure what was troubling her or why she was so uneasy; she even realized that she didn't want to know. When the time came, she knew she would go.

With a curious mingling of defiance and hope she turned to her father beside her in the kiosk. Would he put his foot down this time? "I'm going in to Warsaw after lunch."

"For what?"

"Mr. Rakowicz has invited me to a cafe with him."

"In such weather?" He looked at her for a moment, then shrugged. "Better take your mother's umbrella along."

She made a wry face. "That old thing—I'd be ashamed to be seen with it."

"What's it matter? It'll keep you dry. But mind—see you're back in time for supper."

Tadeusz was waiting for her at the exit in town. He took her arm and opened her umbrella. They started out onto the street. The sidewalk was covered with a layer of sticky mud. Famished street vendors cut across to intercept them. Begging children trailed along beside them, stubbornly nudging them for tips. They tried to pay no attention, hoping to shake them off.

"Shall we go directly to my place?" he asked at last, pressing her arm a little more firmly. She was startled—or was she really? Actually hadn't she been hoping they would be going there?

"All right."

He hailed a horse cab and they climbed in. She loved cabs—the smell of them, the atmosphere. Especially in rainy weather like this with the hood up and the driving sheet hooked high across the front—just like being in a tiny swaying house up in the air. She sat back and stretched out. But somehow she couldn't relax. She felt strangely excited, tense, high-strung. Why wasn't he talking to her? But maybe it was just as well he didn't—she wasn't in the mood for conversation. Her nervousness increased. Everything began to irritate her: his silence, the slow way the cab went on and on, its raised hood, the confined space. She longed to get out and walk. But just then the cab pulled up to the curb. They had arrived.

Tadeusz helped her down. While he paid she took shelter in the entry. They went upstairs. As he unlocked the door her heart was pounding. No, she wouldn't go in. If her father knew . . . the door closed behind them. As he took off her coat, he bent and kissed the back of her neck. She moved away—but wasn't he doing just what she had been dreaming about?

He handed her a glass. She shook her head. "No I don't want any. I don't feel like it today."

Tadeusz raised his eyebrows. "But why not? You did last time. It's only wine—vermouth."

She gave in then; it was rather good—sweet. He turned away and began to make the coffee and set the table just as he had the

first time. She drank down the wine and her mood improved. Suddenly she was puzzled; he meant more to her than anything else, didn't he? So why was she so cool toward him? She asked for a second glass and sat down in the easy chair.

At last the coffee was ready. He came over, and sitting on the arm of the chair, bent down and kissed her mouth. She pulled away, but immediately turned back to him again. Really, she was behaving like an ass. She embraced him.

"You never whisper a pleasant word," she complained. "I don't even know whether you really love me."

He shrugged. "Some things don't need saying." Suddenly, he rose and started pacing back and forth.

"Why did you get up? You're angry about something." She was frightened she had offended him somehow. "Surely you understand how nice it would be to hear you speak with affection. You never have." Inexplicably, she found herself on the verge of tears. At the same time she felt restless, irritable, rather like when they had been in the cab. She took the bottle of vermouth and refilled her glass. "A toast to love," she said, with forced gaiety, then adding ingenuously, "Now you know it—I love you."

Tadeusz looked startled, almost a little shocked. "All right then —long live love." He emptied his glass and returned to the arm of her chair. Again he leaned down and she yielded to his kisses, he drew her passionately to him.

Suddenly he pulled himself away and stood up. He glanced at his watch and mumbled, "We've just got an hour left." He turned toward the window.

She stared at his back. "You're awful today," she said reproachfully. "Here we are alone at last, and right away you have to remind me about the time. It doesn't interest me. It could be tomorrow and I wouldn't care." He turned, obviously surprised. "Naturally there'd be a scene when I got back, but I wouldn't care. I would endure anything for you. Just tell me you love me and I'll let you do everything you want. Do you understand? Everything. So tell me."

Again he looked confused and irritated. "You're really a strange little thing. I wouldn't have invited you here if I hadn't liked you. That's obvious."

"Not for me. I want to know exactly. Don't look that way. Maybe I'm silly." She got up and went over to him. "Maybe I even don't know what I want, except I know it's you . . . listen

Tadeusz, I'm completely crazy about you. Perhaps it's always all mixed up this way when one loves? I don't know. But why are you looking at me like that?"

"It's because you're so childish," he answered slowly. "But charming too—very, and that's the reason I like you so much."

As he said this she pressed herself against him. He drew her over to the couch. They both sat down and he began unbuttoning her blouse.

"No, no," she whispered. "I'm afraid . . . please don't."

He moved away sighing, smoothing his hair. She stared at him, her heart and soul churning with desire, love, fear. She had to know everything now. He mustn't go away again. She snuggled up to him and slipping her arms around him began kissing him passionately. He felt the pressure of her breasts against him, and now there was no stopping him. He tugged at her blouse impatiently. Something tore.

He opened her blouse, revealing a coarse home-made bodice. He hesitated—he was used to well-groomed women—but then without looking at it, he undid the bodice and sank his face into her soft breasts.

She pressed closer against him, whispering: "I'm afraid . . . I'm afraid." He undid her skirt. "No . . . no . . ." She tried to button it again. He pushed away her hands and yanked it off and threw it on the floor. She cowered in an agony of shame as he stared at the shapeless woolen drawers and the array of knotted and frayed ribbons.

"Take them off," he said in a sharp voice. Slowly, she did as she was told. "But don't look at me," she whispered. Then she stood clinging to a small bit of an undershirt. "Take that off too."

"I'm too afraid," she whispered. "Tadeusz, I haven't ever . . ." He brusquely stripped it off himself and pushed her down on the couch. She no longer attempted to stop him, didn't even try to kiss him, merely submitted passively.

6

During the noon hour as usual Nowak closed the store. They sat down at the counter and ate the lunch Helena had prepared. Afterward Nowak said he had an errand to do and wouldn't be back until late in the afternoon. It being a Tuesday, she should be able to handle the small amount of business herself.

In addition to serving customers he had given her the job of weighing bulk sugar into half-kilo paper bags. The bags were all slightly weighted with glue. This bothered Helena who hadn't yet been able to accept all his manipulations. Any day someone might discover they were being cheated, and then what? He had laughed at her concern: in some way, everyone was doing the same thing. What street-car conductor didn't pocket a sizeable part of the fares, and the passengers were expected to look the other way. Actually Nowak's ingenuity also impressed her. Who could have imagined a sealed bottle of vodka as a profitable object for manipulation? But sealing wax was no barrier for Nowak. Deftly he would push the hypodermic needle all the way down through the cork, draw out one length of vodka and replace it with an equal amount of water. Not a tell-tale sign remained on the wax except to an expert eye.

She was so busy during the afternoon with the sugar that it wasn't until the building janitor appeared that she realized Nowak should have been back long ago.

Curfew passed and still he didn't appear. She made herself some supper and then settled down for the night. The next morning she was up early, sweeping out the store and opening up at the usual time. Every moment she expected Nowak, but noon went by without any sign of him. By now she was seriously worried. Something must have happened. What should she do—she didn't even know where he lived. Phone the office? But that might cause unnecessary alarm. He might just be sick.

At closing time she decided to lock up and go home for the night. She took the petty cash to the post for transfer to the Co-op bank account, the way Nowak always did. The following morning, instead of opening up, she went straight to the office. They were obviously very concerned but they asked her to carry on as before while they tried to get some information.

By noon she knew. Nowak was no longer alive. Shortly after leaving the store he had walked into a shooting fray. A stray bullet had got him in the head. His body had been taken home, and the funeral was to be the next day. It was better to stay away, however. For some reason the Germans had searched his apartment, and it was lucky they left without having taken his widow along. It wasn't out of the question they might come to the store too.

Helena was so frightened she even considered the idea of running away. Maybe the Germans were suspicious because of Nowak's

manipulations. And even if she didn't leave, wasn't her job all over anyway? A new manager would be put in who would probably throw her out. She went home worried and concerned.

The next day, however, brought a quite unexpected turn. The director called and asked if she felt she could take Nowak's place. If that was the case they would find an assistant for her. Naturally she agreed: she would do the best she could and hoped they would be satisfied with her work. For a time, she told the director, she thought she could manage without any help.

She threw herself into her new responsibilities filled with pride and determination. She would not fail. Her work would be above reproach. Even Duck Lane would have to treat her differently now. The way she was forging ahead, they'd all have to accept her. In her excitement she forgot about everything else—even about Malinka.

7

A casual conversation with Modlibog the day after his ill-considered Warsaw expedition, more than ever made Tadeusz realize what a fool he'd been. Assuming a fatherly tone, the old man had taken him to one side and said: "I'm not sure, Tadeusz, whether you're aware of the exceptional opportunity that has opened before you. No, no, I'm not speaking of the business arrangement you've entered into with Orlowski. My point of view about that is quite different. I'll tell you something else, however—naturally I expect you to keep it strictly to yourself. To begin with, let me say you've hit it off very well with my old friend Orlowski. You've made a considerable impression and he likes you—a rare concession indeed for him. Yesterday, in the course of a conversation about you young people, he cited you as the sort he wouldn't mind having as a son-in-law. I've noticed your interest in Irena, and so I thought you'd like to know. Of course it would depend in the first place on how she felt about it, but his opinion—needless to say—carries a great deal of weight."

Tadeusz had been stunned, though he pretended to take it more or less as a joke, and thanked Modlibog with a mocking grin. But the fact was the news took his breath away—marriage into the family of the most powerful tycoon of the future Poland? It was the chance of a lifetime.

He immediately decided to break off all further contact with

Genia. Such a stupid liaison could wreck everything. His resolve, however, was very short-lived. In only a few days he found himself standing at the kiosk arranging another date. Genia was very pleased, but it happened that she couldn't make it that day. "My father is going to Warsaw himself and I've got to take his place here."

His initial frustration gave way to relief. What did he think he was doing? Hadn't he learned his lesson?

From then on he made a point of stopping at the kiosk only when he saw her father there. One morning, however, to his surprise he noticed Genia waiting for the train too. He was both excited and apprehensive. So she would be in town today, too, but what if she came over and decided to ride in with them? Leaving Roman for a moment, he approached her and said in a low voice: "I don't want us to be seen on the train together. It's on account of you. Young Orlowski might talk."

She sulked. "Let them say what they want. What do I care? That's why I'm coming in—to see you. And there'll be plenty of time, so we won't have to be in a hurry."

He was utterly unprepared for her to be so frank. "All right," he said hastily, "wait for me out in front of the Hotel Polonia."

On the journey in, he promised himself not to take her to his room. He'd have to go through the motions of a visit to a cafe, but there he would make his feelings perfectly clear so this would never happen again.

They met as arranged, but thereafter nothing went as he had planned. "I'm not interested in sitting in some cafe," Genia protested at once. "Why, when you have such a pleasant room?" and already she was hailing a passing horse cab. All his resolutions collapsed. The moment the door of his room closed behind them, they embraced and soon his fingers were impatiently undoing her clothes . . .

And now—now that it was all over, it was just as he had known it would be. Here he was lying beside her—furious with himself, determined to make an end of it now, right here, and tell her the truth so she would never tempt him again. She was nestling close to him, silent, contented.

"Genia," he began, "we can't go on meeting this way. It must stop."

"Why?" She sat bolt upright and looked at him with unbelieving eyes. "Are you bored with me already? Oh, no, no . . ." and she broke into violent tears.

He tried to give his voice a gentle, reassuring tone. "There's no reason to cry. Listen to me, Genia—it's only for your sake."

She tried to stop, looking miserably at him: "You've had enough of me, I know," she sobbed. "Only . . . only you're afraid to say so openly."

"No, Genia, be reasonable. Look, this is only our second meeting. What you say is silly. It's only that people talk and—"

"I don't care."

"How can you say that? There are your parents to consider. And you know how everything gets around the Lane."

"And what can they say? No one need know. Anyone can come to the kiosk. And why shouldn't you speak to me there, and me to you? What's strange about that?"

"Yes, of course, that's all right . . ." This was not the time to say anything about his future plans. Besides, he couldn't face more weeping.

Genia looked more hopeful: "So you do love me a little?" She tried to slip her arm about him. "Tell me. That's all I ask . . . do you love me?"

He looked away. "Yes. Everything proves that. But I don't go in for exaggerated sentiment."

She pulled back, stung. "You couldn't speak that way if you loved me. You have never said one affectionate word to me, never." And she dropped back on the couch in tears again.

It couldn't go on this way. He started to get up. "What in heaven's name has come over you? You're quite hysterical today. I hope next time you'll be different. But, anyway, now I've got to get going. There's a lot I have to attend to in town."

She was alarmed, aware she was driving him off. "No," she said, "I'm not reproaching you. It's simply that I love you—really, you have no idea how much. That's what makes it so hard. I'm just oversensitive. But don't be angry with me, Tadeusz. I'll behave as you want me to." Again she was close to tears, but managed to control herself.

He dressed in stubborn silence, not once looking in her direction. Again he had been unbelievably stupid. What wasn't a love-crazy girl capable of, and not a very bright one at that?

She was sitting on the edge of the bed, her eyes on his back.

"I'm afraid, Tadeusz . . ." It was as if she were speaking to herself. She slipped off the bed and approached him, just as she was. "I suppose it's natural your not really wanting me . . . I'm a very simple girl and you're a man of the world. Maybe, really, I'm not the sort for you, and it's just that I'm too blind to see it. But oh my God—" she added almost in a whisper, suddenly kneeling and embracing his legs. "If it has to be, it will. I know now that you'll never marry me. You don't even have to tell me. Only don't just drop me, Tadeusz. Please not that, too. I'm prepared for the other—it'll be the way you want. Only don't drop me—" She pressed her face against his knees. "You're my whole life, everything. All I want to know is that you like me just a little in return. That's all I'm asking now."

His eyes were upon her—unabashedly naked against his clothes. His hands slipped under her arms to help her up. He stopped, forgetting what he had intended to do. Instead, he knelt down beside her. He drew her to him. Embracing passionately, they slowly sank to the floor.

9

THE FOREST CLEARING

"MIETEK—are you awake?"

"Are you awake?"

"Yes."

"If you were asleep I wouldn't disturb you . . . but I know you never stay asleep long, not even on Sunday. I'm so relieved it's Sunday, Mietek. Aren't you pleased you don't have to go in to work?"

"No."

"You're so strange—why aren't you? You seem to enjoy running yourself ragged."

"Hmmm . . ."

"Why don't you like to talk? All week I wait for Sunday just for this chance . . . What time is it?"

"Seven-thirty."

"Then we can stay in bed a little still. You won't be going anywhere today, will you?"

"No."

"Mietek, that's very good . . . don't laugh at me, but this never speaking becomes unendurable at times. When you come home of an evening and I see you're all done in, I know it's better for me to remain silent. I can see how tired you are. So much has piled up inside me during the day, but I postpone it for the morning. But the morning comes, and you know how it is—all your chores and then you must rush to catch the train."

"It could be much worse, Giza."

"I'm not reproaching you, Mietek. I understand very well. Only

I wanted you to understand why sometimes I must talk to you. You are probably thinking—why does she have to go on disturbing me when I'm trying to sleep?"

"No, that's not what I'm thinking."

"But I annoy you?"

"I'm tired, Giza, that's all. And if I'm silent it's only because I'm trying to think of a better and safer arrangement—for you, and Poldi, and all of us."

"Oh I know, I appreciate that. But sometimes, Mietek, I think we never should have escaped from the ghetto."

"Don't be a fool woman—you've forgotten how it was, really. Living like animals—worse!"

"But we could sleep at night, Mietek—and there was company —someone to talk to. Just now I was thinking how wonderful it must be for a person not to be afraid. What do you think, are there such people?"

"Of course, my dear. Why shouldn't there be?"

"It's easy to say so, but I can't imagine life without fear."

"You exaggerate, Giza. All things pass."

"Maybe you're different. Or won't face it."

He slipped out of bed.

"You're not getting up so soon?"

"I must. I have a lot to do."

"I know and I shouldn't pester you like this. But be careful, Mietek, you're waking Poldi. No, Poldi, go back to sleep. It's still very early." She covered the boy and waited for a moment until she was sure that he had fallen off again. "I have such trouble with him. Every day he begs and begs me to let him go out and play. How can he understand?"

Mietek dressed quickly and picked up the enamel milk pot. "Will a liter be enough?"

She nodded.

Outside he breathed a sigh of relief. How he hated Sundays. Always this endless talk and there was no way to escape it. She almost drove him to the point where he was ready to explode, shout out that of course she was right, how could she fail to see the mountain of fear in his own heart? Poor Giza, if she knew, if she had any remote idea of the danger hanging over them right now!

He remembered the first time—the stranger tapping him on the shoulder. "You're Mr. Stork, aren't you?" The incredibly evil,

knowing smile. "And living outside the ghetto, eh?" Twenty gold dollars for protection—or else. He had scraped together the money and then—for Stork knew this was only the beginning—they had slipped away. He had found another job and this miserable room at Ogorek's. And then only the other day at the station in Jutrosin, the same bastard, but now the price for "protection" had gone up to twenty-five thousand zlotys! An impossible sum, but he had put him off until Tuesday and somehow, before then, he had to find a new place to live, a new job.

In front of the house he ran into Kozik. Stork smoothed the worry from his face and tried to appear jaunty, casual. "How elegantly you are dressed today, my good friend."

"Sunday, isn't it? Aren't you going to church?"

"Why, of course," Stork said almost too quickly. "With all the chores and the boy sick it slipped my mind. But there's still time for the last Mass. I just want to get him some milk first."

Stork had to go across to the other side of the tracks for the milk. He was lucky, they still had some. Returning home, he scanned the station area. It was completely deserted. Only a few people at the kiosk. He stopped and bought himself a few cigarettes. Ogorek served him brusquely and refused to look him in the eye. As he headed back to the Lane, Stork began to plan how he could tell Giza that they must move again. A better room, that was it, one nearer to his work so he could be with them more.

2

Stork had lit the fire and was about to put the milk on when he stopped and listened. In the hall downstairs there was a sudden commotion, mumbled voices, the thump of heavy boots on the stairs. Giza looked at him questioningly. He turned to avoid her glance.

The footsteps came nearer. More than one person—two, perhaps three. Who could it be? No one ever came up here besides Madey and Kozik and their wives, and their steps were quite different—very different.

"Mietek . . ." It was meant to be a whisper but was hardly more than a gasp.

Without looking at her, he put his finger to his lips. He mustn't show anything. The slightest sign of fear and she would lose control of herself. Mechanically he began to putter around with the milk again.

The first pair of boots had reached the landing and stopped. Whoever it was probably couldn't see where he was going in the poorly lit hall. The second pair had arrived, and still there were steps coming up. Could there be four?

They began knocking at a door, but not at theirs—at Madey's. He felt dizzy with relief. Some railway lineman had had an accident perhaps. Now he felt strong enough to face Giza's eyes. He nodded toward the next apartment, but she hardly reacted. She just stared at him, her face rigid with fear.

He heard someone asking something and Martha replying. He tiptoed toward the door. He felt his throat constrict . . . Them? He tried to keep a grip on himself. But something awful, incomprehensible, was about to happen. He glanced briefly at Giza. Her face was so pale it seemed almost yellow; her eyes were frozen on the door.

The steps approached. Instinctively he fell back. He found himself looking at the window. If he were alone—but Giza, Poldi . . .

Their door . . .

Sharply, brutally—no one with good intentions knocked that way.

So the last fragment of hope was gone.

He was vaguely aware of Giza convulsively gripping the arms of her chair, her eyes boring into him. He must stop the banging. As he approached to turn the key, she was whispering "No Mietek, no . . ." He shrugged—or did it only seem as if he did? Nothing mattered any more. Let it happen. It was better to know. He turned his head away from her and opened the door.

Two blue-uniformed policemen stood in the half-dark hall and behind them the saddle-shaped, visored caps of two Germans. The first policeman, tall and broad-shouldered, pushed him brusquely to one side and went to the center of the room. The other one, an older, weathered man, remained just inside the door. There was a moment of silence as the four pairs of eyes surveyed the scene.

The tall one turned to him. "Your name?"

"Stork."

"First name."

"Mieceslaw."

"Aliases?"

"No—true."

"Identity card."

"Just a moment." He approached his jacket, hanging over the chair, and fumbled for the card in his pocket. His hands were trembling, but a kind of distant mechanical calm had taken possession of him, for a moment even a resurgent spark of hope. If they asked to see his card perhaps this was just a routine check.

The policeman approached the window to examine the card. As Stork waited he was vaguely aware of Poldi asleep in the bed. He couldn't look at Giza.

The policeman passed the card to the Germans in the hall. "This your wife?"

"Yes."

"And who's that under the covers?"

"Our son."

"Come over here to the window."

He approached, surprised.

"Trousers."

"What about my trousers?"

"Open 'em up, goddammit. Don't play dumb."

He looked helplessly from one to the other as if still not understanding. One of the Germans in the doorway undid the holster of his pistol. Stork turned his back on the room slowly and unbuttoned the fly of his trousers.

The policeman bent slightly to see more closely, a sarcastic smile of triumph spreading over his face. "There we are—obviously. Why didn't you admit it at once, pretending you didn't know what was the matter." He went over to consult with the Germans. They crowded into the landing outside while the old fellow stayed at his post by the door, an expression of discomfort, even dread, on his face. Poldi had woken up, his sunken frightened eyes peering out from under the covers for some clue as to what was happening.

The policeman was back. "Get dressed."

"Just me?"

"No. All of you. Hurry."

"We'll be going somewhere? What should we take along?"

"Leave everything here."

Now he'd have to face her eyes. He turned. How small she looked, huddled there in her pitiful dressing gown. "Giza, get dressed. I will deal with Poldi . . . Giza—you heard. We have to go with these men." She stared at him as if she didn't understand. But better a state of shock than tears. "Giza . . ."

She got up uncertainly and looked at the policeman. "Please, could you close the door a little?"

"Don't be stupid," he snarled. "Get moving."

"Giza, you can stand behind me and dress," he whispered. "Don't make a fuss. I will arrange everything all right." He bent down and lifted Poldi out of the bed. He put him on his knees as if he were still an infant. Laboriously he began to dress him, buttoning his shorts, pulling on his stockings, lacing his shoes. He concentrated on the nearness of his son's pitiful emaciated body; let this moment go on for ever, he prayed.

"Hurry up there." The brutal voice came to him as from another world. He pretended to dress him more quickly, but actually lingered as much as before.

"Mietek, I'll do it. Let me finish dressing him." For a moment he was angry. Couldn't she understand? But then he controlled himself; she had a right too. He lifted the boy and stood him before her.

3

There was no one out in front of the house. Giza came close to him. "What's going to happen?" she whispered.

He made a slight reassuring movement with his hand and gave a kind of wink which was meant to say casually: there is nothing to worry about, Giza. With an air of unconcern he looked in the direction of the railway embankment. He was aware that her questioning eyes never left his face. He mustn't let her down. He looked up at the sun already high in the sky. A clear brisk day, the sort that carries sounds to you from far away. How huge it all was. And Poldi—so small and vulnerable. Giza was holding his little hand. If only he could save him—nothing else really mattered.

"Get moving," the tall policeman ordered. They started down the Lane, Stork leading, ahead of Giza. He mustn't walk at her side. She would start asking questions and suddenly he would give in and she would know. He reached the end of the Lane, at the familiar turn left onto Long Street beside the tracks. He stopped and looked round. Giza and Poldi were only a few steps behind, then the tall policeman, the two Germans, and a little way back trying to catch up, the old policeman, a spade over his shoulder. Now there could no longer be any doubt. It wouldn't be the usual turn. As if the tall policeman had read his mind, he waved, "To the right, to the right."

To the right . . . to the forest.

Stork walked more slowly. It was all settled—done. He looked up. As if from far, far away the familiar carriages of the suburban rolled by on the embankment. From the city, from Warsaw . . . from life. The train was almost empty; a face here and there, looking at them but seeing nothing. But in the last carriage someone seemed suddenly surprised and strained to look back at them. What could they know, any of them?

"Mietek . . . Mietek . . . not so fast . . ." Giza called in a low voice. "Mietek, where are we going?"

For heaven's sake—how could she still go on asking? But no—let it be. Let her be stupid this once more. Very quietly and softly he answered: "I don't know, but don't be afraid. I will arrange everything. Probably to a concentration camp. It will be all right, you'll see."

"Then why don't they take us to the station?"

"I don't know. But don't talk, Giza. It may make them angry."

Again she fell a little behind. His thoughts flooded back into his mind as if they knew there was little time. His life, his family, the ghetto, fear, fear. Did it all amount to something which he should be sorry to lose? Shouldn't he be relieved that it was almost over at last?

His eyes were drawn to a thin chain of clouds racing across the sky. He felt a sudden wrench: in spite of everything, it wasn't easy. He was shaken with naked fear. Should he try to make a break for it? He'd be in the forest before they could unfasten their pistol. Rapidly, the plan took hold, everything in him straining to run, when suddenly he recalled Giza and Poldi behind him. How could he have forgotten? He dropped his head and went on dully, resigned. There was no escape, and all that remained was to accept the inevitable—death. It's not important really. Only a moment—the worst thing in fear is time. With all that lay behind in suffering, should it be so difficult?

4

When they reached the edge of the forest, the tall policeman left his place behind Giza and Poldi, and hurried to the front. "Keep moving, no stalling, understand?" The Germans undid their holsters, prodding them from the rear.

He turned. Giza was carrying Poldi now. He waited a moment for her and took the boy in his own arms.

"Mietek, where are they leading us?"

"Don't be afraid. I'll arrange everything all right."

On they went, ever deeper into the shadows of the trees. His

mind was still, he thought of nothing at all. It was hard work carrying the child. His breath came shorter. But the more exhausted he became now, the easier it would be to endure what lay ahead.

The undergrowth became thicker. They almost had to fight their way through at times. He pushed ahead blindly. The branches lashed his face, caught on his clothes. What did it matter?

"Not so fast, please, Mietek," Giza wailed, "I can't."

They came to a small clearing surrounded by spruces and birches. And there the tall policeman stopped and waited for them to catch up. In the matted grass some scraps of old newspapers and an empty vodka bottle.

How still and lovely. Suddenly he was on the verge of tears. No . . . no . . . he set Poldi down. Again he longed to make a break for it. The spruces and undergrowth would quickly swallow him. The glare of the sun would blind them for a moment. And it would be difficult for a bullet to find its mark among all the underbrush. The temptation gathered momentum. But he couldn't help glancing toward Giza, not far from him right at the edge, with the unsaid question in her eyes, trusting him, dependent upon him.

He stood his ground and waited. The Germans had entered the clearing, followed by the old policeman with his spade. He tried to look indifferent. But why were they so slow?

The tall policeman shouted to him. He turned, not understanding. The man was cursing now and waved for the old fellow to come over. He took the spade from him and began marking off a big square in the middle of the clearing.

"Come here. Get digging, and be quick about it!"

He picked up the spade and, with his back turned to Giza and the boy, began to dig. Furiously, he pried out the chunks of sod and damp sand, and threw them to one side. He tried to blank out all thought, to concentrate just on his work. But they came—the recollections. Again flashes of his life, but already far off—so alien, so irrelevant, they seemed to concern someone else.

He glanced up a moment. The policeman was standing by watching his every move. He was tempted to spit in his face. If they went for him, he would fight back and take one of them down with him. They would kill him anyway, so there was nothing to lose.

Why didn't he? Why was he so meekly carrying out the orders of his executioners? He knew very well. It wasn't fear that stopped him. He wiped the sweat from his face and plunged the spade once more into the sandy soil.

He looked for Poldi. He was sitting on the ground, his attention on some pine cones. Today was special—he had never seen anything like them before. He had been allowed outside the way he always wanted. Giza stood a little further away, the two Germans and the old policeman beside her. His gaze shifted for a moment back to the figure standing truculently above him: young, strong, stupid. Evil? Not especially. Just a faithful watchdog who could be counted on to attack whomever his master pointed out.

"Come on there. Keep digging."

Stork dug. You fools, gloating at your own comfortable glut of years in the face of our minutes. What possible gain can it bring you—that extra stretch of life's torment. He felt calmer, almost triumphant. There lay the answer, his weapon of retaliation.

The excavation was almost shoulder deep. The Germans approached and ordered him to climb out. Somehow he was surprised. He had expected he would just be staying there. He swung himself up over the edge. The Germans watched him closely, pistols in hand. They had brought Giza up to the edge too. She was crying, desperately pressing Poldi to her.

The expression of the Germans became more threatening, sharp, wild. The policeman took the cue, shouting and waving his arms: "Undress, undress on the double . . ." Now Giza must know beyond doubt that he had been deceiving her all the time. He took off his jacket, began to undo his shoes. "Everything, everything . . . quick . . ."

"Giza, take off your clothes. It won't help." He wanted to spare her being cursed and yelled at. She obeyed as if in a trance. He turned to Poldi and started undressing him with numb fingers, whispering comforting words into his ear.

But then the policeman yanked him away from the boy. The German gave him such a push he lost his balance and fell into the pit. Instinctively he scrambled back on his feet and looked up. Now they were yelling at his son . . . *his son* . . The child was sitting on the edge and had started wailing loudly. He reached up: "Poldi . . . Poldi, here." He lifted him down gently and stood him next to him, tightly holding his small hand in his.

With a shriek, Giza fell in, almost knocking him over. "Giza . . . Giza . . ." He tried to calm her. "It's all right. We're all together. Stand up and take Poldi's hand too. Don't be afraid. We're all . . ." He broke off as some shots rang out. Almost surprised he looked up to where the sound had come from. The

Germans towered above them. He was staring straight at them.

Again he heard shots. Poldi's hand suddenly dragged on his. But everything was becoming soft, gentle. His breath . . . He was lying in the sand. He felt it cool on his mouth. Poldi's hand was still in his. He pressed it tighter. Shouting somewhere far, far off, then still farther away, much farther—

5

The Germans pushed the pistols back into the holsters. They were tense, pale, silent. The tall policeman had bent over, his back to the pit, and was picking up the scattered clothes and tying them into a bundle. A little way off, near the edge of the clearing, the old man stood as if petrified, still staring dazed at the troopers, his hands trembling.

One of the Germans beckoned sharply to him: "*Na . . . einfüllen. Tempo. Tempo.*"

Unwillingly he approached and, trying to avoid looking down, picked up the spade. But he saw nonetheless. He stopped, frozen. In horror he exclaimed, "But she's still moving!"

His colleague waved his hand impatiently and said in a low voice, "Want to find yourself down there, too?" Seeing the old man trembling, hardly able to hold the spade, he snatched it from him. Frantically he pitched the sand in, his eyes looking straight ahead as if shielded by invisible blinkers.

6

It was Madey's wife who told Ogorek at the kiosk. ". . . And first they knock on my door and ask whether this was where Stork lives. I knew they meant trouble, but I couldn't help but tell them he was next door, could I now? And then the tall one from the police post says they're Jews, and I know for sure there's going to be awful trouble. They go in there, and then they bring them out and march them off to the forest. Could see right from my window. And then afterwards the old one from the post comes by alone and I see him return some spade of yours."

Ogorek was terrified. Before they knew it they'd be shot too for having harbored Jews, and their house burned to the ground. He closed the kiosk and hurried over to the police station. Sergeant Wrona looked up at him.

"What happened in my house?"

"Aw nothing—just you had Jews."

"Impossible, sergeant."

"It's a fact, I tell you. I was worried like hell about you first because they'd been denounced direct to the Germans. We didn't know anything till they came to get them. You were lucky—it was Golke's men."

"But who found out and turned them in?"

"The devil knows. The Germans had all the dope. Must have been on their trail a long time."

"Any chance of further trouble?"

"Not now. When the Germans came, I told them that just last night you reported them to me."

"What? You said that?" He stared at him wide-eyed.

"Sure thing. And that's why you had no trouble. I hope you'll think it's worth a little gift some time."

"Yes, of course. I'm very grateful, yes . . ."

When he got back to the kiosk he was too disturbed to reopen it. Genia *would* pick that day to go to Warsaw with Karol! He hurried on to the Lane.

Out in front of the Green House was a group of people: Kozik and Anna, Madey and Helena. They turned as they saw him approach.

Kozik called out, "D'you know what's happened, Mr. Ogorek?"

"Yes, yes, I know. They were taken?"

"Yeah—to the forest. The room's padlocked. After they've made their haul, they'll open up again."

Ogorek was so tense he couldn't go on talking. For it had suddenly occurred to him that in a way he was responsible. He recalled Stork's urgent plea only a day or so ago for a loan. It must have had some connection. Maybe he could have averted all this.

The living room was deserted. As he looked through the half-open bedroom door he saw Pelagia kneeling against the bed, praying. She looked up at him blankly as he approached and then returned to her prayers. He waited in silence for her to finish. Finally she crossed herself and struggled heavily to her feet.

"Pelagia—you know what happened upstairs?"

"Why don't you answer me?"

"You know better than anyone else why."

"What d'you mean? I know as much as you, probably a lot less since I wasn't here."

"You monstrous criminal! You murderer! I know who did it. So you want to bring God's wrath on all our heads? Doing in

innocent people! When you spoke to me about who they were yesterday, I half suspected. But I hoped you had a shred of conscience. Now I see I was wrong . . ."

"Pelagia, have you gone crazy? For Christ's sake stop it."

"I'm not crazy at all. I can see it right in you, just looking at you. I know you very well."

"Woman, you've gone mad! As I love God . . ."

"Don't swear to it. You'll only add another sin with your lies."

"For Christ's sake, listen to me! As I love God, I didn't breathe one word to anyone."

"Stop piling up further sins, you monster. And what—with what happened to Malinka, you didn't have nothing to do with that either?"

"That was something different. You wanted that yourself and I had to."

"Any child could see if you did it with Malinka, obviously you did it again."

"Jesus Christ . . . I just told you I didn't. He came to ask about money and I refused. I think I was entitled not to if I didn't want to—even with him. But mind you, I never said a word to anyone except you."

"Go! Get out of this room! I can't stand the sight of you."

"Look, woman, I've had enough from you. You be quiet, do you hear? You'll do us all in with your crazy talk."

"You can't scare me. I know everything. You destroyed a small child, too, do you understand? For the child alone I'll never forgive you—never—nor will almighty God, mind my words."

"Pelagia, how can I tell you? You're wrong. Listen, as I love my own children . . . As I wish for a long quiet life for me and you—it's not true. I didn't say one single word about them being Jews. To no one except you. Let God punish me in the most awful way if what I say's not true."

"No, Josef. I know you too well. It won't work."

"What have I done in my life to make you talk that way?"

"Leave me alone. I want to pray. It's not even I care about myself anymore. All I want is for God to spare the children and not punish them too on account of you."

"Pelagia . . . I'm warning you! Watch your tongue, do you hear? Don't forget: if you say one word like this where the children can hear, I might kill you. You're so goddam stupid and irresponsible, you yourself are the one who'll ruin us if you're not careful."

10

MONEY AND LOVE

IT WAS DARK when Roman arrived in Jutrosin. In the cold drizzle the single dimmed platform lantern looked more subdued than ever. There wasn't a soul around—Sunday evening. He crossed the tracks. Even the kiosk was closed. He'd borrow some cigarettes from Tadeusz.

At the villa it was Modlibog who let him in. "Excellent you came," he said. "Have you heard what happened?"

"No." He'd been in town since early morning. "Where? I didn't notice anything special."

"Nothing special! A whole family murdered . . ."

"Who? What family?"

"A Jewish one. Germans came with the blue police." He pulled Roman into the house and closed the door. "Come. Sit down here and I'll tell you everything. It's awful."

"I haven't much time." He knew Modlibog's endless narrative style. He could get whatever it was in a nutshell upstairs from Tadeusz.

"I haven't much time," Modlibog mimicked. "You won't be in such a hurry when you really know. Right here on our Lane. This morning . . ." And he embarked on a detailed reconstruction of the way the Storks were taken off and disappeared in the forest. "It's clear they killed them somewhere. It's unheard-of, doing in a whole family in broad daylight."

Roman shrugged. "That's how they usually do it." Modlibog's outraged excitement seemed slightly comical. His lordship was becoming sentimental in his old age. "An unfortunate incident," he conceded, "but not as unusual as you think, these days."

Modlibog was indignant. "How can you speak in that casual

tone? Whatever you call usual, it's a very real tragedy. Just imagine—only this morning these people got up as usual. They got up like all of us: Sunday morning. And now only a few hours later they've been left lying dead somewhere."

"But that's war. It's this way all the time. None of us can tell at the start of the day how it will end."

"Of course, I realize . . . but I meant something else. I'm surprised at how callous everyone has become toward other people's suffering. Death has somehow ceased to make any impression. That's what frightens me."

"I think in every war that's inevitable."

"Perhaps, but that doesn't make it right. There should be no circumstances that would answer suffering with indifference. The least we can do—and especially now—is to react with feeling, with humanity. To manifest protest and outrage, no matter how helpless we are, no matter how commonplace the crime. Otherwise what is left?"

"What good will that do? It has no meaning in fact."

"But it has! Very much so! With indifference, life would become intolerable. Whoever it may be, they are human beings like ourselves. One should love them and feel compassion simply because of that—they live together with us and share our fate. To become callous on top of everything is unpardonable."

"I'm sorry, but I don't understand you. There are various ways I could react to what happened here today, but why love? Of what possible interest can that Stork family be to me? I've never even spoken to them, in fact I've only seen him at a distance. I agree it's sad and all that, but the way you put it strikes me as sentimental. This is war and brutality is an inevitable part of it."

"No, what happened today can't be crossed off just as war. It's a simple crime, nothing more. War, too, is a crime of course, but at least people have a chance to go down fighting, instead of simply being slaughtered like sheep. And it's just this callousness I'm speaking of in relation to others which leads inevitably to this sort of crime. Look at the Germans. If they weren't so frightfully callous, could they commit these horrors? Even their insane ideas are no justification. They never consider their handiwork because it is of no interest to them."

"But they don't all go along with this."

"That's fortunate if it's so. But if there are any who don't, it's because they haven't lost their love for other human beings."

"Love?" He grimaced. "Aren't you exaggerating a little?"

"No, Roman, it's no exaggeration. Love is a necessity because we are all a part of mankind. How would you feel if you were suddenly left alone on earth without another human being? Can you imagine the horror of such solitude? You would quickly understand then what a debt you owe people, why they are bound to be the source of our deepest joy as well as sorrow. The one true happiness. And if that is so, how can you avoid loving them? How can you be indifferent to their suffering?"

"But that leads to a point of absurdity. I'm not going to start grieving over every person who happens to perish somewhere."

"No need to grieve. It's enough to feel indignation and pity, to express it. What is needed is a show of solidarity in the face of the humiliation of man. We should have in us a basic respect for every human being. For heaven's sake, Roman, when will we learn even to do that?" His voice was filled with emotion. "They have trampled on human dignity, and go on doing so without end. The Germans aren't able to love or feel anything but for themselves, and just this has brought them to extremes of crime like the one that happened today. I never set eyes on this Stork family either," he continued in an excited tone. "I had no contact with them, but I cannot help being affected by what happened to them. And I cannot help feeling indignant at the indifference everyone displays about this. Basically, all they do is congratulate themselves that they were more lucky. Beyond that, there is no real interest. Oh I know—your father too scoffs at me. Tadeusz upstairs at least nods sympathetically. Maybe he is just being polite. What we're facing here is not just egoism but the erosion of human capacity to feel. That is why I look at you young people with such concern. What hope is there for the future if you are beginning to think this way too?"

"Excuse me, sir," Roman said, with obvious irritation. "I've listened to everything you have said, but I can't help wondering why you address these remarks to me. Who is responsible for what is happening today? It's no use blaming isolated Hitlers. It goes further than that, to a whole generation—not mine either. What have we had to do with this? That lack of love which you speak of, we have inherited from the world of our fathers. What else was there for us to learn?"

Modlibog hesitated uncertainly. "Yes . . . but you who represent the future must not make our mistakes."

"It's too late. From our earliest youth we were taught to hate and are still being taught to do so every day. You shouldn't be surprised that such a belated lecture on love falls on deaf ears."

Modlibog sat down heavily. "I suppose in a way it's understandable. You are right in not respecting your elders any more. We haven't earned it, have we? But please think over what I said in any case. Don't just dismiss it because it comes from me, from my generation. Whatever our guilt may be, believe me there is also a lot of right in what I said. Don't blind yourself to it, Roman, for heaven's sake."

Roman bowed politely: "Excuse me, but I have to have a word with Tadeusz upstairs, and then I've got to hurry home."

2

Roman was relieved to be free of that interminable conversation at last. As he went up the stairs, he concentrated on the one important question in all this: someone must have denounced this Jewish family to the Germans. But who? First Malinka and now the Jews. It was time to track down whoever was responsible. One couldn't allow this sort of thing to go on unpunished. The most likely informer was that Krupa. It was time to get rid of the rat anyway.

It suddenly occurred to him that there must be a vacancy over at the Green House now. He had the grace to be a little ashamed. But wasn't it he who was being sentimental now himself? A room wasn't kept empty just because a tragedy had happened there. Certainly not with Ogorek.

"Good evening, Tadeusz," he said entering.

"So it's you." Rakowicz looked up surprised. "It's so late I didn't expect you. If you've come to tell me all about the Stork episode, please don't. I've had it thrown at me three times already. A fourth I couldn't stand."

"Don't worry. The old man downstairs has already given me the works—and then some. But there are a number of things I wanted to go over. First, loan me five cigarettes. Ogorek was closed up . . . thanks . . . you know I've been thinking there'll be a vacant room now at the Green House."

"Presumably yes—so what? Don't tell me you're thinking of moving out from under Papa."

"No. Something else." He stopped and reflected a while. "You

know—I could bring a wonderful business your way, but in return I want a favor from you."

"Why not? But you're so mysterious. Need some ready cash?"

"No, you're way off. But first you'll be pleased to know you're as good as accepted in the underground. Everything's arranged and all that's left are some formalities. You're to get a very good assignment—working with his nibs."

"His nibs?"

"Yes, 'Watchmaker.' I told you about him. A real opportunity. Not a second officer his equal in the Warsaw area."

"Fine, but what will my duties be?"

"Those of an adjutant. Mostly paper work, but very responsible. I'll let you know when you'll be meeting him. That's not all I have to report. There's the business I mentioned. For the underground too, but with a handsome profit for us. Really quite a windfall."

"Tell me."

"All right I will. But that means you'll do me a favor too?"

"Sure, but what is it?"

"Trivial for you, but complicated if I had to do it. It's that room at Ogorek's."

"What about it? What the devil do you need that for?"

"Obviously not for me. But I have a girl."

"A girl? Aren't you the sly one."

"I haven't told anyone about her because I don't want trouble at home. She's wonderful—you'll see. But you know my father. He'd be opposed just out of cussedness. And Mother will go along with him. So I decided to keep mum. Later, when circumstances are more suitable, I plan to marry her and they'll be faced with the accomplished fact."

Rakowicz made a face. It wasn't to his liking at all. By helping Roman he could easily give offense to old Orlowski. Nothing should endanger his good relations there. "Parents can be right sometimes," he said. "You shouldn't reject them out of hand."

Roman smiled sarcastically: "I see my old man bought you out completely. But there's no need to overdo loyalty, you know. To get back to the room. The problem is that the Germans threw the whole family out of their apartment in town."

"Threw out whom?"

"Her—Eva with her mother and younger sister. Three women. Do you understand now?"

"Yes, but what about it?"

"They have no place to go. Can't find anything in town. Eva's mother makes a living baking pastries. Eva's a waitress. They just manage. The problem is to keep their heads above water until the war's over."

"And then?"

"How do I know? Their father will be back presumably and life will return to normal. He's in an officers' prisoner of war camp. A career officer."

"What's your idea now?"

"To put them up at Ogorek's." He shrugged wryly. "A lucky break—for them. But I don't want to go myself. If I do, everyone on the Lane will know all about them. If you go to Ogorek and say it's for some friends of yours, it's done. You might even suggest that he shift the Madeys into the single room—they'd be glad of the lower rent—and give this family their two rooms."

Rakowicz would have preferred staying out of it, but he didn't want to offend Roman. "All right," he said finally, without enthusiasm. "I'll look into it for you."

"Thanks a lot," Roman said. "Tomorrow—O.K.? I don't want anyone else to get it."

Rakowicz nodded. "What's this other business you mentioned?"

"Oh yes—that. The underground is putting in circulation a considerable quantity of forged certificates, the kind the Germans have issued as a reward to farmers who have overfilled their delivery quotas. Each is worth one thousand zlotys in various types of produce. The underground collects 40 per cent, leaving 60 per cent for the intermediaries. I can have as many as I can place. Do you get the picture?"

"Hum." Tadeusz rubbed his chin. "If the Germans find out?"

"It's not likely with a few reasonable precautions—a small quantity at a time. And if they did—for selling cigarettes you can get shot, too. But we have to have an outlet store or two. The safest would be a co-op."

"What goods can be redeemed with these certificates?"

"Alcohol, leather, coal—all kinds of stuff."

"Where do I fit in?"

"Unlike my dear father I have no business head. You're good at organizing—manipulating. All I ask is a share of the profits. The big problem will be finding an outlet to approach."

"What would they get out of it?"

"The largest share of that 60 per cent, I should think. After all, they'd be taking most of the risk." He snapped his fingers. "I've got it! That woman, the one who crawled in with Malinka. Remember? I heard she's now in the same co-op where Malinka used to work. Someone said she even runs it. Anyway we could speak to her right here on the Lane." Roman grinned. "I swear she won't try to lure you with her charms. She pretends she's above all that now."

"When do you want to see her?"

"Maybe tomorrow evening when she gets back. And she'll play along, you'll see."

3

Helena had just blacked out her windows and turned on the light when she heard a knock at her door. Who in heaven's name could that be? No one ever came to see her. When she saw the two men, she almost closed the door in their faces, but Rakowicz said quickly: "We've come to see you in connection with a business possibility . . ."

Somewhat reassured though still suspicious, she said, "Please come in."

"You live very comfortably here," Rakowicz said, rather lamely, when she led them into the living room. Helena indicated two chairs but then, completely confused, she made an excuse and disappeared into the kitchen. When she had collected herself, she returned and sat down across from them twisting a handkerchief in her hands nervously.

"We've got a very profitable proposition to make to you," Rakowicz began, watching her with undisguised curiosity. (While she was out in the kitchen, he had even given Roman a poke and whispered, "Hey—not bad at all, considering . . ."). Now he went on, "Aren't you manager of a co-op store in town?"

"Yes." The question reassured her even more.

"Well, then, without taking any more of your time, let me explain right away what we have in mind." He launched immediately into a persuasive account of their project and what it offered her.

At first she was frightened, reacting instinctively against any new illicit operation. But the possibilities increasingly intrigued her, and she listened carefully.

"And mind you," Rakowicz was saying, "the award certificates were run off on the original dies with the same paper and print,

and even the authentic occupation stamp. There's no way of distinguishing them. That doesn't mean there aren't risks in other respects, but we have to live with danger no matter what we do these days. Your share would be 40 per cent of the value of the goods, the same as the underground's. We take only 20 per cent for ourselves . . . So tell me honestly, isn't it the chance of a lifetime and made to order for your set-up?" He smiled, waiting for her response. Again he found himself staring at her curiously. Could what Roman said about her recent past be true? He had to admit she had it all over on Genia. "Well?" he asked once more, since she was still silent.

Helena was having difficulty concentrating. She couldn't believe that here on Duck Lane people were suddenly treating her like anyone else, even entrusting her with considerable responsibility. And their offer was really very impressive. Quickly, she calculated. How impressed Sigmunt would be when he returned.

"I'm thinking," she said at last. "I'm thinking whether it could be done without drawing attention."

"Well of course it will have to be planned very carefully," Rakowicz conceded. "There are risks, naturally. But remember you'll be under protection of the underground in case anything should go wrong. You wouldn't be left in the lurch."

Actually, Helena's mind was already made up. It was just a matter of not seeming overeager. This she had learned long ago. Finally she nodded. "All right—I'll give it a try."

4

There was a flurry of curiosity on the Lane when new tenants arrived at the Green House. Kozik, of course, quickly made himself useful with this and that, including the indispensable trickle of coal. He soon found an excuse to come over to Helena to report his findings.

"The hallway smells like a festival. This Mrs. Korf, she makes her living baking and selling pastries. Used to better times she is, Mrs. Korf. Her husband's an army major in a P.O.W. camp. Middle-aged, a real lady. She has two daughters. The older one, Eva, she works as a waitress in town. Krisha, the young one, is a kid in pigtails."

Helena listened carefully. Recently, she had come to realize that she would have to get some help in the store. What with manipulating the premium awards and disposing of the black market goods

that became available to her, she found that she often had to stay in town working right through the night.

But she was wary of asking the main office for an assistant. She couldn't be sure who they might send, or how nosy their candidate might be. But this Mrs. Korf, an older woman with no business experience, might be just the answer.

With typical caution, Helena decided to take a good look at her first. From Kozik she learned that Mrs. Korf invariably attended the second Mass on Sunday. She made a point of passing her on the street and observing her at close range. Immediately she decided that Mrs. Korf would be ideal. Since she had no intention of going near the Green House, and in fact except for Kozik always avoided contact with people on the Lane, she decided to intercept her the very next Sunday on her way back from church.

"Excuse me, madam, I am Mrs. Malinka, a neighbor of yours," she began. "Just after we were married, my husband was taken to a concentration camp. I took over his job as manager of a co-op. There's a vacancy there, a very good job. I heard through the grapevine that you might be interested."

Mrs. Korf was clearly startled and perhaps a little resentful too. "But my dear woman, you don't even know me."

Helena was amused. "On Duck Lane, everybody knows about everyone else. Kozik told me about you, that you were an officer's wife, that your husband was in a P.O.W. camp—about your daughters. You sound reliable to me and that's the kind of person I need. It's a good job, good pay, a lot easier than baking pastries up in your room and hawking them in town."

Mrs. Korf could only gaze at her in astonishment. She didn't know what to make of this vigorous, earthy creature with her cheerful self-assurance. A few years ago Mrs. Korf would have hired a girl like this one to be her kitchen maid, and it was utterly incongruous that she should accost her in the street and offer her a job.

As if she could read her mind, Helena said tartly, "It's no skin off my back. If you don't want the job, there are plenty who do."

The truth was Mrs. Korf hated baking pastries. "It's not that," she said quickly. "But surely you can understand I'd like to know more about it."

"The best way to find out is to come by the store tomorrow, and look it over." Helena gave her the address, adding, "If you're

interested then, I'll send you over to the head office to fill out a contract."

Mrs. Korf was both reassured and impressed to hear Helena mention a head office and a contract. "Why thank you," she said faintly, "thank you very much. I'll be there."

5

When Tadeusz entered the cafe there was no sign of Roman. He chose an inconspicuous corner table and sat down. It was midmorning and the restaurant was deserted except for a deeply absorbed young couple and a bald-headed man with his newspaper. He ordered coffee.

Tadeusz was nervous and afraid. Yet he wouldn't think of withdrawing now, even though all his instincts urged that he should. From the first day of the war, he had decided to concentrate on survival. The hell with heroics. Until Roman brought it up, he had successfully ignored the underground. But Roman assumed that, like himself, he was eager to fight back at the Germans. And Tadeusz's vanity, his anxiety to hold Roman's esteem—who was, after all, Orlowski's son and Irena's brother—had cooked his goose.

Now he was not only preparing to risk his life, but he was jeopardizing everything he had achieved during the last few months. His very satisfactory partnership with Orlowski to begin with—almost daily he returned to Jutrosin with bundles of securities, drawing a handsome commission each time. Within a few weeks his arrangement with Helena would begin to pay off. And, most important, there was Irena. He had been increasingly attentive to her of late and there were signs that she was by no means indifferent to him.

Besides all this, Tadeusz had no illusions about himself. He knew he was not the stuff of which resistance leaders were made. He was too easily tempted by a pretty face—look at that ridiculous affair with Genia. He swore again and again to break off their relationship and a week later he had her in that room of his rolling around on the floor. (It was Genia who liked to do it on the floor.) Just thinking about it made his trousers uncomfortably tight.

And then there was the Casino. Thank God no one knew about this any more than they knew about Genia. Hardly a week went

by when he didn't spend an evening trying his luck. Once he had even staked some of the money Orlowski had advanced for the purchase of securities. Fortunately, his luck was with him that night, but suppose it hadn't been?

A young woman appeared in the door of the cafe. She glanced around as if looking for someone and then disappeared. Roman was already fifteen minutes late. Nothing irritated Tadeusz more than unpunctuality.

When Roman finally came, Tadeusz greeted him with ill-concealed annoyance. "I thought punctuality was a byword in your game."

"Keep your shirt on. It's all very deliberate. He never goes anywhere before the surroundings have been thoroughly surveyed. You should understand that."

Tadeusz shrugged. "Can't you be on time and cautious too?"

Roman nudged him. "He's here."

A stooped elderly man carrying a violin case was entering the cafe. His face covered with a gray stubble, he was wearing a threadbare ill-fitting coat and a battered hat. So that's the famous major, Tadeusz thought ironically.

The old man noticed them at once and headed toward their table. Roman jumped up, almost at attention. Tadeusz rose more casually.

"Be seated, both of you. Please don't make such a commotion." "Watchmaker" sat down himself and put the violin case on the floor beside him. He glanced around the room. "A pleasant place."

"This is Mr. Rakowicz . . ." Roman began but "Watchmaker" broke in at once.

"I know, I know. Never use names."

Tadeusz was amused by "Watchmaker's" air of mystery. Obviously the man enjoyed playing his role. But at the same time Tadeusz was very much aware of his penetrating gaze.

"Watchmaker" looked at him a moment in silence and then began to speak in a subdued voice. "You are about to enter a new community—the three of us here constitute a basic unit of this community." He extended his glance to include Roman who bowed imperceptibly in acknowledgement. "We welcome new comrades-in-arms, but we also insist upon their complete devotion and loyalty. Our task is to carry death to our enemies. Ruthless death . . ." Tadeusz shifted uneasily. "And once you have entered our com-

munity, only death can ever separate us. Our demands are high; I hope "Squirrel" here has made this clear to you. Your function is to be my adjutant. To start out with you'll have mostly paper work. Later we'll see. Eventually if you should like to participate in some field work where you'll have a little action I'll have no objection. You're young; I imagine you're anxious to do a bit of shooting?"

Tadeusz nodded mechanically, although nothing was further from his inclinations. He felt increasingly ill at ease and beyond his depth.

"Watchmaker" continued: "You'll be working with my liaison girl, but all I want from you at the moment is your official oath of loyalty to the underground. Later I'll let you know when you'll start actual service."

Tadeusz gave his pledge with a solemn face.

"Watchmaker" then turned to Roman: "Who's going to track down Weber tomorrow and carry out the sentence?"

" 'Flower . . .' " Roman quickly responded. "I wanted to, but I was told it was 'Flower's' job."

"Watchmaker" considered. "It would be better if you handled it. Liquidating Hauptmann Weber may be a ticklish job. He's in the habit of never going anywhere without his SS bodyguard. I'll have the order changed today. Come to me at five."

"Yes sir," Roman answered militarily.

"I think that's all." He turned to Tadeusz and said: "I hope we will be mutually satisfied with each other. We'll be meeting each other once a week when you get started. Please don't leave here right after me. Drink another coffee first." He pulled the rim of his hat down a little lower over his stubbled face, buttoned his coat, and picking up his violin made his way to the exit with the short shuffling steps of an old man.

6

It all happened so unexpectedly and easily that Tadeusz could not believe it. One morning Irena mentioned that she was going to the city the next day and suggested that they meet and return together. So he had asked her to join him for coffee before catching the late afternoon train.

He had been on his best behavior—charming, attentive, amusing. And Irena, who at home sometimes seemed constrained and distant,

had been in an unusually gay and carefree mood. The atmosphere imperceptibly became informal and unselfconscious. And then it had suddenly happened without any forethought: he told her he loved her. At once he was startled, wondering himself whether he had really meant it. She was attractive and impressed him, but wasn't that all? Even Genia awoke more passion in him. Perhaps her wealth intimidated him.

Nervously, he watched for her reaction, thinking if worst came to worst he could turn it all into a joke. After all it was a crazily abrupt declaration. But he could see she was taking him quite seriously.

At last she said, "I've been expecting this rather. You know I like you—like you very much." That was all and then she changed the subject. He felt a flush of hope. So there was really a chance!

A little later looking deeply into her eyes, he told her again that he loved her and this time asked straight out for her hand in marriage. After hesitating only a moment she said yes. Tadeusz was completely dazed; he could hardly believe his luck. They sealed their engagement over a bottle of wine and afterwards on the train back sat in the far corner of the dimly lit, almost deserted carriage and kissed each other for the first time.

Of course Irena's consent didn't by any means settle the matter. What would her parents say? In spite of Modlibog's assertion that Orlowski obviously liked him, he was extremely dubious about his reaction. Of course Irena had a mind of her own. In fact when he had asked her on the train about approaching her parents, she had shrugged indulgently. "You can give them that pleasure if you want, but what they say won't make any difference to me."

That evening he didn't give the slightest hint to Modlibog or Witold, nor did he mention what was on his mind when he went to town with Roman the next morning. But as he went about his affairs he kept worrying about how to approach Orlowski and when. Finally, he became so impatient he took an early train home, determined to see him as soon as possible. If he were turned down, he would pack up and leave the Lane for good.

When he knocked on the door, Anna let him in. A moment later Orlowski greeted him cordially and invited him into his study.

By this time Tadeusz was so nervous he launched without preliminaries into what had brought him over. The old man was so obviously startled, it was clear Irena hadn't mentioned a thing.

"This is certainly a surprise, Tadeusz! Let me call my wife. And of course we must get Irena—we must first find out what she has to say. Personally I assure you I am not unsympathetic. But, well —wait a moment while I call in the others."

Alone in the study, Tadeusz had a feeling of complete unreality. To all intents and purposes the great director was welcoming him with open arms! He almost felt drunk.

One after the other they appeared—Mrs. Orlowska, mystified; Irena, secretly amused; Orlowski, filled with pompous self-importance.

"Irena," Orlowski said when they were all assembled, "a moment ago Mr. Tadeusz stood before me here and asked for your hand in marriage. And so I called you in—you're the one to say whether you accept. And naturally Marie, I'd like to hear your view too."

Mrs. Orlowska turned with amazement to Irena. "But my dear, you never said a word about this." There was a hurt note in her voice, but she added gently, "Though naturally it's for you to decide. I don't want to interfere in any way or try to influence you."

"I've already agreed," Irena said firmly. "It was only yesterday that Tadeusz asked me, and I said yes."

"Then as I see it, it's settled," Orlowski declared looking from one to the other with evident satisfaction. "I must admit I am delighted. I regard Tadeusz as a very capable and steady man, and will be glad to have him as a son-in-law. I have hopes that after the war he will be an intimate business associate as well."

Tadeusz bowed slightly to acknowledge his appreciation. His mind was reeling, but he kept a firm control of himself. He went through the gesture of courteously kissing Irena's hand, and then accepted the congratulations of the others. All the time he was thinking: it's like a puppet show, they're all on the ends of invisible strings doing my exact bidding in some make-believe comedy. Then he pulled himself together, ashamed. This was no time to be cynical; quite the contrary.

He resolved to measure up to their trust and affection and to justify it by all of his actions in the future.

7

The first frost covered the grass, the fences, even the roofs. The sand on the Lane was suddenly firm under foot and around the edge of the well behind the Green House there was a fringe of deli-

cate, crystal-clear icicles. Lines of smoke rose vertically from chimneys into the sky, each representing a hidden island of warmth somewhere inside, but a meagre, hard-to-come-by portion of coal turning to ash as well.

Kozik had a lot of work now; he was the most sought after person on the Lane. Several times a week, well before dawn, he was on his way toward the station with his push-cart and a bundle of empty sacks. It was the same today. At the crossing he nodded to his young helpers listening in the dark . . .

There it was—the far-off rumble of the approaching freight, Warsaw bound. At once their eyes were on the green semaphore light, floating disembodied beside the tracks. Had the switchman remembered? He was an essential cog in this operation, from which he too would be getting his share of the spoils. Yes—there it went: red.

The engine came to a hissing stop and gave two short blasts. Kozik and a lineman ran over and exchanged a few bantering remarks with the man in the cab as the light went green. This was just long enough for his four assistants, the Jakubiak boys, to spot the coal cars from hidden vantage points along the embankment, and still more important—to discover where the German guards were stationed. As the train slowly started up again, they nimbly scrambled up its sides at selected points. In a matter of seconds big chunks of coal were flying down the embankment into the grass. Kozik also had vanished from beside the engine as it got under way and clambered onto the first passing coal car.

Shouts. The flash of a random shot. The Jakubiak boys left the moving train one after the other, quick as cats, and dropped flat in the grass below the embankment. Kozik, too, made a fast get-away and nestled against the back of a telegraph pole as the wheels clattered by above. Then suddenly silence. Only the red light of the caboose running along the tracks, ever smaller and then disappearing around the curve.

Dragging their sacks beside them, the raiders worked their way back along the embankment, feeling in the grass with hands and feet for their precious haul.

The collecting job done, the sacks were loaded onto the push-cart waiting behind Ogorek's kiosk and found their way finally into Kozik's locker at the Green House. Thanks to enterprising souls like him the inhabitants of the Lane would be able to keep the cold out for another stretch of days.

It was getting light. Kozik had just locked up and was rinsing his hands at the well when he saw Madey returning from his shift, his lamp swinging beside him. He dried off his hands on his pants and called out, "Hey there, Madey. How are you?" There was something he was dying to say.

"Awful cold," Madey grumbled. "The worst for poor folk is when there's nothing to heat with."

Kozik ignored the remark. If a railway worker found himself without coal, he must be clumsy indeed. Honesty was all right, but there were limits. Madey had only himself to thank for his plight.

"News, Madey! That elegant gentleman living with the Count is going to marry Director Orlowski's daughter. How's that for a catch?"

Madey had set down his lantern and was working on his pipe. He shrugged, unimpressed. "Nothing special about that. People get born, marry, and die, on and on. It's got to be that way, doesn't it?"

"Yeah, but being on our Lane makes it special."

"Nothing so happy about this place—Turyn killed, the Stork family too, and who knows if Malinka's still walking on this earth."

"Oh, come on—" Kozik broke off. Eva Korf was coming for water. In her black sweater and with her wind-blown blond hair, she was the best looker on the Lane. He hurried over to draw the water up for her. When her pail was full, he said, "Can I carry it up for you, Miss?"

"No, thank you," she said firmly, picking it up and lugging it with evident difficulty back around the house.

"Kind of uppety, but a lovely girl," Kozik commented, shaking his head in admiration. Madey was busy drawing on his pipe and said nothing. Now the Green House was coming to life, and Genia appeared with her pail.

"Good morning" she said, nodding to the two men. Kozik drew the water up for her too, and as she was about to return indoors, he said, "Heard the latest, Miss Genia? There's going to be a big wedding on our Lane."

She stopped and stared at him. Then, almost as if she had to force herself to speak, she asked, "Who?"

"That picture-postcard gentleman in the villa—Mr. Rakowicz."

She set the pail down in disbelief. "Mr. Rakowicz."

"Yeah, him. Going to marry into the Director's family, imagine that, Miss Irena. Some fellows sure have all the luck."

For a long moment she just looked at him, speechless. Then she picked up the pail and, averting her face, hurried back along the side of the house.

"What's eating her?" Kozik said surprised.

Madey shrugged. "I've got to be going upstairs." He picked up his lantern and headed around to the front of the house too. As he entered the hall, he found Genia huddled over on the bottom step, her pail on the floor beside her. She was sobbing.

"What's happened, Miss Genia?" he asked troubled.

"Oh nothing, nothing . . . I . . . I banged my head." She wiped her tears quickly with her sleeve and looked the other way.

"Don't you be crying, Miss Genia," he said. He quickly sized up the reason for her tears. "There's no sense to it. Right now it's bad, sure. But tomorrow'll be good. Everything keeps on turning round—now bad, now good. And look how many folks have died and nobody cries for them. It don't pay to cry about oneself either, because you never know what's ahead."

8

For his first work session for the underground, Tadeusz was directed to report to an apartment house on King Street. He went through the court to the designated entry, and then five floors up a worn wooden stairs. He was filled with curiosity, but was also very nervous. Whatever lay ahead, he was embarking on a dangerous game.

He pressed the bell, but couldn't hear it ring. So he knocked. Finally, the head of an old woman appeared in the door.

"Is Miss Melania home, and would she be interested in buying some tea?" He repeated the greeting exactly as he had been instructed. For a moment the woman looked at him with distrust, but then she beckoned him in.

There was a short corridor, the smell of cooking cabbage. Ahead of him the woman opened a door while she herself went on down the hall. He entered. From a heavy dining room table a pretty young woman with tight drawn black hair was looking up at him. She smiled at his hesitation. "I am Melania—sounds like someone's old aunt, doesn't it? I hope I don't look it though." She laughed and added, "But I guess you don't have much in common with an 'Umbrella,' at least as far as your appearance."

"That's right, my name is 'Umbrella,' " he said, feeling decidedly foolish. His eyes were fixed admiringly on her. "I gather we'll be working together here?"

"Good guess . . ."

They exchanged a few more pleasantries, and then her tone became serious as she asked him to sit down beside her, and began introducing him to his work. "It's a matter of going over reports that have been sent in and classifying them. The less important ones can be sent on direct by you for investigation. The major ones have to go to 'Watchmaker' first. He likes to be informed, but it causes a lot of unnecessary confusion too. It's best for us to deal with as much as we can ourselves. The investigation archives are in my apartment, and as soon as a case is closed, I take the file with me . . ."

She went on to lay the current cases before him. He looked at them intently but felt completely at sea. It was all so new and strange.

"Aha, Krupa . . ." he commented seeing the name at the head of one of the reports. He'd heard all about him from Roman.

"Yes," she answered. "We're just beginning an investigation of him. Would you like to look through the material?"

"No. I'm already familiar with the case." He was relieved to be able to show that he was not completely ignorant. But what fascinated him was Melania herself. He couldn't get over such a pretty girl being involved with such dangerous work. "Tell me, am I right that you distribute the weapons yourself to the liquidation teams when there's an assignment?"

She nodded. "Yes, usually it's me. But don't worry—it won't interfere with our work here."

"That's not what I meant. Looking at you, I'd imagine you'd be much more preoccupied with romance than this kind of business. It seems like such a waste."

She flushed a little and then laughed. "The one doesn't preclude the other, does it? Besides I enjoy danger."

"You're not afraid?"

"Sometimes. But when it turns out well, there's no greater thrill. I guess somewhere in us all there's an impulse that drives us toward risks. Haven't you ever felt the urge?"

"I suppose so. But in a different form. And up to now I always thought that was a man's prerogative." He smiled.

"Well, here you have the best evidence it isn't so. Men have a way of claiming all such pleasures as their own preserve."

"A question whether it's a pleasure."

"Yes, I think it is. Risk is a part of life and we might as well enjoy it. One gets accustomed to the world as it is—living from

day to day and making the best of it. I can't even conceive of life without war anymore. It must be very dull. I can remember those times, but I'm sure I wasn't half as happy—or as much alive."

He didn't answer. Instead he again concentrated on the documents before him.

9

The job at the store turned out most satisfactorily for Mrs. Korf. Suddenly her life was more secure. And the work was easy too, without real responsibilities. While Helena's manner of speech and lack of social polish were unfortunate, this was soon offset by her relief in finding someone to talk to at last. Her need for a confidant was acute. Her daughters didn't seem to have the slightest interest in what she thought, and whenever she began to reminisce they interrupted her or pointedly changed the subject.

Miss Helena, however, always listened attentively whenever she regaled her with the past. There were the reminiscences of her youth, of her first love, of her second one—the dashing young officer whose wife she was to become. Of life in garrison towns, big balls, parties, the little secret clashes of married life. And of course she talked constantly of her husband who, the moment the war was over, would rescue her from her present plight and take her back to that other carefree world which was her right.

Mrs. Korf was convinced that what lay ahead would fulfill her every longing, and this more than anything else enabled her to endure the present. It was simply a disagreeable hiatus—a punishment by God for unknown sins. The important thing was to exist somehow, and to raise the girls so he would be proud of them and of her when he returned.

Her younger one, Krystina, still a gawky adolescent, was no trouble yet. But about Eva she had become ever more concerned without being able to do a thing about it. Of course she had been opposed to her working as a waitress. But finally their difficult circumstances had forced her to give in.

Then she learned of Eva's romance with Roman Orlowski. In spite of the fact the youth came from a wealthy and respected family, Mrs. Korf dreaded any kind of commitment at present involving the girls. How could she know what *his* reactions would be when he came back? Nothing must happen of which *he* might disapprove.

These worries, too, she poured out to Helena, grateful for her

sympathy and understanding. And so when Helena on one occasion said she couldn't understand why she was so dead against Eva marrying Roman, she began to wonder for the first time whether she was right. As Miss Helena said, it could make everything much easier. She tried to find out how things really stood between the two young people. But Eva was evasive and immediately changed the subject. So maybe he wasn't serious about her at all? Her worries increased. She told Eva about a school friend of her own youth whom a student had seduced and then promptly dropped. She made up several further variants on the same theme. The only result was that Eva flared up, "Oh, Mother, stop. You don't know a thing," and turned her back on her.

However, a new incident arose that temporarily diverted Mrs. Korf's attention from her daughter. One evening at the station in Warsaw she ran into Ogorek. He greeted her courteously and then with evident curiosity asked whether she found her job satisfactory.

"Oh yes," she answered. "And the woman who runs the store is very agreeable to work with."

Ogorek smiled sarcastically: "Smart girl all right. Quickest changeover I ever saw. She lived in my house four years before I discovered she was working the streets. And out she went."

"What do you mean—worked the streets?"

"Very simple, madam—as a prostitute. Ask anyone."

"But how does she come to be store manager then?"

"In wartime anything's possible, madam. Look around everywhere. Decent folk getting killed while the scum comes out on top. The Germans did in the Professor, and next thing Malinka and that woman get the house from his widow. Smart, eh? But Malinka never was her husband. He already had one wife. Threw her out so he could live with this woman. That's how it is, madam."

She was shocked beyond words. It all seemed too preposterous, the sort of thing she'd be ashamed even to ask anyone about. She observed Helena intently the following day. More than ever she felt it was impossible. Maybe Ogorek had a grudge against her. Finally, running into Kozik's Anna one evening on the landing, she screwed up her courage and asked. At once from her smile it was clear Ogorek hadn't lied.

"Yes, Mrs. Korf, that's what she was, but she seems to have changed completely. Hard to figure out, but you never can tell with folks."

Mrs. Korf was dreadfully upset. Should she give up her job? How could she, the mother of two girls, the wife of an officer, work side by side with an ordinary prostitute? What would *he* say? But she certainly had no desire to return to baking cakes and hawking them in cafes. She couldn't expect to find a job that suited her as well very soon again.

Helena quickly noticed the change in her assistant. "Has something gone wrong at home, Mrs. Korf?" she asked, concerned. "Please tell me. Maybe I can help."

At first Mrs. Korf said she didn't feel well but finally she could be silent no longer. She turned to Helena and blurted: "Please tell me—is Mr. Malinka really your husband?"

Helena dropped a bag of sugar; her face blanched. "So they told you. I knew from the beginning they would. No, he wasn't. But really, he said he was going to marry me. We lived together like husband and wife. We . . ."

"Oh please, Mrs. . . . Malinka—don't cry. It's not important. I only asked."

Mrs. Korf fell silent. Presently, Helena stopped crying and began to bustle around the stove. Neither of them ever brought up the subject again. But Mrs. Korf made up her mind to keep her job and let everything remain as it was. Convenience was the determining factor: quite simply she needed Helena. To herself she argued that if Helena was so hard-working now everything was in order. It was the present that counted. After a while she even stopped thinking about it and spent her time fretting about Eva.

10

Returning home one evening in mid-December, Helena noticed a card stuck in her door. At once her heart began to pound—could it be from Sigmunt? She couldn't read a word in the dark. She rushed into the living room and turned on the light.

A gray printed card, at the bottom a signature—"Sigmunt Malinka." She didn't even look at the rest, but sat down and cried. Only after some time did she pick the card up again and examine it. It was written in German. Once more she began to cry, this time out of sheer helplessness. Then she recalled a Polish-German dictionary among Turyn's books on the shelf. Laboriously she identified each word. "I am in good health and feeling well . . ." That seemed the gist of it, all that mattered anyway. He was alive! He was alive and would be returning to her some day. She began pac-

ing the room. Was there anything she could do for him? She picked up the card again and looked at the heading—"Auschwitz." That was the German for Oswiecim. She began to tremble, that was the place she'd heard such awful things about. But maybe a lot of it was just rumor. The fact was that he was alive right now, and she should be grateful for that alone.

Gradually she became calm enough to sit down and think. There were various things to do now. First she would write to Mrs. Turyn and tell her the news. Then she would make up a food parcel for him. At the moment that was the only way she could help. Then she began to think of her own circumstances. Recently, she had made her first settlement with Mr. Rakowicz on the proceeds from the premium awards. The amount of her share had almost frightened her. The only safe way to protect it was to convert it into dollars, and through contacts on the black exchange this was what she had promptly done. Then she had brought the big wad of bills home and hidden them in her bed.

Now she rose and went to the bedroom. She counted the bills out in hundred dollar piles. There was almost $2,000.

This money she had determined to save for Sigmunt. When he returned, the first thing she would do was to hand it to him. With this money she would make absolutely sure of his love and respect for her.

But that being the case, she had to find a better hiding place. For a moment, she pondered and then she put the bills in an empty jar and sealed it tightly. She picked up a trowel and went outside. She stood quietly in the dark a moment until her eyes had become accustomed to it. Then she dug a hole right beside the wall and buried the jar, carefully taking bearings of the exact spot. Satisfied, she returned indoors.

Money and love—what more could she demand of life? Money she already had. For Sigmunt she would have to wait a bit. But when he returned, all that people dreamed of, but so seldom achieved, would be hers.

11

CHRISTMAS EVE

SHORTLY before the holiday season the first snow fell, followed by a sharp frost. More than ever Kozik was in demand. In addition to supplying coal there was snow to be shoveled, at Modlibog's a pipe froze, and then there was the matter of Christmas trees. Everyone wanted theirs cut at the very last moment, so the needles would be fresh. As a result on Christmas Eve he was rushing back and forth from the forest. First, one just right for the Orlowskis. Then for the villa next door. After that, the Ogoreks and Korfs. And when finally he was cutting his own, he remembered the Madeys and added one for them, and he didn't even forget the Quail. Madey's Martha thanked him warmly for his thoughtfulness. Helena wasn't home yet. He stuck a scrap of paper on a branch—"From J. K. with Christmas greetings"—and left the small tree in front of the door.

In the early afternoon he went to the Orlowskis to scale and clean the fish for Anna. What a lot there was—who would be eating all that? Anna explained that everyone from next door would be coming over for supper. There would be jellied perch, carp in almond sauce, and boiled pike with hard-boiled eggs. It was a particularly important event because soon after Christmas Mr. Rakowicz would be marrying Irena.

The fish cleaned, Kozik hurried home. This was the moment he had been looking forward to all day—fixing their own tree. From the top of the cupboard he got down the box where he had put it just a year ago. He scattered the familiar tufts of cotton on the branches, carefully hung the glass balls, and clipped on the holders

with last Christmas' candles still in them. He walked round the tree several times admiring it. It was much the prettiest tree he'd ever done. Then he began to clean thoroughly their rooms.

As he was scrubbing the kitchen stove he heard someone calling him from the bottom of the stairs. It was Genia to ask if he would give a hand putting up their tree. With two boards from the shed, some spikes, and a hammer, he quickly fashioned a stand. As he fixed the tree to it he said: "Now all I'm wishing for, Miss Genia, is a lot of presents under this tree for you. Maybe a handsome bachelor in one of the packages," and he laughed. Genia made no response, but turned away as if she were hurt. What had he said wrong?

Again he went upstairs. It was time to start mixing the dough for the noodles and to put the cabbage on.

Suddenly he heard Anna rushing up the steps. He was surprised, for he hadn't expected her so soon. She plunged into the kitchen and went right on through to their bedroom without stopping. Flushed and breathless, she called out: "Have to change my skirt. I promised to serve at table. They can't manage and I couldn't just drop everything . . ."

He was angry. "They ought to have sense enough to know a family wants to be together on Christmas Eve."

"It'll be all right. Should be finished by seven for sure."

"It's time you quit that job," he grumbled. "Might be a little harder, but at least—"

"You know what?" she broke in, "I don't think I'll be staying on there long anyway."

"Why?" He came to the door surprised.

"Seems to me we're going to have that baby at last, Jan. Maybe I'm wrong but that's the way it seems. And if that's so, how could I go on working there?"

2

Every festive occasion had great significance for Mrs. Korf—above all, Christmas. Not so much the event itself as the preparations for it and the memories these evoked.

Helena had given her the two days before Christmas off, and she worked eagerly scrubbing and tidying their two rooms.

"You know, Krisha," she said dreamily as her younger daughter stood watching her put a few meager decorations on the tree. "Before the war we always had a big tree right up to the ceiling with

a silver star at the top and glass balls and little trumpets and lots of candles and angel hair. Every year."

The girl was surprised. "What is angel hair?"

Her mother looked at her sadly and then at the makeshift tree: how pitiful—two utterly different worlds.

Supper she prepared with all the care of the sumptuous traditional meal, though there was only one small fish. That was all she could afford. But she laid the table according to tradition, putting hay just as one should under the cloth, decorating it with spruce twigs. And even though there was no wine, she set out a delicate stemmed crystal glass at each place.

It began to get dark. Soon it would be time to sit down together. Eva returned from town, taciturn and noncommunicative. Obviously something had been bothering her recently, but to question her was pointless. She looked almost pleadingly at the girls, but it was no use. The holiday mood that she had tried so hard to capture was destroyed before it even had a chance to begin. They ate in gloomy silence.

3

Helena stayed later than usual in the store. It was closed; there was nothing really to do. Yet she waited for the last train. For as long as she could remember she had come to think of Christmas as something that had no relation to her. The sight of people carrying trees and standing in queues for fish depressed her. And late in the afternoon when everyone seemed to be swept by a surge of well-wishing, she found herself so lonely and cross she was ready to cry.

When she came up her walk and found the tree at her door she was deeply touched. And then she thought why shouldn't she have Christmas too? It was just as much hers as anyone's. If Sigmunt were here, they would make of it the same festive event it was in every other house. So she should too.

She carried the tree into the living room and looked at it awkwardly. How did one go about making it into a Christmas tree? She propped it up on the table with Turyn's books and tore scraps of white paper and scattered them over its branches. She took a table cloth and spread it in front of the tree. The hay of the manger —she'd heard that was important too. She slipped out in front of the house and felt in the dark for a handful of withered grass that stuck through the snow. Returning indoors, she spread it on the cloth and set the plate on top. Was that how it should be?

She sat down to eat, the first time not in the kitchen since Sigmunt was taken. The first Christmas supper she could remember.

Someone knocked timidly, and there was Mrs. Korf. "I just came over to bring you a Christmas wafer and a piece of cake."

"How nice," Helena cried gratefully. "Please come in." She couldn't help but notice Mrs. Korf glancing curiously around the room. "I haven't done much about Christmas this year because he's in that awful German camp and I'm always worrying about what may have happened to him. But then you understand—it's the same with your husband too."

Mrs. Korf stiffened, yes *he* was in a camp, but that was something completely different. He was her husband and an officer. What crust to compare them! She got up.

"Excuse me," she said, ignoring Helena's remark. "I've got to get back, my daughters are waiting . . ."

Helena followed her to the door, puzzled by the abruptness of her departure.

4

Perspiring from the heat of the stove and her own exertions, Pelagia turned to Martha, who had been helping her. "Almost all done here. It's time to be fixing things upstairs for yourselves. Take along one of those herrings, and here's some noodles. And Happy Christmas to you both."

Pelagia waddled over in her slippers to the door of Karol's room. "Go to the kiosk now. Genia's to come and help me lay. And tell Father it's time to close up." Back at the stove she opened the oven and probed the cake with a sliver of wood. Then she raised the lid of a pot, sampled the borscht, and added some more vinegar. The vegetable broth for the fish was boiling.

She went to her room and sat down heavily on the bed, resting a moment. Then laboriously she began changing her clothes, groaning as she bent and worked her woolen stockings up over her massive legs. Occasionally she stopped to rest again. At last she heard his heavy steps.

"Josef, close the door and come over here," she said in a low voice.

He glanced at her apprehensively—how well he knew that tone. "What do you want? Nobody's stopping you from talking."

"Do as I say. I don't imagine you want me to talk so everyone hears."

He closed the door. "All right, so what's the secret?"

"Secret? . . . yours, Josef. Not mine."

"Jesus, I can see it's got you again, woman. Just lay off, do you hear?"

"Listen to me, Josef. You can't let it go on longer this way. Tonight is a holy evening. On such an evening no one should be walking around with a lie in his heart and a crime on his—"

"Stop it—" he broke in, with difficulty controlling his voice. "How many times have I got to tell you it's nothing but your goddam craziness."

"Josef . . ." Her face was set with solemn determination. "You listen, do you hear? If you don't, I'll call the children in right now and soon everyone will know. Josef, God's already started punishing us, but it's only the beginning. He's watching you every moment, waiting for you to do what you've got to do. It's getting late, Josef. That little boy is never going to forgive you, no . . . and the Mother of God neither. It's Holy Night. They're waiting for you, and they're giving you this last chance. Tonight you're going to confession, do you understand? You'll tell everything and you'll start doing penance. I haven't said a word to anyone, but it can't go on this way with me just praying my heart out for you and all of us, and you doing nothing at all."

"But woman, as I love God, it's not true. I never said a word to anyone about them being Jews, not one . . ." He stared at her in despair, knowing that nothing he could find to say would have the slightest effect.

"No use lying to me, Josef. I told you what you got to do. Now, it's up to you. But mind—if you don't square yourself with God I'm going to tell the children. They have a right to know the sort of father they have. There's no other way. You go to confession tonight and say everything to the priest. You can't go through Holy Night with that on your chest. If you don't, I'm going to tell them, and about Malinka too. About that little boy that's dead now on account of you. About everything. It's up to you . . ."

5

Returning upstairs with the herring and noodles, Martha found her husband sitting in front of the stove, at intervals shoving bits of branches into the fire. Hardly aware of her entry he watched them flare up and illuminate the otherwise unlit room, giving off a pleasant wave of warmth.

"Look," she said, "instead of using up the branches I collected

yesterday, how about doing something about coal over the holidays? You know this way won't get us anywhere?"

Madey scratched his head. He'd been expecting this. She was right. At least they had to have a warm room, and branches wouldn't do it.

"Take the sack and go now. And mind you come back with something. Christmas is no time to be sitting in our coats and freezing."

He didn't move, the only change being that he stopped feeding the fire. If only she knew how he hated this begging all the time.

Martha continued to prod him. "Look at other folks. If it's not coal, at least they got old railway ties. But you—nothing at all. And if it wasn't for what I earn, the money wouldn't even be enough for food."

He let it go over him. Yes she was right, but even so, stealing like others did wasn't for him, and asking for handouts was almost as bad.

Martha went to the rack. "Here's your coat. Go to the station. Bound to be a freight by and by, and see you get some coal off it."

He got up and again scratched his head. Slowly he slipped into his lineman's coat and put on his cap. If they gave him some, all right. If not, it would have to be cold. He would not steal.

"But hurry now so there'll be time for us to celebrate too."

He folded the sack and slipped it under his arm and left. Downstairs he stopped a moment on the threshold and looked around. A clear, crisp night, the blacked-out houses appearing deserted in the whiteness of the snow. And yet inside each, people were sitting down to the holy meal—and he? He raised his collar against the cold wind and went on toward the station.

Timidly he opened the door of the signalman's cubicle. A warm blast from the little pot-bellied stove struck his face.

"Why Mr. Madey! Merry Christmas. So early on your way to your shift?"

Madey hesitated. "No, it's not time yet . . . But it's cold at home and my wife sent me out for some coal."

The signalman shook his head. "On Christmas Eve? A bit late, isn't it? Where could I find you any now?"

"Oh, I know. I know." Madey was already thinking what to say to Martha if he returned empty-handed. "I know you got none to spare."

The signalman looked at him a moment and then shrugged. "There's a freight coming up out of Warsaw. I'll have a word or

two with the engineer and from the other side you get some down off the tender." He switched the semaphore light outside from green to red.

Madey nodded gratefully and continued on to the platform from where he could more easily clamber up unnoticed. But already he had decided he wouldn't steal. He hadn't had the courage to tell the man so, and now he'd be standing here and afterwards feel like a fool.

A light showed faintly down the line in the direction of the city. Already he could hear the train. Now it was slowing down. The signalman emerged from the cubicle at the barrier as the engine came to a stop and gave two short blasts. The engineer leaned over the other side, then clambered down out of sight, oil can in hand.

This was the moment. Madey stood undecided. There was no sign of anyone along the freight cars. The assistant was busy stoking. He approached the tender. He could almost reach up from where he stood. No . . . There was nothing worse than stealing. Again he vacillated. Martha would be angry. He would destroy what was left for them of Christmas. No—couldn't be helped. In spite of everything he wouldn't.

He pushed his cap back on his head and thought a moment. He took a few steps toward the cab itself. He hesitated and then, as the helper noticed him, blurted out: "Mister Engineer, please . . . Would you let me take just a few pieces of coal? It's Christmas and I got nothing at home."

The youth, his face smeared with black, looked at him sceptically. "Jesus—a lineman and no coal! That's a new one. Wanting to do a little business, eh?"

"No—only for me and my wife, honest. Don't need to be much. Just to keep warm over Christmas."

The youth shook his head but at the same time began to smile. "All right, old fellow. Guess we can spare it. Quick, your sack. The engineer will be right back up. We'd get hell if he noticed."

6

The solemn ritual of breaking the Christmas wafers was over. Mrs. Orlowska indicated the places. "Irena, you sit here and Mr. Tadeusz on the other side of you." And between herself and Irena, Modlibog; her husband opposite, and then her two sons and Witold. She turned round and called, "Anna, bring the mayonnaise for the

perch. Also the sardines." Quickly she made one last check of the table—everything in its place.

"We will nominate Mr. Tadeusz as cup-bearer tonight," Orlowski announced. "He's almost a part of the family already and must take on duties too."

"That's right, Alexander," Modlibog spoke up. "But I trust he'll have everyone equally in mind and not play favorites."

Someone laughed. Tadeusz nodded, gratified by the sudden attention given him. Mrs. Orlowska pulled the dish with jellied perch between herself and Modlibog. "Let's start. If I recall right you have a soft spot for this, Henryk."

Anna came in and carried the soup tureen to the sideboard, where she waited for Mrs. Orlowska to give the signal to serve.

"Well, well—so a new pair is about to start on life's road together." Modlibog turned to Mrs. Orlowska. "How well I remember your own engagement, Marie. Especially the big dinner to mark the occasion . . . I'll reveal a secret and I trust Alexander won't challenge me belatedly to a duel. I was in love with Marie myself. She was really beautiful—excuse me Marie, you're always beautiful of course, but at that time there was a special glow. Dinner at the Angelski . . ." and he reported every detail he could recall.

Anna brought the pike.

Mrs. Orlowska found herself staring absently at her daughter . . . That dinner and then the wedding—Modlibog's account made it all come back vividly. And now Irena was following the same steps, would marry, give birth, raise children, and then suddenly notice life had already gone by . . . Modlibog was again saying something about her. She smiled but hardly heard. She pulled herself out of her reverie and beckoned Anna. "Please don't forget the lettuce."

Now it was Alexander's voice—as usual, peremptory, final. "In the coming year the war will end. The Germans are finished . . ."

Yes, she thought, that would be a tremendous relief. But actually would it still have meaning for her? She could no longer expect any big change in her life. Alexander would continue being fussy about the meals she served and be irritable and treat her with condescension. She would go on answering back with poorly concealed barbs, and all the time she would be wondering what it all added up to from start to finish . . .

"Marie is in a silent mood tonight, absorbed no doubt with weighty thoughts," Modlibog was observing. And now once more

it was Alexander, in a tone intended to eliminate the need for further consideration of the subject: "The usual thing when a mother gives her daughter in marriage."

She was on the point of answering something, but her husband had risen at his place, striking his wine glass with his spoon. Anna, who had come in with the carp, remained standing near the wall till a glance from her mistress told her to go ahead.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Orlowski began, "this year Christmas has a very special significance for us gathered here. The first of our children will soon be leaving the family fold . . ."

Her own marriage to Alexander had taken place in the summer. She had worn a white dress and a wide brimmed white hat. Her father too had stood up and delivered himself of similar sentiments. How modest Alexander had still seemed then.

". . . duties. The vocation of a wife is . . ."

And after the ceremonies they had gone on their honeymoon. A beautiful warm September; their first stop Berlin. The best rooms in the hotel. And then he had hurried off to the stock exchange—important things going on there, Marie—and she had waited and wept out of boredom and let-down. A waiting that hadn't ended to this day, that had become her life. Next, Paris—how she had dreamed about it. No better really: transactions, stocks moving up, stocks moving down. It was there that she had reproached him finally and he had looked at her genuinely surprised. Duties first, Marie, he had said to her in the same tone as to his daughter now . . .

". . . and remember one can't just dance one's way through life. A mother's obligation, Irena, is . . ."

When she had noticed she was pregnant, she had wept. So soon? He had answered puzzled—what else did you expect? But she had felt cheated somehow, and her sense of disappointment never left her again. Luckily she rarely dwelt on herself and had learned to accept things as they were. After those first rebellious weeks she had adapted herself to his never having time for her. Life is a business and has to be treated seriously—so he had proclaimed and so she had learned to follow . . .

". . . and entering on this new phase, you should never lose sight of the fact that not only roses . . ."

What about all the wealth with which he had surrounded her, the dresses, the jewelry, servants, the bowing and scraping all

around them—had it any meaning? For years she had gone along with him, imitating his way of thinking, convincing herself money was everything, the ultimate goal. But it had all caught up with her and today she couldn't help see how mistaken she had been. Now she would gladly forego all of that just to find a small corner of true happiness in her life. But what was it she really wanted? She couldn't put her finger on it except that it was what she had been deprived of.

". . . Marie, we are drinking to the health of our young couple here, and you act as if you hadn't heard."

She flushed, seeing all eyes suddenly on her. Picking up her glass, she touched it first to her daughter's and then to her future son-in-law's. She saw Anna hovering in the background. "Yes Anna—the compote now. And please cut the cake."

Her eyes settled on her husband as he moved from place to place refilling the glasses. What basis actually was there for all the blame she heaped on him? He was pedantic and self-centered but also conscientious and dutiful. He had never been unfaithful to her, she was sure. He never drank, never played cards, always insisted on the privacy of his home of an evening. He had never been tight-fisted toward her many whims and extravagances, never resented anything she chose to spend. An ideal husband, it would seem, so the wrong must be in her and her reproaches were contrived . . .

"Mother, how about moving to Father's study for the coffee?" Irena asked.

She pulled herself together. Yes, supper was finished. "Of course," she said. "In fact it's time to light the tree." She turned. "Anna . . . Anna, serve the coffee in the study, and also bring the big platter with all the Christmas goodies." She got up. It was the signal for a general movement toward the other room.

It seemed her husband had given her everything, and yet he had grievously disappointed her. Yes, maybe she had found it at last. He had let her down frightfully. Behind the flawless facade he had robbed her of her life dreams and had given nothing alive in return. He had cheated her. That was why she felt so tormented and would always feel so. And this she could never forgive. And for this reason too she couldn't ever be a good and tender wife to him . . .

Orlowski had brought out the liqueur, filled the glasses and passed them around. "Once more a toast to our young couple,"

he said, raising his own. "Here's to their success and our own continued well-being. All I can wish for you two is a life as happy as mine and Marie's . . ."

How could he! She didn't even glance up, merely settling back deeper in the armchair as she slowly sipped from her glass. Her bitterness grew. At this moment she couldn't bear to look at him. She heard only how he unlocked the glass doors of the bookcase. Then he was speaking to Modlibog. "Come here Henryk, and see for yourself how much I have bought up." Involuntarily she raised her eyes too to the shelves, to the stacks of neat packages tied with string. They filled almost the entire section.

"And believe me, my good friend, they represent millions. Do you understand? Millions. A fortune such as no one else in Poland will have when peace comes. You will see my power then."

She got up. She had to get away from all this. "Excuse me for a moment," she said and left the room.

12

THE CASINO

TADEUSZ'S MARRIAGE to Irena took place quietly on January 10th in Warsaw—so inconspicuously in fact that the lower end of the Lane knew nothing until it was all over. It had taken a lot of groundwork on his part to avoid a large wedding party at the Orlowski villa. It had meant first of all dissuading Irena, then Modlibog, and finally, with their help, the old man himself. In the midst of all this suffering, Tadeusz had argued, ostentatious display would be in bad taste, even unpatriotic. The hardest to bring round had been Mrs. Orlowska.

"I imagined my daughter's wedding very differently. I don't see why we have to be furtive about it as if it were something to be ashamed of."

Actually this was the reason for all his efforts. Perhaps not so much that he was ashamed as he was apprehensive about Genia's proximity on the Lane. Something silly could happen. And so in the end he had persuaded them all to have an inconspicuous church ceremony in the city instead, followed by an equally undistinguished dinner in the private dining room of a restaurant. No invitations, no reception lines, Modlibog and Witold the only guests beside Irena's family, the only concession to grandeur a bottle of French champagne, the only overt display an unscheduled welcome on the threshold of the villa afterward. Modlibog, with his love for ceremony, had slipped out ahead on the previous train to meet them with bread and salt.

Until that moment the secret had been well kept. Tadeusz had even asked Mrs. Orlowska not to say a word to Anna. Then the news spread quickly. The first to come next morning was Kozik with a bouquet of flowers and some spruce sprigs.

"I was on the watch all the time for the big moment, and we all missed it cold," he said, laughing apologetically.

A little later came Madey's Martha. And of course Anna too. But that was all.

Modlibog had made the entire upper floor available to the newlyweds, and in fact from Christmas on it was being readied for them, Kozik repainting it room by room. Witold shifted downstairs, and the room once occupied by the Malinkas was converted into a comfortable living room with the help of a newly built fireplace, a rug, some lamps and easy chairs. They took their meals with father and son downstairs. A very satisfactory arrangement all round, not the least for old Modlibog who felt himself the main beneficiary. Now even when the men went off to town for the day he was no longer alone, and the mere presence of Irena about the house enlivened him. He was always at hand to help or advise or just show his appreciation for her youthful charm, and went about planning the meals each day with renewed zest. Next door, in contrast, Irena's move left a noticeable gap, one to which Mrs. Orlowska found it hard to accustom herself. While Irena dropped in quite often, it was never for long, and it was evident she was completely absorbed in her own new world.

Actually Tadeusz's honeymoon occurred more in an atmosphere of business than of love. It so happened that it coincided with a particularly heavy load of work. First of all there was the manipulation of the premium awards. Helena had let him know she could now absorb an increased quantity. But in order to process them she had to receive them fully made out. Tadeusz had to sit for hours in the secrecy of his Warsaw room with an atlas, digging out villages not too far out of the city and inventing typical peasant names. And even more difficult he had to forge the signatures, keeping them awkward, illiterate, and each a little different from the next.

Still, with all his care, he began to worry whether just the sheer increase in quantity wasn't dangerous. Helena didn't seem too concerned, however, in spite of her original hesitation.

"There's always a risk," she said, "but if something should go wrong I'd get a call first from the office. There'd be enough warning for me to clear out in time, and about you they'd never know. I've nosed around a bit and there are stores who handle more of them than I do.

This was reassurance enough for him. Certainly his own risk

was relatively small. And he had begun to rely on his own proceeds from the venture. With his marriage his living costs had risen sharply and he wanted to avoid having to accept any help from his father-in-law. While he knew that it would be perfectly proper for Orlowski to give them a start, he felt there could be no better way to strengthen the old magnate's confidence in him than by proving his ability to support his wife unassisted even in times like these. Besides he knew very well that Orlowski was reaching the end of his cash reserves. After a stretch of particularly intensive stock acquisition, his father-in-law had declared, as he advanced another 50,000, that this would be all for the present. "I don't want to overextend myself," he had added. "We can assume the war will be over in the spring or summer, but we must also allow for the contingency of having to hold through to the fall." And just the other day the old man had asked him to sell some jewelry for him with the comment that he wanted to use the proceeds to cover their living costs during the next few months.

It was that final 50,000 which had turned into a growing source of trouble for Tadeusz. Orlowski had told him not to be in a hurry with these final purchases, and to wait for a particularly favorable moment. Just this note of caution had landed him in his difficulties. The Casino. With the 50,000 staring him in the face day after day, so did the temptation to put them to use. In one lucky scoop he could make himself a wealthy man. Such a chance for higher stakes might never come again. He couldn't resist. He staked half the sum one tense night. It went badly and he lost it all. Frightened he pulled back. He tried his luck again on a more modest scale during the weeks that followed, desperately hoping somehow to recoup the lost sum gradually. But he had little success. And the evening hours he spent at the Casino conflicted with his newly married status out on the Lane. He sought to pacify Irena by bringing her in overnight to his room in the city several times a week, explaining that he had meetings of the underground to attend. Irena, however, didn't relish the long hours alone in the apartment while he was out, and after the first few times refused to go again. Perhaps a factor was her discovery of a crumpled woman's handkerchief that had slipped behind the bed. Tadeusz had been very confused. "I picked it up in the stair hall once," he had explained lamely. But that was the last time Irena would come in with him. As a result he had no choice but to cut down his gambling to two nights a week.

His actual work in the underground he did very conscientiously. Every second day he met "Melania" at the King Street apartment and went over the cases assigned to him. On one occasion she said: "I have instructions from 'Watchmaker' to have the Casino put under observation, but I have no idea whom to send. It should be someone familiar with that sort of thing who wouldn't be conspicuous."

At first he was alarmed. He had been worrying that the underground would discover his addiction and hold it against him, even purge him as untrustworthy. But then he quickly realized her remark was only a coincidence.

"If it's urgent I suppose I could take it on myself. I wouldn't want to every night, but once or twice a week I could manage," he said casually.

2

On the crowded train Irena suddenly found herself pushing her way past Karol Ogorek. He flushed uncertainly. "How do you do, Miss Irena . . ." Still more flustered, he began to correct himself: "Oh, excuse me . . . I forgot . . . I mean . . ."

"Karol!" She smiled. "How have you been?" She had, she assured herself, been very fond of this silent, overly shy young man. Not that she had ever really known him well. Their contact had been confined mainly to when she lent him a hand with the secret distribution of the underground paper. It had been something to do, a bit of excitement, distraction. But once Modlibog, his son, and Tadeusz moved out on the Lane, she had lost interest.

"I meant to congratulate you before. I wish you all the best . . ." He lowered his eyes, obviously embarrassed.

She looked at him curiously. Could it be that he was still devoted to her? Though he had never said a word, she had always noticed the admiration in his eyes when he spoke to her. Of course it was flattering but a little amusing when you thought of his inarticulate devotion in contrast to the vigor of a man like Tadeusz.

"Yes, I'm a married woman now," she responded and laughed. But then she remembered that since yesterday Tadeusz had left her alone for the third time in a single week. She was certain that Karol would never leave his bride night after night. "What are you doing these days, Karol? Planning to marry too?"

"Me?" He was startled. "Who would I marry?"

"How should I know? I assume you know plenty of eligible girls.

And look how suddenly everything happened with me . . ." But then she regretted teasing him and she added in a subdued voice: "I owe you an apology for the way I stopped my work without a word. My father heard about it and made me, and somehow I never saw you around to tell you."

"It doesn't matter. I manage fairly well by myself . . ." He glanced around to make sure they weren't being overheard. "And I realize our work is pretty ordinary and dull. Not like your brother's for example. There's not much glamor in lugging newspapers about."

"But it is important . . ." She stopped. She too could play the game of being busy. If Tadeusz kept rushing off to the city supposedly for the underground, she could do the same. If he returned home and found she was out, he'd learn it wasn't so pleasant. "Karol," she continued then, "you know—I was thinking, now that I live in the other house and I'm on my own, I could make some time free again. Could you still use me in my old work? Even though I was so undependable?"

He was so delighted she was almost embarrassed. "Of course! But I never thought you would want to now."

"All right, then." She lowered her voice still more. "We'll divide the work as before. I can always come in Mondays and Thursdays, but on the later train at ten. We could meet at the side entrance of the station in town and then go on from there. Until Thursday then."

Again she smiled at him before hurrying off. He was incredibly naive, but a good soul for all that and someone you knew instinctively you could always count on.

3

Tadeusz was exhausted. He had played all night without a single break. Not that he had lost enough to worry about, but he had gone to the Casino with the conviction that he was at last due for a change of luck. Instead he had consistently lost and to top it off some strange young man had sat down beside him and insisted on drawing him into conversation. How could anyone concentrate under such circumstances?

He switched on the light and dropped into his armchair. Mechanically he pulled out a cigarette but then realized he had been smoking steadily all evening. His mouth tasted foul, his head was pounding. It was after three. In a few hours he'd have to be up

again to go out to Jutrosin, only to come back in again later in the morning. He sank back deeper in the chair, his eyes closed, without even the energy to go over to the bed. Suddenly he opened his eyes—didn't he hear steps on the stairs? At this hour? He listened . . . yes, stealthy as if on tiptoe. Now they had stopped. He jumped at the light knock on his door. What sort of visitor arrived at three in the morning?

The knock was repeated. Nervously, he rose, smoothed his clothes, and opened the door. A short man in an open coat, his hands casually in his trouser pockets stood looking at him arrogantly. His slightly superior smile and his Tyrolese hat left no room for doubt—he was a German.

Without taking his hands out of his pockets, the man sauntered past him into the room. "Please close the door," he said in Polish and added off-hand, "I know it's impolite to keep one's hands in one's pockets all the time, and you Poles are very sensitive about formalities. But it's a kind of insurance, you see . . ." He withdrew his hands enough to reveal that he carried two pistols. "Come now—close the door."

Tadeusz did as he was told, too startled and frightened to say a word. Suddenly the man pulled the pistols out. "Hands up! Make it quick—quick, I said! All right, stand there facing the wall. Take off your jacket and drop it on the floor. Remember: a false move and I shoot. And it wouldn't end there. Your lovely young wife to Ravensbruck, or simply to the front to service our soldiers. We're capable of anything. So do exactly what I say. Now, drop your trousers. Mind—if you so much as reach into your pockets, it will be your end. So watch out. No—don't turn your head. All right, kick them over by your jacket. Now go to the corner over there and lie down on the floor. No, not that way. Facing it. And don't look in this direction. It doesn't interest you."

Tadeusz heard him searching his clothes. The jacket landed on the floor beside him. Then the trousers. "Get dressed," the man called out. Eagerly he got up and put on his trousers.

"Now, tell me, any guns in this room? I'll make an agreement: if you have one and tell me, it will remain between us. I will take it and that's all, my word of honor. But if I should come across anything, I'll shoot you on the spot. Remember: these aren't idle threats, my friend. And don't count on help from outside. Downstairs are two of my men and on the street a trooper patrol. So

tell me, anything in here?" He waved his pistol in a wide sweep of the room.

"No, I have no gun. Never had any. Go ahead and look." Tadeusz's voice sounded oddly shrill; he cleared his throat.

The stranger glanced around, still suspicious. "Can never trust you Poles. But perhaps you aren't lying." His voice suddenly switched to a tone of exaggerated courtesy. "Please sit down."

Tadeusz sank into the armchair across from him. He was so numb he didn't even wonder about the meaning of this visit. He simply stared at the stranger blankly, waiting. The pistols had disappeared again and the man's manner now was relaxed and informal. He took off his hat and then his coat.

"Pretty warm in here," he observed. "You wouldn't have some brandy, would you? It's rather late and with a little drink in us it will be much easier to talk. I'm confident we'll quickly come to see eye to eye."

Tadeusz got up and took a bottle out of the cupboard. "Maybe you'd like some coffee too?" he asked trying to steady his voice. His hands were trembling as he set out the glasses and bottle.

"That would be fine if it's no inconvenience."

Tadeusz went through the familiar routine of putting the coffee-maker on the table, poured some coffee in and lit the wick underneath. Then he filled the glasses with cognac.

"To the successful outcome of our talk," the stranger said as he raised his glass. Then he began: "To start out with, let me reassure you that I am not Gestapo. They'd have dragged you off and made mincemeat of you by now. Who I am isn't your concern. I have a certain task to perform, and you're the one who is going to help me. To save you the effort of trying unnecessary subterfuges, you may as well know that I know everything about you—your marriage, your fondness for the Casino, and most important of all, your operation with the premium awards. And of course I know you're in the underground. I could even be more specific, but why bother at this point? Tell me—everything I've just said is correct, isn't it?"

Tadeusz nodded, almost as if hypnotized.

"I'm very pleased you don't try to deny it. Just the business with the awards is enough to send you to the other world—you realize that? But no reason to be alarmed, my friend. Thanks to my interest in you, it may even be possible for you to continue that

little game undisturbed. The only thing I might insist on knowing is how you came by the certificates and who your partners are. We can hardly assume that you're all on your own, can we?"

Tadeusz didn't answer. Not only was he terrified, but any answer he knew would incriminate him even more.

"But all that's peripheral. I know your life like a book—an obvious prerequisite for visiting you. For example, we can agree, can't we, that your underground work takes place in that apartment on King Street? But don't look so alarmed. I wouldn't dream of butting in. You can go on doing what you want there. It's of no interest to me. I notice you haven't drunk yet. Come, I'd like another."

Mechanically Tadeusz reached for his glass. The alcohol revived him a little. If he only knew what this man was after. Money? A large sum through Orlowski? Already more controlled, he refilled the German's glass.

"Thank you," the stranger said. "If I'm not mistaken, the coffee is ready too. I'd enjoy a cup if you don't mind. I feel tired and I imagine you do too." He smiled.

Again Tadeusz could only nod.

"I see you're very nervous. Pardon me for having been a little brusque at first. One has to be cautious, you know. Life is precious for each one of us. No doubt you are surprised I speak Polish so well? Actually I'm not even a Volk-German. My home town's Berlin. But I was stationed a long time in Warsaw—before the war of course—and I must admit I took a liking to you Poles. Unfortunately a situation has arisen forcing us to fight you. But let me come to what concerns us now." He pulled his chair closer to the table. "I think you have already had substantial evidence of the extent of my interest in you. I trust it hasn't escaped you that I have already made you a most valuable gift—that is, your life. I hope you appreciate that. Now I'll add a second: as I already suggested, you can quietly go on with your premium award operation. Yes, right under our noses. But you're a gentleman, and I'm sure you wouldn't expect all this without some quid pro quo, would you now? Unfortunately we live in a world where nothing comes free. A favor for a favor, isn't that so?" He broke off a moment.

Tadeusz shuddered. No, this wouldn't be a matter of money. But he had no choice but to promise everything now and flee tomorrow. But where could he hide out safely?

". . . Listen carefully," the German continued, "now we come

to your part. Here in Warsaw there are three men who happen to interest me. One of them goes under the name of 'Bishop,' the second 'Watchmaker,' the third 'Pilot.' Do you know one of these by any chance?"

He shook his head.

"I don't want to probe now whether that is true. In any case your job will be to find at least one of these three and point him out to me . . ."

Tadeusz blinked; nodded noncommittally. All he could think of was where could he flee to with Irena?

"So that's your half, and upon your fulfilling it your further existence will depend of course. I say this in all seriousness because I know you can. It's only a matter of your wanting to. And even in this I can be a help and make it easier for you to want to. You know, there are occasions when drastic means have to be used to lead someone to the right course. At the time it may seem very disagreeable, like drilling a tooth in order to put the filling in, but please believe me, it's all only for your good. Read this." He took a folded sheet from his pocket and handed it to Tadeusz.

He opened it and began to read the typewritten report. As his eyes ran down the page he had a sickening sensation. Though he was not yet sure of its relation to himself, he sensed what he did not want to believe. "I don't understand why you give this to me," he said, his voice trembling in spite of himself.

"That is your own report to us on Mr. Latowicz. The young man who sat beside you at the Casino and interested himself so in you. In fact a colleague of yours in the underground. And here in your report to us you have written about that. You have also supplied us with exact data as to his task and position in your organization, and you can rest assured everything is correct. Now all you need do is sign it. Mr. Latowicz has been in my care some hours now. What happens to him remains to be seen, though I must say he had real bad luck to sit down beside you tonight. If he had not, my visit to you would have had to be postponed."

"But I . . . I really don't understand."

"You will right away. You see this bit of paper is a sort of insurance—for me, of course. I'm not naive. I know how easy it is for you to promise the world to me now, but tomorrow—will I find you still around? This is how we will avoid the question arising: you will sign the report we have provided for you and in the morning Mr. Latowicz will be brought to me for interrogation.

Then as if unintentionally I will leave your report on the desk while I step out for a few minutes. He'll take care to see what it is, you can be sure. You see my note in the margin? He'll see that too. You will sign with a number, and what does my note say as to the identity of this number? 'Tadeusz Rakowicz, Duck Lane 15, Jutrosin,' my informant. No doubt about it. And so if you should slip beyond my reach then I will see to it that Mr. Latowicz also has a chance to make a break. I'm even ready to sacrifice one or two additional men so it will all seem natural. Do you understand now? He'll go like a fury to the underground and reveal that he knows it was you who was responsible for his brush with death. Naturally he will make very sure that you are tracked down by your former colleagues. You see? Inconvenient, isn't it? But actually there's no cause for worry at all. If you do your assignment for us, you will be completely protected from such an eventuality. Instead, all his knowledge will go into the ground with him."

Tadeusz looked grimly at the German. He was a fiendishly thorough devil.

The German smiled. "I can see that you're slowly beginning to understand the situation, and also appreciate how a little judicious help is needed to push a person in the direction he should be going. Yes, in the right direction. I have no doubt about that. I'm sure that when the passage of time has given you a chance to become better acquainted with National Socialism, we will become real friends. Our present collaboration will prove very useful to you."

"I don't see any possibility of my succeeding . . ."

"Don't try to be evasive," the German cut in, his voice hardening. "Your position is hopeless, admit it! And that isn't all. We have you under constant surveillance. Not only you, your wife and in-laws too. If I have to, I'll destroy the whole family. But of course my warnings are superfluous. You are an intelligent fellow and we'll come to an agreement I'm sure. I appreciate it's a little disagreeable for you, even risky. Every step will have to be done in such a way that no one will suspect a thing. On my part you can be assured of utmost discretion . . ."

The German took the cognac bottle and himself refilled their glasses. "Look," he went on, "you are a gambler, aren't you? Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose—. And when that happens, well —one has to pay. In your case, under very favorable terms. Yes, all of life is a continuous gamble," he observed philosophically and thought a moment. "Yes, round upon round. Sometimes the

cards are good, at others bad . . ." Again he broke off and then continued, "I neglected to touch on the matter of scruples—the sort you may be tempted to have. If so, bear in mind that if the need arose to take you over to my place, within an hour you would tell me all I wanted anyway. Every smallest detail. But what would be the sense? Isn't it better to spare yourself such an experience? Especially as neither you nor anyone else will be the gainer."

"But I don't know these people and I doubt if I could get access to any of them," Tadeusz said truculently.

"That's for you to solve. Even if at the moment what you say is true, with a little ingenuity you'll find a way to them. It's only a matter of wanting to. I'll even give you a month to do it, but remember we're not playing a game. If a month goes by without results, we'll talk quite differently. I have indicated three leaders of the underground. Your job is to point out one of these to us within the next thirty days. For the others I'll give you a little more time. So what is your answer?"

It was all too preposterous that this could be real, that this was he, Tadeusz, sitting here, that the next words would have to be his, and that they were already said before he had uttered them. If only he could face this man on equal terms, but he was completely in his power. Only one fact remained: refusal was impossible. "I am considering how to do this," he heard himself saying. "After all, I can't promise the impossible."

"I'm not demanding any such thing from you. All I want is to force you to do what is completely possible. I see I have to speak more explicitly. All right—I happen to know you have contacts with 'Watchmaker.' "

Tadeusz shook his head.

"Better not deny it. All right," the mouth hardened, the tone became sharp, "so you've had no contact at all with him—yes or no. Consider before you give an answer. If you lie now, we'll break off here and proceed differently elsewhere."

Almost imperceptibly Tadeusz nodded. "But believe me that I don't see him. I don't know how I could arrange for him to want to meet me."

"That's not completely true either. Don't ever try deceiving me. It could end very badly. Don't forget you've been under very careful surveillance a long time. Here, sign your report now. Initial of first name and then the number. Let's see—77. Yes, there . . . all right. Now take this blank sheet and write down everything

you know about a certain Roman Orlowski. But I warn you: the smallest lie and instead of going home this morning you will come along with me. I'm fully informed about him too. The only reason for not arresting him is that at the moment he isn't worth the bother. Write exactly how he recruited you for the underground. Here, take this pen. So go ahead. It's late. And don't forget I warned you."

Tadeusz took the pen and pulled the paper before him.

"Go ahead, quickly. Everything in chronological order, everything exactly as it was."

He felt the German's eyes upon him, holding him firmly in the trap in which he was caught. He bent forward and began to write.

The German lit a cigarette and got up, sauntering casually around the room. After a while he sat down again, silently observed the moving pen. When it approached the bottom of the sheet and hesitated for some time, he again began to speak. "Glad to see you've given up your prevarication. That could have ended badly for you. You're finished?"

He took the sheet and read it carefully. Certain sentences and words he underlined with his pencil. "You haven't written down the whole story, but it will be enough for now. I see that the firmer my grip, the better for you in the long run. Let me remind you; strength and power are always right. We Germans have both. So why be stubborn and self-destructive? Get a grip on yourself and calm down. I'm sure when you've had time to think it all through you'll see I'm right."

He got up, making it clear their session had come to an end. "Oh but I forgot to give you my phone number." He took out a notebook, tore off a page and wrote something on it. "This is my number. Please ask for Fred. That's sufficient. I'm always there between 12 and 1. One thing more, I hope you understand that neither you nor any of your wife's family is to leave the area. And as far as you and I are concerned we'll meet again in exactly a week here in your room at five in the afternoon. Please bring me some of your underground documents to look at. Something say, from those things you work on over at King Street."

Tadeusz wanted to interrupt, but the German went right on. "No, don't bother. Don't try explaining you haven't any. Simply bring them. Understand? That seems to be all." He put on his coat and hat. "Get rid of sentiments, my friend. Don't forget: no one will have them about you."

4

Ogorek always avoided going into the city unless it was absolutely necessary. It disturbed the even routine of his days and always left him irritable and nervous. But this morning there was no way to avoid it; there wasn't a drop of alcohol left and none in prospect. He had sent Genia in the previous day, only to have her return empty-handed with word that there was none to be had through their usual black-market channel. And she had left it at that without even asking how soon they could expect some. The girl was impossible these days—moody, disagreeable, and uncommunicative.

But the core of all his troubles was Pelagia. It was as if she was determined to drive him out of his mind. On that frightful occasion at Christmas he had finally gone through the motions of confession, hoping that at last this would settle the matter and she would stop tormenting him. But never had he been more mistaken. The next day she came up with a new idea; he should pay penance to the church. And when he indignantly protested, she turned all her fury on him again. "You monster—only yesterday you showed a spark of conscience at last and admitted your guilt and . . ."

"What! Are you crazy? I never admitted any guilt anywhere."

"You went to confession—what could be clearer? If you had no such sin on your conscience you'd never gone there. I know you, Josef . . ." And she had raved on until he had rushed out of the house in despair.

So his going to confession had only made everything worse. He was at his wit's end, and sometimes hardly knew himself what was true and what she tried to make him believe. But what he feared most was that she would accuse him sometime in the children's presence. It was a wonder they weren't already suspicious. Or were they?

That morning, arriving in Warsaw, he went directly to his agent.

"Sorry, Mr. Ogorek—no alcohol. I told your daughter that yesterday. Heavy German requisitioning suddenly for their troops."

"But I need some for my regular customers at least."

The agent shrugged. "I know where there's some vodka, but the party will only sell in one lot—over a thousand quarts—and asking a hell of a price."

Ogorek went straight there and on entering almost fell over, finding himself face to face with the Quail.

"I had no idea I'd find you here of all people . . ." he said curtly. "Well, anyway—know anything about some vodka for sale around here?"

Helena smiled. It was funny how the world turned. It was Ogorek who was wanting something this time, and wanting it badly.

"Yes I got some, but it's in a big lot—1130 quarts—and there'd be no gain for me in breaking it . . ." She stopped a moment and then couldn't resist adding, "And I don't suppose you've got that much cash on hand."

"How much you asking?"

"120."

"I'd be willing to settle for a hundred," he said hopefully.

"Don't waste my time." She turned away and began busying herself with sorting some ration coupons.

"All right," he said after a while, "I'll take it. Here's a down payment. Tomorrow I'll fetch it and pay the balance. Can I pick it up direct here?"

"Yes, during the noon break."

"All right." Again he was startled by her assurance. In spite of himself he was impressed. "Tell me," he asked, indicating the store, "how you catch onto all this so quick?"

She shrugged. "What's so special? Don't think you went to the University either."

Her barb hit the mark. "Quite different," he said stuffily. "It cost me years of hard work, a long apprenticeship."

"Guess for some it takes longer, for others less. Anyway, tomorrow for sure now," she cut off the conversation.

"Yeah," and swallowing his pride (business is business) he said, "and in future I can take your vodka regularly. Sugar too—have you got any to sell?" She nodded. "All right, count me in on that too, all you have. After all, we know each other a long time as neighbors, don't we—so why shouldn't we do business together too?"

5

Mrs. Korf stamped her feet and shook her coat. "What atrocious weather—snow, rain, sleet, and such a wind!" She was surprised

to find the kitchen empty, but then she noticed the door open to the other room. "You there, Eva? Where's Krisha?"

"Not back from her lessons yet," Eva replied. "Thursdays she's always late."

Mrs. Korf took off her coat and kerchief, and ran her comb through her hair. She approached the door. "Heavens, Eva, what are you doing in bed? Aren't you feeling well?" Apprehensively she drew nearer. "Good heavens, my child, you look really sick!"

"It's nothing special, Mother," Eva tried to smile. "Really nothing. I just feel a little worn out."

"But I can see from your eyes there's something the matter. And you're so pale." She started into the kitchen for her coat. "I'm going to get the doctor right away."

Eva raised herself on her elbows. "Mother, stop. I don't want the doctor. There's no point, and anyway I won't see him." As Mrs. Korf turned back and looked at her daughter more intently she was struck even more by her pallor.

"Don't torture me this way, Mother," Eva cried weakly. "It makes everything worse. Just leave me alone."

"But Eva, what's happened? Why are you so excited? Did something happen at the cafe?" She didn't even wait for an answer. "I always told you they're riff-raff and no place for a decent girl to be working."

"Mother, you're talking utter nonsense." Eva again raised herself. "Please leave me alone . . . oh Mother, Mother . . ." and she broke into tears.

Mrs. Korf approached the bed and again stared at her daughter. "You're really sick," she said anxiously. "I'll have to get the doctor."

"No, Mother, you won't. Stop going on at me this way. Really, you want to bring me to the point of having to get out of bed and leave the house?"

Mrs. Korf was utterly at a loss. "I just don't understand you. The way you look, there's no doubt there's something the matter with you. Why don't you let me call a doctor?"

"All right—I'll tell you. I didn't want to but you've forced me . . . I was pregnant."

"My God, what are you saying, Eva! . . . And how do you mean—was?"

"Just what I said. I was and I'm no longer. That's why I'm in bed and don't feel well. All I need is quiet, not a doctor."

Mrs. Korf couldn't believe what she heard. It was too preposterous, so terrible it didn't seem real. She felt herself wilt: what would *he* say if he learned of it? What if someone on the Lane discovered? Instinctively she closed the door between the two rooms.

Eva had dropped back exhausted, her eyes half closed as if she were drowsing. "Eva . . ." Mrs. Korf asked feverishly, almost in a whisper. "Eva . . tell me. When did you discover it? I really can't believe it. Obviously Roman—I told you, I warned you . . . no, it's too ghastly."

"Calm down, Mother. It's not pleasant, but I'll survive. I shouldn't have told you."

Mrs. Korf shook her head. "No, it's lucky I know. If you had only told me earlier you wouldn't have done this now. Did you go to a good doctor?"

"Of course. Even very good . . . if I had told you earlier it would have changed nothing."

"Why not? After all, I assume he's a responsible man and knows what he should do. What did he have to say?"

"Who?"

"Roman—of course."

"He doesn't know about it."

"You didn't tell him?" She looked nervously at her daughter. "Perhaps he preferred not to know."

"That's not so. I never said a word to him about it. It's my problem . . . oh Mother, how I hate all this talk . . ." Again she began to cry.

6

Karol Ogorek found Kozik in the shed, milking his goat. "Could you make a trip for us to Makowiec?"

Kozik looked up. "Maybe—when?"

"Day after tomorrow?"

"It could be arranged. When will I get my merchandise?" He grinned, emphasizing the last word.

"Probably tomorrow. A consignment of our newspaper for the outlying villages. There'll be some reports to bring back, but you'll have plenty of room for dairy products, too, if you're interested in doing a little trading yourself. You'll get the papers from Miss Irena . . . from Mrs. Rakowicz," he corrected himself. "And your travel money."

"She working with you again?"

"Yes, just like before." He couldn't resist a note of pride. "Please be waiting for her at home tomorrow early in the afternoon."

The next day Kozik brought a wicker case down from the attic and strengthened its hinges with wire. Then he went to Ogorek and without difficulty got orders from him: butter, cheese, eggs —as much as he could carry.

Irena came in the early afternoon as had been promised, bringing a heavy package and his fare money.

At five the next morning he started on his journey. The drowsing passengers seemed to share a silent fellowship on this early train. At each rural stop, two or three bundled figures with empty sacks and baskets dropped wordlessly off into the night. Two hours along the line it was Kozik's turn.

He swung his case over his shoulder and headed off along the rutted country road. It was just getting light; a damp foggy day, the bare trees on either side emerging out of nowhere and slowly marching past him pair by pair, only to disappear again. A flock of crows circled the black snowless fields, cawing mournfully into the hollow morning silence. Then the fog began to recede and ahead he could see the roofs of Makowiec.

He passed between the houses and entered the small village store. The bell jangled and from a back room a big man in a white apron appeared. He glanced suspiciously at Kozik, before he recognized him. "Oh it's you," he said in a low voice. "Began to think we'd been forgotten."

Kozik gave him the package and asked if there was anything to take back. The man disappeared for a moment and then returned with a folded sheet of paper.

"That's all for the present," he said. "But see it's well hidden."

Kozik sat down, pulled off one boot, pushed the paper along the inside of his sock and then drew the boot on again. "Got any stuff I can buy?" he asked then. "No sense returning empty-handed."

The man nodded. "Can always find something."

By noon Kozik was on his way back to the station, the bulging basket slung over his shoulder. He went at a much slower pace now, often stopping to adjust his load. By the time he reached the railway line, he was very tired. He bought his ticket and settled down to wait for the next train.

As if after a country fair, the platform was filled with the oddest assortment of people with every kind of load: women with

bulging bundles and sacks, men with battered suitcases and baskets from which came the sound of cackling chickens or protruded the heads of geese, ducks, and turkeys. As the train pulled in they all surged toward the doors.

Kozik was one of the first to scramble in. He went along the corridor until he found a seat. He shoved his wicker case onto the already heavily loaded rack, took off his coat, and sat down. His eyes instinctively passed over the various bundles and baskets, appraising their contents. Most of them were very similar to his. He felt a little reassured—the solidarity of company.

Beside him sat an emaciated, older man. Kozik turned to him, eager for any helpful bits of information he could pick up. "Did you manage to get hold of some good stuff?" he began.

"A little." The man pointed to a cackling basket on the floor beside him.

"Been any inspection?"

"Not yet. Otwock's the place to watch out for. If we get through there without trouble, we'll be all right."

The train stopped at station after station. More and more loaded-down passengers boarded until the cars were jammed and the corridors were obstructed. At last they reached Otwock. Kozik leant over and looked through the window. He caught his breath —up ahead the platform was full of German troopers and black-uniformed German railway police. Within a matter of seconds their compartment and the corridor outside began to stir like a disturbed ant pile. "A roundup!" The word was hissed from mouth to mouth.

Kozik grabbed his coat and reached for his basket, planning to slip off the train before it was too late. But the old man beside him tugged at his sleeve: "Where in hell you think you're going? To get beaten up on top of everything? Only thing to do is sit tight and pray."

Already an inspection was going on in the compartment ahead of theirs. A young man was escorted out of the carriage, then a second.

A woman in the corridor whispered: "They're taking the men." In their compartment the tension increased. Again the same woman whispered. "But they're not roughing them up. Maybe they're carting them off for a labor contingent."

Then they appeared in the door of their compartment—a gray-haired railway policeman and two troopers.

In broken Polish the policeman shouted: "Mind, each one of you—tell the truth about what's in your things. Whoever's caught lying, off he goes to concentration camp." He surveyed the frightened passengers and began with the fat woman sitting opposite Kozik. "What up here is yours?" He indicated the racks. She pointed to a big bundle. "And what's in it?"

"Food for my children. Nothing more."

The policeman turned to one of the troopers. "Open the window and get started while I ask the rest." The trooper clambered over and pulled down the window. He reached for the bundle and shoved it out over the side.

"Oh, Jesus . . ." the woman groaned.

The railway policeman had meanwhile turned his attention to the old worker's basket on the floor. "And what's this?"

The old man shrugged and lifted it. "Take it," he said resignedly. It seemed to Kozik there was a trace of a smile on his lips. "I bought them for breeding. I was told the German army needs more eggs. But if it's not allowed what can I do about it?"

The German seemed undecided. He lifted a corner of the burlap and looked at the hens a moment. Then he indicated the basket could remain and went on to the next compartment.

Kozik gave a sigh of relief. For some reason they weren't going to bother him. But no sooner had he dared to hope this than the trooper was pointing at him, as well as the two youths opposite. "Take things. . . . follow."

Kozik jumped up: "But why? . . . my wife . . ." He stuttered. "I'll give you the whole basket, but . . ."

"*Maul zu* . . ." the trooper broke in sharply "Take things. You need for eating. You go for trench digging, *verstanden?*"

"But . . ."

"*Aber schnell. Vorwärts.* No time playing around. *Vorwärts.*"

7

Mrs. Korf pressed the bell, her heart beating violently. Now it was too late to pull back.

Orlowski himself answered.

"Good morning," she began bravely. "I assume I am speaking to Director Orlowski? I wish to see you."

"Me?" He was markedly surprised. He made no move to invite her in.

"Yes. I am Mrs. Korf, the wife of Major Korf. My husband is

in a prisoner of war officers' camp and I am living with my daughters."

"But how does this relate to me?"

His question threw her into confusion, upsetting her prearranged opening speech. She looked at him desperately, afraid he would close the door in her face. "I have something very important to discuss with you. In connection with your son—and my daughter," she blurted out. Now she was irrevocably committed.

Slowly, Orlowski opened the door. "Please come in. I still don't understand what you want of me—" He eyed her warily. "This way." He showed her to his study, but he made no move to suggest she take off her coat or even that she sit down. "Well then, so what is the problem?"

Standing before his desk, she felt herself wilt. How she would have liked to turn then and there and run out of the house. The expanse of desk, the sumptuous furnishings, his cool stare made her feel as if she had been brought before a court of judgment.

At last he relented. "Please sit down."

Seated, she passed her hand over her forehead. "I—I have come —to—to ask your help," she stuttered. "My husband is a prisoner of war—in a camp. He is a *major*—" Again she emphasized this. He should know she was a woman of background and position. "I would never have thought of coming to you—my daughter knows nothing about it. I didn't say a single word because she wouldn't have let me—"

"Very well, but can't you tell me briefly what is the matter?"

"I—I will at once. I was just going to explain everything. It is really very disagreeable for me. You have a daughter too, so I had hoped you would understand. It's this way—" She looked helplessly at Orlowski, her mind momentarily paralyzed. "Mr. Orlowski," she said in despair. "Excuse me but I am very nervous—" Again she stopped. "I have two daughters—one is still a mere child, but Eva is a young lady. Just eighteen. I'm responsible for both of them to my husband. When he returns he'll have a right to ask how I took care of them—" She was on the verge of tears. "I—I'm just trying to say. It's about my older daughter, about Eva . ." Again, she could find no words. Then it came in a rush: "Eva—Mr. Orlowski—yes—pregnant." The moment the impossible word had been hurled out she felt relieved. Now he knew, now he realized. Now she could be the accuser.

Orlowski winced, imperceptibly, in spite of himself. He hadn't anticipated this. "Am I to understand," he asked in a distinctly milder tone, "that the man was my son?"

She nodded silently. Surely now no further explanations were needed. He could deduce the rest for himself.

"Even if your story is true," Orlowski said, considering, "then what? Are you asking for a settlement?"

Tears came to her eyes. "Why are you treating me like this? Do you think I'd stoop to blackmail? You don't seem to realize that Eva is a girl from a respectable family."

"I didn't mean to offend your sensibilities, madam. How can I know just what you have come about?"

"There's such a thing as conscience—" Her outrage drove her on, her fear suddenly gone. "Eva is eighteen, still almost a child. Can you imagine what that means—a girl like that pregnant? Yes, she was pregnant."

"She isn't anymore? Now I really don't understand."

"She went to a doctor and—he—did an operation. They kept it all from me—. But having found out, I've come to you. I care deeply about my daughter's welfare and it can't be left this way."

"All right—so what are you suggesting?"

"I assumed you yourself would understand what," she said sharply.

"Are you suggesting you want my son to marry your daughter?" His tone was polite but distant, as if they were discussing a matter of no immediate concern.

"Yes . . . exactly that."

"But surely you must realize that I can't force my son to take such a step. It is entirely up to him and I certainly have no intention of interfering." He thought a moment, then continued: "But if it were a matter of some financial recompense—"

"Excuse me, sir—" She rose indignantly. "I resent your assumption that I came here to demand payment for the trampled honor of my daughter. When my husband returns from officers' camp he will know how to deal with this."

Orlowski also rose, relieved she had taken the initiative herself and saved him from having to maneuver her out. Leading her from the study before she changed her mind, he said soothingly: "Try to be more calm about this unfortunate situation. In wartime many things happen over which we have no control."

With difficulty holding back her tears, Mrs. Korf walked quickly across the hall to the entry. As he opened the door for her he said: "I will speak with my son and repeat our conversation to him."

8

Irritated by the whole incident, Orlowski returned to his study. However, as he walked back and forth thinking it through more carefully, he calmed down, even began to be amused. That woman was like a character out of a nineteenth-century novel. The way she had gone on and on, afraid to come out directly with the facts. "My husband's a major—my husband will know how—" Actually it was a tempest over nothing. He even allowed himself a paternal smile. Roman was more of a he-man than he gave him credit for.

Hearing his wife on the stairs, he called "Marie!" When she stood in the doorway inquiringly, he said, amused, "Marie, a near thing and you would have been a grandmother." He went on to report their neighbor's visit, adding when he had finished: "Some sort of compensation should close the matter, though I'm afraid it will mean converting one of your bracelets to supply the cash."

"But I'm not sure she'll accept money."

"Of course she will. She goes through the motions of protesting, but what more can she expect? She can't be silly enough to imagine Roman's marrying the girl."

"It's perfectly conceivable, Alexander. I've noticed the girl several times on the Lane and she looks quite charming."

"I see you're becoming a romantic in your middle age. I might agree the girl is pretty—that's all to Roman's credit—but our job now is to help him out of this mess. It will be a good lesson for him to appreciate who holds out a hand when he gets himself into a jam."

They heard someone come in the front door. Mrs. Orlowska looked out into the hall and nodded that it was Roman. "Roman," he called. And when his son appeared: "I'm glad you're back earlier. Come in. Your mother and I want to discuss something with you." He headed over to his undisputed place of authority behind his desk.

Roman looked at his parents curiously. Very seldom was he called in for any talks with them, especially with his father. While the two men lived under the same roof and saw each other every day, they hadn't one thing in common, and neither really understood the other.

"My dear," Orlowski began in a light vein. "Your conquests impress me, but nevertheless I would like you to restrain yourself a little to save your mother and me embarrassment."

"Exactly what are you driving at?" Roman asked coolly.

"A Mrs. Korf visited me a short time ago. The wife of a major, as she assured me several times. She complained that her daughter had been pregnant, and though that has most conveniently been dealt with, she still expects you to be an honorable gentleman. Do you understand? It means she's determined to make you marry the girl."

Roman stared at his father. "The poor kid," he said softly. "I had no idea." Then as if only then seeing him, he shrugged. "There's no problem. I decided to marry her long ago without knowing any of this."

Orlowski flushed. "I advise you to consider carefully before making any decision. I will never give my consent to your marriage to some unknown girl with easy morals. You can't expect any money from me for that."

"I never expected any. Excuse me, Father, but Eva is solely my problem and one I shall handle as I see fit."

13

THE STRONG AND THE WEAK

TADEUSZ picked up the pen and continued the letter: ". . . So now you know exactly how it all happened. You can also understand I have no way out. For us to try to flee together is out of the question. Even if we succeeded, it would be at the price of your parents' death at the hands of the Gestapo. But I can't be a traitor either. So all that remains is suicide. This way at least a decent memory of me will survive in spite of everything.

"In spite of everything—you are puzzled why I write that? Let me explain. You knew me only a very short time, Irena, and my past is a blank to you. As my final gesture I want to fill this in. It is difficult because there is nothing I can boast about, not one thing even to be proud of except perhaps my death. But after that has happened there are bound to be all sorts of rumors, and so you have a right to know the truth. I want to leave you as an honest man, whatever the cost, and at this moment you have the assurance that I am being frank with you. A man facing death doesn't lie.

"I have been thinking how to describe my life. The truth is I was nothing. The most accurate description that fits me is an imposter. It isn't easy to use such a term concerning oneself, yet that's about it. Even with considerable success. Yet my greatest achievement in this respect was marrying you, Irena.

"So let me start with my attitude toward you. I will try to be absolutely honest and not gloss over anything. When I first met you I found you pleasant and attractive, but that was all. Even the day I proposed to you, it wasn't really out of love, though that's what I said. There were many other women to whom I might

have been more attracted, but you had something they didn't have —you were the open door to a bright future. And so I eagerly sought this marriage with you. That is all there was to it really at the time, but in spite of myself your sincerity and warmth won out. You must believe me that at least in our marriage I am no longer an imposter but your devoted husband. If this were not so I would not be forced to commit suicide today. My death and this letter should be everlasting proof of the love for you that has grown in me and the deep changes in my character that you have brought about.

"I hope you were at least a little happy in this short marriage of ours. I admit I often neglected you as a husband, but now you know why and will not think so badly of me. I believe I could have fulfilled your father's trust in me too. We understood each other and in many ways were very much alike.

"But to come back to myself. First of all you should know that I am a very different person from what all of you took me to be. I never was wealthy. My family wasn't even well to do. Quite the contrary, I grew up on the edge of poverty, and my destiny might well have simply been a perpetuation of this. That it didn't happen was not so much my own doing as that of people and circumstances. I was ambitious but not willing to make any real effort myself; rather I watched from the sidelines for the easy chance. My main ambition was to shake off the dust of the provincial town and become a man of the world. It kept me going all the way through secondary school and then on into my first step into this world—the university at Poznan. It was really on my father's back. He was an underpaid post office clerk to whom giving his son a higher education meant great personal deprivation.

"At the university I looked around carefully and it wasn't long before I attached myself to a set of students from old well-to-do families. Everything thereafter was built on this beginning. Seeing me constantly in this company, people began to assume I was one of them, a young man of means. I felt no obligation to change this view. Quite the contrary. With amazement and delight I observed how easy it was for me to win friends and acceptance. The reason was simple—my personality, the manners I had acquired, my careful choice of clothes, neckties in the best of taste, even the shape of my nose. And of course meeting the right people. The art of pleasing is basic to success. And so I climbed ever farther from the world that had been mine, until the transformation was so

complete that I overlayed it in my imagination with a childhood drawn from that of my friends.

"Even so I might not have gotten very far if not for a bit of luck which enabled me to strike out on my own, and for the first time gave me a degree of financial independence. Through these same friends I had landed myself a mistress, an intelligent pretty girl, ambitious and determined—rather like myself. I think she really loved me, but she knew how to put her beauty to use to further her own climb up the ladder of success. And so our romance was short-lived. She managed to catch the eye of an elderly and wealthy gentleman, and suddenly they were married. For me it was a blow, I had become very attached to her. But she softened it by leaving her large furnished apartment to me as a parting gift. I converted it into a sort of student boarding home, emphasizing its exclusiveness.

"Now in addition to the best connections I had a steady income, and my possibilities grew. The only weak point was that it was all based on the student community, and with the end of my studies that would end too. This problem I met by finding ever-new ways of prolonging them year after year. 'Eternal student,' that's how they dubbed my sort in those days. You see how eager I was to coast along on the road of easy living and pretense. Not that I consciously ever intended to become an imposter or whatever you call my kind. Somehow I was continually pushed onto a stage where I had to play the role expected of me.

"Soon I hit upon a source of additional income. I organized a kind of private casino in the apartment, a retreat for card devotees. I never won large sums, but I won enough! And meanwhile my circle of friends grew, and so did my connections.

"It was at this time I met Witold and later his father, and we soon became quite close friends. Modlibog is a pleasant man, though too easy going and self centered to look far into other people's lives. All he noticed about me was my amiable personality, my refined manners and custom tailored suits, and this was enough for him. With Witold I visited his estate often. Then later, with the German occupation, when both the Modlibogs and I found ourselves as refugees in Warsaw, he offered me a room in his apartment which I eagerly accepted. I never took financial advantage of his friendship; even then I paid regularly for my room and board.

"There you have it, the life that was mine until the day I met

you. Are you angry or just disappointed? Would it have been better to have left you with a false image? Whatever you feel, remember you are the only person I have shown myself to as I really was. Through you I have become sensitive to things I never noticed before. Through you I had the opportunity to become something real at last. However, that was not to be my destiny. I have always let myself be carried by the currents of life instead of leading my own way, and now I have to pay for it. There are inescapable moments when one finally has to make decisions oneself. Maybe my choice has been wrong. I don't know, but I can't see any other. You will be the only one capable of judging about my life and death, but then it will already be too late.

"One more matter: perhaps some talk may reach you about a recent love affair with a girl out our way. Don't give it any thought. It was a passing fancy, of no importance. Believe me, I only love you and no one else.

"I think this is really all. You will never see me alive again, Irena. Don't look at me dead. I want you to remember me as the man you saw this morning. Perhaps you were surprised I kissed you longer than usual. It was then I said my final farewell to you, only you didn't know it. Thus remember me. Try if you can to defend my memory and try not to forget me too soon. Good-by, Irena. I hope to see you some day in that other world, if it is possible to find each other in a place so crowded. Good-by.

Your Tadeusz"

2

Tadeusz laid down his pen. He felt very satisfied with himself, even elated. Could anyone have come to a more honorable solution? He looked at his watch: just after two. At three, according to the arrangements they had made by phone, the German would be waiting for him at the cafe. That was his moment of truth. Beyond that point he couldn't delay. If he failed to keep his appointment the German would certainly head over to his room at once. One hour of life remained.

How strange. Not until this second had he confronted the fact that in some sixty minutes he would no longer exist, and in the same instant all that he knew and experienced back over countless years and months and days would disappear without trace. Merely a lifeless body slumped in the armchair. For the first time he was really afraid. How was that possible—the last hour of his life?

But it was all decided. There was no other way out.

He put the letter in an envelope and addressed it. He would give it now to the janitor to take out to Duck Lane, and by the time the man was back he would be no more. No more? . . . Nonexistent? He looked at his watch: barely fifty minutes left. He began to grow angry: that German who was the cause of it all would smile sarcastically as he looked at him lying there—so end the weak! And he would turn and simply go on with his dirty work, would probably do in Roman on the basis of what Tadeusz, himself, had written down.

But why not take the German along, too, into that other world? Why not make his own death count for something? Put a bullet first in the German's head, and then use the second one on himself. Even if something went wrong he could still shoot himself before anyone could intervene. Why hadn't this solution occurred to him before? Feverishly, he began to plan. He knew that small cafe very well. It was on a quiet side street, with only six tables. He'd sit at the fourth. That way he'd see the German before he was seen himself and could aim at him at close range as he turned.

His eyes drifted to the letter lying before him. Should he add his plans for killing the German too? There was no time to spare. He sealed it and put it in his pocket. Again he looked at his watch —twenty minutes to three. He must hurry. He took a pistol from the drawer of the table. Roman hadn't been the least surprised at his request. "In our work one should always be prepared." He checked it and added two more bullets—one for the German, one for himself, one for emergencies. He thought a moment and then put it into his right-hand pocket: that would be the side against the wall.

Downstairs he stopped at the janitor's and gave him the letter, fare money, and a handsome tip. "Please take this out to Jutrosin right away and deliver it personally into the hands of my wife . . . no, wait—" He frowned. The German might not show up for some reason and the whole thing would have to be postponed. In that case the letter would have to wait too. "Don't leave before four. Otherwise my wife won't be at home when you get there."

Ten minutes later he found himself entering the designated cafe. As he had hurried along the streets he had again felt a sense of elation, of determination and resolve, but now he faltered. He sat down just where he had planned, and yet it all seemed very different. He looked around—an old woman slowly sipping coffee, two

men at the table exactly opposite. They had noticed him. He knew perfectly well who they were.

Nothing would escape their eyes. It all seemed hopelessly difficult. He would almost certainly bungle it and be caught alive. He shifted his chair slightly to remove the two men from his field of vision, but it only increased his tension. He fingered the pistol in his pocket.

Just then, the German entered. He nodded imperceptibly at the two men and was about to turn . . . This was the moment—he hesitated and the moment was lost.

He found himself shaking the proffered hand instead.

The German who should have died, but hadn't, said: "Good afternoon, my friend. Excellent you are so punctual." Casually he sat down opposite him. "You're extremely nervous today."

He was afraid to meet his eyes. Almost angrily he said: "Are you surprised? I think I've got plenty of reason to be."

The German laughed. "So we're up against sentiment again. Perhaps you really want to be a hero?"

Tadeusz said nothing.

"I must say I feel sorry for you, as I would be for anyone who is set on destroying himself. Do you recall what I said the first time we met? About life belonging to the strong, the men of decision? It's always been that way and always will. And all you have to worry about are the results. If they are good, then the means are moral. If you fail then everything you have done, even with the finest intentions, will be condemned, in the best case made fun of. But tell me, how do we stand with our little joint venture? I'm expecting to hear something concrete today."

Tadeusz rubbed his eyes wearily. "I've been promised a meeting with 'Watchmaker.' "

"Promised? A pretty vague term. When?"

"Maybe next week. Believe me, it isn't easy to arrange."

"Perhaps. But you are sure—sure that he will come?"

"I expect him to—I'll do everything I can," he lied. "He should come. He's got no reason for not trusting me." Suddenly he was startled by an idea that flashed momentarily through his mind. Suppose he should really sacrifice "Watchmaker" and have peace at last? Frightened, he pushed it from him.

"In that case, all right. I'll wait—up to a point of course. Someone else would have taken you under his wing by now and released you to heaven via a chimney." He laughed. Then rising to leave,

he said: "Let me remind you once more: the strong are always right. All else is sentimental nonsense. Do you understand at last?"

3

Ogorek filled the glass again. Krupa was leaning sideways on the counter as he eagerly devoured the sandwich. He gulped it down, an almost unintelligible patter emerging at the same time from his bulging mouth. The usual talk about "the new wonder weapon" that would bring Hitler certain victory. Ogorek made no effort to understand, merely nodding occasionally to indicate agreement. Surreptitiously, he observed him with disgust, his eyes settling on the wart on his nose, reddening as usual from the alcohol and the exertion of his jaws. He hated this man and at the same time was afraid of him. Once a month this swine came and took his tribute and imposed his presence on him and even spoke of their partnership. And all he could do was pretend to be pleased, to flatter him. A hell of a world.

Again, he filled Krupa's glass. As he did so his attention was drawn to three young men coming from the direction of the station with a fourth, still on the deserted platform, following them. He felt vaguely uneasy without knowing why. The three stopped at the crossing and waited for the straggler.

The last chunk disappeared into Krupa's mouth. "So isn't it better to be rid of them once and for all?" It was the end of some harangue again about the Jews.

He nodded absently. "Would you like another sandwich?" he asked.

Krupa had no objection at all. "But make it sausage this time, the kind with garlic."

Ogorek cut some slices of sausage, spread the bread with butter and held the sandwich out to Krupa on the blade of his knife. The men continued to stand at the crossing conferring. They were looking this way now. So it was the kiosk that interested them. Then it came to him in a flash; not the kiosk but the man standing here, oblivious to their presence. Ogorek was literally too frightened to utter a word.

Leaving the others at the crossing, one of the youths approached. He smiled reassuringly at him before turning to Krupa, who only now noticed him. "Excuse me," the youth said courteously, "are you Mr. Krupa?"

Krupa grunted without taking his attention from his food.

"In that case the gentlemen over there wish to have a word with you. Could you step over a moment? It won't take long."

As he turned and spotted the other men, Krupa stopped chewing abruptly, swallowed with difficulty. "What do they want of me?"

"They'll explain."

Krupa wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and took out a cigarette. His hand was trembling, and his face had lost all its florid color. When he gave him a glance of appeal, Ogorek turned his head away quickly to make clear that he had nothing in common with this man.

Suddenly the youth's face hardened and his eyes became threatening. "Did you hear me?"

Krupa seemed to sway slightly, the cigarette falling from his hand. In a voice completely changed, he pleaded: "But sir, I am a Pole like you. Only my wife is German. I haven't done a thing. I try to defend everyone—Mr. Ogorek can tell you . . ."

Instinctively, Ogorek pulled back from the counter. He ought to speak up and give an answer to the lie, tell these people exactly what this filthy agent meant by "defending." But already Krupa was walking dully toward the others, the young man close behind him. Only then did Ogorek notice what had doubtlessly caused the sudden change in Krupa—a pistol almost concealed in the man's hand, black and small, like a child's toy. And then it all happened before he knew what he was seeing—a few hushed words, then Krupa's strident voice "Gentlemen, gentlemen . . ." He reached out suddenly like a tightrope walker trying to regain his balance. Almost at the same instant there was a shot, a second—Krupa fell face down in the snow, his right leg still quivering.

The men were running straight for the kiosk. He backed into the corner: "Look, I had nothing to do with him. He simply took . . ."

One of the men waved his pistol and broke in, obviously not listening: "Remember you saw nothing, absolutely nothing. One word about what we look like and you'll regret it . . ." He tapped the pistol on the counter. "For half an hour stay sitting right in here and don't move. Then go to the police and report finding him lying there. But remember: you *saw* nothing."

Ogorek swayed with relief. He could have embraced this stranger on the spot, but already the men were running back across the tracks. He wanted to call after them to take along some cigarettes,

or whatever else they wanted. He would give them anything. But they had disappeared without a trace—

4

Marie Orlowska awoke early, but it was already getting light. Alexander was still asleep, breathing loudly with a kind of whistling sound that always got on her nerves. As usual, all the resentments she felt toward him focused on this until she couldn't stand it any longer. As if his way of breathing was any fault of his! How childish—her irritation shifted to herself. She pulled on her dressing gown and slipped out of the room.

The quiet of the house was soothing. At this hour the day was still fresh, pleasantly unknown. Soon all the irritations, the boring routine would begin—the substitutes for living. Not long ago the day had centered around the children at least, and she had tried to live through them. They would achieve what fate had deprived her of. They would love and be happy, and she would share their happiness vicariously. But then suddenly she had to face the idiocy of this dream too. They grew up; Wladek would soon be a man; Irena had embarked on a life of her own; Roman was so frankly indifferent he hardly bothered to come home half the nights. If he loved that girl, why shouldn't he marry her? How she yearned to tell him not to listen to his father. Loyalty wouldn't let her. Then there would be nothing left of the façade. Well then—so she had all but played her role as mother too. Soon she would be expendable, except to baby a husband whom she had never loved and now could not even respect.

The front door bell! At this hour? Anna wasn't here yet; it couldn't even be eight o'clock. As she went out into the entry, she glanced through the window. At the door stood an unknown man with a tired pale face, wearing a worn overcoat and a postman's cap.

The man pulled off his cap. His hair was gray. "Excuse me. Have I the honor of speaking to Mrs. Orlowska?" he said in a timid voice.

She nodded.

"I'm Bartel——Bartel from the post office. My boy is your son's friend. Wladek is your son, isn't he?" Again she nodded, becoming more and more uneasy. "They ran away together . . ."

"What! . . ." She clutched her hands to her chest. "Wladek? That's impossible. He's upstairs."

"Madam, that's why I came. To find out for sure if it's true. My boy left a letter. About them taking to the woods together and joining these partisans."

She hesitated. "I will go and see," she said in a trembling voice. "Please come in."

Lutyk carefully cleaned off his shoes and stepped through the inner door as she ran up the stairs.

His room was empty. On his table there was a sheet of paper. "Dear Mother, I have left for the forests with Stefan. We have a reliable guide to the partisans. Don't be afraid. I am bored at home and want to do something important. Don't be angry, because I will come back when we've won. I kiss you, Mother. Wladek."

Her legs gave way; she found herself sitting on the bed. Her son, a mere boy. Tears ran down her face. How could he . . . Then she remembered the man waiting downstairs.

"Yes, my son is gone," she told him. "He left a letter too." She faltered. "Perhaps they haven't really gone off, perhaps it's only a prank or something, who knows . . ."

"No—they've gone, madam," Lutyk stood, staring at her, a broken man, without hope. "He's gone to get killed. And he was my only one, madam. All I had was this boy and now I'm completely alone. My wife is under the ground already—two years ago—and now he's left me and will go under somewhere too. That's how it happens with children . . ."

Marie slumped to the floor in a dead faint.

5

So it was to be "Watchmaker." Not him, not the German. What had flashed across Tadeusz's mind that day in the cafe, to be quickly rejected, he had now accepted.

The road to this decision had been a long one. He had pulled back shocked, had fought with himself, hesitated, but finally he had come to realize there was no other way. For when he failed to kill the German, he knew he would never have the courage to kill himself. Just in time that afternoon, he retrieved the letter and shoved it out of sight. It was a pity Irena would never read it.

So the decision had been made. Still, he delayed, hoping that a miracle might happen to set him free.

But when Melania said to him one morning: "I spoke with 'Watchmaker' yesterday and he wants to see you Monday. In the same cafe . . ." Tadeusz knew the die was cast. It was as if "Watchmaker" himself had finally resolved the issue.

Ten minutes later he was in a phone booth, dialing the German's number. "It's arranged. Two o'clock, Monday . . . yes, Monday, next Monday. The cafe over on Gold Street . . . but please be careful."

Then he was sitting at the bar just beyond the booth, drinking down one glass, a second. Then he was going to the station, home. And later still he found himself saying to Roman: "Seems to me 'Watchmaker' is an awful talker. Why take risks of meeting when there's nothing important, and it doesn't strike me as being too safe using cafes all the time . . ."

6

Calm and self-assured, Tadeusz went to keep his appointment, all earlier doubts pushed aside. All—except a vague dissatisfaction with himself. In spite of his careful reasoning that for the loss of one man's life, many others would be saved, he was unable to still the voice of his conscience. But he tried, he kept telling himself that if there had been some other way out he would have taken it. And certainly "Watchmaker's" person would not prejudice the outcome of the war one way or another.

He entered the cafe. He was prepared for this moment and steeled himself. He sat down at the table at the further end and pulled a newspaper out of his pocket. He had ten minutes to wait.

The two men who always accompanied the German made their appearance. Now the door was shut; there was no possibility of retreating.

The German entered. He pretended not to see Tadeusz. He sat down at a side table, ordered some coffee, and began reading a Polish newspaper. Tadeusz was sure "Watchmaker" would be late as usual. The first sign would be a woman who would come in and glance around and leave at once. One of the two men got up and left. Instinctively Tadeusz felt relieved even though he knew how absurd it was. The German's assistant was just making sure that the trap was set, that there could be no possible hitch.

The door opened. It was Melania this time. She looked around as if unaware of him, and immediately disappeared again. He shifted uneasily in his chair, his hands trembling slightly as he drank down the coffee. He ordered a second cup. How slowly the time went.

Again the door. Once again it was Melania. She approached him. "I hadn't noticed you," she said, sitting down without remov-

ing her coat. He knew she was lying, and this made him even more jittery. "Papa will be here in fifteen minutes. He's delayed at a meeting. It took longer than he expected. But I see you're very nervous. There's no reason to be. We always take good precautions."

"It's nothing, some personal troubles," he said confused and then recovering added reproachfully, "This waiting around would get anyone nervous. But excuse me, can I order a coffee for you?"

"No, thanks," she said, "I'm in a hurry." She got up: "I'll see you tomorrow. Good-by." She smiled and left.

Tadeusz glanced toward the German. Doubtlessly he had had his eye on them, even though he appeared to be engrossed in his paper. Again Tadeusz had a feeling of being trapped. He couldn't endure this waiting much longer.

At last the stooped figure of "Watchmaker" with his violin case appeared. He had stopped in the doorway and was wiping his glasses with his handkerchief as he looked around. The German appeared not to have noticed his entrance at all.

At last "Watchmaker" approached his table and greeted him: "I'm afraid you've had to wait a long time. I'm very sorry. I've had a very difficult day." He sat down and ordered two coffees.

For a while they were silent, "Watchmaker" frequently glancing around the room, fixing his eyes on each person in turn. The espresso machine was hissing behind the counter. Two people came in. Someone went out. The waitress brought their order. Tadeusz began to pull at his fingers, cracking his knuckles.

"Awful weather," "Watchmaker" said at last, and then reflected a moment. "In the future we won't meet in cafes. We've had some trouble the last few days."

Now Tadeusz was listening keenly. This was news indeed. Whatever happened now would also be attributed to whatever trouble they had already had.

"Probably only an accident, but we'll have to be more careful anyway, just in case. Do you remember 'Jelonek'? You had a meeting together two weeks ago?"

Tadeusz nodded. Of course he remembered. He wondered uneasily if the Germans had caught Jelonek by following him.

"Apparently he's no longer alive. Evidently he was killed at Gestapo headquarters during interrogation. He had a wife and child. We'll have to do something for her. Perhaps you know of a job? She's young and competent."

"I'll look around. Of course something has to be done." Tadeusz nodded eagerly. His confidence increased. If others were arrested, it could happen to "Watchmaker" too, without suspicion falling on him.

Suddenly he noticed that the German had gotten up and was leaving. He continued speaking, hoping "Watchmaker" hadn't noticed his interest in the other man. "I wanted to tell you," he said, "that the accusations against Noga don't look valid to me. Isn't it more likely a case of spite? I can find no reason whatsoever for his turning traitor and becoming a German agent."

"Watchmaker" smiled: "It could be that the reason is completely unknown. Simply stick to collecting the facts: these will be decisive. I'm convinced he's Gestapo . . ." They discussed two further cases. Then "Watchmaker" gave various new instructions. At King Street they had worked too long. The place would have to be changed. He would also shift "Melania," and another girl would be assigned to take her place. Finally he said: "From now on we'll only meet once a fortnight. That will be quite sufficient." "Watchmaker" drew a bill out of his pocket. "I think we've covered everything, so I'll go along. Here's some money. Please pay for both of us." He got up, buttoned his shabby coat, and picked up his violin case. "Good-by. 'Melania' will introduce you to her replacement and will let you know about our next meeting." They shook hands.

Tadeusz watched the stooped form push the door open. It swung shut. He kept on staring. So he was gone, gone for good. It seemed completely unreal. There had been no awful scene, no violence, no last look of betrayal (this he had especially dreaded). Could anyone in the cafe have the slightest suspicion of his own connection with what was about to happen to "Watchmaker"? He felt tremendously relieved. It had all gone so much easier than he had imagined.

He sat at the table another ten minutes before he called the waitress, paid and left. Again he was a little apprehensive—what would he find outside? He looked up and down the street. It was completely normal. For a moment he thought hopefully that perhaps nothing had happened. But that was impossible. The Germans were far too efficient.

7

Tadeusz had to knock three times before he heard the steps of the old woman. She unhooked the chain holding the door and

opened it a crack. "Miss 'Melania' is sick," she said, "and don't come here anymore." That was all. The door closed in his face, before he had the chance to ask a single question. One thing was certain: "Watchmaker" had been taken yesterday as planned and already everyone had been alerted.

At noon he called the German. "Everything is fine," the German reported. "Meet me Saturday same place as usual. Better phone me first."

Tadeusz returned home earlier than usual, too restless to deal with anything else in town. In the early evening Roman rushed in, obviously greatly upset. " 'Watchmaker' has been caught. An inside job—someone must have betrayed him. All work's been stopped. I'm clearing out at once. I don't know about you—you've been involved only a short time—but it might be wiser to clear out too."

Tadeusz had no difficulty pretending to be shocked and frightened. He asked for details but Roman knew nothing beyond the fact of the arrest. Tadeusz watched the dark of the Lane close in on him as he hurried away. Suddenly he felt isolated, chillingly alone—everyone was disappearing just when he needed to be kept informed. To whom could he turn now? He was completely cut off.

He had barely turned back to the house when the Orlowskis came over, the impact of Wladek's running away clearly visible in their faces. She looked aged and distraught while he maintained an exaggerated passivity as if nothing serious at all had happened. Modlibog tried to console them and so did Tadeusz, even though their problem seemed almost trivial compared to his own much greater difficulties. Finally the old people decided to leave again. In the hall they ran into Witold, just back from the city. He told them he had spoken to a friend who might have some leads as to the boy's whereabouts. Mrs. Orlowska thanked him gratefully, tears in her eyes. At last the door closed behind them, and Tadeusz gave a sigh of relief.

But then Irena settled down in the living room with the others and demurred when he suggested they go up to their room. He pleaded that he was tired and then impulsively put his hand in hers and whispered, "Come . . . I feel very close to you tonight. Nothing else matters . . ."

Irena was surprised, but pleased. She got up and excusing herself led the way to the second floor. He was in a strange mood. He would be willing to drop everything, forego all success, all riches, just for a bit of human warmth, just for the knowledge someone

existed who believed in him without reservations. Never in his life had he felt this way. For the first time he thought he understood what it meant to have a wife. Only in Irena could he hope to find the loyalty and devotion for which he was longing.

In their room he turned and suddenly embraced her. "I love you, Irena," he whispered fervently.

She was still more surprised. "You are very nice, tonight. What's happened?" she said laughing, delighted by his attention. For several weeks she had felt increasingly irritated, even angry with Tadeusz. He was always in a hurry, always returning home tired and preoccupied. Even when he was attentive to her, it seemed forced, an effort. Finally, completely exasperated, she had said, "For heaven's sake, Tadeusz, what did we marry for? You act as if I'm in your way—that you'd much prefer to be elsewhere." Perhaps she had made him realize how neglected she felt and he had done something about it. Whatever the reason she was gratified by the sudden change.

This evening she had never seen him so absorbed in her. He kissed her with growing passion and kept on telling her of his love. Feverishly he removed her clothes and caressed her. His impulsive desire for her was almost a little frightening, as if there might never be another night that he could spend in her arms.

8

Saturday morning Tadeusz phoned as he was instructed. The German sounded very cordial. "Could we meet today, usual place and time? Fine."

On his way to keep the appointment he was extremely nervous. He kept glancing around. Was he being followed? He was queasy with dread although he kept telling himself that no one in the underground could possibly suspect him. If anyone did, Roman would surely warn him. But why hadn't they contacted him? They should keep him informed of exactly what had happened, who was to take "Watchmaker's" place and when the work would begin again.

The German greeted him heartily and handed him a small package. "A thousand English pounds. Easy money, eh? If I can do anything else, let me know. We can arrange everything for friends."

"There's nothing," Tadeusz said. "But I'm curious—does 'Watchmaker' have any idea how this happened to him? Has he any suspicion of my role in it?"

The German waved his hand. "An academic question. He'll never see daylight again anyway. Actually I did ask him. He was somewhat evasive but my impression is that he suspects everyone without being sure who. He was very curious how we knew he would be there and how we recognized him. Why worry? Let him think what he wants."

It wasn't that simple for Tadeusz. Far from being allayed, his anxiety grew. From his meeting with the German he headed straight for his room and lay down there a long time on the couch. Could 'Watchmaker' already have had a suspicion before their encounter and communicated it to others? But suspicion wasn't enough—hadn't he gone through all that already? They had to have concrete evidence, and of that there couldn't be a trace.

A week later he got a note from Roman at last: "I have nothing definite to tell you," he wrote. "I can't return home because I'm not sure what the Germans know about me. Yesterday we learned that the Germans have killed 'Watchmaker.' "

This news troubled and upset him far more than he had anticipated. Not that it was unexpected, but simply that he wished it weren't so. He hadn't wanted the death of the man, or of any man. Desperately, he rationalized—was it so important? There would be the problem of a successor, of inventing a new strange sounding name, and soon the incident would be forgotten and with it the word "Watchmaker." He was old anyway, and was bound to leave the scene before long one way or another. Life was a continuous struggle and the world belonged to the young and the strong.

14

THE CROSS IN THE CEMETERY

IRENA always stayed in bed while Tadeusz dressed. That's the way they had started and by now it had become routine. She lay on her back watching him.

"You give the impression the whole world would come to a standstill if you didn't go to the city for once." She laughed at his obvious irritation. "Grumpy old thing—the image of Father. Did you make a pact with him to be exactly the same? Or do all men get that way once they're married?"

He ignored her and went to the bathroom. The blade was dull. There was no hot water. Though he didn't want to admit it, what Irena said was true: he was irritable, and in the morning everything always seemed to go wrong. While he shaved, rubbing his face down with eau-de-cologne, he planned his program for the day. First he'd sell the gold bracelet for Orlowski. Again it was evident his father-in-law had used up all his liquid assets. Then get the money from the dealer for those paintings of Modlibog's. Before he left for the city, he'd better check whether he'd like to get rid of another. There were still several in the storage room. And he had to see Helena and balance the accounts. A lot to do for one day.

He returned to the bedroom and went over to the mirror to put on his tie. This required concentration: Tadeusz thought of his tie as something like a regimental flag; in any case, the hallmark of the male. One look was sufficient to know whom you were dealing with. A careless necktie disqualified a man.

"I'm going in to town later today," Irena said. "Maybe we could meet before train time."

"Yes, grand." He was pleased. He especially enjoyed returning home with her. "Let's meet at the Crocodile at a quarter of five." His mood was already much improved. He sat on the edge of the bed and gave her a lingering kiss.

There was a knock on the door. It was Kateryna. "Some people are downstairs asking for you—a woman and a man. They're sitting in the hall." She left, closing the door behind her. They could hear the stairs creak as she descended.

Tadeusz slipped on his jacket. "Whoever it is, when I get rid of them, I'll go right on to the station with them." He kissed her again. "See you at the Crocodile. Quarter of five, don't forget."

Before leaving he checked to make sure he had his wallet and money with him. Out on the landing he bent over the railing; he was a little surprised to see that it was Melania. He adjusted the handkerchief in his breast pocket and ran his hand over his hair. When he started down the stairs, he saw the man with her—a short, blond, rather uninteresting-appearing individual. They had heard his steps and were looking up at him. There was something vaguely puzzling about their manner as they sat there. Melania looked strained and tense, it seemed to him even grim. Perhaps something had happened?

He smiled and raised his hand slightly in greeting. "What brings you out here, Melania?"

Melania glared at him as if she didn't know him. "Have you ever known a man called Fred?" she asked in a sharp, brittle voice. "His full name is Friedrich Vogel."

He shook his head. "No," he said.

She took a photo from her pocketbook and held it up in front of his eyes. "This man!"

He started. The picture was of his German. And, the name, of course—Fred. "I don't recall. I may have seen him somewhere, but I'm not sure." His voice was unsteady.

"Strange," Melania said quietly. "You were seen with him. In the Green Cafe. And you don't remember? . . ." Her voice hardened: "Anyway we're not here for explanations. I will tell you: it was you who betrayed 'Watchmaker' to him. By verdict of the special military court you are sentenced to death."

A black object appeared in the young man's hand. He raised it and half closed one eye. Tadeusz spread his hands out in front of him as if to ward off what was about to happen. "A moment . . . wait a moment . . . it's a mistake . . . I'll . . ."

The world drained away from him before he even realized he was lying on the floor.

Melania bent over his body. She felt inside his jacket, removing his wallet and identity card. She reached into the outside pockets and took various papers and a notebook. Finally she drew a small slip of paper out of her jacket and pinned it to his lapel.

2

On getting up in the morning, Modlibog's first move was to go out on the front steps and survey the coming day. He loved the fresh clean feel of this moment, especially now with the anticipation of spring in the air.

As usual, he entered the hall in his dressing gown, and was about to turn toward the door when he saw the body of Tadeusz sprawled on the floor, a small puddle of blood by his head. Modlibog swayed, opened his mouth, but couldn't utter a sound. His first impulse was to turn away, escape. Yet he knew he must do something, and quickly. Hopelessly, he began to shift back and forth wringing his hands.

Finally he steeled himself and gingerly touched Tadeusz's hand. He jumped. It was hardly warm. In fact the blood on his face was already dry, the skin almost yellow. He turned and stumbled through the dining room to Witold's door. Speechless, he fell into his son's room.

Witold sat up in bed, alarmed by the expression on his father's face. "What's the matter? What happened?"

"Come . . ." Modlibog gasped. "Come—Tadeusz—my God—dead."

Witold groped for his slippers, still looking incredulously at his father. Modlibog whispered dazed, "Go—go and see."

Slowly he followed behind him.

Witold knelt beside Tadeusz's body. "Yes, dead," he whispered. Then he noticed the slip of paper pinned to his lapel. He removed it and after a moment held it up for his father.

Modlibog took it gingerly: "What is it?"

"Read it, father . . . I heard the shot but I had no idea what it was. It wasn't loud at all. Irena probably didn't even hear it."

Modlibog stared at the typewritten message: "Tadeusz Rakowicz, German spy, shot in accordance with the verdict of the special

military tribunal for betraying a Polish patriot to the enemy. The execution carried out by 'Melania' and 'Marek.' " And at the bottom-left-hand corner the date: "April 1, 1944." He read it again, unable to believe his eyes. Then he handed the paper back to Witold. "Impossible," he said.

Witold didn't answer. Slowly, he stood up. "We'll have to carry him somewhere. We can't just leave him here."

"Where—upstairs?" He looked at the corpse with revulsion.

Witold went out and returned with a towel which he wrapped around Tadeusz's head. "Father, you take his feet," he said. "We'll carry him to my room."

Clumsily they carried the body to Witold's room and laid it on the bed.

"And what now?" Modlibog asked, completely shattered. "Ghastly . . . ghastly."

"Just don't go to pieces, Father. First we'll have to break the news to Irena. Then go and tell the police. There's nothing we can do for him." Witold glanced unhappily at the body. "Who would ever have imagined."

"You'll have to deal with Irena, Witold . . . I couldn't tell her . . . It's no use. I'm too shaken, I just can't take any more. I'll send Kateryna to the police."

At that moment Kateryna appeared in the doorway. As she caught sight of the bed she groaned: "Oh Jesus, what's happened here? But it's Mr. Rakowicz." She fell silent, staring with eyes squinted in horror at the bloody jacket and the towel wrapped around the head. Then she cried: "It was them two who murdered him. Them two—and I let them in. Oh Jesus. How could I have known? I heard the shot, yes. Now I know I did. But I thought they was only banging the door. But how could I know, Mr. Modlibog? Who could imagine a murder happening in a decent house?" She crossed herself. "Died even without a priest. Jesus, Joseph, and Mary!" She looked from father to son and back again, and then abruptly left the room. A second later she was back again even more agitated. "I . . . I wish to leave your service, sir. This very day. I'm not going to sleep another night in this house. It's no place for any God-fearing soul."

Modlibog tried to intervene but she wouldn't listen. "I never worked in a house where people get murdered, and I'm not starting now. Even if you get the priest to hallow it, I'd be afraid of a

single night under this roof. I've heard many times about such things and you'll see."

3

". . . All right then, Irena, slip something on quickly. I've got to see you at once." Witold was standing outside her door. Three times he had emphasized the urgency of his intrusion, but she refused to take him seriously and kept saying that she was washing and would be down as soon as she got dressed. Finally to his relief he heard her footsteps approaching the door.

She swung it open. "What is the matter with you this morning . . ." When she noticed his face, she stopped and then said uncertainly, "Has something really happened?"

"Yes," he said. "Something very painful, Irena . . . I don't even know how to tell you . . ." He hesitated and then went on, "I don't want to frighten you."

"Roman? Wladek?"

He shook his head. "It's not them, but Tadeusz . . ."

"What about him?"

"He's no longer alive."

"Are you crazy? It isn't half an hour since he left the room."

"Irena, listen—it's true. He's lying downstairs."

She stared at him. "You can't be serious."

He held out his hand, let it drop before he touched her. "But I am serious, Irena," he said hoarsely. His voice sharpened. "Your husband was shot this morning as he was leaving the house. He got a bullet through his head which must have killed him instantly. His body is lying on my bed where my father and I carried it. Do you understand at last? Finish dressing and then come down at once. I'm going over to tell your parents and then to the police."

"Who did it? Why?" she almost whispered. "Why?" she repeated.

He shook his head pleadingly.

Without another word she pushed past him and rushed down the stairs.

4

In the hall she ran into Modlibog.

"My dear child . . . such a misfortune . . ." He was relieved to see she wasn't crying. He had been steeling himself for tears,

hysteria. And what possible consolation did he have to offer, especially with that typewritten note in his hand? He had decided that she would have to see it. They couldn't conceal the circumstances from her; it might even be a matter of her own life and death.

But she pushed past him. On the threshold of Witold's room she stopped. Involuntarily she grimaced at the sight of the white sheet that covered her husband's body. After a moment she whispered, almost as if to herself: "Is he really not alive?"

"No, Irena. Unfortunately not," Modlibog answered gently. "He was already dead when we carried him in here."

Her eyes were fixed on the red stain that had begun to spread on the sheet from the pillow. "But who did it—the Germans?"

"A very disagreeable matter, Irena . . ." He hesitated. "Come to the dining room and sit down there. I have something very painful to tell you. Come . . ."

She swung round and stared at him, her eyes already seeming to protest what she could not yet know. "No, no." She shook her head, bewildered, afraid without knowing exactly what she was afraid of. Meekly she followed him out of the room. She felt as if she were living some awful nightmare in which her feet carried her from one horror to another, and no matter how much she wanted to turn back she had to go on. It couldn't be real; only a short while ago she'd watched him meticulously putting on his necktie in front of their mirror. And now suddenly all this. Why had he done that to her?

"Sit down here Irena. I wish I didn't have to . . ." He paused helplessly.

Instinctively, her gaze shifted to the note trembling in his hand. "What is that?" she asked almost inaudibly. He handed her the paper.

She scanned it quickly, then dropped it on the table. "Impossible." And, bursting into tears, she shouted, "It's a lie, a horrible lie. After all, I knew him. He was my husband. It couldn't be true." But even as she cried, a cold note of fear struck her heart. She was his wife; whatever the truth, they might point their finger at her too. "But what was he supposed to have done?" she said despairingly.

Modlibog shrugged. "Maybe Roman will have some explanation. I can't understand any of it either." Mrs. Orlowska came through the hall. He got up and greeted her, relieved at being rescued at last from this trying role. Irena glanced at her almost with hos-

tility. Why couldn't they leave her alone? She couldn't face the idea of having to receive sympathy, answer questions. She didn't want to speak with anyone—ever. She had to be alone, to get away from all these faces. Tears began running down her cheeks. She rushed past them out into the hall and up the stairs to her room.

She locked the door and, dropping down on her bed, buried her face in the pillow and broke into violent sobbing. She cried without restraint—from despair, from dismay, from fear of what lay ahead for her.

It was the first serious trouble she had ever known and she was completely unable to cope with it. Yesterday, going to the station to meet Tadeusz, she had been thinking how uneventful, even monotonous, her present existence was. Again she had felt a little resentful he hadn't more time for her, but then decided she was being silly. Hadn't she everything she had asked for? Her dream had been to be married, and to a good-looking husband. And that was just what had happened. And while he could be wonderfully gay at times, he also won the respect of serious people. Even her father, usually so grudging, spoke well of him. And he was easy to live with, letting her do as she pleased, always agreeable to her projects, even her plan to go traveling for a whole year together as soon as the war was over. The Mediterranean, Italy, Paris. Children? Later—maybe in six or seven years. She was going to enjoy the world before becoming involved with a family. And he had agreed wholeheartedly with her. So what more could she ask of a husband?

Now he was lying dead and all her hopes in life were shattered. How was that possible? Someone was knocking. She knew it would be her mother. Raising herself on her pillow she called, "Not now, Mother. Please leave me alone. I don't want to see anyone." She listened to her mother's footsteps returning downstairs.

Again she pushed her face into her pillow. She had had a right to that happiness. Why had it been taken away from her? She hated everyone.

They had misled her—Modlibog, her parents, even Tadeusz. They had all let her down. Her head writhed on the pillow; she should be grieving instead of accusing him. She had loved him, so how could what they say be true about him? She knew him better than anyone else and would never have chosen a traitor as a husband. It was a lie! But had she really known him? Had she ever even made the effort to? Could it have been a mistake? But

the name on the paper was his, and neither Modlibog's nor Witold's manner suggested any doubt. Again she began to pity herself; whatever it was, Tadeusz had brought misfortune and shame and suffering on her. She had trusted him and loved him, while he betrayed her, her family, his friends.

It would be impossible to stay on here. Everyone would point at her as if she were a leper. But where could she go? It had to be quickly before the news got around. There was no place she could go. Then she recalled the room in Warsaw, Tadeusz's room. No one knew of it out here. She got up and went over to the cupboard. The key was on the hook inside where he always kept it. She would only take the most necessary things. Later Roman could bring the rest. She could trust him not to let the others know.

But money—she had nothing but a little change in her pocketbook. She went over to his desk. He always had some money there. It was locked, the key no doubt in his pocket downstairs. Nothing would induce her to go and get it. She picked up the scissors and began to pry the drawer open. Gradually the crack widened and, with a splintering noise, the top gave way. She pulled out the inner drawer. There was a lot of money—zlotys, dollar bills, and a pistol. He had never mentioned having a weapon here in the house. She laid it back in the drawer and picked up a small tied bundle. She undid it—English pound notes, hundreds of them! She was dumfounded. He'd never so much as hinted he had that much money. Could it have any relation to what had happened? She shivered.

Still shivering, she collected a few essential clothes and toilet articles and put them in her small suitcase. Her only thought was to get away. After what she had gone through today, she never wanted to see this house again, nor this lane, nor even Jutrosin. She hurried down the stairs. The hall door opened. It was Modlibog returning from taking her parents back to the other house. He looked at her, amazed. "And where are you going?"

"I'm leaving. I don't know myself where I will live. I can't stay here. I'll let you know," she said curtly.

"But Irena—wait a moment. You are his widow. You can't just —something has to be done about him—a funeral. Someone has to—" He was so upset he could hardly speak coherently.

"I'll see. Perhaps I'll come later. Now I have to go. Is Witold around?"

"No, he's not back from the police. But Irena . . ."

"I said I have to go!" she said fiercely. "You'll get news from me. Good-by." Quickly she pushed past him out through the door and, before he had a chance to say anything further, was hurrying down the Lane.

5

Struggling with her suitcase, Irena worked her way miserably through the station in Warsaw. The bustle and jostling all around frightened her. She was so alone in this mass of strangers. It seemed as though everyone looked at her with suspicion. Perhaps she was already being followed.

Only when she had withdrawn in the deep seat of a horsecab carrying her to Tadeusz's apartment, did she feel secure again.

But by the time she had climbed the three flights of stairs and opened the door to the room, she was in a state of complete exhaustion. She dropped in the armchair without even taking off her coat, miserably lonely and afraid. The room was utterly alien. She had never liked it and now it was like a symbol of her defeat. She wouldn't possibly be able to stick it out long here.

For a moment, she yearned for her childhood, for its comfort and security. Never before had she had to face anything alone. The longing became so intense she was tempted to pick up her suitcase again and rush back to her family. Then the reality of Tadeusz's death stood before her; she could never go back. But she had to have some human warmth, someone to comfort her and give her courage. It occurred to her that she might look up one of her former school friends. But immediately she rejected the idea. It would be impossible to hide the reason for long and then she would be turned out in disgrace. Suddenly Karol Ogorek came to her mind. Though he was from Duck Lane and would know about Tadeusz, she was sure he would stand by her without passing judgment.

Karol was her one hope. Her mind made up, she quickly scribbled a note. "Dear Karol—please come to me at once. I am waiting, hoping you won't disappoint me. Do come, I desperately need your help . . ." Then she indicated where she was, slipped the note in an envelope, and addressed it. Hurrying down to the janitor, she begged him to take it out on the next train to Jutrosin.

"What's this running out there all the time?" he grumbled. "I'm a busy man."

She pulled out a pound note and pushed it into his hand.

"All right then, thank you madam." He doffed his cap. "But you won't be changing your mind like him the moment I start to go?" He laughed but she couldn't understand the joke, and was far too upset to try.

Back in the apartment, she started collecting all of Tadeusz's clothes and personal belongings and packing them in a box. Tomorrow she would have a second-hand dealer take it all away. She wanted nothing ever to remind her of him again. No one had ever done her the injury he had. Because of him she had to hide like an animal, give up her family, her comfortable life. He was a man without scruples, for whose death she could feel no sorrow, only indignation.

6

Ogorek felt a deep sense of satisfaction as he listened to the police sergeant. "There you are," he said in a triumphant tone. "Such a big shot and look what a swine he really was!"

Wrona nodded. He couldn't agree more. "All this talk about us serving the Germans. But tell me yourself, Mr. Ogorek, aren't we forced to go along? Someone's got to keep order, and it's better us than them. And you know how much we help people. But this fellow—who forced him? The rat. And all the money in the world, too. You'll see, with him it'll all be kept quiet, but if it's a matter of a blue uniform they'll holler their heads off. That's justice for you."

A train had just come in and Karol turned up at the kiosk. Immediately his father told him the news. But his response was disappointing. All he asked was: "What about his wife, Irena?"

Ogorek laughed. "They're all the same. She beat it this morning. Saw her myself lugging her suitcase, but I never guessed she was running away, not even waiting to bury him. Lucky for her she wasn't shot too."

For some reason these last remarks seemed to irritate Karol. He turned to the police sergeant for details. Wrona handed him the report he had just shown Ogorek. After Karol read it, without another word he abruptly headed for home.

"Kind of quiet, that boy of yours," Wrona commented. Ogorek looked after him and shrugged.

The police sergeant had barely finished his drink and said good-by when Karol was back at the kiosk. "I have to go to town again," he said, "I forgot something." Very much surprised, Ogorek

tried to dissuade him; it was getting late and he might not make it back before curfew. But Karol didn't listen and without stopping went on to the station.

Ogorek was annoyed and angry. "That's the way they are these days," he muttered. "Might as well not have any parents."

He closed the kiosk early and went home. Genia was in the living room listlessly flicking through an old magazine.

"Have you heard what happened?" he asked her. "The elegant Mr. Tadeusz was shot."

Her face drained; the magazine slipped from her fingers. "Who was shot? Where—here on the Lane?"

"Yes, here. Early this morning. That Rakowicz from the villa."

"Mr. Rakowicz?" she repeated slowly.

"Yes, and you know what come out?" She should be glad the bastard married Orlowski's girl and not herself—God forbid. "He was a German spy . . . Gestapo."

"Gestapo? What are you saying, Father?"

"Yes, obviously Gestapo. I spoke with Wrona and he took down the report. I read it myself. Karol too. It said a note was left explaining. It was a death sentence—an execution by the underground because he was a German spy. Lucky they found out and finished him off quick. No telling what trouble a swine like that could have brought on all of us."

She stood staring silently at her father. Ogorek continued, pleased to have an attentive audience at last. "Apparently killed by a woman. Point blank in the head and then pinned the note to his jacket, saying it was official and he was a spy."

Suddenly she seemed to awaken. Her eyes burned, she yelled: "Shut up! It isn't true."

"What isn't true?"

"Everything you told me. Of course it's a lie. They killed him but he wasn't a spy. That isn't true. They murdered him."

"But I say it's so, Genia. Wrona told me and I read the report myself. It was signed by young Mr. Modlibog too. Anyway it's not our concern, luckily."

"It's impossible," she cried. "They want to smear him . . . but why did they kill him?" She began to cry. "They're . . . lying . . . intentionally lying . . . not only murdered him . . . but lying on top of it . . ."

"What's gotten into you, girl?" Her strange outburst made him uneasy. "What's happened to you?"

"Because they lie. He was a really good man, better than every one of you. And you should know that I . . ." with a fresh burst of tears she ran to her room.

7

As the afternoon wore on Irena became increasingly nervous. Was Karol going to desert her too? Then suddenly there was a knock. She ran to the door, so relieved she almost embraced him on the spot.

"I couldn't come earlier," he said apologetically. "I was in Warsaw this morning and only got your note when I returned. I turned right round and came . . ." He stopped awkwardly and glanced around the room. "You wanted me to help you about something?"

"Take off your coat, Karol. I suppose you know what happened."

"Yes . . ." He looked at the floor. "I also know—I'm quite sure you had no connection with all that—I'm quite certain. But maybe it's a mistake somehow."

"I can't make any sense of it," she answered absently, unable to focus her attention. Only one thing mattered at the moment. He had come. "I really don't know what to think of it. Anyway it's awful. You can see I couldn't stay on. But here I'm completely alone. Please sit down, Karol. I'll make some tea."

He sat down, shyly. "But please don't tire yourself. I see you are very nervous."

"Yes—you can imagine how I feel. And with no one to turn to. I didn't tell a soul where I am. I couldn't face a single member of my family today, not even Roman. You're the only person I wanted to see. Thank you very much for coming. Really I'm ever so thankful." Tears of gratitude stood in her eyes.

"I saw the police report. A doctor went to the house—a coroner. I get the impression the funeral will be day after tomorrow."

"I won't go to it," she broke in. "Don't be surprised. I never want to see anything of that past again." She covered her face with her hands as if she could see something threatening her.

"I—I understand, Miss—Mrs.—Irena." He was at a loss what to say. "Are you planning to live here now?"

"Yes. But don't tell anyone, please."

"Of course not. You can rely on me." He looked at his watch. "Is there anything I can do before I go back?"

She grew rigid with alarm. He couldn't leave her alone again? "Karol," she said, getting up and approaching him. "Karol, don't go." She seized his hands impulsively. "If you care for me—if you like me even a little still, you won't leave me alone here."

"All right . . ." He blushed. "I'll stay until the last train, and if you wish I'll come again tomorrow."

She didn't answer. Holding his hands as if to make sure he wouldn't leave she tried desperately to think of how she could persuade him to stay. She had to have him with her, he was the one person whom she could trust in this world, whom she could lean on. "Karol, listen . . . I want to ask you a tremendous favor. I beg you not to refuse. Please, Karol . . . Don't leave me alone tonight. Stay with me . . ."

He looked at her, now more frightened than embarrassed. "But how," he muttered. "After all you—you have only one room—" His face reddened, he looked at the floor. "But tomorrow—tomorrow morning I'll come in for sure."

Her determination hardened; she wouldn't let him leave her alone. It didn't matter what he thought of her or what others would say. She needed Karol now as she had never needed anyone in her life.

As if sensing her thoughts, he said: "After all, I couldn't stay here over night. But I'll come every day if you want, really."

She looked at him wearily. If every day, why not every night, why not forever? She let go of his hands and sat down in the armchair. If only he would understand of himself, would approach her . . .

"What did the policeman say? Please tell me," she asked, not that it interested her. All she wanted was to gain time.

"There were two people, a man and a woman . . ." He reported everything he could recall. Seeing Irena slumped in the chair before him, he was intensely sorry for her. He had never seen her this way and somehow he felt she was closer to him, less superior and frightening. He was even aware of a vague sense of pleasure at the situation he found himself in. He had always accepted her as something far removed, unattainable except in fantasy. Her marriage had simply emphasized what he already knew. Yet in the first moment of learning about Rakowicz's death and its circumstances, his reaction had been one of satisfaction, though quickly suppressed. On receiving her note it had grown to happy

excitement. Now face to face with her, pale and changed, he felt driven by pity mixed with admiration. He wanted above all to help her, be her mentor in her misfortune. There was no Rakowicz any more—just him. His shyness, however, plagued him even more than usual. And her behavior frightened him a little.

He couldn't think of anything more to say and again looked at his watch. "Excuse me, but I'll miss the last train unless I go right away."

She stood up. "Karol—" she said coming quickly to him. "Karol —If you really like me a little, you won't desert me now. You will stay. I am really very afraid alone. Karol—" She embraced him. He didn't dare move. "Do you like me? Tell me?"

Suddenly he knelt down and put his arms around her knees. She bent a little and stroked his head, then pressed it against her thighs. Then she drew back and looked at him intently.

"Karol, I swear to you I had no connection with what he did. I didn't know a thing about it. I want you to believe me because you are the human being closest to me in the world. Do you understand me? You will stay tonight? And always?"

He stared at her unable to say a word. Then he nodded slowly.

8

Indignantly Modlibog turned to his son. "Their behavior is a disgrace. Irena runs away, Roman is in hiding, and now the parents wash their hands of everything too."

He was speaking of the problem of Tadeusz's burial. He had gone over to the next house for help. After all Tadeusz had been the Orlowskis' son-in-law, not his. He had found Orlowski in bed, hardly willing to talk to him. "Excuse me, Henryk," he had grumbled. "Can't you see I'm sick? All on account of this whole matter. Why come to me? Let the police deal with it."

It was evident that he would get no help from them. But something had to be done. This man, whatever wrong he had committed had shared their house, their meals, their friendship. Even if everything was true, they had no right to deny him a proper burial. The trouble was there was hardly a zloty in the house. As bad luck would have it, Tadeusz was to collect the proceeds of the sale of two paintings the very day he was shot. He had no idea who the purchasers had been, so it was a total loss. And that was only part of his new worries. Kateryna had gone. He had to prepare

the meals himself while Witold straightened out the house. And on top of everything else, they had to contend with the police, their endless reports and questions.

Witold shrugged when he heard the failure of his father's appeal to the Orlowskis. "I'm not surprised. People always find it easy to turn the other way when things are unpleasant to face. It's been left in our lap and there's no way round it." He took all the money he had of his own and ordered a coffin, the cheapest one he could get, and a cross thrown in for good measure. Then he bought a lot in the poorest corner of the cemetery.

The burial took place the next day. A peasant cart appeared with the coffin. Madey came over and offered to lend a hand. Together he and Witold laid the body on shavings in the crude unpainted box, and nailed down the lid. Then they carried it out again and put it on the cart. Modlibog stood in the door watching. Madey, his pipe put away in his pocket, trailed along beside Witold behind the cart as far as the Green House. There he said: "The diggers will be waiting for you. They'll help you carry. Don't think you'll be needing me any more." He doffed his cap, crossed himself, and turned back. Now there was only the solitary figure of Witold behind the cart as it jounced down the Lane.

They turned onto Long Street. As they neared the station crossing, Genia came out of the kiosk. A bunch of flowers in her hand, she approached the cart and laid them on the coffin. Witold was surprised. But he greeted her and said, "It's Mr. Rakowicz . . . a very unfortunate incident."

She didn't answer. It seemed as if she hadn't even heard. Silently she walked close to the cart, her right hand gripping the sideboard, her eyes fixed on the coffin as if trying to see through it. Witold, who followed at the rear, kept wondering about the girl's presence and her strange behavior. He could think of no plausible explanation.

After considerable search at the cemetery Witold found the burial spot. He called the grave diggers, but they balked and said they knew about him, pointing at the coffin. They'd lower it in the grave and that was all. Finally Witold and Genia lifted the coffin from the cart and carried it over beside the pit. The priest arrived and sprinkled holy water, dispensing with the formality of a prayer. Hardly had the last drop fallen when the diggers impatiently began throwing in the yellow sand. Genia started crying quietly. She wiped her eyes with her handkerchief but the tears

kept coming faster. Finally she went off to one side and remained standing with her back to the others.

Witold stood beside the grave, his head bowed, till the last spadeful had been tossed on the narrow mound. The grave-diggers moved off, leaving the cross lying on the grass beside the grave. He picked it up—two simple slats nailed together—and stuck it firmly into the sand. He looked over to where Genia stood. Should he wait for her? He decided it was better to go. At the gate he stopped once more and looked back. Genia was kneeling, smoothing the surface of the mound and spreading her flowers on it.

9

Witold sat in his room reading by the lamp when he heard a tap on his window. He laid down his book and pulled back the black-out curtain. The light fell on Roman's face as he stood in the dark, indicating with his hands he wanted to climb in.

"Go round front, Roman. I'll unlock the door."

Roman put his finger to his mouth and came up close. "No, just open the window. I don't want your father to know I'm here. No one should. At home I only had a secret word with Mother." As Witold opened the window, he swung himself onto the sill and dropped into the room. "No telling what to expect at present."

"But what about Tadeusz? Do you think it's really true?"

"Not the slightest doubt," Roman answered. "It's all come out now. He was a Gestapo agent, and that's that. We have to presume that all our recent losses were his work. You have no idea of the incredible damage. There's even a suspicion he comes of a family of German origin. We have come across the same family name on a Volk German list. Only the Christian name was different, but probably he intentionally changed that. And it was us who befriended the dog and brought him into the family. Imagine my situation—I recommended him to our people." He laughed bitterly. "Took some explaining. Where's Irena?"

"I have no idea. She simply packed up and left. It was while I was at the police. No one knows where she went."

"My mother doesn't know either. A pity—I wanted to see her badly."

"But sit down . . . how about some coffee?"

"No, thanks. I have to hurry on because there are some other things I've got to attend to out here, and soon people will have gone to bed. I'll be around again by and by." He shook Witold's

hand. "Chin up meanwhile. It'll all come out in the wash. War, my friend," and sitting on the sill he swung his legs over and jumped. A moment later he had vanished in the dark.

Roman headed down the lane. When he reached the Green House, he paused, but then he turned instead toward the Turyn cottage. He crept around to the back. There was a crack of light along the kitchen window. He hesitated uncertain whether to tap on the glass or go round to the door. Deciding it was better not to frighten her, he went around to the front again. He had to knock quite a while before she responded, and even then he had to repeat his name several times before she would let him in.

"Sorry to disturb you so late, but it's important."

Helena looked uncertainly at him as she led him into the living room. "You understand why I feel nervous. The things that happen."

"It's about those premium receipts. You remember, I came originally with Mr. Rakowicz."

"Yes, of course." She winced at his mention of the name. "What's the story about him?"

"Bad. Anyway, liquidate this whole business as quickly as possible."

"But I can't just from one day to the next. I've already registered all these premiums I had, and this week I get delivery of the goods."

"All right, dispose of them as you wish, but there'll be nobody to collect our part of the money. It's strictly forbidden for us to have any further contact with it."

"But what do you think I should do?" she asked nervously.

"If you notice anyone getting interested, there's only one thing to do—run away fast. More likely nothing will happen, but there's just no way of telling. My own hunch is the Germans know nothing about this up to now. So if you're willing to take the risk, you can earn 100 per cent on the receipts you have. No one else will be involved."

"Maybe I'll try . . ." She hesitated. "But is it all right? I don't want trouble. You know what I mean—with your people. I gather from all this, the story I've heard why he was killed must be true."

"Yes, I regret it is. But as for the premium receipts, I guarantee it's all right with the underground."

"But then why don't you want to collect your own and their percentages?"

"That's the order—on account of Rakowicz. They're afraid there might be a trap. The underground has to be very careful. You're responsible only to yourself, but through me many others could be endangered."

Helena shrugged. "If you're sure, all right. But I don't want reproaches in the future about the money. Please sit down and write that you didn't want any of it. I'll hide it carefully, but I want evidence I did nothing wrong."

10

As the shock of that fatal morning began to recede, as the reality that had confronted her with such brutal abruptness from one moment to the next became less of a nightmare with the passage of time, Irena began to ask herself what had come over her. The very day she had lost her husband she had turned around and taken a lover. She would be ashamed ever to admit to her parents or anyone else what had transpired in this room that evening, and what she had now even come to accept. It had happened in the dazed backwash of fear and loneliness when nothing else seemed left to her. And for this she couldn't put the blame on Karol. He hadn't forced himself on her. It was quite the other way round.

Almost from the first moment they had found very little to say to each other, and in the matter of love, well, he had a lot to learn. And so she had pulled back into herself, while he tried all the more to show his devotion by anticipating her every need. He cleaned the room, went out to get their food, looked after her, and in the long stretches of silence sat contentedly gazing at her. As a result she found herself torn, increasingly exasperated by his cloying omnipresence in this small apartment of theirs, yet eagerly awaiting his return when she found herself alone. Against his protests she insisted on his going home once or twice a week for the day at least, arguing he couldn't suddenly turn his back completely on his family. Actually it was to give her a breathing spell.

On such occasions she tried to come to a decision. Even if she accepted their present arrangement as necessary to her, what about the future? After all, she couldn't spend the rest of her life in secrecy in this room. Marry him? That would be a final surrender of all the dreams she had had about life. No—she would speak

openly with him and explain it was only temporary. But what if he was hurt and left her altogether? She couldn't stand being alone. Again she persuaded herself to accept what she had. Need —not love—was what counted. Then for a few hours he seemed less boring to her. She stopped thinking about the future. Just as long as she was not alone in the world.

One afternoon when Karol was in Jutrosin she decided to occupy herself clearing out a small cabinet that had escaped her attention before. She found a coffee-maker there, a cognac bottle with glasses, even a box of dried-out cookies. The discovery annoyed her. She remembered the crumpled woman's handkerchief. But why should she care if she had never loved Tadeusz and hated him now for what he had done to her? All she wanted was to erase him from her memory. She pulled everything angrily from the cabinet and dumped it into a box, to throw away. As she swept bits of paper from one of the shelves, a letter in a sealed envelope fell on the floor. She picked it up and looked at it. To her amazement it was addressed to her, and in Tadeusz's handwriting too.

She tore it open and found herself staring at several closely written pages. Sitting down in the armchair, her hands trembling, she began to read. By the time she came to the end, she was utterly confused. She felt deeply touched, filled with remorse—so they had all been wrong. He had died because of loyalty to her, because he refused to be a traitor. She was tremendously relieved.

But how then did all this fit together? What about that morning—the note? Something was wrong, something didn't fit. She looked at the last page again. There, under his name, the date: weeks earlier—March. Something had prevented him from doing what he intended. What huge secrets people carry around in themselves. But the important thing was that he had only loved her, and only thanks to her had he become strong and set a new course for his life.

He had been loyal to her to the end. She would be equal to him, be worthy of him. She would tell Karol to leave. His presence would be impossible here now. She would find a pretext for getting rid of him. But then she rejected this idea. What would be the point? She couldn't stay here alone, and this letter wouldn't bring Tadeusz back to life. The present was what counted.

During the following days, however, her mind kept on drifting back to the letter. She read it again and again. Whatever mystery there was, there was no doubt of his love for her and no one else.

That was part of reality too, wasn't it? An idea came to her. She weighed it carefully. Yes, she owed him that much.

11

Irena's heart pounded as she stepped from the carriage at Jutrosin. She saw no familiar face. Quickly she headed across the tracks in the opposite direction from Long Street and Ogorek's kiosk. One hand was slipped inside her coat, clinging to a bunch of flowers where no one would see them.

At last she arrived at the cemetery gate. From Karol she had found out the location of his grave. It didn't take long to find a weather-stained piece of paper fluttering from a cross made of slats, and on it written in longhand: "Tadeusz Rakowicz—IV 1 1944." She smoothed it out as best she could, laid the flowers beneath the cross, and then knelt down and began whispering a prayer. As she did, she couldn't help feeling a pang of remorse. After all, there had been days when she hadn't wanted to think about him, when she had cursed him and tried to forget he had ever existed. How could she have, in the face of such devotion? He had been brave and wise. And he had loved her—that of course was the most important thing. Now she hated all those responsible for depriving her of him. She even hated Roman because he worked with them. They had taken away her happiness, the meaning of her life.

In her absorption she was unaware someone else had approached and was watching her. But then she suddenly sensed another presence and found herself looking up at Genia. The girl noticed her surprise, and it seemed to Irena as if a slight sarcastic smile showed for a moment on her face. But what was she doing in this place?

Irena rose quickly, confused at being discovered here and uncertain how to behave. Since she knew Genia, she couldn't just leave and ignore her. She forced a smile but there was no response. She tried again, saying: "Good afternoon, Genia. I was about to go back to Warsaw." She was aware she sounded silly, and felt still more awkward. "I see you come here too sometimes?"

Genia didn't look well at all. She was pale, unlike herself, and her clothes seemed unusually sloppy. At last she spoke. "Yes, I come here . . ." She stopped and suddenly looked sharply at Irena as she continued in a tense voice: "Do you believe it? Tell me the truth."

"I don't understand." Irena was baffled. Why was the girl so worked up?

"After all, you should know—I don't believe a word of it. It couldn't be true about him." She began to cry. "You must believe me that after he married you I never met him any more."

"You? . . ." Was she crazy? Then fragments of the letter flashed across her mind. Oh, how incredible. She stiffened and said coldly, "Excuse me, but I don't understand what you're talking about."

"There's no reason to be angry. He's dead. Just tell me the truth—do you believe what everyone says about him?"

Irena merely shook her head. She didn't want to get involved with Genia but she found herself saying: "No, I don't believe it. But I don't see any point in talking about it." She felt ridiculous standing here being questioned by this girl.

"You don't have to, if you don't want. I know you have more right to him than me. It's simply that I can't forget him. I don't want to think about him—but I do all the time. I even don't understand why he—it's simply—simply that I can't get him out of my head . . ."

"That's very sad for you," Irena said, touched in spite of herself. "But excuse me, I have to go now."

"I only want to ask you one more thing," Genia persisted. "Please don't be angry and don't laugh at me. He was very good to me—really very good. But I told you after he married he never met me again. I just want to tell you, his widow, that I hold him in my memory as someone very fine and good. There have been moments when I wasn't so sure. But that would be wrong, wouldn't it? What sense would there be? Tell me, don't you think the same way?"

Irena hesitated. Genia's sentiments pleased her, but somehow it all sounded unreal in her mouth, even silly, as if she were fooling herself because this was how she wanted it. Yet she found herself answering with conviction, "Yes, he was an unusually good and decent man."

Genia's eyes lit up. "You see, you see—that's exactly what I'm sure of too."

Her eager faith made Irena shiver. Suddenly the grotesqueness of this meeting at the grave struck her: two deprived females bolstering each other by decking the memory of an unworthy man with silly falsehoods. A sentimental overlay of pity where not even

memory was deserved. She had to get away quickly, or she would go crazy. At last here beside the mound of sand the whole illusion had collapsed irrevocably. At last through the mirror of this girl's sentimentality she saw Tadeusz as he really was. For the first time she had no doubts and, as she turned from the grave, she turned with finality, too, from the pitifully inadequate man whose remains she had come out here to hallow.

"I'm going. I have to. Excuse me." She was already afraid of herself, of the cruel words she might blurt out. Everything was so hopelessly mixed up. Where did truth really lie in life, and what was there to those threads which bind people so strongly at one moment and are gone the next? "Good-by, Genia." She reached out her hand without looking in her face.

"Good-by . . . I am awfully happy that you don't believe these people. He was really a very fine man. Up to now I often wondered if it only seemed so, but now from you I know it was true. I'm very grateful to you."

Irena was hurrying off toward the gate. She couldn't bear to hear another word. She wanted to push this grave quickly from her, to think only about life, her life, and never again be reminded of what had been.

15

WAR

"Spring, Mr. Modlibog. The ducks are back . . ." Anna said, taking off her kerchief. She came in every morning now to tidy up and at least keep the ground floor clean. It was very handy for her. Her full-time employment next door had come to an end. "With only two of us here, I can't keep her occupied," Marie had said. The real reason, as Modlibog well knew, was a shortage of money.

A little out of breath because of her condition, Anna continued: "I saw them yesterday flying across the house. When they return to our pond, it means the warm weather's here to stay. That's what my husband always said and he notices such things. But did you know Mr. Roman was out here yesterday? And Mrs. Orlowska told me they've agreed about him and Miss Korf marrying. Funny, the Director wouldn't hear of it before, and now look. Guess with so much trouble around, he just doesn't care anymore."

Modlibog nodded absently. "Yes, circumstances change."

Anna kept talking as she cleared the table. "Yes, you're right, sir. When my husband was around I was always going on at him, and now all I dream of is just having him here." She glanced over toward Modlibog, sitting listlessly in the armchair. "Why don't you walk a little, sir? You'll see how lovely it is out."

Again he nodded, absently. The fact was, he had dropped his morning expedition to the stores and to the barber. He preferred to keep to himself. He even avoided his old friends next door. Somehow wherever he went the shadow of the Rakowicz affair seemed to follow him. After all, it was he who had brought Tadeusz to the Lane.

Anna persisted: "It's lovely out. Why not go and look at the

meadow? It's real green already. I want to clean in here today and I can do a better job if you're not in my way."

"All right, Anna, I'll go," he said finally, realizing if he wanted any peace he would have to leave the house.

He changed his jacket and went out through the garden toward the meadow. Over from the tangle of reeds and rushes that bordered the pond and almost hid it from view, he heard the low croak of a frog, while somewhere high above his head the modulations of a single lark countered it with its liquid clarity. Modlibog went past the two old willow trees, the new shoots sporting their fuzzy caps. The grass became mossy and soggy and squigged under his shoes. Gingerly he went a little further and stared at the patches of water glistening between the hummocks. Already the new green shoots were pushing through the mass of withered stalks that rustled slightly in the breeze. Suddenly there was a violent commotion in the reeds just ahead, the flapping of wings, anxious quacking. The ducks! He watched the two birds rise in a wide circle and vanish above the woods beyond the pond. Soon, they were back to take another look. But the danger was still there and again they vanished over the tree tops. As he withdrew from the meadow they returned once more, circled, circled again, then reassured at last, dropped down on the quiet surface of the pond.

He wandered slowly through the garden, looking at the shrubs and unkempt flower beds. Who would do anything about them this year? Suddenly he noticed Martha, the railway linesman's wife, hurrying up the lane toward him.

"Is Anna at your house?" she shouted breathlessly.

He nodded.

"Kozik! Kozik's back—just now! Escaped from the Germans. Look, there in front of the Green House."

As nothing else could this shocked Modlibog out of his apathy. He had to hear what Kozik had to say. He pointed to the hall door: "Run in and tell her," while he at once headed down the lane.

A cluster had already formed around Kozik. There was Ogorek, Mrs. Korf's daughter, Madey with his pipe. As Modlibog approached, Kozik waved to him and broke from the group, calling "Hello, Count. Here I am—slipped right between their legs. I really foxed the master race!" He was bubbling over with excitement as he turned to the assembled audience again. "And mind my word, they'll soon be on the run. The war's almost over. So scared they don't even watch sharp any more. So yesterday my

friend says: 'Hello, boys. Enough of this lousy trench-digging. Time to go home to mama.' And so when it gets dark, we ran away. Had to leave my basket behind of course, but I made good on that. See this suitcase—real handsome ain't it? German. Stole it on the train. Some settler who'd had enough. There's whole families of them heading back home in a hurry. That's the surest sign. Haven't had a chance to look inside yet. Gotta break the lock first. It's heavy—maybe gold" and he laughed gaily as the others joined in. "Oh there's my woman . . ." He swung out his arms and shouted "Take it easy, gal! What's the hurry now?"

Already visibly pregnant, Anna lumbered clumsily down the Lane, waving excitedly. Kozik ran to meet her.

"There's love for you," Ogorek commented good humoredly as the two kissed each other in front of them all. "The old world can't be too badly off."

Modlibog, too, was enjoying himself. He felt reassured by Kozik's evident friendliness. Maybe he'd been exaggerating. Why not go on now for a shave at Mr. Stefan's and then to the market to see what they had today? The reunited couple had already disappeared into the house. The group began to disperse. Modlibog said good-by and for the first time in many weeks headed down the Lane on his familiar circuit through the town. Anna was right —it was really a lovely day.

2

Genia had come into the city without any definite aim, at least so she had made out to herself. It was simply a matter of getting away for a few hours from the unendurable atmosphere at home. A perfectly good reason. And yet here she found herself turning the corner onto Light Street as if that had been her plan all along.

Half way down the block, she stopped and looked across the street. There it was: the arch, the door into the stair hall. Three flights—her eyes moved up the façade of the building. Could that be the window? No—it had faced the courtyard inside. Nevertheless it all came back to her: the cab driving through the rain, Tadeusz helping her down, she waiting there in the arch while he paid, the intimate half-dark room.

None of what they said about him was true. How could it be? And if he had stayed with her instead of marrying this Director's daughter he would still be alive today. She would have watched over him, shielded him from every danger.

She started to go on—what was the use? Then she stopped and

came back once more and stared at the door as if trying to make up her mind. After a moment she turned purposefully in the direction she had come, and within a few minutes was sitting in a street car taking her over to the East Bank of the city. There, without considering further, she went directly to Lutyk, her father's black market agent who supplied their cigarettes, sugar, and ham, and at one time their vodka as well. It was usually she who handled the transactions for her father. Whenever she appeared, Lutyk, a young, rather rakish man who prided himself on his loud neckties, would offer her wine and pay her extravagant compliments. He was always seeking—and usually found—an excuse to touch her, casually brushing against her or lightly caressing her arm. On more than one occasion his maneuvers had been so obvious she had to tell him to keep his hands to himself. She had no interest in married men, thank you.

And yet now she found herself at Lutyk's with no reason for coming and no business to transact. At the last moment she invented an excuse: "Father wants to know the sugar situation. It hasn't gone up, has it?"

He gave a figure and asked how much they needed. As usual he set out two glasses. He offered her some wine but to his surprise she asked for vodka instead. They drank down one round and then a second. And then his hands began to roam. She moved away but indifferently, without offense. She was having too good a time and wanted to linger a while before returning home. He reached down and stroked her leg, asking what kind of stockings she was wearing. She burst out laughing: as if his concern was with them!

They drank another round and all traces of her earlier depression were gone. Really he was a pleasant, amusing fellow. He caught her hand, looked into her eyes, kissed her neck. Again she laughed: always the same approach, no matter who the man. Once more he was at her legs, now more insistently. Though her head was reeling, this time she became indignant. Haughtily, she announced that she was leaving. He followed her out with a mixture of apologies and compliments. She only managed to shake him off as she clambered onto the street car.

As soon as she sat down she broke into such violent tears the other passengers looked at her with concern. She wept because at that exact moment Tadeusz had come to her mind—everything about him, his kisses, his caresses. It was impossible he could have loved anyone but her.

On the train back to Jutrosin she regained her composure, but

with it came an awareness of her condition, and the fear that her father might notice it. To avoid him she stuck to the opposite side of the tracks and slipped across the embankment to the Lane.

But her mother wasn't fooled a moment. "Why are you so flushed, Genia? Come over here—" She sniffed. "You've been drinking vodka! So that's it! Girl—girl—" and she began to wail. Nonetheless when she calmed down she promised not to say a word to her husband.

A few days later Ogorek sent Genia in to the city with some orders. This time she went straight to Lutyk and very quickly settled on prices with him and arranged to have the things picked up. When the transaction was completed, he said: ". . . and tell your father I've got some excellent vodka in now. Here try a sample." He filled two glasses. Again she felt her mood lightening. She even asked for a second glass. To her surprise his behavior was more circumspect than the previous time. She was even a little disappointed. She suggested another round. She found herself laughing more and more without knowing why—simply because she felt gay.

At last she decided it was time to go. Getting up, she felt amusingly unsteady. He took her arm, saying he would accompany her to the station. It all seemed logical somehow, even his sitting beside her in the street car, holding her hand; guiding her through the station up onto the platform. It was all wonderfully silly. As the carriage door slid shut, there he was still holding her arm: "I can't just leave you in this condition," he said.

They got out at the stop before Jutrosin. "It will be better. We'll walk the rest of the way, and that will give your head a chance to clear a bit."

Passing through Jutrosin forest he suggested, "How about resting a while in the shade here? I can tell you're very tired."

They sat down under some trees off the side of the road. She stretched out on the moss and closed her eyes. How cool, how pleasant! She felt an irresistible indolence, so much so that when he began to kiss her she didn't react, wasn't surprised. Let him, if it gave him pleasure. He began to caress her. Tell him to get his dirty hands off of her? Too much bother—even when she felt his weight bearing down on her, when she realized what was happening. In fact she was no longer aware exactly where she was. It was somewhere far off, somewhere in the past. She embraced him and pressed him close against her . . .

Then she was emerging from the forest alone, the cluster of familiar houses only a few steps away. Her head was pounding. For a moment she was afraid, then angry. But finally she thought, the hell with it. People talked so much about it, but really it was nothing, of no importance at all. The only problem was not to run into her father, and coming this way she would avoid the kiosk. Lutyk had been right to persuade her to leave the stop before.

At home she went straight to her room, telling Pelagia she had a headache and had to lie down. But her mother wasn't to be fooled; again there was a scene. "What's come over you recently, Genia? You never used to be this way. I can hardly sleep nights, I'm so worried about you. It's only lucky Father isn't home. Don't you realize I'm protecting you all I can. But he saw . . ."

"Let him see. What can he do?"

"Shame on you, Genia, speaking that way. It's a father's duty to be sure that his children behave decently."

Genia smiled sarcastically and didn't even bother to answer. Let her rave for a while longer and then she'd have peace.

Finally she was alone with her thoughts—strangely empty ones. No strong feeling one way or the other, nothing earth-shaking. If he were alive, then it would be very different. But this way—why not? She had been with him anyway, even though it was actually someone else. And if vodka made all worries disappear, giving a little pleasure to life for a while, what harm? It was the best way of seeing things not as they were but as one dreamed they were.

Anyway she had a right to do whatever she wanted. Let her father just try beating her. She would give it to him. Hadn't she heard what her mother said to him that night? And he hadn't defended himself with so much as one word. Everything around was deep in muck. Only he—only Tadeusz—had stood above it all, noble, clear as crystal . . . and he was gone for ever.

3

Modlibog was frightfully worried. Witold had gone to the city the previous day but hadn't returned at the usual time in the evening. He had waited supper, then had gone out on the Lane when he heard the last train go by. The next morning he was awake early, wandering aimlessly around the house, his anxiety mounting by the hour. In Warsaw anything could happen, and unlike the others Witold had never missed a night away from the Lane.

Through the window he saw Kozik coming toward the house. He hurried out to meet him.

"Good morning, sir," Kozik said slightly out of breath. "No more trains—Madey just told me. Everything's stopped dead." Modlibog was horrified. "Impossible! How will people get home today?"

Kozik shrugged. "Don't figure anyone will be worrying too much about that with all that's happening around. This morning I hear the Russians are somewhere near and the Germans are ready to beat it across the river. Must be something to it, because it's the Russians who stopped the trains."

"My son went in yesterday and he still isn't back. And now? Maybe something's happened to him . . ."

"No, no. He'll be all right. Don't mean nothing bad, his not coming out. They're getting ready for something big in Warsaw. Don't know what, but all the young folk went in yesterday, all excited and secret-like. Only Genia—you know, Ogorek's girl—she's still out here. Oh Mr. Modlibog, it's real bad with her. Just this week my wife sees her coming into the house, staggering drunk. Honest. And Madey's wife says—"

"Mr. Roman, was he next door yesterday?"

"Yes, I saw him going to the station with your son. Ogorek's Karol was out too—he hangs around the city all the time now, seldom comes home. Can't figure out what's gotten into him. Such a quiet boy. Old Ogorek . . ."

"And do you know—did Mrs. Korf's older daughter go to town yesterday, too?"

"Yes, with Mr. Roman and your son. Karol too. I'm telling you they knew something. All in a hurry to get to the city."

"I think that's unlikely. What could it be?"

"Wouldn't know, but people are whispering that the underground's cooking up something there. Trouble for the Germans, probably. But as I was saying about Miss Genia—Madey's wife saw her at Leokadia's, right at the bar. And you know with whom? Kiwas—yes the black market dealer in foreign money. No good either. And married too. They were drinking vodka. A shame—a young girl like . . ."

"You're certain there are no trains?"

"Sure. Madey told me. He should know and he never says nothing if it ain't so."

"Perhaps it's just temporary."

"No, no you'll see. None tomorrow either nor the next day. Miss Helena, she went in on the last one this morning. Like to see how she gets back."

"I'll have to go in somehow, Mr. Kozik. I've got to find him."

Kozik stared at him: "Your son? But how? There ain't no way in. Don't worry about him. They're together, all of 'em, and nothing bad will happen. The Germans have enough on their hands; they won't look for more trouble. It'll all come out all right. But you know, I'm real nervous about Anna. Any moment and she'll have her baby. Could even be today, maybe tomorrow. How am I going to arrange everything?"

"You didn't speak with Roman or Karol, did you? When did they plan to return?"

"Don't think they knew and wouldn't have said anyway. Maybe a couple of days, who knows. But I almost forgot about the ducklings at the pond—they've grown a lot. Saw them yesterday. They didn't even know I was there. Real nice. You should go and look too. But be careful not to frighten them."

"Yes, you're right—I'll certainly go. But I'm very uneasy. Only a few months ago this house was full of people and now I'm completely alone."

4

Modlibog did wander over to the pond, but it was no use. He was too distracted to take much interest in the ducklings. All that Kozik had reported had only increased his anxiety. He went next door to ask about Roman. The Orlowskis said they weren't expecting him at all. Before leaving yesterday he had told them it might be some days before he could get out again. Mrs. Orlowska added in a low voice, filled with concern: "An uprising—he told me in great secrecy. There's to be an uprising in Warsaw. Today or tomorrow the city will be free and the Germans gone. All we can do is wait and hope."

So what Kozik had hinted at was true. Almost unable to speak, Modlibog returned home and withdrew to his room. How could Witold have left him alone at such a moment without a word?

The silence of the house was unendurable. He had to do something, pick up whatever news he could, know what was going on. He locked up the house and headed down the Lane without knowing exactly where to go. On Long Street he ran into Ogorek and Genia struggling with a loaded laundry basket.

"The devil knows what's up. I've closed the kiosk. Better play safe and take everything home. And imagine—" Ogorek became very exercised, "suddenly nobody wants our Occupation money. Say it's worthless now. So why sell?"

There was a rumbling to the north, and they all looked in that direction.

"What's that?" Modlibog asked frightened.

"Don't know. Explosions. The second time. Probably the front —it's moving closer all the time. Come Genia, pick up your end and let's go."

Modlibog continued on his way. He crossed the tracks. The station area was strangely empty except for a cluster or two of people talking excitedly, pointing toward the platform. He looked too. Some German soldiers—no one else. What could that mean? They were busy laying some wires. As he went on, increasingly uneasy, he noticed the stores were all shuttered. Something was the matter—but who could tell him? Of course, Mr. Stefan. Why hadn't he thought of him before? He headed around the corner to the barbershop.

Mr. Stefan was just closing up his place too. "Sorry, Count, no time for shaving now. Didn't you see? The Germans are going to blow up the station. A bad moment to be strolling around . . . Look," he indicated the platform, "they're already signaling for people to keep clear."

It was true. People were scattering, running in all directions away from the station. He stared in panic at the barber.

"Come with me, Count, quickly. To my apartment and . . ." An explosion out of sight along the line cut off his words. A second, a third. "Come. They've started. They're blowing up the tracks all along the way. To slow down the Russians. Here, in here and up the stairs—" He pulled Modlibog in through a door. "They're already in Otwock."

The barber led the way up the dark stairs. From the floor above, a woman was frantically calling, "Stefan, Stefan—why are you so slow? I'm scared to death."

"It'll be all right," he called back. "Just be calm, keep calm . . . Open all the windows. The children here in the hall. I've brought a guest." Turning to Modlibog, he said: "Stay right here. I'll fetch some chairs and see that everything's all right. Women! Always lose their head right away."

Mr. Stefan brought the chairs, his children trailing behind him.

He had just indicated a place to Modlibog and gotten his wife to sit down at last when there was a rapid series of detonations; everything shook and trembled. Bits of plaster flaked from the ceiling and it seemed as if the whole house swayed. Then suddenly it was very still. They all remained frozen in their places, silent, frightened. One of the children began to whimper. The second one burst into noisy tears.

Finally Mr. Stefan got up: "What's all the wailing? No one got hurt. I think it's all over. I'll go see." Soon he was back. "Folks —come see what's happened to our station—Holy Mary! But not a German in sight. We've chased them out for keeps." He slapped Modlibog on the back in his enthusiasm as if they had just won a battle together. "Come and look yourself."

Modlibog felt reassured by the barber's sudden ebullience. Gingerly he followed him to the window in the front room. The station shelter was one incredible mass of wreckage; even the tracks were twisted and buckled. The barber was hanging out the window shouting to someone down below: "I can see them from here. Blowing up the tracks as they retreat. It's all over here!" He pulled back and turned to Modlibog. "Look how easily we chased Hitler out! Not a single casualty. We're all alone in no man's land. The independent republic of Jutrosin." He laughed. "Let's go down and look around."

They went out onto the street and joined others emerging from their doors. Stout Mrs. Leokadia was standing at the corner, the keys of her restaurant in her hands, protesting loudly: "What about all this Hitler money in my cash drawer? What'll I do with that now—burn it?"

A clattering rumble became audible, slowly grew louder. All conversation stopped again. Mr. Stefan hurried over to the corner of May Avenue and peered down it a moment. Then he called out excitedly: "A tank!" Everyone began backing again toward their doors. From a second floor window someone shouted: "A Russian tank." Mr. Stefan stood his ground as the clatter approached the corner. Suddenly it stopped. "Yes, Russians," the barber shouted and beckoned to the others excitedly. Timidly, people began converging on May Avenue.

There it was, a black-helmeted soldier waist-high in the open turret, running his binoculars along the railway track. He dropped them and leaning down asked something of one of the bystanders who pointed in the direction of Warsaw. Again the soldier looked

through his binoculars. He nodded, then called to someone inside the monster. There was a roar as the engine started up and the tank began to rumble over the cobblestones, heading back in the direction from which it had come.

"No man's land again," the barber announced authoritatively. "Hail the republic of Jutrosin!" He mingled with the crowd, talking excitedly and picking up bits of information here and there. Finally he returned to where Modlibog was standing. "They said they'd be back—maybe this evening. So it's almost all over. Let's go to Leokadia's for a drink."

In the midst of all this excitement, Modlibog felt lonelier than ever. He shook his head. He had to get back. When he was almost at the Lane, he saw Kozik hurrying around the corner, perspiring and huffing. He plied Mr. Modlibog with questions. As he listened his face looked more and more crestfallen—the station blown up, the tracks all twisted, the first Russian tank: he'd missed it all. And for nothing at that.

"There's bad luck for you," he exploded. "An hour ago Anna began having pains and made me get the midwife quick. I stay and stay in the next room, and in the end nothing happens and they tell me it won't be till tomorrow. Darn kid should have a hiding when it comes for spoiling the show." He looked sadly toward the station, but then he grinned broadly. "But even so, I'm inviting you now for the christening, sir."

5

Early in the morning of that same day Helena said to Mrs. Korf on the platform: "I was just thinking. Why don't you stay home today? There's a rumor there won't be any more trains after this one. If I have to, I can spend the night in the store or even walk back out here, but you've got your family and it would be too far for you."

Already very nervous about everything she heard, Mrs. Korf was only too glad to accept the offer.

In the store, there were fewer customers than usual. As the morning advanced Helena even had time to sweep and start doing the accounts. For three days the cash had accumulated. She had had no time to deposit it in the bank, but she would have to find the time today.

Shortly before noon the janitor appeared in great excitement. "Something's going to happen. Young people are getting together

everywhere . . ." He came close, whispering, "Some say there's going to be an uprising across the river. Chase the Germans right out of town."

His excitement was infectious. That meant the end of the war, didn't it? Maybe in only a matter of days, Sigmunt would be back. The happiness she had dreamed of so long would become a reality. They would get married, have one of those wedding photos taken, and find a new place to live. He would be manager here and she his assistant. If only nothing happened to the store now in these final days. He should see it just the way it was. She would do all she could to protect it, even stay right here day and night until the danger was over.

In the afternoon the janitor was back, this time worried and concerned. "You better close up, ma'am, and go home before there's trouble. Look out in the courtyard. It's full of men, and they have arms. Likely to be shooting before you know it."

Helena was alarmed. The last thing she wanted was to get caught in the fighting. But what about the store? If anything went wrong she might be held responsible.

The janitor pressed her. "Go out and look for yourself, ma'am. Not another store open on the whole street. Everyone's gone." Helena went out in the street. It was true. Metal shutters rolled down, wooden ones battened in place, padlocks everywhere. People hurrying by, absorbed in themselves. She needed no further urging. Together, they fastened the shutters. Then she remembered the deposit money. She didn't dare leave it here. She shoved it all into her handbag, along with a few bits of food and a couple of boxes of cigarettes.

She started toward the streetcar stop around the corner. She waited but nothing came and it was soon apparent that nothing would. And obviously the bank would be closed too, just like everything else. An occasional German soldier ran by, his hands nervously gripping his weapon. Military trucks careened through the streets. She became increasingly apprehensive.

Maybe it wasn't true about the trains. She turned and took the road under the tracks to the East Station. She met no one but German patrols, their faces taut, rifles at the ready. Somewhere in the distance there was the sound of shots, the ugly burst of a machine gun. There was only one thing to do and that was to get back to the quiet safety of the Lane. Determinedly she set off on foot for Jutrosin.

6

The news quickly spread that Helena was back. The first to knock in the morning was Ogorek. "What's the story, miss, about money? Still good in the city?"

She didn't understand. When he explained what was worrying him, she became concerned herself. Her Co-op money. What if it became worthless? It was her fault that it wasn't in the bank. She must do something about it right away.

But when Ogorek left, before she had time to decide what to do next, new visitors arrived. She was amazed: Mr. Modlibog and Mrs. Orlowska, both greeting her with the utmost courtesy. They plied her with questions: what was going on in Warsaw, how had she returned, what had she seen on the way?

"Everyone there seemed awfully nervous and expecting something, but the Germans were still around when I left . . ." and she went on to tell everything she had seen in the city, increasingly delighted to find herself being treated as an authority by these people. When they left she accompanied them out to the Lane. She was dizzy with pride. Sigmunt should hear about this too when he came back. What better evidence was there that everyone's attitude had changed?

Next it was Kozik; "Miss Helena—quick. I'm going crazy . . ." His usual jauntiness was gone. "Anna's in labor. The midwife's there, but there must be something wrong. She's yelling something terrible all the time and I don't know what to do."

Helena hurried behind him, but it was already over.

"A boy, Mr. Kozik," the midwife announced casually.

Kozik looked bewildered at the infant she was washing, and then through the door at Anna smiling wanly from the bed, then at Helena standing beside him. Madey knocked on the door. Without realizing the importance of the moment, he beckoned to Kozik. "Come—" he said with an excitement unusual for him, "the troops. The troops are here. Russians. Polish too. Quick!"

Almost beside himself with curiosity, Kozik ran his hands through his hair. The midwife settled the matter herself. She liked to do her work in peace. "We'll manage fine without you. That's right, you *all* go along now," she emphasized including Helena in a quick glance.

Kozik led the way with Madey and Helena trying to keep up with him. As they came to the crossing it seemed as if the whole

of Jutrosin was out in front of the station, milling around a group of tanks and trucks, and a large number of soldiers in green uniforms. The three worked their way around the edge trying to get in closer. At one point they bumped into Ogorek, his face beaming as he elbowed his way out from the center.

"Well, and what?" Kozik asked.

"It's all right," Ogorek shouted. "It's all right about the money. They say it will still be good now and later sometime they'll exchange it. So I'm going right away to open the kiosk again." He was about to hurry on, but then remembered something. In a loud voice he announced, "Now all power's going to be in our workers' hands." When Kozik showed his astonishment, he hastened to justify himself: "And who'd you think I am? Listen—my father, he was a worker, an upstanding farm hand. My grandfather too. Poor as they come. And me? All my life, hard work and sacrifice. Yes, friends, now it's our turn."

In spite of Ogorek's assurances, Helena continued to worry about the Co-op money. If anything went wrong, it could destroy the whole future which at last seemed so close at hand. Not knowing when she'd be able to get it to the bank, the safest course she could think of was to convert it into dollars.

The next morning she went in search of Kiwas. The exchange black marketeer was hanging around as usual out in front of Mrs. Leokadia's.

"I want to buy dollars," she said shortly.

Kiwas laughed. "You're being funny. Who'd want to sell dollars now?" He thought a moment. "Maybe valuables—could be. There's people in bad need of cash who'll sell their gold things for it. If I get hold of anything like that, I'll bring it to you, but on commission." He winked at the fellow lounging beside him.

That same afternoon Kiwas turned up with a gold bracelet. She let him into the hall while she examined it. Suddenly he approached and put his arms around her. She pushed him off so violently that he almost lost his balance.

"Are you crazy?" he said. "What's come over you? I'm so nice to you, and that's the payment I get?"

She threw the bracelet at him. "Take it and get out of here."

"What's got into you? Used to be nicer than any of the others . . ."

"Get out." She went to the door and opened it.

He hesitated a moment, then turned, muttering: "Just take it

easy, girlie—and let me tell you, it don't do for a bitch to play the lady."

She banged the door behind him and stood trembling in the hallway. Then slowly she returned to the living room. Was she sure the reality ahead would be as she had dreamed for so long? Quickly she shook off any doubt: everyone knew the sort of person Kiwas was. Why be surprised at anything that pig did?

In the evening as it was getting dark, Kozik was at her door again. Rifle slung over his shoulder and wearing an armband, he watched carefully for her reaction. "I'm in the militia now, Miss Helena. They came themselves and proposed it." Then he remembered what had brought him here. "But come. Everybody's out watching. Come with me and look."

She was startled, but followed along beside him down the Lane, as he told her how he had happened upon this important job. In the growing darkness she noticed the outlines of people standing singly and in groups up on the embankment among the twisted tracks. Then she became aware of the far off rumble of explosions, interspersed with the dull boom of guns. She turned in the direction of the sound, and very quickly she knew what held all these people silently, immovably staring, every face turned the same way. It was long after dusk and yet the whole sky to the northwest had taken on a deep red hue. Every now and then, brighter spots flared up from the horizon with an almost orange intensity. It was as if the earth itself had caught fire.

Helena turned anxiously to Kozik. The red glare reflecting in his face, he nodded: "Warsaw . . ."

A little way down from them were the Orlowskis and Modlibog. Even Pelagia's heavy form stood there, transfixed by the sky and the distant rumbling. Then suddenly a woman wailed somewhere down along the tracks, a clear, haunting cry, as if calling out for all of them at that moment: "Our children! My God, our children! It's our children burning there."

Then again only the silent figures against the angry sky, and the rumbling and the far-off thunder of the guns.

16

GENIA

"ALEXANDER!" she called from the cellar shelter. There was no answer, just his steps overhead. Mrs. Orlowska lit the kerosene lamp and blew out the candle (they had been without current several days now.) The cellar window was barricaded with sandbags. The furnishings consisted of two armchairs, a table, and two mattresses made up ready for the night on the floor.

Mrs. Orlowska approached the stairs and called again: "Alexander . . ." It was hardly an hour since the first shells had begun falling on Jutrosin, apparently aimed at the railway track. They had decided to take refuge in the cellar when Alexander recalled his shares. Ever since, he had been rushing up and down bringing them to the comparative safety of the makeshift shelter. A moment before two shells had exploded in the meadow not far from the house, but heedlessly he had rushed back to his study.

Marie listened a moment longer. There was not a sound upstairs. Still more perturbed, she hurried up the steps.

He was standing at the open cupboard door, stacking the shares into larger bundles. The big safe door also stood wide open, revealing further papers. "For heaven's sake, Alexander, come. Weren't those explosions enough warning? Next time it may be a direct hit here—" She stopped. They both listened. Another shell, but not quite so close. "Do you hear that? Come quickly."

"I'll come soon. Don't disturb me now," he growled.

She hesitated as she watched him fumbling nervously among his papers. Then she started back to the cellar. There was another explosion. The house shook, the windows rattled, and fragments

of plaster fell from the ceiling. She stopped and, turning, shouted: "Hurry, Alexander. It's getting worse."

At last he seemed to become aware of the danger. Hugging a mass of bundles in his arms, he rushed past her to the cellar stairs. She followed, anxious to reach the relative safety of the shelter. However, no sooner had he placed the shares on top of the others along the wall than he headed back to the stairs.

"Where are you going?"

"To get the rest. After all, my study is on the exposed side."

She knew there was no way for her to stop him. She followed him back upstairs. The only thing to do was to get it over with quickly. For a few minutes they worked in silence making trips back and forth, increasingly short of breath. She was waiting to go up as he was descending with another armful when all of a sudden the whole house seemed to rock amidst an ear-splitting crash. Through the stair door she could see a cloud of dust enveloping everything above, but before she could grasp what had happened, packages were tumbling down on her, followed by the heavy thud of Alexander, almost knocking her over as he fell the final steps to the floor. Terrified, she stooped and touched him: "Alexander . . ." she whispered. She could barely see in the weak daylight filtering down from above. He seemed to be moving but failed to answer. She hurried to the shelter room and returned with the lamp.

He was struggling to his feet, awkwardly brushing his suit and rubbing his shoulder and the back of his head. He was trembling and looked dazed.

"Are you all right?"

He nodded weakly. "I must have slipped."

"Come." She took him by the arm and led him toward the shelter.

As he sat down in the armchair, he suddenly became excited: "But the shares . . . we can't just leave them lying on the floor."

"All right, all right," she said soothingly. "Stay where you are. I'll bring them." She set down the lamp, lit a candle, and made her way back to the foot of the stairs.

When she reached the first floor, she found thick white dust on everything, great hunks of plaster and shattered glass. Hurriedly she looked from room to room. She ran up to the second floor. In Roman's room there was a huge hole in the outside wall, all the furniture a shambles. She hurried down once more. It could have been worse. Thank God no one had been up there. She ran through the study toward the desk. The lamps had been knocked to the

floor. A shell fragment had splintered part of the cupboard but the bundles of shares were still unharmed. She grabbed as many as she could carry, ran with them to the head of the cellar stairs and tossed them down. She repeated this a second time, a third. In the midst of her fear of another hit, she also felt a certain satisfaction throwing these wretched things so unceremoniously.

From down below he called up in a weak voice: "Marie . . . Marie, stop throwing them that way. It's money."

She answered angrily, "No, it's junk, junk," and continued as before.

When at last she was able to return to the cellar, she found him gathering up the packages, dusting each off with his handkerchief, and making sure it was still tied properly before adding it to the pile spreading ever further and higher along the wall. Ten or fifteen minutes went by with him so completely absorbed in his salvage operation that he didn't even ask about the damage upstairs. Meanwhile she had been standing close to the blocked-in window listening. But the shelling seemed to have stopped.

"A direct hit, Alexander," she ventured at last. "In Roman's room upstairs. Most of the windows are gone."

He looked up. "We'll have to get Kozik over and send for a glazier."

She laughed bitterly. "You certainly get wonderful ideas. A glazier—and where do you propose to find some glass?"

He turned back to arranging the bundles and said shrugging: "Well, it'll have to be found somewhere. Obviously we can't live in a house without window panes."

She was too irritated to answer.

2

"It's all over, sir," Kozik announced. He had just come with the news to Modlibog. "The uprising's finished. Warsaw's capitulated to the Germans. Don't know whether to be pleased or sorry. We weren't getting anywhere and the whole place was burning up . . ."

"But where did you hear that? Are you sure?"

"Yes—it's all over town and we got it official at the militia too. And there was two men here. Got through from across the river and told us all the news. It's terrible what they said."

"What about everyone who took part? What will happen to them?"

"They've gone to prisoner-of-war camps. They got the Germans

to count them like regular soldiers. Maybe it was better they stopped. There was no hope anymore. And don't you be worrying about your son. He'll be back by Christmas for sure. Everyone says the war will be over soon. Losing Warsaw won't change that. But have you heard about Ogorek?"

"Something bad happened?"

"No—just funny. Was his own fault. From the moment our people's militia takes over here, he goes walking and bragging around about his coming from a real working family and all that, and so the Russians say to put him as chairman of the Parish Council. Yesterday was the first meeting. You should have heard the stink! First one fellow gets up about Ogorek and then another. They told how he sold sugar and butter and ham at rich man's prices with the help of the Germans, and said there was other stories about him too. Ogorek didn't even try to defend himself. He just took the hint and cleared out quick. Now he's back quiet as a mouse in the kiosk just like before. Some joke. He should have known not to stick his neck out that way."

"Yes—but that's frightful about Warsaw."

"Well, there's nothing we can do about it. Oh, and remember my telling you about his daughter, about Genia. About her taking to getting drunk? It's getting real bad with her—begun to hang around with soldiers, and you know what that means. There's only one thing they're after."

"You think the uprising is all over?"

"Sure thing—I told you. And last night I saw her in Leokadia's again with some soldiers. I don't know—"

"Is her brother back by any chance?"

"No—not a word from him. But that's natural. How could he, if he's been taken prisoner? Much the safest thing. The ordinary civilians got it worse—have to clear out and leave everything behind. Women, children, old people. Leave the whole place empty. And what sense does that make?"

"But how frightful. Where will they go—and with winter coming so soon?"

"Yes, sir, wouldn't like to be them. Better out here quiet on our Lane. But about the cold weather coming I wanted to tell you that you ought to buy a small iron stove for your room. Would save a lot of wood and keep you warm. Won't be no coal at all, and mighty hard even to pick up firewood. Them Dutch tile stoves here weren't made for times like these."

"How could I get such a stove?"

"I'll arrange everything, sir. I'll buy one somewhere and it'll be all right. Anna was at the Director's next door yesterday and I say to tell him too about getting a stove. And, you know, he tells her to mind her own business. Only hurting himself talking grand that way. If it weren't for me, their house wouldn't have a window in it. But do you think he appreciates it? Complains because I had to board some up. Why couldn't I find glass, he asks me. Times have changed, and for him too."

"It isn't easy for an older person like that, Mr. Kozik. It's hard for him to understand what's happening. But if only there were some way to know for sure about my son."

"No sense worrying, sir. The way I figure it, all our young people will be showing up by and by. Like Miss Helena—she's sure about Malinka's returning. She's already living as if she thought it would be tomorrow. And she sure has money—did you know that with her not being able to work at the store any more, she's doing trade in gold and dollars and everything? Real smart at it. She's all right too. Got a warm heart and lives right—and look, used to be a whore! Now folks come begging to her with their gold. Even Ogorek minds her. Smells the money she's got."

"Life takes various unexpected turns."

"Yes, you're right. That's why I never let myself get worried by anything. Always managed somehow. And now I got the baby to take care of too. I'm sure it's going to get better now. Why should it get worse?"

"Maybe I should pay you now for the stove?"

"No, no. It'll be all right. I buy it and you pay me back when you can . . . now take Mrs. Korf who lives in our house. She's the wife of a major. Will be a colonel after the war. She's also sure everything will be turning out fine in the end. She already invited us all to her new home—naturally, when her husband gets free. It's much better always thinking that way than looking ahead for trouble, isn't it?"

3

Christmas Eve—but how different from other years. Kozik looked proudly across the table at Anna. The simplest of Christmas suppers, to be sure, but fixed by her as it should be—no leftovers from someone else's kitchen. And enough to go round even with the extra mouth to feed. His eyes shifted to the open door

of the dark room beyond: sleeping right through it. Still too dumb and little to notice the Holy Night.

His gaze fell on the tree over in the corner. He wasn't satisfied with the decorations. They were spread so thin it looked almost bare. But that wasn't surprising; they'd never had a tree as large as that before. It was the one he had cut for Director Orlowski, only to be told they didn't want a tree this year. It was crazy—Christmas without a tree? You never can tell with people like that. But it had been bad with the trees all round. When he brought the one he had chosen especially for Mr. Modlibog, the old gentleman had shaken his head sadly. "I'm all alone, Mr. Kozik. I'd need our young people here." That was understandable in a way and he felt sorry for the old man. But what had really made him angry was Ogorek's attitude. "What would I be doing with that?" he had growled, waving him away. After all that, it had been a pleasure to watch Miss Helena's delight as he set her tree up. "Thank you so much, Mr. Kozik—I never saw such a lovely tree in my life." For the Madeys he had gotten a little tree, too, of course. And after hesitating a little, he'd offered one to Mrs. Korf and her younger daughter, and they had thanked him.

Really it was strange—as if a whole deck of cards were suddenly reshuffled—that's how it seemed today on the Lane. Some moved down, others came up. He couldn't help feel a flush of pride, but all he said to Anna was: "You know, this year there's only four Christmas trees on the whole Lane, and ours is the biggest."

He was just finishing his cigarette as Anna started to clear the table. He pulled his watch from his pocket. "Guess I've got to be going. I'll be back for breakfast."

He rose from his chair, obviously not relishing the idea. It didn't seem right leaving Anna alone. Other years they'd always gone to midnight Mass together. But nothing was ever just the way one liked. It happened to be his turn on the night beat and that was that.

He took his militia jacket off the hook, put it on and tightened the belt. As Anna watched, he picked up his rifle and swung it over his shoulder. Carefully he placed the cap with the tin eagle on his head. What a difference a uniform made. People took account of him now. It was as if he were a different person from one moment to the next. This way, if he wanted, he could even say to Ogorek, "It's dirty around the house. Please clean it up right away." And the old bear wouldn't dare answer back.

As usual Anna warned him about not standing still in one place and catching cold, about not smoking that dirty stuff all the time because his cough afterwards would wake the baby up. "And did you put on your woolen socks?" He assured her he was warmly dressed, enjoying her concern. Finally he kissed her good night and headed out into the corridor.

Downstairs he ran into Ogorek. "Are you going on duty now?" Ogorek asked as if he had been waiting for him.

"Yes," Kozik answered curtly, still rankled by the Christmas tree incident.

"Maybe you could keep an eye open for Genia. She's not home yet. Something might have happened to her. Pelagia's sick in bed and awfully nervous about the girl."

"Why sure, I'll watch out . . ." Kozik said in a matter-of-fact tone. He knew very well where Ogorek could find her, but then there'd be trouble. "If I come across her, I'll bring her back myself."

Outside the air was very crisp with an icy wind blowing. He raised his collar and shoved his hands in his pockets. The hard snow crunched under his heavy boots in the stillness of the night.

The moon came out from behind the clouds, shining on the deserted ruins of their station. It seemed now as if it had always been that way, and yet it wasn't half a year since the last train had run through. He crossed the tracks. The block opposite the station was dark, all except the windows at Leokadia's. A disgrace, carousing on a holy evening like this. Now that the blackout was over it was easy to spot such things.

He went across and knocked. Through the locked door the waiter asked who it was. When Kozik answered shortly, "militia," the key turned at once. "Oh it's you, Mr. Kozik," the waiter said, relieved. "Very good you come. Who wants to hang around on account of a bunch of drunken soldiers on an evening like this? But I and the madam, we'd be scared to interfere. They've got two girls in there, and what they're not doing!"

Kozik nodded perfunctorily. Obviously no one except him had sufficient authority to do anything in such a situation. Mrs. Leokadia was sitting disconsolately behind the bar. "You're just the right person, Mr. Kozik. Really, I wanted to close long ago, but what can I do? Ogorek's Genia's in there too. Just listen how they're carrying on." From the back room could be heard the sound of a badly played accordion, interrupted by drunken singing and

an occasional yell and, above it all, bursts of high raucous laughter.

Mrs. Leokadia was filling a glass: "How about a drink first, Mr. Kozik, on a cold night like this? And a hard-boiled egg and a slice of carp?"

He had no objection at all; not even to a second glass to fortify him on his mission. Then he said firmly: "Now I'll go in there, Mrs. Leokadia, and put an end to it, so you'll have quiet at last." He adjusted his militia cap, grateful for the extra assurance the insignia provided. He opened the door of the back room. "Good evening, gentlemen, Merry Christmas," he said as if in a gay mood himself. "Militia. We're just checking to see everything's in order." Although he was alone, he spoke as though there were several others with him. He had quickly realized he'd need all the authority he could muster.

Staring at him were four men in uniform, three of them sergeants and one a lieutenant. And on this officer's knee none other than Genia was sitting. "Why, look, it's Kozik from our house," she exclaimed and burst into laughter.

Still more apprehensive, Kozik looked at the second woman. Manka—everyone knew who she was. Had Genia completely lost her senses?

The officer pushed Genia brusquely aside and stood up, smoothing out his rumpled uniform. "What the hell are you looking for?" he asked in an ugly tone.

"But this is Mr. Kozik, our good friend," Genia said, tugging at the lieutenant's arm. "We live in the same house. Mr. Kozik, come and join us for some—some vodka." Her face was flushed, her hair in disorder; she slurred her words.

Far from steady himself, the officer put his arm around her. "All right then," he said without enthusiasm, "if you're a friend of hers, sit down here. But I don't like being disturbed when I'm having fun—get it?"

Kozik nodded. He understood, all right. But he couldn't leave Genia here and fail the first time he had been asked for help as a representative of the people. The sergeant with the accordion struck up a tune. The two couples began to dance. Kozik turned in desperation to the remaining soldier: "Listen—her father is looking for her. He'll go to the command post and there'll be real trouble for everybody. The best way out is for me to get the girl home, and I'll take care of her old man somehow."

The soldier went up to the sergeant playing the accordion and whispered in his ear. The accordion groaned puffily as he squeezed

it shut. "I'm through for the night," he said firmly. "The party's over."

Mrs. Leokadia, who had been watching through the half-open door, took courage and spoke up too. "We're closing. We've got things to do at home. It's Christmas Eve, after all."

The lieutenant looked angrily from one to the other, then suddenly changed his mind and laughed. "All right," he said, slapping Genia on her solid rump, "you come along with me." She smiled uncertainly and then—to Kozik's consternation—nodded. What was he to do now?

Slowly the room began to empty, each soldier stopping to pay Mrs. Leokadia on his way out. As the officer was paying, Kozik approached Genia, "Look, I'll take you home. It's time."

"Go away, you with the faded uniform," the officer shouted. "She's mine. Get the hell out of here."

Alarmed, Kozik backed imperceptibly toward the door—the military were always in the right, militia or no. Then, to his surprise, Genia decided to follow him. The officer caught her arm but she wrenched herself free. Kozik began to feel surer of himself. "Excuse me, lieutenant, we don't want trouble, but her folks are looking for her. That's the way it is. She's a nice girl and—"

The officer shouted: "Sure, she's a nice girl. I've had her before and—" he jabbed Kozik's chest "I'm going to have her tonight."

Genia whispered, "I'm scared, Mr. Kozik. I want to go home." Again she edged toward the door, but the officer quickly caught up with her. Seizing her arm, he said something in a low voice. She shook her head and again freed herself. "Leave me alone. I want to go home."

Mrs. Leokadia spoke up: "Aren't you supposed to be an officer? Can't you see the girl wants to go home?"

The lieutenant stood swaying for a moment as if trying to decide which of them to take on first, then, shouting an obscenity, he stumbled out, slamming the door so hard behind him the glass almost shattered.

For a moment Kozik was too surprised at his victory to speak, then he said: "Wait here Miss Genia. I'll go outside and look. Can't be sure they've really gone. They might be waiting to gang up on us." But soon he was back. "All clear. They're off singing way down the road."

Mrs. Leokadia came over and pressed Kozik's hand warmly. "Thank you—they would have kept on until morning if you hadn't come . . ." Then she turned to Genia and said gruffly, "And you

better stay home more, Miss." She opened the door for them: "Happy Christmas to you all."

Kozik responded, "Happy Christmas to you," and pushed Genia ahead of him out into the night.

Genia began to cry. "Don't you worry," Kozik said gently. "I won't tell your father. We'll just say you were afraid to return alone."

She didn't answer. Other than her sobbing the only sound was the crunch of snow under their feet. Again he tried to comfort her. "There's no reason to cry. It won't help and I'll explain. Your father will believe me."

"It's not because of Papa," she broke in petulantly. "I'm crying because that's how I feel. Everything's so stupid. I should have gone with him. They were such fun and you spoiled it all." She swayed slightly and he took her arm.

"You'll think differently after you've had a little sleep. A girl like you hanging around with soldiers—that's no good. And the other one—you know her?"

"Manka—sure."

"All right—and is it fitting your being in there with her?"

"Used to be a friend of the Quail, so what?"

"That's just it."

"But everyone treats her now as if she were a queen. Papa and even you . . ."

"Because she changed. She's a very nice woman now. You couldn't say that for Manka. I wouldn't even use the word for what she is."

"What's the difference? When I'm old there'll be plenty of time to sit around at home. The only thing that counts in all this muck is what you can get for yourself out of it right now, not when you're dead. There's nothing else worth having."

"I wouldn't know what to say to that. But everyone knows what's wrong for a decent girl . . ." Kozik stared at her. She must be terribly drunk to talk that way. But they had arrived at the Green House and he went on to warn her: "Please watch out your father don't smell your breath. It could be bad if he knew how much you drank tonight. Go right to bed and I'll talk with him."

Ogorek was sitting brooding at the table, his cap on his head. He looked up silently at Kozik and then at Genia.

"Here we are, Mr. Ogorek. With all the drunks around on a holiday night it was good Miss Genia waited for me and didn't come

alone. We even had to be careful together. Soldiers don't respect the militia the way they ought to."

"Yes, all right, all right." Ogorek mumbled as he glowered at Genia. "Thank you, Mr. Kozik."

"You see, I told you everything would be all right with her. She was just waiting for me. But now I must be going. Happy Christmas everybody."

4

No sooner had the door closed behind Kozik than Ogorek jumped up and came around the end of the table toward her, his eyes flaming, his face distorted in a grimace. She backed against the door, terrified.

"You bitch . . . tell me—where were you tonight? Two o'clock and the militia has to bring you home! Where were you and who were you with? Quick now . . ."

She was leaning against the door, her head completely cleared by her father's furious outburst. She looked hopefully toward her mother's door.

"Tell me, you bitch—quick. I know what you are—first that Malinka, now the soldiers—you damned little whore." He rushed for her and slapped her across the face. She shrieked with pain and fright, and crumpled to the floor, her arms shielding her head. Ogorek stood over her, snarling "No daughter of mine's going to be a whore. I'll kill you first." He yanked her to her feet, and began striking her with the back of his hand, first to the right, then to the left, on her arms, on her face, on her head, while she cowered moaning, trying to protect herself.

The bedroom door creaked open. Pelagia, heavier, still more unsteady, in a white nightgown lurched forward with small shuffling steps on her swollen legs. "Genia . . ." she rasped, clutching a chair, then the table to balance herself. Her hair hung limply over her shoulders, her eyes were filmed with terror. "Josef, you monster, get away from my child. Murderer!"

He didn't even hear her. Now he had a grip on Genia's hair and with his other hand was slapping her face.

"Genia . . . Genia . . ." Pelagia cried, tottering toward them. "Run Genia—I'll call for help. Genia, run! He'll kill you! He worked for the Germans—murdered those Jews—Malinka. A monster—run . . ."

Abruptly Ogorek pushed Genia aside and turned on Pelagia.

"You're lying! Genia, don't listen to her. She's sick and doesn't know what she's saying."

"It's the truth, as I love God." Pelagia pointed her trembling hand at him. "He did it. He was in with the Germans. Now you know—"

Ogorek seized her arm. "You fool! You fool! Don't you see the girl could believe it? You don't know what you're saying." His voice broke. He turned to Genia crouching on the floor. "She's sick, Genia. God be my witness. She's talked like that to me before. There's something awfully wrong—awfully wrong." He was pleading now almost in a whisper.

"Don't believe him, Genia. He murdered that child—"

Slowly Genia got up, wiping her eyes with the back of her hand. Standing beside her mother she faced him. "What Mama says is true. Do you think I was blind about Krupa hanging around the kiosk? Or that I never heard you and Mama? If you dare touch me just once more, I'll go to the police and tell them all I know. By now I'm past caring about anything. That's what you've done to me."

Ogorek stepped toward them threateningly.

"You dare touch me again or lay a hand on Mama. They'll lock you up right now in the middle of the night and no one will care what they do with you." She stopped, her eyes widening, then shouted wildly at him: "Maybe you were behind killing *him* too?" Again she burst into loud sobs.

Pelagia stroked her head, then pulled at her arm. "Don't cry, my darling. Calm down now and come to bed. I'll be watching over you. I'll always defend you against him so he can't do anything to you. Come now, my darling. Come." Slowly the two women turned, Pelagia leaning heavily on her daughter.

Ogorek shouted after them defiantly: "Go tell 'em anything you want! Say anything—have 'em shoot me because I sweated all my life just for you. God will punish you both and damn you to everlasting hell." He broke off as if frightened by his own words.

They ignored him and continued step by step toward the door of Genia's room. He fell into the chair where he had been sitting when Genia entered. He put his hands to his head, his cap falling to the floor. As the door closed behind them, he mumbled: "What do they want of me? What do they want of me? Mother of God, tell me—what have I done wrong to be punished like that?"

17

THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

THE SNOW GLISTENED in the brilliant January sun. It was well below freezing. But as Kozik turned into the Lane, he was so consumed with his momentous news he wasn't even aware of the cold. Even the battered remnants of the board fence at the two corner lots (most of it had found its way into various stoves during the past months) didn't annoy him as usual. The glare here was so strong that he lowered his head and screwed up his eyes until he could only just make out the line of churned-up sandy snow immediately in front of him. Like a horse with blinkers, he thought, amused.

He walked more slowly: who should be the first to hear—Anna? But it was doubtful whether she would grasp its significance. All that interested her was the baby. She'd listen and then ask: "Do you think it'll be easier now with food?" No, that wouldn't do. He'd go to Modlibog first—he could depend upon his reaction.

He had reached the point in the trodden path where most of the footsteps turned abruptly to the right—the Green House obviously. The path became narrower. Another branch to the left—that was Miss Helena's private domain, only her tiny footsteps. It narrowed further, as you'd expect—hardly a soul ventured out of doors at this end. The Director was all but hibernating, like an old and cranky bear. Nor did Mr. Modlibog do much better. Only Mrs. Orlowska—she went to market almost every day to exchange old clothes for food.

He wove his way along, faster again, and couldn't resist whistling to himself. When he sensed that he was abreast of the Modli-

bog house, he looked up, shielding his eyes with his hand. There under that long expanse of white lay the meadow, the only sign of it an occasional tuft of brown grass sticking through—the ones his goat had missed. Even the duck pond had become a part of it; if it weren't for the clumps of reeds bent under the heavy load of snow and the white-capped tangle of rushes, you'd never know it was there. And everywhere silence, only a solitary airplane puttering leisurely along low in the sky near the horizon. Just blue and white, cold and pure. He grunted with contentment. It was nice to be alive.

Slowly he opened the gate. It was almost exactly a year ago he'd come here to congratulate the newlyweds. And now everyone was gone except Mr. Modlibog. Next door it was the same—two old people, lonely, neglected, maybe even forgotten.

He knocked, purely for form; he didn't expect an answer. He pressed down the handle and the door opened. Stamping the snow from his boots, he entered the hall. It seemed chilly in here away from the sun. How the place had changed! A film of dust covered everything, the floor was gritty, stained, unswept. A person would think no one lived here at all. But Kozik knew better. He was the one who had fixed up the little pot-bellied stove that had enabled Modlibog to retreat to the bedroom at the back. He went on through the dining room, around the big bare table, and knocked gently on the door at the right, taking off his cap and slipping the rifle from his shoulder.

"Please come in." Though he had expected it, the sound of Modlibog's voice was nonetheless surprising in the midst of all this emptiness.

"Good morning," Kozik said entering, clicking his heels together. Modlibog was sitting beside the stove, a book in his lap, hearty, shaved, as trim looking as ever. He was a strange contrast to the untidy jumble of his surroundings: the table strewn with papers and books, eating utensils—a plate, a knife, a fork, an unwashed pan; the pail of soapy water on the floor; the bag of potatoes; the unmade bed.

"There's great news, Mr. Modlibog, and I came first to you. Yesterday our Polish troops occupied Warsaw. The Germans have gone. It's the end of our troubles, sir. Any day now you can expect your son back."

Modlibog jumped up, beside himself. Unnoticed, his book slith-

ered to the floor. Again and again he begged Kozik for every detail, but then couldn't stand still long enough to listen.

"To think," he said, grasping Kozik's hands in his, "to think they might be coming home any day." His eyes filled with tears. "My dear friend, thank you."

Kozik rubbed his head sheepishly. "I didn't exactly chase the Germans out myself."

"But you brought me the word—and now, now I must tell them next door—that our children will soon be home!"

And without coat, boots, or hat, he ran pell-mell out of the house and across the lane, slipping and stumbling in the snow.

2

By March Warsaw was truly free—what was left of it. The black-out was gone but there was no current. The fighting had rolled on, but still it was war. There were even those who began to say, "The Germans aren't licked yet. Who knows what they have up their sleeve?"

Helena had no real opinion herself on the matter. Her one worry was that *he* wasn't back yet. That was all that counted. Whether it was over in a month or six, surely with the Germans pulling out of Poland, he should be able to come back any day. Kozik tried to explain that it wasn't so simple, but she didn't believe him. Sigmunt might turn up any hour now and she had to be ready to welcome him. She was so sure of this that she was even afraid to be away any length of time from the cottage. Maybe it was nonsense, but what if somehow he did come and she wasn't there?

What made the waiting worse was that it coincided with her having no real occupation, aside from a little trading in gold and jewelry. Since that day in the summer when she had wandered back from town on foot, the world had pulled back with her and Jutrosin had become a small isolated island—no trains, no communications of any sort, no city. They kept themselves warm with railway ties and fences, exchanged and sold and bought within the small circle of their community, producing nothing, just waiting, waiting, waiting. She sat most of the time in her kitchen, keeping the fire going and thinking about the future. About the various things she would buy for him—the suit, the shoes that wouldn't soak through, shirts for weekdays, a special one for Sundays with a tie all its own. She had already acquired two rings, two nice

blankets, and good pillows too. They would buy a house with her money, a cottage about the size of this one. The wedding would be in Warsaw or somewhere else where no one knew them. She would wear a splendid white dress just like any bride, and he a black suit. They would invite Kozik and Anna but no one else. This was how it would be for sure. Nothing stood in the way any more. They would live quietly and in great happiness. They'd have enough money for the rest of their lives.

Practically her only concern was his reaction to her working at the store. After all she had gotten this job originally by saying she was his wife. Would he be angry with her? Would he be jealous? Would he expect her to stop working? But then, she reasoned, if she could tell him first exactly how it happened, show him what she had been able to accumulate—only for him!—while he was in concentration camp, he would understand and be grateful. And after all, when he did get home, he would be ill and tired. She would have him all to herself before the world intruded. There would be plenty of time to prove to him that everything she had done and everything she had become was because of her devotion to him, her husband in fact, if not in name.

Of course she worried about the store too. Had she done everything she could to protect it? She wanted so much for him to see how well she had handled everything. And what if it all was gone, hit by a bomb, burned to the ground? As soon as the news had spread that Warsaw was free at last she wanted to go in. However, Kozik told her that the city was still strictly out of bounds for civilians, and so the waiting continued.

Finally one day Kozik came and said: "The ban's lifted, Miss Helena. You can go in now. The little narrow gauge will even take you most of the way to the East Bank if you don't mind sitting out in the open." He was referring to an old railway that ran through the nearby countryside and had once served as an auxiliary for shipping farmers' produce into the city. Now it had been pressed into service again as a stopgap of sorts until the main line was repaired.

The next morning Helena was among the bundled-up travelers crowded into the little flat cars pulled by an ancient engine, wood smoke billowing from its stack as it wheezed and puffed, stopping every now and then while driver and passengers alike scrounged the open countryside for fuel to keep it going.

At last, frozen to the bone, she found herself in the familiar East

Bank section where her store was located. She noticed only a handful of civilians busy trying to bring things back to life. But soldiers were everywhere, some moving westward in formation, others working on telephone and electric lines, or clearing obstructions where a building had collapsed, or even distributing bread. Quickly she hurried toward her street. As she turned the corner her heart beat faster. What would she find? From a distance, the damage on the block seemed minor. But as she drew nearer, she noticed the broken shutters hanging out on the sidewalk. The glass was gone, the door smashed. She went in. Everything movable was gone, even the drawers. Nothing remained but dirty, empty shelves. She fought off her tears as she looked around. There was nothing she could do. The only remaining hope was the Co-operative head office across the river in the city itself. Perhaps she would find someone there.

Emerging onto the embankment, she was dumfounded as she looked across the snow-covered river at the completely alien skyline on the opposite escarpment. Could these endless craggy shells have any relation to the city she had known all her life? And instead of the bridges, dark twisting lines of people moved on foot across the frozen river. Wrapped, hurrying figures heading toward the ruined shambles; others weaving their way slowly back, burdened down with every sort of object—mirrors, chairs, rugs, bedding, household utensils, loaded baby carriages, and pushcarts.

Helena started across the ice herself.

As she entered the first streets she felt as though she were living a nightmare. As far as the eye could see there was nothing but fire-blackened walls or mountains of rubble that sometimes blocked all further passage. Even more heart-rending were the pathetic islands of recognition that remained—a flight of stairs clinging precariously to a wall and leading nowhere but to the dull and sullen sky, or a corner of a room with a bed, even pictures on the wall but isolated some fifty feet in the air. And rats everywhere, scurrying through the ruins and across the snow. Where were the people, the cabs, the limousines, the jouncing street cars, the lights, the dancing? She shuddered and hurried on. Already she knew deep within her the outcome of her expedition, yet she had to be sure, to feel she had done everything she could.

A passerby called, "Over this way you won't find nothing worth your while. All picked over long ago." She didn't understand. A military patrol stopped her: "Where you goin', Miss?" She gave

the address of the Co-operative office. The patrol shrugged and let her continue.

At last she was there. Burned out—only charred walls. She had to face it, there was no Co-operative, no store, nothing to return to.

3

Modlibog heard someone entering the front hall but, reluctant to leave the warmth of his iron stove, he stayed where he was. Everyone knew he made his headquarters in the back room and whoever it was would look for him there. Minutes went by, however, without anyone knocking, yet he could hear a man and a woman talking. Curiosity getting the best of him, he slipped on his jacket and stuck his head through the door. He saw a tall man with a graying mustache and goatee, wearing an incongruous ski cap; and beside him a broad short woman with a kerchief around her head. Even though their appearance was impoverished and worn, Modlibog recognized them as people who had seen better times. He gave a little cough. Startled, the visitors turned.

"Oh! Good afternoon," the man said apologetically. "We had no idea anyone was here. My name is Rybak and this is my wife. I'm the owner."

"I see. I'm Henryk Modlibog. I'm living here alone. I suppose you'll be wanting to take possession?"

"Yes. We were living in Warsaw but now we've got nothing left except the clothes we're wearing—and this house. How lucky it came through unscathed. You see, it's mine," he repeated a little defensively.

"Yes, I understand," Modlibog assured him. "Mr. Orlowski often spoke of you. Would you like to come into my room? It's very chilly everywhere else. Excuse me for not being able to welcome you the way I would like to, but you know how it is. Potatoes and flour—that is about all the food I have. But I might be able to find a little real coffee and a slice of bread or two. Anyway, please do come in."

While Modlibog was making the coffee, Rybak launched into a long monologue about his wartime tribulations, his four years in hiding, his constant personal danger. ". . . And six times I had to change my name, and I don't know how many times my apartment. You can imagine our relief to return at last to a home of our own." He went on to say he had no idea what he would be doing now that the war was coming to an end, but emphasized that

the sort of high position he had been accustomed to in the past no longer attracted him. "I must tell you frankly I wouldn't want to wish on anyone the experience I went through. Being so long in the public eye, I was continually faced with the danger that an informer would recognize me. Public service has its limits . . ."

Modlibog concealed his surprise. Not only had this face meant nothing to him before the war, but he hadn't even been aware of the man's existence until Orlowski mentioned him in connection with the villa. Rybak continued unchecked; his wife, sitting in the armchair, followed him attentively. Clearly she agreed with her husband's conception of his own importance. Rybak's account finally reached his difficulties after the uprising. ". . . And, imagine, we were dumped into ordinary farm laborers' quarters on an estate. I went to the owner and said: 'I gather you aren't aware who I am.' I introduced myself: 'I am Rybak.' And, you know, this idiot simply shrugged and asked whether the room didn't suit me. 'First come, first served,' he said. 'The main house is full.' Imagine. That's how people are . . ."

Nodding mechanically, Modlibog announced that the coffee was ready. "But, sorry, not a drop of milk."

Between sips, Rybak said, "You say you know Mr. Orlowski?"

"Yes, of course. It was he who suggested my living here."

"I'm relying on his assistance until things get back to normal."

For the first time Mrs. Rybak spoke: "Of course we don't expect to be supported. My husband was thinking of a loan. He helped Mr. Orlowski a great deal before the war. That's my husband all over—always giving others a hand. I tell him he was naive. There's no such thing as gratitude. We've had our disappointments in that connection."

"Zosia, these matters don't interest Mr. Modlibog," Rybak said irritably. "I'm sure Mr. Orlowski will tide us over. The fact is, we're without a zloty to our name at the moment. But what better surety than this house?"

"It's a mystery to me how we're going to manage here," Mrs. Rybak said looking around as if she saw the whole house before her. "Everything in Warsaw gone. Not even one bit of bedding. How are we going to keep warm?"

"I can loan you bedding," Modlibog said. "Of course I haven't got much because I'm displaced myself. My estate was seized in the first weeks of the war. But there'll be enough to go round for the time being. Heating is a more serious problem. The only way

I manage is to collect branches and cones every day in the forest beyond the meadow."

Rybak shook his head. "I'm afraid that's not for me. I'm sure that as soon as I have the loan it will be possible for me to get coal somewhere. It's merely a matter of paying."

"I'm afraid that you're under an illusion," Modlibog couldn't help suggesting at last. "I happen to know that the Orlowskis, like most of us, are in very tight circumstances. As far as I can tell they have no liquid assets at all at the moment. Mrs. Orlowska has to sell off personal things at the market just as I do."

Mrs. Rybak fidgeted uneasily in the armchair. "But you must understand that Mr. Orlowski is greatly indebted to my husband."

Modlibog shrugged. "Naturally I can't speak for him. I only thought I should warn you."

"Orlowski being without money is inconceivable," Rybak replied. "Up to the outbreak of war, he was one of Poland's richest men. It can't just have evaporated. And I won't need much—only to cover a year's living costs and to buy now whatever we need to set ourselves up."

Modlibog nodded. "I understand . . ." He hesitated and at last broached what had been troubling him all the time. "I wonder—will you need the entire house for yourselves? Naturally, I'll have to make plans."

The Rybaks glanced at each other, and as if by agreement it was she who answered. "We'll want the lower floor in any case. But I don't think there would be any objection to your having one of the rooms upstairs."

Rybak approved. "Yes, that would be all right. The only one we'll need is the one with the terrace—a handy thing in warm weather for entertaining."

4

"The nerve—as if it belonged to him," Orlowski said indignantly. "He didn't put down one zloty for it."

"I don't know—but he definitely told me he was the owner."

"Yes—on paper, but it has no meaning. The house is attached for debts above its actual value."

"And he is counting on a loan from you. I told him you have no available funds at present but I don't think he believed me."

"Even if I had, I wouldn't consider it. My dear, you have no

idea what an incompetent man he is. A parasite, nothing more. Yes, and a fool too."

"But you told me yourself he was a man of some importance."

Orlowski snorted. "Meaningless. I doubt if he understands himself how that came about. In the days of the old company, he got a job there because of his connections—an uncle in parliament, another in the government. Some harmless directorship especially tailored for him—a paper director."

"But wasn't he a vice-minister?"

"Yes, yes. But wait, I'll tell you the whole story. When I bought out the old company and changed the name to Masowia, there was the headache of what to do with him. I couldn't afford to fire him. He was as necessary to me as the others—not he himself, of course, but his connections. Where could I place him so he would do the least damage and I could keep an eye on him? You know what I dreamed up? I made him my confidential advisor. And imagine—he took the job seriously and went around with an air of tremendous importance. Almost every day he pestered me with some idea. Often I was on the verge of exploding, but I had no choice but to endure it. You see, when anything came up involving government policy, he was invaluable. He would hurry off to one of his uncles and we could count on smooth sailing. You know—taxes or credits or special legislation. The heavy hand of government bureaucracy makes such a man quite indispensable."

"So he was in fact very useful to you."

"Rather, his relatives. But wait—then one day he came and announced his resignation. Of course I imagined I had offended him somehow. You know my quick temper, and he sorely tried it on many occasions. Imagine my surprise when he explained proudly he had been offered a high ministerial position. Some months later I remember him saying 'It's easier being a vice-minister than a clerk in your company.' " Orlowski frowned. "Quite unlike him to see himself so frankly."

"Maybe you expected too much of him. An average man . . ."

"Completely average! The difficulty was that he was firmly convinced of his own superior wisdom. He even thought of himself as an up-and-coming leader, a man of key importance. For example, a year or so ago I ran into him in the city, and imagine—he asked whether I would like to hold a government post after the war? He said he'd be glad to consider it. I'm sure he already saw himself as prime minister. What can one answer to such a man?"

"Presumptuous to say the least."

"And that woman he married! She wanted him to be a great man, so she talked him into thinking he was. You know what she once said to me? 'I think, Mr. Orlowski, you owe your fortune in a large part to my husband!' "

"Now I see why they regard you as their debtor."

"Insolence! Long ago he was well rewarded. For example, the use of this villa here as if it were his own. And as far as I'm concerned, he can go on using it for the time being. He can live there and enjoy the illusion of being owner, though not forever. As soon as peace is declared, the books will have to be closed."

"He's been through a lot. Perhaps he's learned."

"I doubt it, Henryk. Not after having lived all his life on illusions. The fall would be too painful. He had an important position as far as the public was concerned, but it was all exactly as it was with the house—all borrowed. And now that's over. Maybe if it weren't for his wife he might still wake up, but she'll take care of that. She'll never let him see the truth. My dear, such people stay blind to the very end of their lives."

5

Modlibog moved upstairs and tried to make the best of the new situation. But the Rybaks' company was extremely trying. "I don't see how you can stand it," Orlowski commented, and Mrs. Orlowska added: "Why don't you come over here with us? We'll give you a room or two upstairs and not a soul will disturb you. All that's needed is a little patching and a few window panes."

For a week Modlibog hung on where he was, patiently listening to the Rybaks' endless complaints and boasts whenever their paths crossed. Then he had enough. Arranging for Madey and Kozik to help him over with his things, he told the Rybaks he was moving because he couldn't afford rent and didn't want to live in their house without paying.

Kozik repaired the shell damage in Roman's old room and found some glass for the boarded-up windows. The iron stove was reinstalled, and Kozik celebrated the occasion by contributing a pail of coal.

Modlibog immediately felt much better. Aside from the Rybaks, he had taken a dislike to the other house. It seemed to have brought only bad luck. Wistfully he tried to hope the move would be a

turning point for the better. And so it seemed when the very next day Kozik was back with a startling suggestion.

"Mr. Modlibog, I know you're kind of hard up right now. So when I heard about a job, I thought of you. It's at the parish. The pay don't amount to much but you get a good meal each day. If you're interested you better go over there quick because everyone has his eye out for a chance like that."

Such a thing had never entered Modlibog's head. And yet, he thought, why not? Aside from easing his financial situation, it would help to have something to do to take his mind off the continued silence about Witold. He made up his mind at once and, slipping on his coat, he accompanied Kozik to the parish office.

The job—a supplies' watchman—was still available and the matter was quickly settled. Kozik felt very proud in his role of protector. As for Modlibog, the whole thing had an air of adventure about it. He returned to the villa in such a buoyant mood that Orlowski exclaimed: "You look as if you had just gotten back your estate. What's happened?"

Modlibog told him about the job. Orlowski laughed uproariously. "I see you're quite adaptable, Comrade Modlibog! But, Henryk, the pay is ridiculous. I should think you'd feel humiliated to touch it."

"The pay is only part of it. I get a solid meal out of it too, and, most important, I'll keep myself occupied."

"Find something to do at home. Anything would be better than stooping to be a parish clerk. Really, Henryk, what nonsense!" And again he laughed.

"I'll be glad not to have to sell any more of my things. Like it or not, I've got to start thinking about some steady employment."

"Oh my God! You talk as if you thought the present madness was permanent. Don't you see that the war is all but over and then everything will change? There'll be unlimited credit from England and America. Think of the pent-up demand after these years of destruction and deprivation. There'll be opportunities as never before. You should be thinking how you will fit into all this. You should stake out a plan for yourself. When it comes to the money, I can always help you. But there must be the will, the mature grasp . . ."

"You know perfectly well, Alexander, that I have no knack for business and would make a mess of it."

"You should be ashamed to talk like that. Look at me. In the middle sixties. Penniless. But do I let this worry me for a moment? Just wait and see what I have in store for Masowia. I haven't been napping all these years. I've developed a whole series of ideas all ready to put into effect. No one will be able to hold out long against my competition."

Modlibog didn't answer.

"And you too, my dear Henryk, have great possibilities. I will be glad to stand behind you with whatever is needed—of course for a sound venture. But here you go taking a degrading menial job. Don't you see how ridiculous you look?"

Modlibog went on toward the stairs. "Maybe I do look ridiculous. Even so, I'm going to stick to the job. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, Alexander."

6

Modlibog had just returned from work when Mrs. Orlowska knocked at his door. "Henryk, could you come downstairs? Rybak is here. And Alexander, as usual, has no patience at all. If you could calm them down."

Rybak had come for advice. "As things have turned out we're in very serious circumstances and have absolutely no possibility of keeping ourselves alive. What valuables we had were destroyed in Warsaw and so we have nothing to sell, not even spare clothes."

Orlowski made no effort to conceal his lack of sympathy. Why did this man have to come and bother him in a situation where there was nothing he could do even if he wanted to? It was an imposition. He ought to learn to stand on his own feet. But at least—thank God!—the man no longer had any illusions about borrowing money from him.

"The only thing I can think of," Modlibog suggested, breaking the awkward silence, "would be to try and find a small job like mine. At least it would keep you from starving."

Rybak threw up his hands. "But where do you imagine there'd be something suitable for a person of my background? I wouldn't know where to begin to look."

Orlowski supported him grudgingly. "Exactly. Just because you have such adolescent impulses yourself, you can't expect the rest of us to do the same."

"All right—suggest something else then."

Again there was silence. Then Rybak began timidly: "I have

one idea. What would you gentlemen think? The one remaining asset is the house. I could try to sell it."

Orlowski stiffened. So that's where all this was leading to. He had always regarded the villa next door as his, and now this man proposed to bail himself out with it. But the fact remained that at least on paper: the property belonged to Rybak, and at the moment there wasn't much Orlowski could do about it. So all he said was: "But there's a sizeable mortgage on it, isn't there?"

"The buyer will have to take the risk on that," Rybak said, oblivious to the note of sarcasm in Orlowski's voice. "At present inflated levels that house should be worth twice that amount. The difference should be enough anyway to keep us going for a half year until things get back to normal."

Orlowski began to pace the floor. "In all honesty I can't say I'm delighted with your idea. Years ago when Masowia made this house available to you, we thought of it for your personal use and no one else's. This way there is no telling what kind of neighbor we might end up with. Now all kinds of riffraff have accumulated money."

"But what else is there left for me to do?"

Modlibog conceded that perhaps Rybak's idea was the only way out. "Even so, I doubt if it will be as easy as you think to find a buyer."

"I'd have to find an agent to handle it. Who would you suggest?"

"An agent?" Modlibog shrugged. "You could put a notice on Ogorek's kiosk. At least everyone would see it there. And Ogorek —he knows everybody. He might even want to buy it himself. He certainly has the money."

"Thank you, Henryk, for proposing such a neighbor!" Orlowski said heavily. "That's all we need. In that event my house will be for sale too."

"When it comes down to it, is there much difference whether he lives in the Green House or next door? In any case, he should know who has the funds around at present." He turned to Rybak. "He's your best bet. Go and speak to him."

"I assure you I regret having to consider getting rid of the house," Rybak said apologetically, "but what we're living through defies all reason. It has left my life in ruins. And what hope have I ahead? Not that I imagine either of you gentlemen can expect much from the future—I mean in financial terms."

"You are either a chronic pessimist or the situation is just over

your head," Orlowski snapped. "No—I'm not frightened and don't intend to be. Only fools can talk like that. The second important chapter in my life is about to begin. The present moment is merely a passing phase of no significance."

"But everything is being socialized," Rybak ventured timidly, startled by Orlowski's vehemence. "The Russians . . ."

"Surely you aren't implying you see something permanent in all this?"

"But estates are already being divided up. And what about heavy industry—the new decrees? Of course I am very pleased your view is different. Nonetheless I'm already resigned to the worst."

Orlowski walked from the room without another word.

7

Kozik was troubled and embarrassed. He waited at one side until the first rush of morning customers was over, and then said: "It's pretty bad, Mr. Ogorek."

"What's happened? You have some trouble?"

"No, not me. It's about Miss Genia. You knew, didn't you, she wasn't home yet?"

Ogorek eyed him suspiciously. Genia hadn't returned at all last night—that was true. But how did Kozik know? He had sat up waiting until after midnight and Pelagia had badgered him continually from her bed to go out and find her. As if he could go wandering around in the night asking people where his daughter was! After all, he knew what she was up to and she'd come home when she came home. His hands were tied.

"What about her?" he asked in a belligerent tone.

"It's pretty bad. I hate to tell you. Miss Genia's in jail."

Ogorek jumped up. "In jail!" He sank back on his stool, clutching his head in his hands. If that got around—Holy Mary! "Who put her there?" he asked hoarsely.

"Last night the military police made a check of all soldiers' quarters. They found Miss Genia—another woman, too—and they took them both off to jail. They say the father or mother has to claim her."

Ogorek was already closing the kiosk.

At the militia post the commandant launched into a long tirade about how patriotic Poles were expected to take better care of their daughters. Ogorek had to sit and listen: humble, attentive, the stupid, negligent father.

"You look like a man who knows his way around," the commandant droned. "I'm told you even own a house. But look what's happened to your daughter. I'd advise you to take her to the doctor right away. Who knows, she might have picked up something."

Ogorek grimaced. How much more of this could he take?

"I'm letting her go only because Kozik here vouches for you. Normally we'd send her off to Otwock to be dealt with there. But mind now—you get it across to her that the next time it will be different. We have very strict instructions." He turned toward an anteroom, calling: "Bring Genia Ogorek up. But see that she's decently dressed." Again he spoke to Ogorek: "She was so drunk when they found her, she refused to put on a thing. Stark naked. That's how she arrived here. And her language—I'd be ashamed to repeat it to you."

Ogorek wished he could suddenly just disappear. How had it happened that the reward for a lifetime of thrift should be that he had to be ashamed of his own children, had to hide his face from the world? Before the day was over, all of Jutrosin would be agog with the story.

The door opened. At first, he hardly recognized her. A puffed smeared face, swollen eyes, hair disheveled, her dress torn, rumpled, and filthy. This was some vulgar slut from the street, not his Genia.

"Genia—Genia, what have you done?" he said dully. He couldn't move or say another word. But at last he pulled himself together. "Come, come—we'll go." His voice was so subdued and gentle that Genia looked up for the first time. Avoiding her eyes, he turned and said good-by to the officer. "Thank you. It won't happen again. She's young, a little wild, and this war." Taking her arm, he led her out of the door.

They walked in silence. Automatically Ogorek took the back way so there would be less chance of meeting anyone.

"Papa!" she said suddenly and stopped. "I'm not coming home."

"Are you crazy, Genia?" he flared, but then immediately spoke in a quiet voice again. "Where do you want to go?"

"I don't want to go home."

"But, Genia, you have to. You have to return to your mamma. She's sick, and half out of her mind with worry. Don't be afraid. I won't touch you. I won't beat you. I won't say a word. Come Genia, you must." She stared sullenly at the ground, scuffing the sand with the tip of her shoe. "After all, you must come home. Where else is there?"

"I don't really know what to do," she moaned. "I don't know who is right and where the truth lies. I haven't known for a long time." She broke into tears and then suddenly turned on him hysterically, "Why are you treating me this way? Why don't you yell at me—beat me?"

"Shush, Genia." He glanced around but there was no one in sight. "The time for beating is past, I guess, Genia. It didn't help much, did it?"

"I don't know what's what any more, Papa. Right now I see I've done wrong and that I shouldn't behave this way. But tomorrow I'll spit at everything and say what harm is there in it. That's how it's been—ever since the day he was murdered. They killed me too, somehow. I have nothing left to live for. Nothing matters. If I could forget him, it would be different." She began sobbing bitterly.

He was puzzled. Then it seemed to him that he did understand. "Listen, Genia, it is not that serious. I'll explain honestly how things really are with men and women. I'm not educated but I've got a head too and have seen a lot of what goes on. I never had the time for this falling in love, but that was all right too. Let me tell you, it's a joke. All of us want the same thing, whether it's one man doing it to you or another, the only thing that counts is that he should be suitable. I mean the right kind for a husband. Really Genia, that's how it is. Now you come on home. You'll go to bed and sleep it off, get rested and then we'll get busy. You'll find a decent man and get married. Only don't be foolish. Don't keep on thinking about this other man. He was no good."

She didn't answer at first, but he was relieved to see that she had stopped crying. Finally she gave a deep sigh and shook her head. "You don't understand, Papa. I wish you were right, that there were nothing more to it than getting in and out of bed—nothing personal, nothing deep inside. It doesn't work out that way. All the time I'm looking and looking for something—for what I lost with him. I don't even know exactly what, but nothing else really matters."

"But that's no reason for hanging round with soldiers."

"It's all that's left, Papa."

"You ought to be ashamed talking that way."

"You can disown me if you're ashamed. I've already lost everything. Sometimes I really don't want to go on living."

"One should live right."

"I wanted to—terribly."

"Stop this silly talk now, Genia. Live decently like others and it'll all work out all right."

Again she was staring before her without answering.

"Come now Genia, come."

She didn't move. Then she suddenly looked up and said in a dull voice: "All right, I'll come home. But it will happen again, you know—again and again and again."

8

Rybak intercepted Modlibog on his way home from his job. "Excuse me for bothering you, but I wanted to ask a favor. Would you mind going with me to Ogorek and introducing me? I've never had occasion to buy anything from him and he might not even want to speak to me."

Modlibog was tired but he was too good-natured to refuse. "All right, though I don't think I'm needed. He's over at the kiosk now."

Ogorek was busy giving Mrs. Korf some instructions and hardly looked up as they approached. "If you want something, Mrs. Korf will take care of you. She's going to be here a lot from now on."

But Modlibog, introducing Rybak, told him they wanted his advice. Rybak explained how he had decided he would have to sell his villa. Rather clumsily he suggested: "I thought you might be interested in it yourself. I'd offer it to you on very favorable terms. Or maybe you know of someone else. I'd pay you the regular commission."

Ogorek shook his head impatiently. "No, no. What would I want with a house like that? I have enough problems as it is. And about finding a buyer, I'm sorry but I'm too busy. Why don't you try Miss Helena, over at the cottage. With that store gone she's got plenty of time and she's always game if it's a matter of money."

Modlibog nodded. "That's right. I took some things to her and she was very fair. We can try." They thanked Ogorek and decided to stop in to see her on their way home.

Helena ushered them into her living room and listened politely as Rybak explained his problem. But she was obviously astonished that they should come to her. "How would I know of anyone wanting to buy a big house like that?"

However, when Rybak assured her of a commission, she became

a little more interested. "Yes, of course I can ask around. What would you want for it?"

He explained about the prewar mortgage which could be paid off at a fraction of its real value. All he would ask for his share would be $2,000 in cash.

Helena looked dubious. "That's an awful lot. It's not likely anyone has that many dollars floating around."

Rybak was worried. "If it's too high, I might let it go for less. I've simply got to sell it."

In the end Helena agreed to make inquiries, though she didn't have much hope. When they left, her gaze followed them up the Lane, until they reached the villa itself. A beautiful house. Somehow she'd never noticed how beautiful it was before. Suppose she should buy it herself? She almost laughed out loud. And yet why not? She had the money, it would be a reasonable investment. And imagine Sigmunt's face when he discovered they owned the very house—all of it—where he had formerly lived in poverty in one room.

But before coming to a major decision like that, she had to be more confident of the future. Her trip over a month ago to the ruins of the city had been a frightful blow. Sigmunt would not find her the respected manager of the store as she had always dreamed. Showing him her accumulated money wouldn't be enough. He should see that she was a capable and efficient woman. If the store was gone she would find something else. The very next day she would go back to the city.

Once more she sat squeezed on one of the open cars of the dilapidated narrow gauge which finally took her as far as the East Bank district. Instinctively she headed first to her former store. After all, she was still responsible for it, and she felt concerned, too, about the Co-op money which she had not been able to turn in to this day.

The store looked more deserted than ever. It had been broken into again and now even the shelves were gone. But to her delight the old janitor of the apartment block was back and suddenly stood before her. "Some people from that co-operative were here looking it over. They asked about you."

This news excited her tremendously. She made her way across the pontoon bridge toward the same gutted skyline that had shocked her so the previous time. As she entered the first streets, however, she was aware of something new. Even though the endless

ruins were unchanged, life had returned. Everywhere there were people—clearing, repairing, selling. Improvised stands offered every sort of battered household implement. There were others selling groceries. At open counters you could buy bowls of steaming food to be eaten right there on the street.

At last she reached the vicinity of the former head office. Even from a distance she could see there was no change, the same abandoned building. But as she came closer, she noticed a card hammered into the wall: "All former Co-operative employees are requested to come to our new location . . ." and there followed the address.

Her heart pounding, she ran all the way. It was true. She was welcomed with open arms. When could she start? They were eager to get the stores going again as soon as possible.

"Yours came off lightly being over on the East Bank. We'll have a repair crew over at once and start sending supplies. Engage your former assistant, too, if she's still around. When we once get going, there'll be plenty to do."

Happily she returned to Jutrosin. Mrs. Korf was alone at the kiosk. At first she didn't know what to say. "I've just started here. Ogorek was kind enough to give me a job. There's no commuting. It's still difficult getting in and out of town." But, seeing the eagerness in Helena's face, she smiled and agreed to return to the Co-op. "But only after the first of May. I'm sure by then Ogorek's daughter will be well enough to work again."

9

"What will you gain by going to the city, Alexander? What is there to see except gutted buildings? Everything there is gone and you know that perfectly well. I'm told it's almost impossible to get around, and dangerous too, what with falling walls and people prowling. It's ridiculous at your age. The war isn't over yet. Stay quietly out here for now and be grateful."

Orlowski was insistent. "Marie, stop nagging. I can't go on remaining inactive this way month after month while fools are standing everything on its head. Something's got to be done and the first step is to re-establish contacts. I want to get through to Pruszkow. That's where my former board member Jelinski used to live. It's beyond the area of the uprising, so he's probably still there. I must have a talk with him about my plans for Masowia. It's high time to get going."

She shrugged, knowing that there was nothing she could do to dissuade him. But, drawing Kozik aside, she begged him to watch for her husband's return and when he saw him to let her know immediately.

"He hasn't been at all himself lately," she explained.

"I'll do better than that, ma'am. I'll go in with him. I'll be kind of handy and besides I can always do a bit of business on my own in town."

"You're very kind," she said almost tearfully.

Kozik doffed his cap. "I figure we all have to stick together, like it or not."

They returned on the last truck from town.

"You were right, ma'am," Kozik said when Mrs. Orlowska appeared at the door of their villa. "He shouldn't have taken such a hard trip at his age—especially to hear nothing but bad news."

But even before Kozik spoke, Mrs. Orlowska had noted with alarm her husband's pallor and, in strange contrast, the feverish gleam in his eyes. He tottered into the house almost as if he didn't know what he was doing.

"Alexander," she cried following him, in her anxiety completely forgetting to thank Kozik. But he, relieved to be rid of an unpleasant responsibility, quickly turned and left.

Orlowski stood in the hall, muttering and grumbling; occasionally a queer chuckle-like noise came from his throat.

"Alexander, what happened? Did you see Jelinski?"

Inexplicably he began to shake with laughter. "Yes, indeed, I saw him. And I discovered—I discovered—" He had to pause to catch his breath. "I discovered we haven't a thing, not a groshen." He waved his arms indicating the hall, the house in general. "Except what's here. At this moment, Kozik's a millionaire beside us."

"But your shares, Alexander—"

He suddenly sat on the hall bench. For a moment he didn't stir; his eyes were focused on the faded pattern of the wall paper. Then, catching his breath, he doubled over, his face in his hands.

"Alexander—" She hurried over to him and knelt at his feet. His shoulders began to shake. "Alexander," she said softly, "you're crying."

He shook his head brusquely and wiped his eyes. With a visible effort, he pulled himself upright. And in a moment he was again the unbending, self-contained Orlowski, chairman of the board. He walked toward his study. "Nerves," he said as she followed him,

"merely nerves. At the moment we're in a difficult situation. That I have to tell you frankly. I don't know where I can find money even for daily essentials. But it won't be long."

"Couldn't you sell some of your shares?"

He stiffened. "No. Temporarily even that could be difficult. But rest assured, Marie, everything will turn out all right. I haven't the least doubt."

"Alexander, you don't need to talk that way. I can take it . . ."

"You don't trust me?" For a moment, he looked like a tired and defeated old man. Then, as he gripped the edge of his desk with both hands, his face hardened. "When I tell you it will be all right, then it will—understand?" She nodded wearily. "Everything will be fine and this fool Jelinski will be kneeling before me begging for a job yet. We don't have capable people. We don't have men of leadership. That is the tragedy of Poland. But I have a vast fortune at my disposal and that is what will count . . ."

Again she nodded, with difficulty holding back her tears.

10

When Helena knocked on the door, Rybak's wife answered. Then Rybak appeared himself.

"There's a chance of selling the house for you, but I've got to know your bottom price first."

"I'd begun to give up hope," Rybak said. "Are you sure it's a serious buyer who would have the money on hand in dollars?"

"Yes, strictly cash."

"Excellent . . excellent . . ." He pondered. "The best I could do would be $1750—that's $250 less than the price I quoted the other day. In return, I want the right to use two rooms upstairs. On a rental basis, of course."

Helena shook her head. "That's no good. $1500 top and you must vacate entirely. Otherwise, no deal."

He tried to bargain, even came down a little, and asked for only a six-months' lease on the rooms. But in the end he gave in.

"All right then," Helena said, trying not to show her excitement, "if that's understood there's nothing to prevent us from closing the deal tomorrow. At the notary at Otwock. You have all the documents?"

He nodded. "But tell me who the buyer is?"

She started to blush. "It's—it's me. I'm going to buy it."

That night Helena wrote to Mrs. Turyn advising her that she

had to move away and suggesting Kozik as the new tenant. After all, she knew him, and who would look after the place better than he?

The next day the sale was completed as planned, with the stipulation that the money would only be handed over when the premises were vacated. A week went by, however, and still the Rybaks had found no place to go. Then an answer came from Mrs. Turyn which solved the problem all around. She wrote that she was quite happy to have the Koziks as the new tenants.

When Helena went over to tell them, they could hardly believe she was serious. It was like a dream come true. With the baby it would make everything easier for Anna, and Kozik would have a garden of his own and no one to bother him about his pigeons. And, most important of all, he would be living as a militiaman should.

"But what about you, Miss Helena?" Kozik said, after recovering from his excitement. "Are you moving to the city?"

She pointed up the Lane to the Rybak villa.

"No—that's where. It's mine now. I just bought it."

Kozik looked at her incredulously and laughed. "You're fooling!" But he could see from the expression on her face that it was so. "What do you know! Who could have imagined!" He stared at her, partly awed and partly envious, and blurted out the only explanation he could think of, "I guess it's fate that decides."

18

THE HOME-COMING

KOZIK GRIMACED, making exaggerated gestures to indicate that Mrs. Orlowska shouldn't reveal his presence. "It might make your husband nervous," he said under his breath. "We'd better talk in the garden." Seeing that she was becoming alarmed, he added quickly. "No, nothing bad's happened. Only Anna—she tells me it's better I say it alone to you, not in front of him." When Mrs. Orlowska had stepped outside and closed the door softly behind her, he continued: "Yesterday Madey told me that with the new wooden shelter ready now, there's going to be a buffet concession at the station. I had my doubts, but Anna thought you might be interested. And it might help out a little at that. We figure times are hard right now for you—" He stopped, embarrassed. He was well aware she parted with one of her personal trinkets almost every week, recently even dresses.

"Why, that's very thoughtful of both of you, Kozik. Thank you very much." She quickly brushed her hand over her eyes. "It might be a great help—even our salvation. I'm so grateful."

"That's what neighbors are for!" he said, pleased and relieved at her reaction. "But of course a buffet like that don't amount to a lot. Newspapers, cigarettes, maybe some sandwiches. Beer, of course. If you're interested, we'd better go right now before others hear about it."

"Fine. Let me get my jacket and we'll be off."

She went back into the house, telling Alexander she had to go on an errand. She would sign the contract before saying anything about it to him. That way he'd have no choice but to agree.

At the station she was shown what was involved. It didn't look

very promising. Simply a corner where she could set up a table and beside it a space for a storage cabinet. That was all. She was not put off, however—she would manage somehow. A half hour later, she was back at the house, the contract in her bag.

She waited until after supper when Modlibog was with them to tell Alexander. His reaction was even more violent than she had anticipated.

"A common market woman!" His head trembled with anger. "No—no! Never will I agree to my wife demeaning herself hawking newspapers at the station. Have you no consideration for me?" His voice broke helplessly.

Marie knew the struggle he was going through. She even knew that, in spite of what he would still say, she had won. But she could feel no satisfaction. It was like striking someone who was already down.

Modlibog tried to support her. "Excuse me, Alexander, but I must come to Marie's defense. It's a sensible idea. It won't bring in much, but probably enough for essential living costs. And she'll have something to occupy her. I hope you will come to lend her a hand. The change would do you good. I can't imagine how I could have gone on with this endless waiting if I hadn't had my job. It would be unendurable."

"Maybe you enjoy humiliating yourself. And maybe you do too, Marie, but I never, never—" Orlowski's voice rose; he was almost shouting. "The time will come when you will all see your lack of vision. My fortune can't simply disappear, and it won't. It's there, only right now I am helpless to do anything about it. But it won't be long, Marie, not long. You'll still see what I'll achieve for all of us. I'll not only amaze Poland, but all of Europe—"

"Alexander—Alexander. Calm yourself," she said, deeply distressed. His face was flushed; he raised his hands only to drop them back in his lap, gasping hoarsely. She put her arm gently around his shoulders. He was like a child, a big overgrown child, shrinking from reality into the safety of his make-believe. His toys were his shares. They were all he had left—those and his plans, his fantastic dreams of his return to a position of power and glory.

"Come, Alexander," she said softly. "Come with me to the study and show me what you worked out today."

2

It was just getting dark when Kozik came charging breathlessly up the Lane. Standing in front of the Green House, he spotted Ogorek.

"Mr. Ogorek! Great news—on the telephone—a few minutes ago—end of the war—the Germans have surrendered!"

Ogorek's reaction was disappointingly subdued. "About time." He sighed. "It seems like it's almost too late."

The sour puss, Kozik thought. He might pretend to be happy anyway. But then, poor devil, he didn't have much to shout about. "How's the missus?"

Ogorek shrugged. "About the same."

"Miss Genia?"

Ogorek glanced at him suspiciously. "She's all right."

"Fine—fine! My regards!" and, waving, Kozik hurried up the Lane to Miss Helena's grand villa. He knocked on the door, and knocked again before he heard the sound of slippers in the hall. The door opened a crack.

"End of the war, Miss Helena!"

The door opened wider. "Jesus God! Really? It's all over?"

"Sure thing. Got it over the phone. The Germans surrendered."

"Jesus God!" she said again. Even though he couldn't make out her expression in the dark, her breathless voice left no doubt about her excitement. "Thanks for letting me know, Mr. Kozik. Oh what wonderful news! Do you think—do you think everyone will be coming back now?"

"Sure they will—soon now!" He touched his cap. "But I have to hurry and tell 'em next door."

At the Orlowskis', again it was some time before anyone responded. They had apparently gone to bed. And why not? Why would they want to stretch out the day when they had nothing to do except wait and worry. There was no electricity yet either. But at last there were voices. It was Modlibog who opened the door, holding a candle. Behind him were both Orlowskis in their dressing gowns.

Kozik boomed out the news. "The war's over!"

Modlibog almost dropped the candle. Then grabbing Kozik's hand he cried, "Come in—come in! Alexander! Marie! We must drink to victory. Somewhere there must be a bottle of wine."

Tears of joy ran down Mrs. Orlowska's face. "The children! Do

you realize? Now they'll be able to come back. They can return—"

At first Orlowski showed no reaction, but remained standing just where he was. Then slowly his face began to twist. "Marie, did you hear? The war's over and we're finished, dead. Great moment, isn't it?" He stared about him a moment, and then started laughing—chokingly, hideously—his face violently flushed. Mrs. Orlowska took his arm. "Come, Alexander, come back to bed now."

Kozik fingered his cap uneasily. There was something he couldn't understand here. He nodded good night and unobtrusively slipped out of the front door, closing it silently behind him. Slowly he headed back down the Lane. He had planned to make another stop upstairs at the Green House, but suddenly all the fun was gone.

3

It was just getting light; the sun had not yet broken over the rim of the forest. A youthful rather heavy-set figure—a former soldier judging from the ill-fitting uniform—was making his way up the Lane. He passed the Green House. At the Rybak villa he hesitated at the gate, then changing his mind, went on to the second house. He looked up at it curiously, observed the patched side wall with its boarded-over windows. He followed the path to the door and tried it. It was locked. He had to knock several times. At last Mrs. Orlowska came to open it. She stared in disbelief, then pulled the door open wide. "Roman—Roman, my son," she cried and threw her arms around him, breaking into tears.

For a moment, he held her with tender compassion. Then he drew her in. "You'll catch cold here, Mother."

Orlowski appeared in the hall, his dressing gown over his pajamas. He stumbled toward his son, mumbling: "It's you, Roman. I thought I'd never see any of you again."

Roman was so shocked by the change in his father—his almost white hair, the deep lines in his face, the vagueness in his eyes, the uncertainty of his movements—that he very nearly flinched.

The three of them went into the inner hall. Mrs. Orlowska took her husband's arm and led him to one of the armchairs. "Sit here, Alexander." Then they began plying him with questions: Where was Irena? Had he heard anything about Wladek?

Roman hesitated. He glanced at his mother, then fixed his eyes on his father. "About Wladek, nothing definite. But I was in the West. Irena survived the uprising. She was very active in it and

became a lieutenant— She fought like a man, and very courageously. At the capitulation she was shipped to Germany to prison camp like the rest of us. But she didn't want to come back. I think she's in Paris."

"In Paris?"

"Yes. I guess you couldn't know. She's married again. During the uprising."

"Married?"

"Yes, Father—to Karol. You know, the son of Ogorek. He was in my platoon. I must say he—"

Orlowski shook his head as if he didn't understand. "Karol Ogorek—but he's nothing. A man like that—what was she thinking of?"

Roman shrugged. "She could have done a lot worse. All I know is that she and her husband have decided not to return to Poland. I tried to persuade her to change her mind, but she wouldn't listen."

Orlowski fell silent, staring at the floor before him. There was the sound of steps on the stairs. It was Modlibog dressed to go out. Usually he was the first one up, and was gone to his job before the Orlowskis were out of bed. He stopped when he saw Roman and glanced around the hall as if looking for someone. Then slowly he continued down the stairs, his face expressing a mixture of excitement and alarm. As he approached, he stretched out both hands: "I had no idea! What a surprise. Well—and I see you're in the best of health and in an American uniform too. What could be better! Did you join their troops?"

"No, no. They were issued to us when we were released."

"Anyway—" Again Modlibog's eyes shifted uneasily around the hall. "Anyway I am very happy you returned all in one piece." He avoided Roman's eyes except for short passing glances. "And —and, what about Irena?"

Roman repeated the news about her, then paused and added slowly: "I married too at the same time. Eva." He lowered his head.

"You are married?" Orlowski roused himself. "But where is she? I hope you'll live here. There is plenty of room."

"No, Father, that isn't possible. She's dead. It happened five days after our marriage. She was in our platoon too and . . ." He broke off.

Orlowski clutched his throat. He started to speak and then stopped abruptly.

Modlibog came over and put his hand on Roman's shoulder.

"I'm sorry, Roman, terribly sorry." He shivered. "You were with Witold, weren't you?" Then as if he had forgotten he had asked a question at all, he turned to Orlowski. "Alexander, what is the time?" As he asked he began fumbling with something in his pocket.

"Witold—" Roman hesitated a moment. "I'm afraid that's bad news too. The same shell killed them both—him and Eva. Luckily in his case he was dead instantly. Eva lingered on several days." Actually it had been the other way around, but he thought it would be better for Modlibog like this.

Modlibog nodded slowly. "I knew it, really. So Witold is no longer alive—no longer alive," he said almost inaudibly, his lips trembling, his face very pale. Mrs. Orlowska started toward him, but he waved her off. "Excuse me, but I have to go to my job now. That's very important, and it's getting late." He turned and closed the door softly behind him.

4

At last the train was slowing down for Jutrosin. Malinka pressed his face against the window. At first he could see only the forest, then the field where the sandy path emerged from the shadow of the trees. And suddenly there they were—the four houses and the Lane running up between them, exactly as he had imagined, exactly as if it had only been yesterday. Soon he would be walking proudly up it. They would come out, stare for a moment at his dust-covered clothes—above all at his blue striped prisoner's jacket—then gather around him with awe and give him a hero's welcome. In every town ever since their release their band of survivors had been the center of interest and solicitude, showered with cigarettes and food, questioned about their ordeal, and embraced by their admiring countrymen. But on this occasion he would break through, say he was in a hurry, and as he ran up the familiar path, the cottage door would open and she would rush out to him and all the others would cheer . . .

He made his way to the end of the carriage. His fellow passengers waved good-by and wished him all the best. An elderly woman pressed a can of sardines into his hand. The platform was a little worse for wear; a wooden shed took the place of the trim shelter of former days, but the entrance was bedecked with flags and decorations. He felt as if it were especially for him, though it was obviously to celebrate the resumption of limited service

along the line. He had been told about that. He opened his small bundle and added the sardine can to an odd assortment of gifts collected during the journey of the past few days. Then he swung it over his shoulder and headed along the platform to the exit.

The kiosk was there still, still open. Ogorek himself was behind the counter.

"Why Mr. Malinka . . . As I love God, am I happy to see you alive and in good health!" He came out of the kiosk and grabbed his hand. It even seemed to Malinka as if tears stood in Ogorek's eyes. He felt quite moved.

"And it's good to see you. How are things?"

"Not so good. Not so good. But it's mighty lucky, you returning to us. Tell me . . ." He began to ask the usual questions—was it true he had been at Auschwitz? When had he been released? How had he managed to survive? Already other people from the train were gravitating toward the kiosk, attracted by the tell-tale jacket.

"We'll have a chance to talk later. I'll stop by at the kiosk. Now I want to hurry on to the Lane." He nodded all round and walked off briskly, determined not to be waylaid by anyone else.

The nearer he came to the familiar corner, the more nervous and uncertain he became. Up to a few minutes before, he had been captivated by the images he had visualized hundreds of times, even during the blackest hours. They had a clockwork precision; not even the smallest detail ever varied. But now he began to wonder, to worry. Why was he so sure of her? She might not even be living here any more. But then she had to be. She wouldn't let him down.

The Lane. He almost expected to see the deep ruts of the German truck still in the sand. It all seemed so unchanged, so exactly as he had remembered it. There was the door of the hated Green House. And further up on the same side, the forbidding walls of the villa, the site of so much misery. He felt a twinge of conscience —Matylda. But he pushed it all aside as he turned and found himself facing the cottage. His home. He noticed different curtains in the windows. He felt a little uneasy. The door stood open. It was all right. She must be home.

He walked boldly into the hall but then, disconcerted, he stopped short. There were unfamiliar things on the rack: a man's coat, a cap. He pushed open the living room door. He recognized the furniture—Mrs. Turyn's—but then he saw a baby carriage. At that moment the kitchen door opened. Anna Kozik!

"Mother of God! Mr. Malinka!"

"Yes, it's me. But who lives here now?"

"We do. What's the matter? You look so strange. Sit down and rest. You look awful tired. No wonder, after what you been through. You've got to wait anyway because she's not home yet."

"Who d'you mean?"

"Her . . . Helena. I thought that's what you wanted to know."

"Yes, yes. But where is she?"

"You just rest quiet here. You can wash. I'll fix something to eat. You lie down a little, and then it'll be time. But, the way you look, it must have been real bad. But the real luck is being alive, isn't that so?"

"No, I'm not hungry at the moment. You say she moved out. Where to?"

"Where Mr. Modlibog used to live. You know, the count. Guess you weren't here long after he came. Anyway, that's where she lives—in the villa up there where you used to have rooms with your wife."

"But why there?"

"She bought it. It belongs to her."

"She bought what?"

"The villa."

"But I mean, Miss Helena. You know who I mean?" He blushed slightly.

"Sure, her. I see you don't believe me, but it's true."

"She bought it?" He was still dumfounded, but tremendously reassured too. Anna's tone was filled with something close to awe. So Helena hadn't disappointed him.

"Yes, in May, over a month ago. Now she lives there and, imagine, the former owner—that big-shot government man before the war—well, he's moved in upstairs in the Green House. Our two rooms. You won't believe your eyes when you see how Helena lives."

"But where did she get all the money to buy it?"

"That I couldn't say, but she's got a good head. Always buying and selling. With Ogorek too. She learned at that store, I guess. Trades in gold and jewelry, too. Even the Orlowskis went to her."

"What store are you talking about?"

"In town, where you worked. I don't know exactly. My husband can tell you."

"She isn't home now?"

"No, I told you. She's at the store. She's manager there and Mrs. Korf works for her. Imagine, the wife of a major. Oh, I guess you don't know her."

"No, who is she?"

"A widow—no that's not right either. Her husband's in prison somewhere in Germany. A nice woman. Had two daughters, but one of them got killed. Yes, Helena will be back in the evening. Maybe you can sleep a little now. I'll fix your bed and brush off your clothes a little. Can't go there looking that way."

He agreed. He felt very tired and had hardly gotten a moment's sleep the past few nights. But more than that, he wanted to be alone. Nothing bad had happened. In fact, everything he heard was very impressive. And yet inexplicably he felt let down. The images no longer fitted. It would be a different Helena, a different place.

"Yes, I'd like to take a nap. But be sure to wake me when she gets back."

5

"Mr. Malinka, Mr. Malinka. Get up! She's home."

He jumped from the bed, confused at first about where he was.

"Oh, Kozik," he exclaimed relieved, and dropped back on the bed still trying to get his bearings.

"Yes, me . . ." Kozik was laughing. "You didn't recognize me. Thought I was goin' to eat you up? No sir! We're all mighty pleased to see you back. Thank God you're well and in one piece —that's what counts. But I'll grab a bite now and be on my way again. I'll see you real soon."

Malinka stretched himself and quickly put on his clothes, laid neatly on the chair by Anna while he was asleep. He was so excited his hands were trembling—so she was over there now. Tonight she would be lying in his arms.

When he came out, Kozik was standing in the kitchen door munching a chunk of bread and cheese and talking to Anna. He stared at Malinka amused. "Hey, what kind of crazy outfit is that?"

"I kept the jacket especially," Malinka answered with pride. But not waiting to be drawn into conversation, he picked up his bundle. "Thanks a lot for letting me rest here and getting the dust off my clothes. I'll see you tomorrow." As he turned and

hurried out, he suddenly remembered the last time he had left this house—kicked, shoved, beaten. It had seemed the end of everything. And now a whole new life lay ahead.

He approached the villa warily. It was all so familiar—the walk, the steps, the heavy oak door. Again he felt the pull of the past. Hadn't it always been so? Hadn't he always approached this door with despair and dread? Why had Helena chosen this house with its bitter memories—of Matylda, of Genia? What was he doing here on the Lane anyway? Why had he returned?

He pushed down the handle. The door was locked. He knocked and his excitement began to mount. He heard footsteps.

"Who is it?"

"It's me—Malinka."

The door flew open. For a moment they stood confronting one another, too moved to speak.

"Helena . . ." he said quietly at last, breaking the spell. She caught his arms and embraced him. As they kissed, he felt her tears on his face. He stroked her hair. "Helena . . ."

Clinging to his arm, she led him into the hall. She took his bundle and set it down in the corner. Turning around and looking at him she laughed, "But what an outfit, Sigmunt. Come upstairs and take off these dirty rags." She shivered as she fingered the prison jacket. "I kept all your things, everything you left. And I got you two new suits—shoes. It's all there—everything you need." Her voice was filled with pride and anticipation.

Now the pent-up words came in a torrent. "The very next day after they took you off I went to the German post at Otwock. They said you would go to concentration camp until the war was over, and then you'd be back. And that's what happened and I knew it would. It couldn't be different! And then there was the postcard—remember? That made me sure and I kept it under my pillow all the time. Even last night. And now I've got you." Again she embraced him. Then she pulled back and made a sweeping motion with her hand: "And, Sigmunt, all this is yours. The house and everything. I bought it all only for you. Oh, I'm so happy, Sigmunt." She spoke with such excitement he could hardly follow her.

She took his hand and pulled him along. "Come now. I'll show you everything. This is the dining room—" She suddenly stopped, her face drooping with disappointment. "But, of course, you lived here, so you know all these rooms."

"Not really. Not these rooms. They were locked up."

"Then come. This is your study. See the desk? The biggest I could find." She winked, "And I got it for a song! This room here is empty, but we can always get something if you want—furniture's dirt cheap now. The Rybaks used it and I let 'em take everything when they moved. But come upstairs."

He followed her in a daze. Could this be real? Could this be the same house? Here under the cupboard he'd hidden those underground pamphlets. He was tempted to kneel down and feel for them. They would be something tangible, concrete evidence that he was not dreaming. But Helena was pulling him up the stairs. "Look, Sigmunt—the runner. I got it a few days ago, wasn't that lucky! Do you like it?" But before he had time to answer she babbled on: "The walls downstairs should be painted. I'll get onto that right away. Our bedroom's up here—picked the nicest one. It even has a fireplace." She opened a door and stood beaming. "Here we are."

He stared in disbelief at the two elegant beds, the dressing table, the clothes cupboards with their full-length mirrors, the bedside rugs. Yes, and the fireplace—he hadn't known there was one up here. And then he realized that it must be new. That was what had fooled him at first, what had kept him from recognizing the room he had once shared with Matylda. Right on this spot he had stood cursing her before slamming the door on her forever.

He shook himself. "Come, show me the rest."

Helena was disappointed. Didn't he have anything more to say? Wouldn't he at least look in the cupboards? Shaking his head, he pulled back into the landing. But as they continued the tour she soon regained her happiness and pride.

Malinka, however, remained silent. The fact was he was a little envious. In all those years and with all his education he had only managed to eke out a bare subsistence. How could someone with her limitations achieve so much? Finally he could no longer restrain his curiosity. "It's all very nice, Helena. But tell me how did you do it? It's quite unbelievable."

Helena was aware of his suspicious tone, his critical glance. "Mostly luck, I guess," she said. Then she added defensively: "But every bit of it was earned honestly and decently. The underground helped. Mr. Orlowski can tell you that."

"What—the Director?"

"No, his son, Roman. Later, I'll explain how it all happened.

But as I love God, Sigmunt, I came by it all honestly. I didn't steal one zloty." She looked straight into his eyes and saw he was reassured. But he was obviously very tired. Why hadn't she thought of that? "You must be hungry and worn out, and here I am dragging you around the whole place. I should have given you something to eat first. But I was so excited for you to see it all." Her eyes shone and again she embraced him. But once more she was disappointed by his listless response. "Sigmunt, you look as if it didn't interest you. You do feel happy, don't you, about having this house?"

"This house is yours," he said almost severely. But then seeing her hurt and startled expression he added, "Of course, I'm pleased. But it's all so sudden, so different. Who could have imagined?" With an effort, he smiled. "Yes, I'm very pleased."

6

When he awoke in the morning, Helena was already dressed. "Good morning, Sigmunt. You slept like a log. Look at the sun outside. A lovely morning especially for you and me. Do you want to get up? Or have your breakfast in bed? It would do you good to rest all day."

"No . . . I feel fine, I'd rather get up."

"All right—wonderful. I'll get breakfast ready."

He went to the bathroom. Helena had thought of everything: on a little table lay a razor, a brush, shaving cream, even toilet water. It was all there without her even having known he would be arriving. In fact there was every reason for her to doubt that she would ever see him alive again, that he would even return to her. Tears came to his eyes. Had he ever known such faith and devotion?

He selected a shirt and tie to match. All his life he had been forced to make do with cheap shirts, worn ill-fitting suits and patched shoes. Always he had had to be ashamed of his appearance. Now all this had completely and unexpectedly changed.

Again Helena looked in the door. "How handsome you look!" she said admiringly. "Breakfast is ready—but not downstairs. Out on the terrace here." And she added wistfully: "I've never eaten on a terrace—have you?" Then she hurried off again.

When he came out, he was dazzled by the brilliant light: the whole world bathed in sun, the freshness of June, the pond ob-

scured in a lush tangle of green, the uncut meadow full of daisies. There was a round metal table set for two with a flowered tablecloth. Helena appeared, bringing a tray with coffee, cream, and sugar.

"Sit down, Sigmunt," she said gaily. "Aren't we something!" She was wearing a light blue dress, and over it an embroidered apron. The wind blew her hair. He gazed at her with delight. How young she was, how full of charm! She poured the coffee. "Go ahead —eat."

He looked at the spread before him—jam, various kinds of cheese, rolls, butter, eggs. "I see that in spite of war, things weren't half bad back home," he said ruefully.

"Well, yes and no. You have to know the angles. I bought most of this stuff long ago. They're all from UNRRA cans. Go ahead now. The eggs will get cold."

He started buttering a roll and began eating the eggs. She filled up his coffee cup again, brushing slightly against him. He laid down his spoon and put his arm around her. She leant down and kissed his forehead. A gust of wind gently flapped the tablecloth. Suddenly it all seemed somehow familiar, as if he had sat here before— And then he remembered lying awake on the sofa there in the room, trying not to hear Matylda's loud breathing. He had imagined the same food, the same sun and clear sky. The tablecloth had fluttered, too, as she had come over to serve him, had leant down, the dimples deeper than ever . . . He jumped confused. It was the same but different. A different face—Genia's. If she were with him now, then maybe his happiness would be full to the brim . . .

A moment later, he asked casually, "How are the Ogoreks?"

"He's not quite so cocky, I hear. His wife's in bad shape. Never gets out of bed."

"What about his daughter?"

Her eyebrows rose. "Nothing good has happened to her—or is likely to. She likes her liquor too much they tell me."

"Genia!"

He flushed, but if Helena noticed his agitation she gave no indication of it.

"So Kozik says." She spoke with her mouth full, licking a bit of egg off her lip with her tongue. "I guess if the truth were told, she's pretty much of a tramp. Spreads her legs for every soldier who gives her the eye."

Sigmunt could hardly believe his ears. Talk about the pot calling the kettle black!

She dunked a piece of roll in her coffee, sopping it up noisily. He watched her with distaste.

"Do you have to do that?" he asked quietly.

Helena looked up in astonishment. "What?"

He gestured helplessly. After all she had done for him, how could he complain about her table manners? When Helena raised her napkin to her mouth and blinked away the tears that sprang to her eyes, he reached across the table and patted her arm.

"Nothing—forgive me. I'm still a little jittery."

"Of course," she said, quickly appeased, "of course you are, darling. Why shouldn't you be?"

7

For two weeks Malinka barely left the house. In the morning he slept late, and in the afternoon while Helena was still at work he wandered about the house, occasionally stepping out into the garden.

The endless days and weeks and months in the concentration camp had caught up with him. He couldn't bear to face people, to be bothered with their prying questions, to pretend to be courteous and polite. The truth was he was exhausted—mentally, spiritually, and physically.

But, more specifically, he couldn't bear to face the people on the Lane. When Kozik came to call he refused to see him. Malinka was very conscious that they must all be aware that he was living on Helena—that it was her house, her money that bought his fine clothes and spread their table with such wonderful delicacies. And though he frequently told himself he didn't care what any of them thought, or said—after what he had been through why should he?—Malinka was not morally strong enough to face them down. In his heart he knew that one stifled snicker behind his back would be enough to demoralize him completely.

As far as his relations with Helena were concerned, they were at best ambivalent. Sexually, he enjoyed her with fierce and unbridled lust. In this respect his physical capacities were insatiable —as was Helena's ingenuity in satisfying them. But still when, spent and weary, he would stumble back to his own bed, his heart was seldom filled with love and contentment. Instead, through his mind would run the nasty thought that Helena had been well

schooled. No decent woman would abandon herself to such shameless passion.

Yet he was grateful to her—deeply and sincerely grateful—for all of the luxuries she had brought to his starved life. Never before had he been catered to with such selfless affection. And he reproached himself when her coarseness sometimes offended him: her habit of dunking and the noisy sucking sounds she made when she ate, the way she sneered at the Orlowskis because now she had the money and they did not, her attitude about Genia, her indifference to his need for privacy (in this respect she was even worse than Matylda!), and finally her coarse and grating voice.

However, Malinka might have drifted indecisively for months longer if Helena hadn't come home one night from the Co-op with a large and bulky package. A little amused, he watched her excited hands tear it open. Out of the rough gray paper billowed yards and yards of white tulle, more yards of white satin.

"What do you think of that," she said triumphantly. "And all for two packages of cigarettes and three cans of Spam."

He didn't understand. "What on earth?"

She smoothed the material lovingly. "That's going to be my wedding dress, that's what on earth."

Malinka stared at her incredulously. "Surely you don't think—"

"Think what?" she said quickly.

"But Helena, I am married. I mean, we don't know."

Helena shrugged. "She's dead—got to be."

"But we don't know for sure."

"And who cares?"

"But—"

The flash of her eyes cut him short. "I've waited a long time, Sigmunt, and I'm not going to wait much longer. If she isn't dead you can get a divorce. That's not so hard these days."

He stared at her, almost repelled. "Even if Matylda is dead," he said at last, "do you imagine you, of all people, can waltz down the aisle in—" He pointed. "—in that?"

Helena hugged the material to her chest; she tilted her head a little. "Could it be that you don't want to marry me, Sigmunt?"

"Don't be foolish—" He turned away irritably. "Anyway, that has nothing to do with it. Can't you see?" He turned back, but she had already left the room.

That night, Malinka came to a decision. Helena had mentioned that the main office of the Co-op had announced an expansion pro-

gram. It might be well to investigate. He had been dependent upon Helena long enough.

When he appeared at the breakfast table, Helena was her usual cheerful self. Curiously enough, he resented this more than he would have if she had been morose and sullen. Her attitude seemed to imply that it was he who had been unreasonable. Obviously, the woman had no sense of propriety and never would have.

The new offices of the Co-op were on the second floor of a building which had miraculously remained standing though most of those around it had been leveled during the siege. As he went up the stairs, he passed a figure who seemed vaguely familiar. A second later he was sure. The man was his old friend Jan Surak, whom he hadn't seen since he had vanished into the underground at the very beginning of the war.

Malinka caught his arm. "Jan! You are Jan Surak, aren't you?"

"Sigmunt Malinka! For God's sake, of all people." He threw his arm around his shoulders affectionately. "Come on up."

And, turning around, he led Malinka up to an impressively furnished office. He urged him to sit down in the most comfortable chair and gave him a cigar. "Now, tell me all about yourself."

At first Malinka, rather diffidently, said there wasn't much to tell, but Jan kept urging him and before long he was pouring out the whole story of his life since they had last met, ending up with how the Germans had dragged him off for no reason at all and about the hell hole they called Auschwitz. Though he didn't specifically say so, he intimated that Matylda, whom Jan had known casually, had died.

"Now, again you need a job, hey?" Surak rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Well, you've come to the right man. I've climbed a long way. Director Surak, no less. It's my show now."

Malinka was dumbfounded. Surak, the one-time file clerk at the head office! But all he said was: "You always manage to come out on top, Jan."

"It takes a bit of planning," Jan said drily. Then, all business once again, he said: "To get you a store to manage is no problem—you can almost have your pick." He frowned. "But now's the time to set your sights a little higher, my boy. Do you need a place to live?"

"What?" Frantically Malinka tried to decide whether or not to tell him about Helena. As a director of the Co-op, wouldn't Jan know there was a Mrs. Malinka in charge of one of their stores?

But there was no reason for Jan to be familiar with every employee's name—and if he was, there was no reason why there shouldn't be another Malinka. "No—as a matter of fact, I—well, I have a place out in Jutrosin, quite a nice place—" Quickly, he improvised. "It belonged to relatives—my mother's family—they left it to me. Fortunately, friends took care of it while I was in Auschwitz. So you see—" He smiled weakly. "A fine house, but no job."

"I see, I see. Sounds very promising." Surak nodded. "Now, I'll tell you what I want you to do. Sit down at my desk here and write out a detailed statement about yourself. Everything—especially about Auschwitz. And your brush with the law on May Day back in '33 or '34, put that down too. How you were taken to jail and given a sentence."

Malinka looked at him incredulously. "But that's hardly a recommendation. I was fired because of it."

"You do what I tell you. Put down how you were blacklisted for a time, too. How they wouldn't give you a job here because of the May Day business. Get it?" Malinka nodded. "The pitch is that you were fighting for the workers—their rights. Make it sound good." He glanced at his wrist watch. "I've got to run. I'm late now. But when you've finished your resumé, give it to my secretary—I'll tell her about you—and then, let's see, today's Tuesday, come back on Thursday and we'll see what we'll see." He slapped Malinka's back genially. "Jan never forgets an old buddy, you can depend on it." And then he bounded out of the office, shouting an explanation to his secretary about Malinka as he went.

8

Mrs. Korf arrived at the store in tears. She was so upset Helena couldn't get a word out of her. She simply sat before the cash register, sobbing quietly, taking the customers' money, giving them their proper change, but making no effort to hide her agitation. But these were cruel and heartbreaking times in Warsaw; people were accustomed to women's tears. They glanced at her with sympathy. Occasionally another woman would press her arm, but they made no effort to intrude upon the cause of her grief; most of them had more than enough trouble of their own.

It wasn't until later in the morning, when the store was empty, that Mrs. Korf, unable to contain herself any longer, at last turned to Helena. "I got a letter yesterday—from him, from my

husband—" She dropped her face in her hands. "He's not coming back."

Helena gasped. "The dirty bum!" But then she ran over to the older woman and put her arms about her shoulders. "Oh, but he couldn't mean it—after all the time you've waited, after you lost your lovely girl. No, no, I'm sure. It's probably difficult for him right now, but—"

Mrs. Korf dried her eyes. Her voice still trembled, but it was full of bitter acceptance. "He said plain enough that he wasn't coming back. He gave a lot of reasons but, the fact is, he knows there is no future here for people like us." Mrs. Korf looked at her almost hostilely. "Poland belongs to people like you—the old traditions are gone, gone forever." Abruptly, she began to cry again. "Oh, if I was young and attractive—as you are—he might come back—"

Helena leaned against the shelves, her arms folded across her chest. She was thinking of Sigmunt. He had come back to her, and yet somehow it wasn't as perfect or as wonderful as she had always imagined it would be. He wasn't the same Sigmunt she had sheltered up in her room in the Green House and with whom she had moved across the Lane. The nights were best, when they lay in each others' arms, but at other times he had become increasingly critical, distant, evasive. Occasionally she caught a look in his eye that was coldly contemptuous.

"Being young and attractive isn't everything," she said quietly.

"The other things you can learn," Mrs. Korf said tearfully.

"What other things?" Helena asked quickly.

But Mrs. Korf was lost in her misery. "For five years I waited—my whole life was built on the day he'd come back. And then Eva . . ." She broke down completely, choking, crying wildly.

Finally Helena persuaded her to lie down on the cot in the store room, and there, after she had sipped a small glass of vodka, she fell into an exhausted sleep.

That evening Helena was so concerned about Mrs. Korf, when she returned home, she could think of nothing else.

"Aren't you at all interested in how I made out?" Malinka finally asked impatiently.

"Of course," she said, "I'm sorry. It's just that—no, you tell me first."

Malinka needed no further encouragement to describe his unexpected encounter with his old friend, Jan Surak, and how he had

hinted at all kinds of wonderful possibilities for Malinka's future with the Co-op.

"Naturally! You're just the kind of man they need," Helena said warmly.

Malinka paced about the room excitedly—throwing out for her consideration all of the various jobs Jan might have in mind for him. It wasn't necessary for her to respond, other than to nod or smile. But in the face of his high spirits, she found herself growing more and more depressed. It was plain to her that he no longer needed her and, if he didn't need her, could she count on his love?

Only when his elation had somewhat subsided, did she tell him about Mrs. Korf. He was genuinely affected.

"That's pretty rough for a lady like her."

"Yes." Helena paused. "But it would be for anybody."

He smiled crookedly. "Come now, even you feel particularly sorry for her. The fact is, women like that have no resilience—as you would have. All of her life she's been pampered and protected, now she has nothing to fall back on—no resources."

"Whereas I could always go back to walking the streets, is that it?"

His face reddened with anger. "That's not what I said."

9

On Thursday morning as Malinka was about to leave the house to keep his appointment with Surak, a battered car, once grand no doubt, drove up the Lane and stopped in front of the villa. A man with an incongruously officious cap stepped out.

"Are you Mr. Malinka?"

Uneasily, Malinka said that he was.

"I was told to pick you up and bring you into town. I'm the chauffeur from the Co-operative."

He handed Malinka a letter. It was from Surak, who explained that he was anxious to see him as early as possible and was therefore sending a driver and car to bring him into town.

The chauffeur held the door open. Malinka stumbled into the back seat, feeling completely inadequate. But he was somewhat disappointed that there was no one on the Lane to see him drive away in such splendor.

As soon as he arrived, he was ushered into Surak's office.

"Sigmunt! The driver caught you before you left, I see. Won-

derful. Sit down, sit down." Again Jan gave him a cigar, lighting it with a flourish. "How do you like this office? It's a good place to work, believe me. And that's what you're going to do. Your credentials were fine—" He winked. "May Day—the workers—Auschwitz. My boy, the magic formula. In short, you're in." He bowed mockingly. "Mr. Director."

Malinka's head was spinning, as much from the rich cigar so early in the morning as from the heady words Surak was booming at him. "You're kidding," he said.

"Not at all, not at all. Take it in your stride, my boy, that's the way of it these days. They were in a spot. I told them last week I was leaving. I've a rather juicy offer from one of the new government agencies. And when I came up with you as a candidate for my job—one of the few old timers—" again he winked "—who had suffered so for the cause of justice and freedom, they couldn't agree to hire you fast enough."

"But, Jan," Malinka whispered, "I don't know enough. I haven't had the experience."

"Nuts. There are capable staff people here who will do the actual work. That is, until you catch on. Now, let's get on with it. I want to clear out of here by the middle of next week so that only gives me a few days to show you the ropes."

He stalked to the door and bellowed for his secretary.

The rest of the day passed in a whirl. Late in the evening Malinka was driven home in the battered car. Before leaving him at the villa, the chauffeur arranged to pick him up the following morning at eight-thirty sharp.

Helena, who had been waiting nervously, could hardly believe her eyes when she saw him step out of the magnificent car. Malinka was so tired he was barely rational, but as best he could, in a slurred voice, he told her of the incredible events of the day.

"And now," she said, "you're Director Malinka." If he had been less exhausted, he might have been aware that her voice was more sad than pleased.

For the next week, they hardly saw one another. There was far more for Malinka to learn about the job than Surak had rather off-handedly intimated. And he was an exacting task-master. Each morning the "limousine" picked Malinka up at eight-thirty; often it was midnight before the driver again turned into the Lane to

leave him off at the villa. Because Surak had so little time, they worked all day Saturday, all day Sunday. Helena always waited up for him. The first few days she kept a warm dinner ready for him, but she stopped this when Malinka impatiently explained that of course he ate in town. Surak always had a splendid dinner brought in for them, including champagne. Resentfully, Helena felt more and more cut off though, in all fairness, Malinka was not deliberately surly and uncommunicative. He was simply too keyed up and preoccupied to be aware that she felt neglected.

But finally the week passed and on Wednesday morning Malinka entered his office for the first time alone without Surak to hector and prod him. The relief was so tremendous that he decided to do nothing for the entire day but collect his thoughts and study the Co-op work sheets, programs, and records and try to absorb them in his own way. He was grateful to Surak for the opportunity, for his advice, for his coaching, but now he was the Director and he was really going to be the Director.

He gave his secretary strict instructions that he was not to be disturbed. He worked productively all morning. At lunch time he decided to get a little fresh air. Almost without conscious plan he found himself wandering in the direction of the Old Town, where there was an address that kept on haunting him. He had to know. The chaos of rubble increased till he could hardly recognize where he was. Finally, however, he spotted the place he was looking for. Merely a few remnants of walls. A huge bomb crater in what had been the street. Two shattered tree trunks—that's where the garden had been. He looked around for telltale scribbled notices. There were none. Only some improvised crosses—the graves of some soldiers, judging from a shattered helmet hanging from one, a discolored military cap from another. In fact, there were a lot of crosses here among the scattering of broken beams and bits of furniture and rusty household utensils.

So all the inhabitants were gone and none had returned to pin up news about themselves. He shivered and hesitated. What about the crosses? He decided to inspect them closely. Most of them, in fact, had makeshift identifications on them, names scribbled on bits of cardboard or just scratched on the wood itself. Strangers, unknown.

Suddenly he jumped. "*Janina Katowska 49 years old*"—Matylda's sister. The thought could be held back no longer. Matylda

—might she be here too beneath the rubble? In dread, he moved from cross to cross and then stopped abruptly—yes. "*Matylda Malinka*"—nothing more. She. He stood staring, shocked. Could it really be? A moment of undisguised relief—no scenes, no divorce proceedings. Then shame—how could he, here at her grave? A wave of sorrow came over him and tears ran down his face as he knelt before the grave. All this was his doing. He was the cause of this pitiful end. He had been inconsiderate, cruel, merciless.

But as various recollections from the past came back to him, he even began to feel anger. Had it all been his fault? The more he thought, the more he felt confused, torn between self-justification and shame. He got up and brushed off his clothes and stumbled back to the street as if to escape from any answer. Driven on by a kind of fear, he almost began to run. Only back in the quiet of his office did he regain his calm. Wasn't he completely free now? That's what he had dreamt about, wasn't it?

He had hardly returned when a messenger arrived with a letter from Surak, which submerged his previous preoccupation in a whole new crisis. The letter read: "I think it is essential for your future here to throw a party at which the Co-op board members and some of your top colleagues could meet you. I visualize it as a small evening party at which the wives could also become socially acquainted. In contrast to almost everyone else around, living in makeshift space, you have the good fortune out in the suburbs of living in style in a villa of your own. It will make a terrific impression and your wife can get the necessary food supplies through the Co-op itself. And, of course, don't forget to include your old friend Surak."

Malinka dropped the letter on the desk before him. Thus easily all his hopes could be shattered. My God, what a farce it would be to expect Helena to play the gracious hostess! All kinds of wild schemes flashed desperately through his mind—he could send Helena away for the night, or persuade her to stay upstairs and tell his guests she was ill. But then who would supervise the meal? (That Helena could do; she was certainly an excellent cook.) Maybe he could convince her to pretend to be the maid.

Wiping the nervous perspiration from his forehead, he rejected each of these ideas as quickly as they occurred to him.

He could just move out and tell them his house burned down. And then where would he go—to some stinking little room? Even the job was hardly worth that. But how could he ever introduce

Helena as his wife. He winced; he could hear the men snicker, see the women disdainfully smirk.

Though it was barely four o'clock, he was far too upset to remain in the office. Brusquely he told the chauffeur he wouldn't be needing him that evening. For a while he walked aimlessly around town and, finally exhausted, decided to take an early train back.

By the time he reached the Lane, he had a splitting headache. More than once he was sure he had made a decision, but actually he was no nearer a solution to his problem than when he started. But his old fatalism had begun to paralyze his will. Nothing in his life had ever worked out for him, and nothing would. He might as well give up, crawl behind Helena's skirts and hide there for the rest of his life. One thing was sure, he thought savagely, she wouldn't mind that a bit.

He was so preoccupied he was halfway up the walk to the villa before he became aware of Mrs. Orlowska and her son, Roman, hurrying across the lawn that separated the two houses.

"Mr. Malinka—Mr. Malinka," Mrs. Orlowska called, a bit breathlessly. "Could we have a word with you?" She glanced apprehensively at her scowling son. "I've barely met you, but I do believe you and Roman—" Her voice faded uncertainly.

Roman was glaring at him defiantly, as if he expected Malinka to deny even knowing him. Impulsively Malinka held out his hand. "Of course. How are you, Orlowski." He remembered all too well how humiliated he had felt imposing himself on Turyn. And, after all, Roman was a resistance hero.

The young man was visibly relieved, though he only relaxed slightly. "Good to see you, Malinka," he said shortly as they shook hands.

Then turning to Mrs. Orlowska, Malinka bowed formally and raised her hand to his lips. "Honored to make your acquaintance, Madame."

Calculating quickly, he decided that Helena would not yet be home. He gestured grandly. "Please come in."

He threw the door open with a flourish, but as he was about to step aside to allow them to enter first, to his horror he saw Helena on her hands and knees scrubbing the hall floor. She had wrapped her skirt about her waist, her stockings were rolled to her knees, her pink bloomers were patched and mended.

"What do you think you're doing?" he asked frigidly when she looked up and saw him.

Her eager smile died. "You've got eyes—I'm scrubbing the floor." She pushed back her hair, sinking back on her heels to loosen her dress.

"I've got guests."

"So I see." She had a mouthful of gum and her jaws worked furiously. "You might try knocking before you come busting in."

Embarrassed, Mrs. Orlowska and Roman hovered on the threshold. "Oh dear," Mrs. Orlowska murmured, "I'm afraid we chose an inopportune time."

"Perfectly all right," Helena said breezily. "Just don't slip on the wet floor."

"Of course," Malinka said. "Come into my study."

The Orlowskis bowed to Helena as they passed her to enter the study door and she bowed back, chewing methodically.

Lingering a bit behind, Malinka hissed, "What the devil are you doing home?"

"I took the afternoon off. Any objections?" And then she snapped, "What the devil are you doing home?"

He glared at her but before he followed the Orlowskis into his study, he snarled, "For God's sake, get rid of that gum!"

Mrs. Orlowska was apparently the official spokesman, because when they were seated she began a long, rambling tale about the financial reverses they had suffered, how feeble her husband had grown, and how difficult it was to make ends meet. "The concession that dear Kozik helped me get at the station helps—indeed, it's been a life-saver—but there is hardly enough in it for two of us, let alone three."

Malinka nodded with perfunctory sympathy but in fact hardly listened. All he could think of was Helena—champing gum, scrubbing the floor in her bloomers, bobbing her head ungraciously at his guests. This was the woman who was supposed to act as his wife and hostess!

Suddenly Roman, aware of Malinka's basic indifference, cut his mother short. "Mother, I'm sure Mr. Malinka has worries of his own." He looked Malinka straight in the eye. "There's no point of beating around the bush. I didn't want to come. You owe us nothing, but mother insisted and who can afford to stand on their pride these days. The point is, you're up and we're down—" He moistened his lips nervously. "Once before you and your Co-op got me out of a jam—remember?"

Malinka remembered—the roundup. Just before all of his troubles. And he almost blushed thinking of what a scared little rabbit he had been. How long ago that seemed.

"Of course."

Roman still held his eyes. "I hoped maybe you could help me again."

"A job?"

"Yes—anything. A clerk, truck driver, loader—anything at all."

Malinka sank back in his chair, his chin lowered. He was oddly embarrassed; he felt a quick sting of tears in his eyes. This was how it felt to be somebody. He never had before—really—never in his life. His heart was filled with gratitude toward Roman. He might be the petitioner, but it was he who enabled Malinka to see his own dilemma in its proper perspective—if he had to discard Helena, so be it, but he could never sacrifice his job for her.

Misinterpreting his silence, Mrs. Orlowska said timidly, "Roman is very strong and he's had a fine educ—"

"Mother, please," Roman said roughly. "He will or he won't."

Malinka raised his head quickly. "Forgive me, I was just considering." He smiled. "I'm sure something can be done. Something must be done if at all possible for a man of Roman's background."

Mrs. Orlowska began to rise, tears in her eyes. He waved her to her seat and quickly scribbled the address of his office on a piece of paper. He handed it to Roman. "Give me a couple of days to look into the situation and then come down to see me." He held up his hand. "And don't start thanking me yet. Let's see what develops first."

Taking her cue from him, Mrs. Orlowska managed to compose herself and to resume her usual air of dignity and restraint as if, Malinka thought, it was a cloak she had temporarily laid aside. And he suddenly realized that his behavior had made this possible. He, Sigmunt Malinka, had given her back her self-respect. It was a moment he would never forget.

As they were leaving, Roman hesitated a moment and then he said, "I want you to know how much we all came to admire your—" Obviously confused, he avoided Malinka's eyes, but then doggedly went on, "Her—I mean Helena. She did a wonderful job when all the rest of us were just floundering around." And then with a brief nod he followed his mother out of the door.

10

When Roman and his mother left, Malinka thoughtfully returned to his study. For more than an hour he sat at his desk, his head slumped, staring unseeingly at his folded hands. It was becoming increasingly clear to him that he and Helena would have to part. But how could he tell her this? He could, of course, simply walk out and not return—already she was aware that their relationship, their pseudomarriage, had serious flaws. She would be unhappy, but Helena was a realist; she would pick up her life and go on without him somehow.

A month ago, even a week ago, Malinka knew that this was exactly what he would have done—leave with no explanation and rationalize his behavior to himself somehow. But now he found he couldn't even consider it. This was also a part of being "somebody" rather than a cipher, and a negative cipher at that. No matter what the future brought, for the rest of his life he would have to conduct himself with honor and integrity. That didn't mean he need be soft and vacillating—Helena as the wife of a director of the Co-op was impossible, so he would have to free himself of her. But not as a cowardly schoolboy, but as a mature and resolute man.

He imagined himself telling her, and he was confident that he could. What made him hesitate was not the fact of doing it—the words he must say, the hurt he must cause, the inevitable scene that would ensue—all this, if it was necessary, he could cope with. But what did disturb him was the thought of tomorrow—all the tomorrows—without Helena. If her vulgarity offended him, her vitality entranced him. He enjoyed sleeping with her, not only because she was so good in bed (facts had to be faced) but also because they were so mutually responsive to one another. The act of sex with Helena transcended lust. Even when they lived in Turyn's cottage he had discovered this. And he found himself thinking of the way her blue eyes shone when she had pleased him —the funny little frown that knit her forehead when something momentarily baffled her—and most of all he found himself thinking of her genuine concern for Mrs. Korf, a woman who was probably petty, stupid, and filled with a false sense of her own superiority. But she had touched Helena as probably no one but Malinka himself ever had.

Malinka could only conclude, in all sobriety, that he was at

least half in love with Helena. He was equally sure that his love would be corroded with impatience and humiliation if he didn't make the break now.

Being somebody also demanded courage and the capacity to sacrifice a measure of happiness. This, too, he was learning.

At length he went out to find Helena. All of this he would tell her—or as much as she would listen to—and in the morning he would leave for good. Now that he thought about it, undoubtedly the Co-op could help him find some place to live. The lies he would tell them about his reasons for leaving Jutrosin—they, too, were necessary to a somebody.

But Helena was not in the house. He wandered from room to room and at last went back to his study to wait for her return. He found, however, that now he had reached a decision he could no longer sit quietly—like a man with the prospect of a serious operation before him, he wanted to get on with it.

Then he discovered he was out of cigarettes. He'd go down to the kiosk and get some, at least it would give him something to do. Of course, there was Ogorek to face, but he had greeted him almost with warmth the day he returned to the Lane, and besides Ogorek could no longer affect him one way or the other.

It was considerably cooler now that the sun had gone down, but he could still feel the warmth rising from the sand of the Lane. Malinka had rarely walked down the Lane since his return, and doing so now gave him a curious feeling of nostalgia. He remembered the day he had arrived here with Matylda, the unhappy years when with dragging feet he would return to the room they shared in the evening. He remembered the many mornings he had walked to the station with Turyn (what an overbearing and insensitive man the Professor had been!); later how he had crept furtively up the Lane to beg refuge at Turyn's cottage. And he remembered the nights Helena had met him with her umbrella and the sound of his wet shoes sucking the sand as she coaxed him along to her room in the Green House.

But with all of it, he had done a lot of living on this Lane. If once he had been an outcast, at least he would be leaving with his head high.

When he reached the kiosk he found that the shutter across the front had already been drawn, but under the door there was a crack of light. He knocked and then pushed at the door tentatively. It slowly swung open, but instead of Ogorek, he found him-

self facing Genia. He was so surprised he stood staring at her without saying a word, while she squinted, her head forward, peering toward him blearily. She was, he realized, quite drunk.

"Who's that, who's that?" she asked thickly.

Still he stared, without saying a word. Her face was bloated, her hair stringy and lusterless. There was some kind of a rash under her chin that marred her neck with ugly little sores. How had he ever found her desirable? He thought of Helena's clear, well-scrubbed complexion, the clarity and unequivocal honesty of her blue eyes, the healthy aroma of her thick and well-brushed hair, her trim body.

"Genia," he said at last, "it's me—Sigmunt Malinka."

"Well, well, the hero's returned."

He was so overwhelmed with pity, he felt physically nauseated. "How have you been, Genia?"

She turned and began to throw things in the basket, apparently to take them back to the house for safe keeping during the night.

"Splendid," she said with weary sarcasm, "just splendid. And you?"

He tried to smile. "I can't complain."

"Good. Delighted to hear it. Now—" She made an effort to pick up the basket. "—if you'll excuse me." But then she straightened, pushing back her hair with both hands. "Unless you want something."

"Actually, I did—cigarettes."

"Cigarettes." She reached for a pack and tossed them to him. "On the house—the least the Ogoreks can do for you. Or didn't you know it was my dear father who turned you in?"

Strangely, he wasn't surprised, nor did it seem to matter very much.

"Genia," he said, "I'm terribly sorry."

"Save your sympathy." She spoke harshly, even nastily, but as she stood there sneering at him, tears came to her eyes. Helplessly she cried, her hands at her sides, the tears rolling down her face, down the front of her wrinkled blouse. Malinka had never seen such complete despair.

"Genia—Genia—" he said wretchedly, "isn't there something I can do?"

She suddenly gave a short, choked cry and, reaching for a handkerchief buried her face. "No—no," she said roughly, struggling to control herself, "not unless you have a cache of penicillin—

and a reason to give me for living." She looked up at him with her red and swollen eyes. "It needn't be a very good reason," she said bleakly, "a half-ass reason will do. But if you can't think of one and you have no penicillin, I'll settle for a bottle of vodka."

"Penicillin?"

"I'm sick—the kind of sickness you get from dirty men—soldiers who don't care where they stick it, as long as they get it in—is that plain enough for you?"

"Penicillin," he repeated stupidly.

"Yes," she screamed, "penicillin. Father has the dollars, but catch me asking him. Dollars is what I want—enough to get the hell out of here. Yes—do like Irena. Paris, London—what do I care? Just so I never see any of you again." She stared at him drunkenly; then her expression hardened. "Why am I talking to you, of all people? Go away, will you—beat it!"

He looked at her in horror. "But are you sick, really?"

"So you're shocked. *Really,*" she mimicked. "Ask your friend what that means. Or have you thrown her out? That's the next step, isn't it?"

He felt his face grow hot. "That's hardly your business."

She laughed, bitterly. "Men!" She shook her head. "How did it happen that when God made you he didn't give any of you one tiny drop of decency—to make up for that busy little gadget between your legs?" She kicked the basket. "But you wouldn't know about that, would you?" Suddenly, she became enraged. "Now get out of here—" She picked up a bottle of vinegar and brandished it over her head. "Get out of here or, so help me God, I'll smash this over your head—"

"Wait, Genia—"

But swinging wildly, she started for him. Malinka turned and ran into the night.

11

Helena had still not returned when Malinka got back to the villa. The house seemed much larger and drearily empty. He listened to his echoing footsteps as he walked down the hall. Suddenly the dimly lit rooms oppressed him and he started running around turning on every light he could find. Now the house glowed as if there should be some kind of a party going on. But there was no party, only Sigmunt Malinka waiting for a woman he loved but was ashamed to marry.

Slowly, he began making the rounds again, this time turning the lights off. When he reached the downstairs hall, he heard footsteps coming up the walk. His heart leaped. He stood very still watching the door. When she came in, her shoulders slumped dejectedly. Under her arm, she carried a bulky, dirty looking object.

"Where have you been?" he asked abruptly, sternly.

There was a smudge of dirt across the side of her face. The blue scarf around her head exactly matched her eyes. She looked absurdly young, and very dear to him.

"Do you really care, Sigmunt?" she asked tonelessly.

He followed her into the kitchen. The object, which turned out to be a jar caked with mud, she placed on the table.

"I wouldn't ask you if I didn't care," he said stiffly.

She took off the scarf and threw it on the back of a chair. "I went to say good-by to Mrs. Korf—" She looked at him with absolutely no expression at all. "I'm clearing out. That's what you really want me to do, isn't it, Sigmunt?"

His throat closed, he was incapable of saying a word.

"I stayed with her until it was dark and then I went over to Kozik's—" She nodded at the jar. "I had some money buried out in the back—three thousand dollars in fact. That's enough for me. You can have the rest—" she held up her hands "—all this." When he tried to interrupt, she closed her eyes, shaking her head. "No—no—no, don't start saying things you can't mean. I'm not giving you anything you're not entitled to. I've thought it out. I had a different dream once, but that's impossible, I see now. But I'm grateful to you, Sigmunt. If it hadn't been for you, God knows what would have become of me by now." She smiled wanly. "You made it possible for me to live decently—so it's all fair and square. Helena Malinka could do things Helena Kus never could—or even want to." She sighed heavily. "That's quite a speech for me. We'll do no more talking."

"There's one point you haven't covered, Helena." He waited while she washed and dried her hands.

"And what's that?" she said then.

"I thought you loved me."

"That doesn't seem to matter much."

He came toward her. "But if I told you I loved you?"

"I wouldn't believe you," she said simply.

Suddenly he smiled. "Oh but you will." For the first time her composure cracked. She looked almost frightened. "I didn't really

understand myself until tonight. I had to be told." Gently, wonderingly, he touched her face. "But you get nothing for nothing. It's going to cost us a thousand of those dollars. But it's a debt I have to pay. Do you mind?"

Her eyes were wide with disbelief, her mouth trembled. "That depends," she whispered.

"All right. Sit down here." He led her to a chair. "Now listen carefully. This Mrs. Korf of yours—since you're leaving the store, do you think she could be persuaded to leave too?" He crouched beside her taking her hands in his.

"But she needs the job," Helena said in a small voice.

"I want her to take another, my poor little darling. I want her to teach you how to live with as much money as she claims she once had." He drew her into his arms. "It's all your fault, you know. If you hadn't set me up so there was nothing I could be but Director Malinka, my wife wouldn't have to be a lady—"

She pushed back, her eyes snapping indignantly. "If I'm not—"

He began to laugh. "Like it or not, Mrs. Malinka, you're going to be the most gracious, the most snobbish—absolutely, the swellest dame in all of Poland."

For a moment she glared at him. Then her mouth began to twitch. "And if you think I can't—" Suddenly, she threw herself down on him, knocking him back on the floor. "Oh Sigmunt," she cried, burying her face in his neck, "I love you so much."

EPILOGUE

THE BRAKES SPARKED. Steam hissed from the engine. The train came to a stop beside the platform with its unpainted wooden shack and ghostlike stanchions that once had carried wires—a reminder of the suburban electric of another time. Someone had even taken the trouble to splash the name *Jutrosin* in large, uneven letters on the side of the shack. The conductor emerged first, and then from the ends of the heavy old coaches the disembarking passengers. Uniformly shabby, worn, absorbed in themselves, they moved slowly toward the exit at the end of the platform.

Kozik, his rifle slung over his shoulder, the eagle emblem shining on his cap, stood at the barrier watching them pass. At last all of them went by with the exception of an old woman in a black dress, lugging a battered fiber case, her face shadowed by a dark straw hat. Idly Kozik wondered who she was and where she was going. There was something familiar about her. And then all at once he knew!

"For heaven's sake—Mrs. Turyn!" he cried.

She started at the mention of her name. "Oh, Mr. Kozik." She looked distrustfully at his rifle. "But—but you, a policeman?"

"No—no. I'm in the militia, the people's militia," he said proudly. "But what a surprise—and a coincidence." He grinned like a little boy with a secret. "Everyone will be mighty pleased to see you."

"It's almost two years to the day since I left the Lane. And suddenly I wanted to see it again and so here I am. I guess something draws us to our old corner no matter what the memories."

"You'll stay with us, won't you? Where else? It's your house."

"I really hadn't planned that far. But if you're sure it's all right."

"Why, of course, of course—" He tried to sound enthusiastic but he was a little troubled. It had occurred to him that if Mrs. Turyn was back for good, he and Anna might have to move. And where would they move to? As he picked up her case and they started for the crossing, he asked politely, "Do you plan to be in these parts for long?"

"No, no, I could never live here alone. In fact, Mr. Kozik, I hoped to dispose of my house." She looked at him anxiously. "I thought perhaps you might be willing to buy it. I wouldn't ask a good deal and you could pay me gradually."

Kozik beamed with relief. "Sure, Mrs. Turyn, we'll figure out something. We'll talk about it later."

They came abreast of the kiosk. "Why, it's closed at this hour," Mrs. Turyn said, almost disappointed. "Isn't Ogorek here any more?"

"Him? Sure he's here. We'll always have Ogorek. I expect he had to go into the city for supplies. Kind of difficult for him now. Competition at the station and no real help. Both of his kids have skipped. Karol, remember him, the boy?" Mrs. Turyn murmured that she thought she did. "He married Irena Orlowski, the Director's daughter. They were mixed up in the uprising and when their camp was liberated they went to France. And Genia, she disappeared." He looked around cautiously and then said out of the corner of his mouth, "Just about a month ago. They say she went over to the other side too."

"My goodness, that must be hard for Mrs. Ogorek, with both of them gone."

"It's probably all for the best. Genia wasn't doing herself any good around here, that's for sure. And Ogorek's wife, well, I don't think she'll be with us much longer. She's all bloated and swollen, but she won't see a doctor, just the priest. That's the way of it."

Mrs. Turyn found it increasingly difficult to keep up with Kozik's long stride. "Please, Mr. Kozik, not so fast. I'm not young any more."

Apologizing, he slowed down. But then they had reached the Lane. He nodded his head. "We had to burn the fence to keep warm last winter."

"It's the same everywhere," she said sadly. But as they ap-

proached her little cottage she said, "How nice the place looks, Mr. Kozik." A puzzled expression came to her face. "But what in the world is that?" She pointed to a boxlike object wedged between the chimney and the roof.

"That's for my pigeons." Then he added hastily, "It doesn't hurt anything. It could come down in a second and the roof would be as good as new."

"Bless you, Mr. Kozik, I don't mind at all." She paused for a moment on the walk. "It looks like you had a garden last summer."

He nodded. "Beans, potatoes, a melon or two. It all helps." He opened the door, calling, "Anna—Anna, we have a visitor."

Anna appeared from the kitchen, drying her hands on her apron. "Mrs. Turyn! I can hardly believe my eyes! Come in, come in." She rolled the baby carriage to one side. Noticing the startled look on Mrs. Turyn's face, she said, "I suppose he didn't get around to telling you about the baby. That's a man for you. Do come in and see him. He's a year and three months."

While Mrs. Turyn admired the sleeping baby, Kozik whispered excitedly to Anna. Then he excused himself to Mrs. Turyn, saying he would be back later.

In order not to disturb the child, Anna and Mrs. Turyn went out in the kitchen to have a cup of tea. Anna chatted away about the doings on the Lane since Mrs. Turyn had been away. Mrs. Turyn only half listened; she felt strangely depressed. From where she was sitting she could see the bookcase that she and Josef had bought together, almost the only new piece of furniture they ever had; everything else Mrs. Turyn had gotten from her family. Like the table she was now sitting at; she could remember hiding under it as a child. All the years that had passed since then, not many of them very happy ones. She sipped her tea.

Presently, making an effort to shake off her mood, she said, "Anna, tell me, what ever happened to Sigmunt Malinka?"

"Plenty. He married Miss Helena. You know the one?" She looked at Mrs. Turyn significantly.

Mrs. Turyn didn't like this sort of gossip. "Yes, she wrote that they planned to marry when he was released from concentration camp," she said uncomfortably. Then her voice brightened, "I'm so happy he's well and safe. Josef thought a good deal of him."

"He's not only well and safe, he's very prosperous, believe me. They live in the Rybak villa. Miss Helena has two for help, if you

please. And they have Mrs. Korf and her daughter living with them. Should have seen the doings up there last week! Must have been thirty or forty people at a sit-down dinner and—"

"Excuse me, but who is Mrs. Korf?"

"I'm sorry, she came after you left, didn't she?" And holding out her hand to tick off the people she was about to mention, Anna began explaining. "Well, now, Mrs. Korf came to live in the rooms at Ogorek's after the Storks, poor souls—" She went into a lengthy explanation of the history of the Storks and then the arrival of the Korfs and how Roman Orlowski married the older girl who was killed in the Warsaw uprising. "But now he's seeing a lot of the younger girl, Krisha, so perhaps, who knows—"

The baby woke up and began to whimper and Anna ran off to attend to him. But Mrs. Turyn was only alone for a moment before Kozik returned. With him was old Madey, puffing at his hook-stemmed pipe. She had always liked this quiet, unobtrusive man and was genuinely pleased to see him. He pumped her hand.

"I'm very happy to see you in such good health, Mrs. Turyn."

Kozik pulled at his coat, drawing him back to stand beside him. "This is really an official call, Mrs. Turyn. Tomorrow is a great occasion for this little old Lane because after tomorrow Duck Lane will cease to exist—" He paused dramatically, his eyes twinkling at her confused expression. "On this Lane, you see, we had one really great man," he went on then, a little portentously. "He was wise and brave, an example for us all. And he died like a hero exactly two years ago. I'm not the boasting type, but I'm frank to admit it was my idea. I took the petition around for everyone to sign and then got the parish office to agree. But now it's set, after tomorrow our Lane will be called—" He ducked down and reached for a long, narrow wooden sign, professionally painted. Triumphantly, he held it up so she could read the large gold lettering—*Josef Turyn Road.* "Tomorrow up it goes. The old one disappeared in someone's stove long ago so we don't need to take it down. It will be a road now, Mrs. Turyn, no little insignificant lane. The parish chairman's going to make a speech. And God must have sent you so you could be here too, to set a wreath of flowers by the signpost and say a few words. This is what we wanted to ask of you."

Mrs. Turyn held her hand to her face, her eyes filled with tears. She was moved and touched that these kind neighbors and friends had chosen to honor her dear Josef in such an impressive manner.

Finally, she managed to whisper, "Thank you, thank you, in his name."

The two men, bowing awkwardly, edged toward the door.

"We're pleased, Mrs. Turyn," Kozik said, "really pleased that you will be with us."

That night Mrs. Turyn slept fitfully on her old lumpy couch in the parlor. Kozik had pressed her to share their double bed with Anna and he would take the couch, but she had firmly refused. And after they had supper and discussed arrangements for the transfer of the house, the Koziks had gone to their room. But Mrs. Turyn, who never slept soundly, couldn't settle down. The moment she dozed off, she would find herself wide awake again. As the night wore on her initial pleasure and gratitude at having the Lane renamed in honor of Josef gradually gave way to something very near dismay.

The whole affair was decidedly odd. She knew her Josef. In many ways he had been anything but admirable. He was deceitful, bombastic, and if seldom actually dishonest, he certainly never hesitated to prevaricate if this was to his advantage. What possible image had these people—many of whom knew him almost as well as she had—substituted in their minds for the real man? And why had they?

She tossed restlessly. The more she tried to think it through, the more confused and perplexed she became. How had Josef distinguished himself so that he should be immortalized as a hero? Even his death had been almost an accident, a tragedy only to him and to herself. He had been destroyed like thousands of other innocent bystanders. That was war. But where was his greatness, his nobility, his wisdom, his bravery? What could she say in the morning before all of those people?

And then suddenly she thought—was it possible that this was all some horrible joke, that they would end up laughing at her and at Josef, the professor who was more interested in chasing after women—including that girl who had married Malinka!—than instructing his students?

This idea was so disturbing she rose from the couch and, turning on the light, began pacing back and forth in her bare feet. And then she began to wonder if instead of Kozik and the rest of them, it was she who could no longer see things clearly. She had never been strong and she had been through so much, maybe her mind was breaking under the strain. Perhaps it only seemed to her that

she was thinking logically, perhaps reality had become blurred and it was impossible for her to see things as they really were. She began to tremble. If this were so, the only thing she could possibly do was to slip away before the others were up and about.

Mrs. Turyn turned out the light and sat on the couch with the blanket draped around her shoulders. By the time the first glimmer of dawn was coming through the curtains, she had firmly decided to flee. It had been a mistake to come back. But above all, she couldn't remain to falsely honor Josef. He had been just a man, perhaps more foolish and deluded and weaker than some, but she had loved him and it would be a travesty of her love, of Josef himself, of her entire life, if she pretended that he was something he was not.

Stealthily she began to dress. But before she could leave the house, she heard Kozik's heavy boots out in the hall. She heard the front door open and then close. In a moment there was a clatter at the side of the house and she realized that he was climbing up the ladder, undoubtedly to take care of his pigeons. She tiptoed to the window and pulled back the curtain. Just as the first rays of the sun cut a glistening swath across the dew-covered fields, there was a great flapping as a flock of Kozik's pigeons dipped low into the shadow of the forest. Then, emerging in a burst of gold, they rose ever higher into the clear October sky. For a moment she stood entranced, forgetting everything else. What peaceful, all-but-forgotten memories the scene evoked.

Turning away from the window, she quickly put her things in her case and, slipping on her hat and coat, crept out of the house. On the threshold she listened a moment. She could hear Kozik talking to his birds as he fed them. This was the moment. Lightly she stepped out on the walk and hurried down the Lane. She paused then and glanced back. Everything all right. He hadn't noticed.

At the corner of Long Street her eyes involuntarily went to the place on the battered fence where the familiar sign had always been. There was nothing there now, nothing to identify this little lane, as if all that had happened here had suddenly become anonymous, lost its identity. And here a few hours from now it would officially cease to be. A new unknown chapter would start. She was frightened and hurried on as if it were her fault somehow.

As she approached the crossing, she saw Ogorek opening up the kiosk. He beckoned to her. "Good morning, Mrs. Turyn. I heard

that you were back with us. How does the old Lane look to you?"

"It's lovely here on Duck Lane, as always—"

He waved his finger admonishingly. "Not Duck Lane anymore. They told you that, surely. Very proper and fitting it is—*Josef Turyn Road.* This way we'll never forget the Professor and always be proud of him."

"I'm sure he'd be very pleased," she muttered miserably.

Ogorek suddenly looked lined, old and tired. "I guess all of us have to have our hero, isn't that right? Someone to remind us what we went through and—I suppose, why." But then, almost gruffly, he shrugged off his tone of resignation. "But what are you doing out here with your case so early in the morning? Not going into competition with them, are you?" He pointed toward the Lane.

She looked around and saw two figures plodding toward them, sharing the burden of a heavy suitcase they carried between them. The man was white-haired, stooped. He seemed to have trouble with his sense of balance. Clearly, his companion, a woman, was bearing most of the weight. There was something vaguely familiar about them. She turned questioningly to Ogorek.

"Our Director—our millionaire from the upper end of the Lane. They sell coffee and sandwiches over in the station."

"Director Orlowski and his wife?" she asked incredulously.

"That's them," he said flatly. "If you told me once that I'd be seeing such a sight, I would have thought, good enough for them. But now that it's actually happened, it doesn't give me much satisfaction somehow." He looked at her sharply. "Besides, they cut into my business." Then he remembered his question: "But where are you going now? The ceremony's at noon."

"Yes, I know that," Mrs. Turyn said, confused. "I have to go into town first, that's why I'm up so early." She smiled a little, beginning to edge away. "I'll be back. It's nice to have seen you, Mr. Ogorek—" she glanced behind her once more, "and the old Lane."

He followed her eyes. "I guess it hasn't changed much at that. The whole world goes to hell, but here we sit, just like always, just like nothing had happened here at all. But don't forget," he called, as she started to move away. "Twelve o'clock sharp."

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AND ITS ENVIRONS

