

FRAGMENTS OF AN ANALYSIS OF A CASE OF HYSTERIA

Ian McDonald

British author Ian McDonald is an ambitious and daring writer with a wide range and an impressive amount of talent. His first story was published in 1982, and since then he has appeared with some frequency in *Interzone*, *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, *Zenith*, *Other Edens*, *Amazing*, and elsewhere. He was nominated for the John W. Campbell Award in 1985, and in 1989 he won the *Locus* "Best First Novel" Award for *Desolation Road*. His other books include the novels *Out On Blue Six* and *King of Morning*, *Queen of Day*, and a collection of his short fiction, *Empire Dreams*. Coming up is a new novel, *The Broken Land* (the British edition will be called *Hearts, Hands, & Voices*), and a new collection, as well as several graphic novels. His story "Rainmaker Cometh" was in our Eighth Annual Collection. Born in Manchester, England, in 1960, McDonald has spent most of his life in Northern Ireland, and now lives and works in Belfast.

In the vivid and eloquent story that follows, he takes us back to the days before World War II, and deep into the uneasy dreams of a young girl on a collision course with a strange and frightening destiny.

THE NIGHT SLEEPER

Hurrying, hurrying, faster, faster; hurrying, hurrying, faster, faster, through the forests of the night; the night train, cleaving through the forests of the night, through the trees, the endless trees, cleaving them with the beam of its headlight that casts its white pool upon the endlessly unreeling iron line, cleaving the forest with the tireless stroke of its pistons, cleaving the night with its plume of spark-laden smoke streamed

back across the great sleek length of the engine and the shout of its hundred wheels, cleaving through the night that lies across the heart of the continent; the night train, hurrying, hurrying, faster, faster.

Though it must be hours since your father bid you good-night from the upper berth, hours more since the sleeping car attendant did that clever folding trick with the seat and unrolled the bundles of fresh laundered bedding, you are not asleep. You cannot sleep. Out there, beyond the window are the trees of the night forest. You cannot see them, but you know they are there, shouldered close together, shouldered close to the track, branches curving down to brush the sides of the sleeping car, like the long arms of old, stoop-shouldered men.

And though you cannot see them either, you are also aware of the hundreds of other lives lying still in their berths in the ochre glow of their railway company nightlights, rocked and rolled to sleep by the rolling gait of the night sleeper across the border; hundreds of other lives lying still, one above the other in their tiny, ochre lit compartments, carried onward through the forest of the night to their final destinations. From the adjacent compartment come the sounds again; the small sounds, the intimate sounds, a woman's whisper, a man speaking softly, the creak of leather upholstery, stifled laughter, the repeated knock knock knock knock knock of something hard against the wooden partition. As you lie in your bottom berth your head next to the knock knock knock knock knock from the next compartment, it is as if you are suddenly aware of everything all at once, the lovers across the partition, the sleeping passengers in their berths, the blast of sound and steam and speed of the night train's momentary passage, cleaving through the forest of the night, cleaving through the endless, stoop-shouldered trees.

You must have slept. You had thought that sleep would elude you, but the rhythm of the wheels must have lulled you to sleep, for it is the change of that tireless rhythm that has woken you. The train is slowing. You turn in your berth to look out of the window but all there is to be seen is your reflection looking back at you. The train has slowed to a crawl, grinding along the track with a slowness that is dreadful to you because you fear that should the train stop it will never, never start again.

Up the line, far away, a bell clangs. Barely audible over the grind of the wheels are voices, voices outside the window, shouting in a language you do not understand.

Your father is awake now. He descends the wooden ladder, switches on the lights and sits across the table from you, peering out of the window to see why the train is stopping. By the light from the window you see the

faces. There are men standing by the side of the track, men with stupid, slow, brutal faces. As you grind past them, they pause in their labour to stare up into your faces with slow, brutal incomprehension. The stupid brutality of their faces blinds you to what it is they are doing. They are carrying bodies, slung between them by the hands and the feet, and laying them out by the side of the track. The naked bodies of men and women and children, carried and laid out side by side on the gravel between the track and the edge of the trees. And now you see, far away up the line, a red glow, as if from a great conflagration; something burning fiercely, endlessly, out there in the forest of the night. You ask your father what it all means.

“Some terrible calamity,” he says, as if in a dream. “An accident, up the line; a train has crashed and set the forest burning.”

The night train grinds on, past the bodies of the men and the women and the children, laid side by side while the men carry and set, carry and set, muttering in their dull, brutal language, and the iron bell clangs.

You know that you have not slept, though it is as if you have, and woken up at a different place, a different time. Now the train is entering a rural railway station. A bumptious station master with a black moustache and an excess of gold braid is waving the night train in to a stand by the platform. The picket fence is decked with bunting and the little wooden station house is gaily hung with Japanese paper lanterns that swing and rattle in the wind from the night forest. The train creaks to a halt and you hear the music. Outside the waiting room a string quartet is playing the last movement from *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*, rather poorly, you think. The station master comes striding along the platform in his black kneeboots blowing his whistle and shouting,

“All change, all change.”

“Come, Anna,” your Father says, grabbing his violin case from the rack and before you have time to think you are out on the platform, you and your father and the hundreds and hundreds of others aboard the night train, standing there in your nightdresses and pyjamas and dressing gowns in the cold night air.

Up the line, the locomotive hisses steam. The carriages creak and shift.

“Teas, coffees and hot savouries in the waiting room,” announces the beaming station master. “In the waiting room if you please, sirs and madams.”

Murmuring gladly to each other, the passengers file into the waiting room but with every step you take toward those open wooden doors you

feel a dreadful reluctance grow and grow until you know that you must not cannot will not go in.

“No Father, do not make me!” you cry but your Father says, “Anna, Anna, please, it is only for a little while, until the next train comes,” but you will not cannot must not go, for you have seen, through the latticed windows of the rural railway station, what is waiting in the waiting room. In the waiting room is a baker in a white apron standing before the open door of an oven. He sees you watching him through the window, and smiles at you, and draws his paddle out of the oven to show you what he has been baking there.

It is a loaf of fresh golden bread in the shape of a baby.

THE DOOR AND THE WINDOW

The case of Fraulein Anna B. first came to my attention in the late winter of 1912 at one of the Wednesday meetings of my International Psycho-Analytical Association through Dr. Geistler, one of the newer members of the Wednesday Circle, who mentioned casually over coffee and cigars a patient he was treating for asthmatic attacks that had failed to yield to conventional medical treatment. These attacks seemed related to the young woman’s dread of enclosed spaces, and after the meeting, he asked if I might attempt an analysis of the psychoneurosis, an undertaking to which I agreed, arranging the first treatment for the following Tuesday morning, at ten a.m.

I have learned from experience that psychoneuroses often belie themselves by too great an absence from the facial features of the patient: Fraulein Anna B. was one such, to the perceptions a pretty, charming, self-confident young lady of seventeen years, the daughter of a concert violinist with the Imperial Opera who, I learned to my surprise, was acquainted with me through the B’Nai B’rith, the Vienna Jewish Club. She was an only child, her mother had died in Anna’s infancy in an influenza epidemic and she had been brought up solely by the father. I gained the distinct impression that her vivacity, her energy, were more than could be accounted for purely by youthful exuberance.

She commented on the stuffiness and gloominess of my consulting room, and despite the winter chill, refused to settle until both door and window were opened to the elements. I had taken but a few puffs of a cigar when she became most agitated, claiming that she could not breathe, the smoke was suffocating her. Despite the fact that most of the smoke from

my cigar went straight out of the open window into Berggasse, I nevertheless acceded to her request that I refrain from smoking in her presence. Such was her hysterical sensitivity that, on subsequent interviews, the slightest lingering trace of cigar smoke from a previous session was enough to induce an asthmatic attack.

In interview she was exceedingly talkative and greatly given to the encyclopedic elaboration of even the most trivial anecdote. She could not recall a specific moment when she became aware that she dreaded enclosed spaces, but had to a certain degree felt uncomfortable in small rooms with closed doors and heavy furnishings for as long as she could remember. She had not been consciously aware of a deterioration in her condition until the event that had precipitated first her referral to Dr. Geistler, and ultimately to me.

In the early autumn her father's orchestra had taken a performance of 'The Magic Flute' on tour through Salzburg to Munich, Zurich, Milan and Venice. Seeing an opportunity to expand his daughter's education through travel, her father had arranged for her to accompany him. Fraulein Anna B. admitted to feelings of foreboding all the day of the departure which, as the orchestra assembled at the West Bahnhof, became an anxiety, and, with the party boarding the train, an hysterical attack. The hour had been late, the station dark and filled with the steam and smoke of the engines. The rest of the musicians were already installed in their sleeping compartments, from the door her father was calling her to board, the train was about to leave. These details she knew only from having been told after the event; her attention was transfixed by the brass table-lamp in the window of the sleeping compartment she and her father were to share. Seeing that lamp, she had felt such fear and dread as she had never known before, she could not enter that compartment, she could not board that train. The noise and the bustle of the station overwhelmed her, the smoke and the fumes of the engine suffocated her; overcome, she fought for breath but her lungs were paralysed, unable to draw breath.

Choking, half-conscious, half delirious, she was carried by a porter and her father to the station-master's office, whence Dr. Geistler was summoned by telephone.

The image of the table lamp seemed of significance so I suggested that we explore possible relevancies it might hold to childhood events, the wellspring of all our adult neuroses. She related an incident from her earliest years when she first slept in a room of her own. Her father had bought her a bedside lamp with a shade decorated with the simple fairytale designs that appeal to children. She could not recall having fallen

asleep, but she did recall waking to find the room filled with smoke. She had neglected to extinguish the lamp and the decorated shade, made from a cheap and shoddy fabric, had caught fire. Her screams raised her father in the adjacent bedroom who had doused the fire. For several months after, he had insisted she sleep under his care in his bedroom, indeed, that they share the same bed.

After narrating the incident with the lamp, Fraulein Anna B. declared that she felt very much better and, as our time was drawing to a close, thanked me for my help and asked if payment was required now, or would a bill be forwarded. I replied, with some amusement, that the treatment was by no means concluded, indeed, it had hardly begun; it would require many sessions, over a period of many weeks, even months, before we could say that we had dealt conclusively with her neuroses.

At our next meeting, Fraulein Anna B.'s demeanour was considerably subdued. As we sat with the wind from the steppes whistling through the open window she related a recurrent dream that particularly disturbed her. This dream, which I shall refer to as the 'Night Sleeper Dream' was to continue to manifest itself in various guises throughout the course of treatment with greater or lesser regularity depending on the progress we were making in the interviews. Mutability is one of the characteristics of neuroses; that when responding to treatment in one sphere, they incarnate themselves in another.

Rather than attempt to analyse the entire content of the dream, which, in the light of the previous session, seemed a little too pat, I chose to concentrate on some of the elements that might repay deeper analysis; the threatening forest, the long row of naked bodies, the baker and his macabre loaf.

Through association and regression we explored the significance of an early childhood picnic in the Wienerwald when she first became aware of her sexual incompleteness as a woman. The trip had been made in the company of an 'aunt' (so-called, but who could have been a close family friend) and cousin, a boy a year older than Fraulein Anna B., who at the time could not have been more than five or six. The children had been sent off to play in the woods while the parents conversed, as parents will, upon topics of no interest whatsoever to children and, as children will, the young Fraulein Anna B. and her cousin had been caught short by nature. Fraulein Anna B. recalled her surprise at the sight of her cousin's penis and remembers wanting to play with it, not, she claimed, out of any sexual interest, purely from curiosity. Contrasting the ease with which her cousin had relieved himself with her own cumbersome efforts, she had told him,

“That’s a handy gadget to bring on a picnic.”

As she was preparing to leave, she made this comment to me: “Dr. Freud, I have just remembered, I do not know how important it is, but that table lamp, the one in the sleeping compartment on the train to Salzburg, it did not have a lamp-shade. The bulb was bare, naked.”

In the subsequent months as winter gave way to a sullen Viennese spring, we mapped the psychoneurotic geography of the elements of the Night Sleeper Dream. As childhood fears and repressions were brought to light and acknowledged, so Fraulein Anna B. found her dread of enclosed spaces diminishing; first the window, then the door were acceptable when closed; finally, in the late March of 1913, with not inconsiderable relief, I was permitted my cigars.

The symbolic element of the naked bodies laid by the side of the track proved to contain within it perhaps the most significant of Fraulein Anna B.’s childhood traumas.

Anna’s Father had established the habit of taking an annual holiday to the spa at Baden during the Opera Closed Season. Against customary practice, Anna accompanied him on these short trips with the result that, in the absence of any other children her own age at the resort, she was forced to seek out the company of adults, especially the elderly who abound at such spas and who can be relied upon to take a grand-parently interest in a solitary young girl. She had been left to her own devices by her Father while he went on a walk in the woods with a lady of his acquaintance who came to take the waters every year at the same time as he did. In the pumphoom the young Anna had been alarmed by a conversation by a clearly demented elderly gentleman who had threatened her with eternal damnation if she did not go down on her knees there and then and seek the saving grace of Christ. When the elderly gentleman had attempted to physically accost her, she had fled the pumphoom and attendant gardens into the surrounding woodlands to seek her father.

She remembered running along seemingly endless kilometres of gravelled footpaths until she was stopped in her headlong flight by the sound of voices; her father’s, and that of another woman. The voices issued from the concealment of a swathe of rhododendrons. Without thought, she pushed through the screening shrubs and was met by the sight of her father repeatedly penetrating a red-haired woman bent double over the railing of a small, discreet pergola. She related that the woman had looked up, smiled, and said, “Hello, *Anna-katzchen*” a private name only used by her father. It was only then that she recognised the woman as the lady-friend who came every year to the resort. What she remembered

most vividly from the experience was the peculiar conical shape of the woman's drooping breasts, the way her red hair had fallen around her face, and her father's thrusting, thrusting, thrusting into the bent-over woman, quite oblivious that he was being watched by his daughter. As she spoke those three words in my study: "thrusting, thrusting, thrusting," she spat out them like poison on her tongue.

Her father never learned that he had been observed that day in the pergola. The woman had treated Anna's witnessing as an unspoken compact between them; at dinner in the *gasthaus* that night Anna had liberally salted the woman's dinner with bleaching powder, stolen from the scullery maid's storeroom.

It was the work of what remained of the spring to bring Fraulein Anna B. to the point of acceptance of the emotional insight that her attempted poisoning of the red-haired woman, and ultimately, her psychoneurotic fear of enclosed, vaporous spaces stemmed from her jealousy of her father. For many weeks she was resistant to the notion of her father as a sexual figure to whom she had been, and still was, attracted; this attraction having been reinforced, albeit unwittingly, by her father taking the infant Anna into his bed after the incident with the bedside lamp. Gradually she reached an intellectual insight into her substitution of a male into the mother role, and the confusion of her own Oedipal feelings. Her own awakening sexuality had resulted in the transferral onto her father of her sublimated guilt at her abandoning her first, and greatest love, for the love of others.

Triggered by the intimacy of the sleeping compartment, her memories of childhood intimacies, and what she saw as childhood betrayals of her love, had peaked into hysteria. As the intellectual insight developed into acceptance and full emotional insight, so the night sleeper dream recurred with lessening frequency and, in the early summer, Fraulein Anna reported to me that she had that weekend been capable of taking the train journey to the monastery at Melk without any ill effects. After the completion of the treatment, Fraulein Anna B. kept in correspondence with me and confessed, to my great satisfaction, that she had formed an attachment with a young man, the son of a prominent Vienna lawyer, without any feelings of guilt or the return of neurosis, and that engagement, and subsequent marriage, could be pleasurably contemplated.

THE JUDENGASSE CELLAR

When the proprietors of the Heurigen take down the dry and dusty pine branches from the fronts of their shops the last of the summer's wine is drunk. Time, ladies and gentlemen, they call, the bottle is empty, the glass is dry, time for the benches to be scrubbed and the long pine tables taken in, time for the Schrammel-musicians to pack away their violins and guitars and accordions, time to quit the leaf-shaded courtyards of Grinzing and Cobenzl and Nussdorf by your trams and fiacres and charabancs and go down again to your city, time to seek what pleasures it has to offer among its Kaffee Hauses and Konditorei, its cabarets and clubs, beneath the jewelled chandeliers of the opera and in the smoky cellars off Kartnergasse that smell of stale beer and urine.

They had hoped to outstay the others, outstay even the end of the season, as if their staying could somehow condense it and extend it beyond its natural lifetime up there on the slopes of the Wienerwald. But the last glass of the last bottle of the last cask was drunk dry and, as if emerging from a summer night's dream with a start and a shudder, they had found their revels ended and themselves observing the hot and gritty streets of the city from a table outside the Konditorei Demel.

They were four; two young men, two young women, of that class of Viennese society that, as if sensing on a wind from the East the ashes of Empire, was slowly drawing the orbit of its great waltz ever closer to the flames. They had long ago explored every possible nuance and permutation between them that the fading of the Imperial Purple condones and, having worn out each other's lives like old clothes, turned to the whirl of Kaffee Kultur and opera-box scandal only to find its perfume of bierhall revolution, bad art and warmed-over next-day gossip a macrocosm of the ennui of their own claustrophobic relationship; a boredom not merely confined to persons or places or classes, but a boredom that seemed to have infected an entire continent, a boredom to which even war seemed preferable.

Perhaps it was the foreshadowing of absolute war over their dying Empire, perhaps only an inevitable twist in the downward helix of their jaded appetites that took them to the cellar down in the old Jewish Quarter.

It bore no name, no number, the only sign of its existence was the unpainted wooden shingle above the unlit flight of steps down under Juden-gasse; the wooden shingle in the shape of a rat. It did not advertise in the City Directory, nor on the municipal pillars alongside the more flagrant establishments on Kartnergasse, it needed no more advertisement

than its reputation and the word of mouth of its patrons. Among the *petit bourgeoisie* its name was mythical.

When the lawyer's son had first mentioned its name as they sat bored at their table outside the Konditorei, they'd hidden it away and gone in search of other stimulation, knowing, even then, that those stimulations would fail and fade like fairground lights in the noontime sun and that they would, must, eventually descend that flight of steep steps beneath the wooden sign of the rat. The first light snow of the autumn was powdering the cobbles as they drove in the merchant banker's son's car through the streets of the Alte Stadt. Of the four, it was the youngest, the concert violinist's daughter who was the least at ease as the door opened to their knock and the *maitre d'* bowed them in, old scars she had thought long healed tugged a little, tore a little, bled a little.

Cellar clubs are a universal condition: the floor packed with tables so that not one centimetre of gritty concrete or cracked tile can be seen; the dusty boards of the stage beneath a constellation of tinsel stars, the popping yellow footlights, the musical quartet of hard-faced women in basques, stockings and opera gloves smoking Turkish cigarettes between numbers, the dull red glow of the table lamps that conceals the identities of the patrons at their tables by changing them into caricatures of themselves.

At the foot of the steps she felt the tightness in her chest, and begged with the man who had brought her not to make her go in, but the other two of their quartet were already being seated at their table and he pulled on her hand, come on, there is nothing to be afraid of, it will be fun. As the waiter in the white apron served wine and the cabaret quartet scraped their way through a medley of popular numbers, the sole focus of her concentration was her measured breathing in, breathing out, breathing in, breathing out. That, when next you exhale, you will not be able to inhale: that is the most terrible fear of the asthmatic.

“Excuse me?”

The young man begged her pardon, repeated his request if he might share their table. He took a chair beside Fraulein Anna, a square-faced young man with a small, square moustache. The band played on. The cellar, already full, filled to bursting point. The night wore down. The young man tried to engage Fraulein Anna in small talk. She worried that he might think the brevity of her replies coyness, when it was merely shortness of breath. Was this her first time here? A nod. He came regularly. He was an artist. Rather, he aspired to being an artist. He had twice failed to secure entry to the Vienna Academy of Fine Art. But he

would, in time. He was a painter of postcards and advertisements; a precarious existence, he admitted, but time would bring all his ambitions to fruition, the world would see. After deductions for lodgings, food (too little of that, thought Fraulein Anna) and art materials, he was left enough to visit Judengasse Cellar. Here both high and low mingled, bankers and businessmen and lawyers and priests and prostitutes and civil servants and starving artists, all rendered anonymous on the fellowship of the darkness. It was rumoured that an Imperial prince had been seen to frequent the Sign of the Rat.

“Fear,” he said, the word sitting strangely with his country accent of *Northern Austria*. “*That is why they come. That is why I come.* To learn the power and mastery of fear, to learn that through the knowledge and control of fear, the right use of fear, one learns mastery over others. That is why I come, to refine and hone my power over fear, *gnädige Fraulein*, so that one day, I shall be feared. I know I shall, I know it. Feared, and so respected.”

Fear? she was about to whisper, but a hush had fallen across the tables. An old man with an accordion was standing in the footlights on the tiny bare stage. The old man squeezed a melancholy, minor drone from his instrument.

“Ladies, gentlemen, I tell you a tale, a tale of an old man, a man older than he seems, far older, older than any of you can imagine, older than any living man. A man cursed by God never to die, ladies, gentlemen.” An iron grip seized Fraulein Anna’s chest.

“Cursed by God, ladies, gentlemen. Cursed to wander the world, never knowing rest.” His long, bony fingers moved like small, antediluvian creatures over the keys. “A man who had never been other than faithful to his master, his Lord, a man whom that same Lord called ‘the disciple he loved’; and how was that love rewarded? With these words, how can I ever forget them, ‘If it is my will that this man remain alive until I come again, what is that to you?’ Oh Master, Master, why did you speak those words? Why did you burden your disciple with undesired immortality, so that even as the last apostle went to his grave, this one of the twelve was condemned to continue wandering the world, a Fifth gospel, a living, walking gospel; that those who saw him and heard this gospel,” (the accordion moaned its accompaniment, seducing, mesmerising; with a start, Fraulein Anna noticed that the waiters, that race of troglodytic creatures in braided monkey jackets, were closing the shutters, barring the doors) “might come to penitence, and true faith.”

“Penitence! And true faith!”

The under-song of the accordion rose to a dominant major key, swelled to take the crowded tables by surprise.

“But as I wandered across the continent, across all continents, I learned the name and nature of this gospel I was to bring so that man might come to repentance and faith in God.”

“Fear!”

Now the gnome-like servants were going from table to table, quietly extinguishing the red table-lamps.

“The grinding, driving, shattering fear of God: fear of He who can destroy both body and spirit and cast them into the endless terror and horror of hell. Fear! Nothing else will bring the human spirit to its knees before it’s master; to know, and be confronted by, fear. This was the lesson I learned in the rotting cities of this rotting continent long centuries ago; that I had been set apart by God to be his special Apostle, the Apostle of Fear, the one sent by God to bring the good and righteous fear of Him to mighty and mean, lofty and low, prince and pauper, priest and prostitute. Fear...”

The accordion sent its tendrils out across the packed floor, drawing the patrons into its knot of intimacy and credulity. The cellar lay in darkness, save for a single spotlight falling upon the face and hands of the eternal Jew.

“Fear,” he whispered, the word like a kiss on his lips; and the single spotlight was extinguished. In the darkness, his voice spoke once again: “Now is the time to face your fear, alone, in the deepest darkness of body, soul and spirit.”

And from their tunnels and runways and warrens and sewers, from the vast underground city they had excavated by tooth and claw from the underpinnings of Vienna, they came; pouring out from a score, a hundred, a thousand hatchways and gnawholes and gratings and spouts; a wave, a sea, an ocean of them, swamping the floor of the club with their close-pressed, squirming, surging bodies, spilling over the feet of the patrons, dropping from the cracks and crevices in the ceilings onto table tops, into laps, onto the heads and hands and shoulders of the patrons who were on their feet screaming, beating, flailing, slapping at the torrent, the cascade, the endless waterfall of rats; claws and naked tail and beady eyes, questing noses, sewer-slick fur, pressing, writhing, scuttling; the cellar rang to a million chattering voices that drowned out the cries of the patrons locked in utter darkness, with the rats. Some would flee, some stampeded where they imagined doors to be but in the utter darkness they

fell and were smothered under the carpet of hurrying rats, some sought refuge on table tops, on chairs; some, perhaps, wiser, perhaps paralysed by dread, stayed where they were and let the drown-wave break about them, over them. And in time, the torrent of rats subsided, and faltered, and ebbed, and the last tail vanished down the last bolthole into the storm sewers of the old Jewish Quarter. And the lights came on. Not the dim red table-lamps, but bright, hard, white bulbs, in wire cages, and by that raw, white light the people saw each other in the utter nakedness of their fear, saw the graceful social masks stripped away, and as they saw, they were themselves seen, and it was as if they all, mighty and mean, prince and pauper, priest and prostitute, were joined in a fellowship of fear. There were tears, there was laughter—sudden, savage laughter—there were whispered confessions and intimate absolutions, there was anger, and grief, and ecstatic exultation; the casks of emotion were broached, the conventions toppled and smashed; true selves, true colours long constrained released and unfurled.

In the great catharsis, none thought to look for the master of ceremonies, the aged Jew who had made such outrageous, blasphemous claims for himself. Caught up in the maelstrom of emotions, none saw the two young men from the table nearest the stage, and a third young man with them, with a square face and a little square moustache, none saw them carry a young woman fighting and heaving and clawing for breath up the cellar steps and out of the door into the cold and sleet of Judengasse. None saw the fear in her eyes, wide, terrified, as if struck down by the wrath of God Himself.

THE BELLS OF BERLIN

8th June 1934

After fourteen years of marriage, Werner still knows to surprise me with little presents, still takes an adolescent delight in coming through the front door announcing that he has a surprise for his Anna and hiding the little gift-wrapped something behind his back out of my reach, or inviting me to guess what it is, which hand it is in. I play along with his little games of concealment and surprise because I, after fourteen years, still delight in the pleasure on his face as he watches me tear off the wrapping and ribbon to reveal his little love-token beneath. Goodness only knows where he

managed to find such a book as this one; afternoons much better spent preparing briefs than rooting around in the antiquarian bookshops along Birkenstrasse, but bless him anyway, it is quite exquisite, tall and thin, in the English Art Nouveau Style, the cover decorated with poppies and corn sheaves, the blank pages heavy, creamy, smooth as skin.

Every woman should have a diary, he says. The true history of the world is written in women's diaries, especially in days such as these when history is unfolding and ripening around our ears like a field of wheat. Anyway, he says he fears that what with Isaac now attending school six mornings a week I will descend into a state of mental vegetation the only escape from which will be to have an affair, so for the sake of our marriage, I had better keep this journal.

Yes, all very well Werner, and, yes, affairs notwithstanding, the discipline of diary-keeping is good for me, but what to write in it? A simple family chronicle: Isaac still having trouble with his arithmetic; Anneliese, despite the trauma of her first period, chosen to sing in the school choir for Herman Goering's pleasure? Ponderous Bach violin sonatas from the apartment at the back of the house, evidence of Papa's continued anger at the purging of his beloved Mahler from the Berlin Philharmonic's repertoire? Is this what Werner means by the *true history of the world*? Or does he mean that I should set down the events happening at once so close at hand (today on my way to the shops I passed the burnt-out shell of the Reichstag) and yet seemingly so remote, distant, bellowing voices on the wireless; and try to record my reaction to them and the reactions of those around me. Is it history when Mrs. Erdmann comes to me in a terrible pother because her name has appeared on a blacklist of women still buying from Jewish shops? It is with a certain trepidation that I set these and any future words of mine down on paper; these days generate so many historians, what can a suburban Berlin *Hausfrau* hope to add to the analysis of these times in which we find ourselves? Yet I feel that Mrs. Erdmann's consternation, my Father's dismay at being forced to play racially pure music, Anneliese singing for Herman Goering; these must be recorded, because it is in the trivia and minutiae of our lives that the history made elsewhere must be lived out.

14th June 1934

Dear dear. Slipping. Had promised myself I would write in diary every day. Had also promised myself I would avoid slipping into telegraphese,

and write proper, complete, not pay-by-the-word, sentences. The spirit is willing, and these past weeks, there has been no dearth of subject matter, but the demands of Kinder, Kirche, Kuche (or, in my case, Kinder, Synagogue, Kuche) are all too demanding.

Mrs. Shummel from the Jewish Ladies Society arrived on my doorstep this morning in a state of distraction; in the middle of the night a gang of S.A. bullyboys had surrounded her house, smashed in all her ground floor windows and daubed a yellow Star of David on her door. She had hidden, shaking with fear, in the cupboard under the stairs while the young thugs shouted abuse for over an hour. They must have little enough to do to smash in an old woman's windows and think of enough names to call her for an hour.

Papa is worried too. Unlike me, he has no Gentile spouse to hide behind. Though his colleagues in the orchestra support him in the solidarity of musicians, all it takes is one suspicious soul to denounce him to the Party and his career as a musician is finished. And that would be the finish of him; poor Papa, without his music, he would wither and die. Losing Mahler was enough of a blow to him; the possibility that he might never again hear the final movement of the Resurrection Symphony has put twenty years on him in one stroke.

Symptoms. Disease. Dis-ease. Society is sick. Germany is sick, and does not know it. Werner likes to lock up his work in his office at six o'clock, but I can tell he is concerned. The legal loopholes by which he manoeuvres Jewish assets out of the country are being tightened every day, and he has heard of new legislation afoot that will make it a crime for Jew and Gentile to marry, to even love one another. What kind of a country is it, dear God, where love is a crime?

20th June 1934

I saw them destroy an art gallery this morning. I had not intended to be about anywhere near Blucherstrasse. I would not have passed that way at all but for a consuming fancy for cakes from a particularly excellent *Konditorei* in that neighbourhood. When I saw the crowd, heard the clamour, I should have walked away, but there is a dreadful fascination in other people's madness. Perhaps it is only by the madness of others that we measure our own sanity. Or lack of it.

A good fifty to sixty people had gathered around the front of the Gallery Seidl. It was not a gallery I much frequent; I cannot make head nor tail

out of these modern painters, Expressionists, I believe they call themselves. The Brownshirts had already smashed the window and kicked in the door, now inside the shop, they were breaking picture frames over their knees and kicking, slashing, tearing canvasses with a grim dutifulness that seemed all the more threatening because of its utter dispassion. The mutilated paintings were passed out into the street by human chain and piled to await the petrol can, the match, the *feu de joie*, the roar of approval from the crowd. Herr Seidl stood by benumbed, utterly helpless, as punishment was meted out for admiring abstract, corrupt, decadent art.

I think that was what disturbed me the most; not the grim-faced determination of the Nazi bully-boys, nor the mob acquiescence of the bystanders, but that art, beauty, (despite my inability to comprehend it) should be subject to the approval and control of the Party. It was then as if the whole weight of the Party machine, like some huge, heaving juggernaut, fell upon me as never before; I felt a desperation, a panic, almost as one does when, at dead of night, one contemplates one's own mortality; a knowledge of the inevitable darkness that must fall. I had to escape. I had to flee from the mob, from the smoke and flame of burning paintings that seemed like the soul of an entire nation offered up as a holocaust. I ran then, without thought or heed of anything but to escape. I did not know where I ran; through streets broad and narrow, through bustling thoroughfares and dark alleys, did the people I rushed past stare at me, call out, ask if anything was the matter? I do not know, I do not remember there even having been people; all I remember is that I must run, and run I did, until I came to my senses in a cobbled laneway, overhung by stooping houses and bandoliers of grubby carpets and limp laundry. Lost, in a city that for fifteen years I had called home and which now revealed itself as foreign, alien, and hostile, with nothing familiar or friendly. Save one thing. Perhaps the one thing that had stopped me where I did, one thing and one thing only that had any connection with my past. A swinging wooden shingle, unpainted, hanging above a set of steep steps leading down to a basement; a wooden sign cut in the shape of a rat.

25th June 1934

I had to go. I had to return. When I saw that sign, that crude wooden rat, it was as if a spirit that had never truly been exorcised and had laid dormant for these years had risen up to stake its claim to me. I knew that I would never be free from it until I faced again what I had first faced, and

failed before, in that cellar in the old Jewish Quarter.

Do not ask me how I know; but I know without the slightest doubt that it is the same cellar, the same troglodytic staff, the same ancient Jew with his accordion, and what the accordion summoned...

If it is a spirit that oppresses me, it is a spirit of remembrance. Things I had thought lost in the darkness are emerging after long exile, changed in subtle and disturbing ways by their time in the dark. That same night as I fled from the burning of the gallery, I was woken by a tightness in my chest, a constriction in my breathing; prescience, or is it a remembrance? of an asthma attack.

It took many days for me to summon the courage to visit that cellar club. Pressure of work keeps Werner long hours at the office; I went twice to the very door and turned back, afraid, without him ever knowing I had been out of the house at night; the ease with which I deceived him in that matter makes me wonder: if I did not love him so deeply, how easy it would be to cheat on him. The third night I would have turned away but for a sudden rushing sensation of wild abandon that swept over me like a pair of dark, enfolding wings, there, on the bottom step, and made me push open the door.

All was as I had remembered it that night under Judengasse; the close-packed tables between the brick piers, the miniscule stage, the bored, slutty all-girl band, the infernal red light from the table-lamps. The wizened *maitre d'*, who, if not the one who had greeted me that night so long ago, was cast in the same mould, showed me to a table in front of the stage. While wine was fetched, I studied the clientele. Bankers, Captains of Industry, lawyers, civil servants; these certainly, as that time before, but unlike that other time, everywhere I looked, the gray and buff uniform of the Party. Party uniforms, Party shirts, Party ties, Party armbands, Party badges, Party caps, Party whispers, Party salutes. The wine was fine and well-bodied and brought the memories of that other time welling up in me, impelled by a pressure outside my will and control: we four friends, that quarter that would set the world ringing with the infamy of our pleasure seeking; whatever it was the others found in the rat cellar, it cracked us apart like stale bread and sent us apart on our separate trajectories through history: I with Papa to his new position as principle violinist with the Berlin Philharmonic, and, for me, marriage to the most eligible young lawyer in Berlin, and motherhood. I realised that I had not thought about that other young lawyer in twenty years, the one to whom I was almost engaged, until that night in the rat cellar.

As I sat sipping my wine another face formed out of the interplay of

interior shadows; the aspiring artist who had shared our table. A face lost in darkness of twenty years, a face I now, with shocking suddenness, recognised in every Party poster, every newspaper, every cinema newsreel; the square, peasant face, the little, ludicrous affectation of a moustache, and the light in his eyes when he had whispered by candlelight the words; "I shall be feared one day, I know it..."

"Fear," a voice whispered, as if my own fears had spoken aloud, but the voice was that of the ancient Master of Ceremonies alone in his single spotlight with his accordion and his tale of a burden some immortality and a gospel that seemed curiously appropriate to these times and places. As before, the accordion groaned out its accompaniment, as before the waiters went about barring the doors and shuttering the windows and extinguishing the lamps until finally the spotlight winked out and in the darkness the old Jew whispered, "Can you now face your fears alone, in utter darkness?"

And the rats came pouring from their runways and tunnels under Berlin, summoned by the old man's accordion, pouring into the cellar. I closed my eyes, fought down the horror of damp bodies brushing past my legs, of clicking, chitinous claws pricking at my feet. The people locked in darkness screamed and screamed and screamed and then one voice screamed louder than any other. "Jews! Jews! Jews!" it screamed, and the scream went out across the heaving bodies and touched their fear and kindled it into hate. "Jews! Jews! Jews!" The people took up the howl and took bottles, chairs, lamps in their hands, or bare hands alone, clenched into iron fists, and they beat and smashed at the rats, beat and beat and beat at their fear while the cellar rang and rang and rang with their song of loathing. I tried to shut it out, close my ears, but the brick vaults beat like a Nazi drum, and when at last the lights came on I fled for the door and up and out into the clean and pure night air while below me the voices of the people joined in joyous laughter and someone began to sing the 'Horst Wessel,' and other voices joined it, and the quartet picked up the key, and the whole rat cellar thundered with the joyous fellowship of hatred.

30th June 1934

It is one of Werner's little lovable inconsistencies that the man who is so competent, so incisive, so feared in the cut and thrust of the courtroom is nervous and hesitant when it comes to broaching delicate or serious

matters in his own home. There he stood, leaning against the fireplace, hands thrust in hip-pockets, shifting his weight from foot to foot, looking for a leading line. This time I was able to pre-empt him.

“You think that the time has come for us to sell up and move?”

I think I succeeded in surprising Werner; up until that moment he had not thought I had any conception of exactly how serious events had turned in Berlin. I think, after the Rat Cellar, I knew better than he. If not better, certainly more intimately. They do hate us. They want us dead. Every last one of us. He said that the few remaining legal loopholes were closing by the hour. He said new anti-Semitic laws were being drafted that would force the Jews, and Jews-by-marriage—a fouler crime by far—out of society altogether, and into labour camps. He said that the Party was on the verge of disintegration into factions; Röhm’s S. A. were challenging Hitler’s domination of the party, and that when the long knives were drawn it was a certainty that the Jews would be blamed.

I asked where he had thought we might flee. Holland, he said, was a traditional haven of tolerance and stability. Amsterdam. He had taken the liberty of investigating investment opportunities in the diamond business, and the state of the property market. Had he started proceedings to liquidate our assets? I asked. He looked up at me, at once guilty and suspicious.

“Yes, my love. I have been moving small amounts through the Swiss banks for some months now.”

“That is good,” I said.

“I had thought you would be angry with me, I know how much you hate me keeping secrets from you.”

How could I be angry with him, when I held a secret from him I must take to my grave.

“I think we should move immediately.”

“You have thought about your Father?”

“Without his music, he has nothing, and they have taken the music he loves away from him.” A memory: watching from my opera box the rapture with which he led the Philharmonic in the Adagio from Mahler’s Fifth. “He would lose home, wealth, prestige, power, public acclaim, before he would lose his music.”

“And Isaac, Anneliese?”

I heard again the screaming in the rat cellar, the beating, beating,

beating of chairs, bottles, naked fists on the squirming bodies of the Jews. "Especially them."

We lay together in bed, listening to the night-time news on the wireless. Reports were coming in of an attempted putsch by elements of the S.A. Loyal S.S troopers had quashed the coup, Generals Rohm, Von Schleicher and Strossel had all been arrested and summarily liquidated.

I reached over to turn off the wireless.

"Tomorrow, Werner. You will do it tomorrow, won't you, my love?"

And as I spoke, the bells of Berlin rang out, a thousand bells from a thousand steeples, ringing all across the city, all across Germany, all across the world, ringing out a knell for the soul of a great nation.

THE JUDAS KISS

At two o'clock in the afternoon the small triangle of sunlight would fall onto the floor and move across the sofa and the two easy chairs and the dining table, the little paraffin camping stove, the mattresses and rolls of bedding, all the while dwindling, diminishing until at five o'clock it vanished to nothingness in the top left corner of the cellar, by the secret door. When the sameness of the faces; her husband, her father, her children, the Van Hootens, old Comenius the clock-doctor became appalling in their monotony, when the quiet slap of playing cards, the whisper of the word "check," the murmured recounting of the dreams of the night before, when these all became as terrible and ponderous as the tick of the executioner's clock, she would hunt the beam of dirty light to its source in a tiny broken corner of the wooden shuttering that boarded over the cellar windows. And there, blue beyond any possible imagining of blueness, was a tiny triangle of sky. She could lose herself for hours in the blueness, the apex of the triangle of sunlight between her eyes. It was her personal piece of sky; once when she saw a flight of Junker bombers cross it on their way to the cities of England, the sight of their black crosses desecrating her piece of sky was enough to send her in tears to the furthest, darkest corner of the cellar.

He did not like to see her there, standing on an orange box, eyes screwed half-shut in that triangle of light; he feared that someone might see those eyes, that triangle of face, and report it to the occupation forces. He no longer remonstrated with her on the matter, though. He knew that whenever he slipped out the secret door up into the streets of Amsterdam,

she would be at the shutter losing herself in those twenty centimetres of sky. He would not remonstrate with her because he felt guilt that many of his trips to the surface were for the same reason of escaping from the dreadful claustrophobic sameness of life in the cellar.

Once, on one of his trips out from the ruins of the house on Achtergracht— he had burned it himself, to allay suspicions that Jews might be hiding there—he had seen occupation troops pulling a Jewish family from their hiding place in a house on Herrengracht. A mother, a father, a grandfather clutching an ornamental wooden clog, two little girls in print frocks. Their faces were pale and sickly from life hidden away from the sky. He saw the troopers pull out the householders, an elderly couple he vaguely knew from the Jewish Shelter Society, and push them into the back of a canvas-covered truck. As he went on his way not too quickly not too slowly, he heard the officer announce through a loudspeaker that those who harboured Jews were no better than Jews themselves and would warrant the same treatment. Those who reported Jews to the occupation authorities would be rewarded for fulfilling their civic duty. Even those who were now harbouring Jews might escape punishment if they fulfilled their civic duty.

As he went among the safe shops buying meat and bread and candles and paraffin for the camping stove, the faces of the plump, homely Dutch couple as they were pushed into the back of the truck haunted him. In the small room behind Van Den Beek's dry-cleaning shop, the organiser of the Jewish Shelter Group said that he had been approached by a family whose safe house was threatened by house-to-house searches; would he be able to take them in the Achtergracht cellar? In his mind he saw the truck drive away under the trees that lined the canal, in his mind he heard the cries and moans penetrate the unnaturally quiet street, and he had said, *I do not know, I cannot say, give me a day or so to think about it.*

She envied him his trips above ground. She understood his reasoning; safer by far for just one to take the risk of being seen, but the taste of sky had made her hungry for more, to feel its vast blue vault above, around, enclosing her. In the night, when the others slept on their mattresses, he whispered to her about the new family who needed shelter. She would have loved them to come. New faces, new lives, new stories were almost as welcome as freedom in this place where the major entertainment was the narration to each other of the dreams of the previous night.

But the new family did not come and the days continued to be counted out by the passage of the triangle of light across the cellar floor and the endless, endless recounting of dreams that grew ever more colourless and

impoverished. When, in the night she heard it, she was awake in the instant. The rest slept on, dreaming out their dreams, minting their cheap and tinny coinage, but to her it was as clear and piercing as an angel's clarion. The note of an accordion, far distant among the canals and high-gabled houses of Amsterdam, yet close, and sharp, and sweeter than wine. As if in a dream, perhaps in a dream, a dream that is more solid and tangible than what we call reality, she rose, went to the secret door and stole out through the warren of passageways and charred ruins up onto the street. She did not fear the curfew; with the same assurance that the music played only for her, she knew that she was invisible as a ghost, or a dream, to the occupation forces in their grey trucks.

She found the aged man struck by a stray moonbeam in a street that opened onto a wide canal, bent over his instrument, intent upon his melancholy music. The cobblestones were invisible beneath a shifting, stirring, moon-silvered carpet of rats.

As she walked toward the aged aged man, the rats parted silently, liquidly before her. The wandering Jew looked up from his self-absorbed improvisation.

"*Gnädige Frau*, you should not have come. You are placing yourself in considerable peril."

"I do not think so."

He smiled; teeth long, yellow in the moonshine, like the ivory keys of his accordion. The liquid carpet of rats seethed.

"You are right, of course. Things are ordained by the will and grace of God. It was ordained by God that our destinies be tied together; that we be yoked together for a little while. When first we met, all those years ago at the spa at Baden, remember how afraid you were, how you ran? But we have been yoked together. We could not escape each other. He does that, God, yokes me for a little while to the lives of others. To save them. Or to damn them."

"Would you damn me?"

"I already have, alas. Forgive me. It was not personal, Anna. My ludicrous vaudeville act, my burlesque gospel, my cellars in cities across this continent, my rats, they have played their part in accomplishing the will of God. Apocalypse descends upon us, hastened by my actions, so the Master will return soon and free me from this weary undyingness."

"You think you are responsible for... this?"

"I have served my part in God's will."

“You are mad.”

“That is one interpretation. The only other is that I am exactly what and who I say I am.”

“An apostle of darkness?”

“An apostle of a wrathful God. The Jews have their just punishment now, the Christ-killers. Do I hear the brass hooves of the Four Horsemen on the cobbles? Come Master, come...”

“Mad, and evil.”

“Or good beyond your conception of the word. I have damned, now I may save. Come with me. This place is finished, you are all finished. It does not take the gift of prophecy to tell that. Even the rats are abandoning the city, and I with them. Will you heed them, and come with me?”

The rats moved silently over the cobbles, little pink clawed feet hurrying, hurrying. Noses, whiskers, quested for the moon.

“I have a family, I have a husband, my father, my friends.”

“Unless a man hate his mother, and his father, and all his family, he can be no true disciple. So it is written.”

“I am not a disciple. I am a Jew.”

The aged aged man bowed deeply, took her hand in the moonlight, kissed it.

“*Kuss die Hande, gnädige Frau*, as they said in Old Vienna.” His fingers squeezed a quiet chord from the accordion. He turned away, walked away toward the canal. His music filled the street. The rats stirred and swirled and followed on.

He was awake when she returned. He whispered his fury through clenched teeth.

“You were out.”

“Yes.”

“Why? My God, why did you go out after curfew...”

She shrugged, any explanation would be impossible, but her shrug was invisible in the darkness of the cellar. For the first time she noticed a little triangle of moonlight fell through the wooden shuttering to lie on the cellar floor.

The next day he went out to buy more paraffin for the stove, and some

blankets, for the first autumn chill had found its way into the Achtergracht cellar. When he returned he kissed her full on the mouth and then went to sit, strangely quiet and withdrawn, in a chair apart from the others and stared at the steeple formed by his touching fingers as if he had never seen them before.

At five o'clock the patch of sunlight vanished and the soldiers came. They burst down the door with axes, the soldiers in their black boots and helmets. The old people screamed at the sight of their black machine guns. With the muzzles of their black machine guns they herded the people out through the secret door, out through the warren of collapsed cellarage and fire-blackened walls they had penetrated with such ease, as if they had been told where to go, out into the five o'clock sunlight, to the street, and the waiting truck.

"You forced me to do it," he said to her as the soldiers with grim dutifulness began to push the Van Hootens and old Comenius the clock-doctor into the back of the truck. Old Comenius was clutching an Ormolu clock to his chest. "You went out, you put us all in peril. You could have had us all punished if anyone had seen. So, I had to go to the local headquarters and inform. You think I wanted to do that? You think I wanted to sell the Van Hootens and old Comenius? You forced me to make that bargain, to sell them, in return for our freedom. It was either them, or all of us. That was what the officer promised. If I did my civic duty, we would all go free. I had to sacrifice them to keep us safe, and together."

Then a soldier with black rifle stepped between the man and the woman and the woman and her children and her father with his violin case in his hand were pushed away, pushed toward the truck, pushed into the truck while the man struggled against the smiling soldiers who had taken grip of his arms. The man shouted, the man screamed, and the woman screamed back, and her father with his violin, and her son and daughter, but the soldiers pulled shut the canvas flap and tied it and in a moment the roar of the engine had drowned the voices, shouting screaming the betrayal of their betrayal. And the truck drove away down Achtergracht, and the officer stepped from his staff car and stood before the man and said,

"Jews. Are Jews."

THE STRING QUARTET

Hurrying hurrying, faster faster, hurrying hurrying, faster faster, through the flat black darkness of the night forest, through the endless waiting

trees, cleaving the darkness with the beam of its headlight and the shout of its hundred wheels, cleaving through the darkness that lies across the heart of the continent, the night train, hurrying hurrying, faster faster, toward its final destination.

Though it must be hours since your Father said goodnight and blessed you into the care of God with a kiss on your forehead, as he used to kiss those nights when you were afraid and came into his bed to sleep, you are not asleep. Your Father has rolled his old bones into a corner of a cattle truck and has managed sleep of some kind; your children on either side of you are asleep also, leaning against your body; but you, alone of all the people crammed into the cattle truck, are not, it seems. You envy those crammed people their sleep. There is enough light in the boxcar for the dark-adapted eye to distinguish their shapes; old Comenius still clutching the clock to his chest, its heavy tick ticking away to the beat of his heart, the Van Hootens curled around each other like kittens, reverting to the innocent intimacies of childhood; all the others, clinging to their precious possessions; an umbrella, a carved wooden lugger, a book, a prayer shawl. Mighty and mean, prince and pauper, priest and prostitute, all rendered anonymous, stationless, estateless, shapeless mounds of pain in the night-glow inside the boxcar.

You must have slept. The rhythm of the night train's hundred wheels must have lulled you to sleep, for it is the cessation of that beating, beating, beating rhythm that wakes you. A grey dawn light ekes through the gaps between the ill-fitting planks. The cold is intense, a cold breath from the heart of the continent. The hunger is devouring. How many days since you last ate? Beyond remembering, like an entire life sunk without trace, beyond all remembering.

The train is stationary. You press your face to the cold planks, screw up your eyes, squint to try and make out where it is you have arrived. A rural railway station, somewhere, deep in the night forest, surrounded, encircled, by the waiting, stooping trees, like aged aged men. Figures moving on the platform: soldiers? Voices, talking among themselves in a language you do not understand. Loudspeakers crackle, come alive. In the cattle car, in each of the twenty-five cattle cars that make up the night train, people are starting to awaken. Your children stir, cold, hungry, uncomprehending, where are they, what is happening? You cannot help them, you do not know yourself. The voices draw near. With a crash and a blinding blare of dawn light, the boxcar doors are flung back. Soldiers. Slow, stupid, brutal faces. Slavic faces. They start to pull the people from the cars. Down, down, down. All change. All change. From each of the

twenty-five cars the people are pulled down to stand shivering and blinking in the brilliant dawn cold on the platform. They hug themselves, their breath steams in the bright dawn cold. The soldiers with the slow, stupid, brutal faces go among the people to take away their possessions. Prayer shawls, books, carved wooden luggers, umbrellas. Dr. Comenius' clock is taken from his fingers. Your father clings to his violin in its case, cries out, no, no, do not take away the music, you cannot take away the music. He does not realise, you think, that they took away the music years before. The soldiers, with impassive determination, smash his fingers with rifle butts, smash the fallen violin to a shatter of polished wood and gut.

You press your children to you. You fear that the soldiers will want to tear them away from your broken, bleeding fingers, smash them to silence and nothingness with rifle butts. There is nothing to say, no words that will help. Not now. The soldiers push you down the platform toward the station office. The crackling voice of the loudspeaker welcomes you. Welcome welcome welcome. You notice that a pall of smoke is rising beyond the trees, as if from a great conflagration. The cold morning air draws the smoke in low and close over the station; a vile smoke, a choking suffocating smoke, the stench of something unclean, burning there in the night forest.

Shouting in their stupid, brutal voices, the soldiers herd you toward the office. You do not want to go there, you cannot go there, you must not go there, but you are incapable of resisting the pressing, pressing, pressing bodies. There are figures behind the latticed windows of the waiting room. Seated figures, bowed in attitudes of concentration, as if over musical instruments. Then above the voice of the loudspeaker come the sweet, sad notes of the string quartet, rising up to mingle with the smoke that lies across the waiting trees of the night forest, over all the dark continent, the final movement from *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*; rather badly, you think.

“It is all right, Anna,” your Father says, “it is only for a little while, until the next train comes, to take us on to the place we are meant to go.”