

ISTVÁN GÁLL

THE SUN WORSHIPER

Translated by Thomas DeKornfeld

He started awake to the sound of moaning, but before he could be fully awake, a warm wave carried him back into dreamland, then he started awake again, again to the sound of moaning. How long had he slept? Minutes or hours? Or he may not have slept at all, it may have been the previous warm wave tugging at him, pulling him back down into the oblivion that sleep affords, as if it were a bottomless pit, and he gave himself over to it.

He had nearly sunk into oblivion again when he heard a gentle, quiet grinding noise (a familiar sound, he loathes it!), it infuriated him, he became angry even before he woke up - yet his dreams always disappeared as soon as his wife ground her teeth in her sleep.

He reached out and switched on the wall light. Juli was lying on the other side of the corner recamier, their pillows were touching, and as he leaned over her, he was struck by the aroma of her hair tonic, her breath and the warmth of her body permeating the comforter. He shook her.

“Wha - Huh, whaaa...” his wife moaned.

He gently stroked her head, her hair was damp, she had been sweating profusely in her panic.

“Juli, wake up.”

“Whaa, whassa matter...”

“You’re asking me?”

“Oh. I must’ve been dreaming.”

Her lids slowly parted and her eyes were opaque as though she were looking through water. She turned away from the light, mumbling, lost between the pillow and the comforter. “Turn it off and come over here.”

He reached up to the switch and then, in the dark, he folded back his blanket.

“So you’re joining me?” By now, Juli was fully awake. “So you’re really joining me?”

“Just so you’ll sleep. It’s one o’clock. Sleep.”

“How nice.” His wife snuggled up to him. “How very nice.” She pushed her arm under his shoulder. “I am well at last. Very well.” Her voice was filled with happiness so that the nightly dream gave up and disappeared from their side. “Wait, let me snuggle closer.” She wiggled and squirmed. Every part of her body was happy. “You are a darling,” she mumbled from under her comforter.

“Go to sleep.”

“That would be foolish and I would just dream again,” she fussed at him from below the comforter. “I don’t want to sleep.” “Go to sleep,” he repeated. He was stretched out rigidly with all the discomfort of her body entwined around him. A warm foot glided along his leg, pushing up the legs of his pajama bottoms. But he didn’t move and stares into the darkness, the same darkness he saw yesterday and the day before yesterday. Tomorrow he would be tired again and would be yawning. His work will be shot. His annoyance sent tremors through his body. He knew he should not ask her, he already knew the answer, he knew that it was not

worthwhile to inquire, instead of talking, they should sleep, and he knew that he should not ask, but let Juli forget her dream. Yet he asked her: "Have you had the same dream?"

Juli did not budge, perhaps she was asleep. Or perhaps she also felt that he should not have asked...? No, no. She should recall the dream, but prefers to feign sleep. Or is she perhaps really asleep?

And then he felt his wife pressing her body against his and putting her head on his chest.

"I have dreamed the same dream," he heard her say from under the blanket. "Sometimes there is nothing for months and then it all comes back again."

"Last night too?"

"Yes, last night and the night before and..."

"That damned movie!" he interrupted angrily as though, in effect, he were not angry with himself for having asked.

"That damned movie we saw on Friday."

"It had such an innocent title."

"We have to go and see every lousy movie!"

"Had I known in advance..."

"We have agreed a thousand times that you will not ever again go to a war movie. Why did we not walk out of the theater?"

"We should have."

"Damned right!"

"You are right, so right."

"How objective she is," he was thinking of his wife. It is night, they're up, and she's being objective. He was all too familiar with this throaty voice, an indication that she was trying to sound reticent and calm. It made him nervous. If she only cried, it would be different. If she complained, he could feel sorry for her, just feel sorry for her. Or scold her. Argue. But what could he do now? Perhaps this is why he had to start in on her dream, because his helplessness infuriated him. She must not be hurt. He does not want to hurt her.

"Sleep," he sighed, "it's the middle of the night."

"Sure! So I can dream again."

"Well then don't sleep!" Yet he could not just throw this at her. It would be cruel. He was lying still and was staring into the darkness. Tomorrow he will be tired. He will be yawning. His work will go to the devil. His stomach is already in a cramp, he should get up and drink some milk.

"Let's see what time it is."

"You have just looked. It's one o'clock. Don't turn on the light, don't, don't."

"That shouldn't bother you, you're under the comforter!" he snapped at her, but then he did not move and stared into the darkness again.

And then, from the depth of the bedclothes, barely audibly, Juli said:

"Germans with dogs."

“What?”

“Why do I ask her? I know this, I have known it for years, I know her dreams,” he thought.

“This is what I dreamt...,” and Juli raised her head from under the comforter. At night, her reticent throatiness was even more irritating. “This is what I dreamt tonight.”

“You always have the same dream.”

“I want to run away, but they catch me.”

“Everybody has such dreams.”

“With Germans?”

“No, but that doesn’t make any difference.”

“No?”

“Well, they trying to escape, and...”

“But such a thing never really happened to me. I only dream it. I always have the same dream.”

“Some day it will pass.”

“Sometimes nothing for months, and then it starts in again, night after night, always the same. I dread sleep, for twenty years I have dreaded sleep.”

“I understand.”

“Nonsense.” Juli’s voice was harsh. “You know nothing about it.”

“You have told me many times.”

“You still don’t understand.”

“You should take better care of yourself.”

“I do take care.”

“Take better care! The doctor said no excitement, no stress.”

“That is all beside the point!”

“Do you want to be bedridden again for months?”

“Of course not. How can you even ask?”

“Then it is not beside the point. And did you take your tranquilizer tonight? You didn’t, did you?”

“What if I had?”

“There’s no point in talking to you. The doctor prescribes it and you don’t take it.” He got quite excited about this. The pill, a glass of water, then swallow. Nothing to it. If only there was a pill for everything. Henceforth, I will check up on you every evening.” You will not spoil my night.” Then quickly and even more angrily, he added “Your night! What good is it if the doctor prescribes and you don’t take it?”

“I will take it. You are right. Perhaps it will help.” The calm, throaty voice seemed to hang in the darkness. “She is objective,” he thought about his wife, “she is even objective about herself.” Yet, Juli suddenly straightened out and pressed her entire body against his, her cheek

on his chest and she whispered the barely audible words against the cloth of his pajamas, pressing them almost into his flesh: "But now this is not the only problem."

"What else?"

"The... I don't even know..."

"You always know!"

Juli's head lay on his chest like a rock. Perhaps she had said: "Now I don't know," it was not at all clear.

He would have liked to growl at her, "Let's hear what's troubling you." But he remained silent and didn't say a single word. Juli's mumbling "now I don't know" was too unexpected. This strange denial, waiting for and demanding an answer was surely a confession in itself.

What had happened to the reticent and calm throatiness? That could have made him angry at least.

He was lying rigidly at attention, breathing very cautiously. He stared into the darkness. He stared into it the same way he had done yesterday and the day before yesterday. His wife's body was taut against his, unpleasantly hard and hot, fiery hot.

After a night like this one he will mope around all the next day. His head will ache and his eyeballs will be tight and bulging. He won't be able to work like this. His stomach was again trembling from nerves. Should he feign sleep? He knew that he should ask her, he knew that Juli was waiting for his questions, he knew that he was wrong to be quiet and feign sleep, but he could not bring himself to say: "What's wrong?..."

Juli did not budge for a while, but then her body slowly relaxed and was no longer taut against his, she wiggled away, moaned very quietly and then started to breathe slowly and evenly.

"She acts as though she was sleeping and I am not supposed to think that she was waiting to be questioned," he thought, and angrily threw off the comforter, because he was sweating profusely.

"It is all the same, it makes no difference, the moment has passed when I should have questioned her, I want to sleep, tomorrow work and yawning, tomorrow night I will check if she takes her tranquilizer, now I must sleep and think of something else, not always of the worries, of the aggravations, no, I must not think of these, Juli immediately realized that I did not want to question her, but if I don't get my eight hours, I am not a human being the next day, she doesn't even have to lie down, it won't show, it is as though she were made of iron, yet the two thromboses must have left their mark, but I must not think of this or else I will never go to sleep, it was nice of her to feign sleep, event though I was quiet when I should have questioned her, she would be pleased to talk to me now, would tell me stories, but I am tired and I will be tired, and I want to sleep, sleep and think of something pleasant, not of tomorrow's work, fatigue, headache, but of something entirely different, of some unfamiliar beautiful woman, her legs, thighs, swinging hips, this always calms me down, and then I can at long last fall sleep, if it were only less warm and less humid, what a rotten night..."

Juli wiggled over a little way, moaned quietly, and started to breathe deeply.

She would have liked to sleep, if only she could be sure that she wouldn't dream. Perhaps it would work... Robi was asleep and had not understood what she wanted to tell him, what was bothering her, why she was so restless; but Robi, half asleep, only muttered: "You always know these things," and was already asleep just as she was about to tell him about George...

She will tell him tomorrow, she will tell him first thing in the morning, she can no longer stand the secrecy... Yesterday she thought that she could keep it to herself, after the phone call, when the surprise caused such new anguish, it felt like a knife slash along her entire body, she felt that this pain had to be kept hidden, she would be strong and not talk about it... It would be bad, in fact it would be awful if Robi was pleased with what happened. To be sure, there was cause for some happiness, but only because of George, maybe he will be successful abroad. Maybe... Why does she even think 'maybe'? She had little confidence in that 'maybe', he will screw up his life there as well... It was a strange feeling that George was no more: she had to get used to the idea... She wanted to talk to him and couldn't, she wanted to see him and couldn't... As though she was standing on a bank, high above a dark stream of water with George drifting away from her, ever further and deeper away from her... Where was he going? What will he do abroad? Where will he live? Will he get a job? Will he get used to the life there? Will he succeed? Will he marry somebody? Will somebody marry him? What will he become: an Englishman, a Frenchman, a Swede? Will he remain a Hungarian?

Or not even that...? And the anxiety whether this had been inevitable, or could everything have been different if there had been no divorce, this fear, this irrational self-accusation, this was strictly her private affair, she could not talk to Robi about this, yet she could hardly wait for the morning to tell him about it... Still, she should carefully protect the pain, clutch it to her heart, hide the secret for at least a few days, be alone with it, this was her last link with George, she owed him this much, this was her way to mourn for him. To think that yesterday, after the phone call, she almost told Robi... And because she remained silent, she slept fitfully and the dream came, the eternally recurring dream: Germans with dogs... As though her inner self had no imagination, she always has the same dream when she is restless; before an exam, after a scandal at the office, when she gets into an argument with Robi, or when George called her and was mean because he was ashamed of begging for a meeting with her and she had to scold him because she really did not want to see him, ever again... It would be pleasant to sleep and not to dream, no Germans, no dogs, no illness, no George, nothing, nothing... If she could only have talked about it, she would feel better... But Robi did not understand her... He was sleepy and when he was sleepy he was irritable and if she were to wake him up again, he might say in his fury that he wished that her George had croaked and then we would finally be rid of him, or something like that. Tomorrow, first thing in the morning, she will tell him everything... What will Robi say? If he is not too tired, he will certainly feel sorry for George... Even though he did not show it, he was always interested in what George was doing, how he made his living, and he tried to get translations for him... They might even have met, if she had dared to bring the two fools together (all men were hysterical fools), but with a stranger and particularly with such a stranger, the poor souls are so ironic and so pompous, like teenage louts... Now they will not hurt each other, because they will not be able to meet... Yet, it would be nice to talk about George, even after so many years. One a Sunday afternoon, when there is peace and quiet and it feels so comfortable doing nothing, reading the Sunday paper, she will suddenly ask: "I wonder what George is doing..." But Robi doesn't know him, there is nothing to talk about, tomorrow she will tell him that George had left, Robi will hem and haw, perhaps he will ask some questions, and this will be the very last opportunity to mention George; if she were to mention him later, surely, Robi would nervously get up and leave the room, and with the passing of time, he will even forget that George had been her husband and, if in a conversation his name should come up, Robi would look at her and ask: "Who is that?" During her long illness, Robi did not want to talk about her work... "Don't think about it," he said, "that crummy office will get along without you and if you get excited you will never get well..." And during the third month of her thrombosis, she dreamt over and over again that Vali, the little typist, who sits next to her at a low desk, makes a petulant face,

pokes at the keys with her finger, shrugs her shoulder and it is a waste of time to tell her to get the next client, "Get him yourself," she would say, "but my dear Vali," she implores her, "I can't go, you know, the thrombosis, the doctor told me not to move my legs!" "To hell with the clients," says Vali, "let them get advice from the hangman", she swings her crossed legs nervously, as though she wanted to boot her out of the room and she had to watch this, watch it helplessly, because she can't move, can't move being encased in concrete from the waist down... "Anyway," says Vali, superciliously, "the miserable clients are right here, don't you see them? They are right here, every seat is taken, the witnesses are here, the plaintiffs and the defendants, we are surrounded by them, they are even waiting in the hall, don't you hear the dogs barking?" She heard them. And the clients who sat before her, on the rickety brown chairs and stood by the wall and next to her and behind her and along her side, pressing in on her, impatiently shoving each other and grumbling: "What a pigsty, dogs are not allowed here, Madam, go and throw them out. But she was scared and whispered: "I can't move, don't let the Germans in... I have been in bed for three months with a thrombosis in my thigh and if the clot is not dissolved the doctor said it was all over... it slips into the pelvis and then even God can't help me, they come with dogs..." She would have slept, slept for a long time, if she could have told Robi all this; but at night he is always angry and anyway it is sometimes so hard to talk to him, it is obvious, looking at his eyes, that his thoughts are far away... What may he be thinking about? She asks him in vain, he avoids answering, smiles: "Nothing Kitten, it is not important. I don't even know..." "It would be good," she thought, "to be able to look into his mind, to enter into his head like entering a locked warehouse and wander around among his thoughts... How odd it is, as though there was a different world inside our heads...George is in there now as well, in that other world among our memories..." When she thinks of him, she sees him standing before her as vividly as though he was really standing before her: his torso leaning back because he is slouching in a chair, his thighs crossed, his left leg swinging back and forth, back and forth, he even wiggles his foot nervously, he doesn't know what to do with his hands, he keeps crossing and uncrossing his arms, he sticks his hands under his armpits, all the way to his back: his arms and legs are too long, they must be continuously in motion, bent, folded and shaken in order to put up with all these superfluous extremities. She has no recollection of him when he wasn't moving. Even in court, during the sentencing, he was rubbing his trousers and shaking his leg in the legs of his trousers which were suddenly too large for them. She could not listen to the judge, to the drumbeat of his words, she was only watching George from the back benches where she sat..., she was so sorry that there was nothing she could do for him, in effect, she wasn't even his wife anymore and had to beg to be even allowed to be in the courtroom, yet she would have been happy to take him back again, perhaps even at their wedding she wasn't as confident that this man was her husband as much as he seemed to be now, she wanted to throw her arms around his neck, cleave to him and stop this nervous shaking of his body... All the misunderstanding and anger had vanished over the trouble he had caused her, because she was detained, questioned and interrogated about what she knew of George, and they didn't believe that she knew nothing, couldn't have known, since they had not lived together for a year and had applied for a divorce well before October, but all this didn't matter in the least... She told her cellmates a thousand times that she was the only one among them who was not a patriotic hero and a martyr, no way! Her detention was a mistake, she had nothing to confess about her husband, since while they were shooting in the streets, they had not seen each other, she wasn't even thinking of him, she was concerned about her sick mother and was desperately trying to get a doctor for her in the city gone mad; instead, in the courtroom, the only thing she was certain of was that although she was no longer his wife, she was still his and would do anything for him in order not to have to look at his emaciated body shaking within his clothes... Then a

guard grabbed George by the elbow, turned him around and led him away. She followed and grasped the sentence only after she was out in the hall. She was stupefied.: eight years because of those stupid leaflets? Even today, when she stands before a male judge, an old judge, like George did, she still breaks out in a sweat... After twelve years, they could still hold her accountable for anything... And Judge Low, the sweet titmouse lion, doesn't even suspect why she trembles when after a trial he beckons her to him, that it is not awe and not respect, although it could be, since before they met she had heard terrible things about him, how much the old man hated the young attorneys, particularly the women, makes them look foolish, screams at them from the bench, and during the first trial she watched with deep apprehension the doubting look of this white-maned, emaciated old man, the twitches at the corners of his mouth, the expression of disgust on his face when he had to let her have her say; but at the end of the trial, he suddenly summoned her to him, took hold of her hand with his cold, bony fingers and gallantly kissed her hand: "Miss or Mrs., how should I address you? I am indebted to you for this trial, since so far I have found professionally competent women only among the defendants." Ever since then she'd been worried that he may summon her once again, not to chat after the trial but because he knew everything... It was around that time that the old man was suspended for refusing to preside over political trials, and since then he was assigned only to petty compensation cases, alimony requests and other such petty matters; he thus had moral justification for shaking his leonine head and asking why she had abandoned George when *they* (he would certainly put it that way) had put him on trial... What could she say? That she was thinking of him? That during the three years he was in prison, she thought of him every day, trying to guess what he was doing, how he's pacing up and down, wriggling around, his arms, his legs, his many long extremities, is there even enough room for them? Usually she envisioned George alone in a narrow cell, lying on a narrow, wooden cot, his hands on his chest, his fingers drumming on his ribs, wiggling his toes, his feet hanging over the end of the cot, nervously swinging in mid air... At one time it used to be his favorite position, stretched out at home on the davenport, with his small typewriter resting on his belly, a technical manual he was given by the University for his translations at his side; he raised the book to his eyes, read a few lines of the strange text, stared at the ceiling (the whitewashed ceiling of the narrow maid's room) and then, without looking at the keys, he started to type... Once she interrupted him: "Why do you wiggle your feet while you're writing?" "Do I wiggle them?" He glanced at her fleetingly as he lost his train of thought. He leaned forward, looked over the typewriter, gazed at his stockinged feet sticking out over the end of the davenport, and dropped his head back on the pillow: "Vegetative reflex. If I had another typewriter, I could set it by my feet and could make a simultaneous copy of my work. Wouldn't that be a deal?" Then he mechanically reached for the book filled with technical illustrations, to read another five lines... These were the memories that remained of George... He is stretched out on the worn, blue cover of the davenport, on the formerly yellow flowers, the head-rest is black with grease, at the footend the cover is filthy from his boots, the middle of the davenport is sagging under his weight, and the broken springs are squeaking all the time... One day, at the University, in the large lecture hall, George is stretched out with his feet two rows ahead of him, somebody sticks an old newspaper into his shoe, George pulls his feet back, picks up the paper, stealthily opens it up and starts to read, he couldn't care less about the lecturer... At the Samovar, in the smoky darkness of the morning, exhausted from dancing and from the rum drunk on top of a bread and lard supper, George leans back in his chair, his feet extend under the neighboring table, the waitress has to step over them both coming and going, "Excuse me," she says every other minute, but is not angry, God only knows why she isn't, but she never is; "Pardon me," she says at least a thousand times and smiles at him with such a melting look, with the same smile, just like all the other women smiled at George... How vivid

these pictures are in her mind... But then they become rigid and fade like old films, the details are lost; perhaps she will recall only the events and will not remember George... She can remember only his long legs, careless posture, his wiggling feet, his hands crossed in his lap or stuck under his armpits. These she can remember... He's going to become unfinished business, like a file in a desk drawer in the office. Unfinished business that can neither be closed nor forgotten; the client has skipped and can not be made to testify or confess, can not be sentenced, he doesn't give a damn... Actually, this is precisely what George wanted to accomplish: not to be caught, and nobody to interfere with his life... Where is he resting now, stretched out on his back on some miserable bed? In a hotel room? In the home of some strangers? Or in some temporary lodging on a cot as though he were in prison again...? What's happening to him? What will become of him? Perhaps he is no longer any of her concern, since there is nothing she can do about it... She tore herself away, she let him go... Still, she thinks about him and will mention him, tomorrow, or the day after, then after a while she won't even mention him, because she will no longer have reason to...

But sometimes she sleeps poorly, Robi shakes her, and she says, she's had a dream about Germans, the Germans with the dogs.

"Robi, are you asleep?"

For a moment he did not answer, he stared at the darkness, just like he did last night and the night before; he wanted to snore, snore loudly so that Juli should understand that although he was not asleep, he wanted to be.

"Are you asleep?" his wife asked again in a breathless whisper, and yet with such impatient hopefulness that he could not be angry with her. "I have something important to say."

"So, say it!"

"Then you are not asleep?"

"I am, but say it anyway."

"Won't you turn around? If you'd embrace me and I could snuggle into your Teddy bear warmth, I would go to sleep and dream. Will you turn around?" she asked, still in a whisper, with cloying sweetness, in the dull silence of the night, and gently scratched his back.

"But then you sleep. Promise?" he insisted while turning over.

"This is nice. This is very nice." Juli was elated and stirred slightly, snuggling, every little bit of her pajama-clad body happy; there was the kind of complete happiness running through her from head to toe that only her head to her toes, as can be experienced only by children.

"This is good, I can sleep now."

He did not reply, just held her in his arms to make her stop moving, and he was listening as she was breathing ever more deeply, hoping that she would fall asleep, sleep in peace and not dream of Germans and dogs.

The dogs. Yes, he also remembers the dogs. Gray Alsations, a black stripe along their backs, white fur on their bellies.

They mill around in the kennel, one on top of the other and then they start running around in a tight circle, so that only the blackness of their back is visible and a multitude of flashing, light-colored legs. They suddenly stop and the bodies pile up on top of each other, they snap at each other's throat, growling and not barking, their teeth sunk into each other's fur and

whichever one manages to shake off the others, shakes his head, their fur in wet clumps along their throat. This is how they play. Do they want only to play games with everybody?

There is a high wire fence between them. If he were to stick his finger through the mesh, the soldier would yell at him. But in the meantime he would feel the stiff fur on the dogs' back, it is like wire, then he pulls his finger back, because somebody shouted at him.

The boys liked the dogs. Every afternoon - since there was no school by then, the Germans having requisitioned every building for quarters, hospitals and storerooms - they ran up the hill to the kennels, gaped at the dogs and at the tarpaper shacks at the back, they inhaled the sharp acrid odor of urine which rose from the sodden sand. The kennel and stores were kept in a section of an old stone quarry in the side of the hill, in cave-like passages, where the soldiers could enter only bent in half.

Why were they allowed to go there? Perhaps the guard was careless... But was it always the same guard watching the dogs? He does not remember... Perhaps it was the same one, who acted against orders, in accordance with his own simple notions. Perhaps he was bored. Alone all day long, he was glad to see the boys.

Lizi. The Friedmann's Lizi was always with them. The guard nattered at her in German. If they showed up without her, the guard chased the dogs inside and sent them away.

That Lizi. A blonde Swabian girl. Years later - perhaps in fortyseven - it was Lizi who taught him about love.

Naturally, the guard wanted to talk to Lizi.

They asked in vain about the name of the dogs. They had to ask several times and finally the guard told them that the dogs had no name. They were just dogs. He turned his back to them and talked only to Lizi.

Once an unfamiliar armed guard stood at the kennel. They could not get near the fence; during the night, somebody had thrown the dogs some meat mixed with broken glass.

Did the guard tell Lizi about this? Or did they just hear about it? He could not remember. For a while they watched the dogs from afar and then they went elsewhere. It was then that they started to dig an air-raid shelter in the sand pit until the sand caved in on top of them: Feco Sarkozi almost suffocated (if they had not dug him out then, he would not have stood under the gallows in fifty-seven). When they finally managed to get him to stand up, he was pale, stumbled about, dug the sand out of his ears with his little finger. It was scary and yet funny. They laughed. Today he has no ears, no mouth, and his skull is filled with sand.

Perhaps even Lizi can't remember the guard and the dogs any more. He ran into her some time ago, she had turned into a fat, serious woman, he did not even recognize her. And yet once... But never mind.

He should sleep. Tomorrow, he will yawn all day and he will have a headache. If he doesn't sleep for eight hours, he is barely human the next day.

He did not want to think of Juli, because he wanted to have some peace and quiet and even tried to banish the silly little memories that swarmed in such a night: they're sitting on their first date in the middle of a square, in the suffocating heat, the city is deserted in the blazing heat wave, they should escape to somewhere cool, but Juli had insisted that nobody would see them there, since not even a dog was out in such heat; then suddenly they are on a bus, standing in the corner of a crowded, shaking rear platform, since according to Juli nobody would see them there either, and he braces his arms against the window frame of the bus, with

July standing between his arms, protected, but imprisoned as though in a cage, at every bump her mass of dark hair cascades forward, tickles his nose, but when he kisses her, she pulls her head back to the window. "Hey silly, somebody will see us!" And suddenly they are sitting in a fish restaurant, at the back of a long, narrow room, feeling the stench of the adjacent toilet, but Juli is sure that they would not be seen here, not here, and then they wait and wait, for the waiter never comes their way, and they can't even talk to each other, because they are faint from hunger and they are surrounded by the odor of food, mixed with the odor of ammonia, he doesn't even know why he is suddenly overcome with nausea, is it hunger or the stench, but the important thing is that nobody should see them - at that time Juli was picked up again and again by the authorities and she revealed in the role of a great conspirator, but she was not coerced into this on her own behalf; "It's all the same to me and I may even get a good point if they see me with an important official," she'd say - but because of him, since he was working at the Communist Youth Organization, "I don't want you to have troubles!" and only on the Janoshegy, when they finally escaped the heat of the city, and no longer had to hide, only there among the trees and bushes, close to the sky, where the blue and clear air makes one feel so light, it was only there that Juli was happy, hopping around on the springy turf, then she started to spin around, spread her arms like a clumsy little bird spreading its wings, wanting to soar, soar into the sun and sing: the sun is shining, the sun is shining, the sun is shining... But he did not want to remember this either, he wanted to remember nothing, nothing.

He must sleep, sleep - think of the lovely legs, thighs and swaying of an unknown, beautiful woman, that would be nice - perhaps he could then go to sleep. What a rotten night.

It was warm in Robi's arms, and maybe she could have slept, but she was afraid of her dreams.

The heat of his body reminded her of Little George and of the cellar of the Red Cross. What could this cellar have been in the past? Perhaps a passage leading to the boilers. When the city was being shelled, they moved down there. They put the mattresses on the concrete floor, along the whitewashed wall, there was barely enough room to walk along the other wall. There were two of them to a mattress.

Little George and she lived all the way in the back, at their head the heavily reinforced iron door (leading to the boiler room?).

When the places were assigned, she stood at the end of the line in the yard, together with a boy, and by the time they shuffled down into the cellar, there was only one mattress left.

That was the first time Little George and she first looked at each other; the boy had a small bag of books under his arm, and was grinning. Perhaps he was laughing at her.

Aunt Ibi cast them a suspicious glance from behind her thick glasses and by the dim light of the single bulb they could see that the mottles on her face were getting darker. Then after a short, embarrassed pause she said: "You'll be all right together, my dear." She looked at Juli: "Well, you are only ten years old, aren't you?" (July doesn't understand why this matters, but she nods). "And you, being a big boy," - and she places a tentative, old-maidenly hand on Little George's arm - "take care of little Juli." Then she quickly walks away.

She settles down. They will take care of her. She could hear Aunt Ibi say so. She had appointed a big boy to look after her. She looks at her guardian with curiosity and expectations. The boy grins at her and then, finally, asks the obvious question: "Don't you have a pack?" She nods proudly and from below her overcoat (at that time she still had her blue overcoat) she pulls out Zurzabella, the beautiful black doll.

When the light is turned off, they lie down. Little George puts his arms around her, because the narrow passage is cold, there are few blankets, but in the warmth of each other's body, they fall asleep.

Big George once told her - he liked to be nasty - that it was only because of Little George that she had fallen in love with him, or rather thinks, and wants to think, that she's in love. She has again chosen a George for herself, to make it simple, and she didn't even have to learn a new name; women liked to be comfortable in their love lives, and they like symbols, too... Why did this make her so furious? She cried and tore up a slip. But what if George was right...? It is dreadful when one's emotions are turned inside out and you see yourself from within, recognizing your own most secret emotions.

She wouldn't put it beyond herself that she had fallen in love with him only because of his name. And, naturally not only because of his name. But George was there as well, in forty-four, in that same school. How surprised they were when they discovered this! They counted the months and the days and it became evident that indeed they could have been there together. They did not remember each other. There were so many of them (and she wanted to remember only Little George). She told George at that time, touched by this discovery, that it was ordained by fate that she had him instead of Little George, since fate had led them together even then, but first she had to lose Little George. George grinned, then how come that they met only years later, that this was the first time and that fate was an ass anyway for cleverly getting them together and then letting them pass each other without meeting... This mockery offended her, because she felt that he was speaking the truth and that she considered it only fair that Big George had been there, near to her, when she thought that everything was over and that she would be alone all her life. The week after Little George's disappearance was the worst.

And Big George? How will she remember him? Why did he disappear? And where? It only happened yesterday. But years later this too will become only a memory; it will stop as time goes by.

Robi was reading in the other room. She was working on the crossword puzzle in the Sunday paper. The phone rang.

"Is that you, child?" She heard the slightly accented voice of her former mother-in-law. "Imagine, George has managed it."

She didn't understand and asked: "Managed what?"

"Well, to get out. Now I have no sons left, but perhaps they are happy and that's all that matters."

Why was she so scared, as though she had word about his dying. Her hands were like ice, she could barely hold the receiver.

"For God's sake! What happened?"

"I don't know exactly, but today I received a telegram from Trieste, saying I am here, nothing more, but it means that he had managed, since everybody says that it is child's play to go on from there."

"Please, don't be angry with me, but I still don't understand." "Come and see me and I will tell you all about it, but I know nothing for sure, except that he's in Trieste and now I have to run and call everybody, he left me a list of his friends, colleagues and women to notify. You, child, are the first one on the list."

It seemed that Aunt Maria's voice was trembling behind that strange accented gabble. She is seventy five years-old, after all, and her husband is eighty and they are left alone in those three rooms with the bronze sculptures on the marble pedestals, the leather-covered smoking chairs, the gold-tasseled velvet drapes and the shelves crowded with textbooks and with German, French and English novels.

"Please tell me that there is no trouble?" she asked cautiously. "Trouble?!" she heard the raised, elderly shrieking voice, "What trouble? I have the telegram right here, he has managed it, they did not catch him."

"That's not what I mean, I wasn't thinking of George, but of you, Aunt Maria, is everything all right with you? After such an event... How are you?" She was slurring her words now. She was embarrassed. "Would you like me to come over?"

There was silence at the end of the line.

"It is kind of you, child, to think of me, thank you, this is sweet, well, we women... But there is no trouble! Why would you think so? Is it my voice? Can you sense it? Look, after all, something irrevocable has happened. Ernő in '56 and now George. I have no children left. I must accept this." The hoarse voice became more animated, she fled into her own chatter. "Imagine, child, I can't talk to Uncle Jenő, but you know how he is, the unfeeling money man, this is the role he played for fifty years, but now since the telegram arrived he has locked himself into his room and I hear him pacing back and forth. He will not let me in. Jenő, please, I call him, don't pace like that, you'll wear out the carpet. Then he turned on the radio so that I should not hear what he's doing. Maybe he was crying?"

She tried to laugh, but her voice broke. She could see the spare old lady as tears rolled from her wickedly glistening, small black eyes and ran down along her bony nose.

"Aunt Maria, dearest, I'm coming!"

"Don't," the old lady sighed, "it's passed. I was quite all right until you brought it out of me, you sweet scoundrel, you. You see how it's better for me if you're not here. We'd just fill this room with tears, and water is bad for the parquet floor. It is better like this, believe me, it is better so. So far everybody I called was happy that George had managed it, but I understand you, you were his wife after all, and this is as though he were dead and one feels so sorry for oneself, well, is that not true? Believe me, it is better so. Perhaps some day we will go to Vienna, Uncle Jenő and I, it is now possible, they will give us a permit, Ernő and George will meet us there if they want to see us, and this is enough and it is all we have left in life... You have made me all emotional and I will say goodbye. I am already making blubbering noises like an Aldrich novel."

"But, Aunt Maria, you have still not told me how all this came about?"

"All I know, child, is that he went to Yugoslavia with a tour, that is now possible, even for him, perhaps he could too, perhaps they didn't look into his past, I don't know, and he must've decided beforehand to split from the group. One can cross over into Trieste illegally, by streetcar, and the Italian border is right in the city. I don't know. And now I have this telegram, which means he made it. When we get a letter from him, though I think he will write only from London, when he is with Ernő, or someplace else, from some other family, how should I know, we'll know the details. And now, so long, child, I have a lot of calls to make, and Uncle Jenő, too, I must make him a snack, maybe I can get him to eat that." She was once again the self-assured old woman she always was. "Worse comes to worse, he'll

drink his coffee black, as a sign of mourning. Ciao, child, and greetings to your husband. Ta ta, my dear.”

She'd love to tell Robi about this.

When she hung up the phone, she just sat there thinking how dreadful this was, and she would not tell him, she can't share this with anyone. But why? Will be better for him this way...? It will surely be better. Since he had been released, he was not allowed to get a decent job and he could not get his degree either. He was translating technical texts. “Just like in prison,” George said and laughed, but oddly, without humor, his eyes stony, only his mouth and the wrinkles on his face were laughing, his voice was not amused. His laughter frightened her.

In the morning she will tell Robi everything. On the other hand, she told him about Little George, too, but it didn't help.

She had tried so many times to talk about Little George. George used to snort in the dark when he heard the name: “Aha, my namesake!” And he jerked violently; there was barely room enough for both of them on the narrow settee even though she tried to flatten herself against the wall to make enough room for George. “Let me tell you about him,” she whispered in the stillness of the night, “I know I would sleep better if...” “Take a sleeping pill.” “No, I don't want one, don't you understand? I want to tell you about him.”

The maid's room was very cold and during the night the temperature dropped sharply. As soon as she stopped feeding the old iron stove and climbed into bed, she felt the cold crawling over their face. She snuggled against George's chest under the comforter and talked to him from there. “I have to tell you some time. We had agreed that we would have no secrets from each other.” “Oh, so that is a secret!” George was annoyed, but his teasing tone indicated that he had given up on sleep. He lit a cigarette and even under the comforter she heard the scratch of the match. She yearned for a smoke, but lacked the energy to take off her covers and climb out into the cold; down here she was enveloped in such familiar, friendly warmth, which always reminded her of Little George. “Well, let's hear about your old flirt.” George could still not get over his annoyance. “Shall I get my gun? Or the family sword? If you fully enlighten us about this lover's tragedy, shall I do away with both of us?” “Stop clowning...” “I only asked. Or shall we choose strangulation? That's more popular and looks better on the police blotter. Love tragedy in the night among the debased bourgeois.” He laughed with the short, dry chuckles that he used to entertain himself with. It was unpleasant, listening to it. But she wanted to talk about Little George so much that she was pleading with him: “Don't be silly. Both of us were still children. I only want to tell you because...” “Naturally, I was not the first one. Every woman denies and plays it later as a trump, so that the rascal shouldn't get too confident! Isn't it so? Such a purpose is served by any kind of a silly little story, if there was no real event. An old petting party, a walk in the park, or dalliance in dancing school. Everything can be exaggerated. And how this! Well, tell me, I'm all ears - cold ears, I hardly need to emphasize that.”

She did not answer. She cried and then she feigned sleep. George put out the stub, pushed her away and turned over. The davenport sang underneath them and the springs were squeaking. She waited for a long time, until dawn, hoping that perhaps George would wake up and apologize. After all, it was he who said that their marriage was going to be a new style marriage. Socialist togetherness. They would have no secrets from each other. She was thinking of Little George as she saw him for the last time, engraved forever in her memory. It is not just a memory, it is more than that. As though she had every second of that scene cast in

bronze within her head. No statue or memorial stone is so real and so immovable as the way the cells of her brain preserve the last moments of Little George.

Now there is no George left, not a single one...

In the evenings, there is the cellar, the iron door, she and Little George huddled together after the light's turned off. Zurzabella's porcelain head is between their bellies. "Shall I tell you a story?" whispers Little George. "Do tell me one!" "O.K., nestle down here." And then she pulls the blanket over their heads so that their whispering remains sealed in.

What did he tell her? She doesn't remember. Why did he tell her stories? Did he have any siblings? Perhaps a kid sister to whom he had told stories at home? Did she ask him? Perhaps she did not ask him. She is certain that she did not ask him. It was quite natural that he should tell her stories, since he was told to look after her. She always knew that there had to be someone to look after her and so far there had been no one. No mother. She never understood this... But Little George was looking after her and was telling her stories, but this does not make her particularly happy, since this had to happen, it was only natural that it did happen. She snuggles up to him, hears him whispering, feels the warmth spreading toward her under the blanket and next to Little George, in the warmth of his body, she peacefully falls asleep.

Even today she can sleep best in this way. But today she is also dreaming and that is bad, very bad.

Germans with dogs. Because when Little George died, a dog was barking somewhere.

The Jewish school was squeezed in between large, gray blocks of houses. Next to them a military barracks which abuts on the school from three sides. The courtyards are separated by a wire fence. Some of the wires along the seams are folded back, creating round holes where the soldiers can go back and forth. At noon they come in groups to see what's cooking in the camp kitchen, set up in the gym. Next to the exercise wall two enameled stoves had been set up, with their flues extending ever upward, the protective screens had been ripped away from the windows and the flues are pushed through holes cut into the windows. The spaces around the flues are sealed with clay. A wartime solution. When the Germans come, Aunt Ibi takes off her thick glasses and keeps wiping them, even though the lenses are not foggy. The Germans lift the lids off the round-bellied pots. They taste everything. They dip into the peas, taste them and dump the rest back into the pot. They go into the adjoining dark room (a dressing room with hooks and heavy benches) because they once discovered that tins of meat had been hidden there. That was weeks ago, they are long since gone. But the Germans enter the dressing room every day, regardless, click on the lighters, poke around and tap on the walls, shake the hooks. The dark room is empty and so they come back to the stoves. Aunt Ibi is standing there, wiping her glasses. Next to her, almost hidden behind her, the wife of the school porter, a black-haired, thin woman, Mrs. Wohl (she did not want to open the canned meat, the family was orthodox). Her daughter is even darker, she salivates, her eyes are rolling in a panic; after the soldiers leave, she collapses and has an epileptic fit. They put her down on the rubber floor, Aunt Ibi and her mother stand next to her, they don't hold her down, they just keep her from thrashing about. When she calms down, they drag her into the windowless dressing room and put her down on the low gym bench (the girls in gym pants and white blouses had to exercise on it during gym class, run its length on tip-toes and then stop in the middle, make a balance, extend their left leg and touch the bench with the fingertips of their right hand). They wrap the girl into a blanket and let her sleep. Uncle Wohl, the white-bearded old school porter comes, slaps his trembling wife a few times, Aunt Ibi hustles them to take the food left over in the kettles and put it down by the stoves. The children are hungry. They

are standing around in the doorway, look at the soldiers sampling the food and listen as Aunt Ibi pleads with them in German to leave some food for the children's dinner. The children see Emóke Wohl's epileptic fit and know that when the girl finally goes to sleep in the dressing room, they will be given their dinner. They are looking through the door with a dull expression. This happens every day, they are used to it.

Occasionally, they also get an apple, there are a couple of bushels of apples hidden somewhere and everybody gets one.

After dinner they play in the yard. The yard is actually narrow, but it seems like an enormous area to the listless and tired children. Most of them are girls. They run around for a little while, then stop, gather in groups and stand around. She can barely remember them. After the war she never met anyone who was there in that school with her. It is true that George had said that he was there, but he did not sleep in the cellar. He didn't even know that there was a cellar. Well, where did he sleep? Upstairs, in the former classrooms, from where the benches had been moved into the hallway, piled on top of each other, and when the boys ran into them, because the boys were always racing around the halls, the whole pile of benches shook and almost came down on top of them. George was not with them to the end. His father somehow acquired Swiss papers and they moved into the country. Could she have met him? She seems to remember that the classrooms were emptied to serve as dormitories. But in fact, she remembers only standing in line in front of the classrooms, to move down into the cellar. What happened earlier no longer mattered, only that they were waiting at the end of the line, advancing slowly, one step at a time, to find a new place for themselves in the cellar, and after getting there she found out that there was only one small space left, that there was only that one space for the two of them, and they look at each other - and it is from this moment that Little George lives in her memory.

For a while they went into the cellar only to sleep, but later they could not go to the yard even for a breath of fresh air. The shelling lasted all day, when it came from a distance it sounded like asthmatic coughing. The shelling and bombing were worst at night. The girls are crying in the dark, jump up and run over the mattresses, into one another, fall down and the narrow cellar is filled with screams. Aunt Ibi turns on her flashlights but waves it around only once and quickly turns it off again, not to waste the last battery. This small ray of light somehow quiets the girls. They sniffle and find their way back to their place, somebody has the hiccups and it is quiet until a new explosion makes the whole school shake. This building was in a bad location. The Russian troops quickly got near to it, but the Germans were strongly defending this area; not too far from the school there was a crossing point over the Danube and the roar of the motor boats could be heard between the attacks. Units trapped in Pest were escaping to Buda.

The days are passed in darkness as though there was no dawn and no noon and their life was one long night. They eat something in the dark if they manage to bring something down from above and then they sit in the dark, lie down on the mattresses, feel no cold, although the cellar is not heated, only the heat of their breaths keeps it warm. In the dark they do not appreciate the passing of time, for time is not passing; it has stopped for them, enveloping everything in a heavy black cloud.

One day it was quiet for a short while. How long had they been cowering in the darkness? For an eternity. Aunt Ibi opens the door leading to the yard, they are allowed to stand on the steps, but are not permitted to step outside.

Fresh air streams in. They crowd on the steps and gaze at the outside world.

It is afternoon and a fine dusk begins to descend.

They notice that the Red Cross flag raised over the roof of the opposite wing of the school had fallen down, it was supposed to protect them from bombing. Uncle Wohl starts out to set it back up again. He looks back, he needs somebody to help him. Little George is naturally the first one to step forward, he leaves her side and forces his way through the children on the stairs. She pushes and shoves to keep up with him, but at the door Aunt Ibi throws her arms around her.

They breathe in the fresh air and peer out into the darkening yard for long, timeless minutes. They had not even espied Uncle Wohl and Little George on the roof when the Germans began to shout at them from the other side, from the barracks. Soldiers squeeze through the fence and they see the heavy boots running in front of their eyes. Aunt Ibi says only: "Oh, my God!" and holds her tight, she struggles in vain and can't free herself from her embrace although she wanted to run, run as fast as she could. She felt that this was the end of everything. Little George is no more, the yelling of the soldiers and the furious barking of the dogs from the distant yard of the barracks says it all: she will never see Little George again... Aunt Ibi rushed them all back into the cellar and slammed the door. But she could hear the barking through the walls, through the decades, to this very day.

She must not think of this. She will never go to sleep if she does. Yet, she did not want to be seen with Robi. All she wanted was a little conversation, a walk and a male voice. This is what she was yearning for. Yet it would be silly if the fellow would stub his toe for something like this. "Who knows what people will think of...?" Finally she dragged him out of the city and up the mountain, to be alone together. The sun was shining like crazy. "Tell me a story," she said to Robi. "Not about your work, though. And don't lie that you are not seeing anybody, that you never had anybody, that I am the one and only... Just tell me a story, a real story, like for children, don't you know any? What are you staring at?" Robi quickly looks away. Does he think that she is crazy? No matter. "So tell me a story!" Then, oddly, a wild and wilful rage took hold of her and she was ready to leave him there, she was ready to run away. Let him bust, the idiotic, arrogant functionary, if he wanted to make a fool of her, so be it. Why not? She has the right to a little foolishness, she has the right... "There once lived a bear in forest," Robi started out, faltered, and corrected himself: "The bear lived quite alone and was already quite stiff." She looked at him, her look bashful and yet curiously inquisitive, she understood him and laughed, felt a warmth in her throat. "Go on, go on!" "Well, he was completely stiff... yet he was not a polar bear, just a useless bear." He wiped his sweaty brow and his voice became deeper, less sure and he continued hesitantly: "The bear was looking for honey, mulberries and raspberries, he found enough, it was only of women that he never found enough. Is this O.K.?" "If this is the end, you should say, 'and he lived happily ever after.'" "It's not," said Robi, "now comes the true part, namely... In short, he finally found himself a little kitten..." "No, not that!" "I call every woman kitten." She had nothing to say to this. She closed her eyes and the warm air flowed over her, the sunshine was a red mist around her. "'What will become of you, my little kitten,' said the bear. 'I have no choice, I will take you on my back and will brave the wilderness...'" "Stop, this is the end, say no more." She could not laugh, there was a great big lump in her throat. Robi didn't even look at her, just said: "Now it's your turn." "My turn?" "Yes, say something poetic." "The sun is bright, the sun is bright, and here is then a kitten's bite..." And she bit Robi's cheek. She had never felt so light, happy and free as in those confused and silly moments.

He woke to the grinding of teeth and in the dark turned toward his wife.

"Is there something the matter?"

“Humm, mumm...”

“Juli, wake up!”

“What is it...? On. I must’ve been dreaming.” Under the comforter, she presses her head against his side. “I told you I didn’t want to fall asleep and dream, I don’t want to dream at all.”

There was no trace of complaint in her voice, there was gladness and relief that he had wakened her.

“If you don’t want to sleep, what will you do?”

Juli struggled out from under the comforter, one could suspect that she was poking out her head and was gazing into the darkness.

“I am thinking,” she said.

“What are you thinking about?”

“I will think about what to think.” He felt like laughing.

“When you decide, wake me up. Until then, I am going to sleep.”

“Of course, Teddy bear.” Juli approved heartily.

“There is no need for you to keep vigil with me, I will keep myself entertained.”

How many hours had he slept? He counted three, maybe four and Juli was as fresh as though she had slept the whole night through. An odd creature.

She doesn’t like to sleep. In the evening she dawdles to avoid going to bed.

“I will look at the TV news.”

“But you saw the news at eight.”

“Something may have happened in the world since then.”

“What the hell could have happened?” He sounded angry. “Anyway, in such a short time only something bad could have happened, since good news are usually delayed. And if something bad happened, it will be soon enough if we hear about it in the morning.”

“True,” Juli nodded, and climbed out of her low easy chair.

In the small room, he opens up the day-beds and gets the sheets, Juli looks for something in the closet in the foyer. Then she dashes in.

“Tooth brushing!” she yells, grabs him and pulls him along.

They engage in a battle of tooth brushing: who can last longer. Juli gives up because the toothpaste hurts her gums.

“Let’s drink some soda water,” she suggests.

They shuffle into the kitchen, take the soda water from the refrigerator and drink.

They go back to the bathroom.

“I’ll go first!” yells Juli, rushes into the bathroom, and locks the door. Then you can hear the toilet being flushed, but the door remains locked.

“What are you doing?” he yells through the door.

“I rinsed out a few things.” And in the bathroom the boiler whistles, in the hall the gas meter clicks on, and he stamps back and forth.

Finally, they get settled. “Let’s go to sleep.”

Juli shakes her head.

“No, we have to walk around the flat just as our parents have taught us. Have we turned off all the lights? Are all the windows shut? Have we turned off the gas?”

They almost get started when Juli yells: “Let’s play choo-choo, I’ll be the engine.” He must put his arms around her from the back, Juli puffs and whistles, they start, but get their feet entangled.

“What an idiot! You always forget that the engine starts on the right foot.”

“Which one is my right foot?” asks Juli.

“The one next to the left foot.”

“Next to the left foot? But on which side?”

“Let’s start, we’ll miss our connection.”

It starts at the front door and then they chug along the long hall in front of the white closets, the kitchen, the pantry and the bathroom, each come in turn, then into the living room, and they chug around this room, the tile stove, the three piece set, the bookshelves and the T.V.. Everything is in order.

“Let’s look out the window.”

“Go ahead, look.”

“You come, too, I won’t go alone.”

They belly-up to the window. He puts his arms around his wife’s waist, so that she be unafraid to lean out, and she looks at the windows of the small house across the way.

“Mr. and Mrs. Dirt are cleaning up,” says Juli; on the second floor of a rickety, two-story house, in a neglected bedroom with iron bedsteads, a large, fat woman is picking up lots of clothes from the floor and stuffs them under the pillow on the bed.

“Now it’s your turn.”

He looks at the other apartment on the second floor, but it is dark behind the open window: a young couple lives there.

“The couple is coupling.”

Juli thinks about it and then nods graciously.

“Alliteration is allowed under the rules, but the rest is speculation. You can be sure of this only nine months from now. All right, it’s your turn.”

There is another, modest little apartment on the top floor of that sorry little house.

“The Singers,” - since from there frequent, melodic noises seem to emerge - “are slipping.”

“This is not acceptable, it is not according to the rules.”

“O.K. Then the Singers suffer, perhaps because of that beautiful Italian movie that was on the T. V. tonight,” explains Juli.

Next to the small house, there is an apartment house with balconies, a Mansard roof richly decorated with plaster stucco. All the apartments are large and roomy. Its third floor is on the same level as their apartment and thus from there they can look only into two apartments each on the second and third floor opposite to them. Today the drapes are not lowered - the stuccoed house even has drapes.

“The Bridgeplayers are behind bars. No party tonight.”

“The Auto family is asleep; perhaps, more correctly, the Autoists are asleep.”

“The Doctors are disbursing, they are always counting their money.”

Finally they go back to the small room where the beds are already open.

“Find some good music,” begs Juli.

He looks for jazz on the radio, Juli prances around the room, shedding clothes and dropping them on the chairs, on the rug, on the coffee table, on the flower pot and on top of the radio.

“Where are my pajama bottoms?”

He had been in bed for some time.

“They went to hoe the carrots.”

“Have you really not seen them?”

“If I did not throw them on your bed, they were not folded up in the day-bed. You must have taken them off in the morning and put them in the closet.”

Juli runs out of the room.

“You’ve been gone a long time,” he growls after she finally returns.

“I drank some more soda water.”

“For heaven’s sake, come and lie down. Kill that beastly radio, turn off the light, turn yourself off and let us finally go to sleep; the doctor has said, much rest and much sleep, and you... Ah!”

They are lying in the darkness for a while and then Juli says: “Won’t you come closer? Just so that I can go to sleep and give you no more bother.”

He must move closer to her. Juli is happy and arranges herself as though they would have to lie just like so until Judgment Day, although she knew that she had to return to her own bed, he can’t sleep with anybody else. But still, she snuggles, forces her arms under his body and her legs between his thighs, her head rests under his armpit. She chirps from there: “Tell me a story.”

“No.”

“Yes, yes, or else I start meowing,” she threatens.

“O.K. I will tell you a story of a green pig, of a green pig I will tell you a story, tell you a green story I will about a pig.”

“Not a story like that,” commands Juli. “A true story.”

“Will you go to sleep after a true story?”

“If I go to sleep, you will know that you had told me a true story.”

“I will tell you about a whale.”

“O.K. Please let’s hear about the whale.”

“There is a fearsome whale living in the sea that is always terribly hungry and would never stop stuffing itself, but it has a hard time because in the head of the seaman there is a sea of knowledge and when he sees the whale coming that would love to dine of seaman meat, he doesn’t start praying but takes his boat into a protected cove and so the fearsome large whale that would always and continuously stuff itself is left high and dry. Now go to sleep.”

“Okay, fine. Good night, Teddy bear.”

This is the way she has to go to sleep, with all this playful tomfoolery, so that Juli shouldn’t dream of Germans and dogs.

As a small child, she may have never played. Her childhood had disappeared and she remembers only the war; whatever happened prior to that is paler than a fading dream.

When friends and strangers were moved together to a Jewish house, they played a lot there. They just had to move to the opposite side of the boulevard; thus, having been the first arrivals and coming from the neighborhood they were essentially locals and so rated immediately below the tenants of the house. Those who came later (when the relatives of the tenants who, in spite of strict regulations to the contrary, moved in from distant quarters to be with their family) were only tolerated, strangers who were forced to move into the house and who perhaps had deserved to be thrown out of their own homes - for some fearfully hidden stupidity, otherworldliness or, perhaps, sin! - they had put their few belongings on a handcart, of their furniture only their bed, greasy mattress cover, pots and pans in a large kettle, dishes and glasses, and on top of the pile, perhaps a picture of father, grandfather or grandmother. They also brought the tools of their trade (what they could sneak out of their Aryanized shops), the hatter needle-marked hoods, the barber his razors and scissors in a porcelain shaving mug, the seamstress her Singer sewing machine. Uncle Mikits, that gasping mountain of flesh, sweating lard, dragged two strapped, bulging suitcases up to the third floor. They laughed when he arrived, panting from the exertion, but when he put them down in the hallway, they marveled and even two of them were unable to lift just one of the cases: foot long marble statues and polished pieces of marble, all wrapped individually in tissue paper, carefully fitted together, black and pink and snow-white Carrara imitations. Mikits was a traveler in headstones until the very last minute of his freedom to travel. He had to take advantage of the rare opportunities, since the people in the country, whose deportation had already begun at the beginning of the summer, frequently signed sales agreements even while waiting for the cattle cars, as though the two-ton headstones somehow anchored them to their homes, or as though they felt that their trust in the soil of their homeland and the fact that their money was so spent, gave them some assurance that they would return. (Later Mikits rode the trains until the gendarme captain threw the 100 pengő note with which he tried to purchase his freedom into his face, tore up the certificate from the Pest Jewish Congregation, and had his men shove him into the cattle car.)

She and her parents were quartered on the Felds. They knew the family and she used to go to the third floor to work with Eszter on their math homework. The Felds and their four children had the living room. It was only later, when the crowding became fierce, that an elderly couple was made to move in with them in the same room. Juli and her folks were squeezed into the small room with grandmother. There was a small, carved serving hutch and a large, clawfooted armchair in the small room. These the old woman managed to keep when the young ones had squandered the other furniture, dating back to the beginning of the century, and transformed the apartment in their own image. A drop-leaf table stood next to the arm-

chair and it was here that grandmother, who was known as Feldike in the house, played solitaire.

Feldike got up at dawn, put some cologne behind her ears, laced up her high boots and all this time she prayed silently. She put on long purple gloves and fitted her arthritic nodular fingers, she was very ashamed of them, into the former formal gloves, decorated with lace. She sat behind her small table, almost lost in the velvetcovered armchair whose arms ended in carved dragon heads. She started to play solitaire and was at it all day. It was there that she drank her coffee that Eszter brought, slopping half of it into the saucer. She cowered all day in that armchair, used a spoon to eat some puréed pap at noon and snacked on horehound candy. The solitaire never worked and when she ran out of cards to play, she yelled until her daughter ran into the room, and when she could make no sense of the cards either, she just shrugged her fat shoulders and her freckled third chin bulged out of the collar of her dress. Her gray tresses smelled of goose grease.

The solitaire was the first thing that she noted on the day they moved in. Her father immediately became Feldike's favorite. The old woman no longer called her daughter but yelled "Józsi, Józsi!" in a loud, high-pitched voice. And father came running. He, who was such a wet blanket at home was always nice and cheerful with strangers; he looked at the cards and complimented her, saying "a good hand". "What's that?" screeched the old woman until father realized that he had to talk slowly and directly at her. "I said that this was a good hand, Feldike, that's how card players compliment each other." The old woman nodded, swallowed repeatedly in her excitement, her eyes rolling in thin watery sockets and her wrinkled cheeks trembling. With her purple-gloved, crooked fingers she adjusted the cards so that they were lined up in a military fashion, but her hands were shaking so badly that she always messed them up. Father reached over and with his carefully manicured index finger adjusted the cards. "Tell me, did it work?" asked Feldike impatiently, swallowed the horehound candy she had kept under her tongue, started coughing and almost choked. Her daughter was frightened when she ran into the room, but father, gently patting the old woman's back, just looked at the cards. "What were you thinking about when you laid out the cards?" Feldike was thinking about all sorts of things. If the cards came out right, she may live to be a hundred, or at least until the end of the war. Sometimes she thought of Eszter, her granddaughter, that she should marry well, an officer or a rich merchant. She thought of her mother as well, the widow Proportzi, who had raised her thirteen daughters in Eperjes, even though all she inherited from her husband was a small bakery at the end of town. She frequently mentioned that she was the sole survivor from among her sisters, that she had to look after her mother and whether she was waiting on the other side of Judgment Day among the Elect? Occasionally, very rarely, she thought about her daughter, would the cake turn out well and could they buy a goose for the family feast in December? After father found out what she was talking about, he told her that the cards had come out right. But Feldike was suspicious that he was flattering her. "You must tell me in advance if they will come out right. Otherwise it doesn't count!" She fixed her watery eyes on his face. From then on, he always attested to the perfect outcome of the solitaire. When he pointed out some minor irregularity, Feldike gathered the cards together, grasped the deck clumsily with her gouty fingers, banged them against the table top, but in her nervousness dropped the deck when she tried to shuffle it. Then she gathered the deck together again and sent everybody out of the room so that she could be alone: "I will lay them out again."

Father soon left Feldike to herself. As the house was filling up, more and more card-playing groups were formed. "Is Józsi here?" asked neighbors who came up from the second floor, and once even the janitor yelled for him from the corner of the courtyard. The occasional

players gradually disappeared and a distinct, closed, cardplaying group was formed. When they sat down to play in the corner of the hallway, the other tenants watched them from a distance.

One of the stalwarts from the card tables at the Abbazia, Mr. Mider, also moved in. He was a professional card player, the cards fit smoothly into his long, wide-spread fingers, like carefully folded laundry in a basket, his oval face never showed any emotion and he only twitched his long nose after he had dealt out the cards as though he tried to sniff out the lay of the cards. He could perform card tricks as well. He showed these to the group when they were tired of playing and, if he won heavily, he would give the money back if they could guess the secret of his tricks. When a card, unknown to him, was placed back into the deck and the deck was shuffled and then cut into four piles, he had only to be asked and he unhesitatingly put his finger on the correct pile. When, after having dealt the cards, two players told him the total numeric value of their hands, he could tell them how many tens and aces they held. Another regular card-player was a notions wholesaler, a bald-headed little old fellow on the top of whose head a row of gray hair stood straight up, in a row, pointing at the sky. The row was not much wider than a narrow ribbon; he wore a small, black silk cap to hide this oddity. One of her father's old comrades became his steady partner. They called him Waldemar. He was the only one who seemed to play with obvious enthusiasm. He kept creasing the cards in his short, fat fingers, kept wiping his sweaty hands on his trousers, and on his broad face every deal seemed to cause deep worry-lines. They may have played pinochle or ulti or bridge (they played bridge only rarely, since according to Mr. Mider, bridge was for real only when played by a foursome who had worn out at least one cloth on the card table, playing together), but, regardless what game they played, he was sweating, worried, forgot the bidding or failed to finesse the red queen. He nervously kept scratching the stubble on his jowls, his gray eyes with their reddish whites kept rolling around apprehensively and father threw his hand down: "You are an ass, Waldemar, I even cued you what card to play." "This is not proper," said Mider, and swinging his hand like a scythe, he gathered up the cards, "at least not among serious players."

Not only the parents, but the children and the grownups, separately and together, all were playing, everybody was playing. In the crowded apartments, where four-five families were jammed together, there was always a kitchen filled with footstools, where they crowded in and when the playing surface was too small or covered with dishes and with the remnants of meals; since everything was crowded with all sorts of belongings and even the hallways were jammed with furniture, they put a large lid on the gas stove, covered it with newspapers and played cards on that. In the long, dark foyers there were cupboards along the wall and open iron cots were sitting side by side, yet even there they could find a place to play, perhaps underneath the gas-meter. They played furiously and passionately, everybody wanted to win, to be winners at least here, winners at games and at double solitaire. They also played in the rooms, rooms filled with possessions and divided by armoires into small cubicles for the individual families. They placed the chairs in a circle, turned blackly greasy armchairs, shedding filthy stuffing, to face each other, and whoever had no place to sit, perched on the arms of the chairs. The davenportes were turned into regular gaming parlors, the tears in the large-patterned velvet upholstery became hiding places where an ace could be concealed to be miraculously produced at the appropriate moment.

Cheating was no disgrace, everybody was cheating. Perhaps they did not want to cheat lady luck, but cheating inevitably led to arguments - and this was very necessary, they truly needed the diversion. Now here and there arguments spilled out into the hallway, they were berating each other, and the tenants from the second floor were chased back downstairs; they swore

eternal enmity and forbade them to ever set foot again in the apartment, they cursed their father and mother, their race (with what a self-flagellating hate they cursed their race!). The house trusty, Dr. Krausz, a white-haired, wrinkled lawyer, painfully climbed up the stairs. All that they needed was to cause a public scandal, he announced in his wheezy voice. "Do you want the police called? Do you want to draw attention to us? That's all we need..." This threat was effective. The men became quiet and quietly dispersed. Everybody was aware of the supreme law: concealment. To become invisible. For all of them the gravest danger was drawing attention to themselves.

How many kinds of games they played!

Betting was a game, and one could bet on anything: What they would say on the news, what the weather would be like, what losses would be reported from the front? They played several varieties of dominoes and even Black Jack. If no other game was available, they played "I came from America". Thimble, thimble, who has the thimble was the game the women and the girls played. Monopoly was the most difficult game, where few mastered the secret of playing the stock exchange or of acquiring real estate; this was definitely not a game for children. The older ones liked to play checkers and Chinese checkers and became masters of complicated stratagems. Teams were gathered for button-football, a game set up in a wooden box where wire figures were made to kick the "ball" by having their head pushed one way or the other. A kaleidoscope became a popular pastime. Twenty questions required great concentration. They played with dice when there was nothing else to do. They played heads or tails in the yard and also pitched pennies. Old newspapers were rescued from the attic and if somebody wanted to be extra smart, he cut out the puzzle from an old Pester Lloyd and gave it to others to solve. Crossword puzzles ran out very soon and since no new ones could be had, they started to make up new ones, which was much harder to do. Black or white, yes or no were popular games and those who had been boy scouts remembered Kim. Marine battles were conducted on graph paper, where enemy ships had to be hit on numbered squares, they used this as a gambling game and whoever yelled "Kamikase" had to hit a battleship on his first try or lose five turns if he missed. In a game called Morocco, colored sticks had to be removed from a large pile without disturbing the other sticks, but there were few whose hands were not shaking in those days. Novice card-players played Hearts and Old Maid; there were also puzzles where small balls had to be placed into small holes. They were racing small, wind-up cars and set up mazes with drinking glasses on the floor. The boys were playing snapdragon and there was even a roulette wheel with chips and a rake. The favorite game of the girls was cat's cradle; the smaller boys played with toy soldiers and there was even a small Horthy figure in a black uniform, until a labor battalion veteran, returning from the front, crushed it under foot. They also played anagrams to see who could make the most words from 25 letters, an obscene word counted double. They played Famous Men. They played who is who; they played word games, they played country-city-river; they played barkochba and they played God only knows what else.

The 107 households with 431 people, adults, children and old folks squeezed into 37 apartments on three floors, woke up every morning with the one hope that the day would pass, that nothing would happen, that it would just pass. They were helpless to do anything for themselves or for the world. All they could do was to wait. They did not know what they were waiting for. They played games to make the time pass. And while they played, distant, unknown forces were playing with them.

His arm was numb; he should pull it out from under Juli's head, but he was afraid he may waken her.

He never liked to sleep this close to anybody. At least, not the whole night through. After making love to a woman, falling into a deep sleep, still sweaty from the effort of the encounter and waking up half an hour later, a little headachy, forcing themselves to smile at each other and going through the courteous routine as to who would go to the bathroom first - that was different. That was part of the encounter, when he still had to resort to such. Otherwise, he liked to sleep by himself.

But Juli, before he married her, slept with her mother even though she was a divorcee.

In December of '57, a friendly couple wanted to take him to their home to make a night of it, listen to records, drink and dance; they wanted to cheer him up. He hemmed and hawed, mostly for show, and mumbled that he did not have a date. The woman said, without a moment's hesitation: "Let's find Juli."

"Who's that?"

Edith and Peter pushed him and the bottles they carried, into a taxi; from the name plates by the door of the apartment house on the boulevard, they found out that Juli lived in a corner apartment, facing the courtyard, on the mezzanine. They knocked on the glass door, leading to the kitchen and then a white shadow appeared in the tiny room, where there was practically no space between the gas stove mounted on the wall and a monstrous kitchen cabinet. The shadow pressed her nose against the glass and looked out. Edith, in her mustard-yellow coat with the fur collar, stepped up to the door and rubbed the glass with her gloved hand as though she was trying to get hold of the nose. This is when Juli recognized them. She squealed happily, like a small animal, and this made them all laugh even after Juli had let them come in. She was standing barefoot on the stone floor, her pajamas, shrunken by innumerable washings, barely reached her calves, the jacket barely covered her belly. Switching from fear to hysterical bouts of laughter, she explained in a small voice that the knocking frightened her because during that year she had been "collected" already four times because of her husband, and she expected the interrogators again, before the holidays. While she explained this, she stepped on a cleaning rag, to protect her feet from the coldness of the stones - they were embarrassed listening to her, with the inexplicable bad feeling of those who are secure.

It was Péter's captain's uniform that had frightened Juli, and thus Péter was the most embarrassed. He tried to change the conversation. "You go to bed this early?"

"It is cold and we should light the stove," whispered Juli, "but father is at home and he would just watch as we dragged the heavy coal scuttle upstairs. The hell with it! I rather crawl into bed with my mother."

This was also not a very suitable topic. They were suffering, but Juli did not sense the awkwardness of the situation - her naivete almost amounted to a lack of feeling - how often had he told her that since then - she was shivering there with them, standing in her outgrown pajamas, staring at them with her large eyes, answering readily and slightly obsequiously, she was happy to have guests but did not quite know what to do with them, she didn't even dare to ask them why they were there. And they in their embarrassment just laughed at her. Edith grabbed her and kissed her like a child who unwittingly shows off for adults (and suddenly he envied the woman that she could do this, he would have liked to kiss Juli's scared little face himself, embrace her in her outgrown pajamas, turn her around and run away with her - all his troubles had suddenly disappeared).

Juli hesitated to accept the invitation, it was snowing outside and the pavements were wet.

“So what,” chuckled Edith, a pudgy, pink woman in a coat with a fur collar. With her fluffed up hair, she was serenity personified. “Are you made of sugar?”

“No, but I have a hole in my shoe,” answered Juli in the most natural voice in the world.

“We have a cab waiting downstairs. And at home I’ll give you a pair of shoes I bought last year, but they pinch my toes.” Edith stopped and giggled in an embarrassed manner. “If I don’t offend you with them.”

“No way!”

Juli came out with this so quickly and honestly that they all roared with laughter.

“Get dressed!” Edith pushed her toward the bedroom. “What a girl!” she whispered to the men, “and with a past like hers, to live like this. Only because it is a matter of principle for her to always side with the underdog. This type of person is always getting the short end of the stick. If the men with the purple feathers would again be in charge, Juli would be among the first ones to be arrested.”

“What did her husband do?”

“As far as I know, Juli has no idea. The interrogators questioned her about some leaflets. This is all she told me. At the beginning of the year, she was inside for two months and if they let her out now, when...! In other words, she knows nothing about her husband’s affairs. But since then she is being ‘collected’ on every holiday, April 4th, August 25th and also in October, on the anniversary. She was fired from her job, dismissed from night school, perhaps she manages on her own somehow...”

Her whispering came to a stop because Juli entered the room. An unpleasant male voice was heard from the other room: “And if the Miss is being sought, where shall we send the paddy wagon? Or if...” “But Józsi,” said a tremulous voice. “Why, should we be picked up while she is whoring around somewhere?” shouted the man. “Józsi, not before her friends. How could you?” whispered the woman in a teary voice. (He sneaked a look into the other room, there were two beds there. In one of them a man with sparse gray hair. This is all he remembers of his father-in-law, it being the only time that he saw him. In the other bed, Juli’s mother, with the comforter pulled up to her chest, pillows behind her back, her long suffering face momentarily frozen in the yellow light of the wall lamp: large eyes, unkempt, graying hair, a trembling, poorly defined mouth in a doughy face - this is all he saw of her.) Juli slammed the door shut. She wore a black overcoat, buttoned to her chin, like a military coat, the buttonholes stretched out so that the buttons kept coming undone and she was constantly re-buttoning them. On her head a rabbit fur hat from which her short, dark hair kept escaping over her forehead, her small face painfully contracted because of the previous exchange of words, and then she looked at him and laughed: “We can go now.”

It was this first visit to Juli’s home that remained fixed in his memory. When they were now sitting at home, reading the paper, working, listening to the radio, Juli suddenly jumps up, rushes over to him, embraces him and plants a kiss on top of his head and says: “I had some business this way!” and ambles back to her crossword puzzle - this memory of ‘57 comes to his mind. “We really are a family aren’t we?” Juli keeps asking with a big grin on her face and she climbs into his lap, wiggles around, settles down, makes the easy chair protest. “Well, this is what I love,” she sighs contentedly.

“Teddy bear, I love to be *us*! We are the most, most, most happy people in the world. Aren’t we?”

They used to have two rooms in his home, in a settlement at the edge of town, but they had their own beds. His parents in a double bed, he, in the corner, on the davenport. The old davenport, the old, heavy wall-hangings, the large stove next to him, what a wonderful little corner! A world unto itself. He can even recall the illnesses vividly: the measles, the mumps, the pneumonia. His toys were kept under the davenport and so were, later on, his books, he only had to reach down and pull out whatever took his fancy. “Robi, pick up your little world!” He crawled under the davenport and amid the dirty shoes, miniature railway cars, tops and toy soldiers that had lost their head, he piled up his books! *Mickey Mouse*, *World Traveler* and other similar books about animals and adventures. When he was little, on Sundays, he climbed into the large bed of his parents. There was a radio on the bedside table. It was a wooden box in Gothic style with small columns, and with brown cloth over the speaker. Father reached out and twisted the dials: Cardinal Pacelli was speaking at the Eucharistic Congress. He snuggled in among the many pillows, pulled the comforter up over himself and there was such a warm silence in there as though he was in the center of the earth or in a deep mine. The bed linen were permeated with the strong body scent of the adults.

On the corner davenport, Juli burrows around every evening, just like a mole. She seems to travel between comforters and pillows: “I am a whale,” she says from below the covers. He slaps the comforter, where it bulges, Juli squeals and burrows further away. The comforter bulges and shifts, now here and then there. “May I join you?” she asks and pushes herself forward under the comforter.

“You have whaled enough. Go home and go to sleep.”

“No, no, let’s play a little longer,” pleads Juli. “I don’t like to sleep. It’s time lost. And I don’t like to dream either. Let’s play!”

“One must sleep. You know that I have been appointed President of the Committee for Putting the Kitten to Bed. If I say sleep, it means sleep.”

Juli’s head pops out from under the comforter and she looks hopefully toward him.

“I’ll come over for a little while. Just to get sleepy.”

“But then you don’t like to go back to your bed. I am well familiar with this trick.”

“It would really be best for me to sleep with you.”

“But I don’t like that.”

Juli gives the comforter a few kicks and sighs.

“O.K. Then I will go and drink a little more soda water.”

She pokes her leg out and makes circling movements with her foot, looking for her slippers. She holds up her pajamas bottoms with one hand and shuffles out into the kitchen. But she is afraid to cross the dark room, the light switch is next to the door to the foyer. “Everybody-knows-that-there-is-nothing-braver-in-the-entire-world-than-the-proud-bunny,” she sings and yells until she gets there. Juli has been a child, ever since she lives with him; she is a child now because she had no childhood.

He listened: was Juli asleep?

He doesn’t dare to move. He closes his eyes, opens them again and stares at the darkness.

It’s no good, he could never sleep with somebody else. In the boarding school, after lights out, they waited until the supervising Father had made his rounds and then the gatherings began. The boys whispered and snickered under the blankets, there were some who made the rounds

of the dark room, crawled in with the ones talking and then moved on, visited everywhere. Conversational pairs were established, although only God knew what it was that they could tell each other, yet night after night the never-ending stories continued. Others were wrestling or engaged in tickling competitions, seeing who could stand it the longest and this fooling around went on until one of them jumped out of bed screeching. When this happened, the head boy, a senior, angrily turned on the light and ordered silence or he would get Father Selmeçi. This made them settle down since, if Father Selmeçi did come, he would read *Quo vadis* to them and they had heard that one already, end to end, and did not care to hear it again.

He never went visiting. He snuggled under the blanket and thought of home. He was walking in the settlement: he was running between the flat-roofed miners' homes, climbed up to the roof of a sty, hid in the gooseberry bushes because the Sheriff was after him, holding his Colt in his hand and looking everywhere... He did not even tell the others about this, they would laugh at him. Little boys' game. He didn't even notice that he had gone to sleep: and he was running barefoot in the dust, in the white dust, sifting down from the quarry, dust that could be found nowhere else in the world, only in this settlement. His toes stir up the dust and he is white to the knees. The gym shorts are tight around his waist and sweat is running down his chest since there are no trees at all in the settlement and all the houses, the identical white brick miners' homes, each with six doors, are lined up in geometric order, one behind the other, like the seedlings in a nursery or like the barracks in a detention camp. - When, as a soldier, he had to go to one of these camps, he was amazed to recognize the pattern so familiar from the settlement and he felt sorry for himself, regretting his lost childhood; as soon as he had delivered his prisoner, he escaped from there and didn't even dare look back until he reached the highway...The settlement houses stood in a row and it was not permitted to plant a tree in the garden, that was not allowed by the Mining Trust, so that a gendarme or a mine master could see whomever they wished to see, from three streets away.

As children they were escaping from the Sheriff and this was made most exciting because it was so hard to disappear... After lights out in the Sopron boarding school, the old houses, sties, roofs, wire fences with their well-known holes, the iron scaffolding which ungainly overshadowed the tiny gardens, and which held up the wire for the rows of buckets, all crowded into his memory. How the streets were baking in the heat. No tree anywhere, nowhere any shade. At two o'clock the mine whistle blew and the men emerged, black with coal dust and a pick on their shoulder. They also carried a log of wood, which was their due and which they received at the gate. - Nobody ran to meet their fathers, this was not the custom, they disappeared into their houses and the settlement was again dead until the evening, only the sun was scorching the six-apartment houses. Occasionally a door would open and a bucket of water was emptied out, but nobody moved unnecessarily in the heat. Only the children were running because the Sheriff was after them - they ran from roof to roof, from garden to garden, climbed through the fences, ran, fled and didn't even dare to shout, since if the fathers, asleep after their labors, were aroused, there were a good many slaps. Foolish kids - said the adults - what sense was there in running in the hot dust? They did not know yet what life was all about. They would learn when they grew up.

In the boarding school, one night, another boy climbed into his bed: Ernest. He was a fattish boy with a gimpy leg (his father had driven him up from Nagykanizsa in a car). He climbed in after lights out, when everybody else was asleep. He wanted to put his hands into his, Robi's, pajamas. "You put your hand in my pajamas," he whispered wheezingly, and even though his approach was aggressive, his wheezing whisper was pleading. He pushed him away, jumped out of bed and ran to the john. He sat there until Father Selmeçi came by and found him.

Since that time, he had been unable to sleep with anyone else.

After the Christmas vacation, Father Selmecsi stood up in the middle of the dining room just before dinner and waved to the Polish refugee waiters to hold back serving the meal. "We are in mourning, boys!" he began in his booming sermonizing voice, and spoke of some soldiers, the glorious army that had lost a battle at the Don. They watched his black-robed figure with amazement and growling stomachs. He did not allow the lights to be turned on in the dining room and the only light came from the glass-partitioned, adjoining serving area. After he finished his speech about "the heroic soldiers, dying from the cold", the lights were turned on and the dining room began to resound with murmurs, while the white-aproned Poles distributed the roast pork. Afterward they had ice cream. They placed large bowls, filled with ice cream, on the tables. He had never seen anything like this; he always thought that ice cream came only in cones or, at the most, one or two scoops on a plate. He was the only one who was amazed; the ice cream machine was a Christmas gift to the school from one of the parents, the owner of the manufacturing plant. That evening remained memorable, since afterward, they had ice cream in glass bowls every Sunday.

He could not remain in the boarding school, he didn't feel comfortable and didn't have a single friend. "Your family makes too great a sacrifice for you," Father Selmecsi patted his face. "We have to talk to your parents about this." (Why did the son of a technical official need a wood-paneled sitting room or tennis court in the garden and private piano lessons?). "Yet, there you would have grown up among young gentlemen" said his father; "Robi, did you really get ice cream every Sunday? Even in winter? That's a lot of nonsense..."

He became a day student like many other boys from the settlement. The train for the city left at dawn.

How much he rode that train. He did his homework writing on his lap in the bumpy car, sat back in a corner and occasionally dozed off; or yelling and screaming they fought with their school satchels in the corridor, he was chased from car to car or he was chasing the scattering vocational school students; in the afternoon, when he got bored with memorizing Latin, he snuck out and ran to the railroad, the whole bunch was there, waiting at the sharp curve, where in the deep cut, the trains went slowly, the long German military trains; and the boys yelled and waved their arms and ran along the rails, hoping that the Germans would throw them some cigarettes; at that time his father was already serving in the Carpathians, in a sapper battalion and he had him brought there during the summer of '44; he traveled by train through the Felvidék, among black pine forests; he traveled by military train, his father's orderly, Jóska, a large-headed soldier with vacant blue eyes, smuggled him onto a military train but as soon as they had arrived, the front collapsed and his father said: "Let's go home," and for two days they rode with Jóska in a car that originally served to transport pigs. Now the two-tiered car was filled with the wounded and he couldn't even stand up straight in the confined quarters. He crawled on hands and knees among the strange, dead soldiers, whose face was covered, since the train commander had the doors locked and he could get off only in Komárom; then they fled together with his mother, since there was nothing for them to do in the settlement. There was nothing for them to eat and the bombers, heading for Budapest again and again attacked the factories around the mine, with stray bombs falling into the settlement; there was only a large crater where the neighboring house used to be, with greenish water soaking the rubble. But at night the train stopped, because the bombers were looking for military targets on the darkened rails, the car jumped when the bombs began to fall, the engine ran off the track, the line was closed for two days and they sat shivering in the

car until they were able to go on, but they had to go on, flee to relatives in the country, to save themselves, to survive, and to escape the war.

How much he rode the trains! As though an entire country was trying to find its place; then the war nevertheless caught up with him, the war that the fathers did not want to win or to lose.

Recently he noticed that he was using his father's gestures when he was with Juli, to caress her head with his index finger, to hold her hand in the street, or when sitting at home he involuntarily held out his hand, toward her, for the woman to put her cold fingers in his palm, and then he held her hand tightly and moved their hands back and forth in the air. They would have been stupid and senseless movements if they didn't remind him of his father, who had been dead for twenty years.

He barely remembered him, they did not see each other often, both of them were busy with their own affairs. His father became the manager of two large, interconnecting mines, started new drilling, pumped out the flooded mine shafts and cleared the adits closed by explosive charges laid by the soldiers - the battle for coal had begun. Then he became ill and took to his bed, the doctor said it was just a cold and exhaustion and that he should take some aspirin - but that night his father died.

The women in the settlement went on strike, there was nothing to eat: they marched to the market place and squashed the food offered by the market-women underfoot. He rushed with the R-guardists to the market, he had a heavy iron, German military bicycle and it took all his strength to pump the pedals. The students were demonstrating before the parish manse. And they, the R-guardists had to go again, since the police just stood by as the students were throwing burning brands onto the roof of the manse. They brought the Monsignor out from his smoke-filled study, he was clutching his Bible and his eighty-year old, bird-like body was getting ready for martyrdom with all the stubbornness of the true martyr. And he was there when they dug up the corpses of the miners shot at Kőbánya. Not far from the kennels where he and Lizi used to walk. On that rainy day, he failed to see how it was possible that not so long ago they were playing there. Everything was solemn, all around them the open graves, a cursing woman and men standing on the rubble that was used to cover the graves, they pulled their neck down into the collar of their black coats, watching silently as the shovels scraped over the stones threw dirt on their shoes and the bodies of their comrades, covered by disintegrating clothes were lying helter-skelter on the bottom of the two-foot hole where the Arrow Cross men had hastily buried them...

He did not attend the Gymnazium, the trains to the city were unreliable; later a program was started at the settlement to prepare them for the final examination. This later became the Miner Gymnazium. They were so proud of it! In those days they were proud of everything!

He was the proudest of his iron-framed khaki-colored, military bicycle and of the R-guardist armband with which the Party identified its own soldiers. He remembers the Party office in the former Lieber Tavern, the black billiard tables, the long bar, moved out into the hallway, the folding lawn chairs which had to be moved in and out from the assembly room daily (the former bar), where Kurucz, the lanky, deliberate Secretary gave them their orders and called the school, telling them not to expect the boys, and before the meeting they were standing around in the narrow corridor and peeked into the room, where miners stood along the walls, and the rank odor of sweat and beer and the murmur of conversations drifted out into the hall through the door, opened just an inch or two. He remembers all this much better than he remembers his father, who had suddenly died. At his funeral, getting ready for the service,

they chose six men to carry the casket, but Kurucz said: "Let Robi be one of them," and he excitedly stepped up to the coffin; the miner orchestra was already tuning up and as he was peeking out through the door of the mortuary, he saw the somber group standing among the graves and behind his back, he heard Kurucz say: "It was too bad of him to die just now!" And they lifted the coffin and it was above his shoulder, so he reached up and held the corner of the coffin up with his hand; they opened the black door and they started out, "Keep in step," somebody said and they started again. The woolen sweater he wore under his blue shirt tickled his skin, he desperately fixed his eyes on the mud in front of him, where black water filled the footprints, the mud was sooty, covered with coal dust, the buckets moving along the wires overhead were groaning but the racket made by the band covered all other sounds; he didn't catch a single word of Kurucz's eulogy. This is the way he buried his father, who was not supposed to die.

He stood just before his final exams when the scandal occurred: at a meeting with the reconstituted Social Democrats an argument began about who was greater, Lenin or Stalin? (Who started it? Why did the argument become so passionate?). A disciplinary committee was appointed. A Party investigation was mandated from Pest. Kurucz called him into his office: "I can't protect you. Your father was an intellectual and many have not forgotten it. Anyway, why do you want a baccalaureate? You have already lost two years. Go to an Officer Candidate School and disappear from here for a while, while I can still help you..." After his father's death, his mother reverted to being an old peasant woman, wearing only black, she just puttered around the house, prayed for a long time after going to bed, they hardly spoke. Once, she said about the Party: "You should not go there, I can pay for your education from my pension, go to the University and become a gentleman." Kurucz was right, he had no business being in the settlement. At Pécs, he was assigned to a guard battalion, so that after the basic training he could become an officer candidate. But then the school started a paper and he was assigned to it. When he was sent to Pest, he was assigned to the central Party paper and he went to night school. After the counter-revolution the Youth Communist Organization asked for a staff man, and from there he went to the Institute. The settlement, his father's death, the former R-guardists scurrying around, the Party offices in the Lieber Tavern, all disappeared into the distant past.

At first, Juli didn't like it when he called her Kitten. But he had always called his women Kitten, every one of them. Edith was a messenger in the Officer Candidate school, Éva who attached herself to him in Pest, who dragged him to concerts, who had a little girl's room with white furniture and wore silk pajamas. He also called Vali Kitten. Her ironic face could always make him wild. Vali introduced him to Anni, who was senselessly clinging to her husband, that sloppy, cigar-smoking, black-haired lawyer. He did not even want to think about them. Every relationship was a bust, many years of misery.

Because he called his women Kitten and because he also wanted to marry them. Every one of them. Edith, the messenger in high boots, Vali who burst into laughter when, in bed, he asked her to marry him and Éva who was offended and pulled her head away saying: "You want to support me?" Yes, he wanted to help them. Why not?

Juli needed him. And they accepted each other. Even though, he thought that they would never get used to each other: Juli liked tall, dark men and he liked blonde, white-skinned women. He always thought his wife would look like that. "Are we a real family?" Juli kept asking him, "It is so hard to believe. We are a real family, aren't we? And I would so much like to be *us*..."

On Women's Day, he brought her flowers. They were smiling at him on the stairs. It occurred to him only later that he would have been ashamed to be seen with flowers, he should have been embarrassed and furious, that was the manly thing to do; but actually he wanted everybody to know how the two of them lived. Juli also said very seriously: "Some day I will write a poem about us, if I still know how to write poetry. The poem will say that we are a real family and how well we fit together." Sometimes an incomprehensible panic gets a hold of him: where is Juli? She could be in trouble. She could be run over by a car or by the streetcar, she could be mugged in the evening, a crazy client could stab her, a bridge could collapse under her, so many bad things could happen to her; he would like to run to her and hide her somewhere... Or, he pictures them getting old. They will have retired. They sit in the cafe and read the papers. Juli's sparse hair will be gray and there will be bags under her eyes, her face will still be child-like and her eyes, her black, cheerful eyes will still look at the world with the same curiosity. He will never see Juli as an old woman.

Sometimes he looks at her: what would their child be like? He visualizes a little girl, but that is really Juli. He has a picture of her, her only childhood picture: Juli and a large dog (he has to laugh, a dog of all things). The Saint Bernard sits sloppily, his two front legs spread awkwardly and with his fat body he leans against the little girl. Juli stands next to it. Straight, in snow boots, in a coat, dressed for a walk and all buttoned up; it was an amateur picture taken in front of some cafe with the dog of one of her father's casual acquaintances. Her bonnet is tied under her chin and has two points sticking up like the ears of a cat. Juli stares solemnly into the camera. Her body is rigid and her hands are made into fists in her mittens. Her staring, slanted eyes are fixed and her pupils are huge. Her nose is tiny, her lips are tightly compressed, her face shows anger. Next to the sloppy dog, the rigid posture and loneliness of this small person is even more noticeable. It is a picture of sadness. Juli doesn't like it and does not acknowledge herself in it. When he found it at the bottom of a drawer, he turned it this way and that, and didn't know what to do with it. - Perhaps she wouldn't mind if even this single picture did not preserve the memory of her childhood.

She was roaming the streets. They had already been moved from the Jewish house to the ghetto; her father was deported from there and her mother with her big belly (and because she could prove her Aryan descent) was taken to the maternity section of some hospital. One could escape from the ghetto, through a house with a passageway, into a square and from there into the city.

If examined carefully, one could see the traces of stitches on her blue coat, the site of the yellow star she had torn off. She was wandering aimlessly around the city, wondering to whom she could go; but she had nobody except Zurzabella, her black doll. She finally went to find her father. What ever would she do alone in the ghetto? (She could not know that her father was already beyond where she could reach him).

When she was hungry, she entered the nearest apartment house. Wandered along the corridors on the second and third floors, avoided the shabby doors and rang the bell only on freshly painted doors, with lace curtains showing through the glass. When she was lucky, it was a maid who opened the door. The lady of the house almost always chased her away.

"I am hungry, please, be good enough to give me something..."

"Why don't you go home?"

"My mother is in the hospital."

"Were you bombed out? What hospital is your mother in?" Since she really had no answer to this, it was an excellent answer to say: "I don't know, we are from the country."

The small lie cut off further questioning. She was either given some food or was chased off. At times, they cursed her, scolded her and slammed the door.

One day she wandered in the direction of the Ferencváros Station. There was too much commotion there: soldiers, Arrow Cross Party members, policemen. Among them a number of men in civilian clothes. She had a feeling that this was a bad place. Yet she did not run away. Her father was here. He had to be!

Trucks loaded with Germans drove up and they started herding the prisoners. In the great disorder, she managed to get to the storage sheds. She could see the tracks: there were cattle cars there with their doors open, their inside dark. They set a table down in front of the cars and officers were sitting behind it. On the path leading to the table, a long undulating row of armed men. Between them, two by two, the prisoners: there were some who were shackled together. At the table, one of the officers was leafing through a hefty volume, another one asked for papers from those who still had any. An occasional lucky prisoner who could prove that he was a foreign citizen was moved to one side and was turned over to the police, the others were herded into the cars. When a car was full, a limping, shabby railway guard closed the door and the gendarmes locked it. When this happened, an invisible engine, beyond the station building, gave a snort, pushed the train forward so that another empty car stood before the officers' table.

She did not see her father. Yet, ever since, she wonders if he had not been there anyway. (He could not have been, it was two weeks since he was taken to the camp.)

That same evening, when she got back to the boulevard, she ran into a roundup.

In front of the Cafe New York people started to gather. There were some who resolutely started to walk away, but then ran back, and the pedestrians herded together in the increasingly crowded street, had no place to escape to. She pushed her way through to the human chain of Arrow Cross herders and whimpered: "I lost my mother, I lost my mother." The Arrow Cross shoved her back with their knee, but she did not give way and continued to whimper. She saw an elderly, gray-haired man who held his rifle very clumsily, whose jacket hang in shreds and only his armband was a fresh green.

The armed human chain continued forward, herding the people ever closer together and then the identification began. She did not budge from in front of the elderly man; she no longer whimpered, just stood in front of him and occasionally looked up at him. From behind, a man in a raincoat turned her around, but the Arrow Cross man said: "She has lost her mother." The man in the raincoat nodded: "This has to be checked out."

When the roundup was finished, the Arrow Cross man put his rifle in a truck and took her hand. "Where do you live?" She gave their address, which was not very far away. Holding her hand, they walked along the boulevard. She still remembers the tight grasp of his rough hand.

The janitor opened her eyes widely when they arrived. It was rumored in the house that the Nyulász were Arrow Crossists. The man worked in the next street in a hardware store, he was a locksmith by trade. Aunt Nyuszi - this was the pet name the tenants had given her- had become a little stouter since she had seen her. The Arrow Cross man asked no questions, although he could see that the janitor didn't know what to say. He was satisfied that she was known by the janitor.

When they were left to themselves, Aunt Nyuszi took her into their apartment and questioned her. She told her that her father had been taken away and hearing this, the janitor shrugged her shoulders: "Where he was taken to he will not be able to gamble away his pay." When she

heard that Juli's mother was in the hospital because she was in her seventh month and wanted to have her baby, but couldn't and only had terrible cramps, Aunt Nyuszi's meaty face became more cheerful: "Well, she is in a good place, in the hospital. She should never have followed her Józsi into a Jewish house. That man never deserved her! Where is she? I'll take her some soup." But she did not know where her mother was.

She slept in the janitor's flat for two nights. She was not allowed into the yard and was told to stay away from the windows. On the morning of the third day, Arrow Cross men wandered into the flat (this was, after all, a house on the boulevard) and in her fright, Aunt Nyuszi called her everything imaginable, a relative, a bombed out family, a stranger and her godchild. And that same evening she made her leave. She asked Juli if there was no relative to whom she could go. "You can't stay here, love. It's too bad, but that's the times we live in." She wrapped some food in a newspaper and then, as a sudden inspiration, gave Juli a picture of her own husband, taken in uniform, last spring, before he was taken to the front. "If somebody stops you and gives you a hard time, show them the picture and tell them that he is your father. He is fighting for his country. But don't come back here, you can't stay here."

She escorted Juli to the street. As she stood in the door, on her fat legs, with an apron pinned to her large bosom, her broad face showing more ill humor than sympathy - she was the Aunt Nyuszi she knew from old, the one she liked when she was a child. When she did not want to eat her supper, even though the gruel was ready, her mother tried to entice her to eat but without success, until in the end they both burst into tears. Her mother took her downstairs to Aunt Nyuszi. The large woman pulled her head onto her broad bosom and said: "Don't cry Rózsika. She is a stubborn child, but she is really a good little girl."

"Why doesn't she eat? She will perish! My nerves can't stand it!" sobbed her mother.

"She will eat, she will eat for me!" She placed a little stool on the stones of the yard, placed a little footstool next to it, and made her sit there next to the gruel.

"Why don't you leave us, Rózsika dear. The two of us, Juli and I will take care of this gruel. Not so, my pet? You, you, yooouuu Gruel Juli." When she little, they called her Gruel Juli. And there, in front of Aunt Nyuszi's door, in the depth of the cool yard, while the janitor carefully settled on her doorstep, lifting the cat to her mighty thighs, threatening her that the cat would eat the gruel - she really started to eat. Perhaps because Aunt Nyuszi was so calm. She did not plead and did not cry, like her mother. In fact, it was all the same to her if Juli ate her supper or not. Consequently, she ate.

With the sweet rolls wrapped in newspaper under her arm and with Sergeant Nyulász's photograph in her hand (who with his wide jaw and gray eyes looked rigidly and with embarrassment into the lens, and with his light brown hair carefully combed with a wet comb into clearly unnatural waves), she walked along the boulevard toward the Nyugati Station. She wasn't thinking about Aunt Nyuszi, she was not angry with her, she wasn't even grateful. She had already forgotten her. After the war, Aunt Nyuszi used to say, first carefully and in private, watching what Juli would say, but later and with a self-assured smile, even before others: "Once I saved you. Not so, Juli? If I would have revealed everything then to that Godless vagabond..." for she never openly berated the Arrow Cross, this much she retained from her earlier sympathies, "if I would not have identified you in the proper way, God only knows what would've happened."

She always listened to this listlessly. But when she was a big girl, once, when after opening the door for her, Aunt Nyuszi who did not like to get up at night, snarled at her: "Well, Juli dear does your you-know-what itch that much? The boys will click in it, and then what will

you do?” That’s when they quarreled. It was from the Party office that she was getting home so late and she angrily so informed the janitor, and told her that she should be happy to open the door in peace, that her husband did not get into trouble at the front and that they did not get into trouble because of his green shirt...! From then on, Aunt Nyuszi treated her like an adult. She returned her greetings, since a janitor must keep on good terms with all the tenants, but they no longer engaged in conversation. Once she overheard a few words the janitor said behind her back: “...and yet, once I did the little shit a big favor.” She became enraged, but then calmed down thinking that there was really nobody to whom she owed more than to Aunt Nyuszi. She had given her five jamfilled sweet rolls.

She only found out that afternoon that there were jam-filled sweet rolls in the package, when the sirens started to howl. By that time she had been wandering around for hours and had reached an unfamiliar suburb, beyond the Lipótváros, lumber yards and factories, slums and a market square, a cindery playing field with rickety soccer goal posts, in one field large piles of fire wood, and then again factories, workshops and junk yards and old settlements with flatroofed houses. During the air-raid she was cowering under a fence, but when she heard nothing more, she moved on.

She suddenly came upon a wide street. Streetcars were standing on their rails, since the all-clear had not sounded yet. They were yelling at her from the door of an apartment building. She wanted to wander off, but fell down and the sweet rolls fell out of the package. A helmeted air-raid warden ran after her and caught her. He dragged her into the doorway and questioned her about walking around in the street. But she was so tired, she did not answer the man. Didn’t even look at him, didn’t seem to see him. (She couldn’t remember his face, his figure or anything else. Was he old or young? She only remembered the helmet, nothing more.)

It seems that the man took a good look at her. After the all clear sounded he took her by the hand to go somewhere “where there was a place for little girls.” Was she scared? Did she suspect that he would take her to the Arrow Cross? No. She obediently went with him. She was very tired. Just let them get somewhere, no matter where.

They went to a former Jewish school that was under the protection of the Red Cross. It was an L-shaped, tall building with large windows and a fake marble stairway, and an insignificant little, bearded man, the school-porter, came to stop them.

“What do you want?”

“I brought this little girl.”

“She doesn’t belong here.”

“That’s possible, but she was wandering in the street, I tried to question her, but she could tell me nothing.”

“Take her back where you found her.”

Uncle Wohl was standing in front of them, his clothes hanging on him as though there was no body inside of them, only his face suggested that he was alive. And his face was forbidding.

“We don’t know what to do with her. We have to be careful because... But this is no concern of yours. Take the little girl away.”

“She is no concern of mine! Look here.” The warden unbuttoned her blue coat, took hold of the material and stretched it so that the needle holes revealed the place from where she had torn off the yellow star. “You must take care of her.”

Uncle Wohl saw nothing, since his glasses were not on his nose, but he knew what they would reveal; his jaws moved but no sound emerged from his throat. In the meantime the warden had left the building. "Come back," he yelled after him, "take her away from here! I can do nothing for her. Nothing."

A bespectacled teacher-type came into the hallway and peered at them nearsightedly.

"What happened?"

She listened to the porter's explanations and looked at her. She looked at the lapels of her blue coat, where the warden in his perturbation had disarranged it. Aunt Ibi reached out and straightened them out.

"What did they do to you, my poor child? Do you really know nothing about your parents? Who are your father and mother? Where are they?"

And Juli then opened her fist and held out Sergeant Nyulász's crumpled photograph.

Why did she do this? Because she was tired? Or obstinate?

She had been left alone in the ghetto; mother was taken to the hospital, she actually could leave without her. This is why she was looking for her father; he would have sufficed her. And this week on the streets, and the questionings, the round-up. Aunt Nyuszi with her sweet rolls. The protesting Uncle Wohl and even the helmeted warden told her all she needed to know about adults, she hated them all, she loathed them. With the passionate hatred of a child. She didn't think that anybody would help her. She only showed the photograph so that Aunt Ibi should throw it away and chase her off. Yes, she wanted, she desired to be treated badly, unjustly; let her call the Arrow Cross, it was all the same to her...!

Aunt Ibi looked at the picture of the Sergeant and like all nearsighted people, held it close to her eyes, turning it this way and that, then asked rather indifferently: "Did this man bring you here? Did your parents entrust you to him? Answer truthfully."

And hearing this tired voice - which held little, if any, kindness and was just a question and, at that an almost indifferent one - she started to cry, sobbing and blubbering and screaming, she burrowed her head into Aunt Ibi's dress and even today she can feel the roughness of the cloth as she was biting and chewing it, and the desperation overwhelmed her so strongly, strongly enough that her whole body was shaking, her tears and saliva dribbled down the teacher's dress and made a mess of her face as well. (She well remembers the disgusting scene, but could never tell anybody about it, not even Robi.)

Later, when she calmed down, Aunt Ibi questioned her, but she revealed only her name, Julika. Then she said something else, but she said that with that recurring, stubborn fury and yells it with that angry loathing and animosity she felt before her crying jag. Aunt Ibi took her by her hand and led her along the corridor, chattering about how nice it will be here, at least for the time being, until they can discover something about her, but until then she should be comfortable there, with many nice children, girls too, and it will be very nice and tonight she would sleep well in a nice bed and at the end she said: "We must take a bed for you into the dormitory." This made Juli stop, she yanked her hand out of the teacher's hand and cried out in desperation: "I am not a child to carry things!" She was thinking of the huge davenport at home, and of the new trials. "I am not a child to carry things!" The hateful pride took hold of her again. Aunt Ibi smiled and gently patted her on the head. "Uncle Wohl will do it, little one. We will only help him. We will carry the pillows."

In fact nothing was resolved. It was her great good fortune that Aunt Ibi allowed her to stay; only the children of parents having a safe-conduct from a neutral country were given refuge in that school. Everything good that happened to her she attributed to Little George. He was the only one she could recall with yearning and with an aching love.

It should be morning. If he can't sleep, it should be morning at long last.

He always enjoyed getting up, even as a child. The alarm went off at four thirty and his father called out his name in the darkness; it was not necessary to wake him, he was already sitting on the edge of the davenport, pulling up his socks. The train he took to the city, to the Gymnazium left the settlement at five thirty.

He enjoyed getting up because he always woke up with a clear head and so excited as though some extraordinary experience was waiting for him. He hated the nocturnal alarms and the sleeplessness because they spoiled the pleasure of getting up; he felt rested in the middle of the night, he could get up, but by the time the dawn came he is worn out, the short naps and the wakenings are as though the night had slipped off its rails and was riding on the sleepers rattling and shaking his whole body to pieces; in the morning his back will ache, his shoulder and his joints, his neck is wry, his arm is numb from the pressure of his body, his head is filled with gooey fatigue, his skull as though it were a vessel filled with gruel, his temples are ready to bust - and this is the way it is going to be tomorrow, all day long.

Otherwise, getting up is like a circus at their house. Immediately upon awakening, Juli asks him: "What kind of a day is this going to be?" But she expects no answer, she knows, she'll have to force it out of him. "Turn on the boomer."

The radio booms, fortunately it booms at the neighbors as well, on the floor below them and across the street and thus it doesn't bother anyone. They go to the bathroom, let the water run, back to the bedroom, make the beds, to the kitchen, the breakfast on the hot plate, Juli trots after him everywhere, holds up her slipping pajamas bottoms with one hand, she puts them on so clumsily that the elastic is broken in all of them and she questions him tirelessly:

"What kind of a day is this going to be? What-kind-of-a-day-is-this-going-to-be?"

She leaves all the doors open behind herself, she opens all six doors of the two white clothes cupboards standing side by side in the foyer, the door to the toilet across the hall is also open and like in a bewitched castle, doors swing on their hinges, leading nowhere, when one door is pushed, it bangs into another and one can never tell which doors open to what or close off what; Juli loves this, she plays hide and seeks behind them and calls out: "Hello!", she appears and disappears behind them, she holds up her pajama bottoms with one hand; a door slams into her, she grabs her arm with her other hand, the pajama bottoms slip down, she yelps and makes a grab for them and pulls them up over her round tummy and she goes on aimlessly: "What kind of a day is this going to be?" she keeps asking him from behind the doors; she already has her slip on, she delves deeply into the cupboards where things are piled three feet high, underclothes in nylon bags, cardigans and blouses jammed onto the shelves, crookedly hung dresses on dozens of hangers, she is searching for a pair of step-ins, she shoves the dresses to one side and the metal hangers rattle on the rod, and while she is selecting a dress, the question is repeated over and over again: "What kind of a day is this going to be?"

It is only when they sit down to breakfast in the small, narrow kitchen and the bacon and eggs sizzle in the skillet, the mixed orange and lemon juice is in the glass (all this had to be prepared while Juli dances up and down behind the cupboard as though she were dressing) - in short, when they can finally sit down to breakfast and the coffee begins to perk and its aroma

can be felt, only then is there enough peace that he could answer Juli's question. But he can't answer and Juli does not expect an answer; the question only serves to get the coordination of their daily program started. In the meantime they mop up the last of the egg with their bread, drink their juice, watch the coffee; the radio booms, gives the news, the weather report, music roars, but since the bathroom is far away, Juli holds a portable radio in her hand, she takes it along everywhere and sets it down next to the skillet.

"What kind of a day is it going to be?"

"I don't know, Kitten."

"Will you call me at 4:30?"

"Will you be in?"

"I will in the afternoon."

"And in the morning?"

"I am in court," says Juli with her mouth full.

"How many hearings will you have?"

"I'll be done early. Could we have lunch together. Would you come?"

"No, I have a meeting at 11 o'clock."

"Party? Communist Youth? What kind of a meeting?"

"In the Association."

"Oh my," Juli is wilting, "I don't like that."

"Why?"

"You do always so much talking there, and from there you always join your buddies and don't meet me. I don't like that kind of meeting."

"What kind of meeting do you like?"

"Party. Communist Youth. Whatever kind. They are over quickly."

"In other words, you will go in after lunch and will be in the office at 4:30?"

"Will you call me?"

"If I don't call you, I'll meet you at five."

"O.K."

Juli has to shout because next to her the radio is booming, for the sake of emphasis she nods her unkempt, black head a few times, in the meantime she is still stuffing herself, her fingers are greasy and she leaves fingerprints on the juice glass, she pushes her hair away from her forehead with the back of her hand. "Come and meet me, that will make it a good day; we will walk and..." she says in a voice that will not tolerate contradiction, "we will go to the movies."

He just looks at the remnants of the breakfast and refuses to acknowledge the jubilation.

"We go to the movies - wonderful, wonderful, wonderful!"

Juli becomes quiet, her jubilation was premature and behind the still confident voice, there is a trace of anxiety:

"Then we are agreed on the movie?" Now he looks up.

“What kind of movie? Anyway, what is a movie? Do you eat it or drink it?”

“Goodness, but you are awful,” Juli wails, her lips yellow from the egg yolks, “I was already so, so very certain that we would go. There are so many movies we should see, I have checked ten or twenty of them in the program. I thought that if you were coming to meet me...”

“Should I not meet you?”

“Yes, yes!” Juli outcries the radio and she waves her greasy fingers in the air, they should be washed since she can’t touch anything the way they are, “walking is even more fun than the movies - the coffee is boiling over...!”

Their greatest pleasure is walking. They never get tired of it. Whenever he can, he meets his wife at 5 o’clock, he escapes from the meeting, escapes from the closed circuit television program, gets up from the friendly bull session or, if he chairs the afternoon meeting, he limits the debate. If he has the time, he leaves an hour early and walks, if he has something else to do, he figures he’ll go by bus and if he runs out of time, he waves his arm for a taxi and rushes to the Court from the other end of town.

He doesn’t like to wait. He gets upset if he has to stand around waiting even for a few minutes. He resents standing by the door, since the colleagues of his wife will talk about him (what a Caspar Milquetoast - like kids although they are a couple of old nags - You know, dear, this is just a front, but when we don’t see them... It seems that is why the State pays him - although I must say that our charming little attorney needs a tamer and a nurse - they are so sweet together). Consequently, he stops on the other side of the street, in front of the yellow building. He keeps looking at the announcements on the door of the Court: “No clients will be seen today,” or “Clients will be seen from 12-15 o’clock.” He recognizes the last client coming out, followed by some officials who leave a little early. And finally, the unfriendly and uncouth bell, a remnant of the Monarchy, indicating the end of the working day is rung. Agile secretaries appear through the dark gate, sweaters knitted from Australian wool, nylon-clad legs, large bags, gym bags, string bags, purses and shopping bags. They are followed by the men and only then by the higher echelon of officials. Juli begins to wave even before she is through the gate, he can’t even see her yet, only an arm waving high in the air - he has asked her many times not to draw attention to them - and then her head appears, at the level of a multitude of shoulders, large, dark glasses on her small face. She is still on the far side of the street and makes several false starts to dart between the cars, she runs across the road and is talking already, he can see her mouth move as she tells him, “This will never end,” and with that he left and slammed the door... “What do you think of that? I am so tired...” “Oh, it’s so good to see you. I can hardly ever wait for 5 o’clock and worry whether you’ll be here...” “I have worked like a horse all day...” “Carry my bag, the raincoat makes it so heavy, and the files. For tomorrow. Awful isn’t it? Look that’s the new examining judge, the one getting on the bus, he is a classy lad, isn’t he? Ever since the thrombosis, my veins hurt. Here at the top of my thigh. Isn’t it droll? No?... Well, if it isn’t, it isn’t. Perhaps it’s the change in the weather. Didn’t you feel it? Let’s buy some tomatoes, I love that particular kind. Let’s go swimming in the morning, you know the doc ordered me to move around a lot, let’s remember to set the alarm for 5:30. When Pali heard that we were going swimming he said that I was a spunky lady... What did you ask?”

“Why are you so taciturn today?”

“Impertinence, I will shut up.”

“Do you know how?”

“Look at those green shoes! There on that woman, I want some like those.”

“We’ll knock her down when there are fewer people around. Till then, let’s follow her.”

“Sure, she is a nice tugboat to follow, I can see that you admire her ass. Since you told me how you and the others play, follow-the-tugboat, I know all your tricks.”

“Well she is certainly built to tow four or five barges.”

“And I?”

“One, maybe, if the barge has a hole in it instead of an eye.”

“I’ll box your ears.”

“Easy when both my hands are full.”

“I heard a joke today. At the beginning of the tourist season the policemen have to take a language test, everyone has to say four words in a foreign language. The first one says: “Achtung, achtung, krokodil, grosz”, the second one uses Russian: “empi-rio-kriticismus”. He passes. The third one knows English: “Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer-Aouuuu!”

“Your pronunciation of the lion’s roar was perfect.”

“Oh, Teddy bear, you are in an awkward mood today.”

“So are you.”

“They will make us sit apart. You will see, in the end they will make us sit apart.”

“Like troublemakers in school. Then I won’t be able to tell you that I received some money today.”

“Hey! How much?”

“If the hundred forint notes were in Snow White and not in Little Red Riding Hood, every dwarf would get one.”

“How much will you give me?”

“More than I would like to, but less than you expect.”

This is how they fool around while they are walking. It doesn’t much matter what they say, they only talk for the sake of the rhythm, the same way marching soldiers sing.

Juli holds on tightly to his arm.

After 5 o’clock everybody is in a hurry, the pedestrians zigg-zagg, the streetcars are packed, the cars try to pass each other, flashing their blinkers, the city is nervous. For them, however, this is the calmest hour.

They promenade, watch the people and the shops, Juli pulls him to the store windows and looks at dresses, shoes, books and everything on display. In the Közért they drink a milk shake, they admire the machine as it grinds up the raspberries in the milk. This is their dinner.

In the summer they eat ice cream. Juli, whose blood pressure is erratic, craves ice cream.

In the street, among the milling crowd, they hold hands and are really alone together; more alone than anywhere else, because here they create their own isolation, heeding only each other. Juli chatters-natters and in the roar of the street and the hullabaloo of the underpass, he only hears her squeaky voice. When he looks to one side, he sees her head at the level of his shoulder, her page-boy haircut, which she disheveled during the night was standing up like a

cock's comb all day because Juli only goes through the motions of combing her hair. Her hair is stiff and hard to manage. But this dishevelment is a part of her, so is the sloppy garb, the blouse with its collar turned inward, the zipper stuck halfway up, the wrinkles and the strains which are never seen on the dress of a "regular" woman. She is nevertheless very pleased with her appearance; "I am in my glory," she says proudly, as though she were an illustration in a fashion magazine.

Others don't understand why it is so gratifying to promenade around, telling each other the small events of the day and listening to each other. The conversation is restful, like draining tired oil from a crankcase.

Naturally, Juli does most of the talking. She relates everything, silly things, emotions, thoughts, everything, even things that may annoy him. Her sincerity knows no bounds.

He can't converse quite so free of inhibitions, not even with Juli. There are things he doesn't mention for months. He holds them tightly, inside. There are things he never tells her. He can't talk about them. He would like to bury these memories - stamp them down, forget them, annihilate them, as though the memories belonged to someone else.

Yet, the past keeps popping up. That spring during the war. It only takes one movie. A bad night.

The Mount of Calvary. The village. Mother's relatives to whom they had to escape from the bombings and the starvation.

He hadn't seen Mount Calvary since. He is ashamed to think of it. Time had worn off the topsoil from the highest part of the vineyard; yellowish rocks appear from under the eroded topsoil, like giant skulls, and in this desolation only a few long spears of colorless grass emerge from the crevices in the rocks, like a few remaining tufts of hair. They built chapel on this bare mountain top and along the path from the village, they had erected the Stations of the Cross, carved in stone. This was Calvary.

It was from here that during the spring of '45 they were watching the countryside.

"If they would only go to hell," his father said of the Germans, "then at least we would no longer have to be afraid of them."

The Russian guns still sounded far away, during the night.

His father had deserted from his regiment only recently. Late at night, he crept up to the house from the garden, quietly knocked on the window of the kitchen, whispered with mother in the dark, and then immediately went to the vineyard. He hid his uniform under the thatch of the press house and donned a spraying outfit that was kept next to the fertilizer vat. From then on, every morning, he walked out to his father, just as he was, without any parcels, and only with his pockets bulging with food.

They could see a long way from Calvary. The Altalér sneaked along a wide, watery valley. In the March sunshine, the water shone white and immobile as though its surface was made of molten lead. Around the river, as far as the eye could see, hill towered over hill - crowded and jumbled on top of each other. The banks of the river were a vivid green, the vineyards were a raw brown and the white-washed press houses seemed to be clinging to them. The whole world sparkled clearly and peacefully.

The paved road followed the Altalér and as it ran along it, it disappeared among the hills like an ever narrowing ribbon - perhaps it did not lead anywhere - yet during the last few days, car followed car, continuously and without stopping. The road leading to the village was deserted. They were spared the flood.

“They are clearing out.” His father was watching the retreating troops. His stubbly face was calm, his eyes clear blue. “Your mother prayed well. The war is over.”

Suddenly he felt a great, great bitterness and burning shame. They had tricked him out of this man’s work and his father was even making fun of him...!

There was a wooden bridge across the Altalér. When he got there, two young men were leaning against the railings. They were also hiding in the vineyard, in Feri Horváth’s press house. This was Feri’s cousin from the well-to-do branch of the family. The farm boy with the yellow mustache had the reputation of being a dirty fighter.

He stepped closer to them to see what they were looking at. In a deep hole under the water streaming under the bridge, a shapeless body was bobbing up and down. It was lazily rolling this way and that in the stream, but stayed in place, caught from below by a weed. It was the corpse of a soldier, who had floated down the river from the front in the spate caused by the melting snow. He was on his back with his legs and head under the surface of the water, his body bloated, almost unrecognizable as a human being. His huge, bloated belly sticking out from where his shirt used to be. Nauseating stench rose from the river. It made him gag.

He found everything in the village in a turmoil. He was amazed to see so many men in uniform, coming and going. The gendarmes were yelling at the people to go back to their houses and not to interfere with the military. There were soldiers with armbands, he noticed them too late to turn back. That morning, soldiers with Arrow Cross armbands had appeared in the village, looking for deserters and they also had it announced from the village hall that the Levente, students who underwent training for the army, had to report to the village hall by 4 o’clock that afternoon, bringing food for two days.

He wandered home in a daze. The war had caught up with him. They lived on the main street, not far from the church - but in the back of the yard, behind the carriage shed in a small building, slapped together from stones and boards from an old torn-down barn, that was vacant until they had fled here.

Imre Horváth (mother’s younger brother) lived in the L-shaped, yellow house facing the street. His tailor shop was in the wing facing the yard. Brother Imre was playing at ducks and drake there among the humming sewing machines, the heavy cutting table and the old cupboard filled with textiles, all crowded into the single room. Limping, but still agile, brother Imre was rushing back and forth and when he had to turn around, he lifted his shorter leg and pivoted on his other heel. Even though handicapped, he walked fast, throwing his body forward with every step as though forever wading in invisible water and bobbing up to grab a lungful of air. He could never sit still, he was on the go all day long, ran into the village and sucked up every bit of gossip, got involved in every argument, transacted business with the priest and exchanged banter with the judge.

As soon as he turned into the yard, Uncle Imre hopped out of the workshop, holding his slipping pants up with one hand and maliciously called to him: “We are going to war, young sir! We will thrash the Russkys, what?!”

The heavy flesh of his self-satisfied, fat, beardless face was trembling with excitement. This made him obstinate. He felt that he was stronger than anybody else, a hero on whom the family could rely. Let father lie low among the old barrels, he would finish the war for him.

He felt that he was powerful enough to march right through all the Russian troops.

When his name was called at the village hall, he confidently yelled: "Here - present!"

In the afternoon, they took the Levente to the end of the village, to the mill built on the bank of the Altalér. Among the assembled Levente, there were two prisoners, Feri Horváth and his friend. They had been caught. Fifteen carts were commandeered from the village to transport the stores from the mill to the city.

At dusk, they got under way.

They marched in the increasingly widening gap in the long line of carts. In the cart rattling along ahead of them, a large bull of a sergeant was sitting, leaning against the sacks, with a rifle in his hands.

The two prisoners were kept in the middle of the Levente group. They were cheerful because Feri Horváth - whom the gendarmes of the village held in some respect - had a gallon jug of booze, given to him by his family. When they reached the highway, the night didn't seem quite so dark. He was bragging about his deeds on the front. He mentioned some copper contraption that the Russians used for making tea and old religious pictures painted on a wooden tablet - the German officers paid most generously for these and never asked where they came from.

"We pulled the girls out from the large stoves," he announced in a loud voice (the sergeant laughed when he heard this and took a drink from the jug when it came around to him). In one village, they had collected the women in a basement and were on them and off them for days; suddenly, military police arrived and this scared them, since their actions could get them in front of a court-martial. So, they quickly smuggled the women out of the village, to the edge of the woods and told them to run as fast as they could or the MP-s would shoot them! The little cowards ran, blessing their saviors... There would have been nothing wrong with the war, if that beastly winter had not come, but no human being could endure such cold.

Once, the sergeant on the cart in front of them asked them: "If you were such heroes, why did you desert?" This startled the lads and they said that they had valid leave papers but had lost them. The sergeant laughed loudly because Feri's booze began to affect him and he said: "You better think of a better story by the time we reach town or tomorrow you'll be dog meat."

The lads said no more, their cheerfulness was a thing of the past. It started to rain. Only the creaking of the wheels could be heard in the dark of the night.

When they reached the forest, Feri's comrade escaped. He jumped off the cart, leaped over the ditch on the side of the road and disappeared in the darkness. Confusion arose: The lead wagons continued on their way, the wagons behind them piled up and the soldiers ran around, shooting off their rifles at random. The sergeant yelled at the Levente to stay put. They barely dared to breathe. He yanked Feri Horváth from their midst, hit him in the face with his fist and then tied him to the tail of the cart, like a calf, and then sat next to him with his rifle.

They started out again. No one dared to say a word. Feri sniffled through his nose and walked ahead of them, all bent over. He was crying. Nothing could have frightened him more than seeing this big lad cry. The night suddenly seemed dreadfully dark.

It was deadly quiet among the bombed houses in the city, like a cemetery. On the Main Square, on a tall pedestal, the Kossuth statue stood without a head. Its bronze neck shredded by an explosion. In front of the county building, the flower beds had large humps in them, like giant mole hills. The cemetery had come to the city.

The railway station seemed to be intact. The Levente were herded into the waiting room. There was no electricity and they were feeling their way blindly among groups brought from other villages, trying to find a place for themselves.

He found a place in a window embrasure and sat, leaning against the wall. Those who had arrived before them were snoring huddled together on the benches and on top of the tables. Black hills of humanity loomed around him. Somebody was moaning childishly in his sleep. He was alone, he was cold and he was trembling.

Somewhere the door to an office was opened and light spilled out into the yard, illuminating the whitewashed wall of the toilets across the yard. He saw soldiers. Feri Horváth was shoved against the wall and stood there, subdued but obedient, only his hands, shackled behind his back were twitching; he opened his hands, stretched his fingers, made a tight fist and then again opened his hands. His fingers were trembling. A shot rang out. His cousin slid down by the wall and rolled over onto his side. Somewhere a door was closed and the yard was dark again.

He had watched this so calmly, that he failed to understand why the other boys were suddenly shaking him and slapping his face. Anyway, how did he ever get here? Then he heard himself yelling (he had trouble recognizing his own voice): "I want to go home...!"

When he finally stopped yelling and started to cry, somebody gave him a final slap in the dark and then they left him alone.

He woke at dawn to a feeling that the floor was shaking next to the wall where they were lying. A thunderclap deafened him. Above them, seemingly just under the roof, there was the roar of airplane engines, the building was trembling, just outside, the concrete paving blocks of the station were raked by machine gun bullets. After a moment of silence that barely allowed them to raise their head, a new wave of bombs rained down on them. Next door, a wall collapsed with a dull thump. He burrowed his face into the muddy floor.

As soon as the planes left, they smashed the locked doors of the waiting room. There were dead soldiers sprawled along the rails. One engine was lying on its side, the hot cinders had spilled out from the fire box and the body of the fireman was smoldering on top of the cinders. From the direction of one of the sidings, an unmanned group of cars was rolling toward the station, it slid off the broken rails, thumped over the sleepers with the cars folding up like so many accordions.

Without saying a word, or even looking at each other, they ran. He ran along the rails until he reached the fields. He felt no fatigue. Occasionally he stopped gasping for air and then, mechanically, he ran again, ran and ran. His whole body was transformed into two running legs, nothing else existed...

He reached the village at dusk. The street was filled with long Russian carts. In the garden of the church, soldiers were stringing wire from the top of the tallest pine tree toward the manse and toward the village hall where the officers were staying.

Every house was full of soldiers. Uncle Imre was fuming because his horses had been requisitioned. He was limping around the Russian soldiers quartered in his house and tried to talk to them, and then, accompanied by a soldier, he limped out of the yard.

Soon afterward word came that at the Command Post, he had gotten into an argument with Uncle Kereki, who as a former prisoner of war acted as an interpreter for the Russians; this Kereki was a shoemaker who hated Imre because the whole family was pro-German and he would tell the Russians everything! Also, how was it possible that when the Levente were taken away, none of them came back, but they let his nephew come home? The truth about all of this will be discovered and it will be a different world and just because someone was living in a stone house, he would no longer have a voice in community affairs...

His father was next door. His mother chased him after his father and told him to go back up the mountain immediately, so that they could not be arrested because of Uncle Imre.

In the dark yard he suddenly started to tremble and sank to the ground. Soldiers will come and take him away... Why? Because he escaped from the Germans? Or because he went with them...? Soldiers will come and take him away! He could think of nothing else. A stupid, animal terror shook him. He started to run.

He fled from the village, on the soaked dirt road below the gardens. When he was running through the fields and the vineyards, he suddenly had the feeling that he was pursued. Yet, he knew that he was by himself. With clumsy fingers, he located the key on the window sill of the press house and hid in the lower cellar. It occurred to him only now that he had not spoken to his father, that he had left him behind.

In his dream, he stood on a hill and in the distance there was a row of glittering tanks, parading beautifully and in a dignified fashion like a wedding procession, then loaded wagons with squeaky wheels came toward him, he tried to escape but his feet were like lead and he could not even budge them, they harnessed him to a wagon and he started to drag an immense weight, falling to the muddy ground with every step. Then he became rigid and was turned into a wall, a whitewashed wall; somebody was shoved against him and his forehead banged into him, a single sharp shot was heard and the prisoner, with manacled hands slid down to his feet and as the corpse rolled over onto his side, he saw that it was his father! He couldn't call out and couldn't cry, since he was a wall, an inanimate wall, and yet something was aching terribly within him, he heard crying - and it was his own crying that woke him.

His father came to get him on the third day. "What's with the Russians?" "They have left a long time ago. They were marching to the front, that's why they needed the horses." "And they didn't kill Uncle Imre?" "There is nothing the matter with him," father shrugged his shoulders, "only that one of his legs is shorter than the other."

This was the way he managed to escape the war. He was lucky. He was lucky again in '49 when something strange and incomprehensible began in the country, in the county, in the settlement and in the Party and Kurucz stuck him into the army. His luck held even in '56, he was damned lucky, as a student at the University, he started a special seminar on Lenin for graduate students, - and he fell in love with Lenin, he read him for months, analyzed him, made summaries of his works and annotated them, he envied his style, loved his irony, feared his anger, sometimes he found him to be magnanimous, at other times unjust, he tried to understand his every word, reference and temporal relations, he saw the major outlines clearly and no longer admired the entirety of his life's work, but became intimate with the ideas of a genius and just like all the others, who were not knowledgeable and who were indifferent toward the whole, he studied the details, the subjective clauses and the explanatory asides, the footnotes, the foreword and the epilogue, took notes on the errors in dates, misspellings, mistakes, contradictions and, like a gourmet, he knew every nuance of flavor and this made him feel superior to his subject - when the events caught up with him, his arrogance quickly

evaporated, but nevertheless he knew, felt and suspected what he was not supposed to do. When he recalled all this, he became saddened: he was always lucky and for this he felt ashamed - at least within his own, private thoughts. What did he really know about himself? Nothing. For Juli, he would put his hand in the fire. He knew more about others. He could trust them. They were beyond the daily problems. When he came too close to a whirlpool, it did not suck him under but cast him out. Do his acquaintances envy him? They should really pity him. He tried to put himself to the test and looked for an opportunity: in his work, in his interpersonal relationships and in his private life. How can he talk about this? And particularly with Juli... It was perhaps this very reason why he cleaved to her since their first meeting. This is why he took her part. And when it was mentioned in his office - '57 was a tough time - that the relationship of a Communist Youth Organization official and "that kind" of a woman was peculiar - he defended her, did not give her up, precisely because he felt that he was in the right and that she was the evidence for this. Juli thought that he had sacrificed something for her sake. That he needed her. Those smarter than he thought that this was just rationalization. At that time Pignitz was his chief at the Communist Youth Organization, a major player who gave him a hard time, was ruthless, and he had to go; years later he met Pignitz, who at that time was only the manager of a "House of Culture" and who laughed in an embarrassed way when he spoke to him, and who after a couple of drinks became irately envious: "Admit that you can thank me for being at the Institute. You got yourself a good job, you left just at the right time, today it's a good idea to get out of the State apparatus, isn't it? You see, they destroyed me because I was a factionalist and so on, but you knew even then which way the wind was blowing - wasn't that the reason for marrying that woman? - Don't tell me! Are you still together? You know that these affairs usually don't last long and I don't say this to make a point..." What could he have answered to this tirade? That he cleaved to Juli because of characters like Pignitz, so that he should not become like one of them...? He did cleave to Juli, so that he not be dazzled by his good fortune, that he not become a factionalist or a careerist, that he not become convinced that he was the only one who was always right... How could he talk about this with Juli? He could not tell her anything about this and a stranger would never understand him. There were so many things that he never told her about. Nor anybody else. And it became increasingly more difficult to talk about it. He recalled with amazement that at one time he would talk for hours with his friends: animatedly, interrupting each other, interweaving their thoughts, they argued and talked and talked. Now he could barely spend ten minutes with an old friend. "I will look you up," and they part never to look each other up again. Why is so hard to talk? Everything has become so complicated, explanations would have to begin far, far back. Truth had many facets - he begins to understand and accept things he never could before... How could he admit all this? When he tries, he is displeased with himself, he omits details and shadings from his explanations and yet those seem to be the most important parts, he wanted to talk about them, but he knew that in doing so, he was talking more and more confusedly and got hopelessly lost in his explanations. Around forty, one tends to become lonely... The memories are more appealing. In one's memories everything is nice. Only the glitter remains from the difficult years. For five years they lived on one salary, Juli attended the University. She sat in a corner with her notes and gazed into the air. "Juli, why aren't you studying?" "Huh?" She looked up. "I asked you why you weren't studying?" "Oh, Teddy bear, it's so foolish, but I was thinking how odd it will be when I get my doctorate. All of me will be a doctor, my legs, even my ass, my doctorate ass? Isn't this crazy?" She could sit with her books for hours without turning a page. When he urged her on, she laughed and said that the books were like a movie in her head: "Lenin and Kautsky are arguing about blondes, when actually brunettes are more beautiful." He knew what she was thinking about. Once he admitted it that he had thought that his wife would be different. A

tall, white-skinned blonde, serious and beautiful, This was the type he was always looking for. Edith, the booted messenger girl, Eva with whom he always had to converse about concerts and about Thomas Mann, Anna, who wanted a divorce from her husband, the black-haired, cigar-smoking attorney. He had wanted to marry all of them. He asked them, begged them, harassed them, but only got as far as their bed. How many women were there? Two, three. When other men were boasting, he was ashamed. What could he tell about? What could he boast with? These five? None of whom - fortunately - married him. Juli speaks so easily of George and of somebody called Andris, how does she do it? How can she so easily get over something that happened? Or, was this the normal thing to do...? At the time of her first exam, he had to rush to her side, they called him from the University, Juli was unwell. While she was waiting to be examined, somebody was carried out of the professor's office on a stretcher, a pale man, covered with a blanket and with his notes lying on his chest, like a heroic dead with his rifle, Juli thought that this was standard procedure and promptly fainted, when actually, the examinee just before her was a quadriplegic... Since then, she has told this story a thousand times, this is her favorite story when they were in company - she is not ashamed of it. Why does he blush for her...? How Juli loves to dance. She kept pestering him, she begged him, cajoled him and pleaded with him that Saturday, Sunday, weekday, every lousy office party, every club day they should dance, dance! Then came the phlebitis and she had to be in bed for a month, but she got up when there was a dance at the Court, and he took her home at dawn, with her leg swollen and with a thrombosis. More weeks elapsed and because Juli had just passed her bar exam and cases were piling up on her desk, Juli left her bed and went to the office. The clot slipped up to her groin and she had to be in bed for three months, For Juli, bed is hell, since motion and activity were everything for her. He had to act as her guard, dash home, three times every day to make sure that she did not get up - he guarded her like he would have guarded a prisoner. And Juli, past her first scare just laughed. "I'm the Thromb, Thromb, Thrombeter," she yelled from among her pillows. And the thrombus moved in with them like an errant member of the family. They had to talk about it in order not to be afraid of it. "How is little Thrombi today?" "Thank you, he is well." "Did he behave today?" "Well, Teddy dear, perhaps he moved out, seeing that we don't respect him, the poor little thing." "No way, I am very scared of his grace!" "Not I," shouts Juli and dances around the room, makes the radio roar, dances and laughs at him, "don't look so scared, Teddy dear, let the Thromb, Thromb, Thrombeter bust, let's ignore him, and furthermore, the doc says that I should move a lot, walk, swim and, of course, dance, so that Thrombi goes to hell and I am rid of him..." And yet, he could never think of her without being scared. One of Juli's colleagues, Mrs. Fejér, died a year ago, overworked, tired, nervous, she went to the bathroom to rinse out a few things and they found her lying next to the tub with a thrombotic plug in her heart. Thromb, Thromb, Thrombeter. Can one think of anything else? During their walk, as they promenade along the boulevard, after work, for the hundredth, the thousandth time, to get rid of the stress and the nervousness, and the afternoon sun illuminating one side of the boulevard and the shop windows, the metal frames of the doors sparkling like fireworks, while the other side of the boulevard is in deep shadows and the stream of pedestrians throngs in front of the sightless shop windows of the gray houses - it is on such occasions that it suddenly occurs to him that their togetherness was due purely to luck and that perhaps, perhaps, perhaps some day he would have to walk here alone and his heart contracts and he squeezes Juli's hand, because he doesn't know what to say and only becomes aware that she is shaking his arm: "What did I tell you?" "You really don't know, do you, dear Teddy bear, you pay no attention to me. I am sure that you just watch the women, but you can't fool me, when I glanced at you, I saw that your face was as vacant as a poster and it is in vain that I trot alongside of you and talk, you pay no attention to me, what am I? Am I a seeing eye dog? Yet what I had been

talking about was so important, soooo important, pay attention. It is true that a few years have elapsed, I really don't know what happened to us, nothing really, we live a dull life, two old fogies, aren't we? but we are a real family, it is so good that we are *us*! Do you feel it too, dear Teddy bear?"

Her mother occasionally assaulted her with questions.

"Do you remember, Juli, in '45 you were the head of the household?"

"Yes, Mother."

"Really, we could rely on you for everything, you were always a serious child. Too serious a child. Aunt Nyuszi used to say that you were not a child but a 'Gracious Lady'. Rózsi, she used to say, I am looking at this Gruel Juli, she sits in the corridor all day, here before your door, she gazes down into the courtyard, gazes with those great big eyes of her... My God, she used to say, how she can gaze! If she would look as accusingly at a cow, the cow would stop giving milk. What kind of a deal is this? Juli, what did she mean by that cow? Are you paying attention to me? You are not paying attention! You are reading that miserable paper. Like your father, newspaper after newspaper. Neither of you pays any attention to me, it's like whispering into the wind."

"I'm listening, Mother."

"Why do you make such a funny face? These memories are my greatest treasure. As long as a child is small, it belongs to its mother. Your childhood does not belong to you, you don't know what you said, what you thought, what you liked, why you cried. You were such a solemn child."

"You say this so proudly, Mother."

"What's wrong with that?"

"Do you think a child is solemn, if it is loved and if they play with her, if..."

"You are selfish. Selfish like your father. When would I have had time to play with you? My goodness! When I got home from the department store, I had to cook and wash. Józsi demanded a clean shirt every day. And if he found even a tiny wrinkle on the collar, zap! he tore it in half, if I put too much salt into the soup, he dumped it on the floor. If I wanted to feed you first..."

"Now do you see, Mother, why I was a solemn child?"

"Don't blame your father."

"I didn't say anything about him."

"But you were going to! If you are out of sorts, it's your father's fault. If you have a tummy ache, that's his fault too. You are always criticizing him!"

"All right, Mother, let's leave your Józsi be. I'd rather read."

Their conversation always reached such an impasse. Father stood between them.

For a few months after the war, there were just the two of them, or three with the baby - until father returned. When she tries to think of peace in the family, she thinks of those months; they never spoke as much about father than when he was not around. They spoke of him every day: Where was he? Why doesn't he come? The returnees had brought word that he had survived the concentration camp.

After the siege, her mother was too weak to feed the baby.

“Do you remember, Juli, when you brought milk for Georgie?”

She collapsed in Csengery utca, in front of the Russian military hospital, she let them carry her to a doctor in uniform, pantomimed that she was hungry, asked for milk and took it home.

“Do you remember when you got us some glass for the windows?”

None of their windows had survived. They pasted paper over the window frames, but were terrified that the babe in arms may catch cold. One day she nerved herself and went to the Communist Party office. There was a large sign saying that The Communist Party was the party of the future and the party of life. She spoke to a thin man with a prominent Adam’s apple and a pointed chin, who was scurrying around in the office: “We have a baby at our house, please give us some glass for our windows.” (Sándor Gál later frequently reminded her: “I just looked at you, you little chit. I thought that it was your bourgeois father who had sent you to annoy me and that you were just an impertinent little chit. But your eyes told me that you were serious in what you said. That is why I had to prove to you that we meant what we said on our posters.”) He sent two lads with her, who nailed boards over the windows and into the middle of the boards they, miraculously, inserted a palm-size piece of glass which they had jimmed out of the storeroom window of the Nyugati Railway station.

“Do you remember when you got us some dresses?”

The first JOINT shipment had been delivered to the Jewish Congregation, but she had to prove that they were entitled to assistance. She had no papers. “Pray,” instructed her a jowly woman, unfortunately in school she had attended Protestant religious classes. The woman would have chased her away, but a bearded man ruffled her hair: “Stand over here, child, and think. Maybe you will remember.” There were many there, seeking assistance, the news of the shipment had spread rapidly, in the commotion she nagged an older boy until he taught her a few words. (*Somajisroeladonajelochenu.*) The fat woman made a face, but the bearded Rabbi patted her on the head with his large hand: “You did remember, child, you knew what you had to do. You are one of us.”

“Juli, do you remember the polenta?”

After her mother had regained some of her strength, her chest pain disappeared, her ankles were much less swollen and she could walk. They were promenading along the boulevard. Polenta sellers were sitting in the windows of the burned out stores. They sold the polenta from a basket, covered with a towel. When they pulled the towel back, the polenta, speckled with plum, jam was still warm and its wonderful aroma made them quite dizzy. They walked as far as the National Theater and bought polenta from every vendor. Then they walked back as far as the Nyugati Station on the other side of the boulevard and ate at every store on that side as well. They simply could not get enough of it. Afterward, their belly was hard as a rock, for days.

“Do you remember when you went to Hatvan?”

By that time, they had received several JOINT disbursements and had some extra clothes. There was a scavenging lady living in the house and she accompanied her to get some food. A freight train was leaving from the marshaling yards of the Nyugati, quite a distance from the terminal. It carried military supplies, but they could climb to the roof of a car. They shook and skittered about on the tin roof until Hatvan, holding on to the ventilator with one hand and to their bag with the other. The houses in Hatvan were hospitable, peaceful and white as though it was a different country. Fat people. Clean yards with well-fed animals in the stables. The

lady's relatives insisted on cooking lunch for them. The woman kept patting her head and promised to kill a chicken for lunch. But she shook mutely her head and asked for nothing except what she could take with her. For her mother and for baby George.

“Do you remember when you went to summer camp?”

By the end of the summer, her mother was strong enough to go back to work at the department store and she could leave her for a while. Sándor Gál had not forgotten the window glass business and sent word that they were taking children into the country for a vacation: there they could eat all they wanted, could rest, eat lots of fruit and come back, fat as a barrel... She was at Karczag for a month, bored stiff. She stayed at the home of a railway man, at the end of town. She never saw the man and the woman had a sore leg, cooked for a week at one time and they ate bean soup until she was sick of it. The ditch in front of the house was covered by dense grass and this remained her most pleasant memory. She was looking for mallows and was chewing them, instead of fruit. She was shooting wild oats with a rubber band and enjoyed the acrid odor of burdock leaves, crushed between her fingers.

In the fall they brought her back to Pest and a wonderful new life began for her.

A youth group was established and was assigned an empty room in the Party building, the former Levente headquarters. It had to be cleaned up, the sagging roof had to be buttressed, the three-legged pool table had to be fixed; the folding garden chairs were piled up in the yard, and they hammered together a roof for them. The pictures of Stalin, Lenin, Rákosi, Gerő and Rajk were hung on the walls. The boys carved small airplanes and animals from Plexiglas salvaged from American planes that had crashed in the Buda mountains. The shelves were filled with newspapers and brochures. They received the library from the former Arrow Cross headquarters building. They could choose freely. After some cogitation they decided to weed out all the books written by Germans and all the books that dealt with anything German. They sewed their first flag, a red silk flag with gold tassels. It stood in the corner behind a fancy enclosure, since some of the former boy scouts among them remembered the “corner of honor” for the troop flag.

Everything was marvelous. Everybody was getting ready to perform great deeds. And what came of all this? It seemed in '53, that she had climbed out from a dark dungeon into the bright sunlight, when in a village in Szabolcs, one evening a telegram reached her from George: “Will you marry me?”

She immediately galloped back to the telegraph office. She was holding on to the fences so that she should not fall in the slippery mud. Dogs raced into the yards from behind rickety barns and crooked hay ricks and from the porches, barking like mad, chewing on the boards of the fence, shoving their slavering mouths through the holes, barely covered with a few sticks. They thus accompanied her from yard to yard and the whole street was resounding with their barking. They hated her for being a stranger. The yellowish lights in the kitchen windows were turned off and the inhabitants peered out to see why the dogs were barking so, but nobody tried to shush them. She would never have dared to start out after dark if she didn't have a TASK. She had to answer: “I am yours.”

That same evening she announced to the leader of the detachment, Lieutenant Pócz, that she was going to Pest to be married. Their landlady was warming their dinner at the brick stove. She turned around, in her black dress, and nodded toward her. With her hair in a tight, gray bun, put up with numerous hairpins, she was actually smiling at her from among her many wrinkles:

“Well now, little miss, you are going to be married?” “Comrade!” Lieutenant Pócz admonished her and she turned back to her bubbling kettle.

The lieutenant was perching on a tall chair with a sagging cane bottom, his stockinged feet planted on the dirt floor, because his muddy boots were drying by the fire. He started to explain that the situation wasn't quite as simple as all that, no way! Permission had to be obtained, furthermore, her intention to become married should have been reported to headquarters through official channels and through her immediate superior, namely himself, and this was not done and thus it was possible that permission would not be granted and it was even possible that a disciplinary procedure would be started against her, since they had been told a thousand times that marriage between citizens was not a private matter. Not at all! It was a political matter! Vigilance in such matters was of the utmost importance... All through this canting talk, he turned his red face this way and that, as though he was squeezing the words out one by one from some great depth and from some highly secret compartment.

She sat quietly facing Pócz. She inhaled the sour smell of the bread wrapped in a damp cloth, the acrid smoke of the fire in the stove and the nauseating foot odor which was the flat-footed officer's contribution to the dull evenings. She wanted to sing, jump up and down, dance around the narrow room, climb up onto the wobbly table and meow from the rafters - but she ate her dinner quietly. This is the way she celebrated her engagement.

She would not have believed it - in fact she would have laughed if somebody had suggested it - that she would ever want her old life back. But after the wedding, this happened rather promptly.

George announced to her that he was pretty well filling up the small room where he was staying and that there was no room for her.

“When will you check out, Juli dear,” Aunt Nyuszi asked her, barely a week later, “I have to keep the list of tenants very accurately. The police insists that the janitors do this!”

“I will live at home.”

Aunt Nyuszi leaned against the door post and her amazement barely fit into her fat face.

“And your little husband.”

“He will live with his parents, but separately,” she did not wish to explain, “his room is too small.”

“What do you mean, it is too small? It can't be so small that you can't have your honeymoon there! Juli dear, if I were your husband, I could live with you on top of a footstool. He is a fine one, you hear?” She grabbed her arm and squeezed it. “Or have you separated already? You can tell me. I was as much your mother as Rózsi ever was. Was there something wrong on your wedding night? I told you, Juli dear, that it was not right to come home after the doors were locked, even from the Party Headquarters, regardless how important those political activities may be. The men are all swine, they would screw even on top of a billiard table, and how! Yet, what does a girl have except for her reputation?!”

She almost told her what a girl had.

“This is a modern marriage, Aunt Nyuszi. George is still at the University. He has to study a lot.”

“So, he is a schoolboy. Are you supporting him?” The woman was appalled.

Whatever she could say, her misfortune was the topic of discussion in the entire house.

“They are gossiping so much,” her mother sighed, “this is awful.”

“I can’t explain everything to everybody. Maybe I should issue a circular? At least, don’t you annoy me!?”

“I will fix a pepper stew. Would you like that?” She hesitated a little moment, not looking at her. “Give me some money for shopping.”

“I have no money. I need cigarettes, at least one cup of coffee at the office, where everybody drinks coffee and George gets his scholarship money only next week.”

“In other words, he is taking your money.”

“He is not taking it,” she blurts out desperately, “you’re driving me crazy!”

“Quiet!” Her mother was getting red in the face. “This apartment opens on the courtyard, everybody can hear you.”

“The tenants are used to it. Do you think that we two could do anything to surprise them?”

“Don’t insult your father.”

This stubborn solidarity always made her lose her temper. “Mother, I have had it up to here with your playing the martyr. He has been treating you like a servant for thirty years and your greatest concern is to protect him. At least, don’t try to protect him with me. I know what he is! And so do you! You give yourself away when you ask, ‘Does he take your money?’ You know perfectly well what husbands are.”

“In other words, he is taking your money,” her mother nodded.

“No! He would not even touch it! Kindly remember that!”

He really did not accept money from her. He only, occasionally borrowed some. If she took him some food, he would eat it. And she always took some when she went to see him. George’s scholarship was small and the boys were teasing him that at night he could not walk in the street, because his bones were rattling so loudly that he violated the “No Noise” ordinance. The truth was that they both lived on one salary.

And some money did come in from doing translations, and when this happened... Yes. This was the worst time. He did not call for days. How nervously she sat in the office. Every time the phone rang, she jumped. Finally, George called and they agreed that after work she would go to see him. She bought cold cuts, pickles and chocolates, she will dump it all on the davenport and they would dig through them. It will be heavenly. But then, in the evening, her trip was a complete bust. She banged on the window of the small room, facing the corridor. The package was heavy, she held it against the wall with her belly and knocked and knocked on the window. Curious eyes were watching her from several apartment. It was raining or snowing. It was cold and the soles of her shoes were paper-thin. She could not even feel her feet anymore. “George, George, dear”. She was talking to the window. She tried not to cry, but she wanted to smash the window with her fist... Then, at long last, the door opened and her mother-in-law looked out. They were not on speaking terms and George had never even introduced her. The old woman came from the other end of the large apartment, because she grew tired of the noise.

“I believe my son is not at home. The door to the small room is locked.” She looked at her hesitantly. “Come, put down the package and get warm. Your legs are red.”

She thought the old woman was making fun of her. George had forbidden her to even talk to his parents.

“No, no! Actually my husband and I had a date for later,” she emphasized the word: husband, “but I thought that he may be home. I’ll be back later.”

“As you wish, child,” and her mother-in-law carefully closed the door. This slow, creaking closing of the door also annoyed her. She hated the old woman, who actually expected her to change her mind and come in. After all, she was her daughter-in-law.

It was only in ‘57 - during George’s trial - that they became acquainted and that she was asked to tea. It was also the first time that she saw the three large rooms facing the street. They made coffee in the glass percolator, sipped it slowly from small cups and talked until midnight. Aunt Maria knew thousands of stories and related them seriously and pompously, with hauteur and bashful obscenity. At the end, she always laughed, in her old, senile, hoarse but loud voice. When she was a girl, she had been a guest in a great number of Paris salons, won swimming championships and went riding every morning; but when during the German occupation, she was quartered on a peasant family, she milked the cow and raked out the manure. She was all by herself when she started to repair the shell-damaged apartment; she patched, plastered and painted. When in ‘50 her sons disowned her and her husband was fired, she worked in a tailor shop, took in relatives and, later, gave language lessons. Perhaps it was just as well that she did not know her at that time. Even though her marriage became insupportable, it would have been very difficult to leave her. She suffered George as long as her strength held up and then she divorced him.

But there, in the corridor she was strictly making excuses for him: there was a seminar at the University, he was promised some work, he went to a Party meeting. Struggling with the package, she tore off a small piece of paper and scribbled on it: “I was here.” She slowly dragged herself to the Espresso Bar on the corner, collapsed in a corner, next to the stove and barely kept herself from crying. Occasionally, George came to get her, if the wind had not carried off her note. He came hours later, his gangling figure waving back and forth in the dark cafe, but he was grinning as though nothing had happened. He didn’t even notice that she was choking with rage, he grabbed her hand and dragged her after himself, up to the small room. Sometimes he made some cursory excuse, but most of the time, he just shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

On such occasions, she remembered their trips to the country. They were ranging the country from Monday through Friday and, occasionally stayed in a village for 2-3 weeks, but then a new settlement, a new landlady, a new bed, musty comforters, kitchen odors - smoke, grease and dishwater, everywhere something new and everywhere the same. At that time she thought that she was bored unto death by it. But now it was a pleasant memory.

They set up personnel dossiers and supervised them. The members of the brigade: Nusi the sergeant, round-armed, constantly blushing and yet constantly whispering obscenities and Irene, who was green and thin and who had stomach trouble from trying to preserve her virginity.

In the evening they did laundry. They borrowed a wooden Gypsy tub from the landlady and filled the kitchen with laundry. Nusi analyzed the men in the village and discussed their virtues and their shortcomings. God only knew how she found out so much about them, since they only stood in front of her for a few minutes in the Court house, while she took their ragged birth certificates and filled out sparkling new identity cards with indelible ink.

They looked up the local Democratic Youth Organization and organized a dance. “Inspection,” said Nusi, and her ÁVO sergeant’s uniform made any refusal impossible. The clumsy secretaries, the ham-handed peasant lads and the young teachers looked at them fearfully and

only from the corner of their eyes. And they barely made it out into the street, when they had to lean up against the wall, they were laughing so hard.

“You should have drawn your pistol,” she told Nusi, “and ordered them to bring a ham to the dance tomorrow.”

They were constantly hungry.

“You think that they would have dared not to?” Irene commented with a lopsided grin. She was a weaver in Kispest until she was elevated to her present position; she had nothing but contempt for the yokels. “They have hams. All you have to do is to look at their greasy faces.”

“That’s not fat,” Nusi giggled, “that’s saliva. They are salivating after you.”

“Market women,” the red faced Lieutenant Pócz called them. Yet, at times, he went along with them, as much as his dignity allowed. At one time, the two of them traveled to Pest together and he whisperingly propositioned her, he wanted to have sex with her on a strictly “comrade basis”, excluding all sentiment, since that was not permissible in a relationship between a commander and his subordinate. The pig. (When she told the girls about this experience, it turned out that he had held such a “confidential conversation” with every one of them. Nusi almost certainly had gone along, although she denied it.)

Later, work became scarcer and they divided the group in two. She was assigned to the lieutenant who became increasingly unmanageable; it was Nusi who had kept him in line to date. “I will have you arrested!” he yelled when he didn’t like something in a client’s file. A shrug of the shoulder or a delayed response to a question was sufficient for him to yell at the country people: “I will have you arrested!” Occasionally, he tried to endear himself to her: “Should I have him arrested?” he asked, and on such occasions she didn’t even dare to look at the client who was scared and anxiously shifted from foot to foot, she looked straight ahead and did not answer. The office days were spent with such nastiness and the days seemed to be very long indeed. She was happy to get away.

As a married woman, she was given an assignment in Pest. Prior to that, however, she had to go through a disciplinary hearing, the red Pócz saw to that. “Severe reprimand and final warning,” because she neglected to ask for permission to marry.

They were to meet at 10 o’clock, in the square before the 5th district court building and the marriage was to be performed there. But at the specified time only Béla Kutvás - who allegedly kept an Alsatian in his sublet room - showed up. He sidled rapidly across the small park, walking so strangely that he seemed to change direction with every step. His blonde hair was plastered down over his birdlike head and he was twisting his gold-rimmed glasses between his fingers. He was a theoretical mathematician and one of the witnesses.

“I kiss your hand, Juli dear, I am on time,” he panted, “so far only we two witnesses are present. I guess there will be no wedding. When George instructed me to be here, I knew he was kidding. And to get you here under false pretenses is an outrage.”

“I am not a witness,” she said angrily.

Béla Kutvás grinned with all the jealousy of a timid man.

“You defend George? Of course, you were always one of his admirers. You’re here by chance, aren’t you? Nobody fooled you into being here.”

“I am the bride.”

“That’s a good one,” the boy blinked and leaned over to her, “this joke alone makes it worth while to be here in this lousy weather.”

Finally, George arrived. When he was getting out of a cab, his raincoat opened up and his yellow, roll-neck sweater could be plainly seen. “No bride?” asked Béla.

“I forgot her,” he mumbled, because he saw how easy it would be to fool Béla, “but as long as we’re here, let’s not waste our time. Let’s get another witness to replace Juli and she can be the bride. The tractor whines, the plow turns the sod, Comrade, will you marry me...? That’s settled, let’s go!”

While they were waiting in the wedding chamber for the registrar, George pulled the ski sweater down over his belly, rubbed his muddy boots against the legs of his pants, inspected the gray suit of the porter, engaged as a witness, and her brown skirt and blue blouse.

“It will be a proletarian wedding,” he announced with a pleased smirk, “you are the only one whose startling elegance spoils the scheme.”

“Are you really going to marry Juli,” mused Béla in his dark suit that he had saved ever since his graduation exercises.

This was too much. She had been living on tenterhooks for days, having difficulty believing it herself.

“Does it seem so impossible that someone wished to marry me?”

“Not at all, that’s not what I meant.” Béla was embarrassed, blushed and tried to part his wet hair with his clumsy fingers, “but George - especially George...? He should - well - I really don’t know who may be...”

“Madame Curie, go ahead, say it,” snapped George. Was this irony or conceit, who knows? She was never sure about him. Perhaps he really didn’t understand himself and had difficulty in tolerating himself. The skin of his thin, dry face was like parchment, ever since his youth and was creased deeply around his eyes and mouth. His mouth was colorless and his lips were thin, like a slash in front of his teeth. His glance could make anyone feel awkward; he could look at people pryingly, superciliously, inquisitively or oppressively. There were usually crowds around him, but he was always alone. His friends were just cronies, they were only debating partners, occasionally competitors or enemies and nothing gave him greater pleasure than to ride roughshod over them.

The women could never really control him. There, at the wedding, she thought that she would succeed. She would save George from himself. She always felt that he had been under a spell and that he had to be saved. As though he lived within a magic circle. He could not be approached and neither could he break out of it. Yet, he would certainly like to, he would want to live simply and happily. Yet, he was a stranger in their midst who spoiled everything that was human warmth and everyday simplicity, pious self deception and self-satisfied intelligence. He was the center of his group but not its soul. When George sat among them in the Samovar, every word he said had to be barbed, conversations always became arguments. Like sharpened stakes, driven into the ground, his words rose around him and nobody escaped them unharmed, regardless how hard they tried. Truly it was possible to offend people and feel the better for it, giving pain gave him strength. At the target range one could perforate the target, one could not kill it and the holes could be papered over; they themselves became thus impersonal and merely shadows of themselves as they sat for hours, and occasionally even for days around George. They drank rum. They never had enough money to get drunk, they just dissolved and lost themselves, without getting drunk, when they were together every Saturday

and Sunday, until Monday morning, in the Samovar, or at the home of acquaintances, dragging themselves hither and yon, without sleep, without any purpose, just talking aimlessly, in a daze...

How she looked forward to these week-ends!

She arrived in Pest on Saturday afternoon from somewhere in the boondocks. From the station it was just a short distance to her mother's; mother had hot water ready for her, she greedily spooned up and swallowed her food, since all the previous week, she had nothing but a large kettle of paprika potatoes. Mother had her only dress ready for her, which she saved for such occasions and the blue silk blouse they had received from the JOINT.

"You are leaving already?"

"They are waiting for me."

"At the Samovar?"

"Well it certainly is not a cozy private room at the city morgue!"

She tried to sound arrogant but even this couldn't save her from her mother's lamentations.

"You are always rushing off, like your father, ever since I know him, he comes home only to sleep, if he needs a clean shirt or is out of money. You are just like him. God only knows what kind of blood runs in the both of you."

"Say it: Jewish blood." Her mother's complaints infuriated her. If she had only attacked her father, they could have been allies. She tried to make her mad, perhaps she would turn against him when she recognized his traits in his daughter. "Your Józsi and I are Wandering Jews, aren't we? This is what you think, isn't it? Your Aryan soul finds it difficult to put up with such shenanigans. Why don't you come out and say it?"

"Oh my, the way you talk!" Her mother was appalled. "If I could... Such ideas... I don't know where you learned to say such things."

"I can hear Aunt Nyuszi whispering in your ear. Why don't you admit it? And why don't you tell father?"

"But I don't tell you anything either. You just attribute such nastiness to me! Why, Juli?"

Her mother was cowering in her chair, her brown eyes rolling around in their sockets, her hands fluttering helplessly. She felt sorry for her. She stopped combing her hair and watched her mother in the mirror. Her mother noticed it and quickly tried to tell her everything that made her heart so heavy. She didn't want to irritate her, she started gently, she didn't know that this attitude of martyrdom drove her crazy.

"I only wish that you would stay at home a little more, I wish we could talk and sit together like a real family. You only shovel in the food and then, zoom, out the door; if you would only tell me about your work, about what happened to you. I could also tell you so many things."

No! she could no longer listen to this.

"Really, Mother! What could you tell us? The things that you saw at the department store, that you made up with Juliska, that you and Juliska were fighting, that some charming customer stole a couple of spools of thread, that you are sure that it was the lame, honeytongued seamstress, who always sucks up to you, asks you to put back the spools of silk and then steals the thread, the slut, while your back is turned, etc., etc. That they assigned you to keep track of the 'Peace Loans', that you begged off from air-raid warden duties, that everything is getting

more expensive, that no fresh eggs can be bought because the peasants devoured them all. You see, I know your repertoire. But now I must rush.”

She threw her brush, rouge, billfold and a clean handkerchief into her purse, ran out of the apartment, cut across the cool, shady yard of the six-story apartment house and it was only in the street that she relaxed.

But what was she running from, or who from? And where was she rushing to? And why? I have to have some fun, I need company, she told herself.

It was the Samovar that stood for real life at that time. She threw herself into the midst of the others, like a person going down for the third time. And with her marriage, even this refuge was lost to her.

On the evening of the wedding, the regular members of the group were waiting for them at the Samovar. Béla Kuttyás related the great events over and over again for every new arrival.

Entering from the street, they had to cross the Espresso Bar, which was only for transient customers. In the back, there was a wide staircase, leading down to the bar, three rows of tables, a piano and a drum. This was all the Samovar consisted of. Their usual place was in the corner. It was the choicest place.

She saw Klári from the top of the stairs, as she turned her head to the left and to the right, in an offended way, with her glasses glittering in the yellow light of the wall brackets. Szabó, who had lost an arm, was sitting with his empty sleeve tucked into his pocket. He sat up straight and his white shirt was blinding, his dark suit was carefully brushed. George said about the reporter: “Clothes don’t make a man. It was only the shirt collar that was white in Szabó.” Eta sat with her back to the room, broadly overflowing the table, next to her feet a full bag since the investigators had arrested her once at the Espresso Bar, together with her girlfriend (in those days that was still a crime), she always carried an “air-raid bag”, since, according to her this was easier to change than her sexual orientation. One of his mathematician friends sat next to Béla Kuttyás. They called him Yack. He sat quietly by the hour until somebody poked him into the ribs and said: “Start Yacking,” upon which the tall, blonde, sleepy-eyed, big-nosed chap, sleepily said: “Yack.” Amál was a freckled, rail thin, hairy-legged, lisping, blue-stocking who had peddled her poetry until she was finally hired as a secretary by the publisher of a literary magazine. Pofi was George’s good right hand, secretary, friend, banker and admirer. They had started together at the University, but after three years of struggling, Pofi got tired of it and went to a company as director of planning. The group had some outside members and some rarely seen honorary members, like George’s older brother, Ernő.

“Long live the young couple,” exclaimed Pofi after they managed to snake their way through the crowd, to their usual table.

“Let the wedding march from Lohenry ring out,” Szabó directed the pianist, lifting a glass elegantly with his one hand.

Eta just shrugged lazily.

“George is indubitably the Henry, after all, he is the male...”

“Stop it, Amál,” lisped Amál and her freckles shone at her temerity, “this is not your predilection.”

“But who is the mare?” Eta completed her interrupted sentence.

“There would be no such thing as a mare, but only a sweetheart, if you could ride her.”

“Ladies and Comrades,” said George, pulling his yellow sweater over his belly as he was sitting there, “I have an announcement of cultural-historical significance. There is a wedding march in Tannhauser as well. Your reference is wrong.”

Pofi was happy that it was not he who had made the gaffe.

“Who was it,” he trumpeted, “who trampled on human culture? Naturally it was Szabó. It would be his duty to labor on elevating the cultural level of the working classes in our press.”

“Let him labor,” growled George, “you just stay with your phony planning reports. I won’t let you pester Szabó. His father, having grown old in faithful Party work and his booze-crazed, washerwoman mother didn’t exactly chase him around the dining room table, if he didn’t want to go to the opera.”

Szabó was grinning.

“Right on. You all shut up! I am the one here, who represents the working classes.”

“And if the anti-fascist bazooka had not exploded in the direction of Szabó’s left arm, he would have won the war for the Third Reich,” smiled Béla Kuttyás.

“This is too much,” Szabó was getting red in the face, he tolerated such a crack only from George, “you can’t talk to me like that. Not even as a joke.”

George embraced him with a very serious expression on his face.

“Don’t mind them, brother Szabó! What do they know about the blood-soaked nationalist principles? Finger the Party card in your pocket and spit on them.”

“Idiots,” said Szabó, “uncouth animals,” and he looks out over their heads, showing off his handsome, brown face and elegant figure.

“Bring us another round of rum!” Pofi attempted to lighten the mood. “We were actually talking about the wedding.”

“So we did,” said Yack.

“He can talk!” Klári’s glasses flashed and she blew out her cheeks, after she had been sitting in offended silence. “He must be beside himself to talk so much.”

Eta gave her the once-over with the disdain she felt for any woman who was yearning after a man.

“Aren’t you the one who is beside herself, deary?”

“Me? Why?” Klári was batting her eyelids behind her glasses. “Do you think that I am interested in George’s affairs? I am way past that stage. He marries whomever he wants to.”

“And he didn’t want you,” Amál needled her.

“Yet he gave you a good try-out.”

“It was your offer that was accepted.”

“But there was no understanding.”

“Will you all kindly get off of me,” hissed Klári.

“All of us?” cracked Szabó, who was happy that somebody else had become the butt, “somebody should stay on you so that you keep in practice.”

“Until George wants to change horses again,” grunted Pofi, but then looked at her in some embarrassment, “sorry, it’s not nice to say something like this in front of a new wife...”

That evening she sat mutely among them, the meaning of the conversation barely reaching her consciousness. At other times she had enjoyed the banter. But that evening she only smiled, go and talk, she thought. Henceforth everything will be different. Everything certainly will be different. This day will always remain a great and solemn cornerstone. I will act as though nothing had changed. Yet everything is different.

The Samovar seemed to have shrunk. Smoky and stinking. The band made a noisy racket. Everybody was talking at all the tables. And the waitresses slithered among them. Évi, Ági, little Kati with well simulated indifference on their faces. They all act tonight just as though they didn’t know what had happened. As though it was an evening like any other.

Yet, the Samovar - they called it the Silly Samovarovich Samovar - somehow lost all its meaning that night. It was amazing that it was still there. It should have vanished. And they should have vanished as well, sitting at the two tables pushed together, Béla Kuttyás, Yack, the number jugglers, little Szabó who was dirty inside and out, Pofi with his bulging billfold, Amál and her freckles and Eta with her powerful thighs and her flat, masculine chest. They were strangers. What were they doing here? What was she doing here? She had found what she was looking for. Good by, Silly, Samovarovich, Samovar.

They promenade on the boulevard among the bustling crowds; at that time, after 5 o’clock everybody was in a hurry, running; the city roaring nervously - but they had eyes only for each other.

... And I saw that the judge knew that I would win the case for the District or that I could stick the Capital Court with the responsibility, they are the supervisory authority for the hospitals and this was not the first accident on those worn steps. And actually, that unfortunate fellow is entitled to damages. He would like to see some money. This was a typical case, a clumsily aging man, you know the type, one could see even before the accident that he was going to stumble on those steps. He has three children, his wife is naturally not working, she is sick, and he now has a stiff knee after having been in a cast - and his opponent was an elusive defendant, an office, where they just sit on his 781 forints. It was obvious that he didn’t think that he would ever see that money. The way he looked at me before the trial and thought that his rights were blocked by a dress, a hat, a purple plastic folder with the trial documents - his eyes showed his resignation and his contempt, this lady would get away with my money... suddenly I got mad at him, not because he has nothing but contempt for me, but because he gives up so easily on what’s his right! There is nothing more I can do for him, I asked that the trial be adjourned... Let’s cross over to the other side, Teddy dear, let’s look at the foreign language bookstore, let’s see if Mary Poppins has come in. And then let’s walk some more. The sunshine is so nice. I adore the sunshine. It shines so rarely on me, because by the time I can hit the street, the sun’s working day is just about over.

“Aren’t you tired?”

“No, no, it is while we are walking that my tensions begin to relax and my tiredness goes away. The doc was right when he said that I had to move around a lot, walk, swim and go on excursions. It is essential in such a crazy job.”

“But the doc also said that you needed rest.”

“You know that’s hopeless. I do the work of three people. Two attorneys have left and for what they can pay, they can’t hire any new ones. I don’t even have a typist. She was also lured away by some company.”

“You are a lawyer, give yourself some advice as to what to do.”

“I should set fire to my office. Let the files be destroyed. For the past two years, they just accumulate and accumulate. What in the world will I do...?”

“You just make extra work for yourself. You want to do everything perfectly and that takes twice as long.”

“But Teddy dear! The clients are not interested in this and they are right.”

“I am right too. You should not wreck yourself.”

“Let’s change the subject.”

“Don’t change the subject. You know what happened to Mrs. Fejér. She went to the bathroom to rinse out a few things and...”

“You see, that’s why one should do no housework.”

“You make a joke of everything.”

“Naturally. If we don’t worry about Thrombi, he’ll be offended and just go away. Speaking of uninvited guests, Miska and his wife are coming to see us tonight.”

“Then we have to get home earlier so that I can pick up. You leave your things all over the place.”

“Meow, meow!”

“Don’t scoff, that’s the way it is.”

“Meow, meow,” she scoffs, “you should be used to it by now.”

“One can’t get used to it, Juli. Every time I go into your room, I’m appalled. The comforter is on the floor, your pajamas are on the cactus and your slippers are in the middle of the davenport.”

“Shall I tell you why? If a burglar were to come, Bingo!” and he falls flat on his face and dies on the spot from the shock. “The poor fellow could not expect such a mess in the living room in an apartment where there is a carpet even in the foyer.”

“Good thinking - you are slovenly, that’s all.”

“Who? Me? Slovenly? Take it back this instant. I did clean up once, didn’t I?”

“True”

“You see...!”

“When was it.”

“Two years ago, in August. When you were in Szeged and I was expecting you back.”

“As long as we are talking about an honor roll, when was the last time that you washed the glasses?”

“Don’t make me laugh... Oh, my side...! Stop, I can’t walk for laughing... and I can’t think either. I must concentrate...Well, I washed the glasses when you took Mr. and Mrs. Száraz down to the front door, by the time you came back, I had everything in order.”

“You’re right. I thought I was in the wrong apartment. One more question: when was it that you wanted to make the dessert?”

“For your thirtieth birthday, but you wouldn’t let me.”

“Well if you want to get rid of me on an anniversary, make it the hundredth one.”

“Enough already... Everybody is staring at us... Two idiots stumble giggling through the town...”

“The principal thing is that you managed to prove your orderliness with concrete examples. Yet, in my opinion, you can tell a disorderly person, one disorderly to her marrow, one congenitally disorderly, by the fact that they recall precisely the last time they were orderly. Not so?”

“True, well, Bingo! You are so orderly, Teddy dear, that you would like to line up the motes of dust in a straight line. At least appreciate the fact that my disorderliness was my only dowry... I am disorderly and clumsy, so there. What do you call a disorderly sparrow?”

“I don’t know.”

“A disparrow. This is what we played this afternoon with Mari.”

“Who is she?”

“The funny lady attorney. You know, I told you about her. She is the one who came to check up on my legal procedures.”

“The bookstore is closed.”

“What time is it?”

“Seven.”

“Oh my! We really promenaded away the time. We have to come back tomorrow. They promised that for the Christmas trade they would have some English books. They will have Mary Poppins as well.”

“Let’s go home.”

Juli then related a number of very funny puns. He laughed.

“They will make us sit apart, Juli. It may be the end of us.”

“Oh, Teddy dear, we really are very foolish...But this is precisely why I love to be us! And I must fool around, believe me, Teddy dear, I am all tied up in knots, even in my dreams. And you are right, I am too concerned about my work. One can’t live so tensely and always on a high. If I don’t loosen up, I’m in trouble. If I don’t soften, I’ll break. This is why, please, please don’t be angry with me when I play the fool...I could never play the fool with anyone but you. I have never felt so liberated. It used to be awful. I would always have liked to live like this and behave like this, but I didn’t believe that it was possible.”

“It’s not possible. Not in a real marriage.”

“Aren’t we a real family?”

“No!”

“Well, what are we?”

“Patient and nurse.”

“You think I’m crazy too. Interesting. Mari said the same thing.”

“Who is this Mari?”

“You know, the attorney who came to see me this afternoon. She gave me hell and told me I was nuts.”

“Why?”

“Because of what I do in the case of the unjustified absences from school, it is considered to be overstepping my authority and makes the whole proceeding a farce.”

“Juli, what are you doing?”

“I make the kids sign a formal commitment that they will attend school regularly because, if they don’t, they will be punished severely. You wouldn’t believe how serious they are about this. They read the agreement and even their nose wiggles in their anxiety. Then they belly-up to my desk to append their name, carefully, legibly, but still in a grandiose ‘ministerial’ style. And it is obvious to me that they are really serious about it. What did they do earlier? The educators nattered at them or their parents gave them a thrashing. In my office, they sign an official document, like an adult. This impresses them. They feel their responsibility. They have never been placed into a situation before, where they could act as an adult.”

“And do they come before you again for renewed truancy?”

“Very rarely.”

“Well, if that is so, what’s the problem?”

“That the entire idea and the signature are irregular. Namely, null and void. The signature of a minor legally means nothing.”

“Is this what’s bothering the DA?”

“Yes.”

“She is not interested in results?”

“She must make sure that I don’t act outside the law, or irregularly. And this is irregular.”

“Screw the regulations!”

“Mari and I agreed that henceforth, in addition to the formal dossier. I will have a separate document typed up that I make them sign and then this document goes nowhere. But the kids don’t know this. Oh, my. I had trouble because of the Safranik case as well.”

“Is that the sot?”

“The one who had a whole series of problems with the housing ordinances. I told you about it. He was drinking and caused an uproar in the house.”

“I remember.”

“The last time I adjourned the hearing, so that it has not come to trial because this matter exceeded my regulatory jurisdiction. I had to figure out something. That Safranik, when he stood soberly before me, seemed to be just a big, awkward but decent booby. I got him to admit that he drank only because his home-life was such a mess. He only lives with the woman - I asked him why he didn’t marry her? He muttered that he really should. I kept asking until he finally admitted that he was scared or too bashful to ask her, even though he had been living with her for years. I then adjourned the hearing and ordered the woman to

appear before me today. What an ass I am! There they are, sitting before me, that big oaf and a little black-haired woman and me sermonizing about how important the family was, what a strong and pure relationship there was in a man and a woman getting married and then I turned to the woman and told her that the last time I saw him, her lover told me that he would like to get married, but didn't quite know how to go about it and, therefore, in his stead, I asked her to marry him. Safranik was nodding his head approvingly, but the little woman jumped up and declared that she wasn't foolish enough to marry such a fellow. It was true that they were living together, but she would not become his wife and we couldn't make her... And I thought that all I had to do was to step in and everything would come out all right."

"You are always trying too hard."

"Yes, I am such a fool."

"Yet in this job you could have become stale."

"When I'm tired, I sometimes think about how everybody here hates, hurts and loathes everybody. Husbands and wives, children and parents, neighbors and neighbors. But then I think that these are the poor unfortunates. They could live in peace. In peace and happily. After all, you and I get along well. Aren't we? And then I begin to feel sorry for my clients and would like to help them."

"But, don't you see? There are some who don't want to be helped."

"That never occurred to me. Only in retrospect. Like now, when I'm tired and angry... Every night I go to bed as a wise cynic and every morning I wake up as naive personified."

"You should have become an ingenue or a guardian angel."

"Don't make fun of me."

"You are not really a hard-hearted jurist."

"I certainly am no such thing. I just love what I do. At long last, I can do something. I was always judged on the basis of others, I was persecuted because of my race. I was unfit to become a good Communist, because of my father. They wanted to put me in jail because George was my husband. I got into the University only because of you and having your name. For thirty years, I'm always only an appendage of some other person. Now I finally have to stand up for myself. I am responsible for what I do, good or bad, everything. I have finally achieved that I am I. That I exist at all. That I am somebody."

"In other words, you must constantly prove something. Even to yourself."

"Yes. Why is this wrong?"

"Because nobody expects you to! Don't you see that?"

"You said just now that I always must prove things to myself. When I was in bed with Thrombi, an old girlfriend from the Samovar days came to see me and said, that it was a riot that in this country I was the only one who worked herself to death, me whom everybody always kicked in the arse. That's one way to think about it. But I rather tell myself: Juli, when you were a little girl you had great plans, you wanted to change the whole world. And now even this lousy office work is too much for you?!"

"Nobody can expect you to do the work of three people."

"They don't demand it. I am not obliged, but somebody has to do it."

"Why?"

“Because there are cases. There are clients. There are people who come in and sit down, you can’t just kick them out. They have problems, complaints. They must be given justice. They must be protected. They are asking for advice. Or they just want to complain, because there has to be somebody who would pay attention to them. And if I am there alone, I’m the one who has to pay attention.”

“But your health...”

“I don’t play heroics all by myself. Don’t you believe that. You always scare me with Mrs. Fejér. Pour soul, I feel terribly sorry for her, she really worked herself to death, she was alone in her District. But I can name you some others. Who disappear for a week, a month or six months. They are put up somewhere, are given therapy and when they calm down they come back to the Court, to the Party Commission, to the Council, to the District Police Headquarters and carry on with their work. When we get together for our head-shrinking sessions, we entertain each other during the breaks by listing our symptoms. It’s funny: double vision, tremors, bloating, loss of appetite, constant hunger, sweaty palms, dizziness, anxiety, migraine, headaches, dyspepsia, numbness... Shall I go on? We laugh at these things. The other day, one of the District Attorneys told us that he had the delusion that he had six fingers. On the typewriter, he always wanted to hit the key at the end of the row with his sixth finger and when this doesn’t work, he gets nervous and must stop and rest. He can no longer pound the typewriter. Funny, isn’t it? He has two thousand cases each month. That’s a joke too. The unsettled cases pile up for all of us. As though we were dragging our feet. We will never catch up. I have a case that’s in its third year. And I have clients who are before me for the tenth time. There is more than one, who is known to every District Attorney in the entire capital. And not every one is crazy. There are simply some cases that can’t be resolved. And yet, we have to resolve them. Impounded real estate, that represents the savings of little people. Alimony cases, where one guy has spent all his money and another who has lost his apartment. Evictions which can not be executed, because there are no emergency shelters and there are clients who had been moved to an emergency shelter and whose apartment was paid up, but somebody else has already moved in.”

“And you want to take care of all of them?”

“I would have to be God to do that.”

“See, this is what your trying to help everybody comes to? You should acquiesce in the fact that there are insoluble problems. You can’t live other people’s lives. You will just make yourself ill. ‘Neurotics of the World Unite!’ This seems to have become your battle cry. Don’t misunderstand me, I really enjoy listening to you every day, but these are such drab and pitiful cases that I’m amazed that you can worry so much about them, and get all upset. As though they were special situations.”

“Oh, Teddy dear, this is such uninformed talk. There are also so many major cases. Of course there are some. Gay men who entice young boys to come to them, an elderly tenant-in-chief who was slowly poisoned, a pious widow woman who got married over and over again and despoiled her husbands, and the two neighbors who over the years destroyed each other’s families, some they pursued into their graves, some were forced to flee abroad and now there is only one woman left in one of the families and a man in the other, but the fight goes on. There are cases like these as well. But I don’t like them. I dislike colleagues who specialize in them. I call these societal cases. One can talk about them, they make good stories. But our task is not to waste time on hopeless and desperate cases. We must deal with the problems which are hard to resolve. Everyday, small cases. These are the tough ones. These are the really

trying ones. Because the client wants to get rid of them too. One must help them. The doctors must also give preference to the patients they can cure. We must remedy the legitimate complaints. We must resolve the problems for the citizens. Are these really drab cases? Only to an outsider. There was a time when I also thought that the practice of law was the greatest accomplishment. Justice, in a white robe, everybody talking with all words in capital letters, everybody talking solemnly in hushed voices, announcing irreversible decisions. Our daily work is not at all like that. If it were, I couldn't stand it."

"Juli, you talk like an adult."

"The other day, a little hippie stood before me. He hated the world, was cynical and said that the old people were responsible for everything, namely you and I, that we didn't understand them, that it was easy for us! I never thought that I would ever be accused of this."

"Why, isn't it easy for you?"

"Yes, it is now, because we are a real family, aren't we?"

"We are. If you just wouldn't want to change human nature."

"Don't you think it wants to be changed?"

"You can see how it struggles against it."

"That's because there is nothing they can do. I am the power, and like it or not, I want to make them happy."

"O.K. What will happen if you are completely successful?"

"What do you mean?"

"If you can help everybody in your District. Just imagine, nothing but quiet, decent, happy and well-balanced people. There won't be a raised voice. Nobody will argue. They will have to have a dictionary to look up cuss words. The District Police Department will become an eleemosynary organization."

"And the policemen will be retrained as kindergarten teachers."

"The taverns will be closed and remodeled into flower shops."

"When the neighbors meet, they will exchange kisses."

"The janitor will carry the tenants upstairs when the elevator breaks down."

"But they won't break down. Even the elevators will be perfect."

"Only angels will live in your District."

"And the stores will sell halos instead of hats..."

"Oh my, Teddy dear, we are so foolish, aren't we?"

They promenade on the boulevard among the bustling crowds; at that time, after 5 o'clock everybody was in a hurry, running; the city roaring nervously - but they had eyes only for each other.

After the wedding she never again returned to the Samovar, because she believed that a marvelous and serious new life would begin with George; and later, when the marriage deteriorated more and more, she would have been ashamed of being pitied and she was also not at all anxious to listen to the gloating sympathy of the women.

Her salary decreased in the Pest job, since she no longer received the travel allowance. Her mother had no money and neither had George. Wherever she went, she had to take at least something to eat - and had no money left for anything else. She registered for evening classes at the high-school, she had to study and do homework. This at least made the evenings pass more quickly.

If there were only the two of them at home, it wasn't too bad.

"I'm not disturbing you?" her mother asked and told her all about the minor events of the day: she got into an argument with Juliska, she made it up with Juliska, the evening accounts didn't balance, inventory will be taken, all that responsibility, Oh, my God... But if they really wanted to feel good, they talked about the old times. "When you were the head of the household," her mother recalled, "do you remember when you got milk for Georgie? When you brought that dress home? When you went to scavenge...?" She never tired of this.

Until then she had spent little time at home, because during the past years, whenever she returned from the country, she spent only a few minutes in the apartment; she had to get used to the unendurable, to the presence of her father.

Father rarely came home, because he lived with some widow, the manager of a movie theater, somewhere in the suburbs. If her mother would have been stronger, she could have gotten a divorce but there was nothing she detested more than a divorce - she rather tolerated anything, she was willing to wait for months, for years, as long as she was not deprived of the hope that she would eventually get Józsi back.

Thus it happened at times that when she got home from the high-school, her father was sitting at the table, the remnants of a dinner in front of him, crusts of bread sitting in the congealed grease in the skillet, mother excitedly fixing coffee in the kitchen, while father was reading the paper, in shirt sleeves, with his tie pulled to one side and his collar button undone. They were not talking to each other.

"Do you want your supper?" her mother asked her.

"I have already eaten," her father barked.

"I asked Juli."

"Did somebody come?" and he continued to rattle the paper.

And this was considered to be a joke.

It also happened that he was looking for more serious entertainment. When he finished the paper, he looked at his watch and if on the following day he did not have to get up early, he was willing to spend the time. He liked getting into an argument before going to bed. Any kind of argument. After a shouting match, with his neck beet-red, he could go to sleep as soon as his head touched the pillow. (In his youth, he had been dreaming of a theatrical career.)

So he put down the paper and looked around the room.

"You are not getting any richer, Rózsi," he sighed, but he was looking at her and not at her mother, and if she did not raise her head from her homework, he did not mind the detour, in order to get to the real battle later. "God knows, I like it this way. Nothing ever changes here. The poet would say that this is the old haven, welcoming the tired mariner, one can always come back here. Even the table wobbles the same way it did five years ago."

"I've put some folded paper under that leg," her mother hastened to say, "perhaps it slipped out."

“Leave it be,” he snarled at her, “I am talking to you and you are crawling under the table.”

“I thought that the wobbling was bothering you. Do you want some coffee? There is some left in the pot. You don’t want any? Juli, do you want some? I’ll get it.”

“I do want some,” her father cut in.

“There is only one cup left,” her mother stopped, but her concern was only a housewifely concern. Juli knew what would happen: whatever her mother said, he would find fault with it. “Won’t two cups of coffee bother your ulcer, Józsi dear?”

“Why don’t just come out and say it that you don’t want me to have it?” her father snapped at her, “why don’t you say that? Whom do you want to give it to? To a stranger, because your daughter is just that. She married somebody, who didn’t even ask her for her hand. And now can’t support her. This is why you stay poor. Just look around this hovel. Actually, if she is a married woman, by what right is she staying in my apartment? I could have the police throw her out.”

“Józsi, for God’s sake... Must you?”

“Shut up, I won’t let you interfere. I am the master in this house. Right? Go ahead, tell me to my face that I’m not! You may do so because I’m not the master here. This person is taking advantage of us and is sponging on us.”

“Józsi, she is paying the rent and is buying the food too...”

“I should hope so - I’m not going to feed her! Such a big cow! She crosses over to the other side of the street when she sees me coming. Me, her father! And do I support her husband and her brats too? I could afford it. I am Rockefeller. Aren’t I? She only has the brains to marry a starveling, who has her support him! If there were a law in this country, behaving like this would be punished... But is there anything a Rákosi pimp can’t get away with?”

It was usually about now that they started fighting, because she could stand it no longer. As long as he was just berating her, she was quiet and did not defend George either, but when it came to politics she could not stand his hatefulness.

That’s all her father needed.

“Whom are you defending? Are you defending these people?” His yelling was mostly just expressed by contortions of his face, he was afraid of being heard in the street. “You idiot! What has become of you? How do they compensate your services? Where did it get you? To Szabolcs! The end of the world! They made you into a police spy! This is your great career.”

It was true, this was not the way she had imagined her future. But everything turned out badly.

When during her last year in school she had to apply for additional education, she entered “Ship’s Captain” in the space marked: “What career do you wish to pursue?” To the next question: “Where?”, she wrote: “At the Odessa Naval Officer Academy.”

Aunt Bea, the principal, summoned her during recess. “What is this, child?” and she lifted the questionnaire with two fingers.

The principal was a large, bony woman, whose lips barely covered her buck teeth. But she simpered, made fluttering motions with her hands and always smiled before she said anything; and this was awful because her ugly face was really unsuited for smiling, you could almost hear her wide jaws grinding, she sucked in her lips, so that her yellow teeth should not show, her red nose was twitching with the effort, and the bags under her eyes were wrinkled.

The class trustee had found out that Aunt Bea's father, a former railway official was not certified after the war, and that two families had been moved into their house in the Zugló and that they were forced to live in the basement of their own home, in the kitchen and in the two tiny former servants' rooms. The Class Committee had written a letter to the school authorities and to the District Party Commission, requesting that "an educator with the proper Socialist ideals be assigned as principal, whose past and personality would not debase the proud students of the Class VIII B." There was an investigation, but Aunt Bea remained. Her subject was German and this made them dislike her even more.

"What is this, child," said Aunt Bea, holding up the questionnaire, "you are making fun of the country's educational campaign." This made her mad.

"This is a political issue and I will discuss it only in the presence of the Class Trustee!"

So, they had to send for Kati Balla and when Kati stood next to her, she felt sure of herself and stood with her legs belligerently spread - for which, in the past, she would have been admonished by the teachers, as being inelegant and unbecoming.

Aunt Bea was embarrassed and peered at them like an owl. She was nearsighted, but too vain to wear glasses. (That's a laugh, her being vain. What the hell is there for her to be vain about?)

"I thought that you were joking, Juli dear... Are you really serious? You can't be! How could a serious and self-respecting girl write something like this? Such levity in an official document may have serious consequences, my child. I hope the Class Trustee agrees."

Kati Balla blew out her cheeks and pressed her fists against her chest. (She preserved this nervous habit to this day; Juli had met her recently at the Court building, where she was the DA on a case.)

"Don't appeal to me, I represent the students." Aunt Bea sighed.

"I don't know what to say. I really only wanted to caution Juli that this was not a joking matter. It is her future. Becoming a ship's captain had to be a joke."

"I was serious about it!"

"Child, you don't know what you're talking about."

"Kindly leave that to her," thundered Kati in that strange, deep voice of hers that had made the class laugh so many times.

"I really want to be the captain of a ship. Why are you so surprised. Today we have equality. A woman can become anything!"

"But you wanted to become an attorney, not a mariner. You just made it up on the spur of the moment."

"That's real freedom, and I must have freedom," she blurted out, "I don't want to be a kitchen slave."

"But, child," murmured Aunt Bea, "we had to let you sit in the hall during biology classes because you got sick from the anatomical charts. With such sensitivity..."

"I will get stronger, once I get there."

"Where did you get Odessa?"

“I heard at the National Hungarian Youth Organization that boys could apply there. Why only boys?”

“That’s right,” Kati Balla put in her two cents’ worth, “they are no different.”

“O.K. children,” said Aunt Bea uncertainly, “I will submit your application.”

A few days later an official from the District Educational Section came to see her and told her that her application could not be considered seriously... “That was Aunt Bea’s doing!” was her first thought. She had Kati Balla call a class meeting. “Don’t let them!” the girls encouraged her, “show this bunch of old maids, the teachers and this old cow, Aunt Bea, that you are in the right. Break their neck. You must denounce them! How long will they be allowed to poison the soul of our youth?”

She was convinced and firmly believed that she had to fight for justice. And she would be successful, after all she knew so many comrades.

Kati Balla’s aunt Rózsika sat on the District Youth Association and so did Feri Selymes, the political propaganda officer, Bálint Kis, Kató Nagy and Éva Skoll, who was in charge of all athletics. In the Budapest Association, she could look up Bálint Horváth, who was always talking about the beating he had received from the Arrow Cross men in ‘44. She also knew Rezső Máj, Viktor Varga and even Jóska Szent, who had actually been present in a conference with Comrade Rákosi. The District Leader of the pioneers, Comrade Teacher Józsa had always liked her and his deputy, Irenke Molnár, lived in the neighborhood. Other Comrades who worked there, were Eta Kérész, János Misik and Ervin Kis. At the time they were building the pioneer railroad, she became friendly with a large number of people: Ferenc Kovács, who later became Deputy Minister, their brigade leader, Karcsi Veréb, who since had become an instructor in the Party Commission and Party Secretary of Angyalföld. Comrade Mérges also visited the Hűvösvölgy. Others in the camp had included Ági Kemenes, Mihály Kovalcsik, Gyuri Breznitz (in the police), Pali Fényes (he became an officer in the army), Anti Veréb (Party Secretary at the Ministry of Finance). They were all older than she and all had reached important positions. Father’s former friend - although they no longer spoke to each other - Comrade Wersicz, from the Party Center. Among the old Social Democrats, she knew József Kerekes, Pál Hatvani, Béla Lakatos, Ferenc Csontos and István Zámbocki. She could look up any one of them. During her work in the country she had met László Földes, the Secretary of the Shipyard, Domonkos, the chairman of the Workers’ Committee, and Tibor Gabi, the Youth Secretary, all of whom they had visited from the school. Prior to the elections she worked in the propaganda section with Aunt Anna Kovács, the Chairperson of the Women’s Commission, Bálint Janik, Károly Lament and Nándor Popper, who let her, a child, speak, because she could move the tenants. She also knew the Pest leaders of the glider club: Frici Megai, Feri Gazda, Béla Ordas and his younger brother Vili Ordas (who later crashed in a jet) because it was her job to recruit girls for glider training. In the Hungarian Student Association she had worked for years with Feri Ivánka, Peter Galambos, Jóska Éles, Kornél Grosz, Zoli Uzon, Misi Cindor and Henrik Lammel; of the others, Béla Novák later became a journalist, Gábor Valent was an assistant professor at the Technical University, Pali Fodor became an official of the Borough Council, Dénes Ijjas, the director of a nationalized factory, Zoltán Csombor, who became the head of the Commission for Abandoned Assets, Mari Kuncz, Chief of a Division in the Ministry, Bandi Nell, a Major of Police and Imre Tibor, a Party instructor. With the self-confidence of those living the Movement, she felt that she “knew everybody”.

The ship’s captain business surprised even Sándor Gál.

“You told me that you wanted to be an attorney,” he made a hesitant movement with his hands, “or does my memory fail me?”

An attorney, an attorney yet! Ridiculous... It was as childish as playing with dolls or playing daddies and mummies. Who doesn't have such childish fantasies?

There was an attorney living on the mezzanine, in their house, in a large apartment, right next to the staircase. Her father had consulted him once, but Uncle Wolf did not accept the case saying that it was a lost cause - father refused to even say hello to him, ever since. But she liked them. Aunt Wolf walked around in a silk robe, reaching down to her ankles, and she painted her nails, which was extraordinary. When she laughed, her double chins shook in such a curious way. “You are not a Gruel Juli,” she told her, “that's such a proletarian expression, don't let them call you that. You're Mickey Mouse! It's obvious, with your small little face and your large, dark eyes...” She gave her cocoa, sat on a stool and made her sit in a caned chair. She didn't dare to tell her that she didn't know what that micky-whatever was... “Uncle Dezső adores you,” the woman chuckled, “he loves little girls and that's why we have only daughters, but he is not pleased with them, My God... They took after me, is that my fault?...” Babi and Mari were older than she, quarrelsome and restless kids. It seemed that they did not like to listen to their father. “You will take over my practice,” smiled Uncle Dezső, “but, of course you will have to learn to read first! Babi and Mari are not interested in the law and in justice - yet, that is so important!” And he showed her some files, told her about some legal cases and she had to decide who was in the right. Justice, the law and reading were all very important: this she remembered. After the war she no longer saw the Wolfs. Occasionally, she mentioned them and a career in law. Her father commented that lawyers did very well, they could lie and get paid for it... But she thought that her father was lying. Since Truth was alien to him, truth was opposed to all evil and was opposed to the Germans, she would become a jurist, that's why she wanted to become a jurist. She will collect as many books as Uncle Dezső and will sit in an armchair, behind a desk, smile wisely, speak softly, rub her chin and leaf through the legal files. It seems, that she must have spoken of this to Gál, but all this was a long time ago.

“It was foolishness. Believe me, it was just childish foolishness. I wanted to become a professional revolutionary, but the girls in the class said that there was no such occupation. This is why I thought of becoming a ship's captain. That's revolutionary enough.”

Sándor Gál nodded, but did not look at her.

“Weeeell, as far as that's concerned,” he finally said, very slowly, “I would also not recommend that you become an attorney. It's a bloodsucking profession. We will do away with the law. That's the future. It will no longer be needed. The Party represents justice. That's obvious. We are going to help you somehow.”

Finally - because it seemed to be the natural thing to do - she wrote to the Rákosi Secretariat. She did not beg or complain, she only announced her decision. During the summer, she received her answer: “Please be good enough to appear at 4 o'clock in the afternoon at the District VI, Hungarian Workers' Party office...” Victory!

It would be nice if the entire VIII B class could rejoice with her, but the girls, with their diplomas in hand, had already scattered throughout the city.

She only looked up the Class Trustee.

“Wonderful,” enthused Kati Balla and caressed the letterhead and the red seal on the letter, with the tips of her fingers, “now you are showing those old, reactionary geese in the school, now you are showing them...” In her excitement, she raised the letter to her chest. “You! It’s for sure that up there they have arranged it all for you, because who would they do it for, if not for you?... and at the Party Commission the Soviet Ambassador will receive you, in a black coat and he will ceremoniously present you with the appointment or whatever, and you will curtsy. - No, you should rather shake his hand in a military fashion and say: ‘Comrade, you will be proud of me!’”

“You are an ass!” she laughed at Kati, because hearing it said aloud she thought it sounded funny, even though secretly she expected that very thing.

At the Party Commission a woman from the Personnel Division was waiting for her.

“Is that you? Do you know that your application has become a political affair?” The thin woman, with her hair in a bun, looked at her with irritation. “I came down here to find out what was behind it... But that is not your concern.” She could not contain her irritation. “It’s not enough, you little snot, that you have upset the organization of the school, but you even managed to recruit unprincipled supporters from among the misguided Comrades. This is a mess, I must say.” She stood up behind the desk as though she was handing down a sentence. “Accept the fact that the Party does not endorse your further education. Not even in this country.”

“But why...?”

“I don’t owe you an explanation.” She gathered her papers and was heading for the door. “And all I can say that we cannot be fooled, we know everything. Be sure to remember that well!”

She was left alone in the office. She felt astonishment but nothing more. A misunderstanding - a mistake - she thought. The Comrade had mistaken her for somebody else. She spoke to me like to an enemy. And never even listened to me. It was incomprehensible!

She remembered that she had not sent in a full resume, only a short letter. Of course! How could these people know who I am? But if she had to prove her loyalty to the Party, please, listen to me! Ask me! She could tell them a thousand things, ten thousand things, they would examine her entire life. Already in ‘45, she was given a doll with a blue shirt and a red scarf, because she had accompanied the adults to rouse the tenants and since then she had received numerous testimonials: for her village work, for the demonstrations for nationalization, for organizing the school, for her Hungarian Democratic Youth Organization work, for campaigning before the elections. In the school she was a member of the elite student committee, She spent all her free time in the Party office, every afternoon and every evening. Her father signed her up for ballet lessons to keep her from going to the Party office. This was also an old dream. And Uncle Rada thought that she had talent. “I would teach you for free!” Her father did do this one thing for her, he paid for six months of lessons. And yet, already after two weeks she started cutting classes, they could not do without her at the Hungarian Democratic Youth Organization. She met Uncle Rada by chance. “What’s with you, you lazybones?” The old man yelled at her and in his fury he practically jumped up and down in the middle of the boulevard. “Please, Uncle Rada, I don’t have the time,” she mumbled and escaped, running from the ballet master. Yet she was always fascinated by the dance - the first experiences, the basic positions, the training at the barre, the leg movements remained fond memories for years; the rhythmic notes of the piano, the pitty-patter of the stockinged feet, the swirl of the dresses, the way the twelve of them stood there and rotated and curtsied to the

snappy signals, recurred in her dreams... But all in vain, the movement gobbled up her time. For two summers she worked on the pioneer railroad, and was in the camp until late in the fall. This meant more than anything else, it made her forget Uncle Rada, the piano and the dancing. Her first poem appeared on the bulletin board of the camp: *Beautiful world and shining sun, / Just thirteen years old I am. / I am cheerful, I am young, / Victory will be my song.*

When they wrote a report on the camp, her poem was published in the paper. *My joy is running like a spate, / Today is mine and so is my fate. / My misery also knows no bounds, / It gives my burning hatred grounds.* The poem entitled: "Do not forget the past" won her the Hungarian National Youth Organization competition: *Remember the tears, the burning books, / The ruined houses, the awful bones. / Remember the pain, recall the gore, / The pregnant mother and the child she bore. / The starving children, the suffering, the lice, / Make sure they pay for all this vice.*

They recited it in school, it was read at the opening ceremony of the Csillebérc camp and at home she kept a clipping of the published poem. Doesn't this count for anything? It was published with her name underneath it. "I am not a child, the Party has made me into an adult!" This slogan, taken from one of her poems was displayed in every Youth Organization office in the District.

Sándor Gál came to see her.

"I expected you to come and see me," he growled, but didn't look at her. "I was also censured for taking your side."

She remembered the Personnel woman saying that she had gathered irresponsible supporters from among the Comrades. But she had talked to Sándor Gál, who knew who she was! So, it was not an error! There was nothing to explain...

It was at this moment that she became truly desperate. Her legs were trembling and she had to sit down.

"Uncle Sándor, what is happening to me? Do you understand it?" "Your father, Juli. You ought to know better than I, what your father is..."

Before the war, her father had joined the Social Democratic party organization as an expert on economics. He took care of the finances and he was entrusted with the business management of several trade unions. After the Racial Laws were enacted, he had to yield his position to others but, in fact, continued to direct the economic affairs of the organization. This is why he was taken from the ghetto and dragged off to the concentration camp. He was an important person.

They remembered that in '44, in prison, he belonged to the Social Democratic fraction. Even then and even there, their primary concern was to make sure that everybody knew that they would not cooperate with the Communists. This opposition continued even later in the German concentration camp. Their exclusivity alienated the Communists.

After the camp had been liberated, the British took him and other Social Democratic leaders to Hamburg. They negotiated with representatives of the Labor Party. That's why he came home only late in the fall. When he found out that she was joining the Communists, he became enraged: "I will not tolerate this," he yelled. And in the evening, when she was coming home from the Party office he locked the door in her face. She was stamping around in the corridor, banging on the window and she heard her mother crying and her father yelling in the apartment. She went down to Aunt Nyuszi, but she only shrugged her shoulders: "The

parents' wishes are sacred, Juli dear. You don't want me to get into a fight with your father? He is now a great man! I have enough trouble of my own..." On many occasions, she had to sleep in the Party office in an armchair. Sándor Gál well remembers this. How often did she go home in vain? The autumnal rains were falling, it was cold, the apartment house was full of cooking odors, she was hungry and tired. She worked at the Youth office until late at night and then knocked on her door in vain, their door remained locked. "Mother, it's me," she rapped on the kitchen door. The only response was her father yelling: "Go back where you came from! I forbid you to work for the Communists! If you have chosen them, let them feed you! Get away from here!" Lights went on in the apartments and some tenants stepped out into the corridor, pulling a coat over their pajamas. No, this was insufferable... She preferred to return to the Party office; Sándor Gál locked the door and she slept in two easy chairs pushed together.

Later, the Social Democrats got rid of her father. At least two layers of their right wing had to be eliminated, under Communist pressure. "I would be a Minister, if these bastards wouldn't exist," he yelled, "I would deserve it for what I have suffered. For the connections I have established!" All this, however, was only the fury of desperation. He was eliminated from the party organization.

In order to win her over, her father even tried to appeal to her emotions: "You won't believe it, but in the concentration camp you saved my life. I managed to smuggle in your picture. We made an altar for it and gazed at it with admiration. This gave us strength to endure the trials." This confession made her nauseous. Why wasn't she impressed by this adulation? Father just waved his arms around: "What do you know about it? The kind of hell we were in? You can't really be sorry that I returned from there - your father!"

Well, yes, he was her father, after all, he was her father, she had to acknowledge this a hundred times every day. She had inherited her slovenliness from him. When her father got undressed, the room was a disaster area and his clothes were left on the floor, on the chairs, on the table and on the night stand. After a bath, he didn't feel like drying himself and only patted his neck with a towel, pulling on his shirt over his wet body. When he was dressed, wet spots appeared on his shirt. He never untied his tie, just yanked the knot down and pulled the loop over his head. She never saw her father shine his shoes. He didn't even like to untie his shoelaces and just slipped his shoes off. In the morning he slipped them back on, cracking the leather in the back of his heels. In his sleep, he dragged the comforter crosswise over himself and regardless how much he pulled it up or down, either his back or his feet were hanging out. In the morning, his nose was running, he sniffled, coughed and, in a foul mood, lit his first cigarette. His every movement produced chaos. When he sat at the table, his belly disarranged the table cloth. Wherever he walked, the rugs were kicked crooked. He threw the towel under the sink. After bathing, he never drained the tub. He never rinsed his toothbrush and it was tiff with toothpaste. He kept all his money in his pants pocket, bills and coins together. But he was slovenly only in his personal affairs. His business accounts were always accurate; before he joined the Social Democratic organization, he had worked his way up from being a drummer to being the manager of a commercial traveler agency.

She resembled him in many ways and this was a bitter pill indeed. There was absolutely nothing in which she wanted to be like her father. She would even have preferred to breathe differently. She always wanted to oppose him and whatever he wanted her to do, she did the opposite. Yet, they had defeated her. The personnel woman and her father together were stronger than she.

“Don’t cry,” Sándor Gál tried to comfort her, “we’ll think of something. There are enough other schools. You will study and become an engineer, physician or academician. Why ever not?”

“But father won’t let me study,” she burst into tears, “he told me. Your mother is a kitchen slave,” he said, “you will be one too.”

“What do you mean, he won’t let you study? We will make him!”

“No! I don’t want that, Uncle Sándor. Even though I could not free myself from my father. I don’t want his charity.”

“You are a stubborn child, Juli!”

She suddenly knew what she would do. She would get a job.

“Even I, such a stigmatized person, can get a job, can’t I, Uncle Sándor,” she asked hesitantly, “after all, I was a soldier of the Party.”

“Of course, Juli, and not just a soldier, but a captain, a captain of the ship,” Gál teased her and suddenly she could laugh about it. Since, at that time, a popular slogan urged: “Youth to the steel industry,” and since she always considered any call from the Party to be a personal call to her, she became an apprentice to a lathe worker. She had to get up at 4 o’clock to be at the factory by six. She wielded the large file proudly, since in that trade there had been no women to date and the old master looked at the women with loathing. Then, one day, she collapsed and the doctor canceled her apprenticeship because of physical disability.

There was a new Democratic Youth Organization campaign: “Youth to Stalin City!” She rushed to see Sándor Gál at the party office and asked for his help. She had to participate in this undertaking!

There were only a few barracks standing in the denuded fields and they had just started to erect the first row of houses. “What can you do?” the personnel person asked her. “Nothing,” she answered. The worried face of the personnel man became all smiles. “Splendid, in that case, Comrade, we may put you anywhere!” She rotated through the trade union office, the payroll office, worked in the Trade Union Social Insurance Office, worked as a secretary for the chief of construction, was promoted to the leadership of an independent Democratic Youth Organization branch and, finally, became the supply officer for the settlement kitchens. In the office a rascal simply reached across the table, took off her wrist watch and disappeared. In the tavern, she watched a knifing, standing on top of the bar. One night, the women’s dormitory was besieged, one girl climbed out through the window in her nightgown to get help and the police arrived just as their door was broken down. Her former classmates sat in their school benches - she felt sorry for them.

They were walking. It was raining and on such occasions the city was noisome; only the sidewalks were glistening as though they were pleased with the annoyance of the pedestrians, the black asphalt seemed to come alive under a layer of water and enjoy the attention it received since now everybody was walking with their heads bowed and their eyes fixedly staring forward... The cars proceed carefully on the pavement, when a brake squeals, the car comes to a trembling, slippery stop and the sibilant sound of the tires on the wet pavement ceases. In the groove of the streetcar rails, the water runs like a river, trying to escape the oncoming wheels. It piles up and overflows its narrow banks, then it stops spreading since it no longer matters, nothing matters, the wheels clack, the water splashes onto the pavement - the entire city is inconsolably sad, the rain is falling remorselessly, there is no earth to absorb it, no crops to be refreshed by it, perhaps even the parks are shivering dispiritedly since they

are used to the clear water from the hoses of the park maintenance people - and the rain, rejected by the city runs through the iron bars of the storm sewers with an angry gurgle.

They walked listlessly, as though it was an obligation. Juli hung on his arm and let him tow her along. It had been a long day and she was tired. Clients in the morning and hearings in the afternoon.

A man in a raincoat walks toward them. Juli calls to him: "Uncle Sándor, Uncle Sándor!"

The man stopped and then came closer. He had a narrow face and grooves along his mouth. By this time in the afternoon, there was a white stubble on his chin. His eyes were so light blue that they seemed almost white.

"Don't you know me, Uncle Sándor?"

"Of course. Oh, my goodness!"

Juli was overly exuberant when she introduced the men to each other.

"This is Uncle Sándor Gál! You know, I told you about him. Uncle Sándor, this is my husband."

"Happy to know you."

"Juli told me much about you."

Then they stood, looking at each other. Sándor's faded raincoat must have beaten a path to the cleaners many times. He wore a hunting hat with a green braid and this seemed odd in the city. His thin face, while not unfriendly, remained reserved. There was no joy in his eyes, only a searching, exploring light. He did not like this man. True, Robi would not have liked him, regardless what; Juli had mentioned him repeatedly, and he was always jealous of the past, that did not include him.

"Well, Juli dear, how are you?" asked Gál. He had to say something after all.

"Haven't you heard anything about me?"

"I don't believe I have. I don't remember. What should I have heard? Nothing bad, I hope."

"Don't try to be funny, Uncle Sándor. I mean in general, what I have become and everything... You know nothing about this? Then I have an awful lot to tell you." Both men moved and she hastened to assure them: "Naturally, not here."

"Go ahead, tell me, Juli dear."

"I have all the books I got from you. All of them. Isn't that so, Robi? *The Steel is Forged, The Young City and the Volokalamski Highway*. And all carry the dedication: 'For a leading production worker!' In one of them the words 'production worker' are crossed out and you, Uncle Sándor, wrote: 'Student'. I must have received it a long time ago. You do remember, don't you?"

"Naturally, Juli dear."

Juli suddenly realized that her questions were futile.

"I am talking such nonsense! How could you remember? There were so many of these books, weren't there? What else do I want to ask?... Are you still with the State Railways, Uncle Sándor? Yes? You will retire from there, but that is still a long way off... You are in the Transportation Division? Naturally, none of those who were there in my time - perhaps it was '52 - are still there."

“No, Juli dear, not a one.”

“I am chattering all over the place and this is not what I wanted to tell you but - I am an attorney, Uncle Sándor!”

Gál looked at her and nodded.

“Aren’t you surprised?” Juli was amazed.

“But, Juli dear, you told me a long time ago. I approved that such a smart, clever woman...”

“I went back to school in my old age, Uncle Sándor.”

“That’s all right. They used to say that a good priest learns until the day of his death.”

“It was hard to rush to the exams at my age.” Juli tried desperately to get some sign of approval.

“Everybody studies, Juli dear. That’s what this country is all about.” Gál said what was usually said on such occasions. “But then one is done and can forget all the toil and trouble and just enjoy the results of all that studying. Is that not so?”

“True, true,” mumbled Juli and then she looked at Robi.

But this conversation made him nervous. He was an outsider. These sentences seemed unnecessary and empty. He was careful not to let some impatient remark escape his lips.

And then Gál said something that opened the gates for him.

“Juli dear, will you allow an old friend a question: Are you all right? You look so worn down and, how should I put it...”

He could no longer hold back.

“It is very good of you to tell her this. She does not believe me. - Let me talk, Juli... She boasts of being an attorney. But she believes that everything has to be handled optimally - and that everything can be so handled - she wants to embrace all of humanity. No! Juli, I am not exaggerating...! And she works at such a damned place, that nobody else can stick it: little pay and much work. And she even does the work of the others. Because now she tries to prove to us that it would have been a shame to chuck her out of this world. Many wanted to do just that. From every side. And she feels no resentment, none at all! And that it was worthwhile to become an attorney, since now the world can be saved! I am not joking. No. I am not in the mood for joking. And I know what I’m talking about, Juli don’t interrupt. She had two thromboses. And the second one was more serious because she refused to stay put. Both her father and mother died of coronary thromboses. It has become our major concern whether the damned condition was hereditary? Every doctor says something different, but I am sure that the tendency for hypercoagulability or some minor abnormality of the blood-forming organs is surely hereditary. Why is this important? It’s not. True! Today, one no longer has to inherit it, one can get it from history. And one of her colleagues...”

“Shut up!” Juli pulled him aside.

Gál apologized. “I didn’t mean to start a family argument with my remarks.” Then he told Juli to take care of herself and quickly said good-bye.

They continued their walk in a bad mood.

“Why was this necessary?” Juli was angry. “This is none of his business. He is, after all, a stranger whom we met by accident... And you are wrong. The thrombosis has become a phobia of yours! You know that it was just by chance. I had a cellulitis, did not go to bed, and this led to a phlebitis and a thrombosis. That’s all.”

He was torn by stubborn passions and could barely restrain himself from shouting.

“I am not as calm as you. I no longer know what to do, whom to tell about it, I would almost rather stop strangers in the street and... You have to be protected from yourself.”

Her last job in Stalin City was in the Transportation Division. Once, when she was in Pest at the Railway Center she ran into Gál, whom the District Party Commission had transferred there. (Why? It seemed discourteous to inquire.) Uncle Sándor then offered to have her transferred as well.

This was the way that she returned to Pest.

In her spare time, she worked as an instructor in the Pioneer Movement and it was there that she met Andris, who was supervising the school activities for the Center. They also had numerous mutual acquaintances from the Csillebérc camp times.

“You are a veteran of the Pioneer Movement,” said Andris and then he blushed, “the prettiest of the veterans.”

He was her first date.

“What kind of boy is he?” Her mother was curious.

“Serious. We can talk about anything.”

“You were always very independent. The girls today - I don’t even know what they are like, we were so different. But you will tell me if you fall in love, won’t you...?”

Her mother blushed as she said this and, turning her head to one side, looked at her curiously, but she was annoyed.

“For heaven’s sake, Mother! You think I am a little girl who runs to her mother every time a boy so much as looks at her.”

She liked Andris. He was so old: twenty two years. And he was chasing her. He called her on the phone. Waited for her at the office. Took her to the theater. They were window-shopping. Sat in the espresso bar. Held hands. Is this love...?

Since his family was dead, Andris had his own apartment in Buda. His father disappeared in a labor battalion and his mother died in a German concentration camp. In ‘44 they sought refuge with relatives in the country and the family was deported from there. He had a younger brother, who stayed in Pest with his father’s relatives, but disappeared during the siege, even though the rich relatives put him into a protected house and took good care of him. In that protected Red Cross school he should have survived the war. Nobody knew what happened to him. Andris never found out, because after the war the relatives emigrated to South America.

This lost brother was called George.

(In the cellar of the Red Cross school they lined up the mattresses on the concrete floor, along the whitewashed wall, and there was barely enough room to walk between them.)

She and Little George were all the way in the back, at their head an iron door with heavy steel reinforcements.

Due to the shortage of space, there were two children to a mattress. When they were being settled, she stood at the end of the line with a teen-age boy and by the time they shuffled from the yard to the cellar, there was only one unoccupied mattress left.

This was the first time that she and Little George looked at each other. The boy had a package and there were books under his arm and then he grinned. Was he laughing at her?

Aunt Ibi cast them a suspicious glance from behind her thick, pebbled glasses and by the dim light of the single bulb they could see the mottles on her face getting darker. After a slightly embarrassed silence she said: "You'll be all right together, my dear." She looks at her: "Well, you are only ten years old, aren't you?" (She doesn't understand why this matters, but she nods). "And you, being a big boy?" She places a tentative, old-maidenly hand on Little George's arm. "Take care of little Juli"... And quickly walks away.

She was curiously relieved. They will take care of her. She heard Aunt Ibi say so. She had appointed a big boy to look after her. She looks at her protector with curiosity and expectations. The boy grins at her and then, finally, asks the obvious question:

"Don't you have a pack?" She nods proudly and from below her overcoat (at that time she still had her blue overcoat) she pulls out Zurzabella, the beautiful black doll.

When the light is turned off, they lie down. Little George puts his arms around her, because the narrow passage is cold, there are few blankets, but in the warmth of each other's body they fall asleep...

Little George?

How many, many times she and Andris had talked about him. Excitedly and interrupting each other, they matched times and locations. She described Little George as she knew him and Andris related their entire childhood - but they could never be quite certain that they were talking about the same person. Perhaps there was only one thing that was identical in both their recollections: Little George's zeal. But Andris referred to this as officiousness. His kid brother was the "of course kid". When adults said anything, he jumped. They never had to tell Little George anything twice. Little George was the pet of the family. When he and his mother had to hide with relatives in the country, Little George could, of course, stay in Pest, his Godfather, the rich banker, of course, took him in because "the poor boy can't be left without a father."

This kind of talk hurt her. Perhaps they were talking about two different boys. She would not permit Little George to be mentioned again.

"Perhaps it was when I did no longer defend him against your allegations that I became a woman," she told Andris, when they met, many, many years later. "The wild child I had been until then would have been much more gutsy."

"Today, I accept the fact that I was probably jealous of my kid brother." Andris was twisting the empty cup on the table of the Espresso Bar. He had gained weight and his head and neck had melded together only his eyes were still a childish blue. His graying, brown hair was still parted in the middle and was combed to both sides, like a little boy's. He was the Secretary General of the Pioneer Presidium. He had married a teacher and showed her the pictures of his children.

“But even though I was jealous, I didn’t lie. I did not exaggerate, believe me Juli! I feel badly about Little George to this day. You know that occasionally we talk about our families who all fell victims to Fascism. And then I think that this has paid me handsome dividends. My career...”

“What career?” She eyed Andris warily.

“My assignment. Do you despise me?” Andris blushed and his face took on a teacherish, offended look. His chubby fingers shook around the coffee cup. “I still think back to Little George with jealousy. He was the pet of the family, not I. You know how this sticks in a person’s memory forever. I still feel that he was favored by fate, including your love.”

“My God, but you men are stupid! I was just saying that at that time you already meant much more to me... That was why I would not let us talk about Little George. I felt that we would quarrel about him. I would have had to upend the table over you for offending his memory. I would have too, if I had been the old Juli! That stubborn, belligerent child. But by that time I was a woman. That’s when I became a woman - do you understand it? A woman for whom other things have become important.”

Andris didn’t look at her. He stared at the surface of the table.

“Yet, still... you did love him a little.”

They celebrated New Year’s Eve at the Democratic Youth Association center. A number of unfamiliar comrades sat around the table and Andris, who thought that all the strangers embarrassed her had her dance with him all night, even though he did not like to dance and was not a good dancer. Yet, until morning he sweated and pushed and shoved among the other dancers. Every so often, he doubled back to their table, grabbed a couple of glasses of wine, they drank and went back into the throng. They sat down only at dawn when everybody was sozzled and singing marching songs like Red Csepel and Varsavyanka. Later a fellow from NÉKOSZ, the Association of People’s Colleges, and a former SZIT man from the Union Youth Organization, got into a fight, upset the wine bottles and caused an uproar. They left.

It was a clear cold morning. They went to Andris’s apartment. The tile stove gave out no heat and they crawled into bed. The night, the dance and the wine caused a curious transformation in her.

“Don’t be clumsy,” she told the man whose sweaty hands were all over her body. She was serenely happy in the knowledge that it had to happen.

She woke up in the afternoon. Andris was shaking her and had brought breakfast to the bed.

“What’s the matter with you?” She looked up into his somber face.

“Eat. I have given the matter much thought,” he would not sit on the bed next to her, even though she moved over. His eyes had dark circles around them and his upper lip and his chin was bristly and dark.

“Make some coffee. Do you have any?”

“Wait, Juli. I have to talk to you. First of all, you are my bride. I have to ask your parents for your hand.”

“That’s not necessary - and anyway - you are talking foolishness. Me... a bride?” Confusion, fear and joy overwhelmed her.

“Yes, yes!. This is important. This is the only way that I can atone for what I have done. You are still a child. And I took advantage of your innocence.”

“But Andris dear...”

“I could be indicted if you were to denounce me.”

“Me?!” Fear constricted her throat. “What are you talking about. Tell me right now!”

Andris was staring at the comforter.

“You are not even sixteen yet. I figured it out.” She grasped the carved headboard of the bed.

“I have to tell this to the comrades at the office. I have abused their confidence. I have abused it in two ways. While being a youth leader I have despoiled a child who may even be considered to be one of my charges. I have to resign and face the consequences.”

Andris’s fear spilled over her. But she tried to comfort him. They have to keep it a secret for only two months. Would this be a lie...? After all, she was not a little girl. She had been menstruating since she was twelve years old. Her grandmother was given in marriage when she was fifteen. She had heard the story frequently. It was a characteristic of her race, they matured early. She should not talk about Jewishness? If she said it about herself, it was not an insult. Anyway, everybody considered her to be a big girl. They thought she was eighteen. She will assume all the responsibility and say that she had misled Andris and he should really not make such a big deal of it. He will spoil everything that had been so nice. It was their own affair and nobody else’s business.

Andris insisted on asking for her hand.

Her mother started crying and made a mess of the boy’s face.

“You make a lovely couple,” she said, “like seeing myself. Józsi was such a good-looking lad, you can’t compete with him. Anyway, the only thing that matters that you be a good husband.”

“Mother, are you serious?” she yelped, and couldn’t even laugh because her mother looked at her with such hurt on her face.

“Juli, you are awful! Do you really think that I could make jokes on such an occasion? Kindly treat me with respect before my son-in-law.” And she went to the kitchen to prepare an engagement dinner.

It was harder with father. For three evenings Andris sat in their living room, in a dark suit, clutching a tissue paper wrapped bottle of wine in his hands - but father never came home. In spite of her pleading, he went to see her father at his work place. When he got back the Espresso, where she had been waiting for him, he said accusingly: “Your father is very nice. How come you don’t like him? He apologized for not waiting for me but this week he had to work on a very important report.” Her father had received him very cordially. He said that he had to think about the proposal, but that he already found Andris to be very likeable. He took him to the company cafeteria and they drank to their friendship... She knew that her father was a real comedian. But she was pleased that he took her marriage so seriously. She happily went to the movies with Andris and all that evening she couldn’t bring herself to talk about her father, tell Andris where her father went after work and that the important report was nonsense.

When she got home, her father was waiting for her. He wouldn’t even let her into the apartment, shoved her out into the corridor, yelled at her and called her a whore. Threatened to go to her office, to the Party and tell them what kind of a slut his dear darling little daughter

really was. When the whole house was aroused and her mother wept that she “could not live with such a disgrace”, he calmly put on his coat and departed, well satisfied with himself.

Andris diligently kept her company, took her to the Espresso and to the movies - too diligently, as though his conscience was bothering him and he was living up to an obligation. He fussed and mused. They didn't even go for a walk in Buda and when she once mentioned his apartment, he protested vigorously. “Only after they were man and wife!” He preferred to go to her place and chat with her mother. At last, there was somebody who would listen patiently to her stories about the department store.

Parental consent was required for the marriage. Andris talked to her father repeatedly, they drank brandy and father was cordial. Andris was very favorably impressed and would not believe that he could be anything else. But her father insisted that it would be irresponsible to consent to the marriage of such a young girl. He knew his duty! Naturally, if she wished to force his hand, the Court of Guardianship would grant the consent. Today, nobody respected parental rights. But Andris considered this to be an undignified procedure and word about such fuss would get back to his office. He insisted that Socialist Morality and protection of the young was the responsibility of the Pioneer Association. There had to be a marriage without any scandal.

Father had become a different person during those years. Initially, when he was astonished by the realization that politically he had become a has-been, he was incensed. Then he became embittered and considered emigration. This thought had a calming influence on him, he came and went, negotiated, sniffed around and convinced himself that he was a special case; he even paid up his long delinquent religious taxes to the Jewish Congregation, so that the Congregation would assist him when he asked for their support. After six months, his enthusiasm disappeared. The Hungarian organizations were not helpful and he had news from Palestine that the immigrants lived on a Kibbutz, far from the cities and cultivated fruit trees. Such an agricultural future did not appeal to her father. Here at home, he had a pleasant position in a large company. “I could not stand living abroad,” he insisted, “I get homesick even at Érd, because they brew coffee badly, play cards badly, and the jokes they tell are terrible.”

A few friends who knew about his plans to emigrate, teased him even years later that he had almost become a peasant, because father hated the peasants with a passion. “These rubes are studying at my expense,” he said about the University students. He also looked down on industrialization: “What's the point in building a factory in Rubesville? What will become of it? It's just a waste of money.” He said the same things about building up the army and that it served only to make these stupid peasants put boots on their smelly feet and if they had to shoot, they would shoot us city people... “It was the peasant who betrayed the true revolution.” This was his favorite hobby horse. (In August of '18, when he was in hiding as a Red Army man, it was a field guard who betrayed him to the Romanians.) “You don't have to tell me about the peasants,” he trumpeted when he engaged in one of his political dissertations. “I found out about them. It was a very shrewd move on Peyer's part when he refused to organize the peasants; all those stupid aristocrats were happy and yet this was just as though he put it in writing that he would not organize the beef cattle into the Social Democratic Party. Yet these Rákosi people have been taken in by these clodhoppers. They even let them into the Parliament. Even though evolution and humanization stops when somebody takes off his boots. The Westerners are laughing at our revolution reeking of smelly feet - and they are right. If we had taken over the government we would have known what we owed to

civilization. Rubesvill should stay put and if in a hundred years they become civilized, we will talk about it...”

It was only her second marriage that finally freed her from her father. She hadn't seen him for years. She heard that he was seriously ill, he had circulatory problems, several thromboses and the doctors kept threatening him with the amputation of his legs - but her father did not give up his evening activities, card playing and two packs of cigarettes per day. She visited him in the hospital only during his last days - she wished she hadn't. When she entered the hospital ward and was looking hesitantly for him among the beds, she heard a peculiar sound from a corner, as though somebody was trying to stifle his sobs with his pillow. She looked and saw some women scurrying around and then she heard irrepressible sobbing and loud, inarticulate, wheezing sounds - and she was hustled out of the ward. When her father saw her after she had avoided him for years, he realized that it was all over for him and that he was going to die.

Other than her life, she owed him nothing, she had no pleasant memories associated with him and she recalled his death with slight pangs of conscience and as an unpleasant memory.

She could never forgive him for having thwarted her marriage. How could he have done this to her and to Andris?

A long time ago, after the sudden death of a card playing buddy, her father became the guardian of the minor daughter of his friend. He invested the funds entrusted to him into his own business, and when he made his young ward pregnant, he was forced to marry her. This was the romantic story of her parents marriage. She heard about it during an argument with her grandmother. The old woman never forgave her son for marrying a goy.

What did her father want? Why was he so difficult? What moral pedestal was he preaching from?

And Andris? Why was he not more decisive? “We have to wait until you are of age. You know that I love you, what else do you want?”

What did she want? She wanted to live her own life. She got tired of Andris as well. If he didn't help her to escape from her home, if he does not fight successfully for their getting married, what good was he to her? Her inability to take any action was suffocating her. Will nothing ever work for her?

The Ministry of the Interior was hiring for work in the country, they were beginning to set up personal files. She had Sándor Gál arrange for her transfer from the Railway Company; this would take her away from home. She told Andris only after She had taken the oath of office. She did not return to Pest for months, because the young man could not believe that they had broken up.

The following fall, they read her poem about Korea at the national cultural competition sponsored by the Ministry of the Interior. One member of the jury, a stout bespectacled man came to her during the intermission and praised the poem: “Such creations are eminently suitable to foster hatred of Imperialism.” He encouraged her to see him at the newspaper. It was there in the room of the secretary - Ernő was a member of the editorial board of *Szabad Nép* - that she met George. He sprawled in a chair next to her, crossed his long legs, and said without any further ado: “Are you waiting for my brother? It'll be a long wait. Are you his newest project? Never mind, he is getting older and wants young meat. Come on, let's forget about the arrogant pig. I will get some money from him tomorrow and will present him with your lucubration. Come on! Let's go!”

What attraction did George hold for her that she could not get rid of him? Why did she marry him, when one year later, he asked her to, by telegram?

Why did George want this marriage?

This marriage did nothing for George, he repeatedly withdrew from the University, accepted translation work, or did nothing but loaf around, sitting with his friends all night long. At other times he locked himself in and slept for three days. Occasionally, he became very efficient, threw himself into his studies and passed a few of his overdue exams. He never graduated, however. The pride of the University, the linguistic genius, the mathematical genius - he was believed for years to be all of those - became an occasional translator.

In order to save something of her marriage, she wanted to have a child, but she miscarried. During her second pregnancy, they kept her in the hospital to build up her strength, but during her sixth month, they had to cut her to deliver a dead foetus. This failure - since George also wanted a child - unalterably meant that there was nothing that they could do together successfully.

They discussed the details of their divorce during the intermissions of the Petöfi Society meeting, convened by progressive Party members. George became deeply involved in politics, organized, made speeches and issued proclamations, he was always on the go and kept writing submissions and pronouncements. He was the leader of the University student groups in the central administration.

Her mother's hospitalization came as a surprise. After her second, serious heart attack, in October - father had announced that he wanted a divorce to marry his old lover - it was thought that she was beyond help. Thus October and November - those dreadful months - were spent in going back and forth to the hospital. She had to get food and lug it to the hospital, she had to bribe the nurses, plead with the doctors and try to encourage her mother to hold on, to take her medicine, to rest and not to think. She sat by her bed for hours at a time and tried to talk to her about cheerful subjects, pleasant memories, which were hard to find in the life of their family.

On November 2nd, a group of University students, recently released from prison, appeared at the National Commission on Universities. George had played a major role in their imprisonment and in the liquidation of their organization. The released convicts spat on him and threatened to shoot him "when freedom come". George then locked himself into his room and shot himself into the chest. The bullet only nicked a lung and, in November, it was from the hospital that he continued to organize the resistance movement. He wrote pamphlets and under his mattress they found a veritable office. He was transferred to the prison hospital and an indictment was issued against him.

George's latest lover, Klári, whom she could never stand, erected an "altar" in her room with George's picture and personal mementoes on it; Juli visited her regularly and they talked about George for days on end. They sat there, the two of them from the old Samovar crowd who had the most to blame him for, but who, instead, made a religion of their attachment.

She managed to make herself suspected by the investigators. In '57 she was regularly "collected": she was taken in for questioning on April 4th, in March (when the slogan said: "We will start over in March!"), August 20th and on the 7th of November. It became evident during the interrogations that she knew nothing about George's activities, was not even siding with him, but she stubbornly and skilfully tried to get herself involved in matters about which she learned only from comments or asides made by the investigators. She wanted to take responsibility for her husband and for his actions, she could not abandon him when he was in trouble.

In the meantime, her father had moved back home, since his lover had defected. Whenever she was released from the Main Street she could go home to the family torture chamber. She was expelled from night school and fired from her job. She was finally given job in a nursery near Pest, to take care of saplings. Every day she traveled for four hours and wielded a hoe for eight. Whenever she had some leisure time, she was thinking about when the next national holiday would come and the likelihood of being arrested again.

April of '58 was approaching, the celebration of the liberation, and hence another "collection".

Robi declared that he would take full responsibility for her. Robi was waiting for her at her apartment to talk to her. As they entered the apartment, he smiled at her encouragingly. She stayed in the kitchen, leaned up against the cold wall and could neither cry nor be happy. All she knew was that something had come to an end.

Why did George want this marriage? She had asked herself that question ever since. Was he in love with her? Was he sick and tired of one-night stands? Did he want to help her to get back to Pest? Was he counting on her income? Did he value her company? Perhaps Béla Kuttyás had been correct.

They ran into each other in the street some time ago. Béla tried to pass her by, but she stopped him and talked him into accompanying her. Béla was always a timid soul. They talked only about old times since they had really nothing to say to each other. Ernő had defected in '56. He was living in London. Yes, Béla had also left, but came back after one year and was now teaching at the Elizabeth College. Yack ("Do you remember him, Juli dear?" "Of course I remember him, how could you even ask?" "He hardly ever yacked and women pay no attention to such a man." "Béla, you are talking about yourself and not about your friend!"), in short, Vali was right up there. She was doing research at the Institute for Economics, who would have believed it...? Klári was George's mistress for a while, but had since gotten married; she was now a day care center supervisor. Little Szabó was sentenced to death in '57 for having edited the newspaper of the insurgents. His sentence was commuted, but he died in prison. Amál is counting dirty clothes in some laundry. Eta is a payroll clerk and lives with a girlfriend. Pofi moved to the country and is the chief accountant at a power plant, got married, got divorced, got fat, lost weight, is happy, is unhappy, take your pick, the details don't matter... Just like with old schoolmates, they had really nothing to say to each other.

They reached Engels Square.

"Do you remember?"

Béla was squinting at the budding shrubs and at the children, playing with their mothers in the bright sunshine.

"We were waiting for George. He arrived, wearing a yellow sweater."

"Let's sit down," and she forced Béla to join her on a bench. Her feelings of discomfort had disappeared. This square was a memory they shared.

"Tell me, Béla, why did George marry me?"

The man wanted to get up, but she acted as though she hadn't noticed; Béla stayed put, he could never do anything that somebody else was opposed to.

"Béla, I asked you something."

“He should have kept a dog,” the man mumbled and, turning his head, was squinting to the sky, “they always said that I was keeping a dog in my sublet. Well, one died, one ran away and the third one... I had always wanted something or somebody around me! At least a dog. Don’t be offended, Juli dear, but for George you were just such a dog... Can I speak frankly...? He did not need you. Just as he didn’t need me, or anybody else. He was always a loner and he remained one. The wedding was in the fall of ‘53. Wasn’t it? Ernő had already failed and was moved to the Party History Institute, Everything got very confused for George and he knew that he had to be honest with himself. Why was he doing all that he was doing? He had broken with his parents in ‘50. He repudiated himself. He established a kangaroo court at the University and even the professors were afraid of him. And then, he suddenly realized that all that he was doing was a lie, a sin and a stupidity. This was the hardest blow for an intelligent man. I was amazed at his marriage, I even offended you, don’t protest, I remember it well... But he needed somebody. Who would save him and rescue him. Fancy words? Of course. This would fix nothing. It only ruined your life as well. Perhaps with somebody else - if you had somebody else - and there would have been, who... perhaps even - I... never mind. Don’t think that I feel sorry for you. Or that I feel sorry for myself. I feel sorry for all of us, we are an unfortunate generation. We were knocked out three times. One can’t forget it. When could we ever forget the war? Never! The ‘50s, the personal cult? Never! The events of ‘56? Never, never! Everything always turned out differently from the way we figured. Even the marriages. We had great opportunities in the ‘50s but took no advantage of them. We always picked the hardest tasks for ourselves and thought that we were accumulating capital for ourselves, and then, almost like a double or nothing bet, in ‘56 we went bust and had to start all over again. Perhaps you are the lucky one, you could start over... While I... Ah, revolting! In October one half of the city wanted to kill the other half. In November the second half put the first half in prison, then, after a few years they pardoned them and let them go free and by now the first half has forgiven the second half for having put them in prison. And it goes on and on like this, we just pull the old rags one way and the other. You were too good for us... George was lucky in this as well... while another one, perhaps... others didn’t even manage to get noticed by you. Don’t ask me what I mean, I can’t explain...”

He jumped up, said good-bye and trotted off while she just gazed after him. Béla sidled across the square, his lanky body waving this way and that because he placed his feet in such an odd way as though he was trying to follow somebody else’s footsteps and leave no trail behind himself.

He woke up feeling hot. The pajamas were all bunched up across his chest and were choking him. He wanted to ease his position by a sudden move, but found that he could not budge, Juli was so tightly entwined around him. She radiated heat and when she was asleep, her body always became as warm as a little child’s. He tried to pull away and to get the comforter out from under his waist.

“Are you awake?” Juli whispered.

“Are you awake too?”

“I haven’t slept yet.”

“What’s wrong?”

“I don’t even know,” Juli whispered as though she would give herself away with a single loud sound, in the unfriendly darkness, “something is pressing on my chest. At times it’s like a stab.”

“Why don’t you sleep?”

“I seem to remember everything.”

“Everything bad?”

“That too. But when I snuggle up to you everything is O.K.”

“That’s why I am so warm!” Then he said no more but his voice revealed his irritation. He was lying there staring at the darkness. He had been staring at it yesterday and the day before yesterday as well. There are some bad nights like these, yet he must sleep. He will be sleepy in the morning. He will have trouble at work. And when everything goes haywire, he has to push harder, drive himself mercilessly and tomorrow night he will be too keyed up to sleep... To sleep - they had to sleep. “Cuddle up, Kitten, sleep and don’t dream of Germans and dogs.”

“More the idiot I! I should have said anything but that.”

But perhaps Juli hadn’t heard him.

He was lying there staring at the darkness. He didn’t even try to go to sleep any more, he will be tired tomorrow, it is going to be a long day - he resigned himself to it.

He did not like these nightly vigils, since in spite of Juli’s snuffling next to him, he was alone. It was on such occasions that he felt that he was getting older. These moments, while he was lying there, aged him. He was staring at the darkness. First he thought this was funny. All the things that came to his mind. What really do these bad nights mean? When he was once awake, he could not go back to sleep. This was something new.

So, he was lying there staring at the darkness. On such occasions he was thinking of the next day. His work. His group in the Institute. His colleagues whom he liked and respected, but about whom he was thinking angrily on sleepless nights, they of course were sleeping peacefully... I have to break my back so that they may work undisturbed. Managerial conference, group leader conference, departmental discussion. Party leadership meeting. Attending Communist Youth Organization meetings, managing club activities. Central Committee conference. Quarterly bonus distribution. He was willing to chuck it all. How often had he reached this decision? He would become a simple official. He would be concerned only with his work, nothing but his work. Although others were praising him and referred to him, he knew that his work had run aground, he had to disembarass himself from the oppressive obligations and work and work, because others were getting ahead of him. His time was limited. The days were too short. The years just slipped away. And when he was lying sleeplessly at night, staring at the darkness, he felt the pressure.

“You are always so calm,” he was told. Because he was willing to listen. He disciplined himself. He smiled. How long could he keep it up? He had often wished that the others would notice his anxieties and his pressures. But who was there to notice? Who could really know him? Who could see into his heart? Where have all the old friends gone? He used to have so many friends. How much he liked to talk to them. About his work, his thoughts, about women, his past, his environment, the world - everything. And how little had he talked during the last few years. When they met by accident, he just sat with an old friend and just kept rehashing useless topics. There would have been so much to talk about, but he would have to start way back, at the beginning, it was no longer possible to just pick up where they left off yesterday - he preferred not to get started. Give me a call! I’ll call you! We will look each other up! Yes, it would be nice to have a long discussion. Let’s find an open afternoon! Please, Ági, you didn’t forget to call so that they shouldn’t waste an afternoon waiting for me? Ági - did the comrade call - I understand. He is sending word that he is busy. Ági, please type up the work schedule and please call this number and cancel my meeting. - This is what friendship has come to.

What was left? Walks with Juli, fooling around with Juli, to listen to Juli's stories about the office. Occasionally they go the movies. If somebody comes to see them in the evening, they usually want something from them, or they have a meeting set up with him. Except for Juli, everybody makes him tired. What does this mean? Is he getting old...?

Juli doesn't know how much he depends on her. He was thinking how happy he was when he went to meet her, waited for her to get off at 5 o'clock. He thinks of her smile, her wave, her shining eyes. When he is in a bad mood, he thinks of her voice, the voice she uses only with him. A person whom he alone knows. When they are together, she changes and opens up. And that is the real Juli.

How did this begin? What was the first moment? - He led the investigator into the room at Juli's, into that strange, dark apartment on the mezzanine and as he was looking back from the doorway into the small, narrow kitchen, he saw not only a woman, leaning up against the gas stove, who was nice and smart and who looked at him with fear in her eyes, but a new person about whom he knew that nobody else would ever get to know her, but he.

And at the wedding among the rapidly recruited, numerous witnesses (Juli had to file her application to the University on the next day) and some friends and colleagues who did not really understand what was going on and who congratulated him on his marriage as though it was a self-sacrifice. There at the wedding, he realized from Juli's trembling and from his own happy excitement, that he had been given something that only he knew about, someone who would be his only and whom he actually desperately needed.

He would have preferred to hide her so that others could not get near her. So far he had done everything for her and now it was Juli's turn. She would have to help him, allay his restlessness, his dissatisfaction with himself, this whole painful, confused, maddening feeling which had penetrated his thoughts, ruined his nights, spoiled his days, only his listlessness was growing, weighs on him, treads him underfoot, he escapes into work in vain, it catches up with him everywhere and he just sits and stares at the blank pieces of paper in front of him and his head is empty, then he starts trembling from nervousness, his temples are throbbing, his head is about to split, and he drinks coffee, takes a sedative, gulps a brandy, nothing helps, his ill humor just grows and grows and if he doesn't want to get into a fight with anybody, he must keep quiet, suppressing all his emotions and this makes things worse, much worse, he is no longer nervous, he is not longer angry, he is just listless, loses his energy, only lounges about, he becomes dizzy in the hallway, his body seems to be so heavy, he can barely carry it and still he feels a great big emptiness within himself, he can barely wait until 5 o'clock so that he can go and meet Juli. But even with her it is getting harder to fool around, Juli is full of her own concerns, the office, the clients, the Court and when he complains to her, she laughs at him: "Come on Teddy bear, you have reached a mid-life crisis, don't let yourself go." On such occasions, even Juli becomes almost a stranger, for some days she seems to be far away, he wakes up at night and feels so alone, left to himself, there is no more Juli, he can't recall her face, regardless how hard he tries - another face takes her place, that of his mother, they way he saw her for the last time in the hospital bed, the same features, but old, in hopeless immobility, the forehead, the chin and the bones of her jaw hold her face in a rigid frame, only the large, black eyes are still alive, as though these eyes were kept in a box... Awful... Sometimes he thinks that patient isn't even Juli, but he himself. If he would only know what it was that ailed him? He has to see a doctor, he would get some medicine, a pill, a glass of water, swallow and all will be well.

As though Juli had stirred, she was lying in his arms, her legs along his legs, her body next to his - he couldn't even move, she was holding him so tightly.

“Are you awake?”

“I am, Teddy dear.”

“Did you have nightmares again?”

“No-o-o...”

“Is there something wrong?”

“No-o-o...”

He pulls her even closer. Perhaps she will settle down.

“Sleep.”

“What time is it?”

“I will check.”

“It is not important. Don’t turn on the light.”

“Try to sleep.”

“I have such a strange pain, here, here under my breastbone.”

“You were lying awkwardly.”

“And I have trouble breathing.”

“Shall I open the window?”

“No, no, don’t leave me. I am afraid.”

“From what?”

“I don’t know, perhaps I am scared of dreaming.”

“You dream anyway. You were restless all night.”

“Sometimes nothing for months and then I dream again.”

“Germans with dogs.”

“Yes, I always have the same dream.”

The same, always the same. Because she could not forget it.

They had not eaten for two days. In the house above them, all they had were dried yellow peas, kept in a paper bag, but Mrs. Wohl didn’t dare to go up to the gym from the basement. Emőke had a fit during one of the bombing attacks and since then she had to be held like a doll. The girl slept for half a day, motionless, rigid and when she woke up she started foaming at the mouth. She has never had such a serious fit before. Concern for her daughter completely drained the woman of all her strength. It was in vain that Aunt Ibi hinted that they should try to cook, she asked her in vain to sneak upstairs, that they could not just starve. Finally, she yelled at her that she should not let the children starve. All in vain. Mrs. Wohl just sat on her mattress (her mattress was the last one to be brought down and had to be placed directly at the foot of the stairs, so that anybody who wanted to go out had to step over it) held Emőke’s head tightly, rocking back and forth, staring straight ahead of her with her obstinate, insane black eyes.

Little George volunteered to get some food. After some objections, Aunt Ibi agreed, since even so far it has been the boys’ job to go upstairs, when possible, and fill the two cans with water.

When they opened the door, they heard the sounds of much shooting and of explosions. But if he didn’t try to get some food in the early evening dusk, they would have to wait for 24 hours before they could try again. In any case, Aunt Ibi’s cautiousness was overcome by their hunger

and by her fight with Mrs. Wohl and it just never occurred to her that the boy may not come back with food, since all they had upstairs was yellow peas, uncooked yellow peas.

Little George left and they waited, waited hopelessly, the single bulb cast a yellow light and occasionally shook if a projectile landed somewhere in the not too distant area. Then the light was swinging left and right as though it was shaking its head.

Little George returned after about an hour and in a brown paper bag he had some dry biscuits and some candy. He did not say where he got them from, only smiled. Aunt Ibi did not question him, the food had to be distributed.

After they went to bed and pulled the blanket up over their heads, Little George whispered to her: "I brought this just for you." She felt something sticky. "What is it?" It was a box of candied fruit which had become soft in the box, when the boy had hidden it under his shirt. They ate and ate and stuffed themselves with the sickly sweet treat until they became nauseated. "Where did you get it from? You can tell me." Little George whispered that in the next street there was a pastry shop and that he broke into it. He had his eyes on it for some time. But others had gotten in ahead of him and looted the shop. All he could find were the dry biscuits and, hidden behind a counter the box of candid fruit. He brought that for her.

He had broken in for her. And he did even more. They heard of it after Little George's death (perhaps Hungarian soldiers had been present) that he used to fetch the water from the military barracks. The Germans let him fill the bucket only if he shouted "Heil Hitler". He also had to sing. According to an eyewitness, he had to sing German songs. And Little George did that too. The Germans stood around him and laughed at him. They liked the performance. The ones who stood around him and laughed at him were the ones who later killed him. Perhaps they were mad at him because he could comply with their demands, because he did comply with the humiliating commands. The others needed the water. And Little George sang. He never said a single word about this to her. He really could have told her, in the evening, when they were whispering to each other under the blanket. Perhaps it would have made it easier for him to do it again the next day. Or harder?

After Little George's death she fled from the school. She was looking for her mother and tried to find her.

A patrol caught her in the empty street. They took her to some military barrack. She cried and struggled, but they hit her in the back with the butt of their rifles. And then they pitched her down into the cellar.

There was a large number of prisoners crowded together in that dark cellar. And they always added new ones. There was barely room to stand. She does not remember when it was that she collapsed. When she came to, she was floating, something hard was pressing into her bottom and her back and her legs were held in a tight grip by somebody; she reached out to her side and touched somebody's head. "The child is beginning to stir," she heard. "Then it's O.K.," she heard another voice say, "let's hold her up so she doesn't get trampled under foot." She became frightened when she realized that she was up in the air. The other prisoners were holding her up over their heads.

When they were herded out of the cellar (was this the next day? a week later? or perhaps she had been in the cellar for only an hour?) it was night. There was a single dim bulb burning in the long corridor. They had to line up along the wall. A man gave her a shove. "Don't stand in line, little girl. Disappear if you want to live."

She was weak and her legs were trembling. She crawled along the wall behind the prisoners. She crawled by an Arrow Cross man who looked at her but did not say anything.

Then she was in the yard of the barracks. The prisoners were led away in front of her, in the darkness of the winter night. She followed them through the open gate. One guard yelled something and one of the armed guards looked back at her and waved to her to catch up, but he had to watch the prisoners and had no time to keep an eye on her. She ducked into a side street.

By morning, she reached the hospital and was put into a basement among the patients. She fell asleep and when some shouting woke her, she heard that the Russians had arrived.

She sat in the snowy yard of the hospital, on the hard, frozen body of a German soldier and chewed on some black Russian bread. She watched the soldiers in their quilted coats but felt nothing. She should have been happy. Then and there she was not happy. But when years later on a World Youth Federation program she saw the red silk banners of the Komsomolists, a wave of warmth seemed to flow over her and she fainted. She came to, sitting on the curb of the sidewalk with people standing around her, holding her by her arms and gently slapping her face. "What's the matter with you?" a man asked her and she looked at him uncomprehendingly.

The first doll she played with, free from worries, was her little brother. Her mother wanted him to be baptized Józsi, but at that time Juli was the healthy one and the strong one and she insisted that the baby be called George, to remind her of Little George, always. Two years later, her kid brother died. He was never strong, and since her mother couldn't nurse him, he always remained a weakling.

Little George. What did his face look like? She could not remember. He might have resembled Robi a little bit.

They shuffled down into the cellar at the end of the line and there was just one mattress left.

That was the first time she and Robi looked at each other. The boy had a small parcel and he held some books under his arm, and then he grinned at her. Perhaps he was laughing at her.

Aunt Ibi cast them a suspicious look from behind her thick, pebbled glasses and by the dim light of the single bulb they could see the mottles on her face getting darker. After a slightly embarrassed silence she said: "You'll be all right together, my dear." She looks at her: "Well, you are only ten years old, aren't you?" (She doesn't understand why this matters, but she nods.) "And you, being a big boy," and she places a tentative, old-maidenly hand on Little George's arm, "take care of little Juli." Then she quickly walks away.

She settles down nicely. They will take care of her. She heard Aunt Ibi say so. She had appointed a big boy to look after her. She looks at her guardian with curiosity and expectations. The boy grins at her and then, finally, asks the obvious question: "Don't you have a pack?" She nods proudly and from below her overcoat (at that time she still had her blue overcoat) she pulls out Zurzabella, the beautiful black doll.

When the light is turned off, they lie down. Robi puts his arms around her, because the narrow passage is cold, there are few blankets, but in the warmth of each other's body they fall asleep.

The days pass in darkness, as though there was no dawn and no morning, their entire life is one long night.

One day there was a little silence. How long had they been cowering there in the dark? For an eternity. Aunt Ibi opens the door toward the yard and she can stand on the steps and look outside but is not allowed to go outside.

Fresh air streams in. They crowd together on the steps and look outside. It is afternoon and a fine, gray dusk is falling.

They notice that the Red Cross flag raised over the roof of the opposite wing of the school had fallen down, it was supposed to protect them from bombing. Uncle Wohl starts out to set it back up again. He looks back, he needs somebody to help him. Robi is naturally the first one to step forward, he leaves her side and forces his way through the children on the stairs. She pushes and shoves to keep up with him - but at the door Aunt Ibi throws her arms around her.

They breathe in the fresh air and peer out into the darkening yard for long, timeless minutes. They had not even espied Uncle Wohl and Robi on the roof when the Germans began to shout at them from the other side, from the barracks. Soldiers squeeze through the fence and they see the heavy boots running in front of their eyes. Aunt Ibi says only: "Oh, my God!" and holds her tight, she struggles in vain and can't free herself from the embrace although she wanted to run, run after Robi. During the struggle, she drops Zurzabella, the porcelain crunches under their feet. The Germans are already on the roof. It was not hard for them to figure out who were hiding under the Red Cross, all they have to do is to look at the children. The bombing has made them into savage beasts; they don't even shoot at Robi, they just keep kicking the screaming boy until he falls over the edge of the roof.

Between the buildings, somewhere in the yard dogs are barking, excited by the shouting they can hear. Right in the middle of their angry, deep-toned baying, Aunt Ibi pushes all of them back into the cellar and slams the door to the yard.

That barking could be heard through the walls and she can hear it yet, decades later.

And when this happens, she must run, race and flee, but her feet won't move and she can hear the thundering of boots behind her, but her feet don't move, even though she gnashes her teeth with the effort, but her feet don't move, they don't and don't and don't. She feels an intolerable stabbing pain in her chest and...

I started awake to the sound of moaning, but before I could be fully awake, a warm wave carried me back into dreamland, then I started awake again, again to the sound of moaning, I knew that I was awake, and I knew that I was dreaming, except I did not know how much time had passed, minutes or hours, or I may not have slept at all, it may have been the previous warm wave tugging at me, pulling me back down into the oblivion that sleep affords, as if it were a bottomless pit, and I gave myself over to it, and I had nearly sunk into oblivion again when I heard a gentle, quiet grinding noise (a familiar sound, I loathe it!), and it infuriated me, I was infuriated even before I was fully awake or fully asleep again, because my dreams, too, disappear as soon as my wife grinds her teeth in her sleep; and awake or asleep, I reached out with the familiar motion and flipped on the wall light - Juli was lying on the other wing of the corner recamier, our pillows were touching and as I was leaning over her, I was hit by the aroma of her hair lotion, her breath and her body enveloped in the warmth of the comforter; "wha-a-a-a, oo-oh" she wailed because she felt me stroking her head; her hair, cut short, was damp, she was soaked in sweat with fear and then her eyelids slowly opened and her eyes were opaque as though she was looking up from below a layer of water; she turned away from the light and burrowing between the comforter and the pillow, she mumbled as from very far away: "Turn off the light, I had the same dream, sometimes there is nothing for months and then it comes every night, I begin to hate to go to sleep"; because I knew that I was asleep and I knew that I was dreaming, I didn't care what she said and was only furious because my back was aching and so were my shoulders and my joints, my neck was wry and my arm was numb from my weight, my head was full of a pap of fatigue and my head was a pot full of gruel, my temples were about to rupture - the night seemed as though it had been an eternity, I wish I could get up, I wish I could sleep, it doesn't matter, nothing matters, both getting up and sleeping seemed to be insoluble tasks; yet, awake or asleep I knew that getting up at our house

was a real circus, immediately after waking up, Juli would ask: "What kind of day is this going to be?", but she expects no answer to her question knowing that she would have to drag the information from him, so she reaches down, turns on the portable radio, sitting on the floor and the radio roars and Juli, to give herself some encouragement even sings a wake-up song to herself: "Wake up, sleepyhead, the sun is shining on your tummy don't you se-e-e-e the happy cuckoo-o-o-o?" and if this doesn't give her enough energy, she reaches out from the bed and picks up her stuffed animals from the easy chair, Mo, the large brown bear who says Mo-o-o, when you squeeze him, the tiger, whom she calls Francis Joseph because of his sideburns, Jerome, the rubber giraffe, and the three foot, red-eared, bowtie-wearing rabbit, Doctor Benő Káposztás, who is the ranking attorney in the family and who is therefore a model and then she sets them all in a circle around the bed; I tell her in vain: "Juli, why don't you get up?" "Don't you see, Teddy dear, Mo is sitting on the edge of my bed and I can't get around him;" "Push the miserable thing over," "No way, he would fall on the radio and the roarer would take offense, I will turn it up a little more so that it doesn't feel neglected;" the radio roars, it also roars at the neighbors, it roars on the floor below us, across the street, radios are roaring everywhere in the city; "Pull me out of bed," Juli also roars and I pull her out, her arm around my neck, she clings to me, I shake her until she stands up, - and to the bathroom, the bath water is running - back to the room, I make the beds, to the kitchen, I fix breakfast on the burner, Juli stumbles, bumbles, drags her feet after me everywhere I go, she doesn't help and is just in my way, she holds up her slipping pajamas bottom with one hand (she yanks at them so clumsily that the elastic is torn in all of them) and keeps asking non-stop: "What kind of day is this going to be? whatkindofdayisthisgoingtobe... whatkindof...?"; she leaves all the doors open behind her, in the foyer she opens all six doors of the side-by-side clothes cupboards, she also leaves the bathroom door across the hall open and, just like in an enchanted castle unnecessary doors, leading nowhere are swinging before us, behind us, around us, if she pushes one, it slams against another one, if I turn around suddenly, I bang into one of them, Juli likes this, she plays hide-and-seek between them, laughs, yells "Hello!" from some cupboard, I don't see her, she appears, again disappears, holds up the bottoms with one hand, but when a door swings toward her, she yanks up her hand to protect her face, the pajamas bottoms begin to slide down, she yelps, makes a grab for them, pulls them up over her round tummy and flounces around aimlessly, "whatkindofadayisthisgoingtobe?" she keeps asking from behind the doors, she already wears a slip, spins around, she reaches into the depth of a cupboard where her things are getting wrinkled in large piles, her underwear in nylon bags, cardigans and blouses jammed onto the shelves, sloppily hung dresses on endless rows of hangers - she roots around among them, yanks, pulls, looks, she is looking for her panties- chases stockings, lifts up a dried up shoe from somewhere and the metal hooks of the hangers clang along the rods, her evening dress drops on her head, the raincoat rustles angrily, the skirts bounce around on their hangers, she bangs around between them, tries to fight her way out from among the clothes and again and again and again repeats: "whatkindofadayisthisgoingtobewhatkindofadayisthisgoingtobewhatkindofadayisthisgoingtobe?" and we have time to chat only when we sit down to breakfast in the kitchen: "What kind of a day is this going to be?" "I don't know, Kitten." "Will you call me at 5 o'clock?" "Will you be in?" "I'll be in this afternoon." "And in the morning?" "I am in court." "How many hearings do you have?" "I will be done early, we can have lunch together." "I can't come, I have an 11 o'clock meeting." "What kind of meeting - Party, Communist Youth Organization?" "Association." "Oh, my, I don't like that, you gab so much there and from there you wander off with your buddies, you will not come to meet me, I don't like this kind of meeting..." "What kind of meeting do you like?" "The Party, Communist Youth Organization kind, they are over quickly." "Well, you go back after lunch and be in your office at 4:30." "Will you call me?"

“If I don’t call you, I’ll meet you at 5 o’clock.” “G-o-o-od!” yells Juli, because the radio roars next to her, she nods her unkempt, black head for emphasis while she keeps eating, her fingers are greasy, she smears the juice glass and pushes her hair away from her forehead with the back of her hand; but awake or dreaming, I know that after a sleepless night we cannot be cheerful, we just pick at our food, the egg congeals in the skillet, the cold orange juice makes Juli shiver and she spits it back into the glass and doesn’t ask even once “whatkindofadayisthisgoingtobe?” she only mumbles: “Rub my eyes, they itch,” and I stand next to her and gently rub and massage her eyes with the tips of my fingers and she leans with her unkempt head against my belly and moans: “This is good, this is wonderful, don’t be angry with me Teddy dear, that because of me you had a bad night and that you had to keep vigil with me.” “That’s my job,” I say, “sometimes I think that being your husband is my principal task, the reason for my existence.” “Don’t make fun of me.” Juli tries to yank her head back but I don’t let her go, I hold her, tightly against myself, because I want to tell her noddle, her hair, her skin, the aroma of her sleepiness, the heat of her body, her sleepy tiredness, her whole body, her whole being, yes I am just a shoe horn to ease you into this narrow world and I am happy to be your shoe horn! Juli still yanks her head back and looks suspiciously at me “Are you angry because of the bad night and are you making fun of me?” How could I calm her down when I look at her tired face panic constricts my throat, because this face is so small, so insignificant, it barely exists, the forehead, the chin and the bones of her jaw make a tight frame around it, only her dully shining black eyes are alive, as though these eyes were living in a box and this is frightful and frightening; “Juli, kitten, pet,” I say to her, “Little Fairy, Fairykin, Little Rascal, Grasshopper, Titmouse, Tousehead, Little Rabbit, Little Pussycat, Little Pigtail, Mousy, Meow, Piggy, Sleepyhead, Little Dumpling, Little Acorn, Little Goosy-Duck, Itsy-Bitsy, Little Monkey, Little Sun, Little Bunny, Ketsup, Crackling, Wart, Little Piggy, Currant, Little Bambi!” but those large, black eyes seem to be living in a box, by themselves, for themselves, within themselves; I know I am awake, I know I am asleep, I know that she is lying next to me but I can’t find her, I pat the bed in vain, the pillow, the comforter and the whole bed are still warm from her body and yet I am lying here alone, not with her, only with her memory, I am the Thrombi, Thrombi, Thrombeter - I’ve heard a new joke today - pull me out of bed - let’s play choo-choo around the room - we are a real family - I am so happy being us - I always dream the same thing - Germans with dogs - how will it be if my foot becomes a doctor - or my ass - I have become a child only since we are living together - this is the first time that I am a child - what kind of a day is this going to be - whatkindofadayisthisgoingtobe - I lie down every evening as a wise pessimist and wake up every morning as a naive little girl - the sun is shining, the sun is shining and a kitten will be nibbling - I love the little sun - Mrs. Fejér went to the bathroom, just to rinse out a few things - they will make us sit apart - that will be the end -

“Good Lord, they didn’t make us sit apart, did they?!” The world was much improved, Juli had made it better, casually, between fooling around, people now say hello to each other, they don’t patter around at night, they don’t play their tape recorders at night, or their TV-s, they don’t shake their dust rags on each other’s head, they don’t kick a neighbors welcome mat from his door or take their paper from the mail slot, they don’t lay hand on other people’s children and send them their own to school, they don’t insult the teachers and don’t berate the system, they don’t use abusive language about Gypsies and Jews, they don’t black market in foreign trash, they don’t urinate on the wall at night, they don’t skip out of selfservice stores without paying, they don’t poison the old lady whom they contracted to serve, they don’t abandon mother to the care of the State, they don’t beat the subtlety or calumniate their tenants - Juli’s cases have become just curious footnotes in a Law School text, the LEX JULIAE speaks of all of these in the past tense, the National Assembly has paid respect to

Juli's work by standing in silence for two hours; "they can not make us sit apart!" I know that I am awake, that I am dreaming, I know that I must fix breakfast on the hot plate, the twenty thousand eggs that we have eaten sizzle in a largish skillet, I have sliced a ton of bacon to go with them, I have poured five thousand gallons of orange juice, Juli makes the radio roar, her hands are covered with grease, she makes the glasses dirty, the coffee is boiling over from the large kettle and emits a foul odor, I know that I have done everything I can, for her; my relatives said that the Jews had caught me for themselves, this didn't bother me, I just smiled, I always wanted my wife to be white-skinned, serious and beautiful and yet I loved Juli, I wanted to know Juli, save her, free her of her memories, of the Germans and the dogs, of the sleepless nights, the bad dreams and I begged her to tell me everything, but maybe I didn't beg her hard enough, maybe I wasn't sufficiently interested in her past and believed that she didn't want to talk about it: "Oh, my, Teddy bear, I don't like to talk about it, I can't talk about it, I have told you everything, I have told the story so many times during the '50's, at that time it was all right to talk about it, they liked to hear about it and the sentences became shopworn, my life had become a pattern tale, I have related it at so many meetings, at so many propaganda sessions, at so many seminars, that even I doubt that it is true, perhaps there wasn't such a person as Little George, perhaps I invented him, perhaps it was wrong for me to survive him, it was indecent, and the Red Cross school, the wounds on my body, the Russian doctor, the black bread, they are all just my nightmares, let's not talk about them"; I know that I am awake, I know I am dreaming, I know I should not have hung on to Juli, expect her help, her encouragement, her understanding, she had enough troubles of her own, mine was the drop that made the cup flow over, she could not endure that, because even I didn't know what I expected of her, I just clung to her, I just clung to Juli; I know that I am awake, I know I am dreaming. I know we are growing old together, we are children together, we are dead ones together, we are deep sea fish, two motes of dust, flowers and their leaves, clouds and their shadows, we have been together since the beginning of time, like that Egyptian woman and her fan-bearing servant, whom they photographed in the fresco on the wall of a pyramid, how we laughed at her, how much we talked about her, that the Egyptian woman with her snub nose, tiny little face, large eyes and beautiful ears was just like Juli and that I resembled the round-headed, rigidly attentive, diligent servant, I did everything for her, let no one accuse me, let them accuse only her father, her mother, the neighbors, Aunt Nyuszi, Little George, Andris, George, Aunt Ibi, Aunt Mari, Sándor Gál, the friends from the Samovar, her colleagues who work with her, the years when they wanted to imprison her because of her husband, wanted to set her aside because of her father, wanted to destroy her because of her race, let them come here now, let them all come and let them help, whoever took a year, a month or a minute from her life, let them return it now, let them return it to her; I know that I am dreaming, I know I am awake, if necessary I can dream of Germans and of dogs, but I rather dream of Juli or wake up and worry about her, because she is my history.

In such a terrible night, I just don't know if I am awake or if I'm dreaming and whether there is any hope?

The End