

Louis-Ferdinand

CÉLINE

RIGADOON



Translated by Ralph Manheim

"Céline is one of the great revolutionaries of prose of our century, as great as Joyce or Kafka."
—*The London Spectator*

LOUIS-FERDINAND CÉLINE is a controversial figure in contemporary literature. When he died in 1961, he was regarded as one of the foremost French writers and at the same time denounced as a charlatan, racist, and Nazi collaborator. Céline's reputation in the United States is based on two novels, *Death on the Installment Plan* and *Journey to the End of the Night*, which are widely read in colleges and universities. His posthumous trilogy of novels, *Castle to Castle*, *North*, and *Rigadoon*, have increased Céline's stature as an important writer of the twentieth century.

Rigadoon (meaning a spirited dance for one couple) is the final installment of Céline's nightmare chronicle of Europe at the end of World War II. Céline, his wife Lili, and Bébert the cat (traveling in a musette bag) are on their last trek through a devastated Germany, from Rostock to Ulm, then to Hamburg and finally across the border into Denmark. While passing through Hanover, where phosphorus bombs burst into psychedelic twists of pink and green flame over the ruins, Céline is hit on the back of the head by a brick. From then on, his laments, his obsession with the genetic disintegration of Europe, his cosmic paranoia know no bounds. In the finale of his gruesome journey, as Bébert the cat escapes death beneath a locomotive and the Swedish Red Cross ushers Céline, Lili, and their adopted band of 19 drooling, feeble-minded children onto an express train to Denmark, hallucination and reality become one.

RIGADOON



Books by Céline
available in translation

RIGADOON

NORTH

CASTLE TO CASTLE

GUIGNOL'S BAND

DEATH ON THE INSTALLMENT PLAN

JOURNEY TO THE END OF THE NIGHT

Louis-Ferdinand Céline

RIGADOON

Translated by Ralph Manheim



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Rigadoon.

The third of a trilogy, the title of the first being North,
and that of the second Castle to castle.

I. Title.

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To the animals

*Working with perfect integrity and extreme patience,
François Gibault has given us the text of Rigodon
without changing or omitting one word or punctuation
mark.*

I thank him.

—LUCETTE DESTOUCHES

PREFACE

North, Castle to Castle, and Rigadoon form a trilogy, the last volume of which is now, more than seven years after Celine's death, being made available to the public. *Rigadoon* was written in Meudon during 1960 and 1961 on yellow paper in a fine hand that is difficult and sometimes almost impossible to read.

Sensing the approach of death, Céline had worked unflaggingly on this last book. On the morning of July 1, 1961, he told his wife, Lucette, that *Rigadoon* was finished; then he wrote to Gaston Gallimard, informing him of the news. At six o'clock that evening he was dead.

Two successive versions of *Rigadoon* show how hard Céline worked on this book. Changes have been made on every page, almost in every line; one word is replaced by another and still another, then as often as not the third is replaced by the first; frequently the whole sentence is revised, reformulated. As this constant revision shows, Céline was so concerned with style that he could not let a sentence rest until he had assured himself that it would impress the reader as not written but spoken . . . and spoken spontaneously, without reflection.

His wife had asked the attorney André Damien to decipher *Rigadoon*. Aware of the importance of every detail, he devoted all his holidays and free time to the staggering task. Hadn't Céline written in this same book:

". . . just an accent here, a comma there . . . you've got to watch out for copyreaders, you see, they operate with 'plain common sense' . . . plain common sense' is the death of rhythm! . . ."

In *North, Castle to Castle, and Rigadoon* we encounter the same circumstances of time, place, and action, and also the same characters: Céline,

his wife Lucette, the actor Le Vigan, and Bébert.

It was in 1932, at the pet shop of the Samaritaine department store, that Le Vigan bought the cat whom he named Bébert and who was to become the most famous cat in contemporary French literature.

Adopted by Lucette and Louis-Ferdinand Céline, he accompanied them on their travels through a Europe in flames; he shared their life in hospitals, in prison, and in exile, and died in Meudon in 1952 at the age of twenty.

These are the principal actors in the book; the others are extras: Stationmasters of demolished stations, generals without an army, countless corpses, nurses, lost children, various animals, a lamentable procession of the living and the dead, all, with Céline, witnesses to the Apocalypse.

Rigadoon is not a novel but a chronicle. Indeed, Céline describes himself as:

"I, chronicler of Grands Guignols."

Was he a chance spectator? Was he a victim of chance or an enlightened enthusiast, always in the front row at catastrophes, so as to get a good view of them, experience them, and tell about them?

In 1914, when he was only seventeen, he wrote prophetically in a text that was found shortly before his death and published under the title *The Notebooks of Cuirassier Destouches*:

"But what I want most of all is to live a life full of incidents that I hope providence will put in my path . . ."

and further on:

". . . if I pass through the great crises that life holds in store for me, I shall perhaps be less unhappy than other men, for I wish to experience and to know . . ."

Later, on December 30, 1932, in a letter to Léon Daudet, he wrote:

"I take pleasure only in the grotesque on the confines of death."

And in *Féerie pour une Autre Fois*:

"Nothing intoxicates me so much as great disasters, I easily get drunk on calamities, I don't positively look for them, but they come to me like guests that have rights of a kind."

At about 1 o'clock on the night of May 23, 1968, fire broke out in what had been Celine's office in Meudon and then spread to the other rooms in the house, consuming furniture, mementoes, and manuscripts. By midnight the main house was reduced to a blind skeleton.

One can imagine the story that Louis-Ferdinand Destouches would have made of this "Célinian" catastrophe; what a fresco he would have painted! What an end for *Rigadoon*! He who no longer had the strength to attach himself to objects and had no other ambition than a mass grave!

But a few steps away from the ruins, the aviary was still intact and Toto the parrot very much alive. Today he is master of these ruins. Witness and guardian of ghosts, he is waiting for the Chinese in this Grand Guignol setting.

—FRANÇOIS GIBAULT

RIGADOON





I can see that Poulet is down on me . . . Robert Poulet with his death sentence . . . he doesn't talk about me any more in his column . . . I used to be the great this . . . the incomparable that . . . now I hardly get a word in passing, and pretty contemptuous at that. I know why, we quarreled . . . he finally got on my nerves with his way of beating about the bush . . . "Are you sure your convictions won't bring you back to God?"

"Hell, no! . . . sure, I'm sure! I say the same as Ninon de Lenclos! God was invented by the priests! absolutely antireligious! . . . That's my faith once and for all!"

"A fine authority your Ninon! . . . Is that all, Céline? *hmm . . . ! hmm!*"

"Certainly not, Poulet! There's more to come!"

"Ah?! . . . I'm all ears!"

"All the little Jesus' religions, Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish, all in the same boat! All one! they can nail him to the cross or bake him up in wafers, same difference! same imposture! fairy tales! hokum!"

"Is that all?"

"Far from it! Try and follow me, my dear imbecile."

"Fire away!"

"There's only one religion: Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish . . . all branches of the same 'little Jesus' chains! they hassle, they rip each other's guts out? . . . blarney! . . . for the crowd! their big job, their only real job . . . perfect agreement . . . is to besot and destroy the white race."

"What's this, Céline? You?"

"Pure mongrelization. By marriage of course! With all the sacraments! Amen!"

"I don't quite understand you, Céline . . ."

"You could try . . . you with your death sentence! colored blood, all colored blood is 'dominant,' yellow, red, or indigo . . . white blood is 'dominated' . . . always! the children of your lovely mixed marriages will always be yellow, black, red, never white, never again white! . . . Presto change-o! with all the blessings of the Church!"

"Christian civilization!"

"Creation, Poulet! imagination! hokum! imposture!"

"Come, come! God's creation!"

"Mongrelization! twenty centuries of destruction, Poulet! nothing else! made to order! for that very purpose! every creation, from the moment it's born, bears within it its own end, its assassination!"

"The Church assassinate, Céline?"

"That's right! and you too! all your Church is good for! you holy asshole!"

"You're too much given to paradoxes, Céline! the Chinese are antiracist! . . . and so are the blacks!"

"That's rich! wait till they get here, won't take them a year to fuck everybody! that'll be the end of it! not a white man left! the white race has never existed . . . a 'make-up base,' that's all! your real, honest-to-God man is black and yellow! The white man with his mongrelizing religion! his religions, Jewish, Catholic, Protestant! The white man is dead! dead as a doornail! Believe it or not!"

"Céline, you make me laugh . . ."

I never saw Poulet again . . . I read his articles from time to time . . . a remark or two . . . no more . . . I kind of bugged him . . .



Dingalinng! . . . a journalist on the phone . . .

"Maître! . . . Maaaître! Would you be kind enough to read the letter we're sending you?"

"Monsieur! . . . monsieur! letters! . . . I throw them all in the waste basket, always have! . . . unread! . . . where would I be?"

"Maître, oh dear dear Maître! your opinion! two words!"

"Hell's bells, I haven't got any!"

"Oh, but you have, Maaaître!"

"About what, dammit?"

"Our new literature!"

"That obscene antique? zounds, it doesn't exist! Fetal stammering, that's what it is!"

"Give us that in writing! . . . most honored Maître!"

"I've got a quicker way! take Brunetière, plagiarize him! he's said it all!"

"Oh, but we want it from you! from you, dear Maaaître!"

"You won't pester me any more? You won't come around?"

"Word of honor, Maaaître!"

"He said that literature, all literature, would be devoured!"

"But by whom, Maître?"

"By charlatans!"

"Write us that, Maître! Maître!"

"Hell's britches, no! you'll catch me writing when my teeth grow in again!"

"Couldn't we drop in after all! and take down your extraordinary words?"

"Not mine! Brunetière's! You pipsqueaks! Brunetière!"

"If you'd do us that honor! Maître! For our journal! Please!"

"What journal?"

How can I stop them from coming?

"L'Espoir!"

"But there is no hope, you poor punk!"

"Oh, have pity, write us that! Maître! Maître! Our young people don't know you!"

"Glad to hear it, the swine! Put 'em to work, knock 'em out, make 'em paint the Eiffel Tower head down . . ."

"Do you despair of our youth, Maaaître? underestimate France . . . its prodigious resources, our Algeria, our Academy, our participles?"

"To the shithouse, I tell you! the whole shebang! the country doesn't exist any more, nothing but bureaucrats! . . . and funerals . . . a hundred languages stronger than ours have gone out of existence! How come you don't talk Hittite? or Aramaic?"

"In that case, my dear Maître, we'll definitely come to see you! We'll knock your servants down, we'll kill your dogs, we'll spill your guts! and your rotten demented brains! hello! hello! Got that? Understand?"

"Sure thing! I'm ready! a ferocious interview! count on me! face to face with the wild beasts! a Roman conference! Hear me belch!"

"Splendid, Maître."

"Come! Come quickly, my dear boys! let me embrace you! kiss you! . . ."

"Yum! Yum!"



A big bruiser and a little skinny guy . . . here they are! . . . I shut the dogs up in their kennel . . . I don't want these two young men going around bragging that I've thrown them to the wild beasts . . . These two young men . . . the big one and the skinny one . . . have got acne . . . not very neat or clean, strong breath . . . kind of obstinate-looking, closed, convinced . . . they don't go for discussion . . . Suits me . . . they wanted to come and here they are . . . So what?

"You're from *l'Espoir*?"

"Exactly, Céline! We were wondering, we're still wondering, we and our friends, if you're really as crummy as everybody says? . . . And now we've come to ask you."

"Who are these friends?"

"Well, first of all the magnificent Cousteau!"^o

"First-class skunk if you ask me! . . . Where's he out of?"

"*Je Suis Partout*."

"Oh, working for Lesca and the *Propagandastaffel*."

"He says you're the one, that you were in the pay of the Germans, he said so in black and white, with his magnificent courage, in our Rivarol! one Rivarol is as good as ten Humas.^o Did you know that? . . . What's your answer to that, Céline?"

"Most tedious pipsqueaks, get this through your heads! if I were to answer all the damn foolishness, all the crap printed in the gazettes, not to mention my mail, it would take all that remains to me of life! . . . I've got my chronicle to finish, my enormous debts to pay! . . . Cousteau was a jealous little punk, a would-be deputy, just what it takes to make fanatics out of little jerks like you . . ."

The funny part of it, I'm thinking . . . these two young punks, these

hotheads, could just as well be right, left, or center . . . any period . . . identical! . . . mean hidebound pricks the whole lot of them . . . Maillotins,° Guise conspirators,° partisans of Chambord° or Charles the Bold! . . . fuck all Causes! Etienne Marcel° or Juanovici° . . . this year that year! . . . let the future decide! movie stars' tits and assorted thighs!

"Céline, we asked you on the phone and we ask you again: How far will you go in your career of egoism, treason, and cowardice?"

"Oh, very far, my good friends!"

"All right, but watch your step, Céline, you've only one last chance! We've come to warn you! Rally to our cause! or justice will be done! That'll be the end! No more monkeyshines!"

"Curses! I thought it had been done already!"

"Christ, no! our justice! impeccable!"

"So what!"

"So what? Haven't you read? . . . no, naturally, you don't read! . . . except for a bit of smut!"

"Mercy! Have mercy! I've got to know!"

"The program of the new wave! our *Espoir*, a message from our supreme seer! Listen, take note, meditate, wretch! 'The movement of History demands that France and Germany become brothers.' "

"Get out! oh! what do I hear! the gangsters! out of my sight! you dare! I'll let the dogs out!"

I was going to! they'd have gobbled them up . . . thin air! . . . my two zebras had disappeared! the wind was blowing . . .



I'd moved quickly, wasted a minimum of time before throwing those jokers out, but that didn't prevent the newspapers and café terraces from embroidering on the incident. You know . . . the foulest of vipers has raised his head, yes! . . . he dares! . . . referred to our sublime leader as a big fart! . . . that's right! what's more, he claimed he'd been robbed! . . . thrown into jail, *etc.* . . . *etc.* . . . and wounded in the war, with 75% disability . . . and decorated with the Médaille Militaire long before Pétain . . .

Shit! don't suppose I didn't react! . . . I rummage, I fish . . . found it . . . a quotation to knock them dead! . . . quick, I call a press conference . . . I read! . . . a quotation from Barjavel . . .

"In my opinion, the twentieth century has thus far produced only one innovator, and that is Ferdinand. I should go so far as to say, only one writer. I hope you won't be offended. He is so much above us. That he should be tortured and persecuted is only normal. That is a terrible tiring to write when you consider that this is a living man, but at the same time, what with his greatness, one cannot help regarding him as outside of the times and contingencies that are crushing him. I profoundly believe that the greater a man is the more he exposes himself to being wounded by all. Peace and quiet are only for the mediocre, for those whose heads disappear in the crowd. Céline would like to return to Paris or at least France, and you're doing everything you can to help him, but rest assured of this: wherever he is, he'll be persecuted. His hope of finding peace somewhere else is only a dream. He won't find peace anywhere. Wherever he goes, he'll be persecuted to the death. And he knows it. And he can't help it, and neither can we. The most we can do is to proclaim, on every occasion, that he is the greatest, and even in doing that we bring down on him the decupled hatred of the midgets,

the mediocrities, the eunuchs, of all those who burst with jealous hatred the moment anyone raises their heads to show them the summits. They are the multitude."

I expected some effect . . . none at all! . . . on the contrary! "His Barjavel, good joke! as putrid as he is! . . . Throw 'em on the dump! Both of them!"



Dingaling-ling again! . . . The phone . . . This is really too much! Molière died of being pestered . . . Poquelin! . . . Poquelin! . . . just this little Intermezzo if you please! . . . and this ballet! . . . and Louis XIV is giving a big dinner! tonight! . . . two thousand guests! . . . yes, tonight! Molière died of being pestered . . . he should have said: go fuck yourself! . . . to the galleys, Poquelin! . . . but he was meek as a lamb, he died on the stage, coughing his lungs out, giving his last drop of blood and good will . . . I know what to expect . . . me, not Molière . . . knocking myself out for Ben Achille° . . .

I'd better relax, it's too much . . . *dingaling!* . . . another bell! The *Figaro!* my daily reading! just in time . . . my relaxation, the death notices . . . my meat! how long rich people manage to live, and how happily! . . . unbelievable! . . . in their châteaux, called to their maker! . . . 80 . . . 90 . . . 100! With every possible blessing . . . Grand Cross of everything! and Holy Sepulcher! . . . and those rip-roaring funerals . . . every kind of unction, Bishop, Prefect, Chamber of Commerce, and the Devil himself in his tilbury . . .

My *Figaro*, my relaxation! . . .

I don't subscribe for nothing . . . every day five columns of edifying deaths . . . Mind you, I've been looking for years . . . for news of a lousy collaborator buried in style . . . with honors and blessings . . . no dice! . . . those stiffs get buried without any holy water, without choirboys, in some stinking field . . . nameless . . . like pretty near happened to Poquelin . . . me, they've erased me . . . rubbed out our tombstones in Père-Lachaise, papa, mama, and me . . .

Dear *Figaro*, my yoyo! . . . not just the death notices! another good joke! . . . the news from the ex-colonies . . . how the new electors are planning to decapitate and roast the backward whites . . . oh, with the best of intentions, no thought of racism! nicely salted . . . no swastikas in Timbuktu! once and for all,

the brown plague can't get off the ground outside of Germany! . . . Adolf is dead? another laugh! since Bismarck all chancellors, big, little, young, old, doddering, have been cracked . . . nuts, it's comical! the last one, the sly old wreck, has started a crusade! anti-goy pogroms for Europe! ten thousand massacres on every sidewalk! . . . every night! antiracist! . . . I won't live to see it, maybe you will . . . that's Germany, still chasing after the madman's dream . . .

Dingggaling! somebody else at the door! . . . where's my head? . . . I'm talking to myself! . . . no! no! it's the phone! Again! I've nothing to say! . . . oh yes, I have! . . .

"Hello! Hello! no, monsieur, our goose is cooked! we're cosmic!"

"Cosmic?!"

"Yes, the whole lot of us! . . . I beseech you, let me finish my little tale!"

"What's the title, Maaître? oh, the title?"

"For what paper?"

"*La Source* . . . pro-Communo-pluto-Christian!"

"Excellent! . . . excellent!"

"Yes, but the title?"

"Blind-man's buff!"

"For the movies?"

"Of course!"

"What stars?"

"A whole raft!"

"Names, names, Maaître!"

"Impossible! stars, étoiles, the heavens! Delphi made gods, Rome never made anything but saints, but we, monsieur, the wonders of our age, turn out a hundred stars a week!"

So what? big, little, medium, midgets? . . . I'll see . . . *dingaling!* I hang up, that'll do! somebody else on the line . . . I won't answer.



Here it is Christmas! . . . I say to myself: now they'll leave me alone! that's all senior citizens think about unless they're completely off their rocker . . . about being left alone . . . Hurrah for Christmas . . . not very festive, you've nothing left to give, you're not getting any more visits . . . exempt! Hurrah for Christmas! . . . Not getting any more presents either! Hurrah some more for Christmas! No need to say thank you! Hurrah for Christmas!

Basta! somebody ringing! . . . once, twice, not the phone . . . at the gate! down below the garden, three times! . . . of course I could play deaf, I'm not a maid. *Bow-wow!* . . . the dogs start up! it's their job . . . four of them, the little bitch and three males . . . they like noise! . . . the bastard's still ringing! maybe a beggar? hell! they've taken enough, robbed me enough, they've hauled everything away, sold it at the Flea Market and the auction rooms! shit, I've given enough for a lifetime! I just wish they'd give it back! . . . some people get compensation for being looted, and plenty! I'm not one of them! . . . I'm the other kind that always owe! . . . *Grrr!* the stubborn bastard at the gate, he's rung at least ten times, it gives the mutts a kick . . . not so good, this Christmas! . . . oh yes, I forgot, it's raining blue blazes! . . . he must be soaked through, the lout . . . oh, that doesn't cramp his style . . . he's still ringing, but there's one drawback, the neighbors! suppose they start barking too . . . they've got a right! suppose they get sore at me . . . ten years! . . . twenty years! . . . Hell, that's bad! I'd better go! Get my ass down to the gate and chase that jerk away! loud and quick! . . . I don't see a thing . . . oh yes, now I see . . . a shape in the darkness . . . in the gray . . .

"Get the hell out of here! thug! quick! swine!" and I bark with the dogs! "*bow-wow!*" . . . and I growl! . . . "*grrr!*" ready to bite! . . . all four of us together . . . quite a racket! "*grrr!*" I bet they can hear us all the way to Auteuil! . . .

Merry Christmas! via the Seine, the echo! what a celebration! but does it drive that boor away? Not at all! He shouts at me, he fastens onto the bell . . .

"Monsieur Céline, I've got to see you!"

"Monsieur, impossible at night! Go away! Never come back! I'll tell the dogs to tear you limb from limb!"

The bastard insists!

"I've written you twenty times! I've mentioned you in a hundred articles! dear author, you've never answered! I've called you everything, Céline! Scoundrel! . . . pornographer! . . . double agent . . . triple . . . bought and paid for! You've never answered!"

"I never read anything, brother of darkness, never! I'm not tempted! *Bow-wow! Grrr!*"

"Well, you're going to listen to me now! I'll outhowl your dogs! I beg forgiveness! Oh, forgive me! You do forgive me? Mercy! Mercy! Christmas!"

He kneels down . . . splash! right in the sludge . . . "*grrr! grrr!*" what worries me is the scandal! People aren't deaf . . . not even at night . . .

"I, the Reverend Father Talloire of the Order of the Most-Holy Empire! beg your forgiveness! Just for that I've come . . . I've deeply offended you! on Christmas, Céline!"

He beats his breast, I can hear the neighbors . . . they're shouting, protesting! I don't look.

"To the lions, you holy asshole! *Bow-wow, grrr!*"

That doesn't faze him! No! he defies me . . . he gets up off his knees . . . he talks back!

"To the lions yourself! . . . you damn pervert! . . . that's where you belong!"

He takes the path, I wish he'd fall and crack his skull! shooting his mouth off like that in the rain, that blackshirt has given me my death! I know it! not that I'm soft, but I know what it does to me . . . I never go out at night, I know the risks . . . One more word about Christmas! . . . him or anybody else! That magus! with his cassock under his cassock! let him go back where he came from . . . like he'd never been here . . .



I lie down, Lili goes back up to her room on the second floor . . . I'm giving you these intimate details to help you . . . I hope . . . understand what follows . . . I'm thinking about that priest, the nerve I . . . I sent him packing, sure, he deserved it, a hundred times! a thousand times! if he'd been a rabbi, an Anabaptist, a Protestant pastor, a Greek Orthodox, I'd have done the same, all soldiers of the Christ child, same difference absolutely! they can't fool me with their little squabbles, their arguments, they all come straight from the Bible, in complete agreement that we're nothing but a lot of whites, meat for mongrelization, all set to be turned black and yellow, then slaves, then soldier boys, then stiffs . . . I'm not telling you anything new . . . the Bible . . . the world's most widely read book . . . more obscene, more racist, more sadistic than twenty centuries of lion's dens, Byzantiums, and Petriots^o ! . . . racism, massacres, genocides, butcheries of the vanquished that make our worst atrocities look pink and blue, like thrillers for kindergartens . . . next to the Bible everything . . . Racine, Sophocles, or what have you . . . is candy bars . . . a little more vanilla, a little less, that's all . . . I wouldn't be in harness any more . . . believe me . . . if I wasn't bugged by debts, I'd be taking it easy . . . I'm old enough to retire . . . and so I will . . . all I want . . . is short walks, very short, with canes and smoked glasses . . . so nobody'll notice me . . . *enough we have suffered* . . . hell! that settles it! . . . especially with a bastard like Ben Achille, who publishes twenty novels a day . . . plus his *Compact Review*^o . . . and his bulletin *Your Ferule* . . . *monthly for flagellants and cunt lappers*^o . . . I'll go tell him I'm resigning! that's my decision! . . .

I lie down and wait . . . not long! I'm shaking my bed! . . . A shiver! . . . another! . . . I'm still lucid . . . I say to myself: here I go! . . . that lousy rotten priest has given me my death! . . . I knew it when I was listening to him! . . . I didn't want to go! . . . I was getting delirious, I knew that too, an attack! . . .

delirium passes the time . . . but it's ticklish when anybody's around . . . you can say things you'll regret . . . seeing I'd been dragging this malaria around with me for forty years, since the Cameroons, naturally I wasn't surprised . . . this priest business in the rain, drenched to the skin, in the north wind, listening to his blarney, what would you expect? . . . if that were the end of it! . . . oh no! not at all! something else in the corner . . . at the door . . . I'm positive, somebody sitting there . . . I won't put on the light . . . or move . . . maybe it's just the fever! . . . the other guy talked about Christmas too . . . maybe just an idea, plus the fever . . . an intruder? . . . anything is possible . . . that damn blackskirt was here, wasn't he? . . . maybe he's come back . . . you never can tell . . . anyway there's somebody over in that corner . . . I won't go . . . I'm trembling, I'm sweating . . . somebody? . . . something? . . . trouble enough! . . . but my mind's still working . . . I think it over . . . yes, I'd better . . . that somebody sitting there, he's greenish . . . a light like a firefly . . . I was right to wait. . . these apparitions don't last . . . I can almost see him now . . . an officer . . . something to tell me? let him! . . . I wait . . . he doesn't speak, he doesn't move . . . sitting there . . . greenish . . .

"What? . . . what?"

I ask him . . . I'm trembling! . . . Oh! he scares me! . . . dammit, it's him! . . . I know him . . . I know him! over there, greenish . . . glittering . . . sort of . . .

"Vaudremer!"

I summon him . . . no answer . . . what's he here for? for Christmas? . . . like the priest . . . did he come through the gate? . . . slip through? . . . the dogs didn't bark . . . weird! . . . this Vaudremer . . . major in the medical corps when I knew him . . . where was it? . . . you can imagine . . . my memory in the fever I was in, sweating, shaking the whole bed with my convulsions . . . I had a right not to remember . . . and he wasn't helping me any . . . I raise my voice . . . I strain myself . . .

"Vaudremer! . . . semi-luminous Vaudremer! answer me! . . . what do you want? . . . are you there? . . . yes? . . . no? . . . A ghost? from where? . . ."

He doesn't budge . . . I can't see his face . . . but it's him! . . . we used to consult out there . . . chief medical officer, that's what he was . . . Christ, the hell they gave him in the barracks . . . nasty state of mind . . . all those families complaining . . . they were cold, they were hungry, thirsty, Southwestern Aeronautics, the whole personnel, crammed into Adrian barracks! workers, foremen, engineers, medical orderlies . . . disgraceful! . . . for their money we doctors were criminals, enemies of the people, reactionaries, responsible for everything, the stukas, the fifth column, the food trust . . . our fault if all the poor bastards were dying of starvation and epidemics . . . and our so-called medicines

bastards were dying of starvation and epidemics . . . and our so-called medicines were plain poison . . . look at the latrines, so full (three children drowned) you couldn't get near them . . . our so-called medicine had brought on a brown flood of shit and piss . . . pretty soon the whole camp would be submerged in general diarrhea . . . brought on by our so-called medicine . . . the Boches in Saint-Jean d'Angély had their tactics all set, their tanks were in position to drive us into the shit. . . if we tried to escape we'd all die . . . under at least three feet of excrement . . .

What's become of all those people, I wonder . . . anyway, we got away, Lili, Bébert, and me, thanks to our ambulance . . . ours? no! it belonged to the city of Sartrouville, I'd driven it all the way . . . an odyssey they don't mention any more in the annals of the Seine-la-Rochelle epic! . . . rough going, too! . . . not just me and Lili, we also had a grandmother and two infants on board, I had to drop them on the main square in La Rochelle . . . fairy tales, you'll say . . . not at all! . . . I can prove it . . . I still remember the kid's . . . the younger one's . . . name: Stéfani! . . . she must be married by now, kids of her own . . . then she was four weeks old, at the most . . . the local commandant, a French general, wanted us to take the boat to London, bus, grandmother, kids, and all . . . I admit I was tempted . . . my luck would have taken a different turn . . . what a hero I'd be now! what monuments and streets would bear my name!

"No, General! I refuse! with due respect and a thousand regrets, General! duty first! these infants and their highly alcoholic grandmother are the property of Sartrouville! so's the bus! . . . I've got to take them back to Sartrouville!"

"Splendid. Dismissed, Doctor!"

I didn't go back to that fetid Adrian camp . . . good-bye, Saint-Jean d'Angély . . . I never found out whether they ended under the tanks . . . or buried in shit . . .

I never saw Vaudremer again . . . but this was him all right, sitting there, not saying a word . . . and fluorescent! . . . I command him to talk! . . . no! . . . I can't . . . something I forgot . . . I told you I'd have been glad to get on that boat to London . . . you say he's telling us that because it sounds better, makes him look like a résister . . . no! not at all! I have my reasons, and they don't date from yesterday, for being an Anglophile . . . a lot more than the people who went! I think about that general and his proposition . . . this fluorescent ghost Vaudremer, sitting there . . . anyway, some kind of ghost . . . I know I'm delirious . . . but not completely! . . . just then Vaudremer fades . . . he fades because the dogs are barking . . . *bow! wow!* . . . really the dogs . . . I'm not dreaming! . . . I'm dripping sweat, I'm shivering even harder, but it's passing . . .

for thirty years I've been having these attacks . . . I know how they end . . . and what brings them on . . . this time it's the damn priest that kept me at the gate . . . I shouldn't have listened to him . . . *bow!* . . . *wow!* . . . who is it now? . . . Lili and the dogs . . . she puts on the light . . . all the lamps . . . she's not afraid . . .

"Have you been talking to somebody?"

"It was Vaudremer . . ."

She lets it go at that . . . she thinks I'm still raving . . .

"Been out at the gate?" I ask her . . .

"Yes, there's someone to see you . . . a colonel . . ."

"Colonel who?"

"Cambremousse . . ."

"What does he want?"

"Maybe you could see him?"

"I'm awfully tired . . . Let him come! but quick! and beat it quick! I'm still trembling . . ."

He comes in . . . it's him all right, Cambremousse, no ectoplasm this time . . . flushed, plethoric, I know his blood pressure . . . he doesn't give a damn! . . . he cares too much about good food and national renewal to waste his time on trifles like diets and medicine droppers . . . his passions are fine cooking and France, the jewel of the world, the marvel among nations, defiance, rage . . .

While waiting to be let in, Cambremousse heard everything I said . . . fine! . . . that'll speed things up!

"Céline, we're starting a neo-movement of national resurrection! we're counting on you!"

"Don't! . . . I don't want to revive anything at all! . . . Europe died at Stalingrad . . . the Devil has its soul! he can keep it! . . . the stinking whore!"

"Céline, you're a defeatist! haven't changed! . . . but you can help us!"

"Bugging angels, no! the Chinese in Brest as soon as possible! . . . my most fervent wish! The yellow army's hq. at the Maritime Prefecture! solve all our problems . . . two seconds flat! all those people who've never eaten will fill up on crêpes! . . . you're not needed, Cambremousse!"

"How amusing you are, Céline! . . . in spite of yourself!"

I give an order . . .

"Toto, whistle! for the Colonel! he can learn! . . ."

Toto, that's my parrot, whistles . . . obedient, conscientious, he has only one tune! . . . *On the steppes of Central Asia* by Borodin . . .

"Colonel, there's the whole future . . . listen to Toto and learn! . . . Lili, take

them next door, in the other room, I mean, I've got to think about my 'Chronicle'
... I've got serious work to do! ... before the Chinese get here! say five six
months ... a year ... let 'em practice their *Central Asia!* ... both of them!
Cambremousse and Toto ... I don't want to hear them ..."

"But look here! our program! ... two words! ..."

Him again ... insisting!

"No, Colonel! no! it's all settled ... hearses and coffins! the great
undertaker is everywhere! he sees all, hears all! Listen to Toto! don't open your
mouth ... learn!"

I get back to my work ...



No use asking people what they think . . . if they're poor, they don't give a shit . . . Beelzebub, the Chinese, the Russians! . . . the Algerians? . . . why not? . . . and the rich . . . the one thing they want is no change! . . . Communists? . . . hell! . . . every last one of them! to the hilt! . . . super-progressive plutocrats . . . "midnight blue" dinner jackets when the Big Night comes . . . all the big bank directors, don't forget it, have been to school in Moscow, with the giants of painting, the kings of popular song, the princes of zinc and cotton . . .

The backwardness of the masses! . . . think of it! pathetic militants! . . . red sashes and 1900 . . . ham actors, blunders of History! *Carmagnoles*, jazz, abstract barricades . . . I'm dated and I know it, so naturally I keep my eyes open! waiting for the Afro-Asiatics to come around and put Achille in chains, and auction off the N.R.F. . . . on the double, old man! . . . Here I go! I'll meet you where we left off!



I was about to join you in Zornhof . . . I wouldn't have lost you again . . . but here comes another interviewer! . . . no kidding! . . . sent by Marcel° . . . and by my colleague Gendron . . . okay, two words! . . . no introduction! . . . I'll do the introducing! . . . I yell from my bed that he needn't bother . . .

"Unknown! . . . that's what I am! . . . it's a megalomaniac epoch! . . . the world's greatest writer! You agree?"

He bellows his answer:

"Absolutely, Maître! none greater!"

Maybe I haven't made myself clear . . .

"Except for me there's nothing! all charlatans and bunglers . . . grotesque cacographers, putrid cockroaches!"

"Oh, how right you are, Maître! burn them at the stake! . . . their ashes to the winds!"

Excellent! . . . but who can this tactful gentleman be? . . . I tell him to come in . . .

"Oh no! No, Maître! your work! . . . you have so little time left!"

Mighty well informed! . . . I'd better not see him . . .

"You'll come back another time! in two months! . . . a week!"

"Certainly . . . certainly! . . ."



Yes, but the trouble is . . . it's all so dated! . . .

"We're too old! . . . our stuff doesn't mean anything any more!"

"Oh, but it does! . . . it does, Marcel! . . . some people still take an interest!"

"Who?"

"Hm, maybe the folklorists!"

"Think so?"

"Ten letters a day!"

"You read them?"

"No! . . . but the phone calls!"

"How many?"

"Two a week . . . you understand, Marcel . . . though you don't understand very much, especially since your sickness . . . it's all a question of floods! . . . follow me! . . . try! I won't repeat . . . when I was a kid, we often went to Ablon, summer and winter . . . believe me, I learned a lot, all the little secrets of the river, the banks, the gravel pits . . . I learned all the fine points of sculling, nobody could beat me . . . I could come up against that terrible current and slip into port, to the eighth of an inch! with one hand! take it from me, I was an artist! a hair's breadth too short, the current would sweep you away! one scream! good-bye! . . . high water was my meat! with a flick of the wrist I'd twine my way between convoys, the bow waves of the barges, vicious rudders, long before I knew how to multiply or even add . . . and now, Marcel, listen carefully . . . marvel at the phenomenon . . . upstream . . . I don't get around much any more, no desire to and I haven't the strength, but when I was a kid I was the upstream champ! . . . all this bores you, it's insipid! . . . the big flood can't mean anything to you, you weren't born yet . . . everything was submerged, the Seine gone mad, dams and banks swept away, lime trees and towpaths under water, the whole

plain, villas and furniture . . . national disaster! . . . so bad that years later everything was mud, even the Cour de Rome° . . . You can't have any idea, Marcel . . ."

"Never mind . . . if you say so . . ."

"I say so and I'll prove it! doubting Thomas! but nowadays, same as with everything else, we only get phony floods! . . . since 1910, I mean . . . the elements act up as if something big were going to happen . . . and then practically nothing . . ."

"What are you driving at, Ferdinand? cut it short! I've got to get home for lunch, it's twelve o'clock and I've got people coming . . ."

"All right, you oaf! . . . get this through your head . . . the torrents that smash everything, that stop navigation, that twist bridges, crush cities, make hash out of tugboats and barges, spare the narrow strip of water along the banks! . . . the same with the fury of public opinion! if you're caught in midstream, you're pulverized . . ."

He doesn't let me finish . . .

"You've said all that! it's five after twelve, I've got people coming!"

"I'm not done yet! . . . ignoramus . . . you've got to learn! that little strip at the edge, that's where your expert boatman holds his skiff! it takes all his skill! hard work, believe me, you shaggy hog! you hors d'oeuvres hound!"

"I see . . . got to be going now!"

"One second! you subhuman! the Black Sea Scrolls . . . ever heard of them?"

"Make it quick! . . . what's that?"

"A whole humanity . . . perished!"

"So what?"

"This one will perish too!"

"What you don't know!"

"It cost me plenty! now I take my precautions! I made my prediction for next year . . . never again . . . now I only predict for the year 3000!"

"No kidding?"

"Everything that'll happen! I can't foresee the school programs but I know the history and geography they'll be teaching in the year 3000!"

"You mean you *prognosticate*?"

"Nostradamus! . . . exactly! but he was sibylline, foggy, allegorical. My prediction is clear, straightforward, no charades . . ."

"Okay, make it quick!"

He looks at his watch . . . Christ, can he be annoying!

HE LOOKS at his watch . . . Christ, can he be annoying:

"Afraid of missing the radishes? . . . the anchovies? the foie gras? admit it, you monster!"

"No, but you're holding me up for nothing . . ."

"For nothing, you say! . . . I'm doing you a favor and you insult me!"

"Fire away!"

"The white men invented the atom bomb; shortly afterward, they perished.' You want me to tell you how?"

He shrugs his shoulders . . . He closes, half closes his eyes, like a crocodile .

..

"Is it long?"

"No! you can see for yourself, barely two pages! . . . you can damn well listen, you pale incompetent! . . . several hypotheses: they perished in wars, from alcoholism, motorcars, overeating . . . other authors tend to believe that they succumbed to religions and substitute fanaticisms, politics, family, sports, social climbing . . . all their religions, Catholic, Hebraic, Protestant, Freemason . . . first and most of all, Rome or rue Cadet!° same creed: mongrelize! their absolute article of faith! do you understand, you ignoramus?"

"Yes . . . not much!"

"Wait for the end! the white man's blood doesn't hold up under mongrelization! . . . it turns black, yellow! . . . and that's the end! the white man was born a mongrel, he was created to perish! dominated blood! Agincourt, Verdun, Stalingrad, the Maginot Line, Algeria, pure hash! . . . white meat! now you can go to lunch!"

"Now you've insulted me. You satisfied?"

"Didn't you want them to hang me?"

"No, never!"

"Shoot me, then! and how!. . . beat it, Tartuffe!"

Hee hee! . . . a grim laugh! we were on the outs . . . it lasted two weeks . . . he came back, we talked about different things . . . when you've reached a certain age, no use getting mad . . . we'll all be taking the train and that's that: murderers and murdered . . . same train! *choo! choo!* the engine . . . it's time . . . I hope he comes back, the bastard! . . . mongrel or not! . . .



I could entertain you some more, or at least try, with my Nostradamus, my yellow army in Brest, my black army at the Montparnasse Station, the capitulation of Saint-Denis. But I'll be seventy when this book comes out and by that time your family papers will have run these episodes into the ground, a thousand and one magazines will have photographed them from every angle . . . "nobody's amused by us any more" . . . Marcel warned me . . . we might as well be modest . . . which reminds me that in New York, on the back streets near Battery Place, you'll find old ladies about my age, spinsters in tiny little apartments half a mile from Times Square, fancyworking furniture and knickknacks, embroidering armchairs, upholstering prie-dieus, painting and trimming the cunningest flowerpot covers, things that would bring good prices on the rue de Provence . . . they heat with wood, they've got their regular tradesmen right around the corner, they live like me here in Meudon, insensible to fashions, serenely out of date . . . but in no great hurry to pass on! . . . though there are plenty of young old maids in the neighborhood . . . that go in for upholstery too and are just waiting to take over their equipment, their canvas and wool . . . Marlene, Maurice Dache,^o Chaplin . . . all one to these old ladies! a president? another? stratosphere, bubblegum, Fifth Avenue! you see the skyscrapers, their summits, seems a lot of people live up there . . . these old ladies have work to do, no time to crane their necks! . . . an embroidered cushion takes a year . . . same here, I'm not the idle type, the clowning goggle-eyed tourist, far from it! working my fingers to the bone on the little jobs Achille pays me for! a pittance! a joke! but even so! fine tapestries, artful embroideries, style, that's my trade! . . . not many customers, you'll say, and so hateful! all right with me! they'll be faithful to me at least! jealous? insanely! . . . they'll still be talking about me, about my horrible books, when there are no Frenchmen left . . . I'll be

transplanted to Mali when this little appendage to Asia has been wiped completely off the map! its people, former whites . . . blond, chestnut, brunette! incredible! . . . one of History's bum jokes! . . . deciphered out of a dead language, I'll have my little chance . . . at last!

In the meantime I'm keeping you waiting . . . I lost you at Zornhof . . . Harras° and the *Reichsbevoll* had just left us . . . I've run out on you, you and my *comics* . . . quick, back to business and you! this way, Ladies and Gentlemen! . . . another two thousand pages at least! Achille that wants to see me dead! and inherit everything! *gratis pro Deo!* born to the part! so clever . . . he thinks! he can get in line and follow the guide! that's me! now you're going to see something . . . This magic lantern . . . magic, I say! period and all; like you were there in person!



Bergson tells us! you fill a wooden box, a big one, with fine iron filings, and you plunk your fist in, a good hard punch . . . what do you see? you've made a crater . . . the exact same shape as your fist! . . . To understand what's happened, this phenomenon, two kinds of intelligence, two explanations . . . the intelligence of the befuddled ant, who wonders by what miracle another insect, an ant like itself, has been able to keep all these filings in a state of equilibrium, in the shape of a crater . . . and the other intelligence, genius, yours, mine, explains it by saying that a simple blow of the fist has sufficed . . . as a chronicler I have to choose . . . with the ant explanation I could amuse you . . . scurrying around in the filings . . . with the fist explanation I could entertain you too, but much less . . . the Chinese in Brest . . . all churches in the same boat . . . Demolition and Co. . . . Hebraic, Rome, Protestant, *tutti frutti!* "League of Mongrelization"! in the short time I've left to live, I'd better not annoy you too much . . . not tell you you're a lot of stumbling dypsos . . . Byzantium got along fine for ten centuries, bluffing the world . . . the world saw nothing but conspiracies, double and triple chariot races, buggeries . . . and then the Turks . . . and then curtains . . . will the same happen here? possible! all right with you . . . I, chronicler of Grands Guignols, will show you, without mirrors or false bottoms, the finest spectacle that ever was, the burning of the impregnable bastions . . . the contortions and the mimicry . . . which a lot of people survived!

"What's this? Byzantium? a thousand years? Byzantine yourself! Byzantium didn't have the resources that we have, thank God! . . . progress, monsieur! atomic progress! a thousand years! your thousand years, bah! a minute! . . . a quarter revolution of the cyclotron! science, monsieur! you look pretty sick with your Byzantium! . . . you retarded slow-motion primate! . . . one minute, monsieur, for your whole decadence . . . at the most!"

"Your Greek fire! . . . archaic!"

Another detractor . . . I won't tell you who or where from . . . I don't answer
. . . I know them . . .



"Come on, Céline, cut the clowning . . . your readers have a right to expect it . . . even of you! that stuff about the Chinese in Brest may amuse people for a minute . . . no more! all your anti-white . . . mongrelizing churches . . . ho! hum! doubtful humor! . . . your public wants something else! . . . you didn't know? . . . brain surgery, color vivisection, three-forceps deliveries, the production of 'geniuses' in the chromoplastic factories of the Cordilleras at an altitude of 12,000 feet. . ."

"Curses! 'paleface' that I am, monsieur! and stubborn as such!"

"The 'redskins' perished, didn't they?"

"With a good deal of help from liquor . . . I only drink water . . . the redskins have their reservations and their privileges . . . their conqueror protected them . . . but paleface that I am, the conqueror has only one thought, to debase me more and more! to make off with everything I have, to humiliate me to death . . . and if one of the 'great autolyzer's' cops looks around and finds me at the bottom of the sewer, Fréjus° will be nothing to what I can expect, the torrents of sulphuric acid! Buffalo Bill's wild-western heart was in the right place! . . . racist, yes, but fair play . . . the Sioux had a chance! . . . at a gallop, *bzing!* . . . but there in the sewer, zero! . . . they'll never bring us to the Châtelet° . . . species to be exterminated, covered with shame . . . drowned in shit . . ."

Hard time getting started! . . . but I've got to, I promised! . . . my age? tomorrow I can only be more gaga . . . I've shillyshalled enough!



Here we are! . . . homage to the reader! . . . a low bow! . . . back in the exact same place . . . Harras has just left. . . time to take action, now or never! . . . we've got the main thing, our pass, signed and stamped by the *Reichsbevoll* . . . and still the same idea, Denmark . . . the crossing . . . the opposite coast, Nordport . . . still a certain amount of traffic, so they say, it's possible . . . we'll see! . . . main thing to make it quick . . . our pass won't be good for more than two three days . . .

"What do you think, Le Vig?"^o

He leaves the decision to me . . . okay, Le Vig will stay here . . . with Bébert . . . we'll go to Warnemünde and take a look . . . he'll wait for us, not more than two three days . . . see if the ferry's still running . . . if it's possible to get on board . . . clandestinely . . . I'm not too keen, neither is Le Vig . . . we're clandestine enough already . . . and we'll find out if over there in Denmark they're not worse than over here . . . it's possible!

"You'll take care of our stuff and the cat . . . Don't go too far away!"

He shouldn't get any funny ideas!

"Count on me! . . . except I know what to expect at the manor!"

"You can go to the farm across the way!"

"No dice! . . . anyplace but there!"

No use arguing . . . we leave him . . .

"Good-bye, Le Vig! . . . so long, Bébert!"

We know the road to Moorsburg . . . we've got our pass . . . but even so . . . we don't meet anybody . . . they're bound to be suspicious . . . I hobble . . . but pretty fast . . . I know how to manage my two canes . . . no time to lose . . . straight to the station! there's a crowd at the door . . . and inside, soldiers, civilians, peasants, workers, all sorts, like the *Métro* . . . and every language . . .

there hasn't been a train in six days . . . the Berlin-Rostock . . . nothing to do but wait . . . we're pretty well used to that, I can say . . . there we are, standing . . . then we sit down outside, on the iron bench . . . we'll see the train coming if it comes . . . ah, here comes somebody! . . . talking about trains! . . . Le Vig! . . . sure enough, it's him! didn't hang around Zornhof ° very long! . . . couldn't stand it . . . here he is with a pushcart . . .

"Say, you haven't wasted any time! what you got there?"

"Our stuff!"

I take a look . . . a bundle of shirts, dirty . . . and some burlap bags, empty . . .

"You think it was worth the bother? . . . where's Bébert? . . ."

He had him in his musette bag, slung over his shoulder . . . Bébert goes *miow!* . . . we pat him . . .

"Got anything to eat?"

He shows me . . . in his duffel coat. . . a whole pile of *butterbrot* . . .

"Swiped 'em?"

"Yeah . . . at the Kretzers' °, they'd split!"

"And the pushcart?"

"Ditto! . . . they had everything!"

I see he knows his way around . . .

"They didn't use kid gloves at my pad either! . . . it was better stocked, too! . . . four bicycles! . . . hell! . . . and all the stuff in the cupboards! . . . it's the way of the world!"

I see that he's come out of his dream . . . he's realistic . . . and proud of himself . . .

"You're going to stay at the station?"

"Rather have them murder me at Zornhof?"

"Think so?"

"I sure do!"

"You'll wait for us?"

"There's company, I won't be alone . . . people! lots of people! . . . nobody'll notice me . . . nothing like railroad stations! . . . everybody's waiting . . . I'll wait for you . . . me and Bébert!"

"Whatever you say . . . we won't be long!"

"If it's too long you won't find us! oh, we won't go back to Zornhof! . . . don't worry! . . . never!"

That sounds definite . . . one more remark he makes . . .

"I've got Bébert! luckily! you'd never come back for me! listen! . . . listen!"

I've got Bébert! luckily, you'd never come back for me! listen! . . . listen! . . ."

He hears something . . . it's true! . . . *choo! choo!* a train . . . asthmatic . . . still far away, lots of smoke . . . *choo!* . . . must be the Berlin-Rostock . . . been expected for a week . . . but the tickets? I ask around . . . no more tickets, no more ticket windows, you just get in . . . you pay later, so they say . . . but how do you get in? . . . now we see this streamliner . . . all wood . . . five six cars . . . bristling with all the stuff that's sticking out the windows . . . caterpillars bristle like that . . . now you can see what's sticking out . . . a hundred arms, a hundred legs . . . and heads! . . . and guns! . . . I've seen jampacked Métro trains, cars so full you couldn't get a finger in, but that train was so crammed, so bristling with legs, arms, and heads you couldn't help laughing . . . all that stuff sticking out the windows . . . it pulls in . . . *choo! choo!* but that's not all! . . . right after the engine, a flatcar, a gun, and artillerymen . . .

"Le Vig, my word of honor! wait for us! you've got Bébert!"

Choo! Choo! the train's stopped . . . be pulling out soon . . . I've said it was full . . . not just arms and legs . . . heads, I told you that too . . . another . . . another . . . looks like they were asleep . . . one with its eyes wide-open, staring . . . this train must have been riddled, from the air, I guess . . . lots of griping and groaning from somewhere inside . . . not just heads, boots too . . . must be soldiers . . . civilians too . . . no room at all . . . maybe we could try the tender, I'd seen it was empty . . . we see . . . two Fritzes, engineers . . . I show them our pass to Rostock . . . trouble is they've got to load their tender, six tons of coke . . . they show us another flatcar at the tail end, just been hooked on . . . antiaircraft it looks like . . . maybe they'd take us aboard . . . we run . . . there are five guys on the flatcar, five *Luftwaffe* gunners . . . hundreds of women, children, and soldiers clutching the edges, the wheels . . . all waving stamped papers . . . and bottles and babies . . . some of those people have seen four trains pull out, a month on the platform, had their fingers smashed a dozen times . . . never even tried to get into a passenger car . . . too jampacked with everything, wounded, passengers, corpses, impossible to pry apart, too amalgamated . . . the five air gunners are defending their flatcar . . . with mine stakes . . . *bam!* and *wham!* . . . on all the clutching hands . . . *ouch!* do they yell! . . . the crew is in a good position! . . . high up! *wham!* the attackers plead! . . . *bitte!* . . . *bitte!* . . . *Luftwaffe hier!* I'm air corps! . . . Red Cross armband . . . Bezons, passive defense . . . I yell, I show them . . . armband, stamp, paper . . . *Reichsbevoll* . . . those brutes can't read! . . . yes! one of them can! *da!* . . . *da!* . . . I insist . . . I make him look at it . . . I shove it under his nose, the eagle . . . he sees . . . it's no ordinary pass . . . he asks

me . . .

"All three? . . . *alle drei?*"

He's in command of the flatcar . . .

"*Nein!* . . . *nur uns zwei!* only us two!"

I point at Lili and myself . . . he looks again . . . the stamp, the eagle, the swastika . . .

"*Gut!*"

We should climb on! . . . he gives us permission, but on the other side . . . there are already three characters on the other side, must be "special cases" too heave-ho! . . . we climb up, all five! . . . come what may! . . . we're all set! practically! . . . thanks to my initiative! . . . and the armband! . . . and the stamp! . . . must be a noncom, the one that can read . . . no visible stripes, all smeared with grease and soot like the others . . . only natural, all the smoke comes down on them! . . . well, they took us on. We made it . . . the rest of them . . . *bitte!* *bitte!* they'd be getting their fingers smashed for a long time to come! . . . they'd never get on! . . . the ones in the cars, same story, they must have got caught in the doors or the broken windows, or been crushed against the roadbed . . . somebody must have taken their shoes at some station . . . or are they dead? . . . anyway they don't move . . . this train has six wooden cars plus the flatcars, fifth class, that's for sure . . . taken from the boneyard . . . and put back on wheels . . . I ask the others where it's come from . . . Berlin, direct! . . . evacuating the wounded from the last air raids! . . . sure, some of them die on the way, they drop some off at every station . . . hell of a time getting them out . . . that's why the train looks so funny, all bristling with naked legs, dead heads, and arms . . . and guns wedged into the windows and doors . . . all bound for Rostock! . . . they've got everything there, so it seems . . . especially for surgery . . . this train is more than full already, it won't stop anywhere after this . . . Rostock direct! . . . what they don't know! . . . that hospital . . . I didn't exactly believe it . . . a way of getting rid of them . . . sending them someplace else to rot . . . the German system . . . no nurses, no doctors . . . being I was there with my armband, maybe I could help a little? . . . *ach, kein sum!* ° oh, it's no use! . . . that sergeant was in a position to know it was no use! . . . the gun crew had smashed at least a hundred hands . . . go to it, boys! . . . more and more hanging on! . . . at every station . . . with their mine stakes . . . one car had been taken off someplace, hit, gutted, ripped apart . . . a pile of live people had fallen out . . . they'd been lying under the others, under the magma . . . the sergeant tells me the train is full of phony stiffs, stowaways of both sexes, who'd jumped at the chance . . . to get out

of Berlin! . . . they'd see when they got to Rostock! . . . they'd straighten them out in Rostock! . . . all right with me, but why aren't we moving? taking on coke, that's it! . . . filling up the tender! . . . and water! . . . no more Stationmaster, no more workers . . . the engineer has to do it all himself . . . what's the news? . . . the Russians? . . . the sergeant doesn't know . . . all he knows is that the telegraph isn't working or the telephone or the turntable . . . the whole town's deserted, so it seems . . . the Russians? nobody'd seen them . . . all he knows is nonstop to Rostock! . . . as long as the cars are full and there's certainly no room for any more, might as well skip the seven eight stations . . . full speed ahead . . . manner of speaking, fifteen m.p.h. . . . when we get there we'd see about the ones that can move . . . the rest? . . . we'd do the best we could . . . seems they've got nurses up there and stretcher bearers . . . running slow, operating the turntables and the signals by hand, it would take us five hours . . . best you can do with coke . . . not much snow, though it's November, just a bit of powder . . . funny winter . . . it's cold, maybe about 25, but not so bad . . . they say it'll come on all of a sudden . . . ah, the engineer is motioning to us . . . he's got his coke! . . . we're ready too! nobody's been able to climb on except those three, the ones that were ahead of us . . . come to think of it, the other flatcar, the one right after the tender, wasn't as smoky as ours . . . the tail end of the train gets most of the soot . . . but too late to change now! the ones who haven't made it are still weeping, sighing, imploring . . . their troubles aren't over! . . . they'll wait for the next train . . . *choo! choo!* we're pulling out! . . .

"So long, Le Vig! don't go anywhere! . . . if we can get through, we'll be back! right away!"

Watching us leave, he bursts into tears, he doesn't trust us . . . we're crying too . . . hell, he knows I'm sincere, I wouldn't do anything unreasonable, I'm not selling him a bill of goods! . . . we just want to see about the crossing . . . a slight chance? . . . animals are better off, they know right away what's possible and what isn't . . . we humans hesitate, we fuddle and stumble, natural drunks . . . we live pretty near seven cat's lives . . . the result? we're seven times more idiotic . . . getting that rattler to Rostock . . . the main thing was not to goof at the switches . . . and end up in the middle of the woods . . . the sergeant was worried too . . . *choo! choo!* especially with all that smoke . . . thick! you'd have thought you were in a tunnel . . . but they had to get the direction right! no time for mistakes! . . . Rostock was north-northeast . . . the sergeant had a compass . . . so did I . . . first he looks at his . . . with his *torch* . . . then at mine . . . right! right! hurrah! north-northeast! . . . the engine driver hasn't gone wrong . . . he's a champ! he's

doing it all by himself, coke, water, turntables, signals . . . lucky they don't ask us to get out and push . . . wouldn't surprise me . . . and the smoke that's coming down on us! not just smoke . . . live coals . . . enough to set fire to every haystack for miles around . . . and the sky all full of R.A.F. . . . if they don't bomb us, it's sheer contempt . . . we'll get there by midnight, if we don't jump the track . . . if the R.A.F. clobbered us, there wouldn't be much loss . . . cars, guns, engine, we wouldn't bring a hundred francs at the junkyard . . . it takes special conditions, really unusual . . . to make a train like that run . . . through thick and thin! . . . you can say that again! . . . now it's dark . . . the gunners are all huddled around their gun . . . the stowaways that got on before we did are off to one side, they're not talking, we're chugging along . . . *choo! choo!* . . . we skip a few stations . . . luck at the switches, our needles are steady . . . north-northeast . . . but the smoke we're getting! looks like they're doing it on purpose . . . *clank clank*, it's been about four hours now . . . *bam!* . . . guess some of these tracks have been cut! . . . and new ones put in! . . . ah! . . . the sergeant points at a light . . . way ahead . . . on the left, a red light. . . he must have been expecting it . . . we slow down . . . I ask him where we're at . . . Rostock? . . . no! but we're going to stop! . . . they're going to open the cars and take everybody out . . . he asks me if I can help . . . glad to! . . . Lili too! . . . and those three over there that aren't talking! . . . oh, there's a crowd already! . . . in the middle of the fields . . . funny idea, making us stop here . . . who gave us that signal anyway? . . . I ask the sergeant. . . him over there! . . . can't you see him? . . . I couldn't see "him" very well . . . he comes over to our platform . . . I bend down . . .

"Doktor Erbert Haupt!"

He introduces himself . . . not so easy in the darkness . . . he repeats . . .

"Oberarzt Haupt! . . . Rostock! . . ."

Chief medical officer of Rostock . . . it can't be far . . . but out here in the fields . . . in the pitch-darkness . . . it's not warm . . . not so very cold, but enough . . . I show him my paper, the signatures, the *bevoll* stamp . . . he looks it over with his *torch* . . . he can make his *torch* red . . . or white . . . a railroad *torch* . . . why this stop in the middle of the night? . . . I can't see him, but he points . . . I understand his German . . .

"Those men are going to clear the train . . ."

"Wo . . . where?"

I ask him . . . there are teams . . . special workers . . . here in the plain . . . medics? . . . I can't make out. . .

"We'll see tomorrow!"

He explains

He explains . . .

"Tomorrow! . . . the day after! . . . well see! . . . the ones that can move! . . . the ones that are dead!"

I get it, it's simple! . . . he doesn't want us to help . . .

"*Ach! nein! . . . nein!*"

He's going to take us to a hotel . . . fine! . . . anything he likes! . . . let's go! good-bye to the four gunners and the three stowaways . . . here we are on the roadbed . . . we follow the *Oberarzt!* he knows the way! . . . fast walker . . . I struggle to keep up . . . this hotel can't be very far . . . we pass a switch and a long shack . . . no light, no switchmen . . . guess they've beat it too . . . better keep my thoughts to myself! . . . ah, a street! . . . we've left the tracks . . .

"Here's your hotel!"

Sure enough, there it was . . . a real hotel . . . still standing . . . Rostock must have been hit, but not this place, not yet . . . I look at my watch . . . two a.m. . . . still snowing some, light powder . . . I'm thinking about those people in the train . . . dragging all those bodies out of the cars . . . we might have been doing it too . . . but where did all those people come from in the first place? . . . evacuees from Berlin, I know . . . but how many? . . . we never found out . . . the ones that are dragging them out of the cars are in teams, men and women I think . . . at certain times, when conditions are too rough, you don't pay much attention whether it's men or women . . . especially when they're all in rags . . . At last he's going to show me his face, this *Oberarzt* Haupt . . . there's a light bulb . . . one for the whole lobby . . .

About my age, but very sure of himself . . . not the smiling type . . . khaki uniform . . . gold braid, boots, swastika armband . . . he hardly looks at us . . .

"*Papier!*"

He wants to see our papers again . . . here you are! . . . he asks us where we're bound for . . .

"Wo wollen sie?"

"Warnemünde!"

Good! . . . All right with him! . . . but we'll have to wait . . . he has to notify *Warnemünde* . . . "How many days?"

"One day!"

"*Gut!* fine! . . . tomorrow morning! . . . *Stadthaus!* Town hall!"

He wants to see us again . . . okay, we'll report to his town hall! . . . he leaves us . . . he must have reserved a room for us . . . I see that this hotel is no crumbling ruin like the *Zenith* in Berlin . . . but nobody around . . . just an old woman at the cash desk, in a wig, I think . . . she has us fill out our blanks . . .

neither friendly nor hostile . . . "good night!" . . . colleague Haupt leaves us . . . some words don't mean a thing: "good night!" . . . in solitary, the guard that locks you up . . . double lock . . . also treats you to his good night! . . . *god nat!* . . . the lady from the desk takes us up to the second floor . . . our room . . . two very hard beds and a very thin blanket . . . well, we can't complain . . . the sergeant had wanted to put us to work on the train . . . unloading . . . this Haupt doesn't seem very affable, but he's not too vicious, not the dyed-in-the-wool *anti-franzone* type . . . we'll be seeing him again tomorrow, ten o'clock . . . I say to Lili: "We'd better stay just as we are . . ." keep our clothes on, I mean . . . the sirens are still at it . . . far away . . . but they can come closer any minute! . . . we know all about sirens . . . I'm half asleep . . . I talk about Bébert . . . and Le Vig . . . wonder what they're doing right now . . . Lili answers . . . something vague . . . I've got to keep mumbling . . . no intention of sleeping! . . . we've got to be ready in case of an alert! . . . especially here, in a place we don't know . . . wonder if Rostock is badly beat up? . . . we'll see tomorrow . . .

Knock knock!

On the door . . . somebody there . . . very softly . . . good I kept my clothes on . . . I open just a crack . . .

"Forgive me, my dear colleague! . . . at this time of night! . . . but I've got to see you, warn you! I may not be here tomorrow . . . you never can tell . . ."

This dear colleague is whispering . . . he has an accent . . . but not a Kraut accent. . . where's he from? I'll ask him . . .

"Wait, I've got a candle!"

That's a fact . . . actually I've got several . . . and matches . . . I strike one . . . there we are! I invite the stranger to come in . . .

"So sorry! . . . we were lying down, that's all . . . we were expecting an alert . . ."

He tells me . . .

"There've been only two alerts since I've been here . . ."

He'd been there for six months . . .

"A lot of bombs?"

"No! . . . three raids! four loads of bombs! . . . but they'll be back! . . . I haven't introduced myself! . . . do forgive me . . . Proseïdon . . . Greek . . . professor at the Montpellier Medical School! . . . Proseïdon!"

"Delighted, my dear colleague!"

"My wife is a doctor too! . . . from Montpellier . . . I don't know where she is right now . . . probably trying to join me . . . we escaped from Russia . . . me through Poland . . . she across the Rumanian border . . ."

through Poland . . . she across the Rumanian border . . .

He tells us their story . . . he and his wife had gone to Soviet Russia . . . political conviction . . . but they didn't get along with the Russians . . . not for a single day! they lived and worked with them! . . . ten years! . . . but never joined the Party! . . . they refused . . . only in the hospitals . . .

"I'm a pathologist, you see, my wife helped me . . . laboratory work . . . they assigned me to leprosy . . . I've been in all the republics . . . a good deal of leprosy in Mongolia . . . five and a half years in Outer Mongolia . . . one year on plague in Arabidjan . . . they wanted us to join the party . . . they don't all join the party . . . eight percent . . . eight percent . . . no more . . . we had to get out . . . the future is theirs . . . all Europe . . . all Asia . . . did you realize? . . ."

I listen to him . . . he talks in an undertone . . . he doesn't move . . . standing up . . .

I ask him:

"Well? What about here?"

"Here they're crazy! As crazy as the Russians, but the Russians have more power, tremendous . . . they can do what they please . . . here their myth is race, soil, blood—small-family stuff . . . village snobbery . . . the Russians don't need it . . . they want everything and they'll take everything! . . . unless . . ."

A slight reservation . . .

". . . unless Hitler holds out for a year . . . two years! . . . but I don't think so . . . he's losing too many men!"

"So where does that leave us?"

"Exactly! . . . I wanted to warn you . . . you don't mind?"

"Only too grateful, colleague!"

"Just so you know where you are . . ."

Looks like he knows the score . . . this stop in the fields? . . . in the middle of the night? . . .

"He didn't tell you? it's the Nietzschean technique . . . Oberarzt Haupt is a Nietzschean . . . natural selection! . . . survival of the fittest! the cold, the snow, stark naked, it invigorates them, especially the wounded! . . . the weak die and get buried . . . Oberarzt Haupt's technique . . . they clear the cars, they put the bodies out in the field . . . and leave them there . . . two days . . . three days . . . in the cold, in the snow, stark naked . . . the ones that are able to get up are invigorated . . . you can see them, even on one leg . . . they start for Rostock . . . then they sort them out . . . some go to the hospital for surgery . . . the rest are put to work . . . digging pits for the dead: the ones that don't move after two three days . . ."

Proseïdon had been the doctor . . . assigned to the field, the mass graves . . .
"Maybe they'll take you on?"

Now I understood that enormous work force, why I'd seen all those people in rags around the cars . . . not so dumb, his method . . . but what interested me was Denmark! . . . not Nietzschean selection . . . I had an aim! . . . not listening to him talk about Haupt and his crazy ideas . . . especially if he'd let us go look at the sea . . .

"Yes! . . . but only once! . . . for twelve hours . . . only twelve hours! . . . that's the most he can do! Warnemünde isn't in his jurisdiction . . . Warnemünde is the Admiralty . . . the beach, the defenses, the coast . . ."

Then he tells me that all they wanted in Berlin was to get people out of their hospitals . . . send them anywhere! . . . Hanover . . . Wiesbaden . . . Rostock . . . Lübeck . . . the only trouble, it was the same all over . . . not a bed! . . . they couldn't take anybody . . . and a crazy detail: the lepers in Berlin . . . the Red Cross Commission had rounded up twelve . . . a dozen lepers wandering around the ruins . . . seemed to be refugees from the East . . . they'd sent them to Rostock . . . to Proseïdon, the specialist . . . a dozen ampules of *chaulmo-gras* . . . and then nothing . . . the hospital here had turned them away! . . . no solution but to mix them in with the others, the work crew in the field . . . unloading the cars, digging graves . . . it went off all right . . . not another word about lepers or leprosy . . . Oberarzt Haupt didn't ask any questions . . . as long as the cars were empty and the dead six feet under! . . . his passion was Nietzsche . . . I could expect him to question me . . . he'd judge me according to Nietzsche . . . speaking of Nietzsche, *Proseïdon*, usually so cautious, had put his foot in it . . . given him his frank opinion, that Nietzsche was a romantic smart aleck, full of quibbles and hot air . . . since then they hadn't exchanged a word . . . hardly . . .

"I beg your pardon, madame! . . . I talk so much! . . . so indiscreet! . . . I could talk all night! . . . out there, you know, I didn't talk to a soul for years . . . ten years! . . . neither to my colleagues nor to the patients . . ."

"Think nothing of it . . . we're delighted!"

"You've got to sleep! . . . we still have . . ."

He looks at his watch . . .

"It's three o'clock! . . . I'm going! . . . once again . . . your pardon! . . ."

This colleague is mighty polite . . . and certainly very frugal . . . he lives on black bread, never any butter . . . I think about him . . . nothing else to do, lying there with my clothes on . . . genuine Greek profile! . . . of course there are other kinds of beauty, but not many are so perfect . . . so definitive . . . I think of

myself, my big head . . . I make myself laugh . . .

"What's the matter?"

"I'm thinking about my head!"

"You'd better get some sleep instead!"

Sleep, that's easily said! . . . I don't lose consciousness . . . and besides, that wailing in the east . . . faint . . . but even so . . . we'll see the dawn through the little window . . . what time is it anyway? . . . the *torch* . . . my watch . . . first four o'clock . . . then five . . . half asleep . . . no it's six . . . seven o'clock, rise and shine! . . . got to find some water to wash with and maybe some kind of coffee Proseïdon's at the door . . . munching his chunk of black bread, still the same one, it looks like . . . we tell each other good morning . . . he asks me how I've slept . . . "splendidly, dear colleague!" . . . he tells me there are no more maids or waiters . . . or cooks . . . all cleared out a month ago . . . every last one, nobody knows where! . . . naturally there's no more coffee! . . . or coffee substitute . . . he lives on black bread . . . gets it with his coupons . . . that's all he eats . . . one more thing, he knows where to get coupons! . . . do I want some? . . . definitely! . . . but right away he gets us what we need! a loaf of army bread and a pitcher of water . . . but since I'm going to see the Oberarzt I'd like a bit of hot water to wash with . . . that coat of sludge from the platform won't come off in cold water . . . my colleague says he'll get us some hot water! at the hospital . . . we should wait . . . we wait! . . . he isn't gone long . . . here's the hot water . . . we wash off the grime . . . now we'll go see . . . it's right next door . . . I see plenty! . . . nothing much to pretty up for! sure thing! the minute we hit the stairs! . . . maybe Oberarzt Haupt was a gold-medal Nietzschean, but that didn't clean the rooms! . . . or the corridors! . . . dressings all over the place . . . hadn't been swept for months . . . adhesive tape, bandages, diarrhea . . . of course he needed help! but how could he operate in such a place? . . . the Greek had told me: he eliminates a lot of them! . . . I wondered how . . . but where was he? his office? I look around . . . ah, an old woman, a patient! . . . she's coming down, step by step . . . clutching the banister . . . "upstairs" . . . she says . . . "upstairs" . . . I climb . . . I see a door . . . no name, but a red cross . . . is this it? . . . I knock . . . somebody answers . . . but he doesn't open . . .

"What is it?"

His voice, I think . . .

"A pass for Warnemünde!"

Yes, it's him, the Oberarzt . . .

"Go ahead! You don't need a pass . . . they know!"

But what about a ticket? . . . no need of a ticket, it's free! . . . we'd pay later! . . . there's no station either . . . just the roadbed! . . . we'd take the fish train . . . there and back . . . permission to stay in Warnemünde the time it took them to load . . . two hours at the most! . . . no time for excursions! well, we'd wanted to see the Baltic!

"*Warten sie!*"

He talks to me through the door . . .

"Go and get your things! . . . you won't be going back to the hotel! . . . no more hotel! . . . *verboten!* no more hotel! . . . the factories are closed too! . . . Heinkel!° . . . orders from Berlin! . . . you'll return direct from Warnemünde to Berlin! . . . Proseïdon knows, he'll go with you, his patients too, Berlin direct! . . . he'll wait for you . . . understand?"

"Yes! Yes!"

Not another word . . . I wasn't going to argue . . . this weirdie Haupt wasn't in love with us to begin with . . . the hotel! . . . ah, here we are! . . . I find the sign . . . hadn't noticed it when we arrived . . . "Phoenix Hotel" . . . seems we don't have to pay . . . that's how it is in all the big crackups: Nightmare, Gratis . . . Vichy, Berlin, Sigmaringen . . . where'll it be tomorrow? London? . . . Prague? . . . Moscow? . . . you'll see . . . go take a look . . . but right here and now, what are they worried about? . . . an English landing? . . . the Russians? . . . we'll ask in Warnemünde . . . quick to our room! bundle up our stuff! . . . Proseïdon is in the corridor . . . it was true, he had his orders . . . I ask him: were they evacuating Rostock? . . . he doesn't know . . . maybe . . . anyway he'd wait till we got back . . . he and his lepers . . . all in the same compartment . . . we'd be together as far as Moorsburg . . . then they'd be changing to another line . . . Stettin! . . . say, I'll be damned! that's where our ladies are! . . . or maybe they'd gone a lot further . . . I'll know if we see Harras, the old clown! . . . Proseïdon thinks they've set up a leper hospital in Stettin . . . he's not sure . . .

"A great future, Proseïdon!"

One thing was sure . . . we had two hours to see the Baltic . . . and come back . . .

"Good-bye! . . . good-bye!"

Two soldiers seem to be waiting for us at the hotel door . . . to arrest us? . . . we pass them by . . . they tail us . . . about ten . . . fifteen paces back . . . we follow the narrow-gauge tracks . . . the two soldiers are still there . . . still the same distance . . . some other people take the same path . . . funny, here in Rostock, not a soul in the streets . . . then all of a sudden, a crowd! civilians, soldiers . . . what language are they speaking? . . . I ask one of them . . . Danish

soldiers . . . what language are they speaking! . . . I ask one of them . . . Danish and Hungarian! . . .

"There won't be anybody left in Rostock!"

Whatsisname told me through the door . . . which reminds me, he didn't breathe a word about his Nietzsche . . . only one thing on his mind . . . getting rid of us! . . . suits me! . . . anyway, we'll be seeing their Baltic! . . . and the harbor . . . we'll have two hours . . . all these people are taking the boat . . . hey, I see it! . . . I see the boat! . . . not far ahead . . . Rostock is a seaport, I'd forgotten . . . a very narrow harbor . . . the tracks go right out on the dock . . . let's go! . . . sure, all these people are taking the boat . . . we move up . . . it's a small freighter . . . great big white letters from gunwale to waterline: Denmark and no mistake . . . the two soldiers who've been following us come up . . . they motion to us: not here! . . . this way! . . . further on! . . . I see the gangplank, all those people going up, one by one . . . we push off, we pass the freighter . . . this freighter has no name, only a number: 149 . . . the sea, the beach? further on! . . . further on! right, we're getting there . . . the channel widens . . . we come to a different kind of port . . . sailboats and fishing smacks . . . here there are people . . . all along the shore . . . this must be Wamemünde . . . neither sand nor shingle . . . little black pebbles, little white pebbles . . . kind of pretty . . . except it looks like three-quarter mourning . . . and then a lot of cottages . . . all along the beach . . . baroque cottages . . . the "frivolous German" style . . . all colors . . . especially raspberry and pistachio . . . no bathers, closed shutters . . . fashionable resort, this Wamemünde . . . nothing doing right now! . . . we haven't spoken to a soul . . . nobody's come near us . . . guess they think our two soldiers are taking us somewhere . . . the season here is two weeks, the Baltic climate . . . ah, a little further on, where they've been loading fish, the Berlin train has been made up . . . let's go see! . . . two reserved compartments . . . for us, I guess . . . that'll do for the beach . . . we've seen it! . . . may as well sit down! us and the older soldier . . . take a load off our feet . . . the young one gets in next door . . . they haven't spoken to us very much . . . sitting there, we get a good view of what's going on, the other people getting in . . . ah, they're checking up! . . . at least ten uniformed cops . . . passing papers back and forth . . . stamping and restamping! asking questions . . . especially the Hungarian soldiers with the red caps . . . fine-tooth comb . . . not so easy getting to Denmark! . . . especially for us! with our guardian angels . . . I wonder what they are . . . S.A.? . . . S.S.? . . . I don't see any insignia . . . or stripes . . . I'll ask them later, right now let's admire the beach! . . . we won't have come for nothing . . . not a rough sea . . . flat gray . . . the sky, the little pebbles, the water . . . they meet in the distance, far away . . . in

Zornhof it was the plain that seemed endless . . . so this freighter, the 149, is going out there beyond the sea and sky . . . we wouldn't mind trying it ourselves . . . I don't see anybody on the water, not a boat . . . maybe they only fish at certain hours . . . or at night . . . this beach used to be a garden spot, the snazziest in all northern Germany . . . you wouldn't think it . . . nothing gets gloomier than these so-called beach resorts . . . cottages, casino . . . when the telegrams start pouring in, the bad news and the lightning . . . so us there, looking at the sky and the seagulls, what are we hoping for? . . . gulls and more gulls, diving at the nets and baskets . . . lighting on the deck of the freighter . . . and screaming louder than ever! the whole beach full of them! . . . more and more! . . . we won't go! . . . we won't budge out of the compartment . . . I look at our two sentries . . . one of them must be about fifteen . . . the other's a good deal older . . . the older one gives an order . . . the young one jumps up! . . . he runs across the beach . . . to a shack in the port . . . we wait . . . he comes back with two messkits . . . and a bottle . . . he's made it quick . . . they're taking good care of us . . . piping hot! . . . two messkits full of fish with rice . . . and a quart of water . . . in the last three days . . . I know we're used to it, but all the same . . . if it hadn't been for *Proseïdon*, we wouldn't have had anything to eat at all . . . those messkits hit the spot . . . the young one asks us if it's good . . . "sure thing! *ja! ja! danke!*" . . . kind of a *matelote* . . . *sautéed* in butter! . . . luxury! . . . and out of the blue, just like that! ah, now we feel more like looking around . . . there's plenty to see . . . the freighter's pulling out . . . looks like . . . right, she is! . . . not blowing any whistles . . . the propellers beating . . . very slowly . . . we get a better view of the side . . . from gunwale to waterline . . . Denmark in enormous white letters . . . if they get torpedoed, they're asking for it . . . *bon voyage!* . . . I wave out the door . . . nobody waves back . . . nobody shows himself . . . orders, I suppose . . . and finally the 149 moves into the channel . . . oh, very slowly . . . the sea . . . out she goes . . . the water, flat and gray . . . well, we've seen what we came to see . . . our two soldiers motion us to give back our messkits and empty bottle . . . the younger one takes them back to the shack . . . up ahead they've put the "fish train" together . . . they push our car up to it, they hook us on . . . workmen and fishermen . . . the young soldier comes back, still got his mouth full, and climbs in with us . . . they haven't talked to us very much, neither one . . . haven't said a thing . . . at last the Berlin train is ready . . . nonstop to Berlin . . . except we've got to pick up our colleague in Rostock . . . him and his patients . . . I see it's women loading the train . . . baskets and more baskets . . . same merchandise as Les Sables, Fecamp, or Malmö . . . it's the job that makes the man, a komissar or

a deputy without blah-blah, a fishwife without baskets, doesn't exist any more . . . fly-by-nights, ready for anything . . . one thing, those women don't try to talk to us, to find out who we are . . . I guess they're suspicious of people like us, with special guards! *choo! choo!* the engine! this train has no armored flatcars . . . no gunners . . . our two guards, that's all . . . we're moving . . . *choo! choo!* . . . oh, we don't go far . . . Rostock! . . . the train stops . . . there's Proseïdon, waiting for us . . . not alone, far from it, he's got his patients with him . . . I ask him . . . sure! it's them all right! . . . he's managed to round them up, not a one missing . . . and he's brought our stuff from the Hotel Phoenix . . . not heavy, a small bag . . . two shirts, towels, soap . . . now for Moorsburg! seventy miles! . . . we won't be seeing the Oberarzt . . . the ardent Nietzschean . . . again! . . . I never did see him, only heard him . . . and not friendly, through the door . . . never mind, I'll get over it! . . . it's not the same as coming . . . everybody jammed together . . . Proseïdon is in the next compartment with his lepers . . . he can't leave them . . . only half a door between us . . . I can see them all, they're not repulsive, no age, they're beyond age, so to speak . . . pretty pimply, most of them wrapped in big dressings . . . especially the men, it looks like . . . we're moving . . . this train, it's a fact, doesn't stop anywhere . . . but it doesn't go fast . . . the lepers keep swabbing their noses and eyes . . . with their raggedy rags . . . not hard to diagnose . . . blood coming out of their eyes and noses . . . they couldn't have been very good gravediggers . . . might as well ship them somewhere else . . . a leper hospital? . . . where? . . . still rolling along . . . the planes aren't bothering with us . . . they're up there though, coming and going, diving, wheeling . . . I guess they know this fish train and its schedule, and know it isn't armed . . . friendly little arrangement, I suppose, to let the fish through . . . we'd never see any fish in Moorsburg . . . the whole planet, same story . . . the bigshots roll each other in clover . . . when the next one comes, the atomic shindig, you'll see, they'll send each other baskets of strawberries, from Finistère to Svarnopol, by rocket. . . I'm joking, but not all that much . . . I forgot to tell you about the snow . . . now it was coming down . . . not deep, but quite a lot . . . you couldn't see the tracks . . . I was forgetting the seagulls too! . . . but, never fear, there they were . . . you can imagine, four carloads of fish! . . . wheeling in the air, gliding, coming down on top of the cars . . . and Proseïdon? . . . not talking . . . he's thinking . . . we're pretty near there . . . two . . . three stations to go . . . here . . . this must be it! . . . I see, I think I see houses . . . the snow is in the way . . . the train slows down . . . so to speak . . . foot by foot . . . *choo! choo!* sure enough, it's stopping, it's Moorsburg . . . the station! . . .

"Eordiel Eordiel!"

ferue: ferue:

It's Le Vig! . . . Lili answers . . . with a question: "Bébert?. . . Bébert?"

"Right here!"

We get out . . . so does Proseïdon . . . and his flock . . . they help each other down, they give each other their arms . . . where they're going? . . . it's all one to them . . .

"This way, colleague! this way!"

That voice! It's Harras! He's not alone, he's with Kracht° . . . both in full battle dress, chameleon designs . . . enormous boots, potato mashers, Mausers this big! I ask him:

"The Russians?"

"No! . . . but not far!"

"Okay, bring 'em on!"

"No need to! They'll get here on their own!"

Always a cheerful word! and obliging! he tells me he's been expecting us . . . he's had a corner of the waiting room rigged up for the four of us . . . Lili, me, Le Vig, and Proseïdon . . .

"Where are we going?"

"First some rest . . . could you sleep a little?"

"Yes! . . . yes! . . . definitely! . . ."

"And eat?"

"Yes! . . . yes! that too!"

"You'll have fish!"

Our two sentries haven't left the train, they're sitting in our places . . . they must be going to Berlin . . . they've neither eaten nor slept . . . duty! . . . duty! . . . and back again on the same fish train . . . except that things could change and there wouldn't be any train for Warnemünde . . . and no more fishing . . . *verboten!* . . . Harras knows more than we do . . . it seems the English had sent two big barges to Zoppot . . . to drop buoys? . . . or mines? . . . why not? there was something funny in the air! . . . and how about Oberarzt Haupt? what did he think of him? . . . wasn't he a number? . . . with his testing field? . . . his moribund workers? . . . Harras knew all about it . . .

"Oh, you know, he's doing his best . . . under the circumstances! of course he's demented . . . but in his place?"

The thermometer says 26 . . .

"It's not too cold . . . excellent, the fish train will stay here in the station . . . you'll take it . . . I'll tell you tomorrow . . ."

I wish he'd tell me right now . . . the waiting room . . . we go take a look . . .

full of soldiers . . . stretched out . . . sleeping, I guess . . . all German railroad stations are the same, sleeping soldiers . . . some wounded . . . the right-hand corner is all ready for us, four messkits . . . cabbage soup . . . Le Vig and the Greek are done in . . . they don't touch their food, they drop off . . .

"Destouches! . . . Destouches! let me introduce Sister Félicie!"

Sister Félicie seems perfectly calm . . . not downcast at all . . . almost gay . . . young, about thirty . . .

"Ordre de la Sagesse! . . . practicing nurse! . . . the contagious section . . . at La Charité . . . you know, our big hospital! . . . Sister Félicie!"

"Yes! yes, Harras!"

I introduce her to Proseïdon . . . Proseïdon pulls himself out of his straw . . . bows very low . . . and apologizes . . .

"Sister Félicie!"

Harras explains that she's just arrived from Berlin . . . in a tank . . . direct . . . volunteered for the leper hospital . . . she'd taken care of the lepers in Berlin in the isolation ward . . . I see they're old friends, they embrace . . . first time I'd seen them looking cheerful . . . she'd been at La Charité for ten years . . . first a temporary assignment, just for the Catholic patients, and then she'd stayed on . . . they hadn't deported her . . . and she hadn't asked to leave . . . a lot of nuns like that, from all countries, at La Charité . . . even deaconesses . . . too busy to worry about politics . . . since the air raids, what with all the wounded, they'd put Sister Félicie in charge of all the contagious cases . . . and sent all the lepers to her department . . . these ten, maybe fifteen . . . and more were expected . . . seems there were still some in camps . . . the idea of the leper hospital came from the ministry, Conti's brainstorm . . . Sister Félicie was fully equipped, army shoes, musette bag, black bread . . . the lepers wanted her to attend to them right away, change their dressings . . . all right with her, but there weren't any bandages or cotton . . . ha! surprise! upstairs in the stationmaster's office . . . Harras had brought a whole carload of infirmary supplies . . . ready for use . . . Kracht would bring them down . . .

"Ja! ja! ja!"

But Sister Félicie wasn't ready . . . first she had to tidy up her coif! . . . Harras had thought of that too! upstairs! iron, ironing board, wood for the stove . . . and she'd be alone, the stationmaster and switchman had left for the Western front . . . I notice that Harras has lost his big laugh, his *ho ho ho!* . . . he wasn't sad, but he didn't laugh any more . . . plenty of things I wanted to know . . . I'd have liked to talk to him . . . we waited, sitting in the straw . . . and then we lay

down . . . waiting for Sister Félicie . . . I think . . .



I heard another train . . . *choo! choo!* . . . slow down and stop . . . another fish train? . . . could be . . . and then a lot of soldiers . . . boots and clanking metal . . . guttural orders and counter-orders in German . . . didn't bother to open my eyes . . . what for? . . . assembling outside the station? . . . must be . . . and inside the waiting room there were other noises, these people lying there . . . snoring and grunting . . . and groaning . . . some of them must have been in bad shape . . . it wasn't the Nietzschean system like up there in Rostock, selection by frost, but it probably came to the same thing . . . I'd have bet that every three or four days somebody came to pass them in review . . . these men sprawled in the stations . . . and take the stiffes away . . . there were pits . . . a lot died in transport . . . hemorrhages and gangrene . . . inevitable, coming all that way . . . from this front, that front . . . days and nights flat on the straw, no nurses, no dressings . . . anyway, we were getting a rest . . . Le Vig, Lili, and me . . . not sleeping, no! . . . but comfortable . . . plenty of straw! . . . oh, not easy in our minds! . . . even Bébert in his musette bag was on the qui-vive, not purring at all . . . hard to know what was what . . . with all those noises! . . . which ones had anything to do with us . . . two more . . . there I was sure . . . Harras and Kracht outside . . . I knew them by their step . . . they were looking for us . . . right! . . . it's them! . . . they step over the bodies . . . Harras locates me . . . he lights me up with his *torch* . . .

"Destouches! . . . Destouches! . . . something! something important for you! . . . for all three of you . . . definitely!"

I pull myself out of the straw, so does Le Vig, so does Lili . . .

"I've taken the liberty, Madame . . . you'll forgive me, Madame? . . . important for you . . ."

We listen . . . he talks in a booming whisper . . .

"The French government has left Vichy . . ."

"No!"

"Falling back on Sigmaringen° . . ."

There he's got to explain . . . Sigmaringen? in Germany? . . . certainly! . . . in Germany! but way in the south! . . . near the Swiss border! . . .

I see Le Vig change color . . . he's been pale, practically in a faint . . . now he flushes purple . . .

"Ah, Ferdie! . . . Ferdie! saved!"

He's shouting . . .

"Not so loud, Le Vig! we'll see when we get there!"

"We leaving? When?"

"Yes! . . . yes!"

Le Vig is out of control. . .

"Say . . . we'll be going home . . . to France!"

Me lying down, him on his feet, I can't see him very well . . . the room's dark . . . but I hear him all right . . . Kracht and Harras light us up . . . he's jumping up and down . . . in between the bodies . . . this way . . . that way . . . stepping over them . . . he's out of his nightmare now . . . he sees himself in Switzerland . . . practically home in Montmartre . . .

I calm him down.

"Le Vig, pal, it's not over yet! Listen to Dr. Harras! . . . stop shouting! this place is full of stoolies! they're all over! Didn't you know that? . . ."

Harras interrupts me . . . he takes a rubber stamp out of his pocket . . .

"Here! . . . Look!"

We examine it . . . no more *Reichsgesund* . . .

"An army order to Sigmaringen! . . . more like it, don't you think?"

He's not in a joking mood, it seems to me . . . he warns me . . . the hardest part will be Berlin . . .

"Bad shape there . . . everybody at the station, you'll see . . . not just refugees . . . soldiers! millions! . . . bound for Ulm, for the south . . . you know the *Anhalt* station? . . ."

Certainly! . . . our fish train would stop outside Berlin . . . we'd get out . . . and walk to *Anhalt* with our two guards, they knew the way . . .

"Certainly! . . . certainly!"

As long as we get there!

I hand him our papers, so does Le Vig . . . that beautiful *Reichsbevoll* stamp isn't good enough, not any more, we need the O.K.W. . . . *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* . . . Army High Command . . . Harras adds in his own hand:

"*Wehrmacht befehl! Sigmaringen*" . . . seems to me we're all set . . . but what about tickets? . . . everything seems to be free around here!

"You'll pay later! later!"

The debts we'll have! and to tell the truth I found out . . . later! . . . that the end is not in sight! . . .

Right now it's our papers . . . he gives them back! I shove them into my pocket! . . . including Le Vig's visas, he wants it that way . . . but that's not all! . . . one more formality! . . . he's got to notify Berlin . . . the Foreign Office and Chancellery . . . and all the lines are cut . . . underground . . . above ground . . . as fast as they can repair them . . . I knew that already . . . pretty good idea who it was . . . they'd arrested a hundred suspects . . . they could arrest a thousand for all the good! . . . the *Wehrmacht* technicians had developed a system of cyclo-magneto transmission that nobody could sabotage . . . I go out and look . . . we all go . . . good grief! . . . Kracht's bike mounted on top of a sleigh! . . . did I know that bike! . . . Kracht, the intrepid cyclist! . . . but here now his bike was attached . . . welded and riveted . . . and the back wheel was hitched to a transmission belt that drove a generator . . . Kracht gets up on the seat, and pedals! . . . and pedals! . . . I get it . . . he's making electricity . . . *atta boy!* . . . the long antenna up front transmits! and receives too! . . . a two-way antenna . . . Harras explains . . . only Kracht had better not weaken!

"*Noch! noch!* . . . harder! harder!"

Harras is looking for Berlin . . . transmitting . . . he shows me his little set . . . tiny . . . hollow of your hand . . . and waits for Berlin to answer . . . Harras has his helmet on . . . he listens . . . got 'em! . . . didn't take long . . .

"I'm notifying them of your arrival . . . indispensable!"

All right with me! . . . *dot . . . dot . . . dash!*

I see he's learned telegraphy . . . Kracht up there on his bicycle isn't having much fun . . .

"*Noch! . . . noch! . . . Kracht!* . . . keep it up!"

Kracht is knocking himself out! . . . running the generator! no fits and starts! . . . it's got to be steady! . . . or the antenna stutters! . . . stop! . . . finished transmitting! . . . kind of sudden! . . . now to receive! the reception is more ticklish! . . . Kracht has to pedal in the other direction . . . backwards! . . . that's the spirit! . . . lucky Kracht has kept in training . . .

"*Gut! Kracht! Gut!*"

You can actually see the antenna, the crackling . . . Harras hears . . . he hears Berlin . . . he hears the Chancellery . . .

"It's okay, Destouches! Granted! . . . *ja!* . . . *ja!* . . . you can go! . . . just a second now! . . . *noch! noch, Kracht! Stettin!* . . . got to notify Stettin! . . . they've got to know!"

Right . . . our Greek colleague and his lepers and his nun . . . I'd forgotten them! . . . twelve blood-and-pus cases . . . maybe fifteen . . . a whole sleighload . . . two sleighs . . . Stettin doesn't answer! Kracht gives it everything he's got! No soap! . . . oh well, they won't get lost! . . . there's only one road to Stettin . . . very well marked and guarded . . . and maintained . . . I see . . . a snow plow every mile . . . all the Berlin-Stettin traffic, civilian, military, refugees . . . takes that road . . . Moorsburg-Baltic too . . . Harras had told me about those little Tartar horses . . . special for sleighs . . . I see them there, ready harnessed . . . all shaggy and bearded . . . but to tell the truth they look more like children's ponies than far-north teams . . . snow trotters . . . they've all come from Stettin . . . they'll find their way all right! . . . Harras gives up . . . Stettin is still deaf . . . anyway Kracht is all in . . . his tongue's hanging out . . . our antenna stops crackling . . .

"*Noch! noch!*"

It's no use . . .

"*Nun! nun! lasse!* Never mind, forget it!"

Kracht flops down off the seat . . . he lies down in the snow . . . dead to the world . . . the intrepid cyclist! . . . we leave him, we go see the others . . . all ready to leave . . . the Sister has changed their dressings . . . not a stump showing, everything covered with gauze and cotton and bandage . . . all swaddled, heads, bodies, legs, you'd think they were masquerading as Tuaregs . . . and so happy! . . . I guess the sleigh appeals to them, and going so far . . . and having their Sister back again . . . they won't be going fast . . . five days to Stettin, so they say . . . a soldier leads both teams . . . two horses . . . by the bit . . . on foot and armed, hand grenades and carbine . . . I see they've got this thing organized . . . relay stations all along, so it seems . . . up there in Stettin the depot . . . and the leper hospital . . . not in the city itself, the last village . . . our Proseïdon, I can see, isn't enthusiastic . . . he doesn't protest, but he'd rather stay with us . . . he's had ten years of sleighs, he knows . . . and lepers . . . he'd be glad to go with us, any direction, especially south! . . . but his travel orders say Stettin! . . . he's not protesting, but he's pretty glum in his way . . . I mean, even more retiring than usual . . . he lines up his lepers and leads them to the sleighs . . . he helps them in, the Sister too, they're all nicely seated: good-bye! he says . . . and we answer: *au revoir!* . . . *au revoir!* . . . the two sleighs jolt . . . and slide . . .

they're off! . . . the road . . . it'll take them at least four days . . . they're not waving . . . neither the lepers nor the Sister nor Proseïdon . . .

Fact is, we never saw them again . . . or heard any news . . . of them or the leper hospital . . . or of Stettin . . . I've asked here and there . . . people who said they'd been there . . . seems that towns and villages have changed their names . . . and the inhabitants have gone away . . . I'd have to go see . . . fat chance!

So the three of us, Lili, me, and Le Vig, get back in our "fish train" . . . same compartment . . . our two soldiers haven't budged, they're waiting for us . . . Harras fills us in some more . . .

"You'll have to walk a way, half an hour, from the locomotive depot to the *Anhalt* station . . . the two soldiers will stay with you."

"Splendid, dear Harras! . . . God help us! . . . and *heil Hitler!*"

We shake hands, hard . . . he kisses Lili . . . he kisses Bébert . . . and there we are! . . . yes, we're kind of sad underneath . . . a feeling that we won't be seeing each other in a hurry . . . Kracht full length in the snow panting . . . panting . . . he looks at us . . .

"Good-bye, Kracht!"

"Heil! heil! Doktor!"

He's been a good egg too . . . mean . . . yes, he had to be! . . . we're sorry to leave him . . . wonder what's become of him . . . we knew him well. . .

Oh, but our "fish train" is moving . . . never expected it! . . . *choo! choo!* skidding . . . let's go! another good-bye to Harras . . . and Kracht . . . that's all . . . I never saw them again . . . nor Proseïdon, nor the Sister, nor whozis up there, the Nietzschean of Rostock . . . nor his natural selections . . . in the Superjets people don't lose one another, three hours to New York and hell's bells all together . . . it's in improvised travel that you've got to watch out, that people disappear for no reason at all, it's a wonder if you even remember them, look at the time I'm having trying to prove that these people were really alive and kicking, pity the poor chronicler!

The train takes us away . . . first gently . . . then not so gently . . . all the same, these tracks are better . . . piles of stones, they're making repairs . . . we've settled down, very quietly . . . got some thinking to do . . . no more Harras, no more Kracht . . . got to shift for ourselves . . . not a peep out of our two soldiers . . . we'll see at that station . . . the one before Berlin . . . a few planes in the air . . . but they're not bothering about us . . . we pass . . . without stopping . . . shacks, stations, warehouses . . . our two soldiers aren't talking to us . . . must be their orders . . . with Harras they talked . . . our train's been running about three hours

now . . . they've blown the whistle . . . maybe at every station . . . ah, here we are! . . . a platform . . . this must be it! . . . the older of the two Krauts motions to us . . . yes! . . . yes! . . . okay! . . . we get out . . . a path along the tracks . . . Indian file . . . not bad going, but is it far to this *Anhalt* station? . . . I ask him . . . "*ach, nein! nein!*" . . . right . . . we come to some shacks, a suburb . . . pretty badly beat up this suburb . . . very badly in fact! rubble . . . smoking . . . anyway, two houses out of three . . . I guess they're used to it, two houses out of three . . . so here we go in single file! . . . ah, we're getting there, I recognize it . . . the *Anhalt* station . . . those platforms, the little squares of cement! . . . only the metal's a lot more twisted than last time, I mean up top, the glass roof, the giant vault . . . chunks of it keep falling down . . . *crash! plunk!* . . . never stops . . . a shower of glass on the platforms and the people . . . and the train all covered with ricocheted glass . . . plenty of people though! . . . our platform . . . the southbound express is full up already . . . like the Rostock shuttle . . . except this one's got real cars, tall and wide . . . but the people are jammed in as tight as on the Rostock . . . all standing up . . . we're pretty skinny, super-compressible . . . but we'd never squeeze in . . . we do the whole platform and back again . . . ah, there's a car that doesn't look so full . . . we wonder . . . we're not the only ones, there's a whole crowd wondering if maybe . . . there wouldn't be room for one . . . for two . . . all kinds of soldiers in helmets, in *bérets*, women, children . . . no! . . . no room! that does it! all hell breaks loose! . . . yelling and screaming! . . . they grab hold of everything! . . . I see some *feldgraus* inside, all excited . . . running all along the corridor . . . trying to make them let go of the windows . . . pleading, commanding . . . go fuck yourself! . . . explaining that this is a special car, *sonderzug Wehrmacht*, can't they see the plaque . . . the eagle! . . . and the flag up at the end? . . . do they answer! . . . volleys of insults! . . . horrible threats! them and their O.K.W. plaque! they rip it off the side of the car, they take it away . . . that could have gone on a long time . . .

Crrash! . . . and *pht!* . . . like an explosion! . . . it's one of the big windows of the car . . . smithereens! . . . a brick! . . . another! . . . another window! . . . and the glass in the door at the end! . . . they open it, they've got the handle! . . . they charge in, the whole howling mob! a lot of people brag about seeing the German anarchy, it's a lie, they weren't there, we were there and not for the fun of it . . . I've seen a lot of things, but the nihilist fury in Germany, that's something you'll never forget . . . all those malcontents and their kids and babes in arms charging that *Wehrmacht* Pullman . . . pushing and shoving, the whole car! all scrambled . . . officers in pajamas, soldiers, babies, mothers . . . wrestling! . . . the whole

corridor! the berths are all taken! . . . the fathers climb up too, they all pour in . . . pretty soon they'll be crushed worse than in our Rostock streamliner . . . now it's grandfathers and grandmothers . . . what language? what dialect? . . . one of them tells me . . . they're Finns . . . supposed to go to Zornhof, the ones we'd been expecting! not going there any more! . . . they're sick of Berlin! . . . they want to go south! . . . first train! . . . the Ulm express! . . . this is it! . . . where are they all from, this mob? . . . not all Finns . . . Latvians, Estonians . . . and Danes from the *Frist-Korps*^o . . . those Danes, I'd be running into them later . . . right now I'm telling you about the anarchy at the *Anhalt* station . . . they only wanted one thing . . . to chuck the brass, throw out the officers mother-naked, uniforms, weapons, and all! . . . and their boots! a ball! . . . everything out! flying! and the cursing! and the threats! . . . the officers in their pajamas versus all those enraged window-smashing mothers . . . helpless! . . . they've got to get up and out, and run after their pants . . . the big compartment in the middle is occupied by a big fat baldy with a monocle, he's in his dressing gown . . . they break down his door . . . at least fifteen of them pour in, they grab the sofas and his two beds . . . more howling in the corridor . . . the big baldy resists, but it's no use . . . his uniform goes flying out the window . . . and his coat and his boots . . . and his cap . . . the kids try it on . . . lots of fun! . . . rip it to pieces . . . all those little thugs on the platform . . . and the uniform! especially the jacket, with its layer of decorations . . . and the saber! . . . who's he? . . . some German tells me . . . not a general. . . a marshal! . . . which one? Von Lubb! . . . never heard of him . . . anyway, he wants to go to Ulm . . . hell, the whole car, the whole train wants to go to Ulm . . . not to mention the crowd in the station! this car is the worst, the whole corridor is full of glass . . . so are the platforms . . . a bad place to be in . . . angrier than the Métro . . . and all this glass underfoot! . . . plus the junk falling down from the big vault . . . the Marshal tries to get out, to push through the corridor . . . no dice! the women won't let him, he's blocked! . . . they want his slippers! . . . he resists! "*ach, nein! . . . nein! . . .*" they take them by force . . . now he can go! barefoot! . . . his officers have escaped in their slippers . . . they see their Marshal getting out, they rush to help him . . . to carry him! . . . they carry him . . . the whole train's laughing! . . . the Marshal borne aloft! all along the train . . . *heil! heil!* everybody's yelling . . . *von Lubb! . . . von Lubb! . . . schwein! schwein!* the funny part of it is that he answers their ovation . . . their *schwein! schwein!* . . . most amiably . . . with solemn little gestures . . . head and arms . . . he must be deaf . . . at least ten are carrying him . . . up in the air, in triumph . . . they keep on going! . . . past the coke . . . one . . . two . . . three enormous tenders

. . . this is no little "shuttle" . . . a big brute of a train . . . the locomotive, a factory! smoking, puffing . . . acrid smoke and boiling jets . . . you can't get near it, but now there's at least twenty officers carrying him . . . von Lubb in triumph . . . they give him the flag and the plaque from their car to wave . . . O.K.W. . . . *Wehrmacht* High Command . . . the engineer yells . . . yells at them . . . I understand . . .

"That'll do! all aboard!"

He must know who they are . . . that they've been thrown out of their car . . .

So now they're attacking too! . . . the first tender! the Marshal still up in the air! they dash through the jets of steam . . . fsss! they've made it! they grab hold! they're on! . . . all in the coke! . . . they won't be so bad off . . . but what about us sightseers? about-face, quick, to our car! . . . God knows what's going on . . . they were fighting, wonder if they've stopped . . . it was mostly for the children . . . maybe we'd better say Bébert is our baby . . . you can't see him in his bag, it's closed . . . right! . . . here we are . . . Lili rocks him . . . the women at the door won't let us in! . . . they're all settled! . . . oh, but Lili's an acrobat . . . one two three . . . saved! in through the window! no more glass, only splinters . . . she's in! I pass her Bébert in his sack . . . with me it won't be so easy . . . our two soldiers, always so discreet, have located us, here they are . . . they grab me, one by each foot, and heave! . . . I'm in! . . . Le Vig's next! . . . now all we have to do is push, amalgamate ourselves with the women, against them or under them, the Lithuanians . . . or Bosnians? whatever they are . . . and the husbands and grandmothers . . . and disappear . . . babies all over, the baggage racks full of them! . . . and the bawling! . . . feeding time! . . . *brrr!* the engine trembles! . . . and the whole train! . . . we're moving . . . there's another engine in back, spitting the same as ours, all over the platforms . . . I saw it . . .

"Important, Le Vig, important! we're pulling out! . . ."

We really were . . . oh, very slowly . . .

"Do you hear, do you feel it, Le Vig?"

I want to convince him . . .

"The Marshal's coming with us . . ."

"A phony, I tell you! if he's a marshal, I'm a kangaroo!"

His impression . . .

"Say, Rostock-Ulm is quite a way!"

"Ulm? Ulm? do you believe in Ulm?"

You couldn't say we had much faith.



Faith or no faith, the train's started . . . without too much trouble . . . *choo! choo!* . . . this locomotive up ahead has got more zip than the one that's pushing us . . . the cars in the back are skidding . . . the three of us in there with Bébert, tangled up with these Baltic women, brats, and families, I don't think we were very popular . . . but we'd squeezed in all the same . . . into their magma of asses, tits, arms, and hair . . . so wedged and tangled they couldn't very well throw us out . . . I had at least three thighs and a foot around my neck . . . on my head . . . that car seemed to have more than it could take . . . you'd have expected it to split open and fall to pieces any minute . . . absolutely ripe . . . jolts and shivers . . . in a better situation I'd have taken a look to see if it was the tracks, the roadbed, or the wheels . . . even so she's moving along, shaking less than our Baltic caravan . . . up there, I've got to admit, we had a good laugh! . . . that leper fish train . . . wonder where it is now . . .

That's enough memories! . . . what's going on here and now? . . . the women are talking . . . really weird languages . . . I mean impossible to understand . . . even the simple words the mothers say to their kids . . . zero! . . . oh, I'd learn it all right if this trip went on awhile . . . gift for languages? the gift of pythons and hotel clerks . . . a language is like a chunk of meat . . . you wag your tail and circle around it, you're intimidated . . . then *zoom!* you dive in! you've got the heart of it! . . . by the rhythm! . . . well, anyway, the train's rolling along and we're in it . . . rolling? . . . well, in a way . . . it pretty near jumps the track . . . *bam!* . . . comes back down, settles into place, and rolls some more . . . a good time to think things over . . . wherever we'd shown our mugs for pretty near thirty years, in flaming cities, we'd been through dozens, half consumed or all ashes and islands of wreckage, from Constance practically in Switzerland to Flensburg up north, or in France, let's say Courbevoie or passage Choiseul or rue

Lepic, I've always had a pretty strong feeling that I never should have existed . . . even here in Meudon, though I'm infinitely discreet, nobody could be more polite, better behaved, obliging, they certainly make no secret of what they're thinking, first with petitions and town criers, louder and louder . . . no little murmurs . . . then with records and loudspeakers, all about me, all the details . . . ten times worse than Petiot, hyper-Landru, super-Bougrat,^o traitor with twenty-five masks, pornographer with a hundred organs . . . oh, it doesn't surprise me! . . . the same incredible situation in Copenhagen, the same in Montmartre, even in Zornhof, Prussia, or Honolulu tomorrow . . . especially having the crust to complain! and all the rest . . . his so-called enemies . . . noble souls . . . sublime heroes! *quos vult perdere!*^o (see pink pages).^o

But back to business! I'm diddling . . . our train! we were so compressed, squeezed, crushed, sandwiched . . . I was about to tell you . . . we were spilling all our liquids, urine, sweat, and blood . . . the car falls back on the tracks, but at every switch its only idea is to jump and somersault . . . even so, believe it or not, we're getting ahead . . . between two hips and three necks I see meadows and woods passing by . . . and a farm . . . another farm . . . ah, and some children playing . . .

Ulm is our terminus . . . via Leipzig, it seems . . . I'm not so sure . . . we'll see . . . maybe it's all a hoax . . . maybe they're going to lose us in the middle of a field . . . same as in Rostock . . . we can take a good deal . . . our temperament . . . I think we've proved it . . . I ask them, Lili and Le Vig . . . they agree . . . now we're on our own feet . . . verticalized by our neighbors' convulsions . . . or maybe the jolts of the car . . . been seeing trees for two hours now . . . the other people are griping, not us . . . the three of us and the cat aren't saying a thing . . . maybe we're more used to being pushed around, hunted in all directions . . . say, isn't this? . . . I couldn't believe it . . . a platform . . . LEIPZIG . . . in big red letters . . . fine! . . . we've slowed down . . . right! this is it! . . . but other signs . . . can't get out . . . *Verboten!* . . . and police all over . . . easy to see they were expecting us . . . ah, young ladies with pitchers . . . full. . . they pass them along, up to the windows . . . some windows! no panes . . . and the doors . . . it's bouillon! . . . could be some poison, some horrible brew, no, it seems to be all right! . . . the others are drinking . . . but the cups? . . . got to have cups . . . they've thought of everything! . . . whole loaves of bread . . . and more pitchers for the mothers and kids . . . milk! milk! *milch!* babies' bottles . . . first the bottles! . . . the whole car's drinking . . . the mothers faster than the babies . . . *glug! glug!* without nipples . . . another pitcher! . . . more girls come running,

"Red Cross" . . . bringing everything they can, slobgullion, jam, anything to make these Baltic mothers and children stop squealing . . . the whole car wants some! . . . *milch!* . . . *milch!* . . . the main thing is that nobody's tried to get out . . . nobody's jumped . . . they've respected the signs . . . *Austeigen verboten!*
Verboten!

Now the engines are puffing, I think! . . . right! . . . soot and more soot! . . . thick . . . we can't even see the platform, or the Red Cross girls, or the cops . . . we hold each other by the hands, the three of us . . . the train's started up, we can't see a thing . . . we'd have been separated by all those heaving bodies . . . the bodies are howling! the babies underneath . . . *wah!* *wah!* and the fathers and grandfathers! . . . every language . . . the train doesn't care . . . we're going fast . . . *choo!* . . . *choo!* . . . downhill, I think . . . gone quite a ways already . . . we're getting to be an express . . . between two legs at the window I think I can see the roadbed . . . not so much soot now . . . I think . . . but my eyes sting . . . ah, yes! trees . . . and cliffs . . . I remember now, Harras told me: you'll pass the Eifel Mountains . . . this must be it . . . Eifel or Taunus . . . anyway we're going downhill . . . or maybe some other mountains . . . Herz? we've certainly speeded up! . . . Eifel or Taunus . . . I understand a bit of what they're saying around me . . . Lithuanian women speaking German . . . these other women . . . what can they be? . . . Latvian? . . . Finnish? who cares, as long as we get there . . . and we don't suffocate in this tunnel . . . maybe that was the idea . . . nobody asked for our opinion . . . any more than on the Rostock-Berlin . . . what do they care if we're mummified and smoked? . . . like herrings . . . anyway, we're making time! . . . feels like coasting . . . the whole contraption shoots into a tunnel . . . like thunder! . . . another tunnel! talk about suffocation . . . all of a sudden the brakes! squeak! skid! *sssk!* . . . back . . . front . . . bumps, counterbumps . . . and more of the same! . . . but that's not all! . . . bombs! real bombs! . . . a whole load! . . . another! . . . they're attacking the end of our train! . . . lucky we're in the tunnel. . . they're too late! . . . boom! another load . . . maybe on the last cars? . . . wait till you come out, says the concerned reader! . . . exactly what Le Vig was thinking.

"Don't worry, son! we'll be far away!"

Trying to reassure him . . . Le Vig has his answer ready, but a blast of wind cuts him off . . . black air, more soot than air . . . and sends us flying over the families . . . and another blast . . . from the other end of the tunnel . . . now I get it! they're trying to stave in the tunnel! squash the whole mountain! . . . with their bombs! and get through to us, to our train! doesn't look so good, seems to me we're trapped . . . every time a load of rock falls we're lifted up and dashed

against the families . . . the cars are all shivering and shaking . . . some racket! . . . chains and parts of windows, and the howling and screaming . . . *zing*, the chains snap, they're dangling, scraping against the roadbed . . . showers of sparks! at last we can see the tunnel . . . rocks from end to end . . . thousands of them! . . . every bomb gives the train a push . . . from up top! . . . and a push back from down below! . . . *bam!* . . . regular Luna Park train! . . . but no laughs! . . . an accordion! ah, a bomb! *boom!* another! . . . they'll break through the rock! through the whole mountain and into the tunnel! . . . it looks like . . . they'll smash the train . . . little by little . . . the battering ram system . . . this train looked shatterproof . . . good solid construction . . . for two hours they'd been doing their damndest . . . I could hear the mothers imploring . . . gagging, vomiting soot and sulphur on their kids . . . I couldn't exactly see but I heard . . . even above the jangling metal . . . *boom!* and *wham!* . . . a few of the cars up front must have had it . . . all the passengers getting out! . . . orders: *verboden!* *verboden!* ha ha! . . . go fuck yourself! . . . only getting out faster! . . . coming our way . . . to our car! . . . oh yes! . . . all fours on the roadbed! . . . on their knees . . . every blast they turn somersaults and roll under the cars . . . you never saw that in the Métro . . . between "Rome" and "Saint-Lazare" I've seen . . . harmless alerts . . . even at Berlin Tiergarten, though there the crowds were half crazy . . . nothing compared to this tunnel all full of brats and Baltavians and suffocation . . . and total darkness, had you thought of that? from the entrance, I'm not exaggerating, all the way to the other end, the exit, tremendous hurricane blasts that made the rock up above us throb . . . a typhoon in the tunnel . . . I could see this was going to end in a smash . . . it must have happened in other places . . . the Herz? . . . the Taunus? . . . so I've been told . . . but I'm not satisfied with hearsay . . . if ever I finish this book, I think I'll go take a look, see for myself if they've leveled all those peaks . . . flattened those tourist knobs . . . filled in those entrances . . . and exits . . .

These things I'm telling you about sound funny in a way . . . this tunnel full of people flat on their faces . . . you couldn't move . . . the hurricane was blowing from end to end . . . such volleys of shrapnel, splinters, and stones that if you raised your head . . . *zing!* good-bye beezer!

The cars were "all metal" . . . really tall and wide, big hefty cars . . . but the wallops and counterwallops, the two-way squeezes they took . . . they were groaning . . . not just ours, the whole train from end to end, from the engine up front to the last baggage car . . . such crushers, you'd have expected her to give up the ghost, break in two, perish with all aboard . . . well, not at all! a tornado

from the other end, the whole train shivers *brrr*, and wham gets back on its feet! . . . and starts trembling again . . . in soot and sulphur . . . convulsions! . . . unbelievable . . . the whole train was like a piston . . . driving back and forth in the tunnel as the bombs went off . . . up top, down below . . . and this, I wasn't talking, but I was sure, was only a beginning! . . . ah, something new! . . . down at the end I see a river of flame . . . I know what that is . . . yellow! . . . phosphorus . . . I couldn't much see us getting out of there . . . which way? . . . the mothers there, flat on their faces in the crushed rock . . . realized after a while that crawling wasn't doing any good, that they'd have to get up and run . . . but where to? . . . through the river of flame? . . . no! . . . under the train to the other side! . . . the phosphorus wasn't flowing there . . . the other wall . . . but what they really wanted . . . was to beat it back to Leipzig! . . . they said so, they bellowed . . . an old man translated, told me what they were saying . . . in Leipzig they'd have everything they needed! . . . they'd seen! . . . everything! . . . everything in Leipzig! milk! . . . bouillon! . . . slobgullion! *Rote Kreuz!* . . . Red Cross! . . . go back there! anything but stay in this tunnel . . . or get back in the train . . . this train would be wiped out! nothing left when the R.A.F. got through! nobody'd escape! at the tunnel exit: *boom!* can't you hear? they'd burn it to the ground! mad scramble! still some bodies lying on the roadbed . . . too old, or maybe they've passed out . . . you won't catch me trying to check! ah, an officer! . . . crawling over the roadbed . . . between the tunnel wall and the train . . . there's a glow from the phosphorus . . . you can see pretty near to the other end . . . must be one of the officers that beat it in their pajamas, chased out of the car . . . with their Marshal von Lubb . . . he's got his epaulettes on again, pinned to his pajamas . . . he's spotted me, he speaks French . . . he knows who we are, even in the darkness and soot . . . I ask you! nobody could be more discreet than we are . . . even our cat Bébert is in his bag . . . he knows where we've come from . . . the Rostock-Berlin . . . the fish train . . . information . . . who which what . . . passes through floods, believe me, so detailed, so precise, you're flabbergasted . . . whatever the world's indiscretion can pin on you, no rhyme no reason, whatever label, you're defenseless . . . here in this tunnel, this phosphorus oven, plus the shrapnel at both ends, a flaming slaughterhouse from end to end, all ready for the three of us and Bébert . . . and now this busybody, this officer . . . in the middle of all this molten metal, rails and cars, and their Marshal von Lubb! . . . and the Baltic women and babies . . . gossip is right at home! nothing fazes it! peremptory! on the nakedest summits, Everest or Nevada . . . it'll be there before you are! whispering, snug as a bug . . . or in the heart of Vesuvius . .

. never fear! under myriatons of lava and rock and molten iron! Enough of my exaggerations! let's get back . . . to the tunnel!

A slaughterhouse, I said, for mothers and brats and grandfathers from all those ex-Baltic countries, sub-Pomeranian, Laponid, and still higher up . . . it's hard to believe, but the whole lot of them were blatting for all they were worth, and mostly about the three of us . . . who we were? . . . where we came from? . . . freaks . . . their own countries didn't exist any more, ours . . . France . . . didn't mean a thing to them . . . never heard of it . . . crawling along the tracks . . . they're asking each other . . . which goes to show that people take an interest in you, that they'll never leave you alone . . . even in the goddamnedest tunnels . . . I've shown you . . . gossip is at home all over, wherever you go, it creeps in somehow . . . and you'll find out all sorts of things about yourself and Bébert, make you start wondering if you're really . . . and now this officer who's spotted us, our names and all, in this underground bacchanalia . . . how does he know?

"Dr. Destouches! . . . am I right? . . . and your friend Le Vigan? and your cat Bébert? my humble respects, Madame!"

He talks French, dry and jerky, but clear . . .

"Let me introduce myself, Madame! I have the honor! . . . Captain Hoffmann of the Seventh Engineers . . . and the Marshal's staff . . . which reminds me, gentlemen, have you seen the Marshal? . . . you know, in the second tender . . . Marshal von Lubbe! . . ."

"No, Captain. No!"

"Everything's been upset, you see, everything! . . . he was on top of the coke . . . we've dug, all the officers and the engineers . . . he wasn't there . . . or under the coke . . . and the train has to get out of here! . . . the planes will be back . . . we know . . . this time with full bomb loads . . . phosphorus like up there . . . liquid phosphorus."

"Oh, certainly, Captain! you're right!"

"The tunnel will be submerged . . ."

"Obviously."

"The train has to get out of here!"

Yes, but . . .

"The mothers don't want to get back in, Captain . . . they're afraid!"

"So much the better!"

"Anything but this train! . . . they want to go back to Leipzig! on the tracks . . . on the roadbed . . . !"

"So much the better!"

"They had milk in Leipzig! they don't believe in this train any more! they

they had milk in Leipzig: they don't believe in this train any more: they don't believe in Ulm! . . ."

"Yes, of course . . . they can do as they please! but we're leaving! we only have ten minutes . . . look at your watch!"

He lights me up . . . his *torch* . . . I pretend to see . . .

"Oh yes, Captain!"

My watch has no more glass, no more hands . . .

"The men are working on the roadbed . . . take the planes twenty minutes to reload . . . maybe less!"

This Captain Hoffmann isn't kidding himself, he knows the score . . . fuck the mothers and families, let them go back to their Leipzig, their soup, sausages, and Red Cross! . . . in less than twenty minutes the whole place would be a torrent of phosphorus . . .

I ask him what time it is . . . my watch is broken!

"Five to six!"

"Morning or evening?"

"Evening! . . . you'll see! they'll light us up! . . . first . . . you know? . . ."

Did we know! . . . we'd had flares all over! . . . Montmartre! . . . Renault! . . . Bezons! . . . Berlin! pink . . . green . . . blue! there'll be flares at the end of the world! "We'll celebrate," I tell him . . . he's all for it . . .

"With magic lanterns! and fireworks!"

Not the gloomy type, this Captain Hoffmann . . . not unfriendly . . . no, not at all . . . I'd thought he was . . . easy to make a mistake . . . and the Marshal? his Marshal von Lubb? . . . he's stopped talking about him . . . I'm wondering . . . escaped from his tender? hightailing it back to Leipzig? . . . with the Baltavians or all alone? . . . we'll find out later . . . for the moment, if the train's really going to leave, we'd better get in . . . maybe the Marshal's car? why not ask? this Captain must be able to . . . I'm thinking about these women, so hell-bent for Leipzig . . . and I'd seen the reception they'd gotten . . . forbidden to leave the train, *verboten!* . . . that's the kind of welcome they'd had! never mind! they wanted to try again! well, in a way we're in luck! . . . the train isn't shaking any more, jumping the track, acting up . . . all aboard! . . . if we get thrown out of one car, we'll try another . . . our captain of engineers seems to be looking for the Marshal . . . questioning the families, the people that weren't able to crawl under the train . . . and head for Leipzig on the other side . . . they haven't seen a thing, how could they, flat on their faces on the roadbed?! . . . ah, the sign from the car! . . . O.K.W. . . it's been found! . . . and the plaque with the eagle . . . did the Captain have them under his coat? . . . no! . . . the families picked them up

between the tracks . . . the Captain hooks them back onto the car . . . he asks questions . . . he gets answers . . . but nothing anybody can understand . . . mumbo-jumbo . . . Russian, I think . . . must be . . . they're lying down, they don't get up . . . Captain Hoffmann hasn't found von Lubbe . . . has he really tried? . . . I'm not so sure . . . he looks in all directions . . . seems to be . . . but he doesn't see us . . . a step, two steps, and here we are! . . . we're in the corridor . . . the whole car's full of glass . . . sharper and meaner than the stones of the roadbed . . . a fakir job! . . . but very slowly, *crunch crunch* . . . we make it. . . say, I know this pad! . . . the Marshal's drawing room . . . empty . . . not a soul! . . . oh yes! on the middle sofa a baby . . . all bundled up . . . about a month old . . . he's not crying . . . one of the mothers put him there . . . I go in and look . . . this kid . . . he's not sick, he's not in pain . . . a healthy infant . . . now what? where's Captain Hoffmann? I call him . . . he comes . . . he was behind us . . .

"Look! . . . but there's no milk . . . no bottle . . ."

I explain . . . is he in command? . . . seems to be . . . I don't see anybody else . . . no time for hesitation . . . if we take the kid, we've got to have milk . . .

"Can he make it to Fürth?"

"How long?"

"Forty miles . . . two hours . . . an hour and a half . . . they've got everything in Fürth! . . . okay?"

"I think so . . . an hour and a half . . ."

All of a sudden he lights us up . . . with his *torch* . . . a very powerful *torch* . . . he takes a good look at us . . . he inspects us, kind of . . . first time he's really looked at us . . . and the first time we'd inspected him . . . are we filthy! . . . all four of us! . . . grimy black! really comical . . . but no time to laugh . . . the planes'd be back, what he'd said, with full loads . . . in ten twelve minutes . . . I ask him again . . .

"Definitely!"

Maybe if this infant didn't have to be entertained till we got to Fürth, he'd make us get out . . . now we're here, we'll stay . . . I've told you this captain spoke French . . . he fills us in, he knows where we are, he's got a map . . . the stretch outside the tunnel, at the exit, hasn't been hit too bad . . . so he says . . . which meant we, the train I mean, could put on steam right away . . . twenty twenty-five m.p.h., as soon as we got out . . . they were filling in the roadbed right now . . . perfect! . . . the three of us settle down with the baby on the Marshal's couch . . . "*kitchie coo!*" that was our job . . . the kid doesn't laugh . . . but he isn't yelling either . . . we haven't anything to change him with . . . he

needs it . . . ah, the rest of the officers . . . one by one . . . *crunch crunch* on the glass . . . back to their compartments . . . they believe in Ulm, all they want is for the train to start . . . seeing us in the Marshal's compartment . . . doesn't surprise them, not very much . . . they ask us about the baby . . . is it ours? . . . no! . . . they make up to him . . . "*kitchie coo!*" baby talk knows no country . . . anything goes . . . most of these officers are family men . . . they show us photographs . . . their wives . . . their children . . . nice respectable staff officers . . . I won't ask them any questions . . . where they're from? . . . they'll tell me after a while . . . anyway, I recognize all branches of service, artillery, air force, quartermaster . . . I bet they speak French . . . but right now they don't feel like it . . . or don't dare . . . our captain of engineers dares . . . guess he has permission . . . nobody seems to be missing, they've all come back . . . the whole staff . . . the Marshal? . . . nobody says a word . . . did he fall off the tender? . . . he was sitting on top of the coke . . . not a word out of us! we've been to school! . . . silence is the thing! and getting this train started! . . . *choo! choo!* by golly, we're off! . . . well, pretty near . . . they're trying . . . front . . . and rear . . . there she goes for real! . . .

"Say, aren't we moving?"

"We're out of the tunnel . . ."

"Bravo, Captain!"

I'm not going to start looking doubtful.

"Bravo! . . . bravo! . . ."

It seems they've repaired the roadbed and the planes haven't come back . . .

"They'll be here in five minutes . . ."

He must know.

"We'll be far away!"

I say it good and loud . . . I want them to hear me! as long as it's the O.K.W. car . . . and we're in it! the least we can do is show morale! . . . the baby in between us is laughing . . . anyway trying to . . . good-natured kid, healthy, not a bawler . . . he laughs at our "*kitchie coos*" . . . but what really sends him is when the train starts to move . . . no diapers or towels, no use undressing him . . . what do you know! Lili's rummaging . . . she finds three shirts under a cushion . . . wonder who they belong to? . . . anyway, we're going to change him . . . "*kitchie coo!*" . . . this Captain Hoffmann knows his stuff, if the train isn't blown up we'll be in Fürth about noon . . . forty miles . . . oh, he guarantees nothing! . . . the R.A.F. patrols must have seen us coming out of the tunnel, with our two puffing locomotives front and back, volcanoes of soot . . . if they don't blast us, it means they're not interested! the worst part for us isn't the darkness but the smarting in

the eyes and not being able to tell through the window holes whether it's mountains or what . . . at least we're out of the tunnel . . . there must be country outside . . . ah, a bridge! . . . I think . . . the others are just as blind as I am, I mean Lili and Le Vig . . . rubbing their eyes, that makes them worse . . . the Captain has put on his special glasses, gas equipment, he'd known what to expect . . . I ask him . . .

"Was that tunnel long?"

"Two thousand and twelve feet . . ."

"You've got doctors in Fürth?"

"Anything you want in Fürth . . . but first we've got to get there . . ."

"Of course! . . . Of course!"

The tracks seem to be in good shape . . . I suppose the *Marauders* or whatever they are have other fish . . . you can hear them up there, way up . . . we're going downhill . . . pretty fast, I think . . . very fast for us, this train I mean . . . I'm wondering about those Baltavian women and kids hiking back to Leipzig . . .

"You think they're there by now?"

"No!"

Categoric! . . . we're still rolling . . . but slowing down . . . a platform . . . it's Fürth . . . buried in soot! the brakes! . . . a sign . . . sure enough! . . . this station hasn't been hit . . . I don't think . . . *Wartesaal* . . . waiting room . . . I'm blinking pretty bad, but I see it! I'm sure . . . I ask the others, they see it too . . . ah, nurses! . . . right there . . . the minute we stop . . . Captain Hoffmann wants service! . . .

"*Schnell! Schnell!*"

Our pollywog . . . on the sofa! . . . Lili picks him up and hands him to me . . . and I pass him on to a deaconess . . . must be . . . you know, one of their Protestant nuns . . . Leipzig must have notified them . . . and here they are! . . . they wrap him up and take him away! . . . another good sign! . . . a whole pile of sandwiches! for us . . . bottles of beer! . . . like a pilgrimage to Chartres . . . or Lourdes . . . well, not exactly, but something like . . . Salvation! . . . everything we need! you couldn't call it anything else! . . . salvation for the coke engines and the O.K.W. staff!

"Doctor!"

The Captain wants a word with me . . . in private! . . . I follow him . . . we wade through the broken glass . . . the corridor . . . next car . . . and then another . . . here we are, the compartment he was looking for . . . empty . . .

"Something to tell you, Doctor! . . . my comrades . . . the other officers wanted to throw you out, you and your friend the actor . . ."

wanted to throw you out, you and your merry men! . . .

"I understand, Captain . . . I'm very grateful to you . . ."

He wasn't telling me anything new . . . being a leper has its good side, you don't have to be polite to anybody, wherever you show yourself they throw you out, which suits you fine! . . . I'd seen the lepers in Rostock, how happy they were to be yanked out of their snow piles and sent . . . step lively now! . . . to other snow piles!

"Captain Hoffmann, I'm very grateful to you . . ."

"Yes, but . . . now I have a favor to ask you . . . in return . . ."

"Why, of course! . . . only too glad!"

"Splendid! . . . we, the whole staff, you see . . . we'll be getting out at Augsburg . . . two armies for the Ukraine . . . being reorganized in Augsburg . . . didn't you know?"

"No, Captain! certainly not!"

"The three of you and your cat will take the Ulm train . . . immediately! . . . sonderzug . . . understand? the one the Baltavians were supposed to take . . . you'll have plenty of room! . . . four cars! . . . empty! Augsburg hasn't been destroyed yet . . . listen carefully now! . . . about an hour to Ulm . . . you'll arrive in time for the funeral . . ."

"Ah?"

"A military funeral! . . . General Rommel . . . of no interest to you . . ."

Rommel? . . . never heard of him!

". . . but somebody'll be there . . . pay close attention . . . a name I must ask you to remember . . . Marshal Rundstedt! . . . don't write it down, just remember it . . . Marshal Rundstedt! . . . and one more name: Lemmelrich . . . he's only a captain . . . a captain like me . . . he's on Rundstedt's staff . . . you'll remember? . . . Lemmelrich? . . . I can count on you? . . ."

"Oh, certainly, Captain!"

"Well, then . . . you'll find Lemmelrich . . . you'll recognize him . . . it's easy in church . . . a captain . . . my type . . . tall, lean, gray . . . just one sentence . . . 'your daughter in Berlin is better' . . . that's all . . . he won't answer . . . you'll say it in French: 'your daughter in Berlin is better' . . . he'll understand . . ."

I wasn't going to show surprise . . . but even so . . . time to think it over . . . sitting there . . . he must have been watching me . . . the train was moving along just about normally . . . except that even out of the tunnel the whole car is so deep in soot . . . every window . . . that you'd better not try to look out . . . him with his special glasses, nothing to worry about . . .

Hey! . . . we're here . . . the train stops . . . the station . . . Ulm! . . . signs . . .

we can get out . . . nobody stops us . . . no police . . . we climb out of the cloud, the soot . . . this station is all in one piece . . . or seems to be, we'll see . . . chance to sit down and rest . . . rest? all we've been doing since Rostock . . . but not exactly easy in our minds . . . shunted from leper colony to fireworks to unbreathable tunnel . . . but now we're on the platform . . . we cross the waiting room . . . here's the peristyle, a bench, even a hundred percent fagged out this bench feels pretty good . . . Le Vig's sulking, I can see that . . . me and the Captain shutting ourselves up at the other end of the corridor . . . he hadn't liked that . . . the way he was looking at the sky . . . he was browned off! . . . really beautiful weather, lovely May morning . . . I'd better cheer him up, no good his moping like that . . .

"This avenue is magnificent, do you know why? . . . it's magnificent because there's nobody in sight . . . put in people, it'll stink . . . as soon as people come around . . . not because of anything they do, just because they're there . . . makes you sick to look . . . takes death to clean it up . . ."

Usually he liked that kind of applesauce, vistas, pseudo-profundities . . . lines for a melancholy Scandinavian . . . a dime-store Hamlet . . .

But this time, no soap!

"You pleased with yourself?"

The only effect . . .

I forgot to describe the scene for you, I must have lost some pages, I'd put it all down . . . we weren't in the station proper . . . but on the peristyle, at the head of the stairs . . . from there we can see the whole avenue, as wide as the Champs-Élysées, bordered by sumptuous trees . . . the air was certainly pure in Ulm . . . no factories, no cars . . . and nobody around, neither in the station nor on the sidewalks, not a soul I . . . buildings on both sides, but empty, it looked like . . . ah yes! . . . somebody! not at the windows, right next to us! sitting there . . . this creep must have heard us . . . an old-timer with a goatee . . . who is he? I dive in .

..

"Guten tag!"

I can't claim that he answered me . . . he grunts . . . I try again . . .

"Es geht? you doing all right?"

"Nein! no!"

Off to a bad start . . . no use describing my costume, but him . . . some kind of uniform . . . army? . . . police? . . . funny-looking outfit, never seen it before, though I've seen all sorts . . . every possible insignia . . . since Baden-Baden . . . and Moors-burg . . . I'd better ask him . . . He answers . . .

"*Feuermann!* . . . fireman . . . *Hauptmann* . . . captain! . . ."

Another captain . . . this fire captain only talks Kraut . . . not a word of French! . . . must have come up from the ranks . . . the ones who've been around some, who've been to some kind of school, even something like our Saint-Maixent, want only one thing: to be at home in Paris, voluble, conversative, blabative, with a bevy of midinettes spellbound at their feet, fireside with the big names and nameses . . . stage and screen . . . and socialites . . . ah, Sainte-Catherine!" ah, the magazine section! . . . Stalingrad? not bad! but wined and dined by the N.R.F.? they'll swoon! our love to Gaston! choir boy at Mauriac's mass, black . . . now you're cooking with gas! but this character with the goatee! Enough idle talk . . . got to find out where he's out of . . . I ask him.

"I'm too old, I don't remember . . . but you? where are you from?"

This old-timer claims all the privilege.

"I'm a doctor, my friend here is an actor . . ."

Ah, a doctor, now he's interested . . . a real doctor? . . . he doubts me . . . he wants proof . . . no problem! . . . in one of my sixteen wallets . . . all you want! . . . and official! . . . four five layers of pockets . . . proofs! . . . and in German! from their ministry . . . *Erlaubnis!* I had quite a struggle . . . here! . . . he takes out his glasses . . . he looks at me . . . he reads . . .

"That's you? . . ."

"Who else would it be?"

This skeptical fire captain is getting on my nerves!

Well . . . in that case he wants me to examine him! just like that, he demands it! . . . and palpate his abdomen! . . . certainly! . . . but where? . . . not here on the steps! . . . he's got a place he knows! . . . up in the station! . . . now where's he taking us? . . . he shows me . . . a window . . . he stands up . . . well, almost . . . not all the way, only half . . . with grimaces . . . we try to help him . . . he refuses, he wants to climb up on his own . . . I offer him my cane . . . both my canes! *no!* now we can see his fireman's uniform . . . he sits down again . . . I get it, he's going to climb on all fours, one step at a time . . . that window is on the third floor, at least . . . one step at a time, we won't be there in a hurry! . . . gives him time to fill us in . . . now he's willing . . . not so suspicious any more . . .

"They call me Siegfried . . . *Hauptmann* Siegfried . . . that's not my name, it's the name they gave me! . . . seems they had to . . . we all changed our names . . ."

How about the uniform? . . . is it his? . . . no, it's not his either! . . . his was burned in Pforzheim . . . how come? . . . because they went there, the whole Ulm fire department, all the engines . . . during the last bombardment . . . mines and

the department, all the engines . . . during the last bombardment . . . mines and phosphorus . . . the usual doses . . . two weeks ago . . . and to Frankfurt on Christmas Day, same story, the whole fire department . . . then Stuttgart, two weeks ago . . .

"We had six engines . . . a hundred and ten men on active duty! . . . and now, only five! . . . five firemen! *und noch! und noch!* . . . and still! one engine, just one! . . . all five at home, *feuermannen* . . . *verstehen sie?* . . . do you understand? . . . firemen? home in bed . . . burns! . . . me, the engine, the one and only, all by myself!"

We stop . . . sittee downee! . . . third floor? . . . still a long way off! I count . . . fifty steps at least! . . . he wants to take that stairway, he points to the sign, "*Privat*" . . . inside . . . I look him over . . . what's wrong with him? . . . rheumatism? . . . tabes? . . . he's taking us to the stationmaster's office . . . on the third floor . . . one step at a time . . . slow but sure . . . we'll be pals by the time we get there . . .

"They call me Siegfried . . . *Hauptmann* Siegfried . . . that's not my name . . . it's the name they gaye me . . . seems they had to change our names . . . on account of spies . . . the others changed their names too . . ." What about the uniform? Not his either! . . . his was burned in Pforzheim . . . the whole Ulm fire department was in Pforzheim . . . yes! yes! I knew it! . . . and in Frankfurt on Christmas Day . . . I knew that too . . . and in Stuttgart . . . he stands up with his helmet in his hand . . .

"Why did you change your name?"

"I didn't! . . . the authorities! I've told you! and the spies! . . . they had to . . . and captain right away! . . . one day: sergeant! . . . ten years a sergeant! . . . next day: captain! right away! wasn't that quick? . . . no more lieutenants! . . . no more captains! . . . all dead, all burned! . . . Pforzheim! . . . Frankfurt! . . . Captain Siegfried! . . . you understand?"

This fire department had no more officers . . . their headache! . . . no more men, no more engines . . . but he was still doing his best . . . he's older than he says . . . come to think of it, he hasn't told me his age . . . only mumbled some number . . . he must be more than seventy . . . pale as a ghost, sagging cheeks . . . I'll get a better look at him upstairs, seeing he wants me to check his abdomen . . . ah, here we are! the door . . . on the landing . . . a breather! . . . I'm thinking about that captain of engineers . . . his message for Lemmelrich . . . me whispering in his ear that his daughter and so forth! and so on! you won't catch me whispering anything in Lemmelrich's ear any more than I would in the Pope's! anybody that doesn't keep his mouth shut, all times, places, and

circumstances, is a ham, a jerk, a deputy, a cop, something to keep away from . . . okay! . . . this door now! . . . I knock, Siegfried doesn't move . . . somebody opens . . . not the Stationmaster, a woman . . . in a cap, she must be filling in for her husband, a raspberry-colored cap, she's the stationmistress . . . very friendly, about forty . . . must be her husband's cap, the visor hides her nose . . . the cap covers her ears, you can hardly see her chin . . . *guten tag! guten tag!* a talker, and so glad to see us! . . . and trusting! she tells us the whole story . . . her husband's at the Russian front. . . she's taking his place . . . her children are here, under the bed, three of them . . . she calls them . . . they answer . . . not very loud . . . three little voices . . . already very cautious and well behaved . . . I ask her: two girls and a boy . . . three, five, and six . . . they've got to stay where they are! they mustn't be seen, either in the station or on the street, they'd be picked up . . . probably wouldn't be returned to their mother until after the victory . . . it had happened to other children right here in Ulm, when the Führer had come to town for the big East-West Staff Conference . . . a raid! they'd even picked up members of the *Hitler Jugend!* . . . so obviously these kids under the bed couldn't show themselves . . . not at their age! . . . "*Kindern schweigen!* children, keep still!" . . . our joker Captain Siegfried wasn't wasting his time, he's having trouble with his pants . . . they won't come off . . . they're period pants with an under-strap . . . ah, he's made it! Christ, is he skinny! . . . he puts his helmet back on . . . he goes to the window just like that, mother-naked in his helmet. . . he's got an idea . . .

"Hilda, do you see the steeple?"

"*Ja Krist! sicher Krist!* . . . of course, Krist!"

"Should I jump out?"

"*Nein, Krist! . . . nein!*"

She answers very calmly, I guess she's used to it . . . are they living together up here? . . . possible . . . it's not exactly luxurious . . . something like the Zenith . . . about as comfortable, but not so many holes and crevices . . . same dangling wallpaper . . . the place has been shaken . . . all of a sudden Siegfried starts putting his pants back on . . . he turns around and says to Hilda.

"Hilda! . . . Hilda! . . . this slowpoke asked me my age! . . ."

I'm the slowpoke . . .

She motions me not to answer . . . that it's his head! . . . his head! . . . she slips her finger under her cap, her enormous raspberry dip . . . that's where his trouble is! . . . of course! of course!

"Come and look! . . . come and look, you bad boy!"

I'm the bad boy . . . his Hilda motions : go ahead! . . . no time to antagonize

I'm the bad boy . . . his Hilda motions . go ahead: . . . no time to antagonize him . . .

"Far! . . . far! . . . over there! . . . the steeple?"

"Yes! . . . yes! . . . right you are!"

Fact! . . . at the other end of the avenue . . .

"It's five hundred and thirty-one feet high! . . . understand? the firemen's carnival! *Sedantag!* me up there! . . . way up on top! . . . first! . . . eleven times first! up top!"

I don't quite get it . . . Hilda explains . . . "Sedan Day," their "firemen's carnival" . . . a rope-climbing contest . . . and he'd been first! he, Siegfried, eleven times winner! . . . But she didn't know what year, neither did he . . . his rope-climbing days were over . . . she didn't have to signal me not to contradict him . . . hell no! what if he jumped out the window? . . . why not? . . . since he was already half naked, he'd better just finish the job and let me examine him . . . he'd asked me . . . all of a sudden he's willing, perfectly reasonable . . . Hilda doesn't embarrass him, he even lets her help him . . . his black coat and his helmet on a chair . . . he lies down on the big bed . . . a big bed without a mattress or sheets . . . just the spring and a pile of something on top, rags . . . filthy, greasy . . . they must have been used for wiping machines and lamps . . . before the war . . . I go over to examine him . . . he stops me . . .

"Do you think if I jump out the window I'll break something? . . . in two? . . . in three?"

She motions me not to answer . . . no intention . . . I see him there all naked, really all skin and bones . . . built like an ambadress . . . a naked ambadress, first thing in the morning . . . as amyotrophic as they come . . . with him of course it's age and short rations . . . his abdomen? . . . I palpate . . . I palpate some more . . . nothing! cadaverous but normal . . . the heart? . . . a slight murmur . . . aortic? . . . the lungs? . . . emphysema? . . . maybe . . . mouth? . . . only three stumps left . . . doesn't seem to bother him . . . ears? . . . eyes? . . . nothing to examine them with . . . blood pressure? no Pachon!° . . . I feel his pulse . . . very tense . . . same at the temples . . . makes me think of the Hôtel-Dieu in Rennes . . . old man Follet "at the bedside" . . . the ritual . . . the hospital . . . and old Leduc from Nantes . . . funny memories come to you sometimes . . . funny and not so funny, you can take your pick . . . moments like that when you reach a certain age, you get indulgent, once you admit that you're old . . . the stationmistress there, she's thinking too . . . or asleep on her feet? . . . no! the snoring is the kids . . . she signals me: don't make any noise! . . . hell, why would I want to? . . . all I want is to get out of there . . . the police'll be here any minute

. . . what kind? . . . Kraut, Russian, Angliche? . . . maybe two together! . . . I want to talk to Lili. . . not to Le Vig! . . . not a word to Le Vig! . . . I ask Siegfried, very gently . . .

"Dann? . . . Dann? now what? go back down? . . . *hinabsteigen?*"

He should get dressed . . . and Mrs. Raspberry Cap should help him . . . I'm waiting . . . she asks me what's wrong with him . . .

"Nothing! . . . he's old, that's all . . . perfectly normal . . ."

I'm sick of being questioned . . . oh, she agrees that it's normal . . . and that we'd better get out of there . . . she helps him on with his shirt and drawers . . . now his pants . . . and his coat . . . and his helmet . . . a good thing about filth . . . dust and grime . . . is that you stop noticing . . . your eyes get used to it . . . best people, cream of the cream . . . "where shall we go for the summer, my dear?" hey! I'd forgotten! . . . his reflexes! . . . no hammer, but I can manage with my fingers . . . I make him sit down . . . it won't take long . . . the elbows? . . . pretty near normal . . . a little flabby . . . now the knees . . . left knee, not bad! but the right knee? . . . next to nothing . . . he watches me, he thinks I'm funny . . . he's got something to say . . . he squeaks, he laughs, I mean . . . well, he giggles.

"That's what they did to me in Mannheim!"

Now he's ready to go down . . . Skeezix is impatient . . . he takes my arm . . . one step . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . a breather! . . . like on the way up . . . no faster . . . what's he got to tell me? . . . he's thinking . . .

"That woman still adores me, I think . . ."

"What woman?"

"Hilda up there!"

"Definitely!"

"She'll adore you too . . ."

"Not yet! . . . not yet! . . ."

Okay! . . . another four steps . . . sittee downee . . .

"Now, Doctor, listen! I've still got my wits about me, I can feel it . . . but not for long . . . they're slipping . . . oh, I know myself! . . ."

That's what makes him laugh . . . if you can call it laughing . . . the ideas rattling around . . . coming and going . . . in his head! . . .

"I won't go to the funeral! . . . no! . . . no! . . ."

"What funeral?"

"At the cathedral . . . down there at the end . . . the steeple, I showed you! . . . five hundred and thirty-one feet . . . hee! hee! . . . no, Doctor, no!"

"Whose funeral?"

"Dammell! . . . General Dammell!"

Rommel: . . . General Rommel:

I'd heard of him . . . from Harras, I think . . . Rommel . . .

"Why not?"

"A traitor! . . . I won't go! you'll go! . . . Rommel, *Afrika Korps!* . . . and look, the people that live on the avenue, look! look! . . . all the tenants . . . they won't be there either!"

"Why, Captain Siegfried?"

"The tenants are all in the woods! . . . the whole avenue! . . . the S.A. took them all away! they'll never come back! . . . never! *nimmer! nimmer!*"

He crosses out the air with his finger . . . *nimmer! nimmer!*

Eight steps this time . . . another eight! . . . now something's worrying him! . . . he takes his head in his hands, he's thinking . . .

"Doctor, I confess! . . . that woman's adored me for twenty years . . . but her children aren't by me! oh no! ah no! . . . by her husband in the east! . . . *Gott sei danke!* Thank God! . . . her children!"

That relieves him . . . another breather . . . Le Vig and Lili have been wondering what's become of us . . . there they are, they haven't budged . . . haven't seen a soul . . . neither in the station nor on the avenue . . . talk about vacuums . . . I ask my nut . . .

"Do you believe in Rundstedt?"

"*Ach ja!* . . . he's on his way, he'll be in Ulm before nightfall . . . he'll be coming down this avenue, here in front of us! . . . hee! hee! . . . I don't want to see him!"

Why? a very good reason . . . he, the supreme fireman and captain, promoted for that very purpose, would have to do the whole avenue with his fire engine! . . . orders! . . . not expressly him, but his brigade! . . . but where was his brigade? . . . since the bombing of Frankfurt, where it had lost three engines and a hundred and twenty-five men, dead, wounded, burned, and the rest crippled, home in bed, finished, there was nobody left but him, Siegfried, to parade the engine, the whole length of this avenue from the station to the cathedral . . . I wasn't going to give him any advice! . . . his story isn't impossible . . . it even makes some sense, but I don't trust him . . . I'm beginning to know him . . .

"I don't want to put out any more fires! no more! . . . nothing!"

He's made up his mind!

"*Verstehen sie?* . . . do you understand? *rechts!*"

"Captain Siegfried, you're right! a thousand times right!"

Somebody behind us . . . I thought so . . . Hilda! . . . she's come down . . . with the fire extinguisher . . . her cap, her raspberry cap pulled so far down that

the visor's touching her nose . . . she sails right in . . .

"Wilhelm, you must! . . . you must!"

She wants me to tell him too . . . that he must!

"Er must! Er must!"

He doesn't agree that he must!

"Mein arschloch! My asshole!"

And he spits! . . . and spits some more! . . . long distance . . . sitting there . . . stubborn as a mule . . . Hilda gets good and mad . . . she calls us to witness . . . Lui, Le Vig, and me! . . . we can see for ourselves! . . . that this Siegfried is the lousiest rotten lunatic in the world . . . he should try and deny it! . . . that he's the laziest, drunkenest fireman that ever lived and the biggest liar! . . . he's pissed off because he can't find anything to drink! . . . because it's all gone! because his brigade have drunk it all up! . . . but he's the worst of the lot! . . . the biggest funnel! . . . and they didn't find any in Pforzheim! . . . nothing! not a drop! schnaps! or in Frankfurt either! all Frankfurt! a sea of flames! two hundred thousand women and children in the cellars! . . . all burned . . . but he . . . Siegfried . . . wanted schnaps . . . all he was looking for in Frankfurt! . . . the monster! . . . Siegfried the monster's sitting there all huddled up, turning his back on us . . . he wants to spit, but he can't any more . . . it hurts him to try . . . he's gone dry . . . Hilda's chewing him out doesn't bother him . . . nobody there but us . . . we don't count . . . the whole avenue as far as the steeple, nobody . . . no dogs, no cats . . . oh! mistake! . . . Bébert! . . . Lili's let him out of his bag . . . he's washing . . . his ears, his paws one by one, very carefully . . . Bébert's no sloven, soon as he gets out he takes advantage . . . take more than Hilda with her raspberry cap and her screeching to faze him! . . . when he's finished tidying up, Bébert folds back his paws, curls up his tail till it's just right, and looks into the distance . . . not at us . . . dignified, I'd call it . . . the stationmistress isn't dignified at all . . . she doesn't care . . . she's too mad at her Siegfried! . . . I say "her" . . . I wouldn't know . . . but they seem kind of intimate . . . shriveled up on his bench, all he wants is not to move!

"But the extinguisher? What about the extinguisher?"

She's talking to us! . . .

"Hey, you! you don't know a thing! . . . the police'll be here any minute!"

They'd already been there! she tells us about it . . . and they'd be back . . . to her pad! . . . and take her three children away!

"My children! . . . the bastards!"

She means the police!

"I'll tell them the whole story!"

I'll tell them the whole story:

I see this is getting complicated . . . bad blood between them . . .

"You don't know! . . . I'll tell you! . . . it's true! . . . it's all true! . . . this drunken bum, they made him a captain because they had nobody else on the engines! . . . nobody! . . . for Marshal Rundstedt . . . when he passes the fire department in review! . . . nobody! they're all sick in bed! except him, the drunken bum! Schmidt! . . . *ja! ja!* he's got to go! . . . on all fours! Siegfried! that's the way it is! Captain Siegfried! you understand?"

The drunken bum grunts . . . hey! . . . he's going to fight back . . . no, I guess not!

"Hauptmann Schmidt!"

I tap him on the shoulder . . .

"*Ja! . . . ja! . . .*"

"Your orders?"

He's thinking it over . . . now we're getting somewhere.

"*Sie! sie!* . . . you take the extinguisher! *apparat!*"

His decision! . . . he wants us to take the extinguisher!

"You! . . . extinguisher and arm band! . . ."

Hilda explains . . . he wants us to march up the avenue . . . very slowly . . . one step at a time . . . keeping our eyes open . . . as far as the cathedral . . . the steeple up there . . . with the fire extinguisher! . . . both sidewalks! . . . and the gutters . . . on the lookout for "fragments" . . . fragments? . . . she explains . . . incendiary fragments . . . from where? the air, the planes . . . and then what? . . . douse them quick! . . . a squirt! . . . Hilda knew how . . . but she wouldn't go . . . what could I do with my two canes? . . . I'm looking at this extinguisher . . . a tank in a knapsack . . . with a nozzle on the end . . . looks pretty heavy to me. Le Vig? . . . he's willing . . . chance for a stroll . . . we'll go too, Lili and me, give him a hand . . .

"*Sicher! sicher!* certainly!"

It's all right with Siegfried, as long as he can sit on his ass . . . oh, but the arm band! . . . here you are! . . . Hilda's got half a dozen . . . but only one for the "extinguisher" . . . Le Vig? . . . me? . . . naturally Le Vig! . . . their Ulm "passive defense" arm band has an owl on it . . . an owl's head . . . Le Vig slips it on and fastens it . . . he takes the *apparat* . . . he wants to look at himself . . . with his equipment . . . hand him a laugh! . . . but there's no mirror . . .

"You look perfect, son!"

"You won't leave me?"

"You crazy? Think we'd let you escape?"

I'm beginning to get used to their little Kraut tricks . . . something fishy! . . . this Hilda . . . all of a sudden she's not the same . . . I can see it, I'm sure . . . not just an impression . . . she lifts up her visor with her finger . . . I can see one eye . . . say! . . . that's a black eye . . . she been fighting? . . . with fire pump Skeeze here? . . . with the cops . . . or somebody? . . . I'm certainly not going to ask her . . . anyway, she's friendlier all of a sudden . . . she helps Le Vig adjust his extinguisher, the belt, the straps . . . she's no spring chicken, but not old . . . a slight moustache, dykish . . . she'd better be with her job, the whole station to look after, your wilting lily couldn't take it . . .

Siegfried's talking, that's new too . . . instructions! . . . about the avenue . . .

"If you see any fragments . . . *plaketten!* . . . put them out! . . . like this! . . . one squirt! . . . the extinguisher! . . . *zzzz!* . . . foam! . . ."

We're all set to put out Vesuvius! . . . our lounge lizard could stay right here . . . but these fragments? where were they? . . . Hilda must know . . . I ask her . . .

"*Wo die plaketten?*"

"All over the avenue! . . . incendiary fragments!"

"Have you seen any?"

"No! . . . not here! . . . neither has he! but in Frankfurt . . . Pforzheim . . . falling like rain! so today! here! naturally! . . . with the funeral. . . the Marshal!"

"What marshal?"

"Rundstedt . . . I told you . . . up the avenue . . . before nightfall . . ."

All right with me . . . but what about armbands? . . . we haven't any arm bands . . . hey! of course! mine from Bezons, from the "Passive Defense" . . . I've got it on . . . forgotten to take it off, but it's all black, soot and grease . . . I'd better give it a rinse . . . no! . . . Hilda has an idea . . .

"You can be a blind man, you and your canes!"

She shows me . . . Le Vig would take one arm . . . Lili the other . . . Bébert would follow us, he's used to it, better than staying in his bag . . . there's nobody on this avenue, if he sees anybody coming, he'll jump up on my shoulder, one jump . . . he knows . . . he's an experienced traveler! . . .

He sure was . . . he made it back here to Meudon, he's buried out there in the garden . . .

Looks like we'll be marching up this avenue . . . arm in arm, me playing blind . . . this Hilda is full of ideas . . . all Siegfried wants is to be left alone . . . for us to go looking for fragments! not him! . . . Bébert will follow us, I'm not worried about that . . . his bag'll be empty . . . but what about food? . . . not that we're hungry, but you got to have food! two loaves of bread and some margarine

... coupons? ... Hilda? ... *ja! ja!* she's willing! ... sure thing! ... she goes upstairs and gets us everything we need ... it all goes into the musette bag ... Bebert'll follow us ... we're ready to go!

"Good-bye, madame! good-bye, Captain!"

And off we go ... one step ... two steps ... I'm a pretty good blind man, I think ... I ought to have glasses ... available in Ulm? ... not at all sure ...

"Anybody at the windows?"

I ask ... no, they don't see a soul ... we've gone about a hundred yards ... doing all right, I think ...

"Seen any fragments?"

I'm not looking ... his job ... in the gutters ...

"Fuck their fragments! ... they can stick 'em up their ass!"

He's thinking out loud ... too loud ...

"Easy does it, Le Vig!"

"Do *they* go easy!?"

That starts me thinking ... I sit down! ... a bench ... curses!

"Lili, I don't know ... I'm not feeling so good ..."

"Le Vig can go on by himself ... we'll find you ... okay?"

"Sure! ... sure! ... good idea!"

It's all right with him, he's got the fidgets ...

"Don't you worry! ... we'll find you ... you know, by the cathedral, the steeple ... if you don't see us, just come back ... we'll be here ... but look hard! every corner! don't forget! ... you've got the extinguisher! ssss!"

We're laughing, all three of us, Bébert looks at us, he's serious ... he doesn't budge, he stays with us, he's made his choice ... he needs a rest too ... he's not so young ... besides, I need time out to think ... all the stuff they've told me to do ... the nerve of them! ... especially that captain of engineers ... his name? ... I've forgotten ... no loss! ... damn it all! in the first place why can't they go looking for that jerk themselves? ... see if they can find him ... that other captain! ... at the funeral ... or the town dump! ... me carrying their messages ... "your sister in Berlin is well"! ... who does he take me for? ... and come to think of it, that Marshal von Lubb! ... smothered under the coke? I wonder if he ever existed ... And this Bundstedt that's supposed to be on his way ... could be dead for all I know ... one thing's for sure, since we've been here, nobody's shown, nobody's passed ... nothing ...

"Lili, I ask you ... can you see me hobnobbing with this Rundstedt ... if he exists! if he's really going to this funeral ... shouting '*Heil! Heil! Heil!*' like

Faustus° in Berlin . . . remember! up on his tiptoes . . . the screwball! double, that's what he was, a double agent!" . . . they're all 'double'! Harras! . . . the von Leidens° . . . Kracht . . . Christ, if I had to make a list . . . the crowd in Montmartre and everywhere else! what a collection! say, might be a good idea for getting to sleep . . . to count them . . . all those bastards . . . forget them . . . and remember them again . . .

If you've ever passed through armies in flames . . . yourself, I mean, not your brother-in-law, through jellied cities and empires, and desperate, panting populations, offering you, oh yes! . . . their babies, their wives, and then some! . . . anybody! anything! . . . just so the damage! the lightning! should come down on you! and not them! not them! . . . nothing will ever surprise you any more . . . yeah, but where's Le Vig?

"Hey, Lili, see anything?"

"No! . . . not a thing!"

On the avenue, I meant . . . he hadn't done his "Christ" act in a long time . . . or his Man from Nowhere! . . . where could he be? . . .

"You know the way he is! . . . all alone like that!"

Sure, we were tired . . . but . . . we had to face it . . . he hadn't been quite right when he left us . . . so we get up, nice comfortable bench . . . but the musette bag? . . . hadn't touched the food . . . we had our suspicions . . . maybe we'll eat it later . . . later . . . we'll talk it over with Le Vig . . . anyway we won't throw it away! this is a beautiful avenue . . . wide, really beautiful . . . I've already told you that . . . twenty times! . . . but long . . . where's the end? . . . by the steeple! . . . the funeral . . . the cathedral up there . . . that's where he ought to be . . . if he hasn't gone off his rocker . . . and split! . . . I'm thinking about Le Vig . . . another bench . . . time to catch my breath . . . I've dropped the blind act . . . fed up! . . . I look around, the houses . . . seems to be true what Hilda said . . . not a soul! . . . the S.A. have taken everybody away . . . empty, top to bottom . . . wonder where they are . . . in the woods, under the pine trees . . . the Nietzschean system or something . . . anyway, I'd seen too much to believe anything . . . a time comes when you stop batting your brains . . . look at the universe, the shining stars, millions and millions of them, they're phonies . . . dead for billions of years! . . . evaporated! . . . and don't rib the astronomers, shooting at the sky, figuring, filling the void with mathematics . . . they're only trying to make a living, same as you . . .

So we're resting . . . now what? we haven't seen Rundstedt go by . . . or anybody else . . .

"We'd better be moving!"

we'd better be moving:

It's not so far now . . . the steeple . . . the five-hundred-and thirty-one-foot steeple, the one our Siegfried had climbed, we can't go wrong . . . talking about Siegfried, very convenient to be gaga, that way he could sit tight and send us looking for "fragments"! we didn't find any, nothing in the gutters, nothing on the sidewalks . . . maybe Le Vig? . . . but where is he? . . . the risk, the danger, everything falls on Lili and me . . . the hiking and the hardship . . . this Captain Siegfried would enroll us in the *Hitler Jugend* for the next war . . . the pimp! his cathedral wasn't far now . . . but no Le Vig . . . not on this side . . . or on the sidewalk across the street . . . what if he'd got himself arrested with his foam tank . . . chasing the "fragments" . . . maybe they'd thought he looked suspicious . . . chasing "fragments" like that . . . must be a meeting of top brass outside that cathedral . . . generals and high clergy! I wasn't crazy about being seen . . . let's go back! . . . no more "fragments" in the gutters than bob-tailed kites! . . . I'll give those two jokers a piece of my mind, the fire chief and his raspberry, they could just as well have come out here themselves, looking for firecrackers! Hilda, the concubine . . . I'll make her drag her brats out from under the bed, and send *them* looking for fireworks, *them*, not us! My decision . . . about face! pop Bébert in his bag, no, he won't go in . . . when he won't go in, I know my cat, it's because he's looking at something . . . okay! . . . I look too . . . in the distance . . . the slope . . . the grass border . . . somebody's there! . . . he's right . . . sitting in the grass . . . no! . . . lying down! . . . we go see . . . just as I thought . . . full length . . . Le Vig flat on his back, staring . . . what's wrong? he doesn't recognize us . . .

"Is it you?"

"Is it you? ha, Bébert! . . ."

I cut him short!

"Your tank! . . . where's your tank?"

He shows me . . . the extinguisher . . . in the grass . . .

"Well?"

First he bumbles . . . then he talks . . . if it's the truth, I can see why he'd be dazed . . . I sum up: he'd gone as far as the church . . . not a church, the cathedral . . . we know! we know! . . . well? . . . looked all over! . . . not a single fragment! "you sure?" "yes" . . . but outside the cathedral a mob! . . . of Landsturm and church brass, maybe archbishops! . . . they'd called him to come over! . . . on the double with his arm band and his fire extinguisher . . . he'd split! he'd passed the police station . . . *Feldgendarmarie* . . . they hadn't said anything, not a word . . . but next door, in a factory, a lot of people locked in! . . . that's right, locked in! . . .

. in a brewery . . . exactly! a big beer factory . . . all full of people . . . right away he'd spoken to them . . . through the windows . . . not Germans, foreigners, men and women . . . they were supposed to take the train to Berlin . . . why Berlin? . . . even Le Vig had been surprised . . . Berlin? why not Rostock? . . .

"Did they ask you what you were doing with your foam machine?"

"No! and I didn't tell them either!"

For once he'd kept his mouth shut . . .

"Then what?"

They'd come from a factory in Saxony . . . plumbing equipment, the whole personnel . . . no more copper in Saxony . . . they were being sent to Berlin . . . cement factory . . .

"Ah, I get it! . . . they recognized you!"

"Right! . . . how did you know? no kidding! I denied it! . . . honest to God! . . . but they knew!"

At least one nice thing had happened to him: they'd recognized him! instantly! . . . Le Vigan, the great Le Vigan! those other yokels, those dimwits in Zornhof and Rostock, had never even heard of him! . . . the brewery crowd even threw a party for him: all they needed in their warehouses, three giant warehouses! they were allowed! they could go in and help themselves, anything they liked! as long as they didn't try to escape . . .

Mountains of bottled beer! . . . valleys of sparkling wine and *foie gras* . . . army stores, so they claimed . . .

"They're expecting to be bombed!"

"So what did you do?"

"I ate, I drank, I left!"

"I believe that . . . and didn't you say: 'Pétain! Pétain!?' . . . Hey, Sigmaringen . . . the station! . . . time to be getting back!"

"We'd better wait!"

"Wait for what?"

"For the Marshal to pass! . . . Rundstedt!"

"What can he do to us?"

"If he's got *schupos* around him . . . he must have! . . . papers! . . . blah-blah-blah . . . questions! . . ."

He agrees with me . . . that we'd better stay put! . . . we're doing all right in this grass . . . beautiful day . . . wait for the Marshal to pass! . . .

We'll get up after a while . . . but . . . but . . . oh, the baboon! . . . I knew it . . .

"Hey, company! for you!"

hey, company: for you:

A brunette . . . she hesitates . . . on the grass across the street . . . the other sidewalk . . . she's coming . . . a step to the right . . . to the left. . . she's crossing .

..

"Do you know her?"

"Yes! yes!" . . . he admits it . . . she's escaped from the brewery! . . . blow me down! he's been expecting her!

"Picking up girls? . . . you tramp! . . . don't you ever learn?"

"What's the objection?"

"Maybe she talks too much."

"She doesn't know you!"

"She will! . . . blabbermouth! . . . hey, a daisy! . . . entertain her! . . . pull off the petals! then you won't talk! . . . plenty of daisies around here! she loves me! she loves me not! . . . pick yourself a bouquet! . . . she loves me!"

"Her name's Claire! . . ."

I see they're old friends . . . fast work at the brewery . . . here she comes . . .

"Bonjour, mademoiselle! . . ."

Looks tired, but not so very . . . pleasant smile . . . winning, I admit . . . nothing much to simper about, she in the brewery, us anywhere in the world or here by the roadside . . . anyway, I'm friendly by nature . . . so's Lili. . . Bébert just looks at the road, he doesn't put himself out . . .

"Monsieur Le Vigan . . ."

"My child . . ."

Those eyes! . . . he's not interested in the road . . . only in Claire! suits her to a T . . . they work fast at the brewery! . . . I ask her . . .

"A lot of French people there?"

"Yes, mostly women! . . . from the plumbing factory . . ."

"All going to Berlin?"

Yes! . . . they'll find out . . . I won't tell her about the tunnel . . . I bet Le Vigan means to . . . I head him off . . . I make out I'm thirsty . . .

"Mademoiselle, you wouldn't have some water at the brewery? . . . mineral water, I mean . . ."

"Why, of course! . . . a whole warehouse! wait! I'll be right back!"

"No! . . . no, please, mademoiselle! . . . later! stay here with . . ."

Actually I see water . . . a drinking fountain! . . . right across the street . . . I can go get it myself! . . . I'm only in the way . . . he was in that brewery for an hour . . . two hours . . . I see they're good friends . . . nobody'd known him in Rostock, but now he's okay, he's known! . . . and better still! Mademoiselle

Claire has been in the movies, an extra . . . yes, indeed! she hasn't always worked in factories . . . I'm not trying to listen but I can't help it, they're right next to me and talking plenty loud . . . she doesn't want us, Lili and me, to think she's some little nobody, butting in . . . Lili's asleep, Bébert's awake . . . I see them there, the four of them . . . I say to myself: good time to cross over, get some water! I pick myself up out of the grass . . . very quietly . . . I'm all right, I cross the avenue . . . I see the weather's getting better and better . . . why shouldn't it? it's the middle of June . . . not a plane upstairs . . . in the sky . . . not a smoke trail . . . no gunfire . . . suits me! . . . the grass is taller on the other side . . . here's the fountain . . . I drink just like that, cupping my hands under the spigot . . . fine water, fresh and cold, a pleasure! I drink it down, I cup my hands again, I take some more . . . *vroom! vroom!* a motorcycle! two! . . . four! . . . where'd they come from? . . . same as us . . . from the station . . . and further . . . I says to myself: this is it! they're coming! . . . what we were waiting for . . . but no cars! . . . just another motorcycle . . . and a couple more! . . . *vroom vroom!* oh yes! a car . . . that must be him! . . . Rundstedt . . . I stay right where I am, behind the fountain . . . a phalanx of motorcycles! . . . *vroom vroom!* . . . a formation! . . . no mistake! I turn my head a little . . . police! . . . I see they've still got gas . . . and across the road I see . . . Le Vig and his admirer, stretched out on the grass . . . they're looking for me, they don't see me . . . behind the drinking fountain . . . but I see them! all of a sudden Le Vig stands up . . . shakes himself . . . steps out of the grass and down off the sidewalk . . . a whole pack of motorcycles . . . *vroom vroom!* . . . they pass . . . he jumps into the middle of the street! . . . I'm telling you exactly the way it happened . . . he plants himself! . . . like this! . . . he holds up his right arm! . . . Christ, he's done it! defiance! . . . I should have kept out of sight behind the fountain . . . you don't know me! . . . I pop out! . . . the big Mercedes brakes! . . . stops dead . . . not three feet away from him! . . . the motorcycle cops haven't seen a thing . . . too busy with their own noise . . . besides, when I think of it now, it was the final sprint . . . the cathedral, the steeple . . . in plain sight. . . and probably scared shitless that a load of bombs would come out of the clouds and *bam!* . . . the good thing about their wild charge was that they hadn't seen a thing . . . neither me at the drinking fountain nor Le Vig across the street . . . now naturally . . . they turn around . . . there were twenty of them . . . thirty . . . now what? . . . I hesitate . . . should I . . . shouldn't I get mixed up in this? . . . I shouldn't have . . . Le Vig is throwing a fit . . . no hesitation about him! . . .

"Rundstedt, turn back! Rundstedt, turn back! no, never again will you set foot on French soil!"

FOOT ON FRENCH SOIL:

Firm! menacing! raising his right arm!

He starts in again:

"Never again on French soil, Rundstedt! never again!"

Somebody coming on the run . . . more *schupos* . . . still more . . . and *Landsturms* and civilians . . . Lili had seen it all from the other side, the grass across the street . . . I motion to her: don't move! no! she won't stay put! . . . she pops Bébert into his bag, quick! . . . he's used to it . . . but then . . . before we have time to fart! or get our bearings . . . we're surrounded and . . . whoops! . . . thrown into a car! blitz operation! . . . another car, a limousine . . . me, Lili, Le Vig . . . his admirer, I see, is gone . . . four cops with arm bands . . . one tricolor arm band . . . a French cop? first I've seen . . . where are they taking us? . . . we're there! . . . mighty quick! . . . a big double door . . . *Polizei* . . . they bring us in . . . I'm telling you quick, just the way it happened . . . you've got to realize that this was quick motion! . . . the road, Rundstedt . . . and now a table, two chairs . . . a *schupo* comes in . . . then a civilian . . . tricolor arm band . . . he starts right in.

"You're French?"

"What about you?"

Right back at him! . . . his arm band doesn't impress me . . . what kind of police? . . . from where? is he going to take us someplace? . . . I'm older than he is . . . are the Boches handing us over? . . .

"I'm here to help you . . . I'm from Sigmaringen . . ."

Ah, isn't that a coincidence!

"You weren't there when I left. . ."

"No! . . . I got there later!"

Let me explain . . . I knew the cops at the Castle, and the ones from the Milice . . . he wasn't one of them . . . reinforcements? . . . possible . . . we'll see!

"How's Restif?"°

"Fine . . . he's going to leave, he's waiting for you . . ."

Good answer! . . . all the same, I'm suspicious . . . the *schupo* next to him is interested in Le Vig . . . he looks at him . . . he looks at him some more! the other side again! nothing unusual! . . . he was throwing a fit a minute ago, in front of the Mercedes . . . funny, he's perfectly natural now, it was only a fit . . . jumping out on the road like that . . . he doesn't even remember . . . another *schupo* comes in . . .

"*Papier? . . . Waffen?*"

Papers? You've come to the right place . . . but no weapons! . . . *Waffen!*

"And him?"

The *schupo* asks me . . . meaning Le Vig . . .

"Oh no! . . . he hasn't got any either!"

He probably ought to search us, but I see he's not going to. He only asks me

. . .

"*Sicher nicht?* . . . you sure? . . . *da nicht?* . . . not there?"

"That's Bébert, it's his bag . . ."

"*Ach, nein!*"

If it's papers they want, I can oblige! . . . pockets, linings, crammed! . . . Le Vig ditto! . . . bundles! . . . we fish, we rummage . . . I throw a whole pile on the table . . . *plunk* . . . but they all jump up! stiff! they click heels! . . . attention! somebody's come in . . . I hadn't had a good look at him in the car, the Mercedes . . . it's him, the Marshal . . . Rundstedt . . . alone . . . I can see him close up . . . powdered, wrinkled, but no lipstick . . . all elderly generals use lipstick, not him . . . I hadn't had a good look at him out there on the road . . . Le Vig's conniption! . . . what's this Marshal here for? he must have better things to do! . . . to find out who we are? "marshal"? . . . it's easy, he's got his baton under his arm . . . the *schupo* and our cop are still at attention, frozen! . . . the Marshal asks them . . .

"*Nun?*"

"*Drei Franzosen! . . . trois Français!*"

The two cops answer together, each in his own language . . .

"*Papier sind da! kein Waffen!* the papers are here . . . no weapons!"

I can see the Marshal doesn't give a shit, he hardly looks at us . . .

"*Woher sind die? Where are they from?*"

"*Aus Paris . . .*"

"*Nur gut . . . good!*"

"*Und das? . . . and that?*"

That's the musette bag, it's moved . . . he's noticed . . . Lili tells him . . .

"Our cat Bébert!"

"Would you be so kind as to show me, madame!"

Somebody else wants to hang him, I suppose . . . we open the bag . . .

Bébert sticks out his head, his moustaches . . . they still bristled, hadn't begun to droop like later on . . . here in Meudon . . .

"All the way from Paris?"

"With us, Monsieur le Maréchal!"

Le Vig puts in his two cents worth . . .

"From Montmartre! . . . he belonged to me, Monsieur le Maréchal!"

"*Hé! hé!*"

LES OUIS:

That's Lili . . . I look at her . . . she'd only have done it for Bébert . . . she never says anything . . .

"Madame, you're quite right, Bébert is yours!"

The Marshal is interested in the cat.

"He won't scratch me if I touch him?"

"Oh no, Monsieur le Maréchal!"

His hand on his head . . . Bébert doesn't say a thing . . . then he starts purring . . .

One of the cops at attention there says something . . . in a whisper . . . the Marshal doesn't quite get it . . .

"Was? was? what?"

It's about us.

"You're going to Sigmaringen?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Maréchal!"

"*Ja! sicher!* . . . yes, certainly!"

He must think we're funny . . . luckily . . . how old can he be? . . . about my age . . . my age now . . . he speaks French almost without an accent, except his "vous" are kind of clipped . . .

He stands up . . .

"My respects, madame!"

He bows.

"Good luck, my friends!" . . . that's for Le Vig and me.

A little pat for Bébert . . . he leaves . . . with his baton under his arm . . . the way he came, same door . . . I'm kind of wondering . . . never mind! our two cops aren't wondering at all! they know the scenario! same car with the blurred windows . . . they put us in . . . actually they help us! . . . same road . . . back to the station, I think . . . no problem! . . .

"The train ought to be ready!"

Says our tricolor cop . . . he must know . . . I ask him:

"You coming with us?"

"What did you think? . . . the more the merrier!"

We're riding along . . . here's the station! . . . the square . . . no reception committee . . . Captain Siegfried? evaporated! the raspberry stationmistress? . . . her three children? maybe the trains evaporated too . . . no! . . . there it is, all made up . . . our cops weren't lying! . . . a sign! *Sigmaringen* . . . "special" for us . . . nobody else! . . . we get in quick and settle down, we and our cops . . . no other passengers . . . a tiny coke locomotive, had time to see it . . . same kind of

train, wood and tin, as up there, our fish train . . . oh well, Ulm-Sigmaringen is only seventy miles . . . barring accidents we'll be there about six . . . or seven.

"We'll be there for dinner!"

He's thinking about dinner! . . . anyway no planes upstairs . . . a few little "booms" but far away . . . shaking us up, pretty bad in fact, but not as bad as the fish train . . . nothing to complain about . . . and what they'd said at the brewery . . . I'm telling you all this helter-skelter . . . I'll straighten it out later . . . the station . . . the cops . . . Rundstedt . . . the brewery . . . and back again . . . now for a laugh . . . Mademoiselle de Lespinasse ceased to make judgments . . . impressions! from that point on she only had impressions! . . . my impression was that we'd been kidnapped, Le Vig, Lili, me, and Bébert . . . kidnapped! . . . we'll find out later on . . . maybe . . .



Esteemed reader, forgive me, the affairs of the Congo have arranged themselves more or less, the gains pocketed, the losses lamented, the raped are sick in bed . . . what a dearth of copy! . . . the journalists are frantic, stirring up, reviving the most evaporated rumors . . . whipping by-gone celebrities to make them yap, anything to liven up the season, the torpor of the bars, the casinos going bankrupt in this rain that'll never stop . . . even me here in my obscurity, don't get the idea that they leave me alone, peace-loving and down at heel as I am, to live out my difficult last days . . . hell no! . . . here's one now, a skirt! . . . here comes another, in pants! . . . here come ten of them! . . . and what questions! . . .

"Oh, have pity! . . . Oh, Maître! . . . Oh, would you?"

"What?"

"What you think of the taenia . . ."

"All the good in the world!"

"His marriage! . . . whom do you see him marrying? . . . his ideal woman in your opinion?"

"Mistinguett!"

"Your reasons, Maître!"

"They'll be happy in his jar, united in formaldehyde, cozy . . . she a stiff, soon a skeleton . . . he, don't forget, is only a ring . . . detached from the tapeworm's tape . . . he can only crawl, wriggle . . . at the very most! in seats of pants, toilet bowls, on bedside rugs . . . best he can do! . . . a tragic fate! I can prove it: his convulsions under the microscope . . . he takes the form of a face with two kinds of eyes, globulous, divergent . . ."

"You think so, Maître?"

"I am . . . harumph! . . . a parasitologist! doctorated! don't forget it!"

"You're cruel!"

"No! . . . the life of the taenia is horrible . . . I admit . . . I forgive him everything! . . . if he migrates from our rectal ampulla, he can only . . . via the Sorbonne, betrayals, café terraces, plagiarisms, and mutations . . . end up in the toilet bowl . . . or on rare, privileged occasions, in a five-percent formaldehyde solution behind the bar . . . waiter! my friends here would like to try it! . . ."

"And supposing he marries Mistinguett's skeleton, Maître?"

"Ladies and gentlemen, I will answer no more questions . . . dear gossip-mongers, get out!"

"A question! . . . just one! one more! . . . have you any friends? many?"

"No! scared shitless, the whole lot! canaries! . . . all of them!"

"Not one?"

"Not one! . . . less than one . . . anything as long as the lightning doesn't strike them! . . . their beloved selves . . . it should strike me! . . ."

"You're embittered, Maître, sorrow . . ."

Curses! they'll never leave . . .

"No! I'm a biologist, I tell you, that's all! . . . only biology exists, the rest is hot air! . . . all the rest! . . . in the world dance marathon . . . the 'Gametes Ball' . . . the blacks and yellows always win! . . . the whites are always the losers, 'make-up base,' painted over, effaced! . . . politics, speeches, bullshit! . . . only one truth! biology! . . . in half a century, maybe sooner, France will be yellow, black around the edges . . ."

"And the whites?"

"Folklore, striptease, jinrikisha . . ."

"Has anyone ever told you you were nuts, Maître?"

"Ten times a day for thirty years!"

"Do you expect to be hanged?"

"It's too late, I couldn't take it, I'd break into pieces! . . ."

"Into rings, Maître! . . . into rings!"

Hee hee . . . so funny! the imps! they've wasted fifteen minutes of my time! . . . they beat it! oh well! . . . they'll do for a page . . . more or less . . .



Did you see and hear those people? so rude! the nerve of them! . . . they've wasted hours of my time . . . maybe more! . . . with their grotesque questions! . . . their hogwash about races . . . white, yellow, and black! . . . what do they take me for? an encyclopedia? . . . that's what lecturers are for . . . and to entertain archbishops, well-fed vénérables, bankers, and "small shareholders" . . . my business is to stay with you! . . . get back to you in Ulm! . . . remember? that's where we were with our two cops, the tricolor and the Kraut, in the train . . . another dodge to make us confess . . . this crime and that crime . . . Lili, me, Bébert, and Le Vig . . .

"Sigmaringen!"

"You were there! you left!"

Obviously . . . it was a mistake to go showing our faces in Berlin . . . and still further north! . . . right! . . . I admit it, ridiculous . . . but under the circumstances mightn't you have done something even stupider! . . . telling about it now, it's simple! . . . "we're all of us so wise after the event!" no doubt about that! . . . commentaries, philosophy! . . . we laugh ourselves sick! myself here twenty years later, I know where I'm going . . . not hard to make you laugh! . . . the game's over . . . the ball has stopped rolling . . . nothing else going to happen? . . . go on! full speed ahead! . . . grist for your baloney mills? . . . no! no! no!

We're in this train, reserved entirely for us . . . no other passengers, no need to talk . . . just look at the fields, the roadbed, rocks, and thickets, two . . . three farms . . . way in the distance . . . but what's going to happen? where are they taking us? are they real cops? . . . we'll find out at the end of the line . . . maybe . . . this coke rattler is making pretty good time . . . plenty of smoke though! . . . we'll be pitch-black when we get there . . . who cares! . . . the jolting bothers me

more . . . but nothing to complain about, not as bad as the *Warnemünde*, anyway it's no time to saw wood, I've got to think . . . what'll we find? . . . Restif, I hope . . . our two cops, the Kraut and the other one, they must know . . . maybe we won't find anybody . . . neither at the *Löwen* nor the *Bären* . . . transferred? . . . escaped? . . . how do I know? . . . Restif must still be there . . . him and his "Valiance" commando . . . if they'd left we'd have heard about it . . . he and his men, they were going to reconquer all of France in less than a month, the citadels and ports, the whole works . . . serious operation, pretty ticklish . . . they probably hadn't completed their preparations yet . . . Marion^o had told me: it'll take them at least a year! . . . there'd been twenty Z-days already . . . and twenty counter-orders . . . hold everything! today they'd call it *suspense* . . . basic Franco-pidgin . . . we're not very talkative, sitting there with our two cops . . . easy to see why . . . we were definitely expecting some infernal machine on the tracks . . . or all of a sudden from the air . . . after all, we'd been traveling . . . so to speak . . . for months . . . east . . . north . . . zigzagging from switch to switch, bombed roadbeds, local rattlers, special trains . . . we had a right to feel kind of tired . . . which didn't prevent us from finding out that this was only the beginning . . . that we still had plenty of surprises ahead of us . . . funny and not so funny . . . even some musical surprises, I'll tell you about them . . . just then I was getting ready to ask the cops a question . . .

"Raumnitz?"

"He's there, you'll see him!"

Restif and Raumnitz . . . somebody that knew us at least . . . our train's rolling along . . . clattering some . . . but not bad . . . a bit of a roller-coaster effect . . . ups and downs . . . ah, here we are . . . we're pulling in . . . very slowly . . . a big sign . . . *Sigmaringen* . . . the cops weren't lying . . . I recognize the platform . . . hell, I've paced it often enough! and the waiting room . . . oh, it's Restif! in person! . . . right at our door . . .

"Don't move! *bonjour! bonjour!* keep your seats! Raumnitz wants to see you! he's coming! . . ."

Our two cops . . . the tricolor and the Boche . . . they know all about it . . . they get up, they leave us . . .

"Good-bye! . . . *bon voyage!*"

No surprise to them . . . here's Raumnitz with his two dogs . . .

"You can get out! . . . this way please, I want a word with you . . ."

He doesn't greet us or shake hands . . . cold reception . . . no questions . . . I see that he's aged . . . yellow . . . wrinkled . . . I know him, he doesn't drink or take drugs . . . something must have happened . . . ravaged . . . looks ten years

take drugs . . . something must have happened . . . ravaged . . . looks ten years older . . . and we'd left only six months ago . . . on this Brandenburg zigzag . . . naturally things can happen in six months, and not just to us! the time only passes for us! how can other people have trouble? nothing happens to other people, nothing, all they've got to do is pity us, comfort us, weep over our misfortunes, shower us with gifts . . . so we step out . . . we cross the platform with Raumnitz and his dogs . . . the waiting room . . . here we are . . . it's empty . . . six chairs, that's all . . . the Major closes the door . . . now what? . . . he sits down . . . we're all ears . . .

"Well, doctor! . . . during your absence decisions have been taken . . . for you and for others . . ."

He's lost the thread . . . oh yes!

"Sigmaringen evacuated . . . must be! . . . quickly . . . three days . . . special train for you . . . you and Restif and his men . . ."

"Major, all we do is travel . . . we've come a long way . . ."

"I know . . . I know . . . but it's necessary!"

"Where to, Major?"

"I can't tell you, but pretty far . . . it's all arranged . . . you see . . . you're expected . . ."

Le Vig stands up . . . his arms outstretched . . . his head drooping . . . there he goes again! . . . Christ crucified! . . .

"Major, I can't move another inch! . . . I can't go anywhere! . . . kill me! kill me! . . ."

He's sobbing . . .

"No, of course not! . . . not you, Monsieur Le Vigan! at any rate not right away! . . . you wish to go south, I believe . . . still south, is it?"

How did he know?

"Oh yes, Major! . . . Rome! . . . Rome! . . ."

Perfect agreement . . .

"Tomorrow, Monsieur Le Vigan! . . . via the Brenner . . . Rome! satisfactory?"

And how! tears of joy! . . . the sooner the better! . . .

"Ah, Ferdinand! and you, Lili! forgive me! I couldn't go on! . . . I put in a request . . . up there!"

He'd doublecrossed us, the skunk! . . . where had he put in this request? To who?

"Harras!"

"You bastard! at least you could have . . ."

"Alone, Ferdinand! . . . I wanted to be alone! you understand? . . . you forgive me?"

"Alone in Rome?"

"Yes, Ferdinand! yes! I've got to be alone!"

He goes into his Christ pose . . . right there in front of us . . . tears and all . . . contrition, bitter grief, the same old dodge . . . I'd seen him like that in Grünwald with his two cuties . . . the two Polish broads, remember? . . . praying together and all . . .

"Lili, you'll take care of my Bébert? . . . you know how I love him . . ."

He puts out his right arm . . . very slowly . . . he holds it over our heads . . .

"Le Vig, I see you're giving us your blessing . . ."

I hadn't time to tell him what I thought of him . . . Raumnitz cuts me off . . .

"Doctor, you'll take another train, the one you came on has pulled out! . . . ha ha ha! . . . the Ulm express!"

He's laughing . . . unusual for him, very unusual . . .

"Now you'll have something else . . . something you don't know yet!"

I'm not really listening, I'm thinking of Le Vig . . . food for thought . . . his Rome caper . . . he didn't want to be with us any more . . . okay! . . . he wanted to see the sun . . . true, we hadn't seen much of it, but was that a reason to drop us . . . *plunk!* . . . like a hot potato! . . . I couldn't believe it . . .

"Doctor, if you please . . ."

"Yes, Major . . . yes!"

"Restif will explain it all in the train . . ."

I couldn't quite see Restif explaining . . . it wasn't his way, never had been . . . maybe you remember . . . Restif had his school in Sigmaringen . . . but nobody attended his classes . . . except the men of his commando, the ones that were supposed to reconquer France . . . those were the days of the lists and secret tribunals . . . Strasbourg was occupied by the blacks . . . Restif was going to put an end to all that, first liberate Strasbourg, then the whole of France, like some kind of Jean d'Arc, and chuck all the English into the sea . . .

Now we can laugh! right now, December 1960, there are new lists going around in addition to the old ones . . . names have been added to names . . . the first listmakers have all died! . . . of prostate, fibromas, or strokes, and their successors, the new listmakers, are wondering if they ought to change the names, if maybe those people are dead, if it's not their sons, cousins, nieces who were on the wrong side . . . very hard to mete out justice with lists twenty . . . thirty years old . . . the Chinese won't have anything to do, nobody to purge, much as they'd

like to, there won't be any Frenchmen left, they'll all have been murdered . . . Restif had started long before the war . . . maybe you remember, the Roselli sisters^o in the Métro . . . and Barrachin^o in the Bois de Boulogne . . . political affairs . . . he never talked about his technique, if you brought it up, he walked away . . . what he liked to talk about was History . . . especially Greek history, but without the murders and sacrifices . . . Marion gave a course in history, for him and his men . . . never a word about massacres . . . but what about this famous technique? nothing to it! . . . Marion had gotten him to explain it . . . operation in two steps . . . step one, harpoon your man, push his head back! . . . step two, sever his carotids . . . both of them! . . . in short, the guillotine in reverse! but quicker! that was the whole trick! harpoon the victim and *fsss!* two steps, one movement! . . . head back, two jets of blood! . . . that's all! oh yes, the weapon! . . . a very fine sickle! a razor . . . *fsss!* not a cry, not even a hiccup . . .

So there was a black army in Strasbourg? . . . they'd stepped into a trap, fine! . . . they'd be liquidated! . . . Restif didn't boast, that was Sigmaringen chit-chat . . . Restif never boasted . . .

"Doctor, if you please . . . your train will be over there . . ."

Raumnitz speaking . . .

"What train?"

He explains . . . a "special strategic" train . . . and then what? . . . going where? . . . no name given! . . . this didn't look so good! . . . coal-burning engine . . . no soot! no smoke cloud! . . . Le Vig must have known all this, all these advantages, this "special strategic" tourism . . . he'd dropped us all the same! . . . must be some plot . . . cooking up since Moorsburg . . . to ship the two of us, Lili, me, and Bébert, off someplace . . . and him, Le Vig, the Christ, to the sun in Rome! . . . supposedly . . . Restif must have known more, but I've told you, absolute discretion . . . I'd have welcomed some news of Marion, Bout de l'An,^o Brinon^o . . . and this one and that one . . . but I thought I'd better not ask . . . memory is a privilege . . . lightnings and a thousand deaths to anybody who starts murmuring maybes . . . nobody wants your maybes! maybe? . . . there's only one truth! on one side! . . . only one church! . . . worried? in doubt? . . . the like of us? . . . cyanide!

"Doctor, I believe you can . . ."

I guess he's trying to tell us the train's there . . . I'd heard a locomotive . . . Restif motions to me . . . yes, that's it . . . Lili's ready . . . Le Vig doesn't look, doesn't move, his head in his hands . . . he's not leaving, he'll be leaving tomorrow . . . we go out on the platform, Lili, me, and Bébert . . . not exactly what you'd been expecting . . . three big freight cars . . . gray . . . "eight horses

what we'd been expecting . . . three big freight cars . . . gray . . . eight horses, forty men" . . . every army in the world, the same . . . our car . . . door half open . . . right! this is it! . . . Raumnitz leads the way . . . this train with three freight cars has come from Constance . . . we get in . . . the usual freight car, I see . . . thick layer of bedding, hay and straw . . . this one's for men . . . I don't see any stalls . . . here come the men . . . with Restif . . . his whole "commando," at least thirty of them, "Milice" equipment, capes, potato masher hand grenades, Mausers . . . they whisper among themselves, pass in front of us, and settle down in the corners . . . they're still whispering . . . we'd better get settled too . . . Restif must know what this is all about . . . I'll try to get it out of him . . . no whistle! . . . we're moving! . . . nobody's seen us off . . . neither the Major nor Le Vig . . . no need to prod Restif . . . glad to talk, he'd only been waiting for the train to pull out . . . plenty on his mind! . . .

"Doctor, I see you're not surprised, you've been around, but this time they're overdoing it . . . couldn't say anything in front of them . . . you know how they are! . . . but now we're moving, okay! nothing to lose now! . . . neither have they, take it from me! . . . I know them inside out! . . . I've worked for them . . . full time! . . . so have my men! . . . the Boches can't pull the wool over my eyes! oh no! . . . I know what they're up to before they do! . . . you want to know where we're going . . . they won't tell you . . . God-forsaken hole that's lost its name, they've taken it away, scratched it off all the signs! . . . painted it over! . . . you won't find it anywhere . . . not even at the station . . . this station we're going to . . . Oddort, it used to be called . . . now it isn't called anything . . . and I know why . . ."

"Is it far?"

"Hmmm! three . . . four hours^o . . . with them you never know . . . this train's an express . . . none of your smoke factories . . . coal-burning! . . . it can do seventy . . . you won't even see the tunnels . . . you won't see anything! . . . *whish!* in the first place you won't be able to look out . . . no windows! . . . can't open the doors! locked from outside . . . no use trying! . . . all three cars!"

"Raumnitz! . . . and Le Vigan! . . . did you notice? absolutely in cahoots!"

I should have looked around . . . this track we were on? . . . I really didn't get it . . .

Restif explains . . . organization! they'd built the whole line in a week . . . all the convicts, all the *bibels*,^o and three engineer divisions . . . the whole works! roadbed, tracks, ties! . . . only the tunnels had been there before . . . an abandoned line! . . . 1896 . . . they'd cleared away the rock, fixed the whole thing up in less than a month! . . .

"They can't impress me, I know them! the bastards!"

They didn't impress me either, but they certainly did what they pleased, except of course what was in the cards, that they'd be scrumpled to a pulp . . . same as us . . . when I think of it now, they were kerflooy already, the rest was blah-blah, playacting . . .

Meanwhile we were making time . . . those freight cars held the track and didn't rattle . . . if there'd been windows and crappers nobody'd have complained . . . we couldn't see the faces of the "Restif Commando," it was too dark, but they were certainly snoring . . . it was a coal engine, no soot at all . . . we'd be there pretty soon . . . in Oddort or whatever it was . . .

"Restif, what is it near?"

"Hanover! . . . three miles!"

"Fire?"

"Plenty! . . . it's still burning . . ."

"How do you know?"

"Never mind, I know . . ."

Then he asks me if I know a certain Svaboda . . . if Raumnitz had mentioned him . . . no! that is, yes! . . . in the movies! in Paris . . . in a picture! . . . it wasn't the same one! . . . not the one in the movies . . . another Svaboda a general! . . . a Comitadji general . . . the Germans had adopted him . . . put him in command of the whole "Central Europe" Resistance . . . Restif knew this General Svaboda well . . .

"I missed him in Schweningen!" I see!

"At the Orpheum Casino, at the concert! . . . I had him in my . . ."

He didn't have to tell me any more, I understood . . . they had accounts to settle . . . none of my business what kind . . . I knew better than to ask questions . . . but what was he exactly? a general of what?

"He'll tell you . . . he's the 'heart of the Resistance' . . ."

"Where? . . . in Oddort?"

"Yes! . . . against the English, against the Russians, against everybody . . . air, land, and sea . . . in the Redoubt too . . . didn't you know? Didn't Raumnitz tell you?"

No! . . . not a word . . . Restif knew all about it . . . lucky Le Vig wasn't there, I was thinking, there'd be no holding him . . . he'd doublecrossed us, the bastard, escaped like a fart, good riddance I'd say! . . . to Rome supposedly! . . . well, anything's possible . . . we were rolling along . . . it was like magic . . . these tracks were practically intact . . . after what we'd been through! . . . the

leper trains and fish trains . . . I've told you, falling apart, no more rails, no more wheels . . . never fear, this train would get its comeuppance too . . . so would their whole regenerated line . . . it was funny, but that's all! Siegfried was funny too, the character in Ulm, with his steeple, his lost youth, his outfit, his rope-climbing . . . all these sensational stunts are only preludes . . . then *wham!* nothing left . . . like going down Niagara Falls in a barrel, tied hand and foot . . . "You are about to see, ladies and gentlemen! thundering waters, fuming spray . . . ladies and gentlemen, you've seen! this way now! a cruise to the entrails of Vesuvius! sulphur and porphyry! all shapes and colors! the big show! . . . twenty-five thousand tons! in one fell swoop! and off she goes! . . . into the clouds! Can't you see it? . . . have pity!"

Ruminating . . . recapitulating . . . we'll be getting off at the next stop . . . in about an hour . . . Restif was talking to his men . . . giving them their instructions, I guess . . . nothing to do with us, I hope . . . but bound to be some connection . . . who'd be there to welcome us in Oddort? . . . who'd break our seals? . . . plenty to keep me awake! . . . ah, we're slowing down . . . they're putting on the brakes . . . the engine's puffing a little . . . here we are! . . .

They're working on our doors! the linchpins . . . all of a sudden, broad daylight! . . . and a platform, all we had to do was get out . . . fine! I let Restif go by . . . he shows me: no signs . . . you'd never have known it was Oddort.

"Now we'll see Svaboda . . ."

I look at our train, three freight cars . . . I see other trains coming in . . . at other platforms . . . and more trains . . . all with three freight cars like ours . . . three . . . four . . . five . . . *Volksturms* open them up . . . all full of people like us, just as dazed, climbing out . . . where'd these people come from? . . . from all over . . . Restif knows . . . workers and white-collar stiffs . . . looked like a big rally . . . in Oddort . . . this station without signs . . .

"I don't know if you know . . ."

Something else to tell me!

"After General Svaboda it's me! I'm second in command!"

"Certainly, Restif!"

"After him it's me!"

"Well?"

"You'll see the way we work!"

"Glad to see anything you like . . . I'm ready for anything, Restif!"

"But you'll help me?"

"What could I ever refuse you, my friend?"

"Now you're going to see the Jew . . . he knows about me . . . he's known

Now you're going to see the Jew . . . he knows about me . . . he's known for a long time . . . look at him!"

He shows me . . . a man with a pepper-and-salt goatee . . . dark complexion, very dark, olive . . . imposing nose, as hooked as they come . . . black eyes, somber . . . they're imposing too . . . it must have been like that in the Balkans . . . painted generals, authoritative noses, surgery it looks like to me, glad Le Vig isn't with us, he'd have thought they were trying to steal his act, he'd have had a stroke . . .

Let me tell you about the waiting room . . . they'd cleaned it up good . . . four armchairs and four stools . . . nothing else . . .

The General sits down, he gives me his hand, cordial, I'd almost say pleasant . . . he speaks with an accent . . . more Russian than Balkan, I think . . . a natural flow, singsong, not guttural . . . certainly not Turkish . . .

"My respects, madame! . . . and you, Doctor, my friendship! . . . we'll talk next door . . . all these trains here! . . . all these people! . . . this noise! . . . you'll come with us, Restif?"

We follow him . . . I see his back . . . tall, thin, almost hunched . . . next door there's an office, filing cases, a card file . . . four of them . . . the phone rings . . . he answers . . . *ja!* . . . nothing but *ja!* . . . and then *nein!* . . . he hangs up . . . he picks up a paper . . . runs his eyes over it . . . mumbles . . . he takes out his monocle . . . he turns to us . . .

"Doctor, I presume Restif has told you . . . Restif knows everything . . . I want him to know . . . he has to know . . . when I'm away, I need someone to answer . . . you understand? . . . I'm in command here, this station, the trains . . . but up top, on the wire, they command me! they give me orders! . . . someone must be here . . . responsible! . . . at all times!"

"Oh, I understand, General!"

"Someone must be here! . . . at all times! I never stay away very long . . . five ten minutes . . . I have to! necessary! . . . the outposts!"

I must have looked pretty goofy . . . what made me wag my head wasn't what he said, but his cap . . . I've seen revues all over the world, starting with the Bouffes . . . a thousand big-time operettas . . . but never a cap like that, so high, so full of embroideries, gold, silver, foliage . . . that cap was a tiara . . . the General saw my mind was wandering, he wanted to make it absolutely clear to me that he often absented himself, especially at night! . . . he attended to everything! . . . himself! . . . the outposts . . . all *Volksturms* at the outposts! . . . lazy old imbeciles!

"You're right, General!"

Restif didn't wink at me, but he tapped the floor, kind of . . . that meant "watch your step!"

Okay . . . there was something fishy about all this . . . I'd find out . . . in time . . . the General gets up . . . cap and all . . . Siegfried in Ulm had a cap too, red and white chenille, and his period coat . . . this Svaboda with his tiara cap and his super-Mephisto look was another unforgettable . . . anyway Svaboda filled me in . . . "good-bye" . . . he leaves us . . . we hear his voice outside . . . he's talking . . . Restif listens . . . he's gone . . .

"Doctor, now listen to me!"

He gets up, he goes to the door, he opens it . . . anybody there? no! . . . he comes back . . .

"Doctor, quickly! . . . I'm sure you've guessed . . . this station is a trap . . . all these people from the trains are due to be liquidated . . . they're in the way . . . you're in the way too . . . so am I . . ."

"How do you know?"

"Doctor, I'll explain later . . . now I've got to warn you . . . in a hurry! . . . they're doing it tonight. . ."

"Why?"

"Because there's no more room in the camps . . . and no more food . . . they know it outside . . ."

"Where outside?"

"In America!"

"That there's no more room in the camps?"

He's got me puzzled . . . what about Zornhof? or Rostock? . . .

"Yes, but the Russians!"

"Sure, the Russians . . . everybody's talking about the Russians, nobody ever sees them . . ."

Restif is well-informed.

"They're supposed to stop them here! . . . right here in Hanover . . . General Svaboda served with the Russians for years, he knows them . . ."

"So what?"

"They're doing it in a hurry . . . tonight. . ."

"You don't say!"

"Not the Russians! us! . . . I know that scarecrow!"

I still don't understand . . . he tells me . . . to keep my eyes open and my mouth shut . . . Lili too . . . and clear out! . . . with him! follow him! him and his men, his "commando" . . . they knew . . . I still don't get it . . . well, a little . . . I know that Restif doesn't waste his breath for nothing.

KNOW THAT RESTIF DOESN'T WASTE HIS DREAM FOR NOTHING . . .

"Quick, Doctor! . . . luckily he takes drugs! . . ."

Ah, another victim! . . . sad! . . . but in this case . . . perfect!

"He never sleeps more than an hour . . ."

"Restif, I know something about sleep . . . an hour's not enough . . . he'd crack up . . ."

"He goes back to sleep in the daytime!"

The daytime? . . . we'll be far away! . . . mum's the word! . . . a train coming in . . . three more freight cars . . . and a mob . . . the three cars are packed . . . the station too . . . jammed! . . . what are they all going to eat? . . . where have they come from? . . . factories and offices like the rest . . . no more raw materials, no more jobs . . . but where's our General? . . . Svaboda . . . at the outposts? . . . telling them what?

"That the time has come!"

"So what do we do now?"

I was pretty tired . . . so was Lili. . . Restif notices . . .

"Doctor, I implore you! you'll be a witness . . . you'll tell the world! . . . who saved them! . . . one man: Restif! . . . you'll see . . . you'll tell!"

"Certainly, Restif. . . but from what?"

"He'll be back . . . he'll say: Restif, stay here . . . by the phone! . . . if anybody calls, wake me up! . . . when that happens, Doctor, look sharp! . . . you'll see! . . . I won't wait, not I! . . . it won't take a second!"

I listen to him . . . it all looks pretty tangled to me . . . damn their fuckups . . . for months now they'd been entertaining us . . . all over the place! . . . ah, a step! I hear a step! steps . . . and voices . . . must be him . . . it is! . . . the door . . . the gold and silver tiara . . .

"All my respects, madame! . . . Doctor, you have permission to sleep, you must be tired! . . . you, Restif, wait for me! here, by the phone . . . I'm going to lie down! just for a minute . . . if anyone calls, shake me! I have to go back to the outposts in an hour . . . I'll wake up . . . we'll each take his turn . . . you'll go in two hours . . . you'll take my watch . . ."

You can see in this office, but not very well . . . two big standing lamps . . . the General lies down in the straw . . . he doesn't undress . . . he keeps his cap on, he even pulls it down over his ears like a nightcap . . . fine! . . . we lie down too . . . Bébert hasn't been out of his bag, now we open it some, enough for him to stick his head out. . . the General said he was going to sleep . . . people yacking in the waiting room . . . a lot of them . . . how many? . . . they haven't any straw, maybe they'll come and ask us for some . . . just as I'm thinking about it, one of

them shows! in through the window! . . . and then two . . . three . . . Restif's men . . . I hadn't seen them coming . . . but here they are . . . ten . . . twelve . . . I don't understand, but I hear . . .

"Waa-ah!"

That's all! . . . I get it . . . I didn't see a thing but I heard! . . . he's not dead yet . . . Restif shows me . . . two streams! . . . from the two carotids . . . his fine scalpel, curved like a sickle . . . I can see . . . sure . . . but all this blood! . . . he didn't make any noise, but there's blood all the way to the door . . . and trickling underneath . . . they'll see it outside . . . Restif doesn't waste any time, he grabs the cap, the embroidered tiara, he disentangles it from the hair and puts it on . . . and he shakes us up . . .

"Come on! . . . come on! wake up!"

I hadn't heard the bell. . . the phone! Restif jumps . . .

"Ja! . . . ja!"

He hangs up . . . looks to me like a good time to obey his orders . . .

"This way, you two!"

He shows me . . . through the window . . . climb out! . . . and cross the platform . . . then the tracks . . . looks like there isn't any road left. . .

"*Sie sind Franzosen?* . . . you're French?"

People lying on the tracks . . . Restif is cool as a cucumber . . . one of them stands up . . . a shape . . . he tries to bar the way . . . bam! . . . square in the head . . . the rest of them start yelling! . . . and all the people in the station . . .

"*Mörder!* . . . *mörder!* . . . murderers!"

"The bastards! Who do they think they are?"

"Careful, Doctor!"

"Who told you, Restif?"

"My little finger, Doctor! . . . I'll explain . . . later! now we've got to move fast! . . . I've got to see the *Volksturms* . . . I won't be long! I'll come back for you . . . oh, the weasels! . . . they'll get theirs!"

He means the people in the station . . .

"Murderers! you just wait, my little darlings! Doctor, remember this! remember what you see! . . . there won't be one left! . . . not one! three armored trains! . . . for them! . . . the Krauts have only one Messerschmidt left! . . . for them! for them!"

I didn't get it . . .

"They'll all go up in phosphorus!"

It was the "murderer" that hadn't gone down! . . . I'd seen him, he was cool enough at his work . . . now they'd broyoned him off! . . . calling him a murderer

enough at his work . . . now they'd blown him out! . . . Calling him a murderer . . .

"I'll be right back, Doctor! . . . wait here! . . . I'll call you! . . . got to see the *Volksturms* . . ."

He walks off, a path on the right I think . . . it's pitch-dark . . . I don't see how. . . but he seems to know the way . . .

So far, so good, but it's kind of cold . . . what time is it? about three, I think . . . we'll wait for him . . . I try to make out the station . . . I see shapes . . . they look darker than the darkness . . . no time to show ourselves! . . . hell, no! we keep flat . . . those shapes are moving . . . coming our way! . . . no . . . they're pretty far on the right . . . and on the left . . . where are they going? . . . looking for Restif? . . . Restif and his men? . . . possible! . . . anything's possible . . . you probably think my brains are scrambled, but it's a fact, all this was so sudden, so quick and mixed up, that I couldn't make head nor tail . . . maybe some day the chroniclers will figure it out, but there in the night and, no use denying it, all befuddled, I still think it was sheer luck and genius that we didn't confuse right and left and start following those people whatever they were . . . Germans? . . . Moldavians? . . . Chinese? . . . I whisper to Lili:

"Let's follow them! . . . Come on, up!"

I'm not the hysterical type, but I had a strong feeling that Restif hadn't been lying, that they were going to fire on the station . . . I don't know who or where from, but I did know we were sitting ducks, the two of us . . . and Bébert . . . lying there in the rubble . . . that we were still much too near . . . and that all those shapes, those people who'd passed us, knew the score . . . Lili's willing . . . arm in arm, Bébert in his bag . . . we stand up . . . we take three steps . . . six steps . . . in the grass . . . a voice! *schnell Kerl* . . . *schnell!* quick! . . . Germans in position! . . . and more *schnells*, meaning we should hurry! . . . they let us pass . . . but they want us to shake a leg! . . . at least four . . . five . . . six machine guns . . . in position . . . aimed at the station! . . . where we've come from . . . Restif hadn't been lying! . . .

"*Bam!*"

The whole earth jumps! worse! like it was broken in two! . . . and the air . . . this is it! Restif hadn't been lying . . . *boom!* and another! . . . further away . . . we can see it! the flashes of their cannon! . . . red! . . . green! no! shorter! it's howitzers! . . . all zeroed in on the station! . . . I can see them now . . . Oddort! . . . an ocean of flame, as they say . . . big flames from all over, the windows, the doors, the cars . . . and boom! another! . . . another! . . . they'll never get out of that station, not one of them! . . . Restif hadn't been lying . . . but where can he

be? and those people we'd followed . . . where'd they go? . . . I won't bore you with the shelling . . . dead center . . . all on the station . . . a furnace! . . . now we can see it plainly . . . very plainly . . . the howitzers and the gunners . . . weird . . . short barrels . . . no problem taking aim, they're not a thousand feet away . . . those howitzers are on the tracks, a lot of little flatcars, a whole train . . . where'd they come from? . . . ah, another noise! . . . a terrible racket . . . up in the air . . . a plane . . . with a coffee grinder . . . Restif had told us . . . their Messerschmidt . . . we know the sound . . . *rat-tat-tat! rat-tat-tat!* . . . in bursts . . . like grinding coffee by hand . . . I say to Lili . . . I don't need to say, she knows . . . down! flatter! and *wham!* . . . *crash!* . . . a bomb! and flying fragments . . . the death blow! . . . plunk on the station . . . we can see fine . . . brighter than broad daylight! . . . the howitzer train starts moving . . . their coke engine . . . the machine gunners are going too . . . they pack up and leave . . . nobody coming from the station . . . only a strong smell of fire . . . you know, the same as in Berlin and everywhere else, charred acrid wet . . . maybe more acrid than anything else . . . seeing we're alive, where'll we go? . . . nobody left but the two of us and Bébert . . . and cartridge cases and shell cases and heavy machine-gun belts and fragments . . . this track must go to Hanover . . . all right, let's follow it . . . hey, there's somebody! . . . not a ghost, not a shadow . . . a gunner . . . flesh and blood . . . I get it, he's rummaging, making sure they haven't left anything behind . . . he gropes around in the mud with his fingers! . . . no need! . . . I call him! . . . hey! hey! . . . I show him! right next to us, cartridge cases! . . . a whole pile! he's got them, he picks them up . . . and into his musette bag! . . . and a monkey wrench! . . . he sees us!

"Guten tag!"

That's me . . . then I say . . . "Big fire!"

"Ach ja! . . . sicher! . . . es must!"

He thinks it's fine . . . that it had to be! . . .

He asks me: "Wo gehen sie? where are you going?"

"Hanover! . . ."

He ought to know where Hanover is . . . he shows me! that way! just follow the tracks . . . guess there isn't any road . . . or it's too far . . . okay for the tracks!

. . .

"Sie sind Franzosen?"

We're Franzosen all right! we're workers, I explain, factory workers, our factory is *kaput!* bombed out, burned down . . . so we're looking for another! . . . that hasn't been bombed! . . . that makes sense!

"Sicher Hanover! sure to be one in Hanover!"

I ask him if he's seen any French people . . . not sure! . . . he's seen some foreigners, up there, he points east . . . they were fighting! . . . fighting among themselves . . . during the shelling . . . before the station went up in flames . . . lots of dead in the field! . . . and wounded! . . . maybe Restif, I thought, and his men . . . by the way, I never saw Restif again . . . neither in Germany nor Denmark . . . nor later here . . . I asked all over . . . Marion knew him a lot better than I did . . . but Marion, you know, is dead . . . good old Marion! . . . so sensitive, so affectionate . . . he sure helped us to stick it out in Sigmaringen . . . warned us about all the traps! . . . three . . . four a week . . . and the fun he had with Bébert, getting him to look like old man Descaves° . . . his bristling moustaches, my muffler, the drop at the end of his nose . . . the way we laughed! nobody left to laugh with! . . . Restif had no wit, he was a prestidigitator, a good one, but that's all . . . our job there was getting to Hanover! . . . heavenly chroniclers, don't let me lose the thread! . . . our gunner wasn't talking any more, too busy picking up cartridge cases, they were all over the place, even bullets . . . policing up, in short . . . all the same, he wants me to understand!

"Du verstehst? Kupfer! . . . Krieg!"

Kupfer! copper! war! . . . copper!

Certainly! he was right!

"Sicher! . . . sicher!"

War is copper! . . . it's bread too! and sardines and sausage! . . . he stops poking in the puddles . . . he asks if we have anything to eat . . . we've got half a loaf of bread . . . for us and Bébert. . . I show him . . .

"Ich habe Chokolade!"

He's pulling our leg . . . no, he's really got some! . . . genuine . . . with hazelnuts . . .

"Englisch flieger! . . . Kaput!"

An explanation for everything . . . he picks up better things than bullets and cartridge cases . . . he breaks his chocolate bar into three pieces . . . one for Lili, one for me, one for him . . . what about Bébert? . . . another musette bag! . . . he looks . . . no! . . . nothing! only some wads of bread pulp . . . that must be from the English flier too . . . Lili holds some in the palm of her hand . . . Bébert accepts it . . . now we're all set, I think, we can hit the tracks. . . I ask him . . .

"Kein Zug? no train?"

"Ach nein! nicht mehr!"

Let's go then! . . . not fast though . . . I've only got one cane left . . . they're not bombing very hard, but even so . . . in the north-west . . . direction of Hanover

not bombing very hard, but even so . . . in the northwest . . . direction of Hanover . . . whatever he says . . . and not far . . . you can see the flames . . . I hand him my best German . . .

"*Guten tag! schöne danken!* many thanks!"

We shake hands. . .

"*Gute Reise!* . . . *beide!* . . . pleasant journey, both of you! *höre mich!* listen to me!"

And he sings . . . for us . . .

"*Nach Winter kommst doch ein Mai!* after the winter the month of May!"

"They didn't send up any flares . . . you know, blue ones! and green ones!"

"No! . . . they didn't want anybody to get away!"

Ah, that explains it . . . let's go now! no time to waste . . . tie by tie . . . humble travelers, modest tourists, humbler and humbler, modester and modester . . . we'd end up on all fours . . . Bébert wanted to be carried . . . he wanted something better than old bread pulp, even if it was English and came from an airplane . . .

"Bébert, you'll see in Hanover!"

Lili says tome:

"Hanover's north . . . do you still want to go this way?"

"I don't want to, kid . . . it's not my idea . . . they haven't asked us . . ."

God's truth . . . it was none of my doing . . .

"He said the trains had stopped running . . ."

"He ought to know!"

Referring to the cartridge-case collector . . . we weren't going fast . . . even so, from tie to tie . . . we'd gone maybe a mile and a half . . . it wasn't light yet, but there was kind of a glow . . . pink . . . in the clouds . . . we could see the country . . . the farms . . . not a soul! . . . man or beast . . . we'd finished our chocolate . . .

From tie to tie . . . up ahead . . . a few hundred yards . . . there's somebody sitting on the track . . . and somebody else a little further on . . . we come up . . . I go *hey!* . . . I touch his shoulder, I press . . . oh, not hard . . . whoops, he tips over! . . . flat on his back! . . . with his legs in the air . . . plunk! . . . on the roadbed! . . . I go over to the other one . . . I hardly touch him . . . same caper . . . he capsizes! . . . I look at their faces . . . a man . . . a woman . . . about forty, forty-five . . . dead at least six hours . . . death certificates, I've told you, I'm experienced . . . I ought to take a look at the bodies . . . they must have been riddled . . . sitting here like this? . . . from the air, by a plane? . . . or by a patrol? . . . from which direction? . . . hell, it's none of our business! . . . come on! . . .

let's go! . . . crumbled walls over there . . . used to be factories, I guess . . . say, voices . . . over there! . . . several in fact . . . I don't see a thing . . . they're hidden behind a wall . . . a discussion . . . in what language? . . . German? . . . yes! and French . . . we'd better listen before we show ourselves . . . they're talking about Hanover . . . about passing through . . . from one station right near here to the other one, a long way . . . I don't think we know these people, they're workers from somewhere else . . . not from Dresden or Ulm . . . Poland, I think . . . they weren't in Oddort . . . that's for sure! . . . okay then! . . . we're practically on top of them, but they don't notice us . . . they want to go to Hamburg . . . fine! so do we! . . . I gather from their mumbo-jumbo that trains are still running . . . from Hanover . . . the other station . . . to Hamburg . . . good! but not regularly . . . I wouldn't think so . . . the rough part is getting through Hanover . . . they know all about it! the suburbs, the city . . . all burned, so they say . . . that'll make it easier! let's go! I think there's about fifty of them starting out, mothers, children, old men, old women . . . we're in with them . . . a parade . . . they're not sad, I'd even say cheerful . . . okay! off we go . . . we haven't attracted any attention, me, Lili, and the cat . . . we're part of the crowd . . . they knew what they were talking about . . . I can see there aren't many houses standing . . . more? or less than in Berlin? the same, I'd say, but hotter, more flames, whirls of flame, higher . . . dancing . . . green . . . pink . . . between the walls . . . I'd never seen flames like that . . . they must be using a different kind of incendiary gook . . . the funny part of it was that on top of every caved-in building, every rubble heap, these green and pink flames were dancing around . . . and around . . . and shooting up at the sky! . . . those streets of green . . . pink . . . and red rubble . . . you can't deny it . . . looked a lot more cheerful . . . a carnival of flames . . . than in their normal condition . . . gloomy sourpuss bricks . . . it took chaos to liven them up . . . an earthquake . . . a conflagration with the Apocalypse coming out of it! the "fortresses" must have been here . . . and not just once . . . two times! . . . three times! . . . complete destruction was their idea . . . it had taken them more than a month, hundreds of them passing over, dropping tons and tons day and night . . . there really wasn't a thing standing . . . nothing but fires and scraps of wall . . . all the ex-buildings were still full of soot and flames . . . and little explosions . . . I've told you enough about smells . . . always about the same . . . Berlin, Oddort, and here . . . charred beams, roasted meat . . . the whole crowd of us were walking arm in arm in the middle of the street . . . headed for that station . . . they seemed to know where it was . . . the day was breaking . . . lucky there were no houses left . . . I mean nothing left to clobber . . . the swirls of flame were like

pink and violet ghosts . . . on top of every house . . . thousands of houses! . . . it was getting lighter . . . I've told you: not a single inhabitable house! . . . wrong again! over there! . . . no! people standing stiff against the walls! . . . there! now we can really see them . . . a man! . . . we stop, we go over, we touch him . . . he's a soldier! . . . and another one . . . a whole string! . . . leaning against the wall . . . stiff! . . . killed right there! by the blast! . . . we'd seen it in Berlin . . . instant mummies! . . . they've got their hand grenades on them, in their belts . . . they're still dangerous! if they're armed . . . *bam!* . . . if they collapse on those grenades! *Vorsicht!* careful! . . . we take our hands away . . . the other side of the street, another patch of wall . . . more of them . . . more frozen soldiers . . . one thing's sure, they didn't have time to let out a peep . . . caught right there . . . bomb blast! . . . I'd forgotten one detail, now that I get a good look at them, they're all in "chameleon" camouflage! . . . stone dead! . . . we'd better steer clear of them and move on . . . but that station? . . . I wish we were there . . . hey, here it is! it isn't standing stiff by the roadside! . . . it's gone! . . . a whole bombload! . . . it's flown away! the whole station! no wreckage . . . nothing left but the platforms . . . three or four . . . must have been a big station . . . Hanover-South . . . our friends seem to know . . . but this isn't the end . . . now we've got to get through the city and find Hanover-North, on the other side . . . oh, I've forgotten the main thing! . . . the crowd! not just on the platforms, on the tracks, sitting, lying down . . . they're talking . . . I hear English . . . English? . . . I see them . . . some women and a man, English civilians . . . what are they doing here? . . . parachutists? . . . I go over and get acquainted . . . no! . . . they're landowners . . . three women and a man, the man's paralyzed . . . in wartime you keep running into cripples! they're looking for the British Army, they think they'll find it between Hanover and Bremen . . . they had a radio there at home, in Brunswick it seems, their estate . . . enormous . . . enormous . . . a horse farm . . . riding horses and work horses . . . and naturally they'd raised feed, plus alfalfa and colza . . . and the Nazis left them alone? . . . I ask them . . . certainly! they'd only asked them to give courses in English, especially conversation . . . oh, they'd had fine pupils, conscientious . . . this paralytic, I could see, was in worse shape than von Leiden Junior . . . maybe you remember him . . . in Zornhof . . . but he wasn't delirious or vicious, not at all! . . . a courteous, reasonable cripple . . . how had they brought him this far? . . . from Brunswick to Hanover? . . . by "shuttles" . . . taken them two weeks . . . like us from Rostock . . . this "shuttle" traffic went on for almost two years . . . about ten raids on Hamburg before they surrendered . . . now it was time to get moving . . . these Britishers, especially with their

cripple, couldn't see themselves hiking through Hanover and its red and yellow streets . . . furnaces all the way . . . I've told you they weren't the only ones, the platforms and tracks were full of people wanting to get through Hanover and go north . . . people really from all over the place . . . somebody hears me talking to Lili . . . an old Italian . . . old? well, about my age now . . . he tells us, he's only got one thing on his mind, to get back to "da boss!" , . . he's just come back from Italy, he'd gone to see his family, his four children . . . and he's late! . . . a week late! . . . chickenshit at the border . . . where is this boss? . . . a brickyard in Brandenburg . . . a long way! . . . first he's got to go north to Hamburg . . . and then south! he's looking for a shuttle! I didn't want to discourage him . . . he'd worked in France, Toulouse and Narbonne . . . always in brickyards! now, under the circumstances, it was Brandenburg . . . the only drawback, he was late . . . it wasn't his fault . . . the Italian border . . . he shows me his papers, he had them all! all the stamps and visas and photographs . . . so what was the trouble? too many papers! this pocket, that pocket . . . and more in his musette bag! . . . it took an hour just to collect them, to put them in order . . . that's war, spending all your time getting things stamped!

He acted it out for me! the stamping! this one, *wham!* . . . that one, *plunk!* . . . all day long! but what about us? . . . who were we? where'd we come from? . . .

"Down south . . . way south!"

And where were we going?

"Up north! . . . past Hamburg!"

"Boss?"

Yes! yes! . . . of course! . . . we had a boss too, up there! . . . and we were late too . . . just like him! . . . that went over . . . he understood . . . he wasn't interested in the war . . . as far as he was concerned, the war was someplace else . . . his boss . . . that's what mattered! . . . and being late! . . . a week! good reason to be furious! he grumbles, he listens to himself, a week they'd made him waste at the Italian border! . . . ah, but Lili? he looks at her . . . he thinks she's looking peaked . . . a little tired, I tell him . . . yes, she's pale! I agree . . . it's the cold . . . of course . . . all these people on the platform around us, they know how to talk, but none of them thinks of making a fire . . . God knows there's plenty of that . . . a hundred yards away, all the streets on the right and left, all Hanover, I think . . . tail ends of houses burning . . . you had to see it . . . every single house . . . in the middle . . . in between the ex-walls a flame . . . yellow . . . violet . . . spinning . . . whirling . . . and flying away! . . . up to the sky! . . . dancing . . . disappearing . . . starting up again . . . the soul of the house . . . a farandole of colors from the first

rubble heaps as far as you could see . . . the whole city . . . red . . . blue . . . and violet . . . and smoke . . . this bricklayer's idea was to make a fire for us right there . . . a little fire. . .

"My name is Felipe . . ."

Felipe's stopped talking . . . he's looking for a piece of wood . . . he finds one . . . on the platform right behind us . . . he takes out his knife, I can see he's a real worker, no goof-off, it takes him two seconds, a little pile of shavings . . . looked like long matches . . . Felipe really knows his stuff . . . now what? Lili has an idea: tea! . . . she's got some little bags of tea in her musette bag . . . but what about water? Felipe knows where . . . the end of our platform . . . we've got canvas buckets . . . and three tin cups . . . we've got everything! full camping equipment . . . actually we'd been at it since Baden-Baden, treks, shocks, countershocks, breathers! . . . and more to come! . . . promising outlook! . . . right now we're going to have tea . . . the water's coming to a boil . . . we can't invite anybody, we've barely enough for the three of us! . . . but those cross-eyed looks! they think we're pretty damned selfish . . . hell, I'm sure they don't like tea! . . . Felipe doesn't like tea either, he's only joining us for the company . . . and besides, it's hot! . . . he tells us what he likes . . . a leetla sunnashine . . . a leetla chiz . . . and a beeg chunka bread . . . white or black . . . either one . . . he has simple tastes . . . like us . . . but with him it's coffee . . . not tea . . . I understand, I'd be glad to oblige . . . we'd had our last coffee in Rostock! not a drop since! . . . ah, our English friends are here again . . . the women and the cripple, they've done all the platforms trying to find some more Britishers . . . no! . . . they're the only ones . . . they ask me what I think . . . their worry . . . the women . . . is how are they going to get through the whole of Hanover with their paralytic! . . . they can't carry him, they need something to roll him on, and even then! . . . same problem as von Leiden Junior up there in Zornhof, the basket case . . . they'd chucked him in the manure . . . here they had the flames, the whole street, both sides as far as Hanover-North . . . we could see that station . . . these three devoted women, they'd have every opportunity and who'd have said a word? right here in Paris I've seen smellier things happen, me here in my own house, you think I'd say something? . . . there's a time for everything! . . . when the "anything goes" hour strikes, you will keep your trap carefully shut . . . you're being murdered? amen! the world has forgotten you? . . . you're in luck! down on your knees, you pervert! . . . kick in patiently, abjectly! and give thanks! . . .

Suppose they'd chucked their paralytic in the fire . . . he wouldn't have been the only liquidé! . . . there must have been dozens tossed out of every house

the only liqueur: . . . there must have been dozens tossed out of every house, bothersome grandmothers, noisy brats . . . family roasts, so to speak . . .

"Have you seen any stationmen?"

I ask . . . yes! . . . they're on the third platform . . . I'm thinking about us, our junk . . . quite a pile we've been lugging around, we want for nothing, complete equipment, dishes, cups, knives, rice, flour . . . but that whole street as far as the station? . . . I'm thinking about a luggage truck . . . I see some that aren't being used . . . with a lot of people piled on them asleep, maybe stationmen . . . third platform? . . . I go to the biggest tallest raspberry cap . . . I know their hierarchy . . . I've got my little idea, always the same: a hundred marks! . . . before opening my mouth . . . it's not a station-mistress like in Ulm, this one has a pepper-and-salt beard, I dive in, big handshake, my hundred marks, my explanation . . . I tell him what I want, I don't waste any time, I ask him to give us a hand truck, lend it to us to take our stuff to the other station, Hanover-North . . . we're all in . . . we're sick, my wife and me and our Italian friend . . . and we have to take the train to Hamburg . . . he's willing . . . only one objection: who's going to bring it back? . . . I'd foreseen that . . . I had another hundred marks already folded the same way! . . . that does it . . . he whispers in my ear: "I'll go get it"! I don't believe him . . . I don't think he gives a shit about his truck or anything else . . . with his whole station gone . . . blasted away! . . . nothing left but the four platforms . . . I look around . . . and all this sleeping, snoring flesh . . . families, even on the tracks . . . ah, no, mistake, they're moving! . . . they're waking up! . . . it must be seeing the two of us talking to the Stationmaster . . . they'd been so pooped they weren't even hungry . . . but now they're sitting up! they want to know what's going on! you never saw such curiosity! . . . and the Englishman and his three women . . . they had a few ideas too! . . . they motioned to me: us! us! us! . . . anyway, the Stationmaster was willing, we could take a truck, he'd lend it to us . . . oh, no need to go get it, they must have heard us, there was a whole army of them, at least fifty, around one of the trucks, they'd already loaded their stuff, sacks, musette bags, bottles, alcohol lamps, and way up top, enthroned so to speak, strapped and corded, the English cripple . . . looked like Mardi Gras . . . 'sbodkins . . . they'd sure been quick! the three of us had only to stow our stuff somewhere . . . anywhere . . . in with their magma, and let's go! . . . as long as they don't lose us! . . . they were in a hurry now! . . . Le Vig could have helped us . . . no! Lili and I were tougher than he was, we could take more . . . tired or not, we popped Bébert into his bag . . . they didn't lose us . . . they certainly meant to . . . even sprawled all over the platforms . . . that was their only thought! . . . maybe it sounds cockeyed, but to this day, from Moscow to

Buenos Aires, from rue Brottin° to Broadway, they wake up in a sweat at the thought that we're still alive . . .

Now I could get a good look at this Englishman, they'd hoisted him way up top, the captain on the bridge . . . I hadn't really looked at him . . . believe me, I'm not making it up . . . a face all in profile, a Polichinelle . . . a *Punch*, they'd have said in their country . . . not a friendly face, vicious in fact, but amusing . . . and our Felipe? . . . he was there, he wasn't saying anything . . . he'd had his piece of cheese . . . I tell him . . .

"Felipe! . . . Hamburg! . . . Brandenburg!"

"Certo!"

All he cared about, I knew, was getting back, that he was late! . . . okay! . . . we were ready to go . . . I let the others tighten the ropes, consolidate the edifice . . . I've told you, there were at least thirty of them . . . maybe fifty . . . they were going to push . . . at least three miles, I think, through Hanover . . . the ones that were staying . . . the platforms were all full of them . . . didn't seem happy about it . . . far from it! . . . they were even insulting us . . . they'd gotten up, they were running . . . looking for more trucks like us, to get through Hanover with . . . sure if we didn't shake a leg, if we let them catch us . . . they'd grab us and finish us off! . . . they were madder than hornets . . . to see us leaving ahead of them . . . why hadn't we waited for them? . . . the Englishman, Mr. Punch, didn't say a word . . . he didn't look very happy up there on his throne of knapsacks and semi-mattresses and crockery . . . he rolls, he pitches, he catches himself, by the skin of his teeth . . . this street isn't carriageable any more . . . too many shell holes . . . and further on big mounds of rubble . . . this city is smashed up worse than Berlin . . . our truck's getting ahead even so . . . they're all pushing, but by fits and starts . . . depending on the shell holes . . . I egg them on! . . . can't they see that mob? . . . the mob is making time! . . . they've found all the trucks they needed! . . . four . . . five . . . six! . . . I've got a sense of danger! . . . I yell at them in German . . . I show them what's coming after us . . .

"Schnell! . . . schnell! . . . mörderer!"

And then in French:

"Murderers! murderers! quick!"

In other words an alert . . . they're not chasing us to give us the time of day! . . . five . . . six carts . . . I'm not dreaming! . . . they should look! . . .

"Push! . . . push! . . . suffering catfish, push!"

I don't know if they understand me . . . if they're French . . . or Latvians . . . or Moldavians . . . I've given up trying to find out . . . anyway, up bump and down shell hole and through rubble heaps I think we're almost gaining on the

down shell hole and through rubble heaps I think we're almost gaining on the posse. . .

From this moment on, I warn you, my chronicle is a little jerky, I myself, who lived through what I'm telling you, have trouble getting it straight . . . I was talking about "comics" . . . even in the comics you'd have a hard time finding a sudden break like that in the continuity, balloons, and characters . . . a double-barreled shambles . . . take my word for it! . . . so brutal that all of a sudden nothing was there . . . and I myself . . . telling you about it twenty-five years later . . . I hem and haw, I'm all balled up . . . too many bits and pieces! . . . you'll have to forgive me . . .

"Stop spluttering! . . . just tell us what happened!"

Right you are! well, at that exact moment they caught up with us! . . . our pursuers . . . raving mad . . . and their four five jam-packed hand trucks! . . . a balcony had fallen plunk in the middle of the street . . . and blocked us . . . off a house that was still standing . . . not all of it, only the front! but what a balcony! forged iron! . . . I hadn't seen this house from a distance . . . house is too much said! just the front and the walls on one court . . . I remember saying: "this is it, we're fucked! . . . they'll tear us to pieces!" at that exact moment *wham!* a bomb! . . . not a little one, a big splasher . . . *thump!* and another one, nearer . . . I guess we all panicked . . . we fugitives and our pursuers . . . Ill say it again: I guess . . . I don't know, I can only imagine . . . I'm not sure, I'm not the fainting kind, but there I was kind of stunned . . . pain, but not bad, and blood . . . on my neck . . . I'm bleeding, yes, blood from my cerebrum . . . no! my medulla . . . I think . . . anyway, that area . . . I know I tried to stay lucid . . . I thought about Lili . . . and Bébert . . . but as if they'd gone away somewhere . . . far away . . . and me too, still further . . . in a different direction! that's all I can honestly remember . . . that bomb . . . where'd it come from? . . . and the blocked street . . . and the shell holes . . . and all the junk and rubble . . . pretty near twenty-seven years ago . . .



I says to myself: Lili, I've found you, you're here! . . . and so's Bébert! . . . oh, but the sirens . . . all those sirens! as many as in Berlin . . . you'd think they were finished around here, they've wrecked the whole place! . . . well, pretty near . . . *wheee!* . . . another alert . . . from one end of the moonlight to the other . . . I forgot to tell you . . . what a moon! . . . *wheee!* . . . *wham!* . . . *boom!* bombs . . . more bombs . . . what was there left to smash? hey, Felipe? . . . where was he? I ask Lili . . . Felipe answers, I hadn't seen him . . . but he was right there, two steps away . . .

"You stopped a brick!"

He tells me . . . I don't know, but it hurts bad . . . same place, between my head and my neck . . . Felipe's mistaken, the brick stopped me, hit me between my head and my neck . . . I can get up, I think, that's the main thing . . . we certainly ought to be getting on . . . *wheee!* ah, they're still at it! mostly in the south . . . and flames, sparks, far away on the horizon . . . swirling flames, I've told you . . . flames coming down from every ruin . . . leaping into the air . . . and back down again! . . . like an egg on a jet of water . . . except here it was green . . . and red . . . but what can be burning? . . . roasted leftovers? . . . and what was the sense in coming back, the "fortresses" I mean, to stir up dead fires? . . . and drop God knows how many bombs . . . thousands! . . . I don't get it . . . those people must have money to burn . . . so rich they don't know what to do . . . *wheee!* . . . just for the hell of it, I guess . . . and what illumination! . . . that moon! straight out of the opera! . . . plus the searchlights of the "passive defense" . . . sweeping the clouds . . . an enchantment! . . . a spectacle not to be missed . . . I saw the bombing of the Renault factory in Issy in 1943 . . . I've seen tropical tornadoes, Cameroons 1918, all the huts flying away, and not little ones, as big as my house, in the lightning . . . and crammed full of merchandise . . . but

next to this return of the "fortresses" in force and these avalanches of bombs, it was nothing . . . in another vein I've seen something memorable that will never be seen again: the big cavalry maneuvers at Camp Cercottes in 1913, deployment in extended order, wheeling movements . . . seven divisions! . . . with trumpets! . . . the hero of the future will be tied to a pole, immobilized, gagged, and shot out into the stratosphere . . . once around the globe, barely time to take a leak! and whoops! home again! . . . the more times around, the more of a hero he'll be!

But now back to business . . . on this road where we are you can see as clear as day . . . really bright moonlight . . . like a mild late-autumn sun . . . *wheee!* say, that's quite a show they're putting on! . . . there! . . . there! . . . shrapnel! . . . in the clouds! and in between . . . bursting shells . . . really a grandiose panorama . . . in my opinion! . . . and all this to music! . . . I was looking for a tune . . . an accompaniment . . . I ask Lili . . . "don't you hear something?" . . . sure! . . . she hears the sirens . . . that's all! . . . but this music . . . nobody else? . . . Felipe? . . . he listens . . . he doesn't hear any music either, only a lot of bombs and sirens . . . *wheee!* how come? . . . I'm no musician . . . far from it . . . I'm getting melodies . . . I'd go so far as to say magnificent melodies . . .

But a musician is something else . . . if I was a musician, I'd know . . . in all these years naturally I'd heard a lot of concerts . . . big ones and little ones . . . if I was the society type I'd be an authority . . . I'd give world-shaking opinions . . . stockbrokers would invite me to dinner . . . there of course I knew what was what . . . echoes . . . of faint strains . . . were coming to me . . . from this side and that side! . . . memories sprouting! piles of them! same as an old toad covers himself with pimples if you barely touch him . . . right here now I'm in shock, stunned! . . . I'm not saying a word, but my mouth is full of blood . . . it must be all over my shirt and pants too . . . Felipe says it was a brick . . . all right, call it a brick! . . . in the confusion when our pursuers . . . and their six hand trucks . . . caught up with us, hell bent on making us pay for our head start . . . the explosion had broken it up . . . buried all those lunatics under five and a half stories of bricks . . . so why wouldn't there be one for me? Felipe'd seen it . . . we were all together . . . a wonder the others hadn't been hit! . . . I've got to admit I wasn't feeling right . . . not just the brick, not just that clout between my head and neck . . . also further up by the left ear . . . not imaginary, medically certified, two three opinions and counter-opinions . . . first in 1916 and then later at the Ryshospital in Copenhagen . . . skull and otic cone in bad shape . . . God knows I'm used to it! . . . whistles . . . drums . . . jets of steam . . . okay! . . . but a melody a melody! . . . and as I've said, magnificent! as magnificent as the

melody: a melody: . . . and as I've said, magnificent: as magnificent as the
panorama . . . a symphonic melody, so to speak, just right for this ocean of ruins
. . . wild ruins . . . this "fiery surf" . . . pink . . . green . . . and little crackling
clusters . . . the souls of the houses . . . far . . . far away . . . dancing . . . I tell Lili:

"Don't move, I've got it!"

"Why would I move? but you, are you in pain?"

Ah, I don't want to talk about my head! . . . an adapter, that's what I needed!
. . . and right away! . . . all full of memories! grotesque memories . . . in
snatches! . . . you can't have grandiose melodies without counterpoint!

Terrible pain from temple to temple! . . . it never stops! forgive me! . . . I
won't complain . . . my shirt was clinging to my back . . . right! I didn't mean to
talk about it . . . such dramatics! this "me me" chronicle! . . . Europe's falling to
pieces? my shirt! the ridge of my back! me! *wheeng! wheee! wheee!* sirens still
blowing somewhere . . . I'm imitating the music . . . too bad I have no talent! . . .
wheesh! listen! . . . I need another ear, the one I have left is no use at all . . .
maybe at the piano, groping . . . from key to key . . . later in Copenhagen up
there, two years in the clink, I had time . . . I composed grandiose melodies for
myself, still in memory of Hanover, symphonies so to speak, and hummed them
to myself . . . like this, inside my mouth . . . *boom!* . . . *wham!* . . . *wheee!* I was
all alone, I wasn't bothering anybody . . . the guards were used to it . . . my time
in the clink, two years, Pavilion K, Vesterfangsel . . . seeing I was in Denmark
they had to put me someplace . . .

Here now, up above where I'm writing, I hear phonograph records through
the floors, movements of symphonies, I think, I don't ask . . . I listen, I keep quiet
. . . I don't want to hum like up there in solitary in the Vesterfangsel . . . it's ballet
dancers, I think, not tongues of flame like in Hanover . . . so they tell me, I don't
know them . . . I know their studio . . . I've gone up two three times . . . at night .
. . . I'm not the society type, what I don't know I don't know . . . still as down at
heel and scrupulous as ever . . . he holds his tongue . . . I hold my tongue . . .
your highborn man doesn't hesitate, he barges right in! . . . nothing can stop him!
. . . proclaims his opinion! judges! . . . and to hell with what you think! the
highborn man doesn't know how to do anything . . . but highborn he is,
thunderbolt, omnipotent! . . . and that's that! . . . whisper so nobody can hear
you! . . . one peep and you're through!

Up there anyway, where I was telling you, it was three . . . maybe four
notes . . . on that platform of shards and plaster . . . the remains of the real one, in
Hanover-North . . . there, I can tell you, we had nothing left . . . our last rags and
knapsacks had disappeared in the smashup! the cave-in! seven hand trucks under

the torrents of bricks, two three house fronts and forged-iron balconies! . . . ah, moonlight! you'll never see such settings and tragedies in the movies! . . . much less on the stage! . . . they tell us that Hollywood is dead! . . . they can say that again! how can the movies deliver after what's happened for real! . . . which is why I personally can't even look at a photograph! . . . to translate is to betray! right! to reproduce, to photograph, is to putrefy! instantly! . . . anything that existed makes you sick to look at! . . . therefore transpose! . . . poetically if you can! but who tries? . . . nobody! . . . look at Goncourt! . . . that was the end! . . . "they ceased to transpose" . . . what were the crusades for? . . . the crusaders transposed themselves! . . . now they get themselves ejected from their sixteenth floor in Passy by air-conditioned super-jet direct to Golgotha . . . seven minutes . . . get their pictures taken on the Mount of Olives . . . Monsieur as Joseph . . . Madame as Mary . . . the children? angels naturally . . . home again for cocktails . . . now that every man and his wife has a motor on his ass and can go wherever he likes, without legs, without a head, he's nothing but a balloon, a half portion of air . . . he won't even pass away, he's done it already . . .

Oh, you say to yourself: this old fool, what a bore he is! . . . all right, I admit it, I'm talking too much . . . back to my three notes . . . quick! I'm not putting on . . . but you see . . . I need them for my Hanover panorama! . . . before that brick hit me and scrambled my brains, I hadn't a care in life . . . I let my head buzz any way it liked, without order or pretention . . . I let it trumpet any old way, I didn't bother about the music . . . but now, like it or not, I've got to! . . . I'd even call it a melody . . . can you imagine? untrained, untalented, forced to bumble snatches of melody . . . but something else! my canes! . . . lost them both in that fool explosion . . . when everything fell down on us, well anyway, the house front . . . I think, I'm not sure . . .

"Felipe, my good friend! . . . Felipe!"

I tell him about it . . . he'll find my canes! I'm sure he will . . . because we've got to keep on going . . . on the other track . . . the last one they've got at this Hanover-North . . . they tell me a certain train will be passing through . . . we'll see! . . . no lack of passengers! . . . people like us and soldiers . . . Krauts and Hungarians, I think . . . not talking very loud, whispering . . . they're looking around same as us . . . far . . . near . . . the little fires . . . what's left of the houses . . . the colors . . . we all look like Pierrots, all covered with flour in the bright moonlight . . . Felipe brings me my two canes, they weren't far away . . . good! . . . good! . . . but my grandiose melody? . . . just what I need in these ruins . . . this ocean of fire, this fiery surf from end to end of Hanover . . . I can hear the tune in my head . . . pretty sure the tune is right . . . but the notes? . . . the exact notes?

my head . . . pretty sure the tune is right . . . but the notes! . . . the exact notes! hell, mere reminiscences . . . I admit it . . . but what of it? . . . comforting music after the tornado . . .

Believe it or not, but after that night in Hanover I wondered if I had the notes I wanted or . . . were they too high? or too low? . . .

"But the man is *gaga*, it said so in *Paris-Match!* dribbling, drooping! he was shitting in his pants!"

I'm letting you interrupt me . . . but the truth remains the truth . . . through myriad adventures, amusing and much less amusing moments, I kept wondering if I had my musical setting . . . oh, I have no great pretensions . . . three four notes . . . pleasure notes, so to speak . . . that'll do! . . .

I finally made up my mind . . . I went upstairs . . . where the young ladies are, the ballet dancers . . . at eleven o'clock at night . . . I was positive, I'd heard it! . . . enough of it anyway . . . three . . . four notes . . . nobody up there at eleven o'clock at night . . . I knew what I wanted . . . symphonies! . . . I thumb through the records . . . a big pile! . . . believe it or not, I find it in half a second . . . the one I need . . . yes! . . . no! . . . yes! now for a keyboard! at the other end of the studio . . . thinking about it so long, maybe . . . I poke around on the keys . . . I've got it! . . . pretty near right . . . yes! yes! . . . where's the A on the keyboard? . . . I've got it! . . . the tune! . . . a miracle! twenty years you've been racking your brains, and damned if you haven't got it! . . . stupid and unmusical as you are! . . . I go back down, I've got my four notes . . . G-sharp! G! A-sharp! . . . B! Got to remember them. I should have had them there in Hanover.

There on the roadbed . . . I guess I was sick . . . fainted like a sissy . . . must have, because Felipe woke me up . . . it was getting light. . .

"Has the train passed?"

I ask him.

"No . . . no . . . not yet!"

That's a good thing . . . I says to myself: Lili, I've found you, you're here! . . . so's Bébert! . . . oh, but the sirens, wheee! . . . as many as in Berlin . . . you'd think they were finished around here, they've wrecked the whole place! well, pretty near . . . *wheee!* . . . from one end of the moonlight to the other . . . and *wham!* . . . and *boom!* . . . *bombs! smash!* . . . but what was there left to smash? . . . hey, where's Felipe? . . .



At last! the train! . . . I can hear you saying: all he does is take trains . . . anyway, here it is! . . . seems it's the last train from Hanover to Hamburg . . . if you call it a train . . . a coke engine hitched to ten, maybe fifteen open-work cars . . . cars? not exactly . . . no walls, no doors . . . more like platforms . . . the worst of it is that they're all full . . . war materiel, mostly . . . I think . . . enormous searchlights under tarps . . . nobody stops the passengers from climbing on . . . they've just got to squeeze in . . . it's the last train on the line . . . then they're going to rip up the rails for strategic reasons . . . that's what they're saying . . . they seem to know . . . rumors aren't always wrong, that's what's so frightening, that shred of truth . . . but even if it wasn't sure they were going to discontinue the Hanover-Hamburg, even if it was only probable, we couldn't take the chance . . . heave-ho! . . . not so easy, but we make it! . . . we're wedged between an enormous spool of cable and some other huge object, a dynamo, I think . . . pretty tight squeeze, but not too uncomfortable . . . Lili, Bébert in his musette bag, Felipe, and myself . . . we've only got each other to keep us warm, nothing to put on, lost it all in the hostilities and under the brick slide . . . well, pretty near . . . our knapsacks and duffel coats . . . buried in bricks . . . I think, I'm not sure . . . I won't claim we were naked, no! . . . but that's what it felt like in the rain and wind . . . besides, it was coming on winter and we hadn't had anything to eat since the smashup . . . I think all our stuff was buried under the bricks, I'm not sure . . . I'm not saying we were stark naked, no! . . . but nothing to eat, not a thing, no coffee, no bread . . . the other people on the other cars haven't anything either, I can see the positions they're in, they've climbed on, hoisted themselves like us, not a peep out of them, they're only trying to keep warm like us, but in clusters of ten or fifteen . . . men and women . . . in between spools of barbed wire, steel girders, and more searchlights . . . all this equipment for Hamburg? at

the tail end, it looks like, they've even got pieces of railroad cars . . . quarters, halves . . . that we're toting along with a regiment of searchlights . . . no skin off my ass! . . . to the repair yard! . . . why not? . . . I promise Lili: "this is going to be fun!" . . . "think so?" . . . she's not so sure . . . she asks me . . . "are you feeling all right?" . . . the fact is, I'm feeling remarkably chipper . . . in spite of my stinking headache . . . my nose and mouth are bleeding too . . . not much, drop by drop . . . must be blood, it's trickling down my back and between my legs . . . I don't want to say anything, but there in that street, in the fracas, I took a clout between the medulla and maybe the mastoid . . . I've got a lump, feels like a warm moist ball, hair, mud, and something else . . . but as long as I can stand up more or less . . . and we've found a place . . . not the first time! . . . wedged between tarps and dynamos . . . the main thing is to keep from falling off this shelf! . . . a hell of a setup, this bric-a-brac flatcar . . . and cold! . . . it's September . . . if we fall off this shelf nobody'll come and pick us up . . . I mean by rail . . . if the tracks are still there! such a hurry, they tell me, to do away with this line! . . . hee! hee! . . . I tell Lili it's funny . . . she doesn't think so . . . she never sulks, but right now she's sulking . . . since that brickfall, I think . . . me, it's the exact opposite! . . . ever since that brick hit me, except for this lousy headache, I've been wanting to laugh! . . . at everything . . . for instance this platform we're on . . . and the cool of the morning . . . cool? . . . understatement . . . it's just plain cold . . . but I can't complain! . . . "Lili, I've got a fever! . . . how about you? . . . and you, Felipe?" something's jiggling, I don't know who's doing it, but it's one of us . . . in my case it's malaria plus everything else . . . later . . . a little later I'll go into the clinical aspect . . . but . . . say . . . this car is moving! . . . definitely! . . . I said to myself . . . we'd pulled out and we hadn't even noticed . . . we were rolling along . . . charming landscape! . . . well, kind of hazy . . . poetic, let's say . . . the people behind us . . . on the other flatcars . . . must be joggling too . . . I get a glimpse of them . . . here and there . . . between the tarps and searchlights, they seem to be all huddled up like us and not very happy . . . they're dressed pretty much like us . . . I think . . . but there must be some more under the tarps, that can't be all war materiel . . . hiding in the hardware! . . . on the lam from something or other . . . people that don't want to be seen . . . here we are, joggling along on these flatcars with a whole raft of invisibles . . . coexistence is the word nowadays . . . okay, we're coexisting! . . . the main thing is we're rolling! even with these stowaways, we'll get to Hamburg, unless the train blows up . . . it's the things you don't see that matter in life, what you see is all masquerade, blah-blah, theater! . . . it's what's going on

inside your prostate that's interesting, that millionth gamete that decides he's sick of it all and isn't going to take any more orders, no, he's going into business for himself, to hell with the ladies and cock robin! he's going to proliferate . . . quick! this minute! for his own benefit! and you can croak! you'll never see that millionth lowdown cancerous anarchist gamete! . . . you won't even know he existed! . . . oh oh! now I'm proliferating, losing sight of you . . . curses! . . . off my rocker? . . . never mind, I warned you! . . . my head! . . . my head's acting up . . . no! it can count me out! . . . I'm bringing you back to our rolling platform . . . this enormous contraption and all these people wedged between the dynamos . . . here we are again! . . . nothing to complain about, we're getting ahead . . . there's definitely somebody under those tarps . . . I'm positive! . . . time will tell! . . . Henry IV? . . . Romanov? . . . Louis XV? they lived well . . . and shitless . . . assassins in every doorway . . . every street corner . . . those things, as you know, concern the Fates, not us! . . . to sum up: that brick hasn't improved my health . . . I admit it! but not depressed . . . not in the least! . . . actually I'm kind of gay . . . a special kind of whimsy . . . those thatched huts, for instance . . . on both sides of the landscape . . . seems to me they're acting kind of theatrical . . . tableau effect, leaning over, undulating . . . especially the chimneys . . . it's a kind of vision, a style . . . oh, I know my head has something to do with it! . . . that brick . . . I ask Lili . . . no! . . . she doesn't see anything undulating . . . I won't say any more about it! . . . talking about smoke, we're doing all right . . . soot, the usual cloud, we're not far from the engine . . . but nothing like those tunnels! the innards of the Harz! here it's flat country . . . plains . . . and another thing: no alerts! . . . we hear a few squadrons high up . . . but nothing coming our way, they're not interested in our string of flatcars . . . same old story . . . I guess we're not worth a bomb . . . come to think of it, we hadn't been worth a bomb quite a few times . . . which hadn't prevented me from getting mine, but indirect . . . a brick! . . . according to Felipe . . . one thing for sure, my mouth was full of blood, fresh, not clotted . . . where was it coming from? . . . this slow trickle . . . the inner ear? . . . I was thinking, I'm still thinking . . . and at the same time this gaiety . . . so sudden . . . not much to be gay about, except that we were rolling in the direction of Hamburg . . . and points north . . . and up there there might be some way to . . . if you've got your idea, your idée fixe, you're sitting pretty, other people do your thinking for you, they think of everything, knock themselves out doing this, doing that . . . it's gruesome to think what slaves they are, motorists, casuists, alcoholics, plurisexuals, bulimics, coprophagists, super-production perverts! . . . which didn't prevent me, clever as I am, from picking a

winner that's still giving me trouble with my beezer, and today, twenty years later, I'm still wondering how it could have happened . . .

All right! you're sick of listening to this stuff 1 you'd like to see me get somewhere . . . I understand! I sympathize! . . . my brick and ear stories are driving you up the wall . . . I'll abridge! . . . our train was getting ahead . . . without incident . . . they must have repaired the roadbed . . . maybe a bit of jiggle-joggle . . . not much . . . but too cold for sleep . . . the only trouble with these flatcars . . . all you could do was look at the landscape . . . an hour . . . two hours . . . always the same . . . farms, thatched roofs in the meadows . . . and mists . . .

Personally I have to admit that my shirt is sticking to my back . . . I'm positive . . . could I still be bleeding? in my pants too . . . believe it or not . . . in spite of the cold, I must have dozed off . . . I know it, because I couldn't believe what I saw when I opened my eyes . . . our train had stopped . . . up ahead I saw a mountain of scrap, maybe a hundred yards away . . . and perched on top of it a locomotive . . . upside down . . . and believe me, that loco was no toy . . . twelve wheels! . . . upside down in the air . . . I count them . . . twelve . . . I count them again . . . it must have been an explosion . . . volcanic! . . . that shot it up there . . . upside down! . . . on the mountain top! . . .

Not sure of my head, my impressions . . . my eyes weren't acting right . . . I ask Lili . . . I ask Felipe . . . yes! . . . no mistake! . . . they see it too . . . this locomotive with its wheels in the air! . . . naturally it could have happened to us . . . not once, a hundred times . . . the way we'd been zigzagging around Germany . . . all the same, this locomotive way up there . . . upside down . . . I'm like St. Thomas, I only believe what I see! . . . "behold, Thomas! touch! . . ." as long as our train with all its flatcars and caboodle had stopped, I might as well go take a look . . . at this phenomenon, I mean this mountain of scrap and the locomotive on the summit . . . I suggest it to Lili and Felipe . . . it wasn't very daring, there were plenty more in the meadow who'd come down off the flatcars like us, to go get an idea *de visu* . . . families of every language . . . in tatters like us, but better covered . . . rags but several layers . . . that explosion had wiped us out . . . taken away pretty near everything we had . . . say what you please, there's something mysterious about that loco perched on the scrap . . . how'd it get up there? . . . an eruption in the meadow? no bomb could have shot that monster up in the air upside-down! . . . to the top of that crag! . . . they were all talking it over . . . not loud, more like whispers . . . snatches of sentences . . . it was mock-German . . . from pretty far-out countries, I'd say . . . anyway, they didn't agree . . . one

explanation wasn't bad: a munitions dump . . . and another, just as plausible . . . a secret weapon . . . launched in Peene-miinde . . . had turned around . . . boomeranged . . . possible . . . everything was possible . . . it had been intended for London . . . I must say I couldn't see any reason why they wouldn't try again . . . and shoot us up on some mountain peak next time . . . meanwhile they were all looking at us . . . so ragged, worse than the rest . . . I guess they thought we were indecent . . . and something had to be done about it! . . . right away they think of the tarps on the cars! . . . one two three! . . . they climb up up, they come back! they cut! they tailor! . . . for us! . . . good deal! . . . big patches of green . . . brown canvas . . . give us something to put on . . . peplums . . . and rope girdles . . . there was everything on those flatcars! . . . seems there were people between the searchlights and the rolls of cable . . . lots of them . . . sleeping . . . and kids . . . so we make ourselves peplums out of these tarp cuttings . . . now we're presentable! . . . but this canvas is mighty wet! . . . the autumn weather . . . we won't be dry in a hurry . . . I've told you these people around us were whispering . . . a mixture of Low German and other dialects . . . later . . . later I'll ask them . . . now my idée fixe is this loco up there on the mountain . . . it makes me laugh . . . I ask them about it . . . a man . . . a woman . . . they're wondering too . . . that's what they'd come down off their flatcars for, to find out . . . I'm getting impatient . . . besides, I've still got a pain in my ear . . . I never drink a drop, but I'm feeling kind of tipsy . . . even with my canes . . . or rather, my sticks . . . oh, I'm not the only one! it's a common symptom . . . now, twenty years later, I still have this sensation of tipsiness . . . but now I'm the right age for it, the wind in my sails . . . man must stagger at his death . . . drunk with life, he's had too much fun . . . the long and the short of it! . . . I'm entertaining you again . . . but there all of a sudden I was sick of not understanding those people . . .

"No French people? . . . *Keine Franzosen?*"

I say it out loud . . . hell! . . . there's been enough whispering.

"*Ja! . . . ja! . . . eine Dame!*"

Glory be! at least one that's not afraid to answer! where can this lady be?

They go after her . . . is she on one of the flatcars too? . . . under a tarp? . . . it takes them quite a while to find her . . . ah, here she is! say, she's not in rags at all . . . smart, I'd almost say . . . how come? . . . the rest of us rigged out like beggars . . . Chinese canvas puzzles . . . scarecrows! . . . and this young lady . . . where's she out of? . . . I'd better ask her . . .

"I am honored, mademoiselle!"

She looked like a mademoiselle to me . . .

"Permit me to introduce my wife and our friend . . . Euliel . . . and myself

Permit me to introduce my wife and our friend . . . Felipe: . . . and myself with all my respects . . . Louis Destouches . . . doctor of medicine . . ."

"A great pleasure, Doctor! . . . Madame, I want to embrace you! . . . if you don't mind! . . ."

"By all means! . . . by all means! . . ."

This young lady's name . . . Odile Pomaré . . . she looks a lot better than we do, her attire, I mean, dress, blouse, little fur cap, scarf, but when it comes to her complexion certainly worse . . . consumptive it seems to me . . . that flush on her cheeks . . . thin and feverish . . . cadaverous . . . I don't say anything but she seems seriously sick . . . I don't have to ask because right away she gives a little cough, for my benefit I guess, she wants to show me . . . in her handkerchief . . .

"Yes . . . I see . . . often?"

"Often in the last month . . . but even in France . . ."

But where's she come from now? from Breslau! . . . my goodness! . . . our Faustus, the lawyer . . . there really was such a man in Breslau! she'd known him slightly . . . but maybe it wasn't the same one . . . Cardinal de Retz claimed that suspicion makes us pull as many boners as confidence . . . it was all right for the cardinal! with all that power and what have you! . . . but when you're a poor slob, confidence isn't so hot! you know what you can do with it! . . . super-suspicious! that's me! anyway, I listen . . . what was this consumptive young lady doing in Breslau? instructor at the university! . . . oh! oh! . . . what degrees? . . . Ph.D. in German! . . . from the Sorbonne! . . . baloney, it seems to me! but that locomotive up there . . . does she see it? . . . she should answer me, dammit! . . . and right away!

I'm in no joking mood!

Yes, she sees it! . . . doesn't she find it strange? . . . no! . . . if you ask me, this chick is nuts! . . . instructor in Breslau? baloney! . . . I get the giggles! . . . it's my right! . . . they all look at me . . . let 'em look! . . .

"It's the brick! . . . the brick!"

Now they'll know! "*si! si!*"

Felipe backs me up . . . they ought to know I'm punchdrunk . . . the brick! . . . they were there, the dolts! or weren't they? . . . and where'd they come from anyway? . . . Breslau or someplace else! . . . they were in rags at least! . . . but this blood-spitting Odile? . . . standing there hardly rumped, I mean her dress and her lavender scarf . . . her family is in Orange . . . she'd studied in Aix . . . possible! . . . taken her degree in Paris . . . not so sure, but one thing, this Odile is very sick . . . I may be foggy in the head, seeing that loco perched in the air upside down, but this Odile Pomaré, Ph.D. or not, is in a bad way . . .

"Mademoiselle, if you don't mind, I'm going to take your temperature!"

"Where, Doctor?"

"Under your arm, mademoiselle! Lili, the thermometer!"

Lili'd been pretty badly jumbled by that hurricane of pursuers and the cataract of bricks, I'd seen it, I was scared stiff, practically undressed, but she'd saved her belt . . . which was something! . . . my hard-core reserves . . . ampules, packages of this and that, syringe . . . camphorated oil, morphine . . . plus a phial of cyanide . . . and the thermometer!

"Well, let's see now!"

A hundred and one and five-tenths! . . . pretty bad! . . . what'll I tell her? . . . I'll think about it. . .

"Oddort! . . . we were supposed to go to Oddort . . . our train . . . ever hear of it?"

Odile isn't interested in my medical opinion . . . she wants me to tell her about Oddort! and quick!

"Yes, we know all about it! . . . you're better off here, mademoiselle . . . but how come you're so neat and clean? . . . were you in a passenger car?"

Seems to me I have a right to be curious too.

"The other people are in rags! . . . what countries are all these people from? . . . and the locomotive up there?"

"Up where?"

Puzzled! the impudence! . . . I see it clear as day! eight wheels! upside down! up there! what's more, it's starting up! . . . I hear it! . . . *choo! choo!* that's not my sounds, I'm positive! I know my own sounds! I'm used to them, aren't I?

And then socko! I don't hear a thing . . .



They managed, I don't know how . . . anyway, they carried me up to my place between the dynamo and the yellow searchlight . . . I couldn't really tell at the time, but it must have been rough going . . . took twenty, maybe thirty of them . . . Lili and Felipe of course . . . and all those other people, I guess . . . I was unconscious . . . I'll give you the details another time . . .

Dingaling! I'll have to break off . . . you understand . . . it's the N.R.F. . . . got to answer! suspense! . . . Nimier^o wants to see me! . . . oh yes! yes indeed . . . let him come . . . been expecting him for two years! . . . exactly! he bought a car to come to see me in! must be broken in by now . . . that's why they're calling . . .

Here comes Nimier, he hasn't aged, I'd even say more boyish than ever . . . certainly more sprightly than at our last meeting . . . I congratulate him . . . he hasn't come to be admired! . . . or for reasons of courtesy or affectionate philosophy . . . it's my discomfiture! my chronic literary fiasco . . . that's what he's come to see me about . . . Achille is good and sick of it . . . I know the routine: the younger generation never heard of me, the graybeards hate me, the bookstores boycott me, the students have reverted to baby talk, the Leagues and their manifestoes are hanging me from every lamppost!

"So what?"

Our "brain trust"—he means the Compact Review—have decided you've got to go left . . . only the left can reinflate you! . . . look at you, old and isolated . . . in a word, a senile anarchist . . . all the other writers have somebody in back of them . . . we might just be able to rescue you . . . if you'd only listen! . . . Achille thinks so . . . take Cachin^o . . . he recovered all right! . . .

Cachin? say! . . . that name rings a bell! . . . why, yes! . . . the posters! . . . used to see them every day on my way to Bezons . . . green! . . . right outside the Berliet factory . . . I'm not telling Nimier . . . I don't tell anybody anything . . .

"Couldn't you remind them? just a few lines . . . of some little favor you once did . . . for the left? . . . anything at all . . . we could give you a fresh start! . . . come on! . . . give it a try, Ferdinand!"

In all good faith I try, I get to work . . . I look within . . . ah yes! . . . certainly! . . . but so far away . . . years and years! I rack my brains . . . in that Sargasso Sea of memories I find all sorts of things . . . bodies disintegrating in the water . . . bodies of famous people . . . and of despicable gangsters . . . moving with the seaweed . . . in eddies . . . whirlpools . . . and even saints! . . .

"Nimier! . . . Nimier, wait!"

A final effort . . . ah, I believe . . . yes! yes! . . . I've got it! . . . I think. . .

"Hey! How about *Journey*? . . . 1933!"

"What about it?"

"In Russian!"

"It was translated into Russian? . . . into Russian? . . . by whom?"

"Madame Elsa Triolet!"

"She spoke French?"

"A few words . . . very little . . . but Harengon,^o the great poet, gave her a hand!"

"Bravo! bravo! . . . but are you sure?"

"Am I sure! . . . I saw them myself, with my own eyes, hard at work! translating my white elephant . . . they were living in a studio . . . glassed in! . . . does that convince you?"

"Have you seen this translation?"

"I had it, but not any more . . . I lost it with everything else . . . you know, on rue Girardon . . . when the purgers purged my apartment with three moving vans . . ."

"Have the Russians got it?"

"Of course! I checked up on the spot!"

"Where?"

"In Petrograd!"

"You?"

"Yes! . . . and I may add, at my own expense! something the world ought to know . . . in fact they still owe me money . . . rude and disloyal! . . . me who don't owe anybody a sou, neither Achille nor Hitler nor Nobel nor Stalin nor the Pope! in fact I'm starving absolutely at my own expense . . ."

"So now what?"

"I'll ask the Russians what's become of *Journey* . . . they're bound to have a

copy . . . or two! . . . I know Russia's a big country, but I'm sure if they try . . . just a little . . ."

"My dear Céline, I must leave you now! dreadful hurry, they're waiting for me! my fifteen millionth invitation!"

I don't quite get it. . .

"High society, Céline!"

I wait till he's gone . . . then quick I grab a sheet of paper . . . a letter to Madame Triolet! . . . most courteously I take the liberty . . . I ask her if she's heard anything about her translation . . . since 1934 . . . and I wait . . . two weeks . . . two months . . . a year . . . nothing! . . . Madame Elsa is lying low . . . not the least discouraged . . . I try the Soviet Embassy, the Cultural Attaché . . . rue de Grenelle . . . a year goes by! nothing! never mind! I'll write to M. Gromyko! . . . I do him the honor . . . Monsieur le Ministre! . . . he's right on the spot . . . with an army of secretaries . . . one word, an order, and they'll find it! . . . no dice! . . . same as Elsa and the embassy . . . I think they must be embarrassed, no manners, no breeding! that big fat Russia, what a slob! . . . she loses everything you give her . . .

Two years since I laid eyes on Nimier . . .

"Hello! hello! . . ."

He doesn't let me get a word in . . . *he's* got something to say! to hell with *Journey* and Gromyko and Triolet and all that! . . . he wants to talk about his car, his brand-new beautiful car! . . . all *plastic!* . . . bought it just to come and see me in! one way of escaping from time, people, and space . . . buying new cars! . . . all right with me, it amuses him . . . forget it! I'd better get back to you! . . . remember? . . . I've been away a long time . . . my head . . . I'm sure it's the brick! . . . Mademoiselle Odile Pomaré . . . come to think of it, is she Mademoiselle or Madame! . . . better watch my step! . . . I won't ask her just yet .

..



No desire to make your ass bleed for me . . . stands to reason . . . already given you four books devoted to my misfortunes! . . . I could have a little consideration for you . . . haven't you suffered? . . . a damn sight more! a thousand times more! . . . but with more dignity, that's the difference! you don't exhibit it, not a sigh! . . . my crude calamities. . . enough!

There on that flatcar where they'd hoisted me . . . that open-air platform, I could have lamented my lungs out, nobody would have heard me . . . because of the noise . . . the axles and all the rattling junk, dynamos, searchlights, beams, tools . . . forgive me if I have to repeat myself . . . this is at least the tenth time we've entrained for some place or other across Germany . . . across plains, might as well call them steppes, through tunnels, soot ovens . . . and the return trip to the sea and back . . . I'd forgotten that! you're going to find me tedious . . . boring, this deluge! . . . I could invent, transpose . . . that's what they all did, the lot of them . . . in Old French it went over . . . Joinville, Villehardouin had it easy, they took full advantage, but our French today, so anemic, so strict and finicky, academized almost to death, they'd call me worse names than they do now . . . abject Pléiadic turd! . . . and I wouldn't sell at all . . . all right with me, I don't give a shit, it's the end . . . they've hunted me enough, robbed me, locked me up, plagiarized me . . . I'm old enough, I'm pulling in my oars, let the galley take care of itself! . . . good-bye! . . . easily said! if I don't row and hard, they'll flog me! . . . red, purple, and white . . . this lousy galley is leaking, leaking bad, but still afloat . . .

My verve is carrying me away . . . whoa there! back to the young lady! . . . I was listening to her with one ear . . . only one! . . . couldn't hear a thing with the other . . . Mademoiselle Odile Pomaré . . . I couldn't move either . . . unusual for me to lie still that way . . . helpless . . . not my style . . . but there I was really out

for the count . . . not exactly unconscious, but really conked . . . the train . . . the one we're on . . . our flatcar . . . I'm wondering . . . maybe if I opened my eyes I could see where we are . . . but no use . . . my eyes hurt too much! they stayed shut, stuck, lead in my eyelids . . . I could feel them . . . enormous! . . . I'm all full of edema, not just my eyes . . . my mouth and ears, black, blue, and swollen . . . not surprising . . . anyway I'm listening to the young lady . . . I get it . . . I'm under the tarp, in a big fold, between her and Felipe the Italian and Lili and Bébert in his bag . . . up against an enormous searchlight . . .

Mademoiselle Odile? . . . I'm not so sure, maybe it's Madame . . . who cares? . . . Ph.D. in German? . . . not so sure of that either! . . . French instructor in Breslau? . . . hm! hm! . . . anyway she's telling her story . . . some story! . . . supposedly they told her to leave, said the Russians were at the gates and terrible things would happen! . . . okay! plausible! . . . but there was more to it! "take these forty-two children . . . don't leave without them!" . . . how many were left of those forty-two? twelve . . . thirteen . . . she thought . . . she didn't remember . . . this Mademoiselle Odile is coughing a good deal . . . and spitting . . . I'm not looking at her, I can't, all I can do to listen . . . tell you the truth she's getting on my nerves with her spiel about Breslau, those idiot children, *etc.* . . . my head's giving me trouble enough! and what about my locomotive . . . up there? think I've lost interest? . . . it's still sailing around in the clouds . . . from cloud to cloud, sort of . . . still upside down, belly up . . . puffing . . . *choo! choo! ha! ha!* laughing its head off . . . I can see why . . . this Mademoiselle Odile of Aix-en-Provence and Breslau on the road with her idiot kids . . . how many did I say? . . . fourteen or sixteen! . . . in a special reserved coach . . . what had she done with the rest of them? died of measles? . . . that's what she thought, that's what they told her at Chemnitz on the way through, the Red Cross doctor . . . measles or something else . . . quite a ways from Breslau to Oddort . . . a laugh when you stop to think of it! . . . if they'd got there on time they'd have all been wiped out . . . fried to a crisp! Odile too! she didn't know about that bonfire! . . . tuberculosis and all! the Chancellery in Berlin isn't the only place that ended in a furnace . . . a thousand other places east, west, and north! . . . don't listen to the propagandists . . . east, west, or north . . . they're demoniacally partial, lying alcoholic idiots . . . and temporary! they swear everything's just fine when it's the end, the last pestilential spasm . . . like right here for instance tomorrow, when that rocket comes from the east, west, or north, come and tell me . . . who's a Communist and who isn't . . . or anti . . . you'll be mashed and that's that! like it, holy cow, or not! that's what man has come to with all his vast ecumenic

pluratomic progress, everybody in the arena, not a single voyeur in the stands! . . . Caesar so comfy in his loge will go off in neutrons like everybody else! . . . not even first or separate . . . no! no processions, no return tickets, no vestal virgins! . . . all in the same quarter of a second! *taraboom!* . . . and away she goes! Think I'm kidding around? . . . certainly not! I'm listening . . . very attentively . . . *choo! choo!* . . . my locomotive up there . . . in the clouds . . . and this Mademoiselle Pomaré right next to me . . . I can't help myself, wedged in like this between the enormous searchlight and God knows what . . . if I moved, the pain would be even worse . . . especially one ear . . . I beg your pardon, I'm getting sorry for myself, I'm only trying to tell you it . . . that brick! . . . hit me hard! . . . if I moved half an inch . . . I'd fall out! . . . onto the roadbed! . . . the crushed rock . . . I listen, she's left her kids in various places . . . this station . . . that station . . . and farms . . . whenever there was an alert . . . Mademoiselle Odile's telling her story . . . they've changed trains three times . . . how many kids has she got left? . . . about twelve, she thinks . . . sick? . . . of course! in addition to their natural state, microcephalic, drooling, spasmodic . . . so what's the urgent problem? . . . measles, she thinks, that's what she's been told . . . I'd like to see those children . . . not so easy! . . . they're scattered all over the train, under the tarps, this car that car . . . wonder where they come from . . . what language they speak . . . that's easy, none! . . . they just babble any old thing . . . all between four and ten years old . . . Mademoiselle Odile was a linguist, she knew Russian and Germanic, even the dialects . . . these kids didn't understand a word, she'd tried everything . . . these children . . . kind of mongoloid they looked . . . must have come from some asylum . . . evacuated in haste! oh, they hadn't told her a thing! . . . they'd simply handed the whole lot over to her as the train was pulling out, with two cases of powdered milk . . . and all aboard! . . . "you'll be met in Oddort! you're expected! bon voyage!" Oddort . . . I was going to tell her! . . . about the fireworks! . . . no! . . . too tired! . . . but this Odile there right beside to me was coughing worse and worse . . . Lili whispers to me . . . Odile's spitting blood . . . big help! . . . all the same it's funny! . . . I can't help laughing . . . I've got a right! I'm spitting blood too, there! . . . I've got a right, since that brick hit me! . . . I'm bleeding from my mouth and ear! . . . Odile interrupts my laughing . . .

"You too, Doctor? you too?"

I answer her, I've got an answer to everything . . . I even shout . . .

"Don't you see anything up there?"

She looks up . . .

"No, nothing! nothing, Doctor!"

We're not getting anywhere . . . oh yes! . . . something's happening! our train's moving . . . I think . . . very slowly . . . I can spit too, just like Odile . . . I sure can! . . . blood too, same as her! . . . mine comes from my ear . . . I think . . . anyway my mouth is full of it . . . anatomy, you see . . . the fine . . . less than a millimeter . . . finely perforated membrane between the tip of the otic bone and the liquid rim of the brain . . . if there's a passage, the blood filters through! naturally! . . . so what's the solution? . . . not to move . . . neither my body nor my eyes! . . . in the first place not to look at this Odile! . . . but why would I? . . . I ask you . . . my eyelids are like lead! . . . I got a brick in my skull . . . oh yes! . . . me, not somebody else! . . . not tubercular Odile or Lili or the Italian . . . something fishy about him . . . bricks he makes . . . I'll get to the bottom . . . find out why he brags about it all day long, glories in it . . . no glory in my ear . . . a split skull is no laughing matter . . . sure it is! . . . on account of that locomotive up there in the clouds and now there are seagulls all around it . . . *choo! choo!* I can even hear it . . . it's passing through a cloud . . . another . . . it'll come back! . . . this is all pretty silly . . . the main thing is to lie still . . . and for our train, our flatcars, to get ahead! . . . us and our searchlights! . . . ha, I feel like laughing again! . . . I stop myself, I don't want to offend anybody . . . what do I want to laugh about anyway? . . . curses, I've forgotten . . . little by little I'm beginning to understand Odile's story . . . all those little idiots must have come from an asylum . . . "hurry, hurry, all aboard! . . . the Russians are coming! . . . no questions, just get going!" . . . ah, Oddort! . . . a narrow squeak they'd had! . . . man, were they expected! . . . you can say what you like, they had it pretty well organized, liquid phosphorus, howitzers . . . Odile Pomaré didn't know . . . she'd missed her appointment. . .

The measles had broken out en route . . . how many kids had died? . . . Odile gave me a rough estimate . . . Odile was only interested in one thing, herself, her chest, her cough . . . measles? . . . maybe the kids had starved to death . . . three cases of milk from Breslau to here . . . not much! . . . I still hadn't seen any kids, not one . . . according to Odile they were sleeping under the tarps . . . somewhere, some other flatcar . . . the train was really moving, tell the truth it was going pretty fast . . . and no alerts, not a plane . . . a pleasure trip if it hadn't been so cold . . . where to, this pleasure trip? . . . we'd get there when the time came . . . or maybe we wouldn't . . . so comical! . . . especially having to keep myself from laughing! . . . my locomotive of the clouds was still passing over . . . at that moment! . . . *choo! choo!* . . . there it is! . . . upside down, with its twelve wheels in the air! . . . it disappears . . . I feel around for Lili . . . her hand . . . not

a sight to miss! . . . I ask her:

"Don't your eyes hurt?"

"No . . . not at all . . ."

The Italian's heard me . . .

"No, no, *Dottore!* . . . no soot! no soot! . . . They're pushing us from behind!"

Excellent! . . . bravo! . . . all the way to Hamburg without soot. . . loco in back! they're spoiling us!

But Odile wants me to listen to her . . .

"Doctor! . . . Madame! . . . look at me!"

No! . . . I won't look at her!

"I'm going to stop in Hamburg! you understand, I can't bear it! . . . I'm not going any further . . ."

Lili asks her . . .

"But the children?"

"I have nothing left to give them . . . I don't even know where they are . . . on the car behind us, I think . . . maybe you'd be kind enough . . ."

She's palming them off on us . . . I don't answer . . . maybe I'm not quite right in the head, but she starts me thinking about us! . . . how? where? . . . we're moving . . . so far so good . . . but slower . . . with my eyes fixed on the sky I can't see the country . . . if I could, I'd know . . . hey, we're slowing down . . . they're putting on the brakes! . . . can this be Hamburg? . . . yes! . . . two three jolts . . . we've stopped! . . . to hell with my edema! I lift an eyelid . . . a little . . . I'm all right! I can see! . . . and the other eye! oh, just a crack, a slit . . . that does it! now to sit up! . . . heave! . . . not so easy! . . . say, it's like I was drunk . . . but still an improvement! . . . to hell with the clouds and my screwball locomotive up there . . . only one worry: what's to become of us? . . . and my headache . . . and wanting to laugh all the time . . . the laughing, I know, is the brick! . . . this brickmaker, I'll have him up for high treason . . . forget it! we'll see about that later! later! . . . I'd better take a look! see what's going on . . . plenty to see! . . . there in the distance . . . say, it's a port! . . . and there's the basin . . . enormous . . . all full of ships . . . but all these ships are ass up, propellers out of the water . . . bows in the muck . . . I'm not drunk, but it's comical! grotesque! . . . at least ten ships, and good-sized ones, at least fifteen thousand tons . . . there must be some little ones too . . . I couldn't see them . . . the big ones I was sure . . . not hard to understand . . . we'd seen the finish of Berlin . . . Ulm . . . Rostock . . . but Hamburg was really finished . . . not just the city . . . the docks and the population . . . what about the cranes? . . . not a trace! . . . they'd knocked

population . . . what about the cranes! . . . not a trace! . . . they'd knocked everything flat! . . . I knew something about shipping, more than about railroads . . . I was even shipwrecked off Gibraltar . . . so naturally . . . there I could see clear across the harbor . . . at least twelve ships out of water, with their propellers in the air . . . the city must look lovely! . . . I ask Lili . . .

"Where are we? what station?"

"A new one . . . it doesn't say anything . . . no signs . . ."

"You sure?"

She looks around . . . I'm not sure Felipe knows how to read . . . one thing definite, there's nobody left on the cars, or on this wooden platform . . . everybody, grown-ups, kids, they've all gotten off . . . I see them further on, all over the roadbed . . . ah, the little cretins! . . . here they are . . . couldn't be anybody else, no exaggeration, all bandylegged, big droopy heads, about four to ten years old . . . drooling little Quasimodos . . . I look for a sign myself . . . there isn't any! same as Oddort . . . and no stationmen either . . . must be a makeshift station they put up after the air raids . . . not made to last. . . an emergency station . . . anyway there's a good view of the harbor . . . and the ships with their propellers in the air . . . how about the locomotive in the clouds? . . . I wouldn't be too sure . . . phantasmagoria? . . . maybe! . . . effects of my fever . . . but these steamers with their asses out of water, I'm dead sure! . . . *vide Thomas! vide latus!* that mob down there on the roadbed, drooling brats and cockeyed tourists, couldn't see a thing . . . we up top had the view. . .

"Doctor! Doctor, there they are!"

They'd gotten off long ago! her brats, she was talking about . . . she'd been too busy with her coughing fits . . . she hadn't seen a thing . . . she's heartbroken . . . they'd crawled out from under their tarps . . . safe bet that nobody'd helped them . . .

"They're coming! . . . they're coming!"

"They won't bite you!"

Her and her hemoptyses! . . . pretty weird . . .

"I haven't anything to give them, Doctor!"

Neither have we, that's for sure . . . at least a week since our last loaf of bread . . . completely conked and punch-drunk and having to listen to this bullshit! . . . I ask you! . . . what I'm thinking about is ourselves, the condition we're in, the trip ahead of us . . . what trip? anyway, another little case of "chin up, kid!"! . . . I'll be seventy pretty soon . . . it must have been about 1896 when I heard those words of encouragement for the first time . . . "chin up, kid!" it was my uncle, we were walking across the Carrousel, he was coming in the opposite

direction on his way to open his shop on rue des Saint-Pères . . . me and my mother were going to rue Drouot . . . her shop . . . rue de Provence . . . where she mended lace . . . from gate to gate the Carrousel is enormous . . . no time to chew the fat . . . my mother wasn't in the mood, neither was I . . . I didn't need his "chin up, kid!" . . . I was doing all right by myself . . . I guess my prick of an uncle thought young men should sprint to work . . . I should get into the habit . . . I assure you my mother and I weren't dawdling . . . it was quicker by omnibus, but it cost five sous for the two of us . . .

I'm losing you again! . . . ah, this exasperating habit old people have of jerking off with their childhood, every insignificant detail, every time they peed on the floor, their whooping cough and chicken pox, their shitty diapers . . . I see them every day in the paper, photographed back, front, and profile, so pleased with themselves, moldy flesh, dewlaps, sagging temporals, ripe for vivisection and so pleased to be getting so much attention, celebrities as admired as the Kidnapper of Greasy Street or superstar Brilliantine . . . formidable governors of something or other . . . flamboyant marshals of Blarney . . . I'd put them all on the slab . . . let them exhibit their pineals, pancreases, prostates, show us what a disemboweled bigmouth looks like inside, his true self, his essential nature . . .

Come on! back to our chronicle . . . I'm losing you again . . . my head, you know, the brick . . . that's no reason . . . I was talking about photographs, narcissism, the arrogance of the stiffs-to-be . . . oh, it's not just liquor, cars, and vacations . . . the crux is photography, that's what's sent man, the whole human species back to the troglodytes and then some . . . every day you can see their pictures, ecstatic hams, open your daily paper, any self-respecting gorilla would be ashamed . . . cave paintings . . . entirely handmade! . . . wouldn't be so bad . . . give the Lumière brothers something to be ashamed of . . . but now look around you and in your daily paper . . . those mugs in glasses! that fringe of curls! . . . I'm a fine one to talk! . . . with so much to be forgiven for! . . . first of all my three dots! . . . my so-called stylistic renewal! Cousteau, *l'Huma*, Sartre, the Lodges, the Archbishop have taken to their sickbeds over them . . . and that pipsqueak runt Vaillant^o that got the Goncourt for valiantly assassinating me, he's soft in the balls and I'm still waiting for him, which is why I never go out any further than my garden, here in the garden of Meudon, Seine-et-Oise . . .

Oh, how they hate me! enough to burst their Rolandics, their whole cortex . . . the whole lot of them, feminine and neuter! . . . I'll never be plagiarized and counterfeited enough!

"Does he still exist?"

"Him? impossible! they shot him twenty years ago!"

him! . . . impossible: they shot him twenty years ago: . . .

Each man to his dream, his ideal! . . . an "ex," that's what I am, I don't exist! . . . I have the nerve to speak of justice! . . . you won't catch my "pale feet"° going up there to see those ten Nobel blockheads and telling them to pay me an annuity . . . two annuities! one for the novel! another for Peace! . . . all my "pale feet" think about is massacring me, offering up my carcass to the Great Idol. . .

In my condition at my age I can't leave anything out . . . I owe you an accounting, never mind if I digress a little! . . .

But back to business, Odile's kids were there, they'd crawled out from under their tarps . . . and shinnied down off their flatcar by instinct . . . they'd come to Odile, their little mother . . . their little mother was looking glum . . .

"I can't move any more, Doctor . . . I'll stay here . . ."

She was telling me . . .

"But what if they come back?"

The bombers I meant . . . they don't stop to see if it's worth the trouble . . .

The kids come closer, there's no difference between girls and boys . . . all bundled up in woolen rags . . . about fifteen of them . . . no need to look twice, they're wrecks . . . drooling, limping, lopsided . . . cretins out of an asylum, definitely . . . of course we have examples that live to a certain age and make honorable careers for themselves, or even get to be bigshots, dictators, and hell's bells! . . . right then the problem was to get those kids something to eat . . . Odile could have bestirred herself . . . we had a right to be tired! . . . lovely, her deciding to sit tight and spit blood, convenient! what about us? . . . wasn't I losing blood? I suppose my cracked skull was nothing! . . . plus, I repeat, my 75% disability . . . when Petzareff° can say as much and produce a grade-school certificate, he'll have a right to talk . . . some of those idiots were certainly missing . . . she'd have dropped them en route . . . too sick . . . measles supposedly . . . these survivors were a selection, so to speak . . . anyway, they were hungry . . . we had nothing to give them . . . parts of words came out of them . . . they looked at us and Odile . . . but they were speaking to us . . . I tell Lili: "show them Bébert" . . . she takes him out of his bag . . . ah, now they're interested . . . they laugh . . . I mean they screw up their noses and drool even more . . . they want to play with Bébert! . . . no! . . . mustn't! . . . but Bébert wants to play with them . . . so bad that he miows . . . and the kids cry . . . let's get this over with! . . . easy to say! . . . this place we'd come to was something, the big basin in front of us, all those boats bottomside up, and on the right the city, well something with smoke coming out of it, ruins . . . maybe worse than

Hanover, flatter than Ulm . . . well, this basin I was telling you about. . . it was about the size of the Pool of the Swiss . . . you know . . . in Versailles . . .

To tell you the truth, these kids, so feeble-minded, so dribbling and drooling, couldn't ask us for anything . . . we could only see they were trying to tell us something . . . there wouldn't be any more slaughterhouses if the officials in charge took a look at the eyes of the feeble-minded . . . naturally wars go on and on . . . the same brutes keep it up on both sides . . . like the Goncourt Prize . . . judges, candidates, both sides do their best and it's not good enough . . . "they're not made for it . . ." our little snot-noses weren't made to exist but here they were and they were hungry . . . I was feeling kind of "abstract" myself . . . not so much fatigue as shock, that clout with the brick . . . Felipe had seen it . . . and loss of blood, my ear . . . my pants were full of blood too . . . I wasn't dreaming . . . clotted, I might add.

"Let's go, Felipe!"

"Go where?"

"Look for something to eat!"

He's willing, but where? . . . I explain . . . over there, other side of the harbor . . . the city actually! . . . all he can see is a lot of smoke! . . . everything's hidden . . . he doesn't look very enthusiastic, he'll come though . . . me, I've got the staggers from head to foot, but I'm determined . . . Odile's determined too, determined not to move, her cough is too bad . . .

"Oh no, Doctor, I can't . . . I want to die right here . . . take the children, please!"

Damn! . . . I'm sicker than she is! . . . hemoptysis? . . . big deal! . . . the Great Cardinal spat blood all his life . . . which didn't prevent him from screwing every duchess in sight and sitting on Europe! . . . so hard that she's still groaning under his weight . . . Europe I mean . . . deformed, disheveled . . . this hemoptysis jazz is the bunk! . . . and instead of the Great Cardinal all we've got is a lot of jerks! . . .

"Let's go!"

Chin up, kid! I've told you about this basin the size of the Pool of the Swiss and all these ships with their noses in the muck and their propellers in the air, a most indecent position . . . I see there's practically no wind . . . funny so close to the sea . . . charred smell. . . naturally, like everywhere else in Germany but here in addition burnt asphalt, a blue mist . . . like our streets in the old days when they were mending them . . .

I look around for a sign . . . something to find our way by if we get lost . . .

same as in Oddort, nothing! . . . a stationman? . . . not a trace . . . it was an emergency station they'd thrown up outside the city, not made to last. . . all wood . . . good view of the harbor, the boats, *etc.* . . . I've told you that at least twenty times . . . propellers in the air . . . I'm going on seventy, it's remarkable enough if I don't drool as much as my little cretins . . . especially the frantic way I work, rewriting ten times, twenty times . . . as stubborn as Achille, me for art, him for profit. . . only natural if I were plumb gaga . . . especially after that clout with the brick! . . . I've told you that too, fifteen . . . twenty times . . . about that locomotive in the clouds I'm not really sure . . . to hell with being sure! did the taenia have any proof that I was getting money from the Germans? . . . did that prevent him from saying so in *Les Temps Modernes*? to make perfectly sure I'd be shot . . . hell, no! . . . or that little epilo-cretin Vaillant from bragging about machine-gunning me on my stairs? and Cousteau in *Rivarol*! just as slanderous, maybe even more rabid, when already he was going around with the whole works . . . rectum and attachments . . . under his arm . . . did he think twice? certainly not! which proves that cancer is horrible but that jealousy wins out! . . . Q.E.D. . . . and explains why all these people, right, left, and center, are absolutely the same and all one to me . . . envious sadists, absolute cowards, and to cap the climax, "idols of the youth" . . . I'm not speaking of the rank-and-file, the hordes in the gallery, balcony, and orchestra, the jerks of the bars, boudoirs, and salons . . . it seems to me there are sewage farms where the shit is so well mixed and diluted that they sell it to us in the form of leeks, carrots, and celery, extremely appetizing . . . seems there's some shady business afoot out there . . . I wouldn't be surprised . . . think of the brilliant careers of all those people that looted me . . . everything! furniture and manuscripts . . . leaving me to die in the ditch . . . the dazzling honors! commanders of everything under the sun! . . . and the funerals! all France in tears! that's why I love the Figaro, its boring obituaries, those pompous columns, it's their Temple so to speak . . . Brisson^o wasn't born in vain . . .

No wind, I've told you . . . thick smoke going straight up . . . funny so close to the sea . . . I find you where I left you . . . outside Hamburg . . . well, the ruins of Hamburg . . . like other authors I absent myself now and then . . . just long enough for a short résumé, a roll call of shadows and aspects . . . in short, an inventory . . . I don't ask you where you've been . . . we're back again and that's that . . . I've told you the sea was right there . . . gulls and terns gliding right over us . . . want to know who we are, I suppose . . . and darting away to the soot clouds, the ruins . . . since then I've found out what they were curious about . . . curious to see if we were dead . . . or dying . . . if you're dying, they peck at your

curious to see if we were dead . . . or dying . . . if you're dying, they peck at your eyes, they scoop them out and gobble them up, conjunctiva, retina, and all. . . which goes to show that sharks, squids, and lampreys only get the inferior cuts . . . arms, guts, legs . . . I'm good and sick of being a loser! neither a shark nor a seagull, my job is getting those kids something to eat . . . a special brand of kids . . . Lili wants to go too . . . fine! . . . Odile will stay put, she doesn't want to move . . . her idiot kids, I wonder how many of them can walk . . . more or less . . . maybe some of them have criminal instincts . . . well, there's nothing for them to set fire to! . . . Odile tells me they're peaceful . . . not mean at all, more on the affectionate side . . . she ought to know them, she's had plenty of time . . . all the same she wants to get rid of them! . . . she shows me again, a little blood, she spits, she wants me to examine her! . . . that can wait! . . . first things first . . . these little cretins haven't had any milk since Leipzig, if they'd arrived on time, in Oddort I mean, they wouldn't need a thing! . . . Odile didn't know . . . I wasn't going to tell her . . . so let's go!

"Follow me! . . . follow my canes!"

The ones Felipe had made for me, thick white pine . . . oh, kids are always ready for an adventure . . . even these dotty droolers . . . staggering, reeling, worse than me . . . tripping themselves up for no reason at all, some pebble . . . not a whimper! no, they're laughing! . . . I don't know if we've got far to go, I can't see the city at all, too much soot, too much smoke . . . I've told you this basin was about the size of the Pool of the Swiss . . . piffle! . . . much bigger! . . . I'm sure now that I get a good look . . .

Felipe's got something to say, he's got himself some information . . . all he cares about is the train to Magdeburg . . . his boss! . . . his brickyard . . . and he's a week late . . .

"Your Magdeburg isn't there any more . . . burned down! wiped out same as here! off the map!"

He doesn't believe me.

"Si! si! . . . si!"

He argues.

But his Magdeburg express won't be leaving until midnight . . . he's got plenty of time.

"We'll go get a tarp, Felipe! . . . a big piece!"

I don't want him to think, he was made to obey . . . I look at these kids . . . how many? . . . about twelve . . . these survivors of the Breslau-Hamburg trek . . . they're not fat and they're not pretty, but they're not sad either . . . the little lepers up there in Rostock weren't crybabies either . . . sadness like everything

else has got to be learned, it comes with life, it takes time . . . your old man has tears in his eyes, it's chronic, all he does is cry . . . he cries because he's going to be crated and everybody else will be sticking around, having fun . . .

"Okay, kids! let's go!"

I want them to follow me . . . I'm the guide . . . nuts or not, this "chin up, kid" energy will always be with me . . . what you learn in childhood sticks . . . the rest is all beer and skittles, repetitions, fatigue, bowing-and-scraping contests.



I'm going to repeat myself a little, can't be helped . . . few things to say about Felipe . . . going back to Magdeburg to knead more bricks . . . admit it's a crazy world! . . . and hysterical because he's late! . . . wonder what we'll find in Hamburg . . . bricks and stiffs . . . I see there's no wind . . . funny so close to the sea . . . charred smell . . . naturally, like everywhere else in Germany, but here in addition burnt asphalt . . . like our streets in the old days when they were mending them . . . I can see our flatcar companions, they're all down on the roadbed . . . are they whispering to each other! . . . probably about my kids . . . fact . . . a lot of cripples . . . I shouldn't have taken them, but their Odile doesn't want them and these other people, these people from God knows where, won't even go near them . . . I bet they'd chuck them in the drink . . .

Besides, you know, there's my head, that brick! . . . ten times . . . fifteen times I've told you! . . . about that locomotive in the clouds, I'm not so sure . . . to hell with being sure! . . . was the taenia sure I was getting money from the Germans? did that prevent him from saying so in *Les Temps Modernes* to make sure I'd be shot! . . . hell, no! and Cousteau (of *Rivarol* and *Propaganda*), same accusations! already rotting with cancer, going around with his anus under his arm, condemned to death for working for the *Staffel*, consequently extra well informed, didn't he swear he'd met me in all the most sinister offices? . . . nobody else had taken any money, only me . . . but Cousteau? how'd he wriggle out of it? . . . him and a hundred others! . . . a thousand! . . . one of the screwiest is Vaillant. . . the literary midget . . . eating his heart out because he didn't succeed in murdering me on my stairs . . . he'd heard me going up and coming down . . . but, hell, I'm still waiting for him . . . him and other "Idols of the Youth!" . . . Paris-Meudon is no distance at all! . . . a short taxi ride . . . ten francs . . . I'm never out . . . but what about the taenia while we're at it, why

didn't he provoke the Boches, he'd have been in stir, he wouldn't have had to suffer like he says he does from running around free . . . he had all the Nazis, full house, at the Sarah-Bernhardt! . . . he could have come out on the stage and said: you Teutons, I hate you, pillagers, torturers, you'll soon be driven out! bravo! . . . and chopped up fine! and roasted . . . there's my Sartrean vengeance! my word of honor as a taenia! hurrah for Free France!

I think he'd have had what he's asking for, they'd have thrown him in the clink . . . still, I'm not so sure they'd have taken him seriously . . . you've got to be taken halfway seriously before a French or even a German prosecutor . . . which is why it seems to me that as long as all these people . . . right left or center . . . haven't been jailed . . . and even then!!! . . . they can only be regarded as partly nuts and partly paid for . . . I'll tell you about the rank-and-file later . . .

Now we're on the edge of Hamburg, out to seek our fortune . . . so to speak! . . . up there on the embankment certain sounds are reaching us . . . muffled explosions . . . some bombs make up their minds . . . long after the raids, sometimes after months . . . years . . . of "suspense" . . . but where's our Felipe? . . . I didn't see him . . . had he split? . . . no! he's three-quarters hidden in the folds of an enormous tarp . . . actually he was underneath, I couldn't see him . . . damnation! I'm still thinking about the taenia! I can't tell you this in the right order! it's the brick and my head . . . But *alas too late, poor Taenia!* you'll forgive me! . . . if you don't, I can't help it! a slight escapade! . . . the first time is tragic, the second time is grotesque . . . alas! alas! I was telling you about these delayed-action bombs . . . we'd better be prepared for the worst . . . I'm following Felipe with his tarp rolled up on his head . . . the little cretins don't understand my French but they're only too glad to follow me . . . reeling, staggering . . . we were just as idiotic as they were . . . they knew as much as we did . . . they at least had come out of an asylum, where we came out of nobody knew . . . drooling and wobbling as bad as they did from gutter to gutter, heading for the city, well, the smoke and ruins up ahead . . . anyway gives us time for reflection . . . let us then reflect! . . . no tears or lamentations, no! I'm not asking anybody to weep for me! to hell with condolers, they can get lost! quick! . . . and stop weeping! crocodilers! . . . memories, that's what I need . . . I can't remember anything . . . so many things and people . . . I lose my way . . . like Felipe there under his tarp . . . crushed, lost . . . I'll find him again for you . . . first my memories . . . all mixed up . . . Baden-Baden . . . Le Vig . . . Restif . . . Harras . . . Moorsburg . . . Zornhof . . . I'm sure of those . . . the others, I'd need to sleep, then they'd come back to me . . . in snatches . . . one way or another . . .

"No syntax, no style! he doesn't say anything any more! he doesn't dare!"

NO syntax, NO style: he doesn't say anything any more: he doesn't care:

Ah, the turpitude! that's a shameless lie! . . . I've got oodles of style! . . . that's right! . . . what's more, I'll make the rest of them unreadable! . . . every last one of them! wilted impotents! rotten with prizes and manifestoes! I can lay my plans in all security, the epoch belongs to me! I am Literature's favorite child! anyone who doesn't imitate me is through! . . . no doubt about it! okay, let's see where we are! gutted barrels, flooded terraces and urinals! vast despair! ah, grand crosses of all the Legions, super washouts, eminent jerks! . . . I'd feel sorry for you if I could, but I can't . . . not any more! . . . what can I do with all these snivelers . . . and their "studio-light" pseudo-fin-de-siècle chromos . . . I told them to go out and get some fresh air, they wouldn't listen, serves them right! let them rot, stink, ooze, end up in the sewer . . . they keep wondering what they can do in Gennevilliers° . . . easy! fertilize the fields! . . . why should I worry my head about the sewer? they'll get there and produce the sludge that's needed . . . I see Mauriac, the cancerous old drip, without glasses in his *new look* maxi-cape, the family idol, "work hard, my dear child, and you'll grow up to be like him" . . . tartufferie and neoplasm, the perfect formula for success under every regime . . . every cockeyed state . . . drums and trumpets! taraboom! guts, epiploons, and cerebellums all over the sawdust. . . the true sense of History . . . and what we've come to! jumping this way! . . . whoops! and that way! . . . the death dance! impalements! purges! vivisections! . . . twice-tanned hides, smoking . . . spoiled skulking voyeurs, let it all start over again! guts ripped out by hand! let's hear the cries, the death rattles . . . a national orgasm!

"Hey there! you've gone off your rocker!"

"Absolutely!"

"Haven't you seen anything on these docks? be serious! tracks? . . . at least a crane or two?"

"Oh yes . . . a crane lying on its ear . . . and railroad switches . . . smashed to pieces . . ."

"So what's next?"

We're heading for the city, that's what! seeing there's nothing left of the harbor . . . except for these ships with their ass out of the water . . . don't make me repeat myself . . . I've said it twenty times . . . a hundred times . . . we . . . you know, Lili, Bébert, me, Felipe the Italian, and the kids . . . how many? I'd say seven . . . no! at least ten! . . . or fifteen . . . I'm not going to start counting them again! . . . let 'em come if they want to! the stinking brats! . . . and these people off the flatcars, what country are they from? they're whispering to each other . . . not in German or Russian . . . maybe Hungarian . . . I never found out . . . you go

near them, not another word! . . . I don't know who they take us for . . . never found that out either . . . so forward march! the kids are looking at the ships . . . but not the least bit surprised . . . no effect at all . . . drooling neither more nor less . . . I wouldn't exactly say they talk to each other . . . sounds come out of them, parts of words, and plenty of slobber and bubbles . . . two of them bark kind of . . . they're willing to come along, which is something . . . the city and the big clouds of smoke don't scare them . . . even the explosions . . . we're hearing more and more of them . . . not concussion bombs . . . no, time bombs . . . I know all about them . . . there, maybe two hundred yards ahead I see the first big ruins . . . at the end of the basin, by the locks . . . looking back we can see the whole crowd . . . the ones that have stayed on the flatcar . . . they see us too, but they don't want to join us . . . they'd have a good laugh if something blew us up . . . say, there it is! . . . I'd been wandering again . . . we're in Hamburg . . . the city proper . . . I'd lost my bearings . . . I ought to be used to mashed-up cities, where you don't know which end is which . . . there I think it was the Sankt Pauli district . . . more than a district, practically another city, devoted to nothing but pleasure, nothing but whorehouses and fish-and-chipperies . . . my giggles came in handy! . . . I've known other ports of call with about as many fish-and-chipperies, dance halls, and floor shows . . . my first comparison would be the Brousbir^o in Casablanca . . . rue Bouteru^o didn't amount to much . . . Sankt Pauli was something . . . Chatham, Rochester, and Stroude may have been more impressive, especially on Saturday night, when all the garrisons were on pass and the fleet was in, troops and crews on the binge . . . and believe me, those uniforms from navy blue to scarlet, from lemon-yellow to mignonette . . . the grandiose palette of the Empire . . . the whole enormous Saturday night Rochester Chatham waterfront reeling with colors and whiskey . . . soldiers and sailors ranting, roaring, fighting . . . and don't forget the acetylene light . . . so raw, so brutal it pretty near tears their faces in two . . . and the Salvation Army singing about their hopes . . . "God's a-coming!" . . . right in the middle of the orgy! . . . harmonium and trombones . . . their Miss Heyliett^o in her black bonnet does a bit of hymn-singing herself . . . a duet with the old woman that's dishing out soup . . . by the bucket . . . surrounded by ex-longshoremen and down-and-outers, both sexes . . . it's the weekend for them too . . . but that's enough publicity for the enchantments of other times . . . other ports . . . I'll get back to you! all well and good about my head, the clout with the brick, the blood coming out of my ear and *et cetera* . . . there are limits! respect the reader if you please! right you are! . . . all the same I'd like to point out . . . I take the liberty . . . that

the smells are lacking, the aroma of chips, tobacco, and sweat . . . and of all those people, sailors, soldiers, and underworld . . . the smell of cargoes too, Campeachy, saffron, palm oil . . . absolutely essential if you're to get the feeling of being there, if those waterfronts of Richmond, Chatham, and Stroude are to be anything more than a dream . . . well, you can give it a try! . . . God help us all! .

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I'd better get after those kids! And my head too! all this reminiscing hasn't done me any good! . . . I could get good and mad at Felipe, the damn wop . . . him and his brickyard! . . . maybe it's him that cracked my skull . . . him with his train that he doesn't want to miss, his Magdeburg express . . . I wouldn't put it past him . . . such a hurry to get back to his brickyard! . . . don't worry, I've got my eye on him! . . . lovely, supplying the whole world with bricks! . . . never mind, we'll see . . . let's get back to you! . . . I'd got my bearings . . . we were in Sankt Pauli, the night club, cathouse, and carnival section . . . not bad getting this far with our staggers . . . us and the kids . . . I still hadn't counted them . . . some other time! . . . I was all in, I'd have been glad to sit down . . . tourism and adventure are ornaments of Peace, don't try to sell me that stuff in wartime! . . . and yet, take the general staffs of the most ferocious frantic bleeding armies, look at their all-powerful leaders at the most critical moments when History is hanging . . . reeling . . . in the balance . . . this way, that way, a thread, a straw . . . and see if they don't shovel it in! and keep their cooks on their toes . . . look at the bellies on them! the distended walls . . . last stages of pregnancy. . .

As you can see, I'm hesitating . . . I cogitate, I ponder, instead of doing my job . . . prospecting the ruins . . . to see if I can't find the remains of a shop, a cracker or two, or a can of milk under these ruins . . . I admit it, these ruins are smoking . . . they even explode now and then, I've told you that . . . but not very hard . . .

"All right, let's go! you, Felipe, don't start without me!"

I'm not too easy in my mind . . . the kids aren't scared at all, they come right along . . . they're insensible, at least one advantage they've got . . . they flop, they pick themselves up, they keep crawling . . . they slobber, they bark . . . they must be hungry, they can't say so, they don't complain . . . they don't say anything . . . these little explosions . . . they must have heard worse on their way from Breslau . . . they can't tell us . . . they're all swaddled and wrapped in tarps and scraps of wool . . . be all right if they weren't sopping wet . . . ought to be some way to get them dry! . . . damn it, there's that "ought" again . . . at certain times that's the only word that turns up! you haven't got a stitch of strength left, the whole world is collapsing on top of you, and there they go . . . "he made a mistake, he ought

is collapsing on top of you, and there they go . . . he made a mistake, he ought to have . . .!" . . . the kids collide, flop, pick themselves up . . . and start all over again, stumbling from hole to hole . . . we're getting into Hamburg! . . . say, this is it! . . . bravo, little cretins! the heart of the city . . . I tell Lili, I tell Felipe! . . . I want them to know! to get a little benefit from my erudition . . . I know Hamburg and its history . . .

"You've split my head, Felipe! you brickmaking brute! but Charlemagne! it's Charlemagne that founded Hamburg! big man, Charlemagne! don't contradict me, Felipe! . . ."

He doesn't contradict me, he doesn't give a shit . . . with his tarp bundled up on his head . . . let's try and get my bearings . . . I know this place! I mean, I used to . . . I'd been here lots of times . . . ten . . . twenty times . . . for the League of Nations . . . long time ago! . . . connection with tropical diseases . . . that nobody's interested in any more . . . even their names wouldn't mean a thing to you . . . right here now, what a shambles! mountains of paving stones . . . with a streetcar . . . two streetcars! . . . perched on top, teetering . . . I've seen drawings by the supposedly insane that aren't half as crazy . . . nothing much to recognize . . . especially with this smoke, so thick and grimy-sticky, worse than the tunnels, like cotton wool, I defy you to tell me which is what . . . to recognize objects or people! Felipe! Felipe! Lili! I'm calling the roll . . . "you got Bébert?" "yes!" . . . about the kids, there was no way of knowing . . . in the first place I hadn't counted them . . . besides, they had no names . . . but they heard me . . . oh, the people all around us, the ones that are supposed to be normal . . . same difference! . . . they hear us and they don't understand a thing . . . the earth doesn't want men, it wants hominids . . . in a hominid world, man is a degenerate, a monster, who fortunately reproduces less and less . . . the future belongs to the chopper-gobble Balubas, the train eaters . . . whole trains they'll gobble up, passengers, conductors, babies! the whole works! when? as soon as they're motorized plus the atom, you'll see . . .

How many children? I've told you, I never knew exactly . . . twelve? . . . fifteen? why not count them? easy to say . . . but the strength? I wasn't as old as I am now, but even so . . . when it comes to strength, a healthy, well-fed man is only a sixteenth of a horsepower, at the very most . . . a sick muddle-headed jerk is hardly a twentieth . . .

All of a sudden, right where I'm telling you, in the heart of Hamburg I think, a gust of wind! the wind must have changed, I see where we are . . . no mistake, we're in front of the Hotel Esplanade . . . oh, I can't be wrong! . . . but this Hotel Esplanade is all split open . . . the roofs hanging down in front . . . the

effect . . . surrealist I was going to say . . . not as scrambled as those paintings, but pretty near . . . except that the paintings are practically odorless . . . and here there was all the smell you could ask for . . . acrid . . . with a slight tinge of corpse, I'm not saying that for effect, I know . . . but nothing fazed those kids, neither the black acrid smoke nor the explosions, I suppose they were used to it . . . nothing bothered them but the holes . . . there's another! still deeper! ah, and disemboweled rails, twisted like bobby pins . . . talking about this Hotel Esplanade, I could tell you about their head wine-waiter, who refused to serve iced Bordeaux and they threw him out, etc., I'll tell you the story some day if I have time and I'm still alive . . . *Zimmer Wärme! Zimmer Wärme!* room temperature! . . . he stuck to his guns! it had cost him his job, the customer had been furious, *et cetera* . . . he told me about it twenty times in the prison infirmary . . . and that wasn't the only dumb thing he had done . . .

That'll do, I'm getting lost! . . . what I really want . . . this minute! . . . is for Felipe to explain about that brick! . . . more and more I'm thinking he did it on purpose . . . that he baked it himself in *da bricka vork* back in Magdeburg! . . . exactly! and I wasn't going to let him get away with it! . . . bashing my skull in for no reason at all . . . curses! his abominable deed has got me thinking so hard I can't move! . . . they could all jump in the ocean . . . the whole lot of them! I resign, not another step! . . . I'm going to lie down like Odile, I'm as weak as water . . . talking about Odile, the bitch . . .

"Lili, go take a look back there . . . quick! go tell her to come here this minute! . . . tell her I've counted the kids . . . tell her I can't keep up . . . tell her I can't go looking for food . . . I'm afraid . . ."

Felipe's there . . . a little further on . . . lying under his tarp, at least three four layers . . . he's not moving . . . Lili doesn't wait to be asked twice . . . fact, she's younger than me, a lot younger, but she could be tired . . . she's got no right to be tired! . . . quick! . . . quick! . . . she should go and shake up this Odile! . . . and bring her back! . . . the lazy bitch! . . .

I don't look . . . I close my eyes . . . but I'm not asleep . . .

I'm thinking . . . wondering what we're looking for . . . a grocery store? . . . a pharmacy? . . . a bakery? . . . I'm not very confident . . . it's bound to be worse than Berlin . . . Harras had told us . . . those runaway prostitutes . . . said they wouldn't find anything in Hamburg, the whole place had burned down . . . all the same, as long as we'd got this far, we'd go see . . . but what was keeping Lili so long? . . .

I felt my ear being twisted . . . a little hand . . . and then a nose . . . at least

four of them were pulling my hair . . . the kids having fun . . . I could frighten them . . . they'd run away and I'd have to catch them . . . hey, what is this? . . . they're pissing on me . . . one . . . two . . . at least three . . . that's what comes of procrastination! . . . I sit up! . . . I go: *boo!* . . . makes them laugh . . . no authority, I see . . . I see Lili too . . . there she is! . . . high time!

"What about Odile?"

"She can't move!"

"And who are these characters?"

I see four little gnomes, even sicklier than ours, and just as snotty drooly as our little tarp and wool packages, but the difference is they're laughing . . . ours never laughed much . . . these four seem to be full of beans . . .

"Where'd they come from?"

"They were with Odile . . . she sent them . . . to you!"



Heaps of rubble, granulated shops . . . mounds . . . mountains of paving stones . . . streetcars on top, standing, lying, astraddle . . . nothing you could possibly recognize . . . especially on account of the smoke . . . I've told you . . . so thick and grimy, black and yellow . . . I seem to be repeating myself . . . but don't you see, I have to . . . I want to give you the exact idea . . . haven't come across a living soul . . . where are they? . . . gone, I suppose . . . or under those piles of rubble? hard to believe . . . there used to be a lot of population in this Hamburg! . . . all dead? that's their lookout! . . . what I was after was condensed milk . . . an aim in life! . . . I hadn't much hope of finding a shop open . . . a grocery store or pharmacy . . .

"Shitass droolers! . . . rally to my white canes!° . . ."

My orders! . . . I force myself to stand up . . . we'll go reconnoiter these ruins! . . . sure to find some bread . . . some kind of army bread, I mean . . . damned if we don't! time bombs, burning asphalt, explosions, we've seen worse! . . . hey, one of the kids has stopped . . . what's he looking at? . . . I go over . . . so do Felipe and Lili. . . something has caught his eye . . . down there in the asphalt . . . a black foot . . . just a foot . . . no leg, no body . . . the body must have burned . . . Harras had told me . . . they sprinkle phosphorus all over . . . nothing's left . . . I wouldn't think so! . . . hey, the kids are crowding around something . . . it's not a foot this time, it's whole bodies in the sludge . . . melted asphalt, a sticky sludge all over them . . . greasy and black . . . hey! . . . a man, a woman, a child! . . . the child in the middle . . . they're still holding each other by the hand . . . and a little dog right next to them . . . a lesson . . . people trying to get away, the phosphorus set fire to the asphalt . . . I heard about it later, thousands and thousands . . . we weren't there for the fun of it, our aim in life was milk and a loaf of bread . . . some kind of a shop . . . when I stop to think

about it, those ruins must have been dangerous, corpses aside . . . an explosion here! an explosion there! . . . the fires weren't really out, and I could see the asphalt . . . the further we went the softer it got . . . pretty ticklish, like the quicksand in the bay at Mont-Saint-Michel . . . except here that burnt smell . . . the bodies didn't smell so bad, it was too cold . . . in the spring they'd stink . . . plenty to laugh about, but first something to eat . . . rations . . . you'll have to forgive me, but that word rings a bell with me . . . my head, you know . . . the brick . . . I'm entitled to a few memories, they come up like hair on the soup . . . I can't help it and so on! . . . Verdun . . . October 1914, rations for the Twelfth . . . I was there with my wagon . . . our regiment on the Woëvre . . . I can still see that drawbridge in Verdun . . . I stand up in my stirrups and give them the password . . . the drawbridge comes down . . . creaking . . . the guard, twelve men, come out and check the wagons . . . one by one . . . the army knew its business in those days . . . the living proof: they won the war . . . we ride into Verdun . . . at a walk . . . to get our army bread and our sacks of "monkey meat" . . . we didn't know the rest of the story, the long and the short! . . . if people knew what was in store for them, they wouldn't move, they wouldn't ask for any drawbridge to be lowered or any doors to be opened . . . not knowing is the strength of man and beast . . .

Right then there was no door . . . I'm telling you about Hamburg . . . I could walk right in with my gang of slobbermouths . . . the tar wasn't burning any more, but it was still soft. . . you didn't sink in very deep, but deep enough, you had to watch your step . . . sure to be still hotter in town where the explosions were coming from . . . boiling . . . better keep away . . . but what about our rations? . . . we wouldn't go far . . . only where it looked possible . . . just the other side of the little canal . . . Hamburg's all full of little canals, something like Venice . . . this one was practically full up with rubble . . . but only in places . . . it was possible to cross . . . "courage, ye blockheads! this way!" . . . I still hadn't counted them . . . they cross over ahead of us . . . us is Lili and Bébert in his bag, Felipe with his tarp on his head, and me staggering . . . more ruins, the wreckage of a whole street, heaps of everything like in Berlin . . . but here it's hotter, I think . . . heaps, I said, more like mountains! . . . that one over there is enormous, this high, this wide . . . as big as from La Trinité to Place Blanche . . . there must be whole neighborhoods under there, buildings and people . . . which naturally accounts for the smell . . . the smells I should say . . . we sit down . . . say, that's something! . . . a mountain as high as the one in Lüneburg . . . remember? . . . the one I saw my first locomotive on top of . . . we take a little rest . . . all of a

sudden an idea! . . . "our kids! our snotnose bundles! . . . they've disappeared . . . Felipe! Lili! . . . where are the kids?" . . . they don't know . . . ah yes! Lili's seen them . . . they were playing, pushing each other around . . . on the other side of the mountain . . . I says to myself: sure as shit! they're in a hole . . . they had a thing about these holes . . . I'd noticed . . . their dodge was to disappear . . . bury themselves, two three at a time . . . the little monsters, the loonybin dropouts! . . . where can they be? . . . under a house? . . . "Lili! Felipe! . . . come on quick! we'll go look for them!" . . . crevasses and fissures . . . there's a big one, big enough for the lot of them to crawl into . . . bet they're at the end already . . . no use shouting, they wouldn't answer, they wouldn't know how . . . the deaf cretins! with all the padding they've got on they can easily squeeze through the holes, between the rocks and scrap metal . . . catacombs are just their meat . . . there must be everything in there . . . I've told you how high it was, from where we were standing to the summit as far as from La Trinité to Place Blanche . . . can you imagine! maybe the kids had been crushed . . . or suffocated . . . even in the open air, in the daylight their movements were jerky . . . they'd drag themselves out of one hole and flop into another . . . there in the total darkness I couldn't imagine . . . no use trying . . . how far we'd gone in this fissure . . . if the kids had disappeared and gotten themselves crushed and mangled, we'd go back to the train, what else could we do? . . . they'd escaped of their own free will! . . . Lili says: "the best way would be to let Bébert loose . . ." if there was a hole, that's where Bébert would go, when it came to disappearing he was worse than the kids . . . he'd run in hell-bent . . . and when he found what he was looking for, he'd miow . . . "let him loose!" . . . Lili puts him down on the ground . . . how'd those kids get through? . . . I'm wondering . . . for Bébert it was easy, off he goes . . . Lili calls him . . . he miows . . . a comfortable miow . . . Lili's satisfied, she follows him, one two three . . . on her knees, no trouble for her, she's an acrobat . . . not so easy for me, I'll never make it . . . say, I can do it! . . . on my knees! same as her . . . chin up, kid! . . . never say die! . . . damn! . . . this is clay! . . . I sing out . . . "I'm coming! . . . I'm coming!" Lili answers . . . we're all right . . . I'm getting ahead . . . on my elbows . . . with my elbows . . . I wouldn't have thought it possible . . . from outside you had no idea . . . the passage, I mean this crevasse we're in, broadens out . . . into a kind of corridor . . . not straight, all detours and zigzags . . . clay floor . . . not fragile and crumbly, my impression, but very wet and sticky . . . how'd this mountain get here? . . . hadn't seen any others like it in Hamburg . . . so high and enormous . . . of course everything was hidden by the smoke . . . and hollowed out like this . . . but I'm not a geologist . . .

. I sing out "Lili! . . . Lili! . . .". . . "Yes! . . . yes! . . . come on!" Felipe's got something to say too . . . "*Dottore! Dottore!*" he hasn't lagged behind, he's right here in the tunnel . . . at this point it definitely smells of corpses . . . rats or people? . . . we'll see . . . maybe . . . quite an adventure, in a way . . . come to think of it, this hill is shaped like a bell . . . but how did it get here? maybe some secret weapon . . . there'd been talk about a secret weapon . . . that was going to wipe out England or some such rot . . . maybe it had boomeranged . . . or maybe a munitions dump had exploded . . . such things had been known to happen . . . anyway, an enormous mountain! . . . and nobody around to tell us how it got there . . . I've given you an idea of the height, from La Trinité to Place Blanche . . . we were moving ahead very cautiously, step by step . . . in kind of a half light that seeped in from overhead, the top of the crevasse . . . I shout: "any light where you are?" . . . "yes, yes, come on, plenty of light! . . ." how's that possible? . . . an above-ground grotto, so to speak . . . you get the idea . . . three four times as high as Notre Dame . . . further ahead I can see . . . I'm sure . . . it must be another fissure at the top . . . a crater, I mean . . . fissures are only in the sides . . . anyway, this mountain has holes all over . . . try and get the picture, a giant bell of fragile clay . . . actually more like a blister . . . an enormous clay bubble . . . other people must have seen it, why not? . . . some day they'll bear witness . . . the miracle was that it held up! . . . or we wouldn't have been there, groping our way . . . light wasn't the only thing that came in from up top, naturally it was raining too, the walls were dripping . . . nowadays there are speleologists that treat themselves to much more difficult descents every Sunday in the Alps, the Dolomites, and the High and Low Pyrenees . . . this cave of ours was nothing much, just sticky . . . of course the clay could have collapsed, the big bubble on top of us could have caved in . . . undoubtedly . . . but there for the moment we were getting ahead . . . I've told you what it was like, three four times the size of Notre Dame . . . the tunnel we'd taken, so narrow at the start, had opened out into a giant grotto . . . and what's more you could almost see . . . the light came from up top . . . the crater hole . . . the effect, I repeat, was like an enormous nave of solid clay . . . solid? . . . well, not so very . . . in my estimation those walls are pretty thin . . . but bell, blister, or shell . . . how'd it gotten there? . . . a tempest in the subsoil, an earthquake, an exploded munitions dump? . . . which had been known to happen . . . maybe there were more mountains . . . or blown-up bells . . . like this right here in Hamburg . . . I hadn't seen them, I couldn't see anything on account of the smoke . . . well, I think we'd come to the end of our crevasse . . . it stank of corpses all right . . . much worse than outside . . . I hadn't seen any

dead animals, no rats, no dogs . . . as an epidemiologist, you see, I observe . . . first thing I do is observe . . . I was kind of surprised . . . outside we'd seen lots of bodies rolled in asphalt, like icing . . . and cooled . . . Harras had told us what to expect . . . not just whole bodies . . . separate limbs, especially feet . . . Hamburg had been destroyed with liquid phosphorus . . . the Pompeii deal . . . the whole place had caught fire, houses, streets, asphalt, and the people running in all directions . . . even the gulls on the roofs . . . the R.A.F. wasn't picky and choosy . . . they just unloaded! . . . on the roofs, basements, and open spaces! . . . don't let me lose you . . . there I was wondering why it smelled so strong of corpses . . . I sing out . . . Lili's there . . . and all our lopsided kids . . . all? . . . I'll count them later . . . and Felipe? . . . he's here too, he's caught up . . . they're looking . . . at something . . . blow me down, a surprise! . . . a grocery store! . . . flattened against the black wall, stuck in the clay . . . grocery store, I said, you get my drift: *Kolonialwaren* . . . how'd it get there? and what makes it stand up? . . . there's a sign, you can't go wrong! . . . magnificent gold lettering on a red background . . . and nothing dinky about it . . . long and wide! . . . I don't get it . . . Felipe looks . . . he gets it . . . "it was a grocery store, *dottore!* . . . *boom!* swallowed up! . . . see?" Felipe was right, he caught on before I did . . . a small pile of bricks . . . two piles . . . on part of a house . . . you visualize the cataclysm? . . . and don't think I'm exaggerating . . . if I tell you that tomorrow France will be all yellow by intermarriage, that all politics is idiotic, because all it gives you is harangues and a jumble of parties, in other words, hot air, that the only reality that counts is the secret, discreet, biological reality you can't see and can't hear, that white blood is the underdog, and the only thing whites can do, quick quick their last chance, is harness themselves . . . to jinrikishas or starve to death . . . don't tell me I'm exaggerating . . . but don't let me lose you! I was telling you about this giant vault and this spooky grocery store spilling its guts in the clay . . . I'm entitled to my blurred vision, it's my age, you can rectify . . . give me a hand, so to speak . . . not just a grocery store, a lot of other stores stuck in the clay . . . a wrecked restaurant and further on a tailor shop . . . stools and counters! . . . mashed! . . . outside there'd been corpses, in the harbor, on the railroad tracks . . . we'd seen them, but mostly limbs, rolled in asphalt . . . here in this grotto, under this clay bell I mean, the only corpse I'd seen was the grocer . . . no rats or other animals . . . but the smell was too pungent for one corpse, I know about these things . . . there had to be more! . . . but the kids? our pissy snottoses . . . I'd lost sight of them! I ask Lili . . . Felipe knew, they'd gone into another fissure . . . every last one of them! . . . in the clay . . . hey, there it is

again! . . . there! . . . the corpse . . . dead five six days, I'd say . . . cold in here, it hasn't fermented very much, but it stinks all the same . . . I go over . . . it's a storekeeper . . . sitting . . . at his cash desk . . . slumped forward . . . pharmacist? . . . grocer? . . . cash desk, I said . . . that's definite, the drawer's open, all full of paper marks . . . and a box full of food coupons . . . the box is open too . . . you see, I'm giving you all the details . . . but what interests me . . . is the cause of death . . . now I see! a fragment! his guts were hanging out . . . cut him open from hip to navel . . . disemboweled, in short . . . his intestines and epiploon on his knees . . . a fragment? from where? . . . Felipe catches on quicker than I do . . . he shows me . . . at the top of the roof . . . a breach . . . what I was calling the crater . . . *boom! Dottore!* an aerial bomb, direct hit! . . . that's where it came in! . . . and, just as he says, *boom!* . . . right on the store, the stores, and the pharmacist . . . or the grocer . . . I couldn't tell which . . . anyway a cash drawer full of marks and ration coupons . . . this stiff stinks . . . the kids didn't stop, they're not interested in stiffs, their specialty is fissures . . . where are they crawling around now? . . . in this one? . . . that one? . . . the lousy little drips! . . . better go see! . . . maybe they've fallen into a pit . . . I wouldn't put it past them . . . with all these crevasses . . . altogether a place I wouldn't recommend, to tourists, I mean, anyway that grotto isn't there any more . . . I've told you how high it was . . . and fragile . . . all clay . . . a phenomenon hard to imagine except in very unusual circumstances, a whole underground arsenal . . . *boom!* . . . the elements unchained, so to speak! . . . but what about my slobbering screwballs? . . . and Bébert? is he gone too? . . . I wasn't naturally so weak in the head, but now, I admit, I let go . . . fatigue, of course, you know all that, and my accident . . . I won't start on the brick again . . . you've had it! . . . first the brats! . . . Lili calls them . . . Bébert answers . . . *miow!* and here he comes . . . on the other side, a different opening . . . I've told you that bell, grotto, blister, anything you say, was full of surprises . . . *miow!* I bet he's been to the end and back . . . now what? . . . these sticky dripping walls . . . but it seems to lead someplace . . . I haven't got my sticks any more . . . Felipe, I see, hasn't got his tarp, left it at the entrance . . . he couldn't have . . . it's better this way . . . I could have stayed at the entrance too! . . . shit! . . . let them figure it out! . . . and this guy with his guts all over the place . . . grocer? . . . pharmacist? . . . I don't know . . . my ears are on the blink . . . I'm collapsing and that's that . . . they can do what they please . . . I'm telling you just the way it happened.



I'd have stayed right there on my back . . . gone to sleep? maybe not . . . it takes strength to sleep, and I was weak as water . . . so weak Felipe and Lili were wondering what was wrong with me, if it wasn't my heart. . . I told them not to worry, I tried to get up . . .

"Think you can make it?"

"Not right away . . . after a while . . ."

I was perfectly conscious though . . . I know, because I said:

"Go see what the kids are doing . . . come back and tell me . . ."

When you've been brought up right, anarchist or not, duty comes first . . . with me it was those drooling cretins, especially their milk . . . maybe they'd found some . . . God knows they had the knack! . . . not of talking, not of looking at things . . . specimens in jars for instance . . . but when it came to disappearing, phenomenal I tell you! . . . the merest mousehole . . . now you see them, now you don't! . . . the slightest crack . . . mud, ashes, clay . . . they vanish . . . and turn up at the other end, some other crack . . . right now they must be hiding . . . where? . . . in the attic? . . . possible! seeing everything was upside down, the roofs in the cellars! . . . Bébert was sure to be with them, Lili'd only have to make him miow . . . nobody obeyed me . . . all the same I should have pulled myself together and helped Lili and Felipe . . . helped them do what? . . . little by little I understood what they were saying . . . right! they wanted me to help them . . .

"Christ!"

That's me coming to . . . I pick myself up, I'm wobbling, but I make it . . . "Over there!" I look . . . I see it! . . . it's in the shadow . . . looks like a stage set . . . in the middle of the clay . . . a door . . . a wooden door . . . they want me to help them . . . they've tried . . . it won't budge . . . where's that door lead to? . . . it's a

backdrop, interior of a shop . . . and shelves . . . I can see them now . . . above this door and along the clay wall . . . they're not empty! piled high! . . . almost to the roof . . . with bread, sausage, cans of milk . . . high, I've said, and I repeat, three or four times as high as Notre Dame . . . you'll say I'm exaggerating, I've got witnesses . . . I think . . . exactly what we needed, tons of condensed milk! but the kids? . . . seems they were on the other side of the door . . . how come? . . . they'd gotten themselves shut in . . . they were stuck in the clay, in a pit, and Bébert was with them . . . we could hear him miowing . . . certainly he could get out. . . when a cat decides he's got to be thin . . . and a little thinner . . . he practically fades away . . . our kids? no problem! . . . room enough in that pit for twelve or fifteen of them . . . I hadn't counted them . . . all doubled up and slippery with slobber . . . they could get through any opening, any crack, you'd wonder how . . . and I've delivered babies, fascinated, I might say, by difficult passages, visions of the narrows . . . those rare moments when nature lets you observe it in action, so subtle, the way it hesitates, then makes up its mind . . . life's critical moment, as it were . . . all our theater and literature revolve around coitus, deadly repetition! . . . the orgasm is boring, the giants of the pen and silver screen with all the ballyhoo and the millions spent on advertising . . . have never succeeded in putting it across . . . two three shakes of the ass, and there it is . . . the sperm does its work much too quietly, too intimately, the whole thing escapes us . . . but childbirth, that's worth looking at! . . . examining! . . . to the millimeter! fucking . . . God knows I've wasted hours! . . . for two three wiggles of the ass! look at the novelists, our masters, when they wanted to put on a big show . . . they knew the score . . . they gave you gladiators killing each other! . . . opening each others' thoraxes . . . and senators and their ladies coming down from the stands to watch their bleeding agonies and their beating hearts until they're torn out and thrown to the wild beasts . . . our pancratiums are pathetic . . . that's what they need . . . for our senators and their ladies to climb through the ropes and tickle the morituri, and fling their hearts to the people . . . our poor dear people that shout so much for nothing! . . . *yum! yum!* give them a treat! . . . our decadence is flabby . . . all it does is jerk off . . . never stops . . . me too, curses! . . . I'd better get on the ball . . . we were outside this fool door with all our kids on the other side . . . supposedly! . . . so all together! . . . we pull, we push! . . . it's giving . . . it's giving . . . wham! and who gets it? me! the whole works! . . . one . . . two . . . three sugar loaves! . . . and the whole shelf! . . . two shelves! on the bean! . . . and all the merchandise! on my head! you'll say: he does it on purpose . . . no! . . . like with the brick . . . no! . . . my head is unlucky!

. . . it's big, but even so . . . like with the brick . . . is it fate? . . . or just to amuse you? . . . *ding! dong!* anyway I hear bells! . . . gongs! . . . I say no more, that's enough! . . . I'm shaken, I mean I'm out for the count . . . my hearing's gone, I lose consciousness, I ought to be getting used to it, I'm really ashamed of myself, I faint at the drop of a hat . . . it's that brick! . . . in Hanover, that house front . . . the others can take over! . . . I'm in a coma! . . . the others? Lili and Felipe . . . for once, I admit, I'm really out! . . . I think they try to wake me up . . . they even shake me . . . I think . . . and then little by little my hearing comes back . . . oh, no intention of moving! . . . they can move! . . . I half open one eye . . . I see a kid . . . two . . . our kids . . . they're coming out. . . it's true, they were down in that crevasse . . . that's where they're coming from . . . five . . . six . . . and all carrying something . . . where are they going? . . . Felipe shows them . . . I get it, he wants them to take their bundles outside . . . bundles of what? . . . looks like condensed milk! . . . grocery store? . . . pharmacy? . . . I can see better now . . . they've all got an armful . . . and not just milk . . . no, bread and jam and . . . they're heading for the entrance . . . that's where the tarp is, the enormous tarp Felipe was carrying on his head . . . he'd spread it out on the ground . . . the kids were making return trips and emptying their bread and cans of milk . . . the little cretins were still slobbering, but steadier on their feet, it seemed to me, not falling so much, and some, I think, were even enjoying themselves . . . out there by the train I hadn't seen one of them laugh . . . children perk up quick, just a wee bit of adventure and even the worst little defectives . . . like ours . . . are full of piss and mischief! . . . cripples or not, you can't keep up with them, they're in the stream of life . . . if you're old, they slip through your fingers, whatever you do! when the menopause comes, the athlete who hangs on, the asthmatic prime minister, are deflated rubbers, fit for the sewer . . . a lot more ridiculous than our little cretins, puny and pathetic as they were, but for them there was hope, when an athlete is through he's through, and as for the minister who was all wind to begin with, he hasn't even got that left . . . our kids went in and out, each with his jam and a loaf of bread . . . where were they taking it all? . . . to the mouth of our crevasse, I think . . . they come right back . . . I really ought to pick myself up . . . and see what's going on . . . in the first place, no use kidding myself . . . this giant vault, this clay blister, wouldn't last . . . I've told you how high it was . . . three four times as high as Notre Dame . . . one more seismic shock, one more subterranean upheaval, you could kiss it good-bye, the whole thing would collapse . . . on top of us . . . I was perfectly willing to get up . . . but the strength? . . . oh, I'd recovered consciousness all right, but standing up was

something else again . . . Lili and Felipe come over and help me . . . the "chin up, kid!" routine, I get it . . . there! I'm up! . . . same crevasse . . . same walls . . . it's slippery! . . . we're going downhill . . . this wet clay . . . and there's the light . . . broad daylight! . . . this is the place! . . . I'd guessed right! . . . that's what the kids have been doing! . . . their return-trips! toting the stuff out here from those stores we'd seen . . . hidden under the clay . . . pharmacy? . . . grocery store? . . . I never found out. . . all I'm sure about is the disemboweled storekeeper at his cash desk with his guts hanging out . . . hell of a good time they're having . . . with their bread and milk and jam . . . playing follow-the-leader . . . and dozens of screwdrivers . . . corkscrews and can openers . . . that stuff looks more like a grocery store . . . and heaps of little bottles . . . liqueurs, it looks like to me . . . some liquor supply! . . . they chuck everything in the tarp at the entrance, just as I thought . . . Felipe's tarp . . . if you ask me, that grocer was hoarding! . . . he won't be hoarding any more, with his belly wide open and his guts all over the place . . .

"Dottore! Dottore! we're late!"

Felipe's trying to hurry me up . . . he's right . . . I'd sort of lost track . . .

"Right you are! . . . the train! . . . the train!"

It's all right with the kids . . . but we've got this tarp . . . full up . . . to tote . . . we all grab hold, we drag it . . . good strong canvas, it holds . . . there aren't so many of us, but between us and the kids we'll get there . . . come to think of it, I haven't counted them! . . . we take the same route . . . the crevasse is slippery . . . a little snow has fallen, not much, a bit of powder . . . so let's go! back to the train, our flatcars! . . . assuming they're still there! . . . that the train hasn't moved! . . . anyway somebody's calling us from up there, from the top of the embankment! . . . guttural! . . . *los! los!* . . . a Kraut! . . . two Krauts! . . . we should hurry! . . . not passengers, the passengers weren't talking . . . it's the engineers, they're in a hurry . . . but we've got the provisions . . . they're not dragging this tarp, it's us and our drooling cretins . . . and it's not easy . . . fits and starts! . . . take a break! and pick her up! . . . another few yards! . . . this enormous pile . . . it's not them, it's us! . . . hanging on for dear life! . . . Bébert follows us . . . on his own . . . okay, okay, we're coming! . . . the whole side of the basin to go . . . you get the picture . . . a struggle! . . . *los! los!* . . . mighty impatient up there! . . . but come down and help us? oh no! . . . what's it to them if we die in the traces! . . . what's so urgent up there? . . . a fire? . . . there's always a fire, always and everywhere! . . . the nitwits! . . . *"ja! ja!* we're coming!" . . . we're almost there . . . but the kids are stumbling too much . . .

they're all in . . . they let us drag them with the tarp . . . they hold on . . . we stop, we put them back on their feet more or less . . . and here we go again! . . . now I see them, those two impatient characters up there . . . *los! los!* two engineers . . . we're coming! . . . and look what we've got! . . . plenty of loot under that mountain! . . . that blister . . . I've told you . . . I'm not going to tell you again . . . high, two three times as high as Notre Dame . . . we're almost there . . . only the embankment . . . and the roadbed . . . but I don't see any passengers . . . not a one! all gone off to town? . . . or back where they came from, wedged between the searchlights? . . . one thing for sure, our two loudmouths haven't calmed down . . . *los! los!* what's so urgent? . . . *was? was?* . . . I shout back! . . . what? . . . the R.A.F., the "fortresses!" . . . they're on alert! . . . if you ask me, they're epileptic! . . . is the alert still on? "quick! quick!" . . . they're bellowing! . . . got to get the train out of there! . . . they're going to burn the whole place down! . . . okay! let's go! . . . but what about Odile? that's easy, she's not moving! . . . the whole world can go up in thunder and smoke! . . . we offer to take her with us . . . no! she refuses! she coughs, she spits blood, okay! she refuses to travel any more . . . I should take her brats, I should save them, she gives them to us! they seem to be happy with us, they even laugh, well, in their own way, hiccups and slobber, first time we'd seen them laughing, they limp, they stumble, they flop, they slobber and cry, but cheerfully all in all . . . Felipe opens cans for them, the whole lot, first with a chunk of iron, then with a real can opener, the tarp's full of them . . . man! are they sucking! . . . "all aboard!" . . . the kids aren't worrying about Odile, they see us get on, so they get on, they settle down on the first flatcar with us . . . Lili, Bébert, and me . . . but the loot! . . . our cans, our jam, our bread! . . . and the chocolate bars! Felipe helps us, so do the two old engineers, the tarp, the whole stock, up on our flatcar! . . . heave! right next to the loco . . . I was the only one . . . I couldn't make it . . . I've got to admit the little cretins helped, every one of them . . . we leave Odile four cans, and plenty of jam and bread . . . don't worry! we've got all we need! . . . "Felipe! . . . Felipe! . . ." he hasn't lost any time, he answers from the other side of the tracks, another flatcar, he's leaving too, right away, his train's all made up! . . . his "Magdeburg express" . . . "*Dottore! Dottore!*" . . . he's getting back to *da boss* . . . I don't answer . . . got to hoist myself aboard . . . with the tarp, thanks to the tarp I'll make it . . . I hold on tight! here I go! . . . right in the middle of the provisions! . . . the kids are all hiccupping, their way of laughing! . . . I'm so comical! . . . all right with me! . . . hey! . . . now our two ancient engineers are making fun of us too, the insolent louts! . . . so help me! . . . they're old, about as old as me now . . .

. "alert" or not, what can it mean to them? . . . at a certain age nothing means anything . . . unless you're in advertising, selling "eternal youth pills" . . . anyway we've got everything we need, I'm lying on it . . . man, the stuff we've brought back from that grotto! . . . that bell . . . blister . . . abyss . . . that buried grocery store . . . we've got everything . . . we'll take inventory later, plenty of time . . . victuals, cans, and memories . . . "get moving! . . . get moving! *los! los!*" . . . my turn to yell! . . . they should evacuate these lousy flatcars! . . . this station's going to be burned down! . . . I know the score! so now I'm shouting at them: alert! alert! they should get moving! . . . cars, loco, jam, and condensed milk! . . . I'm a damn sight more "alert" than these two septuagenarians, these insolent bald toothless engineers . . . who have the crust to give orders! . . . "lazy bastards!" . . . I give it to them good . . . "get going! saboteurs! . . . imbeciles! . . . *traitors!*" . . . that's a word I know well: *verräter* . . . they don't know who they're up against! . . . get up in that engine! . . . they'll know soon! it works! sure thing! our flatcar's trembling, so am I and Lili and Bébert in his bag . . . they've started up . . . we're moving! lucky I gave them a piece of my mind, we'd still be there! . . . anger has its points sometimes, especially when you're worn to a frazzle . . . anyway, we're off! . . . this loco doesn't whistle and it doesn't *choo! choo!* . . . I don't wave good-bye! . . . to anybody! . . . neither Felipe nor Odile . . . they'd made their beds! . . . okay! oddballs, you say? okay! so am I, take it or leave it! . . . the proof is that I'm here and haven't forgotten a thing . . . and as you can imagine, I didn't take notes . . . I'm here, not in very good shape but wide awake . . . and all around me . . . I've got a lot of snotty, jealous, drooling, fanatical imbeciles, worse than the pilgrims who've gone to Lourdes four or five times to pray that somebody will cut my throat . . . so naturally I'm on my guard! . . . that blood-spitting floozy . . . and that wop with his brick . . .



First they had a good sleep, the kids, I mean, some right there, some a few feet away, and another bunch at the end of the platform, wedged in between a dynamo and something that looked like a transformer . . . some kind of contraption in a cage with a lot of springs . . . good shaking up we were getting . . . plus the bumps from in front and behind . . . the line had been repaired, you could see that, but not very well . . . we were moving, though . . . the main thing . . . and pretty fast . . . we'd been on worse trains . . . Lili asks me . . .

"Now where are we going?"

I had no idea . . . those two old fogies on the diesel must have known . . . in an hour . . . maybe two . . . I'd ask them . . . I didn't want to question them right away . . . in the first place I didn't have the strength . . . besides, I couldn't ask them in this bacchanal of rails, flatcars, shocks, and chains . . . I'd have had to bellow . . . I hadn't the strength . . .

"After a while, Lili, when we stop! I'll ask them when we stop . . ."

This hardware train has got to stop some time, I think . . . I wasn't sure . . . these two old geezers . . . so rude . . . look perfectly capable of not stopping at all . . . I was pretty vague about the future . . . nobody left but Lili and me . . . no more Harras . . . no more Restif . . . no more Le Vig . . . even Felipe was gone, him and his brick . . . he hadn't been with us very long . . . Odile didn't count . . . just time enough to palm her kids off on us . . . come to think of it, how many were there? . . . of these loonybin dropouts . . . I wasn't going to look under the tarps . . . later . . . at least twelve . . . fifteen . . . it seemed to me . . . but what about this Felipe? . . . I couldn't get him out of my mind . . . him and his brick . . . maybe I'd accused him unjustly . . . but if you accuse indiscriminately there's always a chance of guessing right . . . hit or miss, grope and find . . . a rather curious principle . . . all miscarriages of justice, all unwarranted decapitations

were irrefutable at the time . . . flawless hand-stitched verdicts . . . there I go, off the beam again . . . I'll never have any of those ideas, good for three four gilt-edged idiocies a line, that make a man feel like a fucking prodigy, a prophet without equal, convinced that nobody existed before him and that after him it'll be a lot worse, back to zero, the robots on the blink and all the cafes jerking off dry . . . for my part, aseptized by ten thousand hatreds, I'm confident that I'll never infect anybody, not even long after my demise, my humble contribution to the worms, my only sincere admirers . . . hey there! . . . I'm running wild! . . . each thing in its time! . . . I'm supposed to be telling you about that flatcar . . . you'll say: that'll do! . . . you'll be right . . . at least ten . . . twenty times I've told you . . . about our rather peculiar kind of tourism in tunnels and in the open air . . . here for instance it's flat country, practically no grass . . . the sea can't be far off . . . gulls overhead . . . kind of like Zornhof. Say, what about the von Leidens? . . . the Russians must be there now . . . curses, back to business if you please! . . . my compass here . . . I always wore it on a chain . . . so nobody could fool me . . . north! . . . north! . . . north! . . . here I keep it on my desk, all rusty, a souvenir . . . I'd had somebody smuggle it in from Switzerland, to cross the Swiss border with . . . just then we were tempted by tourism, though we're not the traveling kind . . . but somebody's always trying to make us move out . . . impossible vermin that contaminate the air . . . me, who never says a word, never shows myself, never receives any visitors . . . oh, of course it doesn't matter, when you get to a certain turn in the road nothing matters except fun and the cemetery . . . in any case we're definitely going north . . . due north and pretty fast . . . we've been moving at least an hour . . . it's coming on nightfall . . . seems to me the kids need something to drink, all they've had is milk, they're sleeping but they'll wake up . . . and we haven't got any water . . . maybe on the other flatcars? . . . I'm wondering . . . or in the locomotive? . . . not far, we're right next to it . . . but I don't see our two doddering engineers . . . maybe they've bedded down somewhere after starting their engine . . . possible! one thing's for sure, they're not paying any attention to us . . . the sky isn't paying any attention to us either . . . lucky for us! two three purrs in the distance, way high up, and that's all . . . not Germans, no more Krauts in the sky . . . at this rate, I've studied the maps enough, we can't be far from the famous "Kiel-North Sea" canal . . . I tell Lili . . . "it'll be fun up there!" . . . she doesn't get it. . . but I knew, I'd been through that canal a lot of times, ship's doctor looking after the emigrants . . . the Havre-Danzig-Leningrad line . . . small freighters and a couple of pretty big ones, the *Kansas*, the *Columbia*, those ships must be on the bottom by now . . . anyway I

knew that canal, no joke, especially the wind! freezing cold from one sea to the other, even in summer, between its giant walls, rocks and stunted pines . . . you were glad to get out . . . bridges and footbridges higher than about the first story of the Eiffel Tower . . . which gives you an idea of the grandiose achievement, the prestige it gave Wil-helm's Empire . . . of course that Empire had other marvels to show . . . right now at the moment I'd have liked a drink of water . . . the kids too, I think . . . we had a whole tarp full of stuff to eat, but the only liquid I could see was those little bottles . . . with labels . . . containing what? you won't catch me sampling them . . . from the pharmacy or grocery store . . . I'll ask the old men on the diesel . . . maybe they'd like a try . . . it was booze, I was pretty sure, but I'd have to see them . . . they must have stashed themselves away somewhere, maybe they're sleeping too . . . we were going slower now, a lot slower . . . maybe we're arriving someplace . . . right! . . . an upgrade . . . this must be it . . . the whole shebang stops . . . the locomotive and our flatcar and the rest of them, the whole string . . . it's pretty near dark . . . nobody gets off the other cars . . . they're stayed in Hamburg . . . those men and women . . . where'd they come from? . . . I never found out . . . all I know is that we're all alone, Lili and me and the kids . . . and all this military bric-a-brac . . . heading north . . . north, but where? I don't know, I'll ask . . . it's not completely dark . . . kind of gray . . . on account of the searchlights in the distance, I think . . . light enough to see that our two old palookas have gotten down off their diesel and are groping along our platform, along the edge . . .

"Nun? . . . well? . . . Wasser . . . water . . ."

I ask them.

"Da! . . . da!"

They answer . . . the water's further down! down where? . . . I get down to look, not alone, with Lili and Bébert . . . and naturally the kids too . . . they all drag themselves out of the tarps and climb down . . . they're on the roadbed before we are . . . I'd seen them crawling along like sleepy cockroaches, now they were almost nimble . . . adventure's the thing for kids, goofy or not, they come to life, ready to tear the house apart! . . . you, old man panting on the ragged edge, you've got situations, itineraries to worry about, your hard luck! these kids are on the roadbed, I've told you that . . . the water isn't far away, about a hundred yards down the tracks . . . an enormous tub . . . the kids get there first . . . they stick their heads right into it and drink . . . hell, we'll do the same! . . . Bébert doesn't want any, he's not thirsty . . . I ask our two old geezers if we're pulling right out . . . not for a while! got to wait for the alert to be over! . . . we

hadn't heard a thing, Lili hadn't and neither had I . . . but what's this here? . . . the *Kanal* bridge! . . . oh, I'd suspected we were getting there . . . and here we are! . . . I want to make sure, it must be over there, just a few steps . . . right! . . . empty space and a lot of iron girders and arches, this is it all right, it's the canal. . . they weren't lying . . . way at the bottom of the darkness, the empty space, the ditch, let's say . . . two three blinking lights . . . maybe ten . . . battleships? . . . I don't think so . . . ah, now I know . . . I don't need anybody to tell me . . . *Unterseebooten!* submarines! . . . I know all about ships and navies . . . no! not all, but something . . . anyway, I know this canal, I've been through it eight times . . . ten times . . . from end to end . . .

I ask our old men! . . . they agree . . . those lights come from submarines . . . waiting for permission to enter the North Sea . . . but what about our train? . . . are we waiting for signals too? . . . exactly! . . . all clear! . . . got to wait! . . . the sirens . . . I don't hear any planes at all . . . this canal is certainly a good place to bomb . . . but why would they come running at this particular moment, after four years of war . . . they'll need it themselves soon for their own shipping . . . if they win . . . I wasn't going to tell these old-timers what I was thinking . . . in the first place they were busy . . . especially one of them, who wasn't quite as old as the other . . . he'd decided to shave . . . right then and there! . . . take advantage of the alert and the big tub of water . . . he'd brought all he needed, a *torch*, a little mirror, two cakes of soap . . . I saw where the water came from, a big droopy canvas pipe, same as here in our garden . . . no skin off our ass! we'd all finished drinking . . . he'd hung his mirror on a nail . . . on our flatcar . . . the kids and us, we're all watching him, he's lathering his face . . . just then flares, green ones! . . . from all directions, every cloud . . . you know, signal flares . . . then the usual . . . white ones . . . and then bombs . . . you're lucky if you've never been through it . . . I don't remember how many times it happened to us . . . our comic drama . . . Montmartre . . . Sartrouville . . . Saint-Jean d'Angély . . . Frankfurt . . . *etc.* . . . Berlin . . . even here in Meudon twenty-five years later I've got a crater, an extremely treacherous hole, right outside the garden gate, and all the neighbors say it's me and it's high time I was thrown out of the neighborhood and petition the Prefecture to do something about it! . . . oh, I'm not joking, it's no news to me that Attila was small beer, him and his grass that would never grow again . . . with me it's craters, wherever I go! . . . wherever I turn up, everything rots, soil, flora, fauna . . . one look at me and the human race loses all desire to eat, drink, and sleep . . . the sad truth! . . . and to think that this extremely treacherous crater just outside my garden gate comes from the bombing of the Renault factory . . . I

know, I saw it with my own eyes, we were up in Montmartre, corner of rue Girardon to be precise, not the end of the world! . . . a thousand years from now all the whites of this earth will be a deep yellow . . . "Super-Brazilias" . . . but that won't stop them from blaming every crater on Mars, the moon, or the Little Dipper on me! . . . I'm ready! . . . forewarned! . . .

Oh, I don't doubt it for a moment! where am I taking you? . . . we were up above . . . remember? . . . the Kiel Canal . . . almost vertical . . . that canal with its enormous high banks, rocks, and grass . . . one of the ancient engineers was shaving, remember? . . . we'd all drunk out of the tub . . . he . . . I'm filling you in . . . was just starting to shave . . . he can see . . . but just barely . . . thanks to his *torch* and his little mirror . . . hung up on our flatcar . . . *bim bam!* all of a sudden we can see fine! . . . broader than daylight! . . . the prelude to the scrunch! . . . same as in Montmartre or Berlin . . . or Zornhof . . . we knew . . . not much time to think . . . *wham!* there she goes! the bridge is moving, I think . . . rising into the air . . . and falling back down! . . . and the tub of water! . . . and the old man shaving right on top of it! . . . carried away! . . . flung through the air, I can still see him . . . with his open razor . . . wide open! and the tub! the whole works! into the ditch! . . . I won't go looking right now . . . carried away, the blast from a whole string of bombs . . . ten . . . fifteen of them . . . we were a yard away . . . no more than a yard . . . he must be down at the bottom by now . . . I think . . . I'm not going to investigate . . . I've told you how high it was . . . that plunge . . . about as high as the first floor of the Eiffel Tower . . . not the first time . . . at least our tenth narrow squeak! . . . but not from so high . . . pretty lucky! . . . but don't crow too soon! there's always a next time, they're just keeping it in reserve! I know, some people are optimistic, and some that are no better than I am are always lucky . . . they have their health, fortune smiles on them . . . in their shoes I wouldn't be too sure! . . . even with my character, suspicious, pessimistic to the hilt, I'm snarled up in every known calamity! . . . but as I was telling you, we had these two engineers . . . the one that's left is every bit as old as the other . . . he shouts in my ear "got to go back down!" . . . down where we came from, he means . . . not I! nothing doing! . . . too weak, we've struggled enough! but what about the kids? where are they? say, they've gone out on the bridge! for the hell of it! . . . with *boom! wham!* explosions all over the place! . . . it's not a *Blitz*, they're not dive-bombing like the Krauts, they're way high up, above the clouds . . . these kids of ours aren't afraid, they can't hear a thing, they're enjoying themselves . . . I think it must be a squadron of "fortresses" up there . . . come to destroy the bridge or the canal or the submarines . . . all three, I guess . . . the

kids aren't scared at all, they're running, well, trying to run, at every enormous *boom* they collapse, all in a heap! . . . some of them must have fallen into the canal . . . everything makes them laugh . . . except the ones that fall . . . I can see they're improving, all the way from Breslau . . . every air raid . . . they've been improving, nothing else to do . . . no wonder their Odile was fed up . . . no feeling for children . . . but Hamburg, I ask you, the "fortresses" must have gone back . . . and that flimsy wooden station! so there we are, right next to the tub . . . I'm shouting . . . telling them what to do . . . first catch our little creeps . . . they'll be blown into the canal! . . . the old man thinks so too . . . he says he'll go after the kids with us . . . but first he asks us for something to drink . . . not water out of the tub, something else! . . . he's fastidious! . . . fine time to be fastidious! . . . *boom! crash!* a whole arsenal they're dropping on us! the banks of the canal and the high walls are all lit up with the bursts . . . red and green . . . and rivers of magnesium! no visibility trouble, it's dazzling . . . both banks! . . . and the ramparts on top! . . . the prettiest part is the explosions, the bombs bursting like enormous flowers . . . green red blue . . . against the stone of the ramparts on both sides . . . opening downward and across the canal . . . red blue and green . . . flowers thirty feet wide . . . at least . . . hard to believe if you haven't seen it . . . I can't make you hear the *booms!* . . . especially, you can imagine, the echoes between those high walls . . . the old-timer is willing to help us round up our little cretins and maybe the other engineer, but first he wants a drink, and not out of the tub! . . . something else! . . . he knows we've got it! . . . sure we've got it! . . . a whole tarp full . . . but of what? . . . rum or medicine? or vitriol? . . . I couldn't say . . . pharmacist or grocer? . . . I'm still wondering . . . in any case we'd seen him at his cash desk, completely disemboweled, with his guts hanging out! . . . he hadn't smelled so bad because of the cold . . . the question of those bottles was more serious, maybe it was carbolic acid . . . it all depended, I never found out . . . I hadn't tasted it . . . hell, let him risk it! . . . there was a corkscrew! . . . two in fact! . . . okay! . . . you could see fine, I've told you, better than broad daylight . . . they weren't trying to save on magnesium . . . the flares were falling in rivers! this old engineer, I don't mind telling you, wasn't too steady on his pins . . . he tried to stand, but at every *boom* he staggered and lurched, I expected him to fly away like his buddy . . . not at all! he's as steady as a rock . . . bomb or no bombs! . . . if the R.A.F. had been after the bridge, they'd have demolished it long ago, it wouldn't be there . . . no, it's got to be the submarines . . . which would take some doing, they're strung out all along the canal . . . I know that canal, I've told you, exactly sixty-two miles long . . . I risk it on all fours, I crawl

to the bridge ramp . . . Lili comes with me . . . from there we can see that both banks and the ramparts are in bloom . . . the bomb bursts . . . violet . . . red . . . and yellow . . . a spectacle we'll never see again . . . like the big maneuvers of 1913, the whole cavalry, light, heavy, and dragoons . . . deployed in extended order . . . and charges! . . . forty, fifty squadrons . . . the Cercottes camp in 1913, you've either seen it or you haven't, and that's that . . .

Getting lost again! back to business! . . . I was telling you that this bridge was shivering, I'd even say trembling! . . . and that bridge was no fluff, a giant structure of girders and arches . . . it didn't seem possible . . . but it was! . . . just from the blast! . . . a regular jig! and us out there enjoying the view of those flowering bombs! . . . violet! red! yellow! . . . at the bottom of the chasm . . . in the canal for sure! some punishment those subs must be taking! . . . and talk about whirlwinds . . . give you the staggers! . . . but what about our little slobberpusses? . . . every reason to worry . . . maybe they'd crossed the bridge, maybe they were playing on the other side . . . the trouble with those kids wasn't just that they were deaf but that nothing scared them, they were used to bombs and thunders, they'd been through it not once but a hundred times . . . as a matter of fact . . . they hadn't crossed over! . . . there they were on the bridge, I could see them, playing tag, catching, flopping, catching again, trying to push each other off . . . the explosions didn't bother them at all . . . I'd never seen them so gay . . . playing tricks, tripping each other up . . . I couldn't go any further, neither could Lili . . . and besides, you should have seen the way the bridge was jumping . . . so were the rails and our flatcars . . . and *bam!* . . . coming down again! . . . the whole thing was like a roller coaster . . . naturally we're deaf . . . like the kids . . . from the explosions, the hurricanes of bombs . . . more than anybody's ears can take, or his head . . . or my head, you can imagine! I won't start on that again, or the brick either . . . I can still see that other engineer flying into the canal . . . with his open razor! . . . he was going to shave . . . the one that's left isn't coming . . . he'd promised . . . he's rummaging for a bottle . . . on his knees in our tarp . . . I call him . . . hey! . . . *hier!* . . . he shows me he's got it! he holds it up . . . a big bottle . . . two! . . . three! . . . "okay, so come on!" . . . *crash! bang!* no, he doesn't want to! he's making motions . . . to tell me the bridge is shaking too much . . . what about us? I suppose we're having a picnic! . . . and our little slobberpusses out there playing, mightn't they be afraid? our one and only engineer isn't just jittery-shitless, the brute is completely stinko . . . he must have found some kirsch . . . I think we had some in our tarp . . . Christ, the stuff we've toted! and the trouble we've had! I'm not going to moralize, but it's

always the trouble you take that turns against you . . . you think you've done a good deed, you've only damned yourself for life! . . . take a look around, the lousiest crummiest disloyal charlatan traitors have no trouble at all covering themselves with gold and honors . . . *wham! boom!* they're interrupting me! . . . I'm not here to meditate . . . I'm here to get on with my travels . . . northward, my hobby! but first find our gang . . . our little creeps! . . . *click! crack! . . . ptim!* . . . brittle sounds . . . bomb fragments striking iron . . . the first I've heard . . . they'd been bursting lower down up to now . . . if they were trying to squash the bridge, they'd have done it by now . . . it must be the subs down below . . . from end to end of the canal . . . North Sea-Baltic . . . I've told you, sixty-three miles! . . . anyway, no mistake, it's hailing on the bridge spans . . . and the blasts! . . . gales and counter-gales, so bad that even stretched out flat you couldn't dream of raising your head . . . or even opening an eye! . . . you just had to wait . . . it would pass, everything passes . . . we'd risked it this far, but kids or no kids we couldn't go out on the ramp . . . not even on all fours . . . beyond the tub . . . beyond the tub you'd be blown away! . . . I'd gone through this canal from east to west and back any number of times, and I knew . . . all you could do was lie on your belly until the flares went out . . . after that they'd stop bombing . . . naturally . . . and head for home chop-chop to reload! . . . took them at least five six hours to fill up on bombs and whiskey . . . we'd pretty well gotten the hang of their raids and habits . . . they'd come in all fire and flame . . . a wave! two waves! . . . volley and thunder! . . . and then *fsss!* nothing! . . . no more light, not a flare! . . . darkness, black night . . . this was the time to run for it! but our engineer, the second one, maybe he'd flown away like his buddy . . . I turn around! I call him . . . *heil! heil!* . . . he's got to answer me, even if he's drunk . . . *los! los!* . . . he's heard me . . . let's get going! . . . all right with him! . . . he gets the drift! . . . he's willing to make a run for it! . . . but our little cretins? . . . if one of them's missing, I'll never know it, I haven't counted them . . . hell, the way they're pounding us . . . this hail of phosphorus . . . and the tornadoes, you can't expect me to take a census! . . . let's say twelve or fifteen . . . girls or boys? . . . it's completely dark now . . . if only they'd come back . . . cross the bridge . . . at least that'll prove we can do it, that maybe the train can get across, that the tracks are still there . . . for a moment the superstructure, the enormous girders, had bent and twisted, we'd feared the worst . . . not at all! . . . here come our kids, looks like they've had a good time . . . happy as larks! . . . it's pitch-dark . . . I feel one, two of them . . . maybe a couple had flown away . . . they had no way of telling me . . . our first engineer . . . I'd seen him flying through the air with

his razor . . . I hadn't seen any kids . . . the second engineer was there . . . *los!*
los! I yell at him . . . he should get his diesel started . . . I can't see him, but I'm
sure he's dead drunk . . . he must have had quite a party with our bottles . . . he
comes up close, he says something right under my nose, he stinks something
terrible . . . he doesn't know what he's saying . . . gobbledygook in German . . .
the main thing is he should start up . . . and quick! . . . and the kids should climb
on! and Lili and me and Bébert . . . not so easy . . . luckily the drunk is pottering
with his handles, his diesel . . . hard time hoisting myself up on our flatcar . . .
I'm not trying to make you weep for me, I'm just telling you . . . ah, I've made it!
. . . the kids too! . . . there! . . . there! . . . we all settle down between the
dynamos, in the folds of the tarp . . . anyway I think so . . . one thing's for sure,
it's not so dark any more . . . it must be coming on dawn . . . *pom! pom! pom!* the
drunk has got his diesel going . . . hurray! . . . *los! los! heil!* . . . he answers with
the same . . . *es geht?* . . . everything okay? . . . and now, full speed ahead! . . . if
the bridge collapses, we'll know it in due time! . . . just to give you an idea of our
morale . . . let's go! . . . the bridge doesn't collapse at all . . . but it buckles . . . up
hill and down dale . . . "scenic railway" effect . . . the drunk isn't worried,
anything but! . . . *heil! heil!* he bellows . . . me, I'm dog-tired and sober, but I
don't want to seem down in the mouth, I wouldn't want anybody to think I'm
dissatisfied or scared . . . our flatcar, I've told you, is going up and down . . . up
hill and down dale . . . "roller coaster" effect . . . this bridge hadn't looked
flexible . . . but it is! . . . it is! like rubber! . . . we're undulating . . . it could
perfectly well snap and collapse . . . I could take a look down below, at the canal,
see if the subs are still there . . . they put on red lights . . . no! . . . no trimmings!
we're getting ahead and that's enough! . . . anyway, I think so . . . up hill and
down dale . . . all this tin, I mean the superstructure, the enormous spans could
perfectly well crack . . . split . . . we'd topple into the void like whosis with his
razor, then we'd get a first-hand view of the submarines . . . and plenty to drink .
. . . the whole canal . . . wouldn't that be a scream! oh, my head! . . . I'm laughing
again, I can't stop it . . . a fit! . . . *heil! heil!* . . . I only hope our old-timer doesn't
fall asleep, the only one we've got left . . . he should step on it! give her the gas!
and get us across! . . . this bridge is certainly going to collapse! . . . say, this is
the other side! we're here! he's made it! we've stopped undulating . . . our flatcar,
I mean . . . we're on the level, so to speak . . . we're doing all right! rolling along .
. . . *pom!* . . . *pom!* . . . just a couple of jolts . . . and daylight . . . here all around us
it's plains . . . yellow soil, yellower than Zornhof . . . and way in the distance two
. . . three . . . farmhouses . . . I don't see our kids . . . they're under the tarps . . .

are we really going north? . . . still got my compass, it's around my neck, nobody's going to fool me! . . . right, north it is! . . . and slightly east . . . pretty good! . . . I can't trust anybody . . . I'm feeling kind of funny, though . . . like laughing! . . . I tell Lili. . .

"It must be the brick, you know."

She can't believe that I feel like laughing . . .

Anyway we're moving! . . . pom! pom! and heading north! . . . with my compass I'm sure! . . . we can hear the engine . . . we're right in back of it, first car . . . I can't see the engineer . . . who cares! . . . we're moving and we won't stop! north! . . . north! . . . no reason to stop . . . anywhere! Christ, do I feel like laughing! . . . I won't sit up, I'd fold . . . I won't talk to Lili, she'd only say it was the brick . . . I know what's going on better than she does! . . . and I don't want to be contradicted! she'll see, she'll get a surprise . . . in maybe an hour . . . oh, I had my suspicions . . . we were getting there all right . . .



Crossing the canal may have been amusing but it wasn't the end of our troubles . . . far from it! . . . the worst danger now, in a way, was the Danish border . . . I hadn't mentioned it to anybody, but I'd been thinking about it since Paris . . . in fact it had always been in the back of my mind, because all the royalties of my beautiful works, about six million francs, were up there . . . not just lying around, no, in a bank vault . . . now it can be told . . . *Landsman Bank . . . Peter Bang Wej* . . . no danger now . . . only I wouldn't want people to think this chronicle is nothing but a tissue of applesauce . . . the police wondered to the very end what I'd come to Denmark for . . . I never told them, other people shot off their mouths, but never the exact address, Landsman Bank . . . Peter Bang Wej . . . at this late date it doesn't matter . . . in the meantime I'm forgetting you! . . . we were on this flatcar in with the dynamos, searchlights, and miscellaneous hardware . . . but only Lili, me, and the kids, and Bébert in his bag . . . the others were gone, I've told you, Le Vig, Restif, *etc.* . . . you're always losing people, that's the way it goes . . . here . . . and there . . . I'd be losing a lot more people . . . I'll tell you as I go along . . . all the more or less amusing vicissitudes . . . takes all kinds of crap to make a world . . . not to mention a book! . . . I guess you think I'm an awful sap . . . I could easily have stayed home taking a lofty view of events, and written about the stirring adventures of our intrepid armies of the Great Shit Parade, the way they managed to come home in triumph, welcomed by marshals under the Arch . . . I could have spawned words of genius . . . the Boches had done it all, the horrible V 2 genocides, the dissection camps, the Volkswagen, and the Grand Guignol . . . I'd never have said that since Stalingrad France and the colonies had ceased to exist . . . nothing left but black, yellow, and green nondescripts . . . a kind of mock Brazil . . . who don't know where they come from . . . Provence? . . . Normandy? . . . mountains or seacoast? . . .

At the moment we're not on vacation, our problem is to hold on tight and not get thrown out on the roadbed! . . . one jolt and good-bye! and barring that, still another danger: that damned border! suppose they turned us back! or pulled us in! we'd be cooked! must be about an hour to this border . . . two hours from the canal. . . it all depended . . . on a lot of things . . . the train might change its mind and switch off to the east . . . or west . . . no! it's still going north . . . my comfort is my compass . . . it doesn't lie! . . . we'll get to the border all right . . . main thing is to be prepared . . . and not start talking through my hat . . . got to stop these mirages . . . can't have them thinking I'm nuts . . . that locomotive in the clouds, for instance! . . . and no fumdiddle about my head or the brick, et cetera! . . . we're expected in Denmark, a whole raft of friends . . . names and addresses . . . *Veg Stranden*, purpose of trip: recreation, *Staegers Allee*, and especially my bank, my funds, *Landsman Bank* . . . you get the picture . . . I'm pulling myself together, getting ready for their interrogations . . . not so easy with all this jiggling hardware . . . muddlement isn't presentable . . . on the day of the Deluge the ones that came through were the ones that got out of the Ark in good order, properly dressed, with their little bundles under their arms . . . that's what we've got to be, Lili, me, Bébert, and the kids . . . properly dressed . . . of course there are unpredictables! . . . I'm trying to get my wits back, my clear mind! hell, I've still got the vapors! . . . no good! I can stagger some other time, not now! . . . I fill Lili in: "I'll give you my arm, I'll only take one cane, two'd make me look too much like an invalid . . ." while I'm talking we roll along . . . jolts, but not bad . . . the sky is blue, practically no mist . . . on my back like this I'd see the planes if there were any . . . why wouldn't I look at the country? . . . the yellow plain . . . I roll over, now I can see it . . . kind of fuzzy in the head . . . it's not just a plain, there's woods and farmhouses . . . some pretty big ones, with gables . . . Schleswig is like this, we're tourists . . . Léon Bloy . . . didn't dig it at all. . . his passion was meat, steak . . . Schleswig is no place for gourmets . . . it's a rugged moor between two seas, you either like it or you don't . . . Bloy complained something terrible, he'd never been in the clink or in the war, would have done him good, same as the people today, flatulent, swilling, boozing hogs . . . our Great Paleface, think of him! the poor bastard! with nothing to do but pick up the pieces after the gigantic heroic shambles! the gangrene, the scraps and tatters of Ural, Stalingrad, Maginot . . . pulp the white race! . . . no more degrees, no more shadings! from boulevard Saint-Michel to Hong Kong! . . . you've made your bed! . . . all yellow you'll be, you are already, hell, you asked for it! . . . and black on the side! the white man has never been anything but a

"make-up base" . . . he was waiting . . . that's right! . . . I'm delirious again . . . it's my age, plus the hardships! . . . but back to Schleswig . . . city and province . . .

"Lili, you'll see . . . it can't be far . . ."

I'm not too confident . . . vision still blurred . . . better she should look . . . but she can't read German, she could go wrong . . . I think it over . . . maybe another five minutes . . . the train's slowing down . . . curses! I drag my head up . . . there! on the right! . . . sure enough, houses . . . I'm so damn dizzy . . . I look . . . we're still moving though . . . very slowly . . . a sign . . . another . . . Schleswig! . . . this is it! . . . a platform . . . intact . . . the station too . . . no civilians . . . a few Kraut soldiers . . . who don't even look at us, they must be used to . . . this *pom! pom!* isn't stopping . . . we're only passing through . . . okay . . . Lie down again . . .

"Lili, be careful."

"Why?"

I explain . . . we'd be coming into Flensburg, a name that wasn't so well known at the time . . . I myself didn't realize . . . anyway, not much . . . seeing that Denmark is like a swan's head at the top of Europe . . . obviously everything has to pass through the neck . . . this neck is Schleswig and the border cuts across the neck . . . at Flensburg . . .

And the details . . .

"The customs . . . we haven't got anything! . . . except Bébert in his bag . . . no papers, no photos, nothing . . . lost! burned! the kids don't know and they can't talk!"

The closer we come, the more I suspect that it's going to be tough, that I'll need my wits . . . as many as I've got left . . . no more visions in the sky! no planes, no locomotives! . . . not even a soft purring in the distance . . . it's early May, springtime . . . perfect visibility . . . if they'd wanted, it's a cinch, we wouldn't be here, neither would these hardware wagons . . . but I've told you they hadn't been out to destroy these tracks . . . or the switches . . . or the bridges . . . it's the submarines they were after, we'd seen that at the canal . . . destructive sons of bitches, but practical! . . . same thing at home, at Renault Billancourt down below, I'd seen their routine . . . a deluge of bombs, you'd have thought all Paris was on fire, lit up from Montmartre to Suresnes . . . you'd have said: good-bye Renault! reduced to powder! wrong again! they hadn't touched a screwdriver, the next day the plant was going stronger than ever! tanks and trucks and even big guns! not a day lost! I can easily see one of those rockets they talk about falling on New York without touching a single drugstore,

business as usual . . . the super-power giants know what they're doing, rest assured, they're as finicky as old maids, needlepoint . . . it's the tropicals that don't give a damn, that barge right in and bugger everybody, government, dairymaids, nuns . . . and don't give a shit about the future! pigstickers, tomahawks, go to it! the primitive's motto is: get 'em while they're hot!

With all this malarky I'm only trying to show that you can't judge by appearances . . . all over BocheLand, for instance, I saw factories running full steam that were supposedly reduced to ruins . . . between supposedly and the real thing . . . a yawning chasm! no chasms around here, I see other flatcars same as ours on other tracks hitched to other locomotives, full up with the same kind of hardware, dynamos, and searchlights . . . looks like we're really coming to this damn border . . . this is it! . . . not a single sign! . . . it's Flensburg, though, I know it . . . pom! pom! . . . but not so hard . . . hey, look at all those people . . . railroad workers, men and women . . . this station is really doing business . . . the men are in army uniform . . . the women in overalls . . . I'm giving you these details so you won't think I'm making it up . . . right away a big fat lout lights into us . . . "*raus! . . . raus! . . . get out!*" and tells us where to go . . . "*Wartesaal! Wartesaal! waiting room!*" . . . obviously! . . . this lout has a spiked helmet and a big badge . . . *Feldgendarmerie* . . . naturally! we know the type . . . his job is to bellow at people, keep 'em moving . . . we comply, what else can we do? . . . but not so fast, brother! . . . we're down . . . this rough treatment could be upsetting, but this is no time to worry about sensibilities, the idea is to watch our p's and q's! it's here in Flensburg that they sort out the ones they let through and the ones they send back . . . I wonder where . . . must be in the *Wartesaal* . . . the customs? we haven't got a thing . . . but the police? . . . plenty of papers, but which ones do we show? . . . presence of mind, that's the ticket! . . . it's a toss-up! . . . when it's a toss-up you've got to know what you're doing, but they don't give us time to think, they push us into a basement, well, a cave under the station . . . barely time to read: Flensburg . . . oh, I don't like stations! . . . I especially don't like basements and crevasses . . . even now you couldn't get me to take the Métro for a kingdom, or risk my neck in a movie theater . . . it's my experience of very nasty things, solitary confinement *et cetera* . . . any time they invite you down to the basement it's to brutalize you something terrible . . . you're engulfed, everything turns to ectoplasm, you can see it in the movies . . . and the catacombs . . . naturally some people like it . . . perverts! . . . there used to be volunteers for the penal colonies . . . that's the human race for you, they'll eat flowers and they'll eat manure . . . don't let it worry you . . . plenty more waiting!

We were waiting too . . . customs? . . . police? . . . all I could see was a lot of shapes stretched out on the stone floor . . . people . . . your eyes adapt . . . up top an enormous globe . . . it gave off something, you couldn't call it light, more like a bluish glow . . . hard to tell if all these people are dead . . . or asleep . . . though this is at least the tenth time they've shoved us into this kind of waiting room . . . in Oddort I knew why, here I don't think it's the same . . . I can't see them demolishing Flensburg, especially the station, which is the most strategic, I'd even say the most valuable place in all Denmark . . . I've told you all that . . . now what? . . . nothing to do but lie down like everybody else . . . it's been a rough trip! dead or alive, we're entitled . . . anyway nobody can stop us . . . sounds like they're snoring . . . not very loud . . . we've got all the kids around us . . . they've followed us . . . slobbering idiots but faithful, their travels have done them good, I think . . . how many are there? I still don't know . . . never mind, we'll count them later . . . try and remember the state we were in, a miracle that we'd reached that border . . . after so many detours, holdups, and zigzags! . . . and all the times we could have gone up in smoke! . . . we'd dropped a few companions on the way . . . no! they dropped us! . . . Harras . . . Le Vig . . . Restif . . . Felipe . . . what would you expect? . . . they had no faith in our tourism . . . they goofed off, I'm not complaining, I haven't got much faith myself . . . soon as we hit Baden-Baden they told me: don't go to Denmark, they're even more ferocious . . . worse than France . . . and here we're at the border trying to cross . . . I have my reasons! *Landsman Bank* . . . my nest egg, my cash . . . if nobody's glommed it! . . . the Boches attach everything, I'm told, safes and all . . . the Danes too, probably . . . and my friends that have the key . . . the first to help themselves are your friends and relatives . . . relatives have the right! . . . I know from experience . . . well, just so they let us through! . . . Lili feels the same way . . . here in the basement, even on the stone, we're not too uncomfortable . . . I can manage anywhere as long as nobody asks me to move . . . seems to me we've been on and off tracks for at least three weeks, we and our kids . . . this train that train . . . tunnels, flatcars . . . now we're here, a stopping place! pillar to post since Baden-Baden . . . wriggle! jump! . . . and zig and zag! we could be slobbering too . . . worse than the kids! . . . they've got it easy! . . . wards of the asylums! they can stick their wards of the asylums up their . . . we're not exactly asleep, but pretty near . . . there's this blue glow . . . these people lying around don't bother us . . . alive or not, they don't move, I wonder how many there are . . . hundreds, it looks to me . . . soldiers . . . civilians . . . men and women . . . not many children . . . except for ours of course . . . it'll

never get light down here . . . little by little I feel I'm sinking . . . dropping off . . . sleep or a kind of faint . . . hell's bells, no! blue light or not, I've got to be absolutely lucid! . . . at least there's no sky to screw me up and make me see locomotives, I'm fit as a fiddle, ready for come what may! a good hour goes by . . . two hours . . . I can't deny that I'm tired, but it doesn't affect my will . . . no indulgence for myself, never had it never will . . . and come to think of it neither has anyone else! . . . infinite skulduggeries! . . . more than my share . . . my character development has had every advantage . . . let's leave philosophy to the advertising barons . . . we had serious things to think about, we were there for the customs . . . maybe this wait in the cellar was part of the program . . . with nothing to eat or drink and this blue light . . . this endless wait . . . no! . . . not endless! . . . here comes a gendarme! a *Feldgendarme* . . . he's reeling . . . he must have been asleep . . . or is he drunk? . . . "Train for Copenhagen! . . . passports! . . ." he yells . . . but in German, a guttural bark! . . . not very many get up . . . four . . . five soldiers . . . the others don't bother, they stay on their backs . . . I never found out what they were . . . wounded? . . . or just asleep? or asleep for good . . . we'd often had that experience in waiting rooms, not knowing if people stretched out like that were only asleep or worse . . . you'll tell me it was none of my business . . . so we follow this gendarme, we and our kids . . . they've woken up, as far as they're concerned it's still an excursion . . . they're still slobbering, they still don't talk, but they're gay, they flop, they pick themselves up, they bawl, they laugh . . . absolutely perfect idiot children . . . the gendarme leads us out of the cellar . . . it's daylight! . . . ah, a platform! . . . two platforms! . . . and all sorts of switches, plenty to look at . . . we're dazzled . . . must be about five six o'clock in the morning . . . let's not worry about being tired, the idea is to look sharp and, hell's bells, be ready for anything! . . . the gendarme leads the others away someplace, the five soldiers . . . he yells at us . . . Lili, me, and the kids . . . to wait, he'll be back, we can lie down on those sacks over there . . . big piles of empty sacks . . . maybe we will, but first let's think! . . . hell of a fix! . . . what are we going to say? . . . what are we doing here? . . . what do we want? . . . where do we come from, we and the kids? . . . they're sure to ask us . . . and where we're going . . . who'll be asking us? . . . Boches? . . . Danes? . . . we don't see anybody, they must be inside . . . it's the border, no doubt about that, signs all over . . . "*Grenze*" . . . and "*Flensburg*" . . . big ones and little ones . . . and the Danish flag, red with a white cross . . . they'll send us back or throw us in jail . . . this is going to take some thinking. . .

"Lili, kid, we've got to get through, no matter what."

She thinks so too . . . I see we're not alone on the platform . . . lots of people . . . must be waiting for a train too . . . or trains, I don't know . . . now, thirty years later, there must still be people on those same platforms, but not the same . . . people from all over, tourists who like it up there . . . traveling, once and for all, isn't my cup of tea, Lili's neither, I'd say . . . and this Flensburg border was only a beginning . . . I'll tell you all about it . . . everything looks easy afterwards, but under those conditions, in the flesh, the slightest boner, even with that brute of a gendarme, I know the type, they'd skin us alive! observe, if you please, our presence of mind, not a second's rest in months . . . you'll say: I could do just as well! . . . maybe . . . I won't judge you! I'm here to tell a story . . .

A brainstorm! . . . instinctive! . . . my arm band! . . . I'd forgotten! quick as a flash! . . . I rummage in my pocket! . . . I had it . . . greasy, grimy, but authentic . . . Bezons, Passive Defense . . . red cross, stamps, the whole works . . . I slip it onto my arm and say to Lili: "Listen! . . . we've no more papers, no more passports, no more anything! . . . just my arm band!"

"Anything you say, Louis!"

"Listen some more!"

Nothing to listen to, but suddenly plenty to look at! big commotion! . . . I've told you this Flensburg station had at least twenty platforms . . . all of a sudden they were crowded with people . . . looks like these people are going someplace . . . crumpled up on my sacks, I couldn't see exactly where they were going . . . I get up, I drag myself . . . ah, now I see! . . . at least a hundred of them have grabbed hold of a car . . . a hundred? more like a thousand . . . women men kids . . . soldiers, civilians . . . trying to climb in, but the doors are locked . . . not just one car . . . four . . . five . . . a whole train . . . hey, I see what it is, I dig it! it's a Red Cross train . . . covered with little Red Cross flags and great big signs! . . . I'd have seen them before if I hadn't been so foggy in the head . . . and say, it's all in technicolor, all the cars . . . sky-blue and yellow . . . the whole train from end to end . . . I think some more and finally it sinks in: this is a Swedish Red Cross train, Sweden via Flensburg . . . naturally there are plenty of takers! . . . they're trying to take it by storm . . . but it's jampacked already, looks to me . . . hundreds of women at the windows and their kids and nurses . . . this train is all full of children . . . say, I'm "Red Cross" myself! my arm band proves it! . . . and I've got a litter of kids too! in distress! . . . this blinking train is pulling up where we are . . . it'll cross the border all right, no customs, no nothing! that's why they're all so hopped up, them and their bundles, holding on for dear life! . . . a hundred, I said, no, a thousand! . . . I'm not exaggerating . . . civilians and

soldiers . . . even French soldiers, must be from the camps or factories . . . they've all got a thing about Sweden . . . I call one of them who's hoisted himself up on a coupling, I ask him what's going on . . . it's Swedish kids and their mothers being repatriated from Germany . . . the Swedish Red Cross! . . . good deal! just what we needed! our kids are Swedish too, every last one of them! . . . an idea! . . . that takes care of everything! . . . the kids won't say different! . . . I may be gaga, falling apart, but when it comes to ideas . . . never at a loss! . . . I've got mine . . .

Lili understands . . . right away . . . she'd better! . . . quick, I've got to find some official! or better still an officer, and explain! . . . there must be somebody in charge of this stinking Red Cross! . . . that we've got all these Swedish children and they should take them . . . save them! . . . that we haven't anything left to give them! . . . that the Red Cross came along in the nick of time . . . that we've come from Berlin . . . and these slobbering lopsided children have lost their fathers and mothers . . . in the horrible air raids . . . but that they're Swedish, every last one of them! . . . guaranteed! . . . that they can't talk or understand, all they know how to do is slobber . . . nothing else . . . hardly walk . . . that I'd had their papers, but we'd lost everything in Hanover in the phosphorus bombing . . . and crossing the canal . . . there wouldn't be anybody to contradict us . . . shell-shocked Swedish children that had lost their fathers and mothers . . . and that we . . . them and us . . . had absolutely no biscuits, milk, or papers . . . okay with Lili, but who are we going to appeal to . . . I see that this Swedish train isn't stopping . . . it's going very slow, but it keeps moving . . . it's passing . . . with big clusters of people hanging onto the doors and couplings . . . lousy luck, I'm thinking . . . I stand there like a sap . . . not Lili . . . before I can bat an eye! . . . she's under the train . . . that's right! . . . she's thrown herself on the roadbed! . . . and what a scream! . . . she that never screams . . . run over? . . . not at all! . . . always so quiet and soft-spoken! I go down on my knees, I crawl . . . I crawl under the crowd . . . I sing out: "Lili! Lili!" . . . naturally she can't hear me, they're all yelling too loud! . . . oh, I've got my wits back! better late than never, I need them! . . . "Lili! Lili!" . . . the Swedish train has stopped . . . it's puffing hard: *choom! choom!* they must have pulled the alarm bell. . . maybe Lili is . . . I'll find out! . . . "Lili! Lili!" she's still screaming down there . . . I'm still crawling, I see her . . . she's crossed the track . . . no! she's under the car, between the rails, on the roadbed . . . "here! . . . here! . . . here! . . ." it's her! . . . "Lili! Lili!" . . . she's still screaming . . . but not an agonizing scream . . . I can tell . . . I know my screams . . . she's wailing, she's calling me . . . I think . . . I'll

have to get under that car myself . . . I climb over one rail! . . . I see her! she's up against the opposite wheel, I think . . . doesn't seem to be hurt . . . I know she's supple . . . all the same it took some acrobatics to slip between the moving wheels . . . moving very slowly, I grant you, but even so . . . the whole hollering crowd was doing like me, trying to see what was going on underneath and whether Lili's been squashed . . . at least with all their yelling they'd stopped the train! . . . and *click! click!* a door opens! . . . same car! . . . finally! . . . an official in uniform appears at the door, I guess he wants to see for himself . . . *boo! boo!* . . . they're heckling him, howling, bellowing! hell, they'd wanted to see him, hadn't they? . . . oh, it doesn't faze him . . . he looks at us, he's not even surprised . . . a Swedish officer, I think . . . or maybe a train master . . . anyway, something in the Red Cross . . . he's got the same arm band as me, except his is very clean . . . I get down on my knees, then on all fours, I crawl to the door, not far, two three yards . . . I'd suddenly got my wits and gumption back! . . . "it's now or never! . . . I'll worry about my emotions later! . . ." exactly! now, thirty years later . . . I say to myself . . . so I'm in front of this Red Cross officer . . . no, not in front . . . under! I'm on the roadbed, on all fours, under the running board . . . he's up top . . . dominating the bellowing crowd . . . I don't bellow! . . . I speak in a loud voice, but not too loud . . . distinctly so everybody can hear me! . . . in French . . . and in English! . . . who we are! . . . I've got to make him understand! that I'm a French Red Cross doctor . . . my wife . . . a nurse . . . is under the train! that's her screaming! . . . "you can hear her, can't you?" . . . we've got sixteen children with us! all Swedish! . . . they've come from Breslau! . . . they've lost their parents! . . . all their parents dead, burned! . . . air raids! . . . phosphorus! these children can't talk, neither language . . . they can't talk at all . . . shock, and losing their parents! . . . they've been burned too, a lot of them were killed, we've got the sixteen survivors.

This harangue, first in French then in English, makes him look at me . . . he answers me in two languages . . . he thinks it's a habit I've gotten into, an affectation . . . our French English makes the mob stop yelling . . . they're trying to understand . . .

"What were you doing in Germany?"

"I was a prisoner, a doctor in one of the camps . . ."

"Are all these children Swedish?"

"I should say so! . . . I had their papers and ours . . . my wife's and mine, but . . . you see . . . everything was destroyed by fire in the Hamburg station . . . clothes, knapsacks, billfolds! we haven't anything left!"

But come to think of it, where's he? he hasn't told me . . . a military escort?

But come to think of it, who's he? He hasn't told me . . . a military escort! . . . a captain?

He tells me . . . he's a Red Cross doctor . . . me too! the Bezons "Passive" . . . my arm band proves it! . . . he can examine it! . . . he examines . . . grimy black but authentic, stamps and all! . . . that's what interests him! where had I learned such good English? . . . London Hospital Mile End Road . . . and at the League of Nations in Geneva and in America at the Rockefeller Foundation . . . ah, that's a bridge between us . . .

"Where are the children?"

"There in the crowd . . . underfoot . . . you can't see them, but they'll show themselves if my wife calls them . . . they can't talk but they obey her . . . more or less . . ."

But Lili? where is she? I look under the car . . . she's on the other side of the tracks, she's not hurt . . . "Bébert! Bébert!" . . . he's run away! . . . the mob are all under the train calling "Bébert! Bébert!" . . . having a fine time . . . that crazy cat had seized the opportunity, no exercise in a week, we couldn't let him out at the canal . . . and you've never seen such a cat for expeditions . . . a naturalist, sort of . . . a sniffer . . . real appreciation of grasses and plants . . . even if he was a city cat out of a department store, from the pet shop . . . once he's disappeared into the bushes, try and catch him! . . . except Lili . . . nobody else . . . I could see this Red Cross official wasn't so strict, I even think he was sympathetic . . . especially because I spoke English . . .

"How many children have you here?"

"I can't tell you exactly . . . we've lost some along the way . . . we lost two or three in Hanover . . . and some at the canal, I think . . . there must be about seventeen . . ."

We could talk at our ease . . . the howling mob were on the other side of the train with Lili, beating the bushes, I was sure she'd have caught Bébert a lot quicker by herself . . . the Swede thought so too . . . he finally makes a note: seventeen children . . . but where are they? . . . Lili'd catch them quick . . . they must be across the way . . .

"And they're all Swedish?"

He wants me to confirm . . .

"Certainly!"

"How old?"

"From five to eight . . . you'll see . . ."

"And the parents are dead?"

"Most probably . . ."

I can see this Scandinavian is sympathetic . . . he realizes that what I'm telling him may be kind of contrived . . . and that maybe the kids aren't exactly Swedish, but the main thing right now is that his train should take us aboard, if it doesn't we'll be in a bad way . . . worse than bad . . .

"You realize that this is a very special train . . . absolutely reserved for the repatriation of Swedish children and mothers . . . you understand?"

I understand all right! No answer to that, so I don't say a word . . . here's Lili again, not hurt . . . she hasn't crawled under the car, she's gone around by the roadbed . . . all our little cretins are with her . . . they'd been in the bushes with Bébert, enjoying themselves . . . that's why I didn't see them . . .

"There! there they are!"

The Swedish officer counts them . . . not seventeen . . . but eighteen! . . . to tell the truth, I'd never counted them . . . he's going to register them . . . he has a book . . .

"They haven't any names? . . . girls? . . . boys?"

"We have never known . . ."

God's truth! oh well, as long as he lets them in . . . he opens the door of one car . . . double-locked! . . . and an enormous padlock in addition . . . *click clack* . . . the people are coming back, the kids don't climb up, they can't, we hoist them . . . some nurses come and take them, one by one, and lead them away . . . very gently . . . they talk to them, they try . . . the kids slobber and laugh . . . we see them . . . for the last time . . . Lili and I have to go to the tail end of the train . . . the kitchen, to be exact . . . our Red Cross officer leads the way . . . through one . . . two corridors . . . a fat lady welcomes us . . . very friendly, big smile . . . she's at home here . . . she offers us everything . . . everything . . . enormous sandwiches! . . . fish! . . . sausages! . . . sliced meat! . . . three big tables covered with cold dishes and hot dishes . . . and salads and goodies . . . mountains! . . . and all sorts of puddings, tapioca . . . macaroni, corn meal, oatmeal! . . . you never saw such eats . . . a vision! for sure they've brought it from Sweden . . . they haven't suffered up there, anyway not from hunger . . . this incredible food certainly isn't from Germany . . . they've brought it all with them . . . they're not suffering up there, certainly not from hunger . . . the fat cook motions us to help ourselves, to dive in! . . . take all we want, the sky's the limit! she doesn't speak French or English . . . but she's so kind and friendly we're ashamed to be standing there in a daze . . . stupefied . . . in front of all those riches . . . luckily Bébert saves the day, he sticks his head out of his bag . . . and his moustaches . . . a bite to eat would suit him fine . . . he doesn't stand on ceremony! they

understand each other, success! . . . she knows cats, she holds out a big meatball in the hollow of her hand . . . "don't mind if I do!" . . . *yum! yum!* nothing wrong with his appetite . . . I have none at all . . . not yet. . . I just look at the stuff . . . Lili looks too . . . our trouble is fatigue! . . . too tired to eat just then . . . never mind, we'll get it back . . . first we've got to catch our breath . . . it's all right with our amiable cook, she understands . . . first we'll rest! . . . take it easy . . . rest! . . . rest! . . . she has three chairs lined up against the wall. . . she makes us sit down . . . I ask Lili . . .

"You all right? . . . no pain anywhere? . . . not sleepy . . . not hungry? . . ."

"No, Louis . . . no . . . I'm fine . . . what about you?"

"Oh, I'm all right!"

It looked like we were all set . . . ah, the poverty of our times! . . . Racine, Aeschylus, even Sophocles could keep you panting for three or four tragic acts with next to nothing . . . the ancients were grandiose sex pots, sumptuous cuckolds, incestuous monsters, believe you me, such discombobulating assassins, they had the gods in a dither . . . today, I ask you: a continent needs to be wiped out? . . . nothing to it, two three minutes . . . at the most! . . . where are you going to find time to enjoy the show? . . . there in that kitchen of abundance, that chamber of luxury, we had nothing to hurry about . . . but all the same, what was going on outside? . . . our Red Cross man had taken us aboard with all our kids . . . now I knew how many . . . eighteen! . . . all of them Swedish from one minute to the next! . . . that Red Cross man had a good heart . . . I don't think he was taken in . . . later on I was in even tighter squeezes . . . without doctors and medicine I'd never have come through . . . that's why in the great epileptic moments, purges, massacres, assorted lunacies, the doctors . . . black, yellow, or white regardless . . . get it in the neck . . . they know too much, they stick together too much, they're too clannish, unforgivable and unforgiven . . .

But let's get back to our kitchen . . . I didn't know if we were still in the station . . . or if we were moving . . . and the switch? . . . I couldn't look, I'd have to stand up, the Red Cross man had sat us down with our backs to the partition . . . he hadn't put us there to exhibit us . . . but that didn't stop them from yelling outside . . . that mob was good and mad . . . high time for the train to make up its mind! . . . two shots! . . . *bang! bang!* no intention of investigating . . . revolver shots sure as hell! . . . at that exact moment we start moving . . . you don't mean it? oh yes! . . . very slowly but *choo! . . . choo!* . . . sure enough . . . who fired those shots? . . . I never found out, I never even asked . . . as long as we're in a train and it's moving . . . kind of cautiously, I'd say . . . hey, a nurse! . . . she

doesn't look our way, she takes a tray and serves herself . . . a whole tray and then another . . . sandwiches and salads . . . she doesn't say a word . . . she's fairly young, not bad-looking, but not the smiling type . . . she walks away, back to her car, I suppose . . . another nurse comes and serves herself . . . they're dressed pretty much like ours, with starched caps . . . six nurses come in, one after another, not one of them says a word, the last takes nothing but porridge . . . bowls and bowls . . . I guess they're not supposed to look at us . . . orders . . . all right with us . . . as long as they don't throw us out . . . wouldn't be so easy now with the train moving . . . unless . . . unless . . . nothing is ever sure . . . I tell Lili, a good time to sleep, we could do with some sleep, here on these chairs we certainly have a right, weeks and weeks of sleep to catch up on, since Montmartre actually, since 1939, come to think of it . . . it's not just the sirens on the roofs, it's the ones inside you, they don't make any noise but they keep you awake all the same . . . when it came to not sleeping, we held the world record . . . right now it was time to keep a weather eye open and not to believe we were out of the woods . . . the train was moving along, pretty fast in fact, I tried not to look out, I stayed where they'd put us, way back in the corner, so did Lili and Bébert in his bag . . . he'd eaten . . . rather greedily . . . the cook told us again in sign language to help ourselves, anything we wanted . . . there was plenty to choose from! I've told you . . . no beanery victuals, all fresh stuff . . . the best . . . Gargantua would have had himself a feast, but us? . . . I ask Lili . . . she's not hungry, not at all, neither am I, all I ask is to keep rolling and not to be thrown out . . . a few more nurses come in, they fill up plates and platters and bowls . . . they certainly saw us, even if we were in the shadow . . . way in back . . . and still as a mouse . . . they just didn't look in our direction . . . I see by my compass that we're still headed north . . . you never can tell! I know this line . . . in about two hours, I figure, we'll be in Copenhagen . . . if it's nonstop . . . but we've got to turn east! . . . I wouldn't want them to go wrong! . . . one thing for sure, our Red Cross man hasn't been back to see us . . . no doubt about it, he has a good heart, he could have turned us away, us and our snotnoses . . . he must have caught on . . . luckily I'm extremely cautious by nature, life has taught me absolute discretion, you wouldn't think so from my books, but the fact is I'm the soul of self-effacement . . . I see a character let's say once, I make an appointment with him for thirty years later, naturally I find him completely changed, so putrid and bloated it's no use even talking to him . . . naturally I'm discreet . . .

But I'm losing you! . . . so there we are in our corner . . . on our two chairs . . . this kitchen car was rolling . . . rolling . . . ah, our Red Cross man! he's in the

... this kitchen cat was rolling . . . rolling . . . ah, our Red Cross man! He's in the corridor, coming our way . . . he motions me not to get up . . . he slips in between the two tables . . . he asks us . . .

"You haven't eaten at all?"

"Later! . . . Later! . . ."

What I really want to know is where this train is taking us . . . I mean, where we're supposed to get off . . .

"Wherever you like!"

I know where I want to go, Copenhagen . . .

"*Certainly! certainly!*"

Sweden? . . . impossible! I'd suspected as much . . . but Copenhagen, fine, perfect! . . . Copenhagen would be about three hours . . . splendid! suits me fine! . . . I've got friends in Copenhagen, they're expecting us! . . . I even have their addresses . . . I show him . . . *Staégers Allee, Ved Stranden* . . . and *Landsman Bank* . . . my bank . . .

He's not very demonstrative, I can see that, I'd even say impassive . . . "oh! oh! oh!" he goes, as if those two addresses frightened him . . . and that bank . . . and he starts warning us!

"*Beware!* . . . Copenhagen is very anti-German! all Denmark! . . . worse than Sweden! . . . don't say you came from the Nazis! never! don't tell anybody anything! . . . you've come out of chaos and that's all! the train to Flensburg: chaos . . . Hamburg: chaos! bombs! the Swedish children with you? . . . chaos! found! lost! you understand?"

I understand all right! you won't catch me putting my foot in it! . . . anyway another three hours to travel in this kitchen . . . the soul of discretion . . . absolutely no desire to show ourselves . . . Bébert is hungry, he sticks his head out of his bag . . . the cook gives him some pâté . . . *yum! yum!* . . . he dives in . . . he does it justice . . . this providential colleague, I forgot to tell you, has left two coats for us on a stool, one for me, I put it on . . . brand new, magnificent . . . and for Lili one of those nurse's capes, lined with astrakhan, I think . . . the lap of luxury! . . . seems to me that with these over our rags we can show ourselves anywhere . . . I'm not wasting my time, I'm thinking, I don't fall asleep for a second, I'm figuring out what we'll do . . . so the Danes are murderers . . . hell's bells, they won't be the first! . . . all the same, it's good to know what you're up against . . . I may as well tell you, I knew Copenhagen, though I certainly got to know it better . . . I certainly know it better than his Excellency the Ambassador, all bloated with credentials, immunity, and petits fours . . .

"Don't you worry, Lili. . . I think the worst is over . . ." I can see that Lili

isn't so sure . . . she has her doubts about the reception we'll get. . . even with me rigged out very presentably and her in her astrakhan lining . . . my weakness is optimism . . . well, not really, for one thing I've got my compass to rely on! sure enough, we've changed direction, right angles! . . . east! . . . east it is! . . . Copenhagen's at least another two hundred miles . . . I'm pretty sure . . . two arms of the sea to cross . . . the Little Belt . . . at the Little Belt there's a bridge . . . the Great Belt it's a ferry . . . anyway the train's running along, smooth as silk like before '39 . . . at the Little Belt I'll look . . . it'll be safe by then . . . I think . . .

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I can't say that we felt the Little Belt, that arm of the sea, the bridge . . . maybe we were in too much of a daze to feel anything . . . that train, I've got to admit, kind of lulled you, no more roller coaster . . . of course there'd been sabotage and bombs here and there, so we'd been told . . . but there was no sign of it, the train was running along perfectly, like a charm . . . I'm not moving, neither is Lili, like we were asleep . . . never fear, it's not even a half sleep, you could call it resting . . . in a deliberate, rigid kind of way . . . once you've gotten into the habit of this very special wakeful somnolence, you've moved once and for all into a different world, where your subtle witticism hasn't a leg to stand on! it grates, and so . . . a damn sight worse . . . does your hearty buffoonery! the ideal of the Species! how are you going to charge your batteries under those conditions? . . . disaster in the symposiums, asylums, bistros, penitentiaries! . . . intoxication is dead! life is unlivable! . . . I ask you, isn't this stuff insipid? . . . my contract with Achille calls for something entirely different! let's get on with our story! you couldn't deny it, we were moving right along . . . I'll look out in a little while, I'll raise the blind . . . the cook won't object . . . at the Great Belt we'll certainly have to open our eyes . . . there it's not a bridge, it's a ferry . . . the train goes aboard and it takes you across, I've told you, I'd done it before . . . this arm of the sea is very calm . . . all the same we'll have to look . . . nobody's been to see us, to ask us where we've come from and where we're going . . . luckily! . . . if only it lasts! a mouthful! little did I suspect . . . this must be Nordport . . . our train slows down . . . this must be it . . . hell, I'll look! just as I thought . . . the city, the station, not a crack, as far as I can see, no damage . . . looks funny, almost suspicious, a small town like this, absolutely peaceful, you can't help wondering: what are they waiting for?

Our sad experience! . . . hell, ever since Montmartre! . . . oh well, this is

Denmark, we'll see . . . as I've told you, just as I'd been thinking, this Great Belt was very calm, the sea was tourist-blue . . . a healthy swell, though, just enough to put a pretty crest of foam on the waves . . . the gulls are circling around them . . . just the thing for a poster, irresistible . . . actually the gulls aren't just pecking at the foam, they're diving at the propellers, at the eddies, and especially at the portholes of the galley, the peelings, the scrapings . . . all the stuff that floats, scatters far and wide . . . out there in the foam . . . in the swell . . . as far as the horizon with its enormous clouds climbing up to the sky . . . the crossing will take a good hour, I figure . . . I knew the far shore where we'd be landing, Korsör . . . everything in due time, I'll show you the place . . . now the ticklish part, getting off the ferry, the whole train passes over the joint, each car gives a little jump . . . the passengers have been taking the air during the crossing . . . I see the nurses, no intention of showing ourselves! . . . quick, back to our kitchen, all aboard! . . . about seventy miles to Copenhagen . . . still on our two chairs in the back of the kitchen car . . . absolutely somnambulistic from exhaustion, I've told you, I see that Lili's nodding, but this is no time to give in . . . or for Bébert to come out of his bag, she's holding it on her knees . . . I think we must have dozed off once or twice . . . since Flensburg without knowing it, without realizing, and hell! we mustn't! . . . we ought to be adjusting ourselves to this . . . if you see what I mean . . . this atmosphere of peace . . . you can tell by the way we're rolling, smooth as silk! . . . hee hee! . . . isn't it funny? . . . no! . . . it's not funny! . . . people like us from rue Girardon . . . passage Choiseul . . . and Bezons, et cetera, we're not at peace at all . . . no more in Denmark than in Bavaria or anywhere else . . . absolutely made to be tortured . . . hell, I can't even count the journalists who've come around and stolen hours of my time, and the Television, driving me up the wall with their *O Maaître!* . . . with their trailer and their hundreds of mikes . . . and vanishing as they came . . . gone forever . . . to tell you the truth, the whole world is howling because the arena has gone out . . . that's where they want us . . . Petiot started the ball rolling, not to mention Cousteau and Landru and Vaillant . . . and even people who don't exist yet, embryos in incubators, who'll evolve into worse rippers and manglers than anything known up to now . . . we'll see . . . you get the picture, with a dib and a dab I'm trying to give you an idea of their lowdown ways . . . ever since *Journey* it's been a scramble . . . who could steal more from me, plagiarize more, stuff himself fuller . . . the whole stinking horde! . . . since 1933, it seems to me, I've been feasting them all, they're at the table, at my table, and always asking for more . . . and more! they guzzle and swill and they never, never admit it . . .

guests you might say, except that I never invited them, and they think it's owing to them . . . and in addition, not satisfied, they've done everything in their power since 1933 to have me skinned, drawn, and quartered . . . expunged, to fix it so they exist and I've never existed! . . . the villainy of those scavengers! since 1933 it's been going on, since 1933 I've been protesting, the pillaged host! you'll say it's their right, okay, but later on they'll say: "the stupid bastard never even knew it!" that's where I draw the line! I'm sorry, my indignation . . . it sticks in my craw, one trifling remark and I caught fire . . . forgive me! . . . back to our train, I mean our kitchen car . . . I've told you, springs and comfort like before the war, you couldn't even feel the tracks . . . and they refused us nothing . . . all we had to do was help ourselves, the fat cook kept telling us . . . take this! take that! I accept a cup of coffee, so does Lili, for Bébert it's pâté . . . he dives in . . . yum! yum! . . . perfectly at home! . . . think I'll take a chance on looking out . . . lift up the blind . . . I knew the landscape . . . farms like in Normandy . . . except for the pastures . . . up there the land is so barren, the grass so rare that the cattle never get out of the barn . . . the winter's so long, implacable, practically all year round . . . for two months it's almost possible if they hurry, fling themselves on their impossible soil, absolutely hysterical, and make it yield, yield come hell and high water, their own technique, everything, wheat, cattle feed, spuds, beans . . . and the payoff, wait, is that everything has the same "Baltic" taste . . . absolutely insipid . . . codfish, strawberries, beans, asparagus, a hundred percent interchangeable . . . same "Baltic" taste . . . luckily, in two hundred years the waves and the wind will have "reclaimed" the whole place, wiped it out, melted it down . . . Denmark, Tivoli, prisons, monarchy, and agriculture, all those horrors . . . I know whereof I speak! . . . two years they kept me in a cell for no reason at all, for the hell of it, one good thing at least, they'll never ask me to send them a tourist . . . still, I'm not so sure, some people are perverts, there were guys in the galleys that didn't have to be, that liked to suffer in a big way, crazy about dying under the whip . . . and in the snazzier, richer classes, take the motorists, their only dream is to buck a stone wall, uproot the biggest plane tree . . . and spill their guts in the bushes! . . . faster! oh, faster! . . .

I'm cutting loose again, I'm going to lose you, but I've got a feeling that maybe I'll never finish this book, it's all very well writing a chronicle of exploits that were important twenty . . . thirty years ago . . . but what about the things of today? . . . everybody in my age group is gone except for a few relics who've lost track, who quibble scribble and shoot the shit from one driveling rag to the next, about the Cognac Prize^o in Garganne,^o about Renegade-Eichmann in Sekout-the-

Ridiculous, a man has only one life, that's not much, especially when I feel the Fates scratching at my thread, kind of toying with it . . . that's right! which doesn't alter the fact that you're waiting for me and that instead of chronicling in good order I've forgotten where I'm at . . . no! . . . we're having our coffee . . . and I'm about to risk it, to get up and take a look at the country . . . I've done it! just a glance . . . same plain . . . a few plowed fields . . . no fires . . . no ruins . . . naturally it can still happen, but they haven't suffered yet . . . neither has the roadbed or the tracks . . . our train is running like a charm . . . at this rate we'll make Copenhagen in about an hour . . . the Red Cross officer won't be back to see us . . . I've got a hunch . . . his kindness to us can cost him plenty, taking us on, us and our kids! he'll have to explain, some bastards they must be, his superiors up there in Sweden . . . "neutral" . . . enough said! . . . anyway, we've had a good break . . . our Red Cross man was okay . . . there's always a slight chance, very slight, in the midst of the worst calamities . . . in Ablon, when I was a kid, during the floods, you know, in 1910, you only had to hug the shore with your boat and you could make it upstream safe and sound . . . half an inch off course and . . . bingo! . . . you'd find yourself in Choisy, caught like a top in the whirlpools . . . with your keel in the air! . . . good-bye! hey, that'll do! . . . that'll do! . . . I look some more . . . still the plain . . . maybe we'll stop . . . that'll be Roskild . . . their Chambord . . . a Chambord all in brick! . . . they're short on stone in this country . . . and on everything else! . . . but these eternal rascals! they make the best of it, they call their mackerel sardines and their turnips artichoke hearts! . . . don't let me lose you en route, our kids are settled, but what about you? what'll you do if I lose you up here? . . . don't worry, I won't! . . . half an hour from Roskild to Copenhagen at this rate . . . our train runs through Roskild without whistling . . . it'll be dark when we get there . . . fine! darkness is just right when you're done up like us . . . let's face it, in tarps and strings . . . we've got our capes, they save us . . . but in the light they'd be bound to notice . . . hey! . . . we're slowing down . . . half a second . . . we've stopped! just time to say good-bye to our angelic cook and bingo! . . . my two canes and out we go! . . . the whole station, I see, is like in France, on "passive defense" . . . blue lights . . . maybe they've been bombed . . . or only a precaution? . . . say, they don't let the grass grow, here's somebody now . . . they've spotted me . . . another Red Cross officer . . . he comes straight up to us . . . "Bonjour, Docteur! . . . pleasant trip? . . . and to you, Madame, my respects!" . . . a Dane, to judge by his accent . . . and his get-up . . . weird uniform! . . . folding brandenburgs with the ends hanging down . . . cute, straight out of an operetta . . . not exactly the time or place . . . he

must be here for some reason . . . the right man at the right time, I guess he's thinking . . . I won't contradict him . . . I see that nobody's getting out . . . is this stop just for us? . . . the train's going on to the port, the Malmö ferry . . . I know the place . . . anyway, they've only stopped for the three of us, Lili, me, and Bébert . . . our little cretins are all set, no need to worry about us any more, now that they're Swedes, slobbering, deaf and dumb, but Swedes . . . here thirty years later I'm thinking about them, wondering if they're still alive, hell, they're grown up now . . . maybe they've stopped slobbering, maybe their hearing's fine, perfectly reeducated . . . no hope for the old folks . . . but kids, anything can happen . . . when I think of all the children we've left . . . one place or another . . . especially since Sartrouville . . . talking about Sartrouville, I wonder what became of little Stéfani! nothing wrong with her, strong as an ox, she was exactly a week old when I took her to Issoudun in the ambulance, just in time for the disaster she never knew about, the whole neighborhood crushed and crumbled, all around her, waves of bombers, the house in flames, she in her cradle, not a scratch! we went to get her and take her back to Sartrouville, they had her in the Town Hall, absolutely unharmed . . . I wonder what's become of her . . . naturally we never had any news of our seventeen slobbering infantile wrecks . . . maybe they're Olympic ski champions now . . . or boxers . . . no call to laugh . . . with kids anything is possible, old fogies nothing . . . anyway we're here on the platform with our new Red Cross man . . . kind of surprising, I must say . . . in the first place how did he know we were coming? who notified him? . . . the same monkey-shines as in Germany, where we could never be anywhere, even perfectly camouflaged, in tunnels clogged with soot or under cataracts of bombs . . . without some Ostrogoth coming around and striking up a conversation . . . here I'd hardly set foot on the platform when this character shows . . . can he be of assistance? . . . all he wants . . . in the first place where were we going? . . . my turn to be curious! . . . "are you on alert like this every night? . . ." no, he says! pissed-off! he's lying . . . two tracks further on, in the blue light, I see two three teams of workmen . . . digging and ramming . . . it was just like that in Ulm . . . and in Rostock . . . I'm curious, I want to see what they're doing! . . . they're working by acetylene lights . . . I see they're very thin and they all look terrible, *all* of them, they're not young and they're pale and cadaverous . . . the Germans strip them bare . . . I'm thinking . . . like in Paris . . . yes, of course, but later when the Krauts were gone they still looked the same way, pale as ghosts in sub-zero weather . . . and with hardly any clothes, practically naked . . . having themselves a health cure in stir . . . I'm not making

it up . . . enough of my reflections! . . . here we are on the platform . . . Lili, me, and Bébert . . . and this peculiar Red Cross man . . . Danish he is, he's told us so, he speaks French and English, he asks me where I'm going in Copenhagen . . . he says he can put us up, plenty of room, a whole floor . . . oh no! not so fast! much obliged! . . . straight from the shoulder: "Hôtel d'Angleterre!" there and no place else! if he'd care to drive us . . . he's got his car . . . splendid! two minutes . . . *Vesterbrogade!* . . . here we are! . . . the main business street, makes you think of rue Sainte-Catherine in Bordeaux . . . at this end the Main Square . . . *Konges Ny Tow* . . . Bordeaux again . . . provincial, an overgrown small town . . . takes a bit of adjusting, it's a life we'd forgotten not so much because it's provincial as because the streets are the same as before, with sidewalks, normal shop windows, no ruins, the kind of thing I thought we'd never see again . . . we're strangers in this world . . . no business here any more . . . it's dangerous to be in the streets like this . . . for us . . . real streets like before, with sidewalks and shop windows . . . it'll be worse when there are people around and it's light . . . at this end the Main Square . . . *Konges Ny Tow*, with the statue of the king in the middle, on horseback, Christian, I think, the Fourth . . . at the other end the theater . . . just like Bordeaux, same style, but not so successful . . . better than the Châtelet, though! . . . the canal across the way . . . man, is that picturesque! . . . looks like a small port, plenty of color, on one side the dives with the big numbers, reminds you of rue Bouterie in the old days, same pimps and whores and fags . . . further on the docks, the ocean liners . . . all that practically at the door of the hotel, a marvel for tourists . . . a hundred times better, if you ask me, than rue de Lappe or Harlem-by-night . . . I know what I'm saying, I got to know that town well, the bright and the seamy, every daybreak for two years I heard them unloading the haul from the raids under the big vaults of *Vesterfangsel* prison, every night, two three paddywagons full of pimps and streetwalkers, squares and their wives, dykes . . . all in a heap! . . . and did they get a shellacking! man! massaged to a pulp! the whole vault vibrated with their howling, and that building wasn't made of paper, and the windows, a wonder the panes didn't fall apart . . . so bad that even the prisoners in shackles like me, condemned to death, waited for them, knew exactly when to expect them, their only entertainment, the massage when the raids were brought in, the howling . . . always about three o'clock . . . *Kloken tre! Ny Ham* . . . this little port, haven of every vice, right in front of the Hôtel d'Angleterre . . . you'll tell me I've lost the thread! . . . not at all! . . . I know exactly where we were . . . at the station . . . on the platform, with this baroque Red Cross man . . . time to watch my step . . .

"Hôtel d'Angleterre if you don't mind . . ."

Hôtel d'Angleterre if you don't mind . . .

I could give him other addresses . . . no intention! . . . but from the platform of this station up to their waiting hall it's a long climb, for me at least . . . even taking it slow, step by step . . . I'm thinking it over . . . what I'll do at the Hôtel d'Angleterre . . . and especially the look on their face when they see me . . . I must have changed a good deal . . . the desk clerk knew me well . . . they're sure to be "resisters" . . . and they're sure to turn me in before I know what hit me . . . to who? . . . to the Devil, the King, the Embassy, the Pope, anybody they can think of! . . . God knows we're used to it! . . . if I'm not arrested, slandered, threatened with everything under the sun . . . I feel funny . . . to tell the truth, ever since *Journey* I've kept my distance, made people hate me worse and worse, done my damndest . . . that way I don't have to be nice to anybody, except Achille, I've been treating him pretty well . . . since his "centenary" . . .

But let's not lose you! back to our Danes! you've observed no doubt that those people never make war . . . their business is supplying . . . both sides . . . toward the end they come out for the winner, and that does it! . . . from one day to the next! . . . that gives them everything, the kitty and the glory! ready for the new crop of tourists! . . . we'd picked a bad time, ahead of the game, so to speak . . . between two acts . . . we'd just have to put a good face on it . . . but what face? tourists enchanted to revisit our dear old Denmark? . . . none of our business what they're up to . . . we're here to admire everything, especially their "Resistance in technicolor with commentary . . . filmed under the iron heel . . ." the frothing Teutonic horde . . . the same climate as here of course, but much funnier because they were all Germans, especially King Christian, né *Glücksburg, Hesse, Holstein*, a total Boche . . . I've been in his prisons, and not for the weekend either . . . worst possible treatment, the darkest dungeons, and I've always wondered if it wasn't on Himmlers orders . . . most unlikely, you'll say! . . . granted . . . still, worse things have been known to happen, stuff that nobody'd believe . . . but nothing compared to what you'll see later on . . . for instance, take the little romance between your cleaning woman, white, and your postman, black . . . dominated blood, dominant blood! . . . that does it! . . . let your sumptuous chiefs of state keep their monopoly on the Vacuous Gesture, on their horse guards and trumpets! I could have said a yellow postman . . . even more triumphant! those are the things our princes never mention, too absorbed in their blithering obfuscating blah-blah . . . white blood's the loser! . . . and here we are in Brazil! . . . the Amazon! . . . Turkestan! . . . aviation and moon rockets are a lot of ballyhoo, hokum for the grandstand . . .

In the year 2000 there won't be any whites left . . . nothing to get excited

about . . . I agree! I'm telling you all this higgledy-piggledy, in a few lines . . . now back to business, quick! I've told you what it's been like since that brick in Hanover . . . I screw myself up, I straighten myself out as best I can, it's a reflex, my sense of duty, same as in the war, in a way . . . I mean war the way it used to be, when they fought for real and not by hearsay . . . all that's as dead as a doornail, make way for the janissaries, the hundred percent racist Balubas, the fellaghas . . . and the Viet decapitators . . . that's where the Power is, then the bank presidents will rest easy, good manners will be reborn, and all the little teenage delinquents will come running to help the old folks, to sweep and dust for them . . . hey there! I'd better calm down, this laughing fit . . . remember? . . . ever since that crack on my temple in Hanover . . . my temple . . . the brick . . . I've got to put my head in order! . . . and stop laughing!

We were in this character's car, practically at the Hôtel d'Angleterre . . . this character mumbles something . . . I answer: Hôtel d'Angleterre! I say . . . he should take us there! . . . not someplace else! . . . I'm good and sick of it! of being deflected! . . . don't worry, I know the way! . . . this street is *Vesterbro* . . . *gade* . . . after *Radhusplatz* . . . they seem to be on alert . . . haven't heard any sirens though . . . and nothing in the sky, no purring, no searchlights . . . nothing blinking at the windows . . . the houses and streets don't seem to have suffered . . . their "Ilium" department store is the same as before, chock -ful of truck, I even had time to notice a whole parade of wedding dresses . . . and sports outfits . . . maybe it's only the window! . . . if our joker doesn't try to pull a fast one, if he takes us directly, we'll be there in a second . . . right! . . . here we are! . . . *Konges Ny Tow* . . . the royal theater back there on the right . . . there's a bit of moonlight but not enough to admire it properly . . . there aren't very many really fine squares . . . you can count them on your fingers, try it yourself, one or two in Paris . . . about the same in Rome . . . well, you'll see this one later, there's not enough moonlight. . . in the center, I know, the king in bronze on horseback, one of their "Christians" . . . any agency will tell you which . . . anyway we're here . . . Hôtel d'Angleterre! . . . four porters at attention . . . the best of service, I see . . . we've nothing for them to carry . . .

"Our luggage will be coming later . . ."

I tell them . . . been a long time since we had any luggage . . . now at the reception desk the clerk gives me a card to fill out, he doesn't seem surprised to see me, he doesn't ask for any papers and I don't show him any . . . I see we've got the same idea . . . what's going on doesn't exist. A tacit agreement . . . fine! don't upset any applecarts! . . . I know this desk clerk speaks French, I've often

stopped here . . . I'm sure he recognizes me even if I'm not very presentable . . . suits me, the less talk the better! a man takes us up to our room, he has the key, he opens . . . immense, sumptuous, with two beds . . . I open the window . . . and then three more windows . . . we're on a terrace, with a view of the whole set, *Neiham* across the way, the little port I told you about, really theatrical, big bars with juke boxes, tough dance joints all along, one side of the port, I mean, as far as the big channel and the customs house . . . makes you think of Saint-Vincent, Le Havre in the old days . . . the same customers drunk as lords, same ladies, and sailors and merchant seamen, all in a knot, tourists with vices, queers and turd eaters . . . anything people can do to the sound of the accordion between three and four in the morning . . . rush hour for the folks with peculiar tastes . . . take it from me, I know what I'm talking about . . . yes indeed! . . . at least one thing that no tourist will ever see . . . the paddywagons coming in after the raids . . . much less hear . . . the shellacking . . . *biff! bang! wah!* the wholesale massage . . . *waaah!* the howling! just about every night in season . . . two three busloads . . . and *bing!* and *bang!* sobering them up! maybe you don't know it, that prison is high, hollow, and resonant like a cathedral . . . *wham! waah! ooh!* . . . nothing missing but the organ . . . Christ, here they come! . . . another paddywagon! . . . let 'em out! . . . two years of solitary I had in the *Vesterfangsel*, Pavilion K, I'm not putting you on . . . it's the same all over, any town, the truth is in prison, outside it's all chitchat, drawing-room splutter, everything's gratis, nothing's paid for . . . it took the Temple^o to show what the nobles were really made of . . . Moscow, America, Carpentras, same difference . . . twenty-four hours in the clink in any of those places and you'll know the whole story, twenty years as a tourist and you'll come home squarer than the day you were born . . . I'm talking to you like this, taking the liberty, higgledy-piggledy . . . no order, too much of a hurry! . . . I've just turned sixty-seven, my wild ass's skin" is well shrunk, I should have been dead long ago, I've done everything possible in that direction . . . applaud! . . . if I thought I gave lots of people a pain, I'd have enough reason to hang on, but it's not even true! . . . a telephone call now and then, curiosity . . .

"Wouldn't you be the man who wrote this . . . or that . . . long long ago . . . under the name of Céline?"

I don't answer, I hang up . . . Achille can take care of them . . . he's got the *Pléiade*, that's what the *Pléiade* is for . . .

Profuse relics, museum of by-gone authors . . .

Only three of us in that crowd are alive, I've told you which, "Lacquer Lock,"^o "Walking Bust,"^o and me that won't answer . . . fancy that, the "*Pléiade*"

. . . three alive, all the rest dead! . . . the most compact of graveyards . . . which shows you what a finagler Achille is, when he's seven hundred he'll be thinking up new schemes . . . "contracts" he calls them . . .

Hey there, I'm losing you! O, hideous ravages! . . . the young blat, the old run it into the ground . . . take your pick! . . . we were in this high enormous room, three windows on the terrace . . . it's dark outside . . . I whisper . . .

"Lili, listen!"

She listens . . . she agrees with me that this room is bugged . . . and certainly has holes in the walls . . . and we've got something under Bébert in his bag . . . I haven't told you yet . . . something perfectly harmless, but none of anybody's business, you'll see . . . microphones, I'm thinking, who put them there? the Krauts? the Danes? . . . both, of course! and a lot of other people! . . . a new caper, I'm thinking, something I'm not used to yet . . . I'd learn . . . took me two years to learn and I came out in bad shape . . . flat on my ass! . . . I hear on the radio about all the trouble they're taking in Tel Aviv to welcome their dear Jewish brethren that are arriving from all over, Patagonia and Alaska, Montreuil and Capetown, all so persecuted, tongues hanging out, heroes of labor, of deforestation, of the hammer, bank, and sickle . . . the trouble they take to give their dispersed brethren the right kind of reception! Committees of affectionate welcome, tears unlimited, wreaths of azaleas, gifts in kind and cash, choruses and kisses . . . shit! it's kind of different around here! . . . "Oh, how vile you are! . . . why doesn't somebody finish you off?" relations, friends, courts, executioners, all doing their damndest! . . . we'll make you pay for coming back! for daring! . . . why didn't the Boches finish you off? . . . tear off the bit of flesh that's still sticking to your bones . . . that's all the "Committee of Native-Born Frenchmen" can do for you . . . I know what I'm saying . . . I say that Israel is a real fatherland that welcomes its children home and my country is a shithouse . . . on my word as a volunteer, seventy-five percent disability, *médaille militaire*, and all . . . in addition, by your leave, a writer, a terrific stylist, the living proof: they put me in the "Pléiade" with La Fontaine, Clément Marot, du Bellay . . . not to mention Rabelais! and Ronsard! . . . just to show you that I'm not worried . . . in two three centuries I'll be helping the kids through high school. . .

"You're all dead in your collection! . . ." no! . . . three of us are still alive! . . . "Lacquer Lock" and "Walking Bust" . . . and your humble servant who isn't very steady on his pins, I admit . . . come on now! let me catch up with you and no more fooling around! . . . "Lacquer Lock" never fools around, much less "Walking Bust" . . . that's their strength . . . especially, you can imagine, in the

walking dust . . . what men suengui . . . especially, you can imagine, in the Pléiade! . . .

We were in this, I've been telling you, beautiful room with three windows, two enormous beds . . . perfect silence . . . you think that would make us sleep? . . . certainly not! . . . fatigue be damned! you hear a little sound, a scratching, something . . . no! nothing! . . . I go over to the window to look . . . there's a bit of light in the sky, in the clouds I mean . . . two three searchlights . . . from far in the distance . . . two beams . . . a discreet alert, kind of . . . without sirens . . . no planes either, I think . . . I guess they had a curfew . . . sure they were "occupied," but still very discreetly . . . later on we saw the Germans, whole truckloads, and more on foot and on bicycles, the armies from Lapland, Tromsø, Narvik, Bergen . . . the retreat, same old story, nothing to be surprised at, Ypres in 1919, Maisons-Laffitte in 1940, dazed bedraggled flesh, lost their shoes, dragging their puttees, using their guns for crutches . . . up here the only decorative troops were the Hungarians with the tall red hats . . . and the Bavarian mountaineers with their hunting horns and beautiful packs of hounds . . . I think they were all supposed to get reorganized at a camp near Lübeck . . . a lot of them got lost on the way, I ran into some in prison, stragglers, deserters, mostly picked up in waiting rooms . . . waiting rooms are the last hope of defeated armies . . . if Napoleon had had waiting rooms in Poland, he'd have put his army together again, he'd have retaken Moscow for sure . . . but you're loyal, you haven't left me, here it's coming on dawn . . . at Zornhof too I thought we'd get a chance to rest awhile . . . you saw what happened . . . in Rostock and then again in Ulm . . . seemed to me we were entitled . . . not any more, I've stopped believing in anything, all I'm sure of is that it's settled once and for all . . . Berlin, Ulm, Frankfurt, or Copenhagen . . . that we were made to be dished out in small pieces . . . by one side . . . or the other . . . even now, here in my pad at Meudon, I've still got the same feeling . . . look at the petitions and posters . . . and to cap the climax only two steps from where I was born, 13 Rampe du Pont, Courbevoie . . . I can hear what you're saying . . . "things are taking a turn for the better! . . ."

"Not at all, if you ask me!"

"Then what do you hope for?"

"The Chinese in Brest!"

Okay! . . . I'm old, I'm raving, it's my right. . . but no right to lose you . . . we were up there in Denmark to admire . . . the prowesses and sublime ingenuities of their Resistance, filmed with sound track . . . the whole infernal "occupation" . . . there at the moment I didn't see a thing . . . no foaming Teuton

hordes . . . later on I was told about them, massacres, robberies, rapes . . . I was even treated to two versions, the official version and the prison version . . . the stage and the wings . . . one as crazy tall as the other . . . Teutonic hordes? . . . King Christian X knew a thing or two about that, he spoke only German, he tias only German, absolutely, undeniable, *Glücksburg, Hesse, Holstein* . . . not to mention his *dronnin!* . . . I was in his Bastille . . . and not for the weekend! and I've always wondered if it wasn't an order from Himmler that put me there . . . you'll compliment me on my imagination . . . granted . . . but worse things have been seen, much worse . . . and I can assure you the future will be ten times lovelier . . . the Chinese in Brest, the whites on jinrikishas, not sitting down! no, between the shafts! . . . let all Gaul and all Europe with it, Yids included, change color, they've griped the world long enough! . . . with their blue, pretentious, Christianemic blood!

I'm running away with myself, I'm forgetting you . . . not at all! . . . I'm guiding you . . . it's light now, well, pretty near . . . *knock knock!* "come in!" . . . a flunkey . . . he's brought our breakfast . . . he knew we were going out . . . yes, but I hadn't ordered anything . . . an extra-complete breakfast on a great big tray, English-style, porridge, toast, ham, tea . . . coffee! . . . I've told you, they're spoiling us . . . luckily we'd kept very quiet all night, sure they were listening . . . one way or another . . . plus three books of coupons for everything . . . bread, butter, meat . . . Danish coupons . . . *bröd* . . . *smör* . . . this flunkey talked French. . .

"You can get fish on the open market, smoked salmon . . . and coffee . . . and clothing . . . you'll see when you go out . . . you know, I presume . . ."

I knew all right! . . . *Emporium of the North* . . . *Ilium* . . . *Vesterbrogade* . . . what I didn't know, they taught me later . . . we were on our way out . . . "you take the bag" . . . I tell Lili . . . "I'll take my two canes, don't worry, I'll manage . . ." first we'd take a look at the news . . . they've got everything down there, newspapers, the bank, the desk clerk, information, I've told you it was practically like peacetime . . . with one little difference . . . that none of this is for us, that we're completely out of place . . . superfluous, dubious individuals, worse than in Boche country, and there already we were hanging by a thread . . . here it's like a theater . . . we've dropped in and there's no part for us . . . and pretty soon it's all going to disappear, fold up: the sets, the streets, the hotel, and us underneath . . . see what I mean? . . . it's hard to know what's what when you've stopped sleeping . . . it's still very early . . . the papers are all in Danish or German . . . with Danish you've got to catch on that they've turned *nicht* into *ikke* . . . once you dig that

you're okay . . . kind of a dialect . . . the *Wehrmacht* communiqué . . . always the same . . . okay . . . okay . . . this desk clerk has known me a long time, he certainly knows the score . . . what wind has brought us . . .

"Doctor, over there, you see him?"

Odd at this time of day, some kind of Swedish officer . . . in khaki . . .

"He's just arrived from Berlin . . ."

A man in his forties . . . not the least bit ruffled or dusty, I'd even say neatly dressed and freshly shaved! . . .

"Count Bernadotte! Red Cross! . . . on his way back home . . . been to see Hitler in Potsdam!"

Why is he telling us this? . . . I didn't ask him . . . what the hell do we care? . . . going back to Sweden? our kids are up there now . . . got there ahead of him! . . . let's attend to our own problems! of course we haven't slept, but we're pretty well used to that since Montmartre . . . not very noticeable, though . . . anyway not in critical moments . . . pretty quiet around here, no danger, nobody seems to be up except the desk clerk and this Bernadotte . . . I'm talking about the big lobby . . . the bank is still closed . . . haven't they had any alerts? . . . yes, twice! . . . a bomb . . . they're "occupied" . . . you can tell because they're all "resisters" . . . I found out later . . . the hard way . . . the Vikings are rough customers, in prison, to the prisoners, I mean . . . there outside the door the desk clerk is waiting for me to say something . . . I don't say a word . . . little by little it's getting lighter . . . we can see the theater on the right, at the far end of the square . . . the other end it's the French Embassy . . . the Germans haven't gone in . . . if only it could stay like this, locked, with seals! . . . but the war would be over sometime and the French Embassy people would be back . . . the Danes can be putrid enough, but they'll never be as crummy as what comes out of France . . . to us, I mean . . . there in the dawn outside the hotel I had a hunch that all sorts of entertainment was in the making, give you something to laugh about . . . maybe you'll visit Denmark as a tourist, you'll see the place, it's worth your trouble . . . you'll recognize it easy . . . *Kongsnutord*, Royal Square . . . Christian IV . . . this equestrian statue . . . the streetcar loops around it, big long cars, yellow . . . like in Brussels . . . I say to Lili . . . "let's go see . . ." I know what I want to see, not the city! . . . I've never told you about the stuff I had stashed away . . . or Harras or Restif or Le Vig . . . certain objects and papers at the bottom of the musette bag . . . oh, certain people suspected it, no doubt about that! . . . I cleared out just on time, you can imagine that I wasn't going to exhibit anything in that grandiose room . . . sure to be holes all over and *voyeurs* and

microphones . . . I knew what I was looking for, a really isolated place . . . I was pretty sure I remembered . . . not Hellerup . . . but all the same that park is very quiet, you seldom see a soul . . . an enchanting park, I can say without exaggeration, between the little port and the streetcar line, amazing flowerbeds and foliage of a diversity that I've never seen anywhere else . . . well, this park doesn't attract anybody, and that's a fact . . . you'll easily find the little yacht basin, right at the streetcar terminus . . . I was thinking about it there on the sidewalk outside the Hôtel d'Angleterre . . . but Lili'd have liked us to go straight to the "Groenland," the big store down the block . . . in the window she'd seen some of those sealskin suits, with high boots, embroidered in every color . . . marvelous . . . incidentally the last they had . . . after that it was the same as the rest of the world, the Greenlanders took to dressing like everybody else, half white-collar stiff, half plumber. . .

I show Lili by my watch . . . I tell her . . . that it's not even seven o'clock and the "Groenland" isn't open . . . this Count Bernadotte hasn't budged . . . he's out on the sidewalk same as us, he doesn't look at us, he's staring straight ahead . . . he's not looking at anything . . . he can't be waiting for the streetcar . . . maybe a taxi? . . . ah, here it comes! . . . *clank! clank!* . . . the Number 11 . . . I've told you, all yellow, "Hellerup," our car! . . . the first, I think . . . "come on, Lili!" . . . I climb in, not so easy, I must say . . . oh well! . . . so does Lili, with Bébert in his bag . . . I forgot to tell you, I'd arrived in Denmark with Boche money, the desk clerk had put me wise . . .

"Change all that! never mention it to anybody! they'll throw you in jail!"

This racket with "hot" money that had to be changed right away! . . . they pulled it on me a dozen times . . . a ritual swindle . . . he changed it quick into Danish crowns, enough for the streetcar and even for the hotel, it seemed to me . . . luckily I had other ideas . . . he asked me at the same time if I had a weapon on me . . . and if I had a bank account . . . it's his business to be curious. . . but he knew enough already . . .

Not many people in the car . . . a few couples sitting there minding their business . . . "two to Hellerup" . . . two in Danish is to, not *zwei!* . . . three is *tre* . . . not *drei!* . . . these other people are rocking and jiggling same as us . . . all directions! . . . these tracks are in bad shape, but better than Hamburg! . . . or Brussels for that matter! . . . and in Berlin the tracks aren't even there any more! *hee hee!* or the ones on rue du Quatre-Sept embre! . . . I knew them well! . . . Les Lilas! anyway, all Europe needs to be made over! . . . what I feel like is a good laugh! *hee! hee!* . . . I stop myself . . . I force myself to hold it in! I'd explode! . . .

. absolutely! I stuff my fist in my mouth . . . that'll do! . . . I'll make it to Hellerup . . . to laugh or not to laugh! the rest is hot air! . . . this whole vehicle squeaks . . . and *clank! clank!* we're getting there! . . . oh yes, I know . . . I remember . . . this is where we get out! . . . and then a little way on foot . . . to the edge of the woods . . . well, the tall brambles, the bushes . . . there I know it's deserted . . . I've been there often enough . . . no! I've gone wrong! . . . it wasn't like this . . . it must have been further up . . . we must have missed the path . . .

"Lili, I can't go on . . . you must be all in yourself . . . just a minute!"

We sit down, I wouldn't call it grass, on a pile of creepers and brambles . . . they dig into us! . . . we're torn to pieces! . . . we get up, we keep going . . . ah, now I remember! . . . I've got it! "This way, Lili! . . . this way!" . . . now I remember perfectly . . . it's a sandy path, funny color, almost pink . . . years since I've been here, long before the war . . . hey! . . . this is it! . . . it all comes back to me . . . the bench! . . . and down below, on the other side of the path, the ruins . . . even the name: the Citadel . . . well, what's left of it . . . a demolished Citadel, razed . . . a war? . . . which war? . . . nothing left but the dungeons in the basement . . . the bars and chains . . . all eaten with rust . . . kind of like lace . . . all this right beside the sea, I should have remembered . . . you can hear the pebbles, the lapping of the water . . . the gulls . . . good place to rest, not a soul . . . I'd noticed that before the war . . . this path was very well kept, clean pink sand, but nobody there . . . hardly ever . . . in that case, you'll say, I must have been easy in my mind! . . . not at all! . . . I was worried all the same! . . . but not enough! I should have thought ten times harder! realized exactly what was lost . . . and would knock us for a loop! now I know, what good does it do me at the end of my rope? scratching paper for Achille . . . even insulting him, calling him every name in the calendar, he doesn't give a shit! gliding ahead to his second billion! I'm at the oars, he's bugged me good! pretty near a hundred years now that he hasn't lifted a finger . . . tomorrow I'll be gone, so will he . . . some people circumnavigate the globe in the stratosphere, it's okay in a galley too, depends how you're situated, at the oars or on deck . . . when they came to la Rampe du Pont, Courbevoie, where I started out, it was only to get galley slaves . . . come on now! my duty! . . . let's get on with this story and cut the crap . . . we're resting there, I was telling you . . . across from the Citadel, remember? . . . the ruins . . . nobody on the path . . . at last I could take inventory . . . I'd been thinking about it for months, so had Lili for sure . . . but maybe you've noticed, we never talked about it, never! . . . very important, though . . . we could have been searched, especially, I don't have to tell you, in Zornhof! . . . shady

characters like us! and just now at the border, in Flensburg . . . they'd certainly have found it . . . oh, no explosives! . . . only our real passports, our marriage certificate, and four ampules of cyanide . . . all perfectly respectable, you can see . . . but this cyanide, I was sure, wasn't wet like Laval's . . . genuine potassium cyanide, dry and fatal . . . I'd gotten it from . . . from . . . no, even at this distance I wouldn't want to compromise anybody . . . one of these days a Communist historian, yellow no doubt, will write a book: the Martyrdom of the "Collaborators" . . . in a century, let's say . . . my hour will strike . . . they'll study my "memorial" in the high schools . . . are you lucky! you so hungry for novelty thrills, firsts! . . . and me letting you in on a historic moment that nobody else will find out about for a century . . . which puts us, you and me . . . as you can't fail to realize . . . plunk in the middle of "relativity"! . . . we were so early out there, I was sure nobody'd disturb us . . . Lili knew what I wanted . . . to see if the stuff I'd put in Bébert's musette bag in Bezons was still there, our cyanide, our two passports, and our marriage certificate . . . nothing so important, when everything else is gone, as your marriage certificate . . . the general hue and cry hadn't started yet, but I already had a good hunch . . . "when all is over," when you're absolutely down and out, a pustulant leprous criminal! you can expect three things: one, to be accused of going by a false name, false passport, false everything . . . nothing wrong with our passports, they could put them under the microscope! . . . sure I could have gotten phony ones, but I didn't! . . . naturally my name was no help, article 75 and so on! but there were worse "war criminals" . . . the ones on the lists in Washington and London . . . *Chief Justice* . . . for two years they poked around, while I was in the lockup, to see if I wasn't a real "war criminal," escaped from someplace . . . and "camouflaged" as Céline . . . two years they kept me in the pit, while my dossier was ripening, a pretext, a rotten chunk of meat on the dump . . . pretty much what I still feel like, talking to you now . . . the second peril of the chase is if they think you're not married . . . legally, I mean, no monkey business! . . . I can assure you that when tomorrow the Communists, Slav, yellow, or black take over, even the Balubas, the first thing they'll investigate is whether you're properly hitched . . . and not just a couple of dissolute pornographic jokers, uncertified . . . we'd have been separated, we'd never have seen each other again! . . .

Even absolutely regular, God knows we had enough trouble! . . . two years, minute by minute . . . absolutely dazed in the pitch darkness . . . wondering if those howls came from "14" . . . or from across the way . . . the other pit . . . some people went through a lot worse, I admit . . . take Eichmann, the renegade

Jew, or Sachs° or Riefensthal, those raving masochist perverts, the punishment they asked for and got!

Hey, where are we at? . . . got to get you back! . . . on that bench, I've told you, not a soul far and wide . . . Lili knows what I'm after . . . she puts our bag on the bench . . . Bébert comes out, stretches, I know him, he won't run away . . . he'll stay right near us, in the grass . . .

I know what we've got to look for, our treasure in the false bottom . . . lots of times . . . since Paris . . . I've wanted to take a look . . . in Sigmaringen they suspected . . . here it is! the false bottom! . . . I unfasten it . . . I look . . . it's all there . . . we haven't lost a thing . . . our two passports, our marriage certificate . . . and a lady's Mauser . . . the rest was at the bank, well, supposed to be, I've told you, in the city, *Landsman Bank, Peter Bang Wej* . . . the bank, in due time, when we've rested! . . . first things first! . . . I fasten the false bottom . . . it's all ready for Bébert again . . . he catches on right away, he jumps, he settles down, he purrs . . . he isn't just any old cat, he understands our living conditions, I'm sure he knows more than he lets on, even about what's going to happen . . . an animal's silence is something . . . I ask Lili . . . "you think it's all there?" . . . she's not so sure . . . "Come on! . . . to hell with it! . . . we'll come back and look another day . . ." this path is really deserted . . . but say! . . . Lili's eyes are better than mine . . . it's nothing . . . over there in the grass, a bird . . . but not the usual kind of bird . . . "collector's item," I'd say, from the *Jardin des Plantes* . . . about the size of a duck, half pink, half black . . . and ruffled! feathers every which way . . . I look further . . . another! that one I know! . . . I saw him first! . . . an ibis . . . fancy meeting you here! . . . and an egret! . . . certainly not from Denmark! . . . now a peacock . . . they've come here on purpose! . . . and a lyre bird . . . they want something to eat . . . it's not a very nourishing spot, ruins, brambles, and stones . . . still another! . . . a toucan! . . . they're only ten fifteen feet away . . . they'd make friends if we had something to give them, but really we haven't got a thing . . . I tell Lili . . . "close the bag good, don't let him put his head out!" . . . I'm thinking of Bébert . . . surrounded by birds like this, if somebody came along they'd wonder what we were doing, if maybe we wouldn't be charmers . . . bird charmers . . .

"Let's get out of here!"

For us, I think, everything's dangerous . . . these birds . . . I'm sure they've escaped from their aviaries . . . they must have come from down south like us, from zoos in Germany, bombed . . . anyway, my canes! . . . I struggle to my feet . . . and back to the streetcar! . . . I've told you, the terminus . . . where we came from . . . we'll find the way

from . . . we find the way . . .



If you ask me, that's enough . . . 791 pages . . . whew! . . . enough? . . . enough? . . . not at all! I'd signed up . . . I had to finish . . . oh, not that I gave a damn! . . . but Achille wasn't going to shell out any advances for asking myself questions . . . being neither a queen nor a cokehead nor a common-law criminal, I have no excuse . . . if you're a cabinet minister, your debts don't count . . . if you belong to some Academy, they'll understand your weaknesses . . . but me, suppose I start talking about *Journey*, that it's a date in history, that everything that's been written since is "clumsy imitation, lukewarm gook" . . . they'll tell me to go fuck myself! . . .

"You arrogant old fool! nobody's even read your *Journey*!"

No answer to that one! . . . the younger generation are absolute idiots, can I help it? . . . all they're interested in is the movies! . . . not a single producer knows how to read . . . all the more reason! . . . the movies know nothing, stop at nothing . . . what audacity! bravo! . . . you tell yourself that if you manage to turn out 791 pages more or less right side up, it's plenty! especially as this chronicle isn't so very gay . . . and the rest if I finished it wouldn't exactly make you laugh . . . not that I go looking for tragedy, mind you! . . . I do my best to avoid it . . . but *bam!* . . . naturally in the conditions we're reduced to it tends to catch up with us . . . if we'd stayed on rue Girardon, we'd have been rubbed out right away . . . murder with trimmings, "Dental Institute"^o or "Villa Saïd"^o . . . Achille's galley is pretty rough, I admit, especially at my age, but all the same a breeze compared to what we'd have been in for . . . step one, flayed alive . . . step two, larded and spitted with small onions and green peppers over a low fire . . . maybe you think I'm partial . . . holy cathouse, not at all! . . . they were the same in both camps! Cousteau was as stinking mean ferocious as Sartre . . . true as I'm standing here, the Petiots of both camps have the same instruments of torture ready for me . . .

I've seen them . . . same perfected racks and . . . where? you'll ask me . . . okay, I'll tell you, it won't cost you anything to look . . . down under the L.V.F.° office that used to be the "Intourist" . . . corner of Caumartin and Auber, a deep, enormous cellar, straight out of Piranesi, absolutely incredible! . . . go see for yourself, they've thought of everything . . . I'll repeat the address: across the street from the Turkish baths . . . you see how impartial I am, pure historian . . . equally sadistic in both camps . . . only one aim in life: murder! blood and guts! fricasseed brains, slaves to the barracudas, Christians to the jaguars, collaborators to Villa Said . . . you'll see a thing or two tomorrow! . . . foaming kettles on every street corner . . . for who? . . . who do you think? for you! to simmer you with the season's slogans . . . but one little thing that bothers me . . . sticks in my craw . . . their bad manners . . . if Hitler, for instance, had won, and he only missed it by a hair, take it from me, they'd have been all for him . . . mad scramble to see who could hang more Jews, who could be a bigger Nazi . . . extract Churchill's guts, exhibit Roosevelt's heart, make the most love with Goering . . . whichever way it turns out, they all come running, all the same to them which organ they land on as long as they got a thorough fucking . . . believe you me, a hair and they'd all be sucking Hitler off! . . .

I had a right, you'll admit . . . 796 pages . . . to take a breather . . . oh, not to deliver messages! . . . the "messagiers" are a different breed, philosophico-addlepedated, heaven help you if you mess with them, if you lose yourself in their waves, urinals, terraces, abbeys . . . complexes, seaweeds, and complications, you'll never get your bearings again . . . *knock knock!* somebody's there! . . . *wah! grrr! miow! tweet! tweet!* . . . I'm imitating the pack for you . . . and the trees, you know, the birds . . . *ding-a-ling!* the door! . . . and Flute, the cat . . . he's a bold one! . . .

"Come in! . . . come in!"

"Ah, how are you?"

It's Ducourneau! this is serious! . . . he hasn't come for nothing . . . right away we get together . . . just a few minor questions . . . that does it! . . . just an accent here, a comma there . . . you've got to watch out for copyreaders, you see, they operate with "plain common sense" . . . "plain common sense" is the death of rhythm! . . . all fuckers of imperfect women, I know whereof I speak . . . Ducourneau has come to see me for the N.R.F. . . . you suspected as much, about the last little trifles, the p.e.'s and tr.'s . . . on that God-awful paper from Madame Bolloré's vats in earth's end° . . . a few slight changes if possible, nobody dares! . . . imagine! *Journey and Death on the Installment Plan* . . . coming out at the end

of the year, under his command . . . and don't forget it! . . . as long as he's here, we talk about one thing and another . . . Balzac, for instance! . . . it seems that Balzac came to Meudon . . . and stayed in Bellevue at the house of Count Apponyi, the Austrian ambassador . . . Ducourneau is a "Balzacien" and no dilettante . . . far from it! . . . serious and thorough! . . . knocked himself out trying to find a trace of Balzac and this Count Apponyi . . . no luck! . . . at the town hall . . . at the land office . . . at the notary's . . . nothing! . . . if a reader has any information, would he be kind enough to write . . . ? Ducourneau changes the subject . . . "and what about you?" he asks me . . . "your affairs?"

"My dear Ducourneau, it's not the Pléiade with its four percent royalty that's going to put me on easy street! four percent is kidding the Muses . . . the Pléiade authors won't complain, they're all dead . . . except two . . . or three . . . survivors . . .

'Lacquer Lock' . . . 'Walking Bust' . . . and me-that-gripes . . . 'Lacquer Lock' is rich, 'Walking Bust' has no need of anybody, eminent patrician, Olympus' con man, toast of the Academies . . ."

"Your case is hideous indeed, a semi-living 'Pléiaden,' virtually unknown, except for your abominable past. . ."

Ducourneau was telling the truth, but if I complain about the four percent and tell them their Pléiade is a shameless racket, they'll tell me to go chase myself, shower me with a new batch of insults, and kick me out of the "cemetery" . . .

Ducourneau agrees.

Same as my father and mother at Père-Lachaise . . . their names were rubbed out. . .

"My dear Balzacien, this state of affairs won't last!"

"Why not?"

"Why not? I'll tell you! . . . I keep informed! the Chinks, the genuine Chinese, the hard-core, the ones that are going to occupy France . . . right now they're bivouacking in Silesia . . . Breslau and environs . . . mines and blast furnaces . . . and there's more coming! lots more across the steppes . . . hordes and hordes! . . . Kirghizes, Moldo-Finns, Balto-Ruthenians, Teutons . . . you'll see them at the Porte de Pantin, welcomed by the biggest crowds you ever saw! howling with wine, happiness, freedom!"

"Bravo! bravo! when are you expecting them?"

"Soon . . . say in two three years."

"All Communists?"

"Naturally! but that's nothing! the big thing is their blood! it's only

naturally: but that's nothing: . . . the big thing is men blood: . . . it's only the blood that counts! they've got the 'dominant blood' . . . and don't forget it!"

I point out to him that in Byzantium they were worrying about the sex of the angels when already the Turks were shaking the ramparts . . . setting fire to the low quarters, like here now in Algeria . . . you won't see our Great Transitioners worrying about the sex of the angels . . . or the yellow peril! what they're interested in is eating . . . better and better! . . . and wines to match . . . menus a yard long! are they or aren't they the masters of the swillingest nation in the world? and the most saturated? . . . let the Chinese come if they dare, they won't get any further than Cognac! the famous yellow peril will end up in the cellars . . . happy, stewed to the gills! besides, it's a long way to Cognac . . . billions and billions of them will be out for the count by the time they get to you know where . . . Rheims . . . Epernay . . . those bubbling depths that cancel our existence . . .

CHRONOLOGY

1894 Louis-Ferdinand Destouches born on Courbevoie (Seine), son of Ferdinand Destouches, minor employee of an insurance firm, and Louise-Céline Guillou, lacemaker.

1905 *Certificat d'études*. Starts work as an apprentice and messenger boy.

1912 Enlists for three years in the 12th Cavalry Division.

1914 Wounded in Poelcapelle, Flanders. High military honors.
Severe head and arm injuries resulting in 75 percent disability rating and withdrawal from active service.

1916 Trip to Cameroons with Occupation Services. Malaria.
Amoebic dysentery. Travels to London for Armament Service.

1917 Obtains baccalaureate degree. Preparation completed on his own.

1918 Begins medical studies in Rennes.

1919 Marriage to Edith Follet, daughter of the director of the medical school.

1920 Daughter, Colette, born.

1924 Diploma from the Faculté de Médecine in Paris. Doctoral thesis on Semmelweis. Missions for Rockefeller Foundation in Geneva and Liverpool.

1925 Further travel in Cameroons, United States, Canada and Cuba.

Divorced.

1928 Sets up practice in Clichy. General practitioner, specialist in children's diseases.

1932 *Voyage au bout de la nuit* published by Denoël and Steele.

1933 *L'église*, Celine's only play.

1936 *Mort à crédit*. Trip to Russia financed by royalties from Russian translation of *Voyage* by Louis Aragon and Elsa Triolet.
Upon return, denounces communist society.

1937 *Bagatelles pour un massacre*, racist pamphlet, followed by two similar works (1938, 1941).

1939 Attempts to enlist. Rejected due to ill health. Ship's doctor, then runs dispensary in Sartrouville. Leaves Paris.
Ambulance service. Returns to practice in Montmartre.

1942 Trip to Berlin.

1943 Marriage to Lucette Almanzor, a dancer.

1944 *Guignols band* published by Gallimard. Leaves Paris in an attempt to reach Denmark, accompanied by his wife, his cat Bébert, and a movie actor, Le Vigan. Imprisoned in Berlin, then goes into exile in Sigmaringen.

1945 With his wife and cat, crosses Germany on foot amid bombardments. Hides in Copenhagen. French legation asks for his arrest. Fourteen months in the prison of Vensterfangsel.

1947 Released. Lives in an attic on the Princessgade, then in a hut on the Baltic Sea.

1950 Condemned by a French court to a year of prison, fine of 50,000 francs, and the confiscation of half his property.

1951 Exonerated by military tribunal.
Sets up practice among the poor in Meudon on the outskirts of
Paris.

1952 *Féerie pour une autre fois* published by Gallimard, as are all his
subsequent works.

1954 *Normance, féerie pour une autre fois II.*

1956 *Entretiens avec le professeur.*

1957 *D'un château Vautre.*

1960 *Nord.*

1961 Death and burial, kept secret from the press.
Rigodon published posthumously.

GLOSSARY

COUSTEAU. Paul-Antoine Cousteau, born in 1906, not to be confused with Jacques-Yves, the oceanographer. Journalist. Contributed to *Je suis partout*, an extreme rightist weekly published in Paris from 1933 to 1939 and from 1941 to 1944. Taken prisoner by the Germans in June 1940, he was set free in 1941. Became associate editor of *Je suis partout*, which had been suspended at the outbreak of the war but was relaunched under the German occupation, and of *Paris-Soir*. Replaced Brasillach as editor-in-chief of *Je suis partout* in 1943. Fled to Baden-Baden in 1944, then to Landau, where he broadcasted for Radio-Patrie. Condemned to death in 1946, then reprieved, after which, if Céline is to be believed, he turned against his former associates.

HUMA. Nickname for the French Communist daily *L'Humanité*.

MAILLOTINS. Paris insurgents, so-called from the lead mallets (*maillets*) they were armed with. Their rebellion in 1382 was provoked by the imposition of a sales tax.

GUISE, Henri I of Lorraine, duke of Guise, known as Le Balafré (1550—1588). One of the instigators of the massacre of St. Bartholomew (1572). Head of the Holy League, or Catholic Party. Enjoyed great popularity in Paris, tried to seize the throne of France and besieged Henri III in the Louvre. Not long afterward the king had him assassinated in the Château of Blois.

PARTISANS OF CHAMBORD. The legitimists. Henri de Bourbon, duke of Bordeaux and count of Chambord (1820-1883), was the last representative of the elder Bourbon line. On the death of Charles X (1836), he became legitimist pretender to the throne of France under the name of Henri V. After the fall of

Napoleon III the restoration seemed imminent, but failed because of Chambord's extreme demands.

ETIENNE MARCEL. Provost of the Paris merchants. Prominent in the States-General, obtained an edict of reform in 1356 and led insurrection when the king annulled the edict. Murdered in 1358.

JUANOVICI. Joseph Joinovici or Joanovici, known as Monsieur Joseph. Rumanian Jew, came to France from Bessarabia in 1925. Founded his own scrap-metal firm. In 1939 Joinovici Frères was a thriving concern. After the French defeat, transferred nominal ownership of his business but remained effectively in charge and supplied metal to WIFO, a Berlin firm. Obtained forged records proving his Aryan origin. Operated on black market, purchasing metal for the Germans. Later confessed to having made 25 million francs under the Occupation. Member of the Bonny-Laffont police group, working for the Germans. At the same time he worked for the Resistance, helped Jews, hid American parachutists and worked for Honneur et Police, the Resistance group in the French police.

Well-known Resisters later testified in his favor. Responsible for the arrest of Bonny and Laffont after the Liberation. He, too, was arrested, but soon released. When the authorities decided to arrest him again, he fled to the American zone of Germany but gave himself up in 1947. Tried in 1949, condemned to five years in prison, a fine of 600,000 F and confiscation of his holdings to the amount of 50 million francs. Freed in 1951, placed under house arrest at Mende, whence he escaped to Israel.

After the French government opened proceedings against him for tax fraud in 1957, Israel refused him the status of immigrant and he was expelled in December 1958. Imprisoned in Marseille. Tried, acquitted of tax fraud but held on two other charges. In 1961, condemned to two prison terms of one year each for issuing bad checks. Released in 1962, he died in Clichy in 1965 at the age of 63.

BEN ACHILLE. Probably Gaston Gallimard, born in 1881, director of the Gallimard publishing house. Founded in 1911 as the Editions de la Nouvelle Revue Française, it is one of the leading French publishing houses and has published much of the best modern French literature, including the later works of Céline. The "Ben" would be attributable to his supposed sympathy for the

Algerian cause during the Algerian war.

PÉTIOT. Dr. Petiot (1893-1946). Between 1942 and 1944 he murdered 27 persons, for the most part Jews, whom he lured to his premises by promising to smuggle them out of the occupied zone of France. He was tried, convicted and executed in 1946.

COMPACT REVIEW. Presumably the *Nouvelle Revue Française* (N.R.F.), a monthly magazine founded in 1909 by a group of writers including Andre Gide. Many of the leading writers of the century were first made known in its pages.

YOUR FERULE, *etc.* Possibly the monthly bulletin of the N.R.F., containing the reviews of the books published during the preceding month and various literary information.

MARCEL. Marcel Aymé, novelist and playwright (1902-1967). Author of *The Green Mare*, *Cleramband*, *Passe-Muraille*. He was a close friend of Céline.

COUR DE ROME. One of the courtyards of Saint-Lazare station in the center of Paris. Céline is referring to the famous flood of 1910 when this area, though far from the Seine, was submerged.

RUE CADET. The Grand Orient de France, largest of the three Masonic temples in France, has its temple on rue Cadet.

MAURICE DACHE. Probably Maurice Chevalier (1888-1972), the famous French singer and movie actor.

HARHAS. A character in *North*. An SS medical officer, a cynic with a resounding laugh, who seems to have been very helpful to Céline.

FRÉJUS. Small town on the French Riviera. In 1959 the lower quarters were flooded and 400 people killed when a dam burst.

CHÂTELET. Large Paris theater (3000 seats) on the place du Châtelet. Built in 1862, it is used chiefly for operettas and spectacular revues.

LE VIGAN. Robert Coquillaud, screen name Robert Le Vigan. Outstanding motion-picture actor (*Pépé-le-Moko*, *Le Quai des Brumes*, *Goupi-Main rouges*). A friend of Céline, he collaborated under the Occupation. Fled to Germany with Céline in 1944. Arrested in 1945, he was tried in 1946 and sentenced to ten years at forced labor. Released after three years, he went to Spain and later to the Argentine, where he died in 1972.

ZORNHOF. The von Leiden estate, scene of the greater part of *North*.

KRETZERS. Characters in *North*.

ACH, KEIN SUM! Apparently derived from *Mach keinen Sums*, "Don't make such a fuss."

HEINKEL. No doubt refers to the Heinkel aircraft plant at Warnemünde.

KRACHT. SS-man. A character in *North*.

SIGMARINGEN. The order of events in *Rigadoon* is rather different from that described in the preceding volumes and also from the actual course of events, which is roughly as follows: In July 1944, Céline, whose life had been threatened in France because of his collaboration with the Germans, crossed the German border, intending to go to Denmark. In Baden-Baden his papers were confiscated and for three months he waited in vain for permission to proceed to Denmark. Finally he asked leave to go to Switzerland or return to France. He spent two weeks in Berlin, trying to obtain a visa. After refusing to broadcast Nazi propaganda he was interned for three months at Kressling near Neuruppin in Prussia in a camp of "free thinkers." This would seem to be the setting of *North*. At this time he tried again to go to Denmark and reached Rostock-Warnemünde, but was unable to cross the border. At this point he decided to join the Vichy refugees in Sigmaringen, where he stayed until March, 1945. It was then, with Sigmaringen as its starting point, that the 21-day odyssey related in *Rigadoon* began.

FRIST-KORPS. Probably *Frei-Korps*, a Danish collaborationist militia.

BOUGRAT. Dr. Pierre Bougrat (1890—1961). Accused in 1925 of

assassinating a bill collector, whose body was found in a closet in Bougrat's house. Condemned to forced labor for life. Six months after his arrival in Guiana, he escaped to Venezuela, where he practiced medicine until his death in 1961.

PINK PAGES. The section of the *Petit Larousse Illustré* devoted to famous quotations was printed on pink paper.

SAINTE-CATHERINE. November 25, holiday of young girls, especially of dressmakers and shop girls who have attained the age of twenty-five without finding a husband. Celebrated by masked balls at dressmaking establishments.

PACHON. One of the standard French apparatuses for measuring blood pressure. Named after its inventor, Michel-Victor Pachon (1867-1938).

FAUSTUS. Character in *North*.

THE VON LEIDENS. Characters in *North*.

RESTIF. An unidentified character in *Castle to Castle*, leader of the "Special Teams," a gang of professional murderers being trained for guerrilla activity after the predicted Allied victory. In the meantime they lived by looting and extortion.

MARION. Paul Marion. Journalist, leading member of Doriot's P.P.F. since its founding in 1936. Resigned from P.P.F. after Munich. Became Secretary of Information in the Vichy government in 1942. After the Liberation, condemned to ten years at hard labor. Figures prominently in *Castle to Castle*.

THE ROSELLI SISTERS. The Roselli brothers, Italian anti-fascist refugees, and the Russian economist Navachine were murdered in 1937. The murders were attributed to the extreme rightist Cagoule.

BARRACHIN. Navachine, see above.

BOUT DE L'AN. One of the chiefs of the collaborationist Milice during the German occupation. Minor character in *Castle to Castle*.

BRINON. Fernand de Brinon. Journalist. In 1933 published the first interview with Hitler to appear in France. President of the Comité France-Allemagne. In December 1940, Laval appointed him delegate general of the French government in the occupied territories, with the title of "Ambassadeur de France." Set up a "Government Commission for the Interests of French Subjects in Germany," which was disavowed by Pétain and Laval. Was condemned to death and executed after the war. Figures prominently in *Castle to Castle*.

THREE FOUR HOURS. Sigmaringen to Hanover is a trip which takes eight to ten hours in peacetime.

BIBELS. Bibelforscher. A radically pacifist sect similar to Jehovah's Witnesses. Literally, "Bible studiers." A group of them figure prominently in *North*.

DESCAVES. Lucien Descaves (1861-1949). Novelist of the naturalist school. Member of the Académie Goncourt (1900).

RUE BROTTIN. Rue Sebastien-Bottin in the seventh arrondissement, on which the Gallimard publishing house has its office.

NIMIER. Roger Nimier (1925-1962). Journalist and novelist. Literary adviser to the Gallimard publishing house. Member of a group of right-wing anarchists popularly known as "Les Hussards" after Nimier's novel, *Le Hussard bleu* (1950).

CACHIN. Marcel Cachin (1869-1958). Socialist deputy, then a leader of the French Communist Party. From 1918 editor-in-chief of the Communist daily *L'Humanité*. In 1935 became the first French Communist senator. Deputy for the Seine department from 1946 to the time of his death. Céline is referring to the posters that appeared in Paris toward the end of the German occupation, reproducing a letter from Cachin, in favor of collaboration.

HARENGON. Louis Aragon, born in 1897. Poet and novelist. One of the founders of surrealism. Converted to Communism in the early thirties. Directed the Communist literary review *Les Lettres Françaises* from 1953 to 1973, when

it ceased publication. Member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. *Hareng* = herring.

VAILLANT. Roger Vailland (1907-1965), French writer, author of *Drôle de Jeu* (1945), *la Loi* (1957), *etc.* Member of the Communist party, active in the Resistance.

PALE FEET. "*Pieds pâles.*" Seems to be a play on "*pieds noirs*" (black feet), a nickname for the French settlers in Algeria. Since the "black feet" are noted for their reactionary politics, leftists by implication would be "pale feet."

PETZAREFF. Pierre Lazareff (1907-1972). French journalist. Directed *Paris-Soir* from 1937 to 1940. During the war directed the French section of the War Information Office, first in New York, then in London. After the war until the time of his death directed *France-Soir* and other publications. The basis of this transformation of Lazareff's name is that *pet* = fart.

BRISSON. Pierre Brisson (1896-1964) was director of the newspaper *Le Figaro* from 1934 to 1942 and from 1944 to the time of his death. The linking of his name with Vichy seems to be an allusion to the fact that *Le Figaro* was published in Lyons in the unoccupied zone of France from the time of the Armistice to the invasion of the unoccupied zone by the Germans.

GENNEVILLIERS. Suburb of Paris, where vegetable gardens fertilized by sewage were laid out under the Second Empire.

BROUSBIR. The red-light district of Casablanca.

RUE BOUTERU. Rue Bouterie, a street in the Vieux Port, the old red-light district of Marseille. It was destroyed when the Germans blew up the Vieux Port in 1943.

MISS HEYLIETT. *Miss Helyett*, a once famous operetta by Edmond Audran (1890).

RALLY TO MY WHITE CANES. A parody of the words with which Henri IV concluded his harangue to his army before the battle of Ivry (1590). "Rally to my white plumes. You will always find them on the path of glory."

COGNAC PRIZE. The Prix Cognacq, established by Ernest Cognacq (1839-1928) and his wife, founders of the Samaritaine department store in Paris. The prize was awarded to conspicuously large families.

GARGANNE. Possibly Gardane, a village in Provence. The Cognacq Prize would seem to have been awarded to one of its families.

TEMPLE. *Le prison du Temple*. Originally the tower of a fortified monastery established by the Templars. Louis XVI and his family were imprisoned there in 1792. It was torn down in 1811.

WILD ASS'S SKIN. A reference to Balzac's novella by that name (*La Peau de Chagrin*).

LACQUER LOCK (*Dur-de-mèche*). Probably Malraux.

WALKING BUST (*Buste-à-pattes*). Probably Montherlant.

SACHS. Maurice Sachs. Well-known figure in the art world and night life of Paris between the wars—esthete, pederast and, according to his legend, something of a crook. Often seen at Le Boeuf sur le Toit, a nightclub that had its heyday in the twenties. In 1942, hoping to escape from anti-Semitic persecution, he signed a contract to work in Germany and became a crane operator in Hamburg. Arrested and imprisoned, he was believed to have informed on a number of people. He is thought to have been killed in a bombardment.

DENTAL INSTITUTE. One of the Paris Gestapo headquarters was located in a dental clinic.

VILLA SAÏD. Name of a street in the fashionable 16th arrondissement of Paris. A mansion situated on it was used by the Gestapo for questioning and torturing Resisters.

L.V.F. Légion des Volontaires Français contre le Bolchévisme. Founded in 1941 by Brinon and Doriot. Its purpose was to recruit French volunteers to fight for the Germans in Russia. It had little success.

BOLLORÉ. Bolloré is the leading French paper manufacturer. The Bolloré plant is in Finistère department. Finistère = "earth's end" (*bout de terre*).



PARIS MATCH

Louis-Ferdinand
CÉLINE

was born in Courbevoie in 1894. His real surname was Destouches. After World War I, when he sustained severe head injuries, he studied medicine and went into general practice in 1928. In 1932 he assumed the name Céline and published *Journey to the End of the Night*. His second major work, *Death on the Installment Plan*, was published in 1936. For several years he wrote racist pamphlets. During World War II he left Paris and was imprisoned in Germany with his wife and cat and a film actor. He spent the last ten years of his life as a pariah, writing furiously. He died, impoverished and unnoticed, at Meudon, on the outskirts of Paris, in 1961.

RALPH MANHEIM is distinguished for his translations of Céline, Günter Grass, and Hermann Hesse. He won the National Book Award in 1970 for his translation of Céline's *Castle to Castle*.

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