




# THE SUNFLOWER

ON THE POSSIBILITIES AND  
LIMITS OF FORGIVENESS

SIMON WIESENTHAL


A K N O P F  B O O K



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~ THE ~  
**SUNFLOWER**

*On the Possibilities and Limits  
of Forgiveness*

SIMON WIESENTHAL

*with a symposium edited by  
Harry James Cargas and Bonny V. Fetterman*

REVISED AND EXPANDED EDITION

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## PREFACE

When the first American edition of *The Sunflower* was published by Schocken Books in 1976, courses about the Holocaust had just begun to appear in the curricula of colleges, high schools, and seminaries. Because it's a book that invites discussion, *The Sunflower* soon became one of the most widely used books in teaching settings. Simon Wiesenthal tells a personal story of an incident that occurred in a concentration camp and asks, what would you have done in his place? Theologians, political and moral leaders, and writers responded to his question—a question that is at once religious, political, moral, and personal—each from their own perspective. As would be expected, a wide variety of opinions was expressed. Nevertheless, each and every respondent had to imagine him or herself in the place of a concentration camp prisoner, to face the enormity of the crime before them, and reflect on the implications of their decision. In this one isolated case, was forgiveness an option, and what would it mean for the victim as well as the perpetrator of these crimes?

The twentieth anniversary of its publication in this country is the occasion for a new edition of *The Sunflower*. This second edition presents thirty-two new responses written for this volume, ten retained from the previous edition, and one, by Edward H. Flannery, revised for this edition. Three contributions—by Jean Améry, Cardinal König, and Albert Speer—were translated from the 1981 German edition and appear here for the first time in English translation.

Why a new edition of *The Sunflower*? In light of the events of the last twenty years, we felt it would be interesting to hear the responses of a new generation. On the one hand, time blunts memory; on the other, our knowledge and awareness of the Holocaust has increased through education. Even those who do not have a living memory of the Holocaust have begun to assimilate what it means for a people to lose one-third of its members to genocide, together with their culture, language, and history. The uniqueness of this event has finally started to sink in to the popular consciousness. Moreover, we suspected that the major changes in the Catholic church's teachings about Jews in these years, as well as other interfaith events and developments, would produce responses that differed from the first generation of respondents. Finally, the world has not stopped seeing horrors that approach genocide—in Bosnia, Cambodia, China, and countless other troubled nations around the globe—as whole classes of people are targeted for extinction by criminal regimes. The issue posed by Simon Wiesenthal in this book is still with us, transcending its original context, and forcing itself upon a contemporary one.

Few people would deny the necessity of bringing criminal leaders and policymakers to justice. Wiesenthal's Dokumentationszentrum, which seeks out Nazi criminals, has helped to bring over 1,100 Nazis to justice since the end of the war. For his work, Wiesenthal has been honored by the governments of the United States, Holland, Italy, and Israel. Committed to the necessity of enforcing international law, Wiesenthal wrote to President Clinton in July of 1995, urging him to condemn the organizers of terror in the former Yugoslavia: “The events in Bosnia, as the media portray them for us today, with all their crimes against humanity—the ethnic cleansing, the slaughtering of civilians regardless of age, the rape of Muslim women—while they do not constitute a Holocaust, repeat many of its horrors....I believe that the condemnation of Karadzic and Mladic—verbal, at first—and the threat to put them before a tribunal—would have an effect. The United States could, I hope, put an end to the deeds of these two men and their soldiers by publicly announcing that the crimes they committed will not remain unpunished.” The importance to the world of holding such individuals responsible for their crimes is indisputable.

But the question posed in *The Sunflower* is more subtle and, in some sense, more vexing. What about the rank-and-

file, the faceless individuals who carry out the crimes against other people ordered by their leaders? What about the individual responsibility of ordinary people, blinded or coerced by the reigning political ideology of their day, and of the small number who may regret their actions or repudiate them in a different climate? We laud the heroic individuals who defy and undermine the immoral actions of their governments, despite the mortal dangers such resistance entails—but what of the converse?

Moreover, when the killing has stopped, how can a people make peace with another who moments before were their mortal enemies? What are the limits of forgiveness, and is repentance—religious or secular—enough? Is it possible to forgive and not forget? How can victims come to peace with their past, and hold on to their own humanity and morals in the process?

All of these issues are raised in this simple and unpretentious book of questioning, based on a single and exceptional encounter between two individuals whose paths strangely and tragically crossed.

BONNY V. FETTERMAN

October 1996

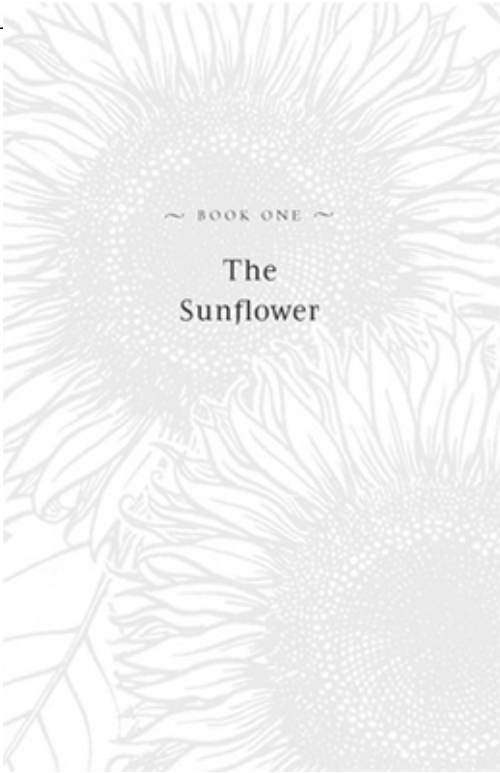
#### **PREFACE TO THE PAPERBACK EDITION**

The revised and expanded edition of *The Sunflower* sparked a new round of public forums and symposia in high schools, colleges, seminaries, and educational institutions across the country. This first paperback edition of the revised and expanded *Sunflower* includes additional responses by Rebecca Goldstein, Mary Gordon, Susannah Heschel, José Hobday, Matthieu Ricard, Sidney Shachnow, and Desmond Tutu.

March 1998



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~ BOOK ONE ~

The  
Sunflower

What was it Arthur said last night? I tried hard to remember. I knew it was very important. If only I were not so tired!

I was standing on the parade ground, where the prisoners were slowly assembling. They had just had their “breakfast”—a dark, bitter brew which the camp cooks had the nerve to call coffee. The men were still swallowing the stuff as they mustered for the roll call, anxious not to be late.

I had not fetched my coffee as I did not want to force my way through the crowd. The space in front of the kitchen was a favorite hunting-ground for the many sadists among the SS. They usually hid behind the huts and whenever they felt like it they swooped like birds of prey on to the helpless prisoners. Every day some were injured; it was part of the “program.”

As we stood around silent and gloomy waiting for the order to fall in my thoughts were not concerned with the dangers which always lurked on such occasions, but were entirely centered on last night's talk.

Yes, now I remembered!

...

It was late at night. We lay in the dark; there were low groans, soft whispering, and an occasional ghostly creak as someone moved on his plank bed. One could hardly discern faces but could easily identify a speaker by his voice. During the day two of the men from our hut had actually been in the Ghetto. The guard officer had given them his permission. An irrational whim? Perhaps inspired by some bribe? I did not know. The likelihood was that it was a mere whim, for what did a prisoner possess to bribe an officer with?

And now the men were making their report.

Arthur huddled up close to them so as not to miss a word. They brought news from outside the camp, war news. I listened half-asleep.

The people in the Ghetto had plenty of information and we in the camp had only a small share of their knowledge. We had to piece bits together from the scanty reports of those who worked outside during the day and overheard what the Poles and Ukrainians were talking about—facts or rumors. Sometimes even people in the street whispered a piece of news to them, from sympathy or as consolation.

Seldom was the news good, and when it was, one questioned if it was really true or mere wishful thinking. Bad news, on the other hand, we accepted unquestioningly; we were so used to it. And one piece of bad news followed another, each more alarming than the last. Today's news was worse than yesterday's, and tomorrow's would be worse still.

The stuffy atmosphere in the hut seemed to stifle thought, as week after week we slept huddled together in the same sweat-sodden clothes that we wore at work during the day. Many of us were so exhausted we did not even take off our boots. From time to time in the night a man would scream in his sleep—a nightmare perhaps, or his neighbor may have kicked him. The hut had once been a stable, and the half-open skylight did not admit enough air to provide oxygen for the hundred and fifty men who lay penned together on the tiers of bunks.

In the polyglot mass of humanity were members of varied social strata: rich and poor, highly educated and illiterate; religious men and agnostics; the kindhearted and the selfish, courageous men and the dull-witted. A common fate had made them all equal. But inevitably they splintered into small groups, close communities of men who in other circumstances would never be found together.

The group to which I belonged included my old friend Arthur and a Jew named Josek, a recent arrival. These were my closest companions. Josek was sensitive and deeply religious. His faith could be hurt by the environment of the camp and by the jeers or insinuations of others, but it could never be shaken. I, for one, could only envy him. He had an answer for everything, while we others vainly groped for explanations and fell victims to despair. His peace of mind sometimes disconcerted us; Arthur especially, whose attitude to life was ironical. He was irritated by Josek's placidity and sometimes he even mocked him or was angry with him.

Jokingly I called Josek "Rabbi." He was not of course a rabbi; he was a businessman, but religion permeated his life. He knew that he was superior to us, that we were the poorer for our lack of faith but he was ever ready to share his wealth of wisdom and piety with us and to give us strength.

But what consolation was it to know that we were not the first Jews to be persecuted? And what comfort was it when Josek, rummaging among his inexhaustible treasure of anecdotes and legends, proved to us that suffering is the companion of every man from birth onward?

As soon as Josek spoke, he forgot or ignored his surroundings completely. We had the feeling that he was simply unaware of his position. On one occasion we nearly quarreled on this point.

It was a Sunday evening. We had stopped work at midday and lay in our bunks relaxing. Someone was talking about the news; it was of course sad as usual. Josek seemed not to be listening. He asked no questions as the others were doing but suddenly he sat up and his face looked radiant. Then he began to speak.

"Our scholars say that at the Creation of man four angels stood as godparents. The angels of Mercy, Truth, Peace, and Justice. For a long time they disputed as to whether God ought to create man at all. The strongest opponent was the angel of Truth. This angered God and as a punishment He sent him into banishment on earth. But the other angels begged God to pardon him and finally he listened to them and summoned the angel of Truth back to heaven. The angel brought back a clod of earth which was soaked in his tears, tears that he had shed on being banished from heaven. And from this clod of earth the Lord God created man."

Arthur the cynic was vexed and interrupted Josek's discourse.

"Josek," he said, "I am prepared to believe that God created a Jew out of this tear-soaked clod of earth, but do you expect me to believe He also made our camp commandant, Wilhaus, out of the same material?"

"You are forgetting Cain," replied Josek.

"And you are forgetting where you are. Cain slew Abel in anger, but he never tortured him. Cain had a personal attachment to his brother, but we are strangers to our murderers."

I saw at once that Josek was deeply hurt and to prevent a quarrel I joined in the conversation.

“Arthur,” I said, “you are forgetting the thousands of years of evolution; what is known as progress.”

But both of them merely laughed bitterly—in times like these such platitudes were meaningless.

Arthur's question wasn't altogether unjustified. Were we truly all made of the same stuff? So, why were some murderers and other victims? Was there in fact any personal relationship between us, between the murderers and their victims, between our camp commandant Wilhaus, and a tortured Jew?

And last night I was lying in my bunk half-asleep. My back hurt. I felt dizzy as I listened to the voices which seemed to come from far away. I heard something about a piece of news from the BBC in London—or from Radio Moscow.

Suddenly Arthur gripped my shoulder and shook me.

“Simon, do you hear?” he cried.

“Yes,” I murmured, “I hear.”

“I hope you are listening with your ears, for your eyes are half-closed, and you really must hear what the old woman said.”

“Which old woman?” I asked. “I thought you were talking about what you had heard from the BBC?”

“That was earlier. You must have dozed off. The old woman was saying...”

“What could she have said? Does she know when we will get out of here? Or when they are going to slaughter us?”

“Nobody knows the answers to those questions. But she said something else, something that we should perhaps think about in times like these. She thought that God was on leave. Arthur paused for a moment in order to let the words sink in. “What do you think of that, Simon?” he asked. “God is on leave.”

“Let me sleep,” I replied. “Tell me when He gets back.”

For the first time since we had been living in the stable I heard my friends laughing, or had I merely dreamt it?

We were still waiting for the order to fall in. Apparently there was some sort of hitch. So I had time to ask Arthur how much of what I recalled was dream and how much real.

“Arthur,” I asked, “what were we talking about last night? About God? About ‘God on leave’?”

“Josek was in the Ghetto yesterday. He asked an old woman for news, but she only looked up to heaven and said seriously: ‘Oh God Almighty, come back from your leave and look down on Thy earth again.’”

“So that's the news; we live in a world that God has abandoned?” I commented.

I had known Arthur for years, since the time when I was a young architect and he was both my adviser and my friend. We were like brothers, he a lawyer and writer with a perpetual ironic smile around the corners of his mouth, while I had gradually become resigned to the

idea that I would never again build houses in which people would live in freedom and happiness. Our thoughts in the prison camp often ran on different lines. Arthur was already living in another world and imagined things that would probably not happen for years. True, he did not believe that we could survive, but he was convinced that in the last resort the Germans would not escape unpunished. They would perhaps succeed in killing us and millions of other innocent people, but they themselves would thereby be destroyed.

I lived more in the present: savoring hunger, exhaustion, anxiety for my family humiliations...most of all humiliations.

I once read somewhere that it is impossible to break a man's firm belief. If I ever thought that true, life in a concentration camp taught me differently. It is impossible to believe anything in a world that has ceased to regard man as man, which repeatedly "proves" that one is no longer a man. So one begins to doubt, one begins to cease to believe in a world in which God has a definite place. One really begins to think that God is on leave. Otherwise the present state of things wouldn't be possible. God must be away. And He has no deputy.

What the old woman had said in no way shocked me, she had simply stated what I had long felt to be true.

We had been back in the camp again for a week. The guards at the Eastern Railway works had carried out a fresh "registration." These registrations involved new dangers that were quite unimaginable in normal life. The oftener they registered us, the fewer we became. In SS language, registering was not a mere stocktaking. It meant much more: the redistribution of labor, culling the men who were no longer essential workers and throwing them out—usually into the death chamber. From bitter personal experience we mistrusted words whose natural meaning seemed harmless. The Germans' intentions toward us had never been harmless. We were suspicious of everything and with good reason.

Until a short time ago about two hundred of us had been employed at the Eastern Railway works. Work there was far from light, but we felt free to some extent and did not need to return to the camp each night. Our food was brought from the camp, and it tasted accordingly. But as the guards were railway police we were not continually exposed to the unpredictable whims of the SS camp patrols.

The Germans looked on many of the overseers and foremen as second-class citizens. The ethnic Germans were better treated, but the Poles and Ukrainians formed a special stratum between the self-appointed German supermen and the subhuman Jews, and already they were trembling at the thought of the day when there would be no Jews left. Then the well-oiled machinery of extermination would be turned in their direction. The ethnic Germans too did not always feel comfortable and some of them betrayed their uneasiness by behaving more "German" than the average German. A few showed sympathy toward us by slipping us pieces of bread on the quiet and seeing to it that we were not worked to death.

Among those who demanded a daily stint in cruelty was an elderly drunkard called Delosch, who, when he had nothing to drink, passed the time by beating up the prisoners. The group he guarded often bribed him with money to buy liquor, and sometimes a prisoner

would try to enlist his maudlin sympathy by describing the fate of the Jews. It worked when he was sufficiently “under the influence.” His bullying was as notorious in the works as his pet witticism. When he learned that some prisoner's family had been exterminated in the Ghetto Delosch's invariable response was: “There will always be a thousand Jews left to attend the funeral of the last Jew in Lemberg.” We heard this several times a day and Delosch was immensely proud of this particular wisecrack.

By the time the various groups had formed up on the command to fall in, we who longed for outside work had already resigned ourselves to the prospect of remaining in the camp. The camp construction work went on without interruption, and every day there were deaths in the camp; Jews were strung up, trampled underfoot, bitten by trained dogs, whipped and humiliated in every conceivable manner. Many who could bear it no longer voluntarily put an end to their lives. They sacrificed a number of days, weeks, or months of their lives, but they saved themselves countless brutalities and tortures.

Staying in camp meant that one was guarded not by a single SS man but by many, and often the guards amused themselves by wandering from one workshop to another, whipping prisoners indiscriminately, or reporting them to the commandant for alleged sabotage, which always led to dire punishment. If an SS man alleged that a prisoner was not working properly, his word was accepted, even if the prisoner could point to the work he had done. What an SS man said was always right.

The work assignment was almost finished and we from the Eastern Railway works stood around despondently. Apparently we were no longer wanted on the railway. Then suddenly a corporal came over to us and counted off fifty men. I was among these, but Arthur was left behind. We were formed up in threes, marched through the inner gate where six “askaris” were assigned us as guards. These were Russian deserters or prisoners who had enlisted for service under the Germans. The term “askari” was used during the First World War to describe the Negro soldier employed by the Germans in East Africa. For some reason the SS used the name for the Russian auxiliaries. They were employed in concentration camps to assist the guards and they knew only too well what the Germans expected from them. Almost all of them lived up to expectations. Their brutality was only mitigated by their corruptibility. The “kapos” (camp captains) and foremen kept on fairly good terms with them, providing them with liquor and cigarettes. So outside working parties were thus able to enjoy a greater degree of liberty under the guardianship of the askaris.

Strangely enough the askaris were extremely keen on singing: music in general played an important part in camp life. There was even a band. Its members included some of the best musicians in and around Lemberg. Richard Rokita, the SS lieutenant who had been a violinist in a Silesian café, was mad about “his” band. This man, who daily slaughtered prisoners from sheer lust for killing, had at the same time only one ambition—to lead a band. He arranged special accommodation for his musicians and pampered them in other ways, but they were never allowed out of camp. In the evenings they played works of Bach and Wagner and Grieg. One day Rokita brought along a songwriter called Zygmunt Schlechter and ordered him to compose a “death tango.” And whenever the band played this tune, the sadistic monster Rokita had wet eyes.

In the early mornings, when the prisoners left the camp to go to work, the band played

them out, the SS insisting that we march in time to the music. When we passed the gate we began to sing.

The camps songs were of a special type, a mixture of melancholy, sick humor, and vulgar words, a weird amalgam of Russian, Polish, and German. The obscenities suited the mentality of the askaris who constantly demanded one particular song. When they heard it broad grins came over their faces and their features lost some of their brutal appearance.

Once we had passed beyond the barbed wire, the air seemed fresher; people and houses were no longer seen through wire mesh and partly hidden by the watch towers.

Pedestrians often stood and stared at us curiously and sometimes they started to wave but soon desisted, fearing the SS might notice the gestures of friendliness.

Traffic on the streets seemed uninfluenced by the war. The front line was seven hundred miles away, and the presence of a few soldiers was the only reminder that it was not peacetime.

One askari began to sing, and we joined in although few of us were in the mood for singing. Women among the gaping passersby turned their heads away shamefacedly when they heard the obscene passages in the song and naturally this delighted the askaris. One of them left the column, ran over to the pavement to accost a girl. We couldn't hear what he said, but we could well imagine it as the girl blushed and walked rapidly away.

Our gaze roamed the crowds on the pavements looking anxiously for any face we might recognize, although some kept eyes on the ground, fearing to encounter an acquaintance.

You could read on the faces of the passersby that we were written off as doomed. The people of Lemberg had become accustomed to the sight of tortured Jews and they looked at us as one looks at a herd of cattle being driven to the slaughterhouse. At such times I was consumed by a feeling that the world had conspired against us and our fate was accepted without a protest, without a trace of sympathy.

I for one no longer wanted to look at the indifferent faces of the spectators. Did any of them reflect that there were still Jews and as long as they were there, as long as the Nazis were still busy with the Jews, they would leave the citizens alone? I suddenly remembered an experience I had had a few days before, not far from here. As we were returning to camp a man whom I had formerly known passed by, a fellow student, now a Polish engineer. Perhaps understandably he was afraid to nod to me openly, but I could see from the expression in his eyes that he was surprised to see me still alive. For him we were as good as dead; each of us was carrying around his own death certificate, from which only the date was missing.

Our column suddenly came to a halt at a crossroads.

I could see nothing that might be holding us up but I noticed on the left of the street there was a military cemetery. It was enclosed by a low barbed wire fence. The wires were threaded through sparse bushes and low shrubs, but between them you could see the graves aligned in stiff rows.

And on each grave there was planted a sunflower, as straight as a soldier on parade.

I stared spellbound. The flower heads seemed to absorb the sun's rays like mirrors and draw them down into the darkness of the ground as my gaze wandered from the sunflower to the grave. It seemed to penetrate the earth and suddenly I saw before me a periscope. It was gaily colored and butterflies fluttered from flower to flower. Were they carrying messages from grave to grave? Were they whispering something to each flower to pass on to the soldier below? Yes, this was just what they were doing; the dead were receiving light and messages.

Suddenly I envied the dead soldiers. Each had a sunflower to connect him with the living world, and butterflies to visit his grave. For me there would be no sunflower. I would be buried in a mass grave, where corpses would be piled on top of me. No sunflower would ever bring light into my darkness, and no butterflies would dance above my dreadful tomb.

I do not know how long we stood there. The man behind gave me a push and the procession started again. As we walked on I still had my head turned toward the sunflowers. They were countless and indistinguishable one from another. But the men who were buried under them had not severed all connection with the world. Even in death they were superior to us...

I rarely thought of death. I knew that it was waiting for me and must come sooner or later, so gradually I had accustomed myself to its proximity. I was not even curious as to how it would come. There were too many possibilities. All I hoped was that it would be quick. Just how it would happen I left to Fate.

But for some strange reason the sight of the sunflowers had aroused new thoughts in me. I felt I would come across them again; that they were a symbol with a special meaning for me.

As we reached Janowska Street, leaving the cemetery behind us, I turned my head for a last look at the forest of sunflowers.

We still did not know where we were being taken. My neighbor whispered to me: "Perhaps they have set up new workshops in the Ghetto."

It was possible. The rumor was that new workshops were being started. More and more German businessmen were settling Lemberg. They were not so anxious for profits. It was more important for them to keep their employees and save them from military service which was comparatively easy in peaceful Lemberg, far from the front line. What most of these enterprises brought with them from Germany was writing paper, a rubber stamp, a few foremen, and some office furniture. Only a short time ago Lemberg had been in the hands of the Russians, who had nationalized most of the building firms, many of which had previously been owned by Jews. When the Russians withdrew, they were unable to take the machinery and tools with them. So what they left behind was taken to a "booty depot" and was now being divided among the newly established German factories.

There was no trouble in any case about getting labor. So long as there were still Jews, one could get cheap, almost free labor. The workshop applying had merely to be recognized as important for the war, but a certain degree of protection and bribery was also necessary. Those with connections got permission to set up branches in occupied territory, they were given cheap labor in the shape of hundreds of Jews, and they also had an extensive machinery depot at their disposal. The men they brought with them from Germany were exempt from



active service. Homes in the German quarter of Lemberg were assigned to them—very nice houses abandoned by wealthy Poles and Jews to make room for the master race.

To the Jews it was an advantage that so many German enterprises were being started in Poland. Work was not particularly hard, and as a rule the workshop managers fought for their Jews, without whose cheap labor the workshops would have had to move further east nearer the front.

All around me I heard the anxious whispers: “Where are we going?”

“Going” means to carry out with the feet a decision which the brain has formed, but in our case our brains made no decisions. Our feet merely imitated what the front man did. They stopped when he stopped and they moved on when he moved on.

We turned right into Janowska Street; how often had I sauntered along it, as a student and later as an architect? For a time I had even had lodgings there with a fellow student from Przemyśl.

Now we marched mechanically along the street—a column of doomed men.

It was not yet eight o'clock, but there was already plenty of traffic. Peasants were coming into the city to barter their wares; they no longer had confidence in money as is always the case in war time and in crises. The peasants paid no attention to our column.

As we moved out of the city the askaris, having sung themselves hoarse, were taking a rest. Detrained soldiers with their baggage hurried along Janowska; SS men passed, looking contemptuously at us, and at one point an army officer stopped to stare. Around his neck hung a camera, but he could not make up his mind to use it on us. Hesitatingly he passed the camera from right to left hand and then let it go again. Perhaps he was afraid of trouble with the SS.

We came in sight of the church at the end of Janowska Street, a lofty structure of red brick and squared stone. Which direction would the askari, at the head of our column, take? To the right, down to the station, or to the left along Sapielny Street, at the end of which lay the notorious Loncki Prison?

We turned left.

I knew the way well. In Sapielny Street stood the Technical High School. For years I had walked along this street several times a day, when I was working for the Polish diploma.

Even then for us Jewish students Sapielny Street was a street of doom. Only a few Jewish families lived there and in times of disorder the district was avoided by Jews. Here lived Poles—regular officers, professional men, manufacturers, and officials. Their sons were known as the “gilded youth” of Lemberg and supplied most of the students in the Technical High School and in the High School of Agriculture. Many of them were rowdies, hooligans, antisemites, and Jews who fell into their hands were often beaten up and left bleeding on the ground. They fastened razor blades to the end of their sticks which they used as weapons against the Jewish students. In the evenings it was dangerous to walk through this street even if one were merely Jewish in appearance, especially at times when the young National Democrats or Radical Nationals were turning their anti-Jewish slogans from theory into practice. It was rare for a policeman to be around to protect the victims.

What was incomprehensible was that at a time when Hitler was on Poland's western frontiers, poised to annex Polish territory, these Polish "patriots" could think of only one thing: the Jews and their hatred for them.

In Germany, at that time, they were building new factories to raise armament potential to the maximum; they were building strategic roads straight toward Poland and then were calling up more and more young Germans for military service. But the Polish parliament paid little heed to this menace; it had "more important" tasks—new regulations for kosher butchering, for instance—which might make life more difficult for the Jews.

Such parliamentary debates were always followed by street battles, for the Jewish intelligentsia was ever a thorn in the flesh of the antisemites.

Two years before the outbreak of war the Radical elements had invented a "day without Jews," whereby they hoped to reduce the number of Jewish academics, to interfere with their studies and make it impossible for them to take examinations. On these feast days they assembled inside the gates of the High Schools a crowd of fraternity students wearing ribbons inscribed "the day without the Jews." It always coincided with examination days. The "day without the Jews" was thus a movable festival, and as the campus of the Technical High School was ex-territorial, the police were not allowed to interfere except by express request of the Rector. Such requests were rarely made. Although the Radicals formed a mere 2 percent of the students, this minority reigned because of the cowardice and laziness of the majority. The great mass of the students were unconcerned about the Jews or indeed about order and justice. They were not willing to expose themselves, they lacked willpower, they were wrapped up in their own problems, completely indifferent to the fate of Jewish students.

The proportions were about the same among the teaching staff. Some were confirmed antisemites, but even from those who were not, the Jewish students had trouble getting a substitute date for the examinations which they missed because of the "day without Jews" outbreaks. For Jews who came from poor families the loss of a term meant inevitably an end to their studies. So they had to go to the High School even on the antisemitic feast days and this led to grotesque situations. In the side streets ambulances waited patiently and they had plenty to do on examination days. The police too waited to prevent violence from spreading outside the campus. From time to time a few of the most brutal students were arrested and tried but they emerged from prison as heroes and on their lapels they proudly wore a badge designed as a prison gate. They had suffered for their country's cause! Honored by their comrades, they were given special privileges by some of the professors, and never was there any question of expelling them.

Such memories crowded into my mind as, under the guard of the askaris, I marched past the familiar houses. I looked into the faces of the passersby. Perhaps I would see a former fellow student. I would spot him at once because he would visibly show the hatred and contempt which they always evinced at the mere sight of a Jew. I had seen this expression too often during my time as a student ever to forget it.

Where are they now, these super-patriots who dreamt of a "Poland without Jews"? Perhaps the day when there would be no more Jews was not far off, and their dreams would be realized. Only there wouldn't be a Poland either!

We halted in front of the Technical High School. It looked unaltered. The main building, neoclassic structure in terra-cotta and yellow, stood some distance back from the street, from which it was separated by a low stone wall with a high iron fence. At examination time I had often walked along this fence and gazed through the railings at the Radical students waiting for their victims. Over the broad entrance gates would be a banner inscribed "the day without Jews." From the gate to the door of the building armed students forming a cordon would scrutinize everybody who wanted to enter the building.

So here I was, once again standing outside this gateway. This time there were no banner, no students to make the Jews run the gauntlet, only a few German guards and, above the entrance, a board inscribed "Reserve Hospital." An SS man from the camp had a few words with a sentry, and then the gate opened. We marched past the well-kept lawns, turned left from the main entrance and were led round the building into the courtyard. It lay in deep shadow. Ambulances drove in and out, and once or twice we had to stand aside to let them pass. Then we were handed over to a sergeant of the medical corps, who assigned us our duties. I had a curious feeling of strangeness in these surroundings although I had spent several years here. I tried to remember whether I had ever been in this back courtyard. What would have brought me here? We were usually content to be able to get into the building and out again without being molested, or without explaining the topography.

Large concrete containers were arranged around the courtyard and they seemed to be filled with bloodstained bandages. The ground was covered with empty boxes, sacks, and packing material which a group of prisoners was busy loading into trucks. The air stank with a mixture of strong-smelling medicaments, disinfectants, and putrefaction.

Red Cross sisters and medical orderlies were hurrying to and fro. The askaris had left the shady smelly courtyard and were sunning themselves on the grass a short distance away. Some were rolling cigarettes of newspaper stuffed with tobacco—just as they were wont to do in Russia.

Some lightly wounded and convalescent soldiers sat on the benches, watching the askaris whom they recognized at once as Russians in spite of the German uniforms they wore. We could hear them inquiring about us too.

One soldier got up from the bench and came over toward us. He looked at us in an impersonal way as if we were animals in a zoo. Probably he was wondering how long we had to live. Then he pointed to his arm, which was in a sling, and called out: "You Jewish swine, that's what your brothers the damned Communists have done for me. But you'll soon kick the bucket, all of you."

The other soldiers didn't seem to share his views. They looked at us sympathetically and one of them shook his head doubtfully; but none dared to say a word. The soldier who had approached us uttered a few more curses and then sat down again in the sunshine.

I thought to myself that this vile creature would one day have a sunflower planted on his grave to watch over him. I looked at him closely and all at once I saw only the sunflower. My stare seemed to upset him, for he picked up a stone and threw it at me. The stone missed and the sunflower vanished. At that moment I felt desperately alone and wished Arthur had been included in my group.

The orderly in charge of us finally led us away. Our job was to carry cartons filled with rubbish out of the building. Their contents apparently came from the operating theaters and the stench made one's throat contract.

As I stepped aside to get a few breaths of clean air, I noticed a small, plump nurse who wore the gray-blue uniform with white facings and the regulation white cap. She looked at me curiously and then came straight over to me.

“Are you a Jew?” she asked.

I looked at her wonderingly. Why did she ask, could not she see it for herself from my clothes and my features? Was she trying to be insulting? What was the object of her question?

A sympathetic soul perhaps, I thought. Maybe she wanted to slip me some bread, and was afraid to do it here with the others looking on.

Two months previously when I was working on the Eastern Railway, loading oxygen cylinders, a soldier had climbed out of a truck on a siding close by and come over to me. He said he had been watching us for some time, and we looked as if we did not get enough to eat.

“In my knapsack over there you'll find a piece of bread; go and fetch it.”

I asked. “Why don't you give it to me yourself?”

“It is forbidden to give anything to a Jew.”

“I know,” I said. “All the same if you want me to have it you give it to me.”

He smiled. “No, you take it. Then I can swear with a clear conscience that I didn't give it to you.”

I thought of this incident as I followed the Red Cross nurse into the building, in accordance with her instructions.

The thick walls made the inside of the building refreshingly cool. The nurse walked rather fast. Where was she taking me? If her purpose was to give me something, then she could have done it here and now in front of the staircase, since nobody was in sight. But the nurse just turned round once, to confirm that I was still following her.

We climbed the staircase, and, strange to relate, I could not remember ever having seen it before. At the next story I saw nurses were coming toward us and a doctor looked at me sharply as if to say: What is that fellow doing here?

We reached the upper hall, where, not so long ago, my diploma had been handed to me.

The nurse stopped and exchanged a few words with another nurse. I asked myself whether I had better bolt. I was on well-known ground. I knew where each corridor led to and could easily escape. Let her look for somebody else, whatever it was she needed.

Suddenly I forgot why I was there. I forgot the nurse and even the camp. There on the right was the way to Professor Bagierski's office and there on the left the way to Professor Derdacki's. Both were notorious for their dislike of Jewish students. I had done my diploma work with Derdacki—a design for a sanatorium. And Bagierski had corrected many of my essays. When he had to deal with a Jewish student he seemed to lose his breath and stutted

more than usual. I could still see his hand making lines across my drawings with a thick pencil, a hand with a large signet ring.

Then the nurse signaled me to wait, and I came back to earth. I leaned over the balustrade and looked down at the busy throng in the lower hall. Wounded were being brought in on stretchers. There was a constant coming and going. Soldiers limped past on crutches and one soldier on a stretcher looked up at me, his features distorted with pain.

Then another fragment from the past recurred to my memory. It was during the student riots of 1936. The anti-semitic bands had hurled a Jewish student over the balustrade into the lower hall and he lay there just like this soldier, possibly on the very same spot.

Just past the balustrade was a door which had led to the office of the Dean of Architecture and it was here we handed in our exercise books to the professors to be marked. The Dean at my time was a quiet man, very polite, very correct. We had never known whether he was for or against the Jews. He always responded to our greetings with distant politeness. One could almost physically feel his aloofness. Or was it merely an excess of sensitiveness that made us divide people into two groups: those that liked Jews and those who disliked them. Constant Jew-baiting gave rise to such thoughts.

The nurse came back and dragged me once again out of the past. I could see from the look in her eyes that she was pleased to find me still there.

She walked quickly along the balustrade around the hall and stopped in front of the door of the Dean's room.

“Wait here till I call you.”

I nodded and looked up the staircase. Orderlies were bringing down a motionless figure on a stretcher. There had never been a lift in the building and the Germans had not installed one. After a few moments the nurse came out of the Dean's room, caught me by the arm, and pushed me through the door.

I looked for the familiar objects, the writing desk, the cupboards in which our papers were kept, but those relics of the past had vanished. There was now only a white bed with a night table beside it. Something white was looking at me out of the blankets. At first I could not grasp the situation.

Then the nurse bent over the bed and whispered and I heard a somewhat deeper whisper apparently in answer. Although the place was in semidarkness I could now see a figure wrapped in white, motionless on the bed. I tried to trace the outlines of the body under the sheets and looked for its head.

The nurse straightened up and said quietly: “Stay here.” Then she went out of the room.

From the bed I heard a weak, broken voice exclaim: “Please come nearer, I can't speak loudly.”

Now I could see the figure in the bed far more clearly. White, bloodless hands on the counterpane, head completely bandaged with openings only for mouth, nose, and ears. The feeling of unreality persisted. It was an uncanny situation: those corpse-like hands, the bandages, and the place in which this strange encounter was taking place.

I did not know who this wounded man was, but obviously he was a German.

Hesitatingly, I sat down on the edge of the bed. The sick man, perceiving this, said softly, "Please come a little nearer, to talk loudly is exhausting."

I obeyed. His almost bloodless hand groped for mine as he tried to raise himself slightly on the bed.

My bewilderment was intense. I did not know whether this unreal scene was actuality or dream. Here was I in the ragged clothes of a concentration camp prisoner in the room of the former Dean of Lemberg High School—now a military hospital—in a sickroom which must be in reality a death chamber.

As my eyes became accustomed to the semidarkness I could see that the white bandages were mottled with yellow stains. Perhaps ointment, or was it pus? The bandaged head was spectral.

I sat on the bed spellbound. I could not take my eyes off the stricken man and the gray and yellow stains on the bandages seemed to me to be moving, taking new shapes before my eyes.

"I have not much longer to live," whispered the sick man in a barely audible voice. "I know the end is near."

Then he fell silent. Was he thinking what next to say, or had his premonition of death scared him? I looked more closely. He was very thin, and under his shirt his bones were clearly visible, almost bursting through his parched skin.

I was unmoved by his words. The way I had been forced to exist in the prison camps had destroyed in me any feeling or fear about death.

Sickness, suffering, and doom were the constant companions of us Jews. Such things no longer frightened us.

Nearly a fortnight before this confrontation with the dying man I had had occasion to visit a store in which cement sacks were kept. I heard groans and going to investigate, I saw one of the prisoners lying among the sacks. I asked him what was the matter.

"I am dying," he muttered in a choked voice, "I shall die; there is nobody in the world to help me and nobody to mourn my death." Then he added casually, "I am twenty-two."

I ran out of the shed and found the prison doctor. He shrugged his shoulders and turned away. "There are a couple of hundred men working here today. Six of them are dying." He did not even ask where the dying man was.

"You ought to at least go and look at him," I protested.

"I couldn't do anything for him," he answered.

"But you as a doctor have more liberty to move about, you could explain your absence to the guards better than I could. It is frightful for a man to die lonely and abandoned. Help him at least in his dying hour."

"Good, good," he said. But I knew that he would not go. He too had lost all feeling for death.

At the evening roll call there were six corpses. They were included without comment. The doctor's estimate was correct.

"I know," muttered the sick man, "that at this moment thousands of men are dying. Death everywhere. It is neither infrequent nor extraordinary. I am resigned to dying soon, but before that I want to talk about an experience which is torturing me. Otherwise I cannot die in peace."

He was breathing heavily. I had the feeling that he was staring at me through his head bandage. Perhaps he could see through the yellow stains, although they were nowhere near his eyes. I could not look at him.

"I heard from one of the sisters that there were Jewish prisoners working in the courtyard. Previously she had brought me a letter from my mother...She read it out to me and then she went away. I have been here for three months. Then I came to a decision. After thinking it over for a long time...

"When the sister came back I asked her to help me. I wanted her to fetch a Jewish prisoner to me, but I warned she must be careful, that nobody must see her. The nurse, who had no idea why I had made this request, didn't reply and went away. I gave up all hope of her taking such a risk for my sake. But when she came in a little while ago she bent over me and whispered that there was a Jew outside. She said it as if complying with the last wish of a dying man. She knows how it is with me. I am in a death chamber, that I know. They let the hopeless cases die alone. Perhaps they don't want the others to be upset."

Who was this man to whom I was listening? What was he trying to say to me? Was he a Jew who had camouflaged himself as a German and now, on his deathbed, wanted to look at a Jew again? According to gossip in the Ghetto and later in the camp there were Jews in Germany who were "Aryan" in appearance and had enlisted in the army with false papers. They had even got into the SS. That was their method of survival. Was this man such a Jew? Or perhaps a half-Jew, son of a mixed marriage? When he made a slight movement I noticed that his other hand rested on a letter but which now slipped to the floor. I bent down and picked it back on the counterpane.

I didn't touch his hand and he could not have seen my movement—nevertheless he reacted.

"Thank you—that is my mother's letter," the words came softly from his lips.

And again I had the feeling he was staring at me.

His hand groped for the letter and drew it toward him, as if he hoped to derive a little strength and courage from contact with the paper. I thought of my own mother who would never write me another letter. Five weeks previously she had been dragged out of the Ghetto in a raid. The only article of value which we still possessed, after all the looting, was a gold watch which I had given to my mother so that she might be able to buy herself off when they came to fetch her. A neighbor who had valid papers told me later what had happened to the watch. My mother gave it to the Ukrainian policeman who came to arrest her. He went away but soon came back and bundled my mother and others into a truck that carried them away to a place from which no letters ever emerged...

Time seemed to stand still as I listened to the croaking of the dying man.

"My name is Karl...I joined the SS as a volunteer. Of course—when you hear the word SS..."

He stopped. His throat seemed to be dry and he tried hard to swallow a lump in it.

Now I knew he couldn't be a Jew or half-Jew who had hidden inside a German uniform. How could I have imagined such a thing? But in those days anything was possible.

"I must tell you something dreadful...Something inhuman. It happened a year ago...has a year already gone by?" These last words he spoke almost to himself.

"Yes, it is a year," he continued, "a year since the crime I committed. I have to talk to someone about it, perhaps that will help."

Then his hand grasped mine. His fingers clutched mine tightly, as though he sensed I was trying unconsciously to withdraw my hand when I heard the word "crime." Whence had I derived the strength? Or was it that I was so weak that I could not take my hand away?

"I must tell you of this horrible deed—tell you because...you are a Jew."

Could there be some kind of horror unknown to us?

All the atrocities and tortures that a sick brain can invent are familiar to me. I have felt them on my own body and I have seen them happen in the camp. Any story that this sick man had to tell couldn't surpass the horror stories which my comrades in the camp exchanged with each other at night.

I wasn't really curious about his story, and inwardly I only hoped the nurse had remembered to tell an askari where I was. Otherwise they would be looking for me. Perhaps they would think I had escaped...

I was uneasy. I could hear voices outside the door, but I recognized one as the nurse's voice and that reassured me. The strangled voice went on: "Some time elapsed before I realized what guilt I had incurred."

I stared at the bandaged head. I didn't know what he wanted to confess, but I knew for sure that after his death a sunflower would grow on his grave. Already a sunflower was turning toward the window, the window through which the sun was sending its rays into this death chamber. Why was the sunflower already making its appearance? Because it would accompany him to the cemetery, stand on his grave, and sustain his connection with life. And this I envied him. I envied him also because in his last moments he was able to think of a living mother who would be grieving for him.

"I was not born a murderer..." he wheezed.

He breathed heavily and was silent.

"I come from Stuttgart and I am now twenty-one. That is too soon to die. I have had very little out of life."

Of course it is too soon to die I thought. But did the Nazis ask whether our children who they were about to gas had ever had anything out of life? Did they ask whether it was too soon for them to die? Certainly nobody had ever asked me the question.

As if he had guessed my mental reaction he said: "I know what you are thinking and understand. But may I not still say that I am too young...?"

Then in a burst of calm coherency he went on: "My father, who was manager of a factory, was a convinced Social Democrat. After 1933 he got into difficulties, but that happened to many. My mother brought me up as a Catholic, I was actually a server in the church and a special favorite of our priest who hoped I would one day study theology. But it turned out



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