phone rang. I deliberately let it ring three or four times and then picked up the receiver reluctantly. It was an employee of the Stratton House.

'Mr. Karski, I was told to inform you that Szmul Zygelbojm, a member of the Polish National Council and Representative of the Bund in London committed suicide yesterday. He left some notes, saying that he did all he could to help the Jews in Poland but failed, that all his brothers will perish, and that he is joining them. He turned on the gas in his apartment.'

I hung up.

At first I felt nothing at all, then a wave of mingled shock, grief, and guilt. I felt as though I had personally handed Zygelbojm his death warrant, even though I had been only the instrument. Painfully, it occurred to me that he might have found my answer to his last question cold and unsympathetic. I had become, I thought to myself, so cynical, so quick and harsh in my judgment, that I could no longer estimate the degree of self-sacrifice possible to a man like Zygelbojm. For days afterwards I felt all my confidence in myself and in my work vanishing and I deliberately forced myself to work twice as hard in order to avoid these intolerable reflections.

Since then I have often thought about Szmul Zygelbojm, one of the most tragic victims of this war and its horrors. For Zygelbojm's death did not have a shadow of consolation. It was self-imposed and utterly hopeless. I wonder now how many people can understand what it means to die as he did for a cause that would be victorious, yet with the certain knowledge that victory would not stave off the sacrifice of his people, the annihilation of all that was most meaningful to him. Of all the deaths that have taken place in this war, surely Zygelbojm's is one of the most frightening, the sharpest revelation of the extent to which the world has become cold and unfriendly, nations and individuals separated by immense gulfs of indifference, selfishness, and convenience. All too plainly, it marks the fact that the domination of mutual suspicion, estrangement, and lack of sympathy has progressed so far that even those who wish and strive for a remedy by every possible means are powerless and able to accomplish pitifully little.

CHAPTER 30

'To Die in Agony...'

A FEW days after my second visit to the Warsaw ghetto, the Bund leader was to arrange an opportunity for me to see the Jewish death camp.

The camp was located near the town of Belzec about one hundred miles east of Warsaw and was well-known all over Poland from the tales of horror that were circulated about it. The common report was that every Jew who reached it, without exception, was doomed to death. The Bund leader had never been in it but had the most detailed information in its operations.

I was to go on a day when executions were scheduled. The information was easy to obtain because many of the Estonian, Latvian, and Ukrainian attendants who worked there under Gestapo supervision were in the service of Jewish organizations. Not from any humane or political consideration, but for money. I was to wear the uniform of one of the Estonians who would stay home while I went in with his papers. I was assured that chaos, corruption, and panic prevailed in the camp to such an extent that there was no chance of my disguise being penetrated. Moreover, the whole expedition was perfectly organized in advance. I would go through a door habitually guarded only by Germans and Ukrainians, for an Estonian might sense a stranger in me. The Estonian uniform, itself, constituted a pass, so that my papers would probably not be inspected. To make the camouflage more foolproof, still another bribed Estonian militia man would

accompany me. Since I knew German, I could talk with the German guards if it became necessary and they, too, could be bribed.

The plan seemed simple and flawless. I agreed without any hesitation and without the slightest fear of being caught.

Early in the morning of the day we had selected, I left Warsaw in the company of a Jew who worked outside the ghetto in the Jewish underground movement. We arrived in Belzec shortly after midday and went directly to the place where the Estonian was supposed to be waiting to give me his uniform. It was a little grocery store that had once belonged to a Jew. The Jew had been killed and since then it was being run, with the permission of the Gestapo, by a local farmer who was, of course, a member of the Underground.

My Estonian uniform was there waiting for me but the man to whom it belonged had evidently decided it was more prudent to remain away. Knowing what was in the air, he had decided it was safer not to have his face seen by me since, for all he knew, I might take it into my head to betray him later. However, he had left me in good order a complete outfit: trousers, long boots, a belt, a tie, and a cap. The idea of letting his personal papers be used had apparently given him qualms, too. Instead he had left me the papers of one of his colleagues who had probably returned to his native Estonia a long time ago and had taken the opportunity to sell his papers. I was not surprised. Selling papers was an established business in Poland, not at all frowned upon. The uniform and the shoes fitted me remarkably well but the cap came down to my ears. I stuffed it with papers and squeezed it about till it fitted. Then I asked my companion how I looked. He said I looked like a model Estonian militia man.

An hour or two later the Estonian who was to accompany me arrived. He spoke German so we had no difficulty in understanding each other. My program had not been changed. We would enter through the eastern gate, as planned. After we entered, my guide would take me to a place suited for observation. He confirmed the Bund leader's assurance that the camp was so disorganized, chaotic, and indifferently managed that I could stroll about in perfect freedom. I was to stick to the place assigned me throughout the executions and in that way I would miss nothing.

After the executions all the guards would be leaving the camp. I was to join them, mingling with the mob of mixed attendants but avoiding the Estonians. He reiterated the latter precaution solemnly, warning me that if I had any close contact with them, it would be easy for them to recognize me as not 'their man.'

He gave me a brief, dissatisfied, critical scrutiny and then began to order me about like a martinet. I was told to polish my boots, fix my tie, and tighten my belt. He even informed me that my posture was too relaxed and undignified. I said nothing and did as I was told but with a slightly grudging air, striking a pose of exaggerated military stiffness. He relented a little and excused himself on the grounds that the Germans were very severe about such matters and did not like to see 'their Latvians, Estonians, and Ukrainians negligently dressed.'

The camp was about a mile and a half from the store. We started walking rapidly, taking a side lane to avoid meeting people and possibly having to endure an inspection. It took about twenty minutes to get to the camp but we became aware of its presence in less than half that time. About a mile away from the camp we began to hear shouts, shots, and screams. The noise increased steadily as we approached.

'What's happening?' I asked. 'What's the meaning of all that noise?'

'The Jews are hot,' he said, grinning as though he had said something witty.

I must have glared at him for he changed his tone abruptly.

'What could it be?' He shrugged. 'They are bringing in a "batch" today.'

I knew what he meant and did not inquire further. We walked on while the noise increased alarmingly. From time to time a series of long screams or a particularly inhuman groan would set the hair on my scalp bristling.

'What are the chances of anyone's escaping?' I asked my companion, hoping to hear an optimistic answer.

'None at all, sir,' he answered, dashing my hopes to the ground. 'Once they get this far, their goose is cooked.'

'You mean there isn't a single chance of anybody's escaping from the camp, even with the way things are there?' I hated to believe it.

'Well, from the camp itself, maybe. But not alone. With a guard like me helping, it can be done. But it's a terrible risk,' he said, wagging his head solemnly. 'The Jew and I could both get killed.'

We trudged on, the Estonian watching me out of the corner of his eye, while I pretended to be more or less indifferent to his presence.

'Of course,' he said craftily, 'if a Jew pays well — very well — it can be done. But it is very risky, it has got to be handled right. . . .'

'How can they pay? They don't have any money on them, do they?'

'Say, we don't try to get money out of them. We ain't so dumb. We get paid in advance. It's strictly a cash proposition. We don't even deal with those in the camp' — he gestured contemptuously in the direction of the noise. 'We do business with people on the outside, like you. If somebody comes to me and tells me that such-and-such a Jew is going to arrive and that he wants him "cheated out," well, if he is willing to fork out plenty of hard cash, in advance, then I do what I can.'

'Have you saved many Jews so far?'

'Not as many as I'd like, but a few, anyhow.'

'Are there many more good men like you there who are so willing to save the Jews?'

'Save them? Say, who wants to save them?' He looked at me in bewilderment as though I was talking unheard-of nonsense. 'But if they pay, that's a different story. We can all use some money.'

I did not venture to disagree. It would have been hopeless to try to persuade him of anything different. I looked at his heavy, rather good-natured face and wondered how the war had come to develop such cruel habits in him. From what I had seen he seemed to be a simple, average man, not particularly good or bad. His hands were the calloused but supple hands of a good farmer. In normal times that was what he probably had been, and a good father, a family man, and a church-goer. Now, under the pressure of the Gestapo and the cajoleries of the Nazis, with everyone about him engaged in a greedy competition that knew no limits, he had been changed into a professional butcher of human beings.

He had caught on to his trade well and discussed its niceties, used its professional jargon as coolly as a carpenter discussing his craft.

'And what are you here for?' The question was at once shrewd and innocent.

'Well, you see, it's this way. I'd like to "save" some Jews, too,' I said with an air of sly conspiracy, 'with your help, of course. That's why I've come to the camp to see how everything works.'

'Well, don't you go trying to do anything without us,' he warned me. The prospect of competition seemed to upset him. I hastened to reassure him.

'Don't be silly. Why should I work without you? We both want to make money and we can both help each other. We would be foolish to work against each other.'

He was now highly interested.

'How will your people pay you — a flat rate or for each Jew separately?'

'Now, that's just what I've been wondering about. Which do you think I ought to ask for, which pays more in the long run?'

He paused to deliberate and give me the full benefit of his professional experience.

'If I were you,' he said, 'I'd make my rates per Jew. You lose too many opportunities of making a haul if you work on a flat rate. You see, each Jew is different. If you get hold of someone who is very anxious to get someone out and if he looks as though he can pay well, you can get a lot out of him if you use your head.'

'You are perfectly right. I guess that's the way I'll work.'

'You'll be better off,' he said. 'But remember — fifty-fifty. Don't try any tricks.'

I hastened to reassure him, telling that it would be foolish and harmful to my work for me to attempt cheating him. Besides, weren't we both honest men, was it likely that we should try to cheat each other?

This satisfied him completely. I now had the status of a younger colleague. He wondered if I was going to stay permanently in the business of 'Jew dealing.' I told him I probably would if it remained lucrative. He expressed considerable envy at the idea of working directly from the ghetto; after all, it must be much easier to 'save' Jews from there. That was quite true, I

admitted, but on the other hand, you got much less per Jew in the ghetto. He acknowledged the justice of my point by a sympathetic nod. Everything had its drawbacks nowadays. Was I doing at all well? No, I barely managed to make a living. He cursed, '*zum hundert Teufel,*' if the *Verdammte* war would only end. When did I think the Germans would win? I proceeded to doubt if the Germans would win at all. This struck him as utterly ridiculous. There was no room for doubt. Look at what had happened so far. Hitler was a fiend, a demon, a magician. Nobody had a chance against him.

As we approached to within a few hundred yards of the camp, the shouts, cries, and shots cut off further conversation. I noticed, or thought I noticed, an unpleasant stench that seemed to have come from decomposing bodies mixed with horse manure. This may have been an illusion. The Estonian was, in any case, completely impervious to it. He even began to hum some sort of folk-tune to himself. We passed through a small grove of decrepit-looking trees and emerged directly in front of the loud, sobbing, reeking camp of death.

It was on a large, flat plain and occupied about a square mile. It was surrounded on all sides by a formidable barbed-wire fence, nearly two yards in height and in good repair. Inside the fence, at intervals of about fifteen yards, guards were standing, holding rifles with fixed bayonets ready for use. Around the outside of the fence militia men circulated on constant patrol. The camp itself contained a few small sheds or barracks. The rest of the area was completely covered by a dense, pulsating, throbbing, noisy human mass. Starved, stinking, gesticulating, insane human beings in constant, agitated motion. Through them, forcing paths if necessary with their rifle butts, walked the German police and the militia men. They walked in silence, their faces bored and indifferent. They looked like shepherds bringing a flock to the market or pig-dealers among their pigs. They had the tired, vaguely disgusted appearance of men doing a routine, tedious job.

Into the fence, a few passages had been cut, and gates made of poles tied together with barbed-wire swung back, allowing entrance. Each gate was guarded by two men who slouched about carelessly. We stopped for a moment to collect ourselves. To my left I noticed the railroad tracks which passed about a hundred

yards from the camp. From the camp to the track a sort of raised passage had been built from old boards. On the track a dusty freight train waited, motionless.

The Estonian followed my gaze with the interest of a person seeing what kind of an impression his home made on a visitor. He proceeded eagerly to enlighten me.

'That's the train they'll load them on. You'll see it all.'

We came to a gate. Two German non-coms were standing there talking. I could hear snatches of their conversation. They seemed to be talking about a night they had spent in a near-by town. I hung back a bit. The Estonian seemed to think I was losing my nerve.

'Go ahead,' he whispered impatiently into my ear. 'Don't be afraid. They won't even inspect your papers. They don't care about the likes of you.'

We walked up to the gate and saluted the non-coms vigorously. They returned the salute indifferently and we passed through, entering the camp, and mingled unnoticed with the crowd.

'Follow me,' he said quite loudly. 'I'll take you to a good spot.'

We passed an old Jew, a man of about sixty, sitting on the ground without a stitch of clothing on him. I was not sure whether his clothes had been torn off or whether he, himself, had thrown them away in a fit of madness. Silent, motionless, he sat on the ground, no one paying him the slightest attention. Not a muscle or fiber in his whole body moved. He might have been dead or petrified except for his preternaturally animated eyes, which blinked rapidly and incessantly. Not far from him a small child, clad in a few rags, was lying on the ground. He was all alone and crouched quivering on the ground, staring up with the large, frightened eyes of a rabbit. No one paid any attention to him, either.

The Jewish mass vibrated, trembled, and moved to and fro as if united in a single, insane, rhythmic trance. They waved their hands, shouted, quarreled, cursed, and spat at each other. Hunger, thirst, fear, and exhaustion had driven them all insane. I had been told that they were usually left in the camp for three or four days without a drop of water or food.

They were all former inhabitants of the Warsaw ghetto. When they had been rounded up they were given permission to take

about ten pounds of baggage. Most of them took food, clothes, bedding, and, if they had any, money and jewelry. On the train, the Germans who accompanied them stripped them of everything that had the slightest value, even snatching away any article of clothing to which they took a fancy. They were left a few rags for apparel, bedding, and a few scraps of food. Those who left the train without any food starved continuously from the moment they set foot in the camp.

There was no organization or order of any kind. None of them could possibly help or share with each other and they soon lost any self-control or any sense whatsoever except the barest instinct of self-preservation. They had become, at this stage, completely dehumanized. It was, moreover, typical autumn weather, cold, raw, and rainy. The sheds could not accommodate more than two to three thousand people and every 'batch' included more than five thousand. This meant that there were always two to three thousand men, women, and children scattered about in the open, suffering exposure as well as everything else.

The chaos, the squalor, the hideousness of it all was simply indescribable. There was a suffocating stench of sweat, filth, decay, damp straw and excrement. To get to my post we had to squeeze our way through this mob. It was a ghastly ordeal. I had to push foot by foot through the crowd and step over the limbs of those who were lying prone. It was like forcing my way through a mass of sheer death and decomposition made even more horrible by its agonized pulsations. My companion had the skill of long practice, evading the bodies on the ground and winding his way through the mass with the ease of a contortionist. Distracted and clumsy I would brush against people or step on a figure that reacted like an animal, quickly, often with a moan or a yelp. Each time this occurred I would be seized by a fit of nausea and come to a stop. But my guide kept urging and hustling me along.

In this way we crossed the entire camp and finally stopped about twenty yards from the gate which opened on the passage leading to the train. It was a comparatively uncrowded spot. I felt immeasurably relieved at having finished my stumbling, sweating journey. The guide was standing at my side, saying something, giving me advice. I hardly heard him, my thoughts

were elsewhere. He tapped me on the shoulder. I turned toward him mechanically, seeing him with difficulty. He raised his voice.

'Look here. You are going to stay here. I'll walk on a little further. You know what you are supposed to do. Remember to keep away from Estonians. Don't forget, if there's any trouble, you don't know me and I don't know you.'

I nodded vaguely at him. He shook his head and walked off.

I remained there perhaps half an hour, watching this spectacle of human misery. At each moment I felt the impulse to run and flee. I had to force myself to remain indifferent, practice stratagems on myself to convince myself that I was not one of the condemned, throbbing multitude, forcing myself to relax as my body seemed to tie itself into knots, or turning away at intervals to gaze into the distance at a line of trees near the horizon. I had to remain on the alert, too, for an Estonian uniform, ducking toward the crowd or behind a near-by shed every time one approached me. The crowd continued to writhe in agony, the guards circulated about, bored and indifferent, occasionally distracting themselves by firing a shot or dealing out a blow. Finally I noticed a change in the motion of the guards. They walked less and they all seemed to be glancing in the same direction — at the passage to the track which was quite close to me.

I turned toward it myself. Two German policemen came to the gate with a tall, bulky, SS man. He barked out an order and they began to open the gate with some difficulty. It was very heavy. He shouted at them impatiently. They worked at it frantically and finally whipped it open. They dashed down the passage as though they were afraid the SS men might come after them and took up their positions where the passage ended. The whole system had been worked out with crude effectiveness. The outlet of the passage was blocked off by two cars of the freight train, so that any attempt on the part of one of the Jews to break out of the mob, or to escape if they had had so much presence of mind left, would have been completely impossible. Moreover, it facilitated the job of loading them onto the trains.

The SS man turned to the crowd, planted himself with his feet wide apart and his hands on his hips and loosed a roar that must have actually hurt his ribs. It could be heard far above the hellish babble that came from the crowd.

'*Ruhe, ruhe!* Quiet, quiet! All Jews will board this train to be taken to a place where work awaits them. Keep order. Do not push. Anyone who attempts to resist or create a panic will be shot.'

He stopped speaking and looked challengingly at the helpless mob that hardly seemed to know what was happening. Suddenly, accompanying the movement with a loud, hearty laugh, he yanked out his gun and fired three random shots into the crowd. A single, stricken groan answered him. He replaced the gun in his holster, smiled, and set himself for another roar:

'*Alle Jüden, 'raus — 'raus!*'

For a moment the crowd was silent. Those nearest the SS man recoiled from the shots and tried to dodge, panic-stricken, toward the rear. But this was resisted by the mob as a volley of shots from the rear sent the whole mass surging forward madly, screaming in pain and fear. The shots continued without let-up from the rear and now from the sides, too, narrowing the mob down and driving it in a savage scramble onto the passageway. In utter panic, groaning in despair and agony, they rushed down the passageway, trampling it so furiously that it threatened to fall apart.

Here new shots were heard. The two policemen at the entrance to the train were now firing into the oncoming throng corralled in the passageway, in order to slow them down and prevent them from demolishing the flimsy structure. The SS man now added his roar to the deafening bedlam.

'*Ordnung, ordnung!*' he bellowed like a madman.

'Order, order!' The two policemen echoed him hoarsely, firing straight into the faces of the Jews running to the trains. Impelled and controlled by this ring of fire, they filled the two cars quickly.

And now came the most horrible episode of them all. The Bund leader had warned me that if I lived to be a hundred I would never forget some of the things I saw. He did not exaggerate.

The military rule stipulates that a freight car may carry eight horses or forty soldiers. Without any baggage at all, a maximum of a hundred passengers standing close together and pressing against each other could be crowded into a car. The Germans had simply issued orders to the effect that 120 to 130 Jews had to

enter each car. These orders were now being carried out. Alternately swinging and firing with their rifles, the policemen were forcing still more people into the two cars which were already over-full. The shots continued to ring out in the rear and the driven mob surged forward, exerting an irresistible pressure against those nearest the train. These unfortunates, crazed by what they had been through, scourged by the policemen, and shoved forward by the milling mob, then began to climb on the heads and shoulders of those in the trains.

These were helpless since they had the weight of the entire advancing throng against them and responded only with howls of anguish to those who, clutching at their hair and clothes for support, trampling on necks, faces and shoulders, breaking bones and shouting with insensate fury, attempted to clamber over them. After the cars had already been filled beyond normal capacity, more than another score of human beings, men, women and children gained admittance in this fashion. Then the policemen slammed the doors across the hastily withdrawn limbs that still protruded and pushed the iron bars in place.

The two cars were now crammed to bursting with tightly packed human flesh, completely, hermetically filled. All this while the entire camp had reverberated with a tremendous volume of sound in which the hideous groans and screams mingled weirdly with shots, curses, and bellowed commands.

Nor was this all. I know that many people will not believe me, will not be able to believe me, will think I exaggerate or invent. But I saw it and it is not exaggerated or invented. I have no other proofs, no photographs. All I can say is that I saw it and that it is the truth.

The floors of the car had been covered with a thick, white powder. It was quicklime. Quicklime is simply unslaked lime or calcium oxide that has been dehydrated. Anyone who has seen cement being mixed knows what occurs when water is poured on lime. The mixture bubbles and steams as the powder combines with the water, generating a large amount of heat.

Here the lime served a double purpose in the Nazi economy of brutality. The moist flesh coming in contact with the lime is rapidly dehydrated and burned. The occupants of the cars would be literally burned to death before long, the flesh eaten from their

bones. Thus, the Jews would 'die in agony,' fulfilling the promise Himmler had issued 'in accord with the will of the Fuehrer,' in Warsaw, in 1942. Secondly, the lime would prevent decomposing bodies from spreading disease. It was efficient and inexpensive — a perfectly chosen agent for their purposes.

It took three hours to fill up the entire train by repetitions of this procedure. It was twilight when the forty-six (I counted them) cars were packed. From one end to the other, the train, with its quivering cargo of flesh, seemed to throb, vibrate, rock, and jump as if bewitched. There would be a strangely uniform momentary lull and then, again, the train would begin to moan and sob, wail and howl. Inside the camp a few score dead bodies remained and a few in the final throes of death. German policemen walked around at leisure with smoking guns, pumping bullets into anything, that by a moan or motion betrayed an excess of vitality. Soon, not a single one was left alive. In the now quiet camp the only sounds were the inhuman screams that were echoes from the moving train. Then these, too, ceased. All that was now left was the stench of excrement and rotting straw and a queer, sickening, acidulous odor which, I thought, may have come from the quantities of blood that had been let, and with which the ground was stained.

As I listened to the dwindling outcries from the train, I thought of the destination toward which it was speeding. My informants had minutely described the entire journey. The train would travel about eighty miles and finally come to a halt in an empty, barren field. Then nothing at all would happen. The train would stand stock-still, patiently waiting while death penetrated into every corner of its interior. This would take from two to four days.

When quicklime, asphyxiation, and injuries had silenced every outcry, a group of men would appear. They would be young, strong Jews, assigned to the task of cleaning out these cars until their own turn to be in them should arrive. Under a strong guard they would unseal the cars and expel the heaps of decomposing bodies. The mounds of flesh that they piled up would then be burned and the remnants buried in a single huge hole. The cleaning, burning and burial would consume one or two full days.

The entire process of disposal would take, then, from three to six days. During this period the camp would have recruited new victims. The train would return and the whole cycle would be repeated from the beginning.

I was still standing near the gate, gazing after the no longer visible train, when I felt a rough hand on my shoulder. The Estonian was back again. He was frantically trying to rouse my attention and to keep his voice lowered at the same time.

'Wake up, wake up,' he was scolding me hoarsely. 'Don't stand there with your mouth open. Come on, hurry, or we'll both get caught. Follow me and be quick about it.'

I followed him at a distance, feeling completely benumbed. When we reached the gate he reported to a German officer and pointed at me. I heard the officer say, '*Sehr gut, gehen Sie,*' and then we passed through the gate. The Estonian and I walked awhile together and then separated. Then I walked to the store as quickly as I could, running when there was no one about to see me. I reached the grocery store so breathless that the owner became alarmed. I reassured him while I threw off my uniform, boots, stockings, and underwear. I ran into the kitchen and locked the door. In a little while my bewildered and worried host called out to me.

'Hey, what are you doing in there?'

'Don't worry. I'll be right out.'

When I came out, he promptly entered the kitchen and called back in despair.

'What the devil have you been doing? The whole kitchen is flooded!'

'I washed myself,' I replied, 'that is all. I was very dirty.'

'You certainly must have been,' was his vexed answer.

I did my best to soothe him and then applied for permission to rest for a while in the garden. He hesitated for a minute as though he were afraid I might flood his garden, too, and then granted it. I wrapped my coat around me and went out into a tiny vegetable garden. I lay down under a tree and with the promptness of utter exhaustion, fell asleep. I awoke with a start, from some nightmare, I think. It was dark, except for a large, brilliant moon. I was stiff with cold and for a moment I could not remember where I was and how I had got there. When I did, I dashed inside the house and found an empty bed. My host was asleep. It was not long before I was, too.

I awoke in the morning. The sunlight, though not strong, was giving me a painful headache. My host stood over me asking if I was ill. I had been talking and twisting restlessly in my sleep. As soon as I got out of bed I was seized with a violent fit of nausea. I rushed outside and began to vomit. Throughout that day and during the next night I continued to vomit at intervals. When all the food had been emptied from my stomach, I threw up a red liquid. My host was terrified and asked me if the disease I had was contagious. I finally succeeded in convincing him that I did not have a disease.

I did not dare get into bed till long after midnight. Before doing so I asked the grocer who now displayed the utmost solicitude to try to get me some whisky, a lot of whisky. A few hours later he was back with a bottle. I drank two large glassfuls and fell asleep immediately. I slept brokenly for the balance of the day and throughout the following night.

When I awoke again, the sunlight was strong but did not hurt my eyes as much as it had the previous day. The grocer was standing over my bed with a bowl of warm milk in one hand and a piece of bread in the other. I ate the bread and drank the milk, still lying in bed, and then I crawled out carefully, afraid I would fall or stumble and bring on a recurrence of the nausea. I had, however, recovered, but I was still very weak. I managed, with the help of the grocer, to get on the train to Warsaw and arrived there without any further mishap.

The images of what I saw in the death camp are, I am afraid, my permanent possessions. I would like nothing better than to purge my mind of these memories. For one thing, the recollection of those events invariably brings on a recurrence of the nausea. But more than that, I would like simply to be free of them, to obliterate the very thought that such things ever occurred.

* * *

Just before I left Warsaw my friends arranged a celebration for me. Early one morning, I was invited to Mass. Many of my friends were devout. Father Edmund, the priest who was to officiate, was one of my best and oldest friends. He had been my confessor for many years. Now he was the chaplain of the Warsaw division of the secret army.

The streets were still sunk in blackness when I set out for the church. It was bitterly cold and the snow that had been falling all the previous day still lay in dark blue heaps on the walks and gutters. I wrapped myself tightly against the cutting wind and walked rapidly through the empty streets. I encountered no one at all, except, infrequently, a German patrol that I avoided, but who seemed much too occupied in keeping themselves warm to disturb me. Now that I was leaving Warsaw — and who knew for how long — it occurred to me how little attention I had paid it during the course of my existence. Eagerly, and walking rapidly as I was, I tried to note every feature of it that I could see, to store in my memory as much as I could of its streets and houses, now quiet and tranquil in the darkness.

When I reached the church, dawn was beginning to break, the first gray streaks appearing in the east. The Mass was to take place in the room of my friend, the priest, which was in a house directly behind the church. When I entered I saw that all my best friends were there. Four women had braved the cold for my sake. One of them was the writer whom we all admired so much for her work in the Underground. Another was a well-known sculptress, still living in Poland. Among the men were my chief and a few others from my department. The curtains were drawn over the windows and the candles cast a pale glow which did not penetrate very far into the huge room, leaving queer dancing shadows in the corners. The chill of the morning air, the presence of all my best friends, assembled here for me, the mysterious atmosphere of the room, made the whole scene inexpressibly charming and touching to me.

We said almost nothing, greeting each other with warm handshakes. It had been arranged so that the full company was already there before my arrival. The Mass was quiet and beautiful and we answered the deep tones of the priest with hushed voices. It terminated unhurriedly with no interruptions from the outside. We all took the Holy Communion. There was no sermon and as soon as the Mass had ended the priest reached for his prayer book. We all did likewise and soon they were repeating the words of the prayer for travelers. I listened in silence, my eyes moist with tears.

The prayers were followed by a part of the ceremony which had

secretly been prepared for me. My friends had planned a surprise for my farewell. They were giving me a present of peace and safety. Not everyday safety, from the clubs and weapons of the policemen and the jails of the Gestapo, but the most supreme safety, safety in God. Father Edmund asked me to approach the altar which had been improvised in his room and made me kneel down. He then bade me open my shirt and bare my chest. Surprised, and not at all aware of what was to follow, I obeyed his instructions. He took a scapular in both his hands, smiled gently at my confusion, and spoke solemnly:

'I have been authorized by those in whom the authority of the Church is vested, to present you, soldier of Poland, with Christ's Body to carry with you on your journey. Wear it throughout your journey. If danger approaches, you will be able to swallow it. It will protect you from all evil and harm.'

He hung the scapular about my neck. I bent my head and prayed. Father Edmund knelt beside me and prayed with me. There was a deep reverent silence in the room. All I could hear was the faint clicking of the beads in someone's rosary.

Their gift brought me not only safety but tranquillity throughout my trip. The treasure I wore against my chest seemed to exude warmth from the day I left Warsaw to the day when I hurried through the noisy streets of London to my first reception by the Polish Commander-in-Chief and Prime Minister, the late General Sikorski. It sped me on my journey as if on wings — the entire trip through all the perilous frontiers of occupied Europe, through so many dangers and pitfalls, lasted only twenty-one days.

CHAPTER 31

Unter Den Linden Revisited

THE day to which I had been looking forward for so long arrived. I left Warsaw without any fanfare and with no one to see me off. My papers were in perfect order, the seal on my photograph magnificently faked. The film was excellently concealed in the razor handle. I had plenty of money and was in high spirits.

The train was congested with passengers of every conceivable nationality, a circumstance which made me completely inconspicuous. Nevertheless, I scanned faces, searching for Gestapo agents whom I felt I could recognize at once. When I spotted one or when I was asked to produce my papers, naturally I felt uncomfortable.

However, there was no danger so long as I did not become involved in a conversation in which I might expose myself. To forestall this possibility, I had brought along a bottle of medicine. Seated in the corner of my compartment, I dampened a handkerchief and dabbed my mouth, pretending to suffer untold pain from a toothache. I felt sure that anybody who caught a glimpse of my pain-contorted face would refrain from speaking to me.

The trip to Berlin was slow and monotonous. The compartment was cramped and smelly; the train, one of the antediluvian relics the Germans had left at the disposal of the Poles, rattled and bounced uncomfortably.

Arriving in Berlin, I was possessed of a lively curiosity as to