replied with a satisfied air. Then suddenly Motele threw out, "And when will you get the Clap?"

Petzinger thought this was the name of another city. He did not want to seem either ignorant or doubtful of victory. With unshakable assurance he replied "Soon, soon."

Motele did not waver. The prisoners who had formed a circle around him began to retreat, but Petzinger walked off smiling, very pleased with himself.

Life was following its deadly course when Himmler arrived. He came to sign Treblinka's death sentence. The Germans wanted to wipe away all traces before closing shop. A few days later the earth opened.

But it is one thing to kill and another to burn, as Lalka would learn from humiliating experience. The soil of Treblinka contained seven hundred thousand bodies, or an approximate weight of thirty-five thousand tons and a volume of ninety thousand cubic yards. Thirty-five thousand tons is the weight of a battleship. Ninety thousand cubic yards represents a square tower nearly three thousand feet high and ten yards across. The task was gigantic, superhuman; the problem apparently insoluble. With an output of one thousand bodies per day, which seems at first glance a good rate, you would have to allow seven hundred days, or almost two years, without stopping a single day; provided, moreover, there was not a single convoy more to process. The future was dim, not to say hopeless, and anyone but a Technician would have given up from the start. Lalka, however, set courageously to work. The orders of the supreme leader of the Technicians were not questioned, even if they seemed impossible to execute.

He began by having one ditch opened. The bodies appeared, arranged in an orderly fashion, head to foot, and emitting a pestilential odor on which Kiwe, stopping his nose, commented, un-

consciously parodying a remark made by a king of France: "They smell even worse dead than alive." It was not in the best taste, but it relaxed the atmosphere.

Lalka then had several dozen quarts of gasoline poured on the bodies and gave the order to light the fire. A huge flame burst forth with a roar and a thick curl of black smoke began to rise. Rolling back on itself it fell, engulfing the spectators. The fire rumbled for a long time in the artificial haze of its smoke, then began to die down more and more rapidly. The smoke whitened and thinned, revealing the frozen forms of the spectators. Suddenly the fire went out, releasing a last sluggish curl of smoke. The S.S. approached anxiously. The bodies were still there, barely singed by the blaze. One, two, three more experiments were made, with just as poor results.

At the German mess that evening consternation prevailed.

But if it is not necessary to have high hope in order to undertake, neither is it necessary to succeed in order to persevere. Lalka's fertile brain had conceived another method. Arriving at the yard at dawn, he had the excavators dig a very wide and shallow ditch to the middle of which the prisoners carried one hundred bodies, forming a pile as tall as it was wide. After the gasoline was poured and the prayer said, the pile was ignited in its turn. Flames, smoke, haze, anticipation, hope: the fire subsided, the smoke lifted, the bodies were still there. They were a little more burnt than they had been the day before, but the failure was apparent, as Lalka admitted to himself.

In the days that followed the experiment was repeated by varying the shape of the piles, the quantity of gasoline, and the position of the fire, but the results were just as disappointing. At the end of a week some hundred bodies could be regarded as completely burned and even then it had taken several hundred quarts of gasoline to arrive at this result. By rapid calculation Lalka estimated the number of years necessary to finish the job at one hun-

dred and forty. Even for the Thousand Year Reich, it was a long time.

Then an S.S. officer remembered having heard through a colleague in one of the small local camps that you had to alternate layers of bodies with layers of tree trunks. The idea seemed good. Several cords of wood were ordered and a new start was made. At first gasoline was used sparingly and the trunks did not have time to ignite. Then the wood was soaked with all the inflammable liquid available. A tense moment: the match was applied, the flame burst out, the smoke rose, fell back and dispersed. All rushed forward and—oh miracle!—the fire continued to roar. A profound silence fell as if to enhance the sweet sound of victory. When nothing was left but a little heap of ashes, a great ovation arose. Congratulations, felicitations, cries of long life to the beloved *Führer* and immortality to the eternal Reich.

Tired, the celebration over, the ashes cool, the Germans added up the figures. The cost price turned out to be exorbitant: besides gasoline, they needed as many tree trunks as bodies. The matter was not feasible, for even if they could contemplate cutting down the forests of Poland, gasoline was becoming increasingly scarce. A German army had surrendered in Stalingrad, and the rich oil fields of the Caucasus had vanished like a mirage.

The next few days were devoted to a number of experiments in which the quantities of gasoline and wood and the diameter of the wood were varied. The problem was twofold: first, to reduce the quantity of wood to a minimum, and second, to try to replace gasoline by kindling and small fires. Men and corpses were sorely tried, but in spite of the undeniable strides that were made, it became evident that the enterprise had failed, that Treblinka was unable to solve the problem. Profound despair; after a night of agony Lalka decided to report his defeat to his superiors and to ask for their help.

Blond and slight, with a gentle face and a retiring manner, he arrived one fine morning with his little suitcase at the gates of the kingdom of death. His name was Herbert Floss, and he was a specialist in the cremation of bodies. Self-educated, he had perfected his art in the little local camps to which the vagaries of fortune had brought him one after the other. He had never visited Treblinka before, but he knew the camp by reputation. At that time Birkenau, the extermination camp at Auschwitz, had not yet established its supremacy, and Treblinka was still the great center of spiritual attraction for the Technicians. Floss was conscious of what this appointment represented for him: it was a promotion, even an ordination; he had heard that there were several hundred thousand bodies.

He reported at once to the administrative director of the camp, who, after wishing him good luck, sent him to Lalka. As he showed him to his room, Lalka began to explain the situation. The cremator listened attentively, then asked to be taken to the spot without delay.

Once there, he asked for information about the placement of the ditches and their approximate capacity. He seemed to attach particular importance to the age of the bodies. At each detail that was given him he replied, *"Tadellos"* (splendid), with a pleased little smile. He submitted his plan that evening.

That night a group of prisoners from Camp Number One left the camp under heavy escort to unbolt the tracks of a nearby railroad. The next morning the masons received the order to build, not far from the ditches, four cement pillars two and a half feet high to form a rectangle twenty yards long and one yard wide. Floss supervised the work. He shouted a great deal, but he was very awkward and seemed incapable of striking a prisoner. Running in all directions, shouting, explaining, gesticulating, he fell down several times. The prisoners did not dare laugh, but they gave him two nicknames: "The Artist" and "Lefty," because

of his clumsiness. When the cement of the columns was dry, Floss had the rails laid on them with much shouting and fuss.

The first bonfire was prepared the next day. Herbert Floss then revealed his secret: all the bodies did not burn at the same rate; there were good bodies and bad bodies, fire-resistant bodies and inflammable bodies. The art consisted in using the good ones to burn the bad ones. According to his investigations—and judging from the results, they were very thorough—the old bodies burned better than the new ones, the fat ones better than the thin ones, the women better than the men, and the children not as well as the women but better than the men. It was evident that the ideal body was the old body of a fat woman. Floss had these put aside. Then he had the men and children sorted too. When a thousand bodies had been dug up and sorted in this way, he proceeded to the loading, with the good fuel underneath and the bad above. He refused gasoline and sent for wood. His demonstration was going to be perfect. The wood was arranged under the grill of the pyre in little piles which resembled camp fires. The moment of truth had come. He was solemnly handed a box of matches. He bent down, lit the first fire, then the others, and as the wood began to catch fire he walked back with his odd gait to the group of officials who were waiting a little way away.

The mounting flames began to lick at the bodies, gently at first, then with a steady force like the flame of a blow torch. Everyone held his breath, the Germans anxious and impatient, the prisoners dismayed and terrified. Only Floss seemed relaxed; very sure of himself, he was muttering abstractedly, *"Tadellos, tadellos . . ."* The bodies burst into flames. Suddenly the flames shot up, releasing a cloud of smoke, a deep roar arose, the faces of the dead twisted with pain and the flesh crackled. The spectacle had an infernal quality and even the S.S. men remained petrified for a few moments, contemplating the marvel. Floss beamed. This fire was the finest day of his life.

When they had recovered from their stupor, the Germans gave expression to their joy and gratitude. Herbert Floss became a hero. An event like this had to be celebrated in a worthy manner. The Germans sent for tables, which were set up opposite the funeral pyre and covered with dozens of bottles of liquor, wine and beer. The dying day reflected the high flames of the funeral pyre, the sky glowed at the end of the plain where the sun was disappearing with a show of fire.

At a nod from Lalka, the corks popped. An extraordinary party began. The first toast was made to the *Führer*. The operators of the excavators had returned to their machines. When the S.S. men raised their glasses noisily, the excavators seemed to come to life and suddenly flung their long jointed arms toward the sky in a throbbing and jolting Nazi salute. It was like a signal; ten times the men raised their arms, each time shouting *"Heil Hitler."* The manlike machines returned the salute of the machinelike men, and the air rang with shouts of glory to the *Führer*. The party lasted until the funeral pyre was entirely consumed. After the toasts came the songs, savage and cruel, songs of hatred, songs of fury, songs of glory to Germany the eternal. Treblinka, abandoned to the madness of men of another age, seemed to have become the sanctuary of terrible pagan rites. The Technicians had been transformed into barbaric and bloodthirsty demigods arisen from some mythology.

The next day the S.S. men became once again the conscientious, busy, meticulous Technicians they were. The experiment had been conclusive. Now they had to translate it from the experimental to the industrial realm. Herbert Floss attacked the problem.

An organized man, he divided the task into combustion proper and fuel; this second point was in turn divided into two parts: extraction, and carrying and loading. Combustion was limited

only by the number of fires, which could be increased at will. The rate of production would therefore depend on the possibilities of extraction, carrying and loading.

The solution of all these questions would take him a certain period of time.

As a first innovation, the excavators would extract the bodies and set them in a pile outside the ditch, where the prisoners would find and transport them to the fires at a ratio of two prisoners per body. This was the first stage. Then Floss noticed that it was difficult for the three excavators to put their loads in the same place and that the prisoners were crowded for room. He divided the prisoners into three teams, each of which served one machine: progress. But a bottleneck occurred at the fire. The number of fires was increased to three: progress. New problem: below a certain level the bodies extracted were dismembered and the prisoners transported them in pieces, a leg under one arm and a torso under the other. As a result they transported many less. Herbert re-enlisted the litters that had been used to carry the bodies from the gas chambers to the ditches: progress. But it happened that limbs fell off along the way during the transfer, which was done at a run. The litters were modified, the canvas was replaced by crates: progress. Then it was remarked that the rails were sagging under the effect of the heat. New supporting pillars were constructed within the enclosure: progress.

The output was now two thousand bodies per day. One evening at roll call Floss made a speech.

"Today we burned two thousand bodies. This is good, but we must not stop here. We will set ourselves an objective and devote all our efforts to reaching it. Tomorrow we will do three thousand, the day after tomorrow four thousand, then five thousand, then six thousand, and so on until ten thousand. Every day we will force ourselves to increase the output by one thousand units. I count on you to help me."

A good-natured little man incapable of hurting a flea, sounding like the head of a factory to his workers, Herbert Floss then had each prisoner given an extra ration of bread.

The improvements continued. The mania for specialization was not peculiar to Lalka. Since the prisoners were losing time loading and unloading their litters, the crews were again divided into three: a crew of loaders, another of carriers, and a third of burners, which acquired the name of fire commando: progress. But the ten-thousand figure had still not been reached. The pyres were loaded during the day and lit in the evening. They now covered a distance of over fifty yards. It was possible to extend them even further, but the fueling had reached a plateau. It was at this level that the bottleneck was occurring. Floss discovered a further improvement. When the carriers reached the piles of bodies they stopped and rested while their litters were being loaded. This represented an enormous loss of time. To offset this disadvantage the excavators were ordered to lay their bodies not in a compact pile but in the form of an arc. The loaders were arranged along this arc and the carriers were instructed to walk along the line of the loaders. Herbert Floss had rediscovered the principle of the assembly line. The loaders were no longer responsible for one crate, but instead they threw a piece of a body into each crate that filed by.

It was at this point that the prisoners reacted. Three prisoners were responsible for counting the bodies. Their comrades, feeling that they were about to die of exhaustion, asked them to make The Artist happy and give him his ten thousand bodies. The next day Floss was informed that the goal of ten thousand bodies had been reached. He insisted on thanking the prisoners for their zeal in the work.

One day an excavator ran out of gasoline. The driver rushed out to get a can and the prisoners seized the opportunity to catch their breath. Just then Floss arrived. The prisoners, knowing that

he did not hit them, were not too afraid of him, and explained that the excavator had broken down and that they were waiting for it to be fixed.

"How long will it take?" asked Floss.

"Three or four minutes," they answered at random.

"Four minutes? You have just enough time to make one haul with the next excavator."

"For one haul," they replied, "we will lose more time going back and forth than we will waiting."

To which Floss replied, "One haul for the principle, to prove to yourselves that you aren't good for nothing. We'll call it the Haul of Honor."

Herbert Floss was mad.

XXV

THE FIRST MESSAGE from Adolf and Djielo arrived over a month after their departure. It was laconic. "Arrived safely in hell, starting the job," the *kapo* of the sweeping commando transmitted.

Carried along by its own momentum, Camp Number One continued to sink into insanity. Like a mad machine, or a runaway horse charging toward a precipice, the camp was rushing toward its end with a kind of infernal gaiety. The only certainty was the approaching end of Treblinka. Everyone knew it—the Germans, the Committee, and the prisoners—but everyone also pretended not to know it: the Germans, in order to reassure the prisoners, the Committee and the prisoners who were in on the secret of the revolt, in order to reassure the Germans, and finally the other prisoners, who knew nothing, in order to reassure themselves. There were still a few convoys, but everything happened in a dreamlike atmosphere.

One day a band of Gypsies arrived at the gate of the camp with caravans and baggage. They were happy to have finished their long trip; the Germans were happy too. In one hour it was all over. Another day, some Balkan Jews arrived. It was Sunday and the holiday was going full blast in the yard of the Ghetto. All at

cism of the other prisoners he had been feeling the futility of his sacrifice. Masha's arrival had changed everything.

The first time he spoke to her of the revolt, she rushed weeping into his arms. After that she became his warlike muse and, some time later, his mistress. Hesitantly, he mentioned her to Adolf one evening. Adolf encouraged him.

"First of all, because you love her, and it is an extraordinary thing to be able to love here, and next because it fits in with our plan."

But Djielo had a last officer's reflex: "What will the men say?"

"That you are lucky," Adolf replied, smiling.

And Djielo took the path to the women's house.

Summer succeeded spring. In this dream atmosphere the ditches emptied inexorably, to the fanfare of the orchestras. Treblinka had just had its first birthday, and everyone felt that its days were numbered. The anxiety of the prisoners reached a paroxysm. The Germans seemed about to win the race against time and death, the final phase of the extermination.

It was then that the cry that was to precipitate the action arose. On Friday, July 20, 1943, Camp Number Two delivered an ultimatum:

"We are starting the last ditch. In two weeks the camp will be liquidated. If you have not given us a final and irrevocable date within forty-eight hours, we will launch the revolt."

XXVI

WHILE THE FESTIVITIES continued at a faster and faster pace, the machinery of the revolt was set up in Camp Number Two.

As soon as they had recovered from their stupor, Djielo and Adolf had begun the work of organization. The first steps were difficult and disappointing. They encountered the same obstacles that Galewski had met when he started organizing the revolt in Camp Number One—the same egotism, and above all, the same skepticism. Dr. Zimmermann was dead, and Camp Number Two had no moral leader. Escape, individually or in groups, seemed to everyone to be the only chance. Djielo and Adolf were strangers; they had not known the camp from its beginnings, they had not suffered along with the others. They received some help in getting along, of course, but they remained strangers. They suffered enormously from their new living conditions and they had trouble getting used to the constant proximity of the corpses, which the others, through callousness or habit, seemed no longer to see. One thing especially shocked them: a certain "professional" language on the part of the prisoners. Every living man was regarded as a future corpse to be carried. When a prisoner ate too much his friends would tell him, "Hey, Moshe! Don't eat so

much, you'll gain weight. Think of us who'll have to carry you!" A good convoy was a convoy of poor people, because, not having eaten for a long time, they were thin and therefore light. Slackers were known as "child specialists." The arrival of the tanned and well-built Balkan Jews had been an event. In the barracks that night this comment could be heard: "How beautiful they were, but how heavy!"

Djielo and Adolf managed to rally a few men, but the majority did not follow. One of their first recruits was Shlomo Finkelstein, head of the commando in charge of sweeping the "road to heaven." This was how they were able to send their first message to the Committee.

Then there had been Herzlik and Wiernik the carpenter. But contact did not occur, and the two speleologists of hell were beginning to despair. The ditches were still being emptied. It was then that Masha arrived in one of the first convoys from the insurgent capital. Her account of the Warsaw revolt played the same role for the prisoners of Camp Number Two as Langner's plea for those of Camp Number One.

The catch was sprung. At night in the barracks everyone told the story of the great battle of the Jews. It was repeated endlessly, and a thousand apocryphal details were added. Djielo felt the atmosphere vibrate with hope and longing, and suddenly in the dark barracks he threw out, "And why not us?" This anonymous voice emerging from the obscurity struck the prisoners. God himself would not have spoken otherwise. Conversation ceased, but minds began to work.

After that, while Adolf was busy organizing the entertainments, Djielo began to prepare a plan. Since Camp Number Two did not have to play the leading part in the revolt, the strategy was simple. The important thing was that every man be ready to leap over the embankment as soon as the revolt was launched. Djielo, Adolf and a few specially selected men would have the

job of destroying the weak garrison. Any Germans and Ukrainians who would be in the yard would present no problem. There were never more than a dozen of them and they would be taken care of quickly by making the most of the surprise effect and by carefully synchronizing the operation. The watchtowers were trickier. There was one in each of the four corners of the camp, and their machine guns covered the whole yard implacably, as the story of the raven who had come to raid the corpses one winter day proved.

"They will have to be eliminated at all costs," said Djielo, "or it will be a massacre. We won't be able to do anything as long as those birds are perched on their nests. The watchtowers must be our first objective."

The first plan had been to burn them, but Djielo pointed out that they covered each other and that anyone who came near one would immediately be within range of the other three. "Not to mention," he added, "that burning a watchtower isn't as easy as striking a match."

The problem seemed as insoluble as the riddle of the chicken and the egg, when Wiernik had an idea. His talent as a carpenter had earned him a certain esteem on the part of the Germans, and consequently a certain respect from the Ukrainians. This had enabled him to study them and in so doing he had discovered the extraordinary magnetic power that gold exercised over them. He had made experiments: the sight of the yellow metal put the Ukrainians literally into a trance.

"Their love of gold is as strong as their fear of the Germans," he explained.

The meeting was being held on his bunk in a far corner of the barracks in the purple obscurity of the night of Treblinka.

After pausing to let the others reflect, he had developed his idea. "I'm sure that a Ukrainian would come down from his watchtower to get a gold piece. He might hesitate at first, but he

could not resist the temptation. What we have to do is to get them used to coming down this way. We would do it a few times to create precedents. Then the day of the revolt we would make them all come down at once."

"The Fox and the Crow," Adolf had commented, but no one knew La Fontaine's fable. He explained. This literary precedent seemed convincing and they decided to try. The results were completely satisfactory.

The ditches were still being emptied.

It was May 15, and the countdown was approaching zero. Djielo demanded the go-ahead from the Committee.

At Camp Number One the situation was not promising. Rakowski was in power, and his activities hindered the Committee. Galewski replied that they must wait.

Some time later Rakowski was executed. Chatskel, who boasted that he would become the new Jewish commandant of the camp, filled the Committee with dread. Galewski made an effort to appear in good health. The shoemakers made him some special boots, a corset was found for him in the store so he could stand up straight, and he rouged his cheeks every morning to give himself color.

On his return from leave, Lalka fell into the trap and reappointed him Jewish commandant of the camp.

The "road to heaven" transmitted the message: "Be ready, will advise you of date in a few days."

The ditches were still being emptied and the revels were going full blast when a terrible mishap occurred in Camp Number Two. Because of the heat, work hours were rearranged and the work ceased at one o'clock. After this hour the prisoners were shut inside the fence that surrounded their barracks and could therefore do nothing. A solution would have to be found, but meanwhile they were stymied.

New message: "Snag, cancel operation until further notice."

At Camp Number One the Germans were reinforcing their surveillance as a precautionary measure. The Committee forced itself to be cheerful to calm the impatience of the prisoners. It even made a few improvements on the original plan: Rudek would seize the armored car and Yatzek, his assistant at the garage, would blow up the gasoline supply.

At Camp Number Two, the solution was found after several days of reflection. The weddings had started, and Djielo and Adolf decided to organize a ceremony on the day of the revolt. This way all the Germans, who regularly attended the weddings, would be under their control. They looked for candidates; they were rare. Schlomek, who greased the motor that fed the gas chambers, agreed. He was a weak man whom the work had partially unhinged. Masha took charge of finding the fiancée. She was short and plump, her name was Esther. At first she refused, but Masha made her understand that it was important. Djielo advised Camp Number One that they were ready.

The Committee's answer: "The date is set for the last Monday in May."

Camp Number Two acknowledged the message and confirmed that everything was ready and that it was waiting impatiently.

The ditches were still being emptied.

Sunday passed in a whirl of merrymaking. Nobody slept that night. Monday morning the prisoners were leaving for work when the mournful whistle of the locomotive was heard. Galewski was on the platform when the deportees got off the train. Many were wounded, some were burned. The Germans and Ukrainians treated them with terrible brutality, killing off the wounded with the butts of their rifles and mutilating the able-bodied. These were the last rebels from the Warsaw ghetto. The Germans were so afraid of them that the train was accompanied by an armed guard of one hundred men. Galewski decided to

postpone the revolt. The forces would be too unequal. The counter order was transmitted to Camp Number Two at once.

That day the savagery of the S.S. and the Ukrainians knew no limits. On the "road to heaven" Ivan, an enormous brute of twenty, slashed open the bellies of the women vertically with a huge sword. Other women were thrown onto the bonfires alive. First their children were thrown on, then they were told to join them. Some jumped on of their own free will, others hesitated. Those who hesitated were told that they lacked the maternal instinct, and were thrown on too. The tension mounted among prisoners of both camps, and the secret organization had trouble restraining them. Adolf was obliged to knock down a man who tried to attack Ivan. The latter, after collecting the disemboweled women at the exits of the gas chambers, forced the prisoners to mount them and simulate the act of love.

The next morning Djielo sent an urgent appeal: "Hurry, we can't control the men." The Committee replied that it had to let things calm down so the Germans would forget that the Jews could revolt and so the prisoners, who were at the final degree of hatred, would not ruin everything at the last moment.

Then Djielo realized that the alibi of the wedding was no longer good. They would have to find something else. The solution came after several days of reflection.

First, the group from the kitchen would ask permission to go and get water from the well outside the enclosure. On that day Adolf would leave with the group, which would be composed of reliable men. Second, they would have to see to it that all the corpses were not loaded in the morning, even at the price of the worst beatings. After lunch Djielo would volunteer to finish loading the fires with a group of determined men. This way the door would remain open to allow the mass of the prisoners to flee.

The ditches were still being emptied.

Life resumed, slowly at first, then more and more frantically. Pain and agony had abolished memory at Treblinka.

There was a new anguished message from Camp Number Two, and a new dilatory reply from the Committee: "Two weeks maximum."

The fever mounted. The agony increased. The ditches were still being emptied.

Time was running out when a disturbing incident occurred. For several days, in preparation for the last act, the final extermination, the S.S. had been supervising the installation of a dense network of antitank obstacles reinforced by an inextricable tangle of wire all around the camp, fifty yards outside the barbed-wire fence. The Committee watched the progress of the job with anguish. It felt an implacable vise closing around the camp. The incident occurred in the course of this work, which was performed by the camouflage commando. Only by a miracle did Kleinmann, leader of the fighting unit of this commando, manage to avoid disaster. To lay the antitank obstacles they had to clear a little wood. While they were doing this, one of the prisoners found a pistol at the foot of a tree. Just as he was slipping it into his pocket Kleinmann noticed the bluish glint of steel. He came over and asked the man to give him the pistol. The man refused at first, then gave in. Kleinmann took the weapon and before hiding it in his belt, he looked at it. It was almost new and the steel was not tarnished. This surprised him and he hesitated. Suddenly he understood: it was a trap, a test. He returned the pistol to the man who had found it and ordered him to put it back under the tree, wait a few moments, then pretend to find it, and take it to the S.S. officer. As the man handed him the weapon Kleinmann watched the German's face from a distance. Now he was sure it was a test.

The Committee met that night. Galewski told the story of the pistol. The conclusions were obvious: the Germans did not know

anything, but they were suspicious. If they had known, they would have exterminated Camp Number One, which they hardly needed any more; but they were suspicious, as this incident proved. The leaders of the Committee disagreed bitterly. Rudek wanted to stake everything, at once. Galewski proposed that they keep waiting to lull the Germans' suspicions.

Rudek was a strong and simple man. In his opinion all this subtle strategy was only a façade for fear, a way of covering up the helplessness of the Committee, which was made up of old Jews who would rather talk than act. He was the spokesman for the men in the combat units:

"You're preparing a revolt as if you were studying the Talmud. This isn't a resistance committee, it's a *yeshiva!*"

But Galewski's arguments were not without validity. First he reminded them of the previous attempt and the premonition he had had. Then he explained that the revolt would be difficult and that the only chance of success lay in the effect of total surprise.

"If the Germans are on their guard, we haven't a chance, not one man will get out of here alive. And we must not lose sight of the fact that our purpose is not to choose our own death, but to get some men out of Treblinka, and in sufficiently large number that at least one will survive and be able to tell the story. We are not desperate men! Our aim is not suicide! We have a mission to carry out. I'm not afraid to die. But I want one man to be able to tell the tragedy of our death."

"You are a broken man," Rudek flung at him. But he gave in. The Committee decided to wait.

The ditches were still being emptied. The revels were going full blast.

In this hypersensitive world in which tension had gone beyond paroxysm, everything seemed to proceed in an atmosphere of unreality and magic. Every day the Committee grazed the abyss,

skirted some catastrophe which was only avoided by a hair. One day Kurland thought that this time it was all over.

The "natural selection" of the Lalka system continued to operate implacably. It generally took place in the evening at roll call. On this particular day Kiwe decided to liquidate a whole shop in which many weak men worked. This shop had been created by the workers themselves to find a less strenuous occupation for their exhausted comrades. The work was as easy as it was useless. It consisted of painting the handles of saucepans black. Why not? For a long time the Germans had closed their eyes. Then one day, probably so as to have less work when the time came to exterminate everyone, they took the prisoners of this commando outside and led them to the "hospital."

Among the condemned men was a former Warsaw journalist named Kronenberg. He was a middle-aged man, sick and near exhaustion. When he came to the edge of the ditch he was suddenly seized with a formidable will to live, a terrible fear of death. He knew that the revolt would soon take place, and he found the idea of dying so close to deliverance unbearable. To have lived through it all only to die now was impossible, it was too unfair. So much effort for nothing, so much suffering only to die anyway, and just when life was about to begin again.

He looked up pleadingly and begged the Ukrainian, who was already raising his gun, to spare him. The Ukrainian, who was not used to seeing Jews resist death, paused in the middle of his gesture. Kurland had heard the man shouting and weeping and had left his hut. There was a moment of hesitation as the three men looked at each other. Then the victim resumed his protest with a kind of fury in his voice. The Ukrainian's gun began to rise again toward the neck of the man, who was now almost stammering. Kurland sensed what was coming before it happened.

Suddenly lifting his head Kronenberg cried, "Spare me and I'll tell you a secret, let me live and I'll tell you about a plot."

Not listening to him, the Ukrainian was about to pull the trigger when, losing control, Kronenberg shouted, "There are some men who are preparing a revolt. They plan to destroy the camp."

The Ukrainian hesitated. Deathly pale, Kurland tried a desperate measure. He walked over and motioned to the Ukrainian, who turned to him. Then Kurland tapped his forehead with a knowing smile to show that Kronenberg was crazy. The Ukrainian returned his smile and pulled the trigger.

"Poor man," said Kurland, now at his side. "He wasn't all there. Death was a blessing for him."

The other condemned men had followed the scene. They bowed their heads, murmuring the *"Sh'ma Yisroel."* "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One." The Ukrainian raised his gun a second time, then a third, then a fourth, and each time the murmur became weaker, until it ceased. The Ukrainian straightened up and smiled; he had finished his work.

Kurland was still trembling when he described the scene to the Committee.

The ditches were still being emptied. Panic slowly overtook the prisoners.

The camouflage commando tried to revolt. One day in the forest the men began to march slowly on their guards. Kleinmann had a hard time stopping them before it was too late, before the guards noticed them. The scene resembled a dumb show. Not a word was spoken; everything was done by expression. Kleinmann won out, but he knew that next time he would not be able to control his men. That evening he came to the Committee.

"The men are at the end of their rope. This thing may explode any day. We are no longer in control of the movement we have started."

The ditches were still being emptied. Treblinka had become a powder keg.

At Camp Number Two things were even worse. At night in the barracks the men talked only of the revolt. Adolf, who had kept control of the situation up to now, was losing it. He himself was profoundly shaken by the memory of the horrible scenes he had witnessed when the last rebels of Warsaw had arrived. To ward off the terrible impatience of the men he multiplied the distractions. Everything became permissible. Adolf had no choice but to encourage all this; but he knew that when the situation finally got out of his control he would not be able to answer for anything. The secret of the revolt would be at the mercy of a joke or an idle word. Every evening the Germans mingled with the prisoners, and every day Adolf was terrified that one of them would attack a German, that he would hear one of them say that the score would soon be settled. But he also knew that if he tried to stop the runaway machine he would blow it up. His only chance was to rush ahead.

The women were now strolling half naked in the yard while the prisoners joked. In the laundry where they worked they took off all their clothes. The spectacle drove the prisoners crazy. But Adolf did not care about morality. Anything was good that kept his men under control. Every night he begged Djielo to send an S.O.S. to Camp Number One. Every day Djielo requested the Committee more and more urgently to set a date.

Still the ditches were being emptied, and still the Committee wanted to wait. It seemed fascinated, as if overcome with vertigo in the face of all this force which it had unleashed and which it no longer controlled. In Galewski's opinion it would be madness to launch the revolt now. The surveillance was too strict and the atmosphere too tense. Tirelessly he replied that first it was necessary to calm the men, whose nervousness was increasing the Germans' suspicions.

But the Jews could no longer be calmed. The unreality of the

world, their impatience for the revolt, and the proximity of death combined in them and transformed them into firebrands.

After the mass of the prisoners it was the men of the shock troops who lost their self-control. Herzl Weinstein and a few others made an agreement with the man in charge of the tool store, whom everyone called the Monkey because of his ugliness, to dig a tunnel. The store adjoined the prisoners' barracks. They all met at the bunk that ran the length of the partition between the barracks and the store. They dug a tunnel under the wall and every night they took turns slipping into the store where the entrance of the tunnel was. The dirt dug up was ill-concealed; the most cursory search would bring it to light.

The ditches were still being emptied.

At Camp Number Two the ashes from the corpses, after being screened and reburned, were mixed with sand and the ditches were filled in with the mixture. On top, grass was planted and white gravel paths were laid out. Wooden benches were set up, as in a public park. Every trace of Treblinka's function was disappearing. The ditches were still being emptied.

A strange anxiety seized the prisoners at the sight of this peaceful Luna Park. It was no longer merely death that threatened them, but nothingness: the absence of human life, traces or memories. The fear of death is nothing beside the fear of nothingness. Death is natural; it is part of the course of history. But nothingness brings man to the edge of the abyss that was the world before the Creation. In the face of nothingness everything ceases to exist. The songs became screams and the dances barbaric rites.

It was in this atmosphere that the last ditch was opened. It contained ten thousand corpses. Ten thousand corpses meant two weeks. In two weeks, Treblinka would be liquidated.

It was Friday the thirtieth. Lalka had just gone on leave. Djielo delivered his ultimatum. The answer came the next day: *"Monday 2 August 1943. Will confirm that morning as planned. The rallying cry will be 'Revolution in Berlin!' "*

XXVII

THE SUN WAS lingering in the sky. The day had been fair and hot, the evening was soft and luminous. The last night was falling on Treblinka.

At Camp Number Two Shlomo had managed to spend a few moments with Malka in a quiet corner of the yard. Throats tight with emotion, they had not been able to speak. Theirs had been a mute dialogue consisting of handclasps, looks, and sighs. Would the end of Treblinka be the end of their love? Malka seemed exhausted, she leaned back limply against the barbed-wire fence, her eyes closed as if she wanted to die here and now. Embracing her violently, Shlomo said, "I'll come and get you tomorrow and we'll run away together."

"Yes, that's right, we'll run away together," she replied in a faraway voice.

Sholek Blumenthal, who had been Dr. Zimmermann's assistant, was lying on his bunk. A bone disease had locked his joints and he could not move his arms or legs. He got around only with great difficulty. It was a miracle that the Germans had not executed him. But this did not matter now. He knew that the next day he would not be able to escape and that he was going to die