

*In the front line of the brave combatants, the dear motherland from the enemy
To defend stoutly and drop down, it is a beautiful end of a happy life indeed.
When to abandon the native city, and the fertile fields ancestral
To eat in despair refuge's bread, where is such agony as this?
Tyrtej vel Tyrteus*

Chapter 5. **Displaced; the first days of exile, step by step.**

Prisoners' transport – is Mother still alive? – a field hospital and the wounded men – the first shelter at a former college boardinghouse in Ostrowiec.

This night the train moved unceasing onwards, at least every time Angus awakened. After the exhausting adventures Angus slept rather early and long, until the daylight became bright. The night being cool, the prisoners had closed the small, oblong windows with anything they could and the air had become stale. However, with the coming of day they now opened them again and crowded around, trying to see and guess where they might headed on.

Moving eastwards, by now they had probably left behind the lands incorporated direct into Germany and had entered the occupied territory known as GG. ("General Government"). As the day drew on, it became a little warmer, the clean wind from the fields blew through the whole wagon. Now the train stopped several times, but the opinions as to their whereabouts changed. Some considered they might soon see Warsaw; others argued this was not the route to Warsaw, they were traveling another direction entirely. Angus did not try to push himself to the windows, which anyway were too high for him to look out. He would have to step on something (and there was only the straw and some personal belongings the people would not allow touch them), or pull himself up with his hands, not exactly an easy and comfortable sightseeing. In fact he didn't give a damn about the destination; going into the unknown was just fine with him. Only occasionally, when the little windows emptied, he could see the sky with little, white clouds or branches of the trees. The tension of

the last days left him, but he felt sure it would before long return. He would soon again need all his strength, but now was time to rest and perhaps to dream. What would be, would be, he would see in time.

In the afternoon, the soldiers of the escort allowed the prisoners to open the doors. Hard to believe, it was already the 2nd of December, yet the weather was as warm as in summer, at least in the middle of the day. The train rolled slowly over a long bridge over a river and stopped on a plain field, but the rails multiplied and in the distance some buildings were visible. Some of the prisoners were convinced (falsely, it turned out), that they had crossed the Vistula River near Puławy. Although the German escort with the increasing distance had relaxed, they had still allowed no outsiders near the train. But before long the prisoners were allowed to get water – not to leave the wagons, but to ask the local people to take some containers and bring them back full of water. Thus they heard, the train was not south of Warsaw, but a long way north, near the Małkinia.

Then again the train moved, but this time they were permitted to hold open the door until twilight, to talk and take in water. The command told them, now the only strict restriction was on leaving the wagons, this act would be punished with a bullet and the escort would shoot without further warning.

Yet just before the doors closed again with the twilight, Angus witnessed a rather extraordinary happening. The train halted several dozen meters from the bushes, along which ran a path. On this path passed a small group of people with bags, then a pause and the next small group, and the next and finally a continuous chain of them. The German escort took no interest in this event. Occasionally some other people moved in the opposite direction. In the evening silence, the voices carried a long-distance and Angus heard distinctly every word.

- "Where are you going?"

- "Running away from "paradise". And you?"

- "To paradise!"

- "Do not be so stupid, turn back. You do not know anything, you do not know how it is there and once you do, it will be already too late; you shall regret this to the end of an extremely short life."

- "And you may see, what is here to happen, even worse!"

The fugitives, the longline of those coming in and the small body of those running out, continued going in their opposite directions. A clear supposition was the train had stopped not far from the Soviet border, which

at the time still was penetrable. In the late evening, the train moved back, and then changed direction.

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Capsule: "The Paradise":

"The paradise", means here the Soviets occupation zone. For years the Soviet press called Soviets "the paradise of the working people", the rest of the world was "a hell". No funny business, they wrote this quite serious. So did the main press organ of Bolsheviks, called "The Truth", despite telling lies. On the long run, the simple people there began believe it, others pretended a make-believe, because it was dangerous to appear an unbeliever. Especially, making fun ("U nas eto szutniki Biełomorski kanał budowali" - the jokers built the White Meer canal"). So developed the first "Gulags" and the matter became still worse.

In Poland the name was told with irony, or sardonic smile, but next they had to stop the laughs. More information about the Soviet Occupation Zone see in Chapter VI, as told by Angus father, who still in march 1940 crossed illegal the "green border" and found his family in Ostrowiec. After 1947 the people in Poland used the term rarely and in private, next dropped it like a hot potato.

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This time Angus could not get to sleep. Eventually, though, he dreamed of fighting the Germans. As he had still no clear image of how such a fight would look now, or the conditions on a present-day battlefield, his sleeping mind drew on storybook engravings of Boleslaw Chrobry, the first great Polish king. Angus became already knighted for brave deeds, wearing the armor of a bested enemy, while his companions in the wagon were rousing themselves to a new day.

On this day, they crossed the Vistula River somewhere around Puławy. Afterwards the train stood a longtime near some forest, in fact they saw this day several forests and stopped several times. Angus remembered his journey in the evacuation train three months ago. One small difference was, last time he could get shot remaining on the train, and now it was the opposite – if somebody were to leap down from the train, he would likely to eat a bullet.

The next day the train stood again for hours somewhere between Radom and Skarżysko. Morning was frigid and the day too, and after a time it drizzled, the first rain after many dry days. It was obvious the Germans had conflicting orders and were not yet sure what to do with the prisoners, because the train chiefly stood still or moved in different directions. Finally, near the end of the short December day they rolled into some bigger station, where the German escort opened the doors one after another, yelling:

“Alle raus! Schnell! Schnell! (All-out! Move!)”

The surprised prisoners expected another camp or prison. However, the escorts now only interested themselves with as quickly as possible emptying the train and made no interference with the incredulous people who stepped down. Nobody barred the way. Nobody held up the small groups which detached themselves from the confused mob around the train. Nobody shot, or tried to stop the exodus. After a time it became obvious that everyone could go free, where they pleased. However, where to?

Because the surprised and shocked prisoners, only now belatedly collected up their belongings and baggage scattered on the floor of the wagons, it resulted in a temporary chaos. Some had already got out and now tried to come back to fetch their baggage. Some tried to get down, which was not easy, especially for the elderly and not fit people, as the wagon floor was high above the ground and there were no ladders or steps. Some right by the door tried to help, blocking the way, a right pallmall. Meantime, into the half-unloaded wagon came several German soldiers from the escort, prompting, yelling, finally swearing and “helping” with rifle butts. To be sure, they did not beat the former prisoners, only pushed them. However, Angus’ mother, rather a substantial lady, although she had several months earlier under rapid-fire in the field been able to outrun Angus, now seemed not fit for jumping. She came to the brink and could not decide on her next step. She should sit down on the ledge to lower herself, but there was not time and, pushed with a rifle (or perhaps only threatened with one, Angus could be not sure), she fell. Angus waiting below was not able to hold her up, they both collapsed and she crashed hard headfirst on the rail. Although with the help of the others, she got up and moved off out-of-the-way, she was dizzy and for the first time in the war, Angus had to lead and support her.

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Capsule: The solidarity and team spirit of the Polish society in time of need and trial.

One may notice that at the time of distress and calamity, the Polish people displayed a high degree of unity and reacted swift and proper for the ill-fated victims. Well, at least until the time when the best among them were dead; the occupying force terminated all such out in the first round. Angus never before nor later saw such a universal, widespread commitment, such unsophisticated sacrifices and at the same time a rare combination of generous altruism with a clever economy.

It was as if, meeting with great calamity and catastrophe the human nature of the simple, common people polarized, the great evil against the best virtues. For example the transport of prisoners had just unexpectedly arrived in Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski (Angus read the name on the board over the station building). They had been at the depot only minutes, well under half an hour, and already among the mob of mindless, confused and jumbled people appeared volunteers. Delegates of different committees, humanitarian organizations or just ad hoc gathered individuals who got wind of the transport, had come to offer relief.

This one example does not begin to tell the story. After the lost campaign, everywhere were many victims, wounded, displaced, refugees, often destitute, without assets, unable to survive, a vast number of the unhappy in need. Those who with luck survived, gave without questions aid to the less lucky ones, without regard for personal material loss, this was simply a common cause. The populace neither then nor now consisted of angels of mercy, but in a time of such good example even the worse ones would feel ashamed to not do their best. Never again would Angus see such a competition in good deeds – a general climate of goodwill which today would seem unbelievable. Probably the people of this former world were of a better material than now.

In Ostrowiec, therefore, never a big city, arrived unexpected and unannounced several thousand displaced and dispossessed people. Even before, came the wounded, the families of men killed in war, with the sick, many children, often without any means; not mentioning the fugitives. In short a loot of people in need of help.

All the arriving got a shelter of some sort, nobody was left hungry or thirsty, the improvised help was quick and efficient. The townspeople took

under their roofs any nearest of the deported on the spur of the moment, although they must be aware that in the future their guests might become a heavy burden. They took to their flats or houses strangers who might not leave, because they had no place to go. It is true, at the time nobody expected the war could take so long.

All Poles still believed, in the spring, or summer at the latest, Germany must surrender. Improvised corporate bodies took care of the rest. They led a large part of the displaced to the offices of diverse organizations, from benevolent or education societies to rosary ringlets, schools (if not occupied by German troops), even to oratories.

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Angus, supporting his mother, went by wet, dark road with a bunch of others led by a cluster of civilians. He felt responsible not only for his mother, but as well for the belongings, bags and packages, which he was not able to carry and could manage only thanks to the help of unknown Samaritans. He behaved not exactly his best, afraid the helpers might bolt with the goods. He remembered this afterwards with shame, but this was the first time he had had to act for the family, and he was afraid he might prove inadequate for the situation and afterwards his mother might blame him. Anyway, if something unwanted were to happen, he could not prevent it, but at the time his suspicions were absurd.

In about twenty minutes, they arrived at a hostel of the Ostrowiec Ironworks, so far unused although the factory had geared up to start production at the beginning of the war. Angus and his mother temporarily took one corner of a great, empty room, and the remaining corners occupied the others. The chamber was freshly painted and washed clean, as were the wooden floor and windows, but there was no furniture. They had to sleep on the blanket laid direct on the bare wood. They got pots with hot coffee, bread and something on top, with a promise that first thing in the morning there would be a supply of beds and some household equipment. The main was, there was a bathroom and they could wash off the journey.

Germans allowed them not take warm clothing, no bedding from their home. Nevertheless, Aunt Frania and her family had supplied them adequately in the camp. Familiar with the prison condition, they could sleep well enough (though a little straw would have been welcome).

The next morning Mother sent him shopping. It was a sensation, simply to go into a store and be able to buy there fresh muffins, milk and miscellaneous other items, just as he had done at home. He had to pinch himself on the way to assure himself it was not a dream. Now he could understand how released prisoners feel.

After breakfast he tried to persuade Mother to lay down, because after yesterday's fall she still had pain in the head and problems with balance. Angus insisted on visiting a doctor; already in the shop he had asked about directions and wanted go and arrange this. However, Mother considered it unnecessary, she felt better after the night.

Womenfolk act queer, Angus could never understand them. Mother had to hang at all cost some frills and finery on the window, if only the one, near which they slept. Angus could not understand this; for him a window fresh and clean, painted recently, was the most natural object, pretty enough. However, all the women of his family, both former and future, got in a frenzy at the sight of a bare window and could not rest until they hung something there.

Mother had not a regular curtain, but sought something out. She did not listen to his comments, she was determined. If she were dying, she would first hang a drapery on the window if it this were her last act in this world.

Now, without any delay, she commanded him up on the chair (they had already got two chairs and a table, the beds would arrive a little later), but it was a high window. It was necessary to position the chair on the table and only then was Angus able to arrange the fabrics according to her instructions. Still not perfect, in her imagination the suspension should be different. Not pleased with his results, she wanted to personally apply the corrections. Paying no attention to Angus' protest, she stepped on the provisory construction.

No way could this end well. In the next moment she toppled from the pyramid, Angus again caught her but she was too heavy to hold and again she struck her head, but this time not the rail, only the wooden plank. Nevertheless, this time she lost consciousness for good.

In a general mess and turmoil, all the people present in the room threw themselves to help, taking her up, laying her down again on the blanket, bringing water, each presenting his opinion and advising something different. Lucky that Angus had already got the address of the doctor. Waiting not a second longer for the unsuccessful attempt to return her to

life, he had already started to run through the wet street. It dazzled with puddles from yesterday's rain, the long period of dry weather obviously ended. On the way, he passed by a chapel or small church, but did not pause to ask God for backing, though still mighty religious. He was also mightily terrified, it was the first time he had been so much afraid for his mother. Under the rapid-fire he had remained staunchly convinced that nothing and nobody could harm her. He considered her as indestructible as the planet.

And now, without any warning at all, any notice, unexpected like a thunderbolt from a blue, clear sky, in one second everything was well and in the next the world shattered, when, why? Running along unfamiliar street of the town, he could not think clearly, could not talk to God reasonably, choose the best offer, consider what currency would please Him best, what offer would best attract. He only kept saying, "My God, take my life instead, I'm younger, I may live longer, swap this for Mummy's life, I don't want to live any more anyway. I would prefer to take hundred blows and die a hundred times." Although all the time he remained aware, it was a plain nonsense, a bid without any value, he can't offer God what is His already and can't promise Him a suicide, this would be a sacrilege, an atrocity.

If so lost in himself, at least he did not lose his way, had been directed right in the shop. He kept running on wet pavements and stones, occasionally stumbling out a question about the street and the house, as if he was himself a stone, falling the shortest way down. He caught the doctor on his way out to the hospital. Angus was not sure afterwards, how he persuaded him. The doctor had a busy time right now, many bad cases and some worse. Angus could not sure, but maybe the right argument was, he already had a cab waiting. He told the doctor, he would be sure to be on time at the hospital or even a few minutes earlier, riding. Angus would hold the cab for him while he saw to Mother, and then the cab would deliver "Sir Doctor" straight to the hospital.

Anyway the main was, he succeeded in bringing the doctor and Mother still was alive. She opened her eyes, but was not aware of where she was and what had happened. She could not get up, had no balance, even sitting fell down again.

The doctor decided it was a concussion of the brain, but he could not say how serious without an X-ray examination of the skull and especially its base. The cab, which Angus had promised would deliver the doctor to the

hospital, took in addition also the woman and her anxious son. She went to the infirmary for the examination and Angus remained alone. It was his first opportunity to close his eyes and pray properly, almost losing contact with the external world. But the external world remained; Angus was not aware how cold he was. He shook and shook, simply could not check himself. Luckily, the small room where he waited was not only warm, it was rather hot. It took a longtime before he learned anything at all and then only, the female patient must stay a few days longer.

It took hours, before Mother installed herself in a bed in a small chamber containing altogether eight patients. In fact, Angus never knew the name of the doctor who saved them. Now he called Angus and announced, that he need not worry, it was simple concussion of the brain without further complications. The X-ray examination was clean and consciousness was coming back. But he had to accept Angus too into the hospital. If his mother could feel he was at her side and safe, this would in fact be the critical condition for her recovery. To be sure, Angus himself was actually sick, he had a cold and the doctor found a severe threat to his lungs. But between us, the most important point was the psychic wellbeing of his mother. Such a clever boy did not need telling, the doctor was sure, but for a couple of days Angus was to be invisible, without any smell even, and not speak too much. Afterwards, he might help his mother, possibly be a help to the wounded too. Yet first, he should be sure the cold was truly gone. Before this, he was to keep his distance, not contacting anyone. The doctor spoke lightly, making fun. He called Angus his colleague and added, he is much obliged to an instructor who in such a short time dispensed him with so much good advice and in minutes educated him better than several years of university study. During this whole speech Angus did not open his mouth, only bowed many times. To be sure, it was convinced that before he spoke little too and only the necessary information, answering only when asked. However, perhaps other people might take a different view or recall him differently.

Mother remained in the hospital not one week, but almost three. Angus had not a doubt that after a week she was in a reasonably good state. He suspected that during the next two she shamelessly exploited her status. Angus pulled her aside and insisted that by overstaying in hospital she was occupying space necessary now for the more needy. She explained that she was a paying patient, that all the patients in this room were on such terms. Her sister Frania had provided her with money, which she

could apply now, in the crisis. With luck, she had found a place where she might regenerate and better to do it properly, than leave in a hurry before she felt entirely strong and healthy again. Perhaps she was stretching it out a little now, exaggerating symptoms, but that was just keeping up appearances for the sake of the doctors, a simple precaution so nobody might accuse them of keeping paying patients unnecessarily. Anyway, she surely was not healthy and strong, it would be unwise to leave yet; she needed still a little time more.

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The fairly new, and initially oversized, building of the Community Insurance Hospital in Ostrowiec functioned now as the Red Cross Field Hospital. During the war it was packed full of wounded soldiers, in fact it could not contain them all. Shortly before the arrival of Angus and his mother, they had been using every corner, every cubicle, including corridors, places under the stairs, even the basement. Now, it was the third month after the campaign and there were considerably fewer wounded, so a few rooms could be spared for the civilian patients of the former public hospital. One of these rooms was supplied with eight beds with screens between them (because it was not yet possible to separate the men and the women). Mother occupied one of these beds and next to her, by a small wonder, they somehow placed a small bed for Angus, also separated by a screen.

This was where, after about a week, this difficult, secret talk took place in hush-hush voices (the other patients, separated from them only by a light linen screen, should not hear the conversation). Mother's arguments didn't convince Angus, he was sure that if not exactly a crime, at least this was a dishonest deception; especially concerning himself, he felt not entitled. But on the other hand, he was so happy the terrible moment had ended rather well, that he left off further insistence on the theme, and decided to be useful and pay off his debt with good deeds.

In fact, the mother and her son had so far had an extraordinary run of luck, had always found a safe niche, a good recess. So it was at the time of evacuation. Next they arrived at the concentration camp when the living conditions were still not too bad, when the guards were normal people, soldiers of Wehrmacht reserve units, not beasts in human shape. Even the weather had been warm and good. The Polish community was able at first

to help the prisoners with provisions, so there was no hunger. And the transport had occurred in the last warm days of a beautiful autumn. Several weeks later just a few days in such a wagon would have been a serious problem, and in an open cattle wagon it could have been fatal. Over the next months, in a period of great frosts, at the stations of Radom, Skarżysko, Płaszow and other towns showed up whole transports of stiff corpses in the form of deep-frozen meat. Remembering his own experiences, Angus considered the real cause of death might be suffocation, the lack of oxygen with all windows almost hermetically sealed by the freezing people. He heard the stupid comments, that nobody had perished yet because of stench, but many because of cold. Exactly the opposite – with lower temperatures the demand for oxygen increases. Anyway, he could ask nobody, and the unlucky ones cannot comment, only the lucky remember (sometimes afterwards they even write memoirs).

The first days in hospital Angus never left the room, especially because his mother was remarkably quiet and reacted only automatically, but often wanted his silent presence. Yet after a few days she began to talk – the room contained only older people who liked to chat, it was their main occupation and amusement. Angus watched this with wonder. The elderly of both sexes talked so; in fact it was as if being sick was their professional business. At the beginning some of the details were interesting, but after a time he was bemused. For example, they had their own particular views on medicine and the functions of the human body. Angus in the first days had a severe cold and cough (which, slightly exaggerated to a possible threat to the lungs, served as official warrant to let him remain with his mother in hospital). One of the elderly commented, with a strange accent:

“This is well, catarrh cleans the gray matter in the brain and this way develops the intelligence and wits.”

Angus had some doubts, but did not comment. As well there were other unconventional, even remarkable, ways and means of medicine, like increasing the health of the liver and heart by exposure to light in a barrel lined with electric bulbs. These were patients with different maladies of age, used to cyclic hospital visits for general inspection and repairs. They were difficult customers, strongly opinionated and often disagreeing with the doctors, especially with the young ones. And more so, if the doctor was of the better sex. As it happened, this room was under the care of a “Lady Doctooooor.”

Angus, amazed, listened at first with interest, but soon had enough of this. He now took interest only in what his mother might say. She talked sparingly, but thank God with sense enough, so all seemed well. In time, she began to interact with this strange community and needed him less and less.

At last he could no longer bear any more of this small talk; his clothes were in a little chest by the bed and he had neither concrete instructions nor prohibitions. If he were to remain in this atmosphere, he was sure that, despite clearance given by the catarrh, the gray matter in his brain would give up the ghost. He dressed quickly and in excitement started with an overall view of the building. Most of all, he wanted see the wounded heroes, but remembering the doctor's warning, let go of this ambition so as not to spread the infection. He compromised on a short stroll on the nearby streets.

He began with the closer roads, Kiliński Street and the main Third May Street. He had seen nothing of Ostrowiec yet. Not a big city and in the dark, wet day not at its best, but afterwards he was to rate it as beautiful. Certainly, compared to Poznań, the houses were smaller and rather low; in fact, there were few apartment houses or imposing buildings, no tramways, no organized community transport system. Transport was supplied by horse carriages and bicycles; trucks and autos were reserved only for the Germans. He walked on foot to the bridge, some distance further there was the railway station and the Ironworks. Right before the river he saw something interesting, a narrow pedestrian arch hanging over the river from one side of the flood walling to the other. It was some masterpiece of the former century, made in the Ironworks. He walked to the portal of the Ironworks and then returned, recognizing now the way he had ridden in the cab. He noticed for the first time the newspapers, edited by the Germans in the Polish language and dubbed the "reptile press." Curious, he bought a few papers and read several more displayed on house walls. The top news concerned the Soviet-Finnish war. The Germans expressed their full sympathy for their ally, the Soviets.

They announced that it was the little Finland who had attacked the Soviets, firing heavy artillery on their territory. After this act of aggression Finland presented a false claim the country had no heavy guns, except some stationary in concrete forts on the marine approaches to the main port and capital. Of course, this foul fabrication did not help them. The Soviets with indignation repulsed the proposal of fixing a joint commission,

which would verify the facts by inspecting the border area and eventually all of Finland's territory.

The reptile newspapers would be found repulsive even by reptiles. They bowed down before the supreme Germans and praised to high heaven their close confederate, the heroic Red Army, her power, efficiency and so on. There was only one damned curious question, why all the stunning victories were happening again and again in the same places. In addition, the diagrams of the front didn't change. It seemed almost as if the Red Army, after winning a masterful conquest and many triumphs, was so disciplined that it moved not one meter into the enemy territory. Such repeated victories one could understand only if the Red Army was defending herself, not attacking. Then again, it was quite impossible that so little a country as Finland would have a chance, with the Red Army outnumbering her entire population. Angus supposed that however brave the fight, they might hold out a week more, two at the most.

The second juicy item was the news about a naval battle near Montevideo. It had cost Germany one heavy armored cruiser of the latest generation; England too had severe losses, but these ships were smaller and older. Pleasant news, but not very important; anyway, Angus had never considered the Germans would have much of a chance fighting the British Fleet. All the rot about the superhuman bravery of the Germans, the valor of the German commander and success was a sweet icing on the bitter pill. But even if Hitler lost a ship every week, this was not enough to effect Germany surrender. Angus destroyed the newspapers. The news being unimportant, he wanted not to aggravate Mother's nerves by showing her the vile press; nor anyone else's for that matter.

On his way back to the hospital he made a capital discovery, finding on Kiliński Street an open public library for youth, the library of the "Macierzy Szkolnej." Macierz Polska, the Polish Matrix mentioned already in Chapter 1, had been a secret organization dedicated to improving the education of children during the times of enslavement. And then in the free Poland, Macierz Szkolna had continued the task. In the library Angus got a second address, that of the TCL Library (the Society of People's Reading Rooms). In both libraries he obtained membership and a library card on the strength of which he could, without further formalities, take out books. What's more, he paid only a small fee for one book, but could get several. The reason for this he knew from his hometown of Poznań; all Polish libraries were on the brink of annihilation. Yet in the GG the formalities took

longer, the Germans were beginning their reign with other tasks. The act of destroying Polish books was not of primary importance. For Angus this was the best luck in the last month. The only better luck would be if he could take active part in resistance, but here and now there was zero chance of this. At least he could get some comfort from reading, while anticipating the final victory.

He returned to the hospital with a reserve of spiritual supplies. It was only a few days and some number of borrowed books later, that he came on a book that determined the course of his life. In fact, it was not one book, but rather a series of booklets sold weekly: Ms. Buyano-Arctowa's novel *The Isle of Wise Men* from the science fiction sort.

Angus had already read such books, starting with those of Jules Verne. Nevertheless, this one was for him a true revelation. Nowadays a rereading of the work might leave one wondering what he saw in it that so impressed. It does contain some congenial fragments, which have survived his era. But it also includes flat moments, run-of-the-mill passages, mushy and downright boring parts. In fact, it should be worked over, a first-class material worthy of careful correction. Only by the judicious use of an editor's scissors could the novel turn into an exquisite literary work. The issue perhaps is that science fiction has continued to develop and today there are many novels in this kind of superior standard.

For Angus, however, this book amounted to opening a new universe, because in it he discovered detailed passages which matched so well with his own half-fleshed dreams. Daydreams so far not properly developed, which he contrived but was not able to envisage concretely. "The Isle..." took his fantasies one step further, fleshing out that which he could not clearly see in his mind: the world of wonderful, dazzling discoveries.

This wonderful book allowed Angus to draw a complete, uniform vision of a world created and revealed by the power of the human mind: knowledge, science and spirit. All that happens on earth, at least as regards the human race, comes first to virtual existence in the brain. Only then, by dint of trying and after many mistakes, is it copied into reality. Development of mind and spirit creates progress, yet the new conceptions may perish in experiments and by "reductio ad absurdum." Some may have potential, but exceed the contemporary mental capacity, may be premature, but after many years came back. Some become fully incorporated despite having initially met disbelief. Some have evolved even further, spawning new generations of inventions.

One new solution may add more to the history of humanity than battles won or lost, may be ultimately more powerful than the great armies and kings. This book supplied many ideas for such great discoveries; carrying out one only would be enough. But to his regret Angus only now noticed how bad was his foundation of knowledge, how great the depths of ignorance he would have to bridge to meet the challenge.

Angus had finished only the fifth class of the preparatory school (not too bad, considering that at his age he should only now begin the fifth year). He had so far studied neither physics nor chemistry, and nothing about technology. In the fifth class the boys had indeed begun the so-called calm nature study, meaning some phenomena of the non-biological world, an introduction to chemistry and physics. Most of his understanding of the sciences came not from school, but had been picked up by reading popular-science books for youth.

From an early age Angus, just plain curious, had asked never-ending questions. He had a constant interest in how all sorts of things are made, from cement, bricks, glass and iron to more processed products: flour, fabrics, fuel, electricity, anything. In fact his understanding of the physical world was an enchilada of vague fragments of information, with a deep vacuum between. For example, the best source of information was the intelligent if already outdated books of Sprague de Camp, "The History of Discoveries" and "...of Inventions" and "The Great Creators of Civilization." Well, even the vintage "History of the Candle" by Faraday. Also many pseudoscientific or -technical articles, from periodicals like *Tęcza* (The Rainbow) or books of a sensational science type like "The side Antenna" by Bruno Winawer. These sources were supplemented by small scraps of miscellaneous information, as for example the fragments about the hydroponic culture of plants from the books of Bertrand Russell. All in all, it was nothing systematic, rather a scrap heap, a garbage dump of information.

It was Angus' hope that this assortment of information leftovers might someday be useful, if only occasionally. Already in Podłoziny, he had tried to tempt his uncle with the hydroponic plant production. In secret, he had planned some other experiments: perhaps he could find some cheap fuel and produce lime and cement, maybe of the type known in ancient Rome. Next he could build a watch turret or maybe a ship's crow's nest on one of the massive old trees, and why not a secret tunnel too. As do many children, he daydreamed of a multitude of such projects, for example

making binoculars from lenses (he had already made the drawing), or tanning skins for leather to make moccasins. But he couldn't find a coworker, and solitary play is boring. So he set the projects aside for later. It goes without saying that all these projects were of similar worth as the tiger spring of Mao. It would amount to changing industrial production, well, not even back to manufacturing, not even to craftsman work, because craftsmen learned first the knowledge and experience as apprentices, but rather to a stage of plain ordinary bungling.

Now, it was another kettle of fish. He needed knowledge, scholarship to make the great inventions and discoveries. Then, arranging these inventions as the occasion arose, he could wrestle down the bad enemy, Hitler or his successor, he could wrestle down the bad and alter the world. If a second Hitler should appear, he would not have a chance.

To start with, he must systematically order such scraps of information as he already had, must locate the empty places between them and substitute for knowledge. He never doubted that with satisfactory education, he would be able to solve any technical problem. This unthinking confidence was a simple result of his experience so far: in all the popular science books he had read, he was unerringly able to guess the next step, the direction progress would take. Just so, but Angus was not aware that these books set out to show the logical outcome of progress, try to present the natural flow, as plain as the nose on your face. The inner logic and relations became visible only "post factum" and not before, when these facts were yet not cleared and predicted.

Now that Angus had his plan, he had to start with something. He decided to start by purchasing in a bookshop the textbook for the sixth and seventh class for physics. There he would find some elementary information about electricity and magnetism with drawings of the appliances, motors and dynamos. On the strength of this, he was ready to make his first inventions. His next purchase should be some more exercise-books, pencils and an eraser.

It is only natural that Angus was an unsophisticated simpleton, a boy in an age when children were children. On the 8th of October, the day of the predicted miracle which would tip the war and restore Poland by the grace of Saint Virgin, Mother of God, he was still twenty days short of eleven and a half years. Anyway, a naive trust in his own power and ability was not a serious fault. His assumption was, he had much to learn and had better speedily start cutting his teeth on science proper, losing not a

second, but he might as well try along the way to plan some inventions. These efforts might or might not be successful, but he had nothing to lose, and the practice would condition him for the future.

His older colleague in trade, Edison, had also started early, as a small child with much imagination and no knowledge or learning – this came later, picked up along the way. Angus had no doubt in his own potential, had no inferiority complex, nor overmuch of natural modesty.

He read all the textbooks urgently nonstop for a couple of days and then began to draw. Unable to make any calculations or mathematical forays, drawing was the only way to plan out the future innovations. Angus' main interest lay in armored machines and especially their motors; how could they be made to supply a large volume of energy, practically without limit? In short, he was after "perpetuum mobile." The reason was simple. Angus had not a bloody notion about the fundamental principle of the conservation of energy, not to mention the second principle of thermodynamics, that only the spread, rather than the concentration, of energy is possible. Seeing the drawings of typical motors, dynamos and other electric appliances, he imagined their means of acting only qualitatively, not quantitatively.

Well, he knew that nobody had yet succeeded in a construction of perpetual motion, but this did not convince him that it shall remain impossible in the future. In the second principle of thermodynamics, he did not believe at all. If anything may spread, it should be possible to concentrate it as well. Throughout history many projects had been called impossible at the time, until someone solved the problem. So why could it not be him? Now to work – if it is for him to succeed in the task, there is no time to lose.

From this moment on, not only during his stay in the hospital but in the months that followed, especially over the winter, he projected, figured out and drew miscellaneous types of "perpetuum mobile," from the simple to the more complex. On paper, all looked reasonable enough; he had high hopes, for all needed was for one of the many projects to be effective. The most simple of the mechanisms based on arranging the vectors of force so the result changed, and there finally appeared pairs of vectors not amounting to the primary value. Or the pair had different points of application, which would result in rotation. In other projects he wanted make use of gravity, or the thrust resulting from electric or magnetic attraction, in his ignorance unaware that any such action is symmetrical,

met by exactly equal counteraction. In his fantasies, one object could attract another, while itself remaining unaffected. And if these objects were to be placed on a common axis, surely the effect would be a single-sided pressure or spontaneous movement of the whole combination.

Angus took also a strong interest in the possible construction of a magnetic mono-pole. He read that such a device could not exist; magnetic poles came always in pairs. Nevertheless, he imagined a long magnet, the poles conducted by a long iron wire. Such a construction might produce energy at the cost of the global magnetic field. Sure not a true "perpetuum mobile," but it should make possible to produce some energy, like a little water taken from almost never-ending ocean. Only, what might be the yield, and would the expense be worth it? Again, he had not a bloody notion how calculate or figure this out.

Another project was to produce intelligent ammunition by adding before the bullet a small aerodynamic wing, like the great procedures installed on some planes. The aerofoil installed before the fuselage, they called this steering by configuration of a duck. The mechanism could direct the shot to one side. If steering by radio signal proved too complex, the simplified variant would be shooting not straight, but along a radial curve. For example, a machine gun could fire from behind a barrier which the bullets evaded. Or it could shoot straight-on, but the bullet changing direction would copy an effect of flanking fire. The small steering aerofoil could be set constant and it would be possible to project a viewfinder allowing calculated deflection of the bullets. The last possibility, rather simple, would be to achieve a more flattened ballistic curve of the bullets, probably an improvement for targeting at great distances. Obviously to achieve this effect, the frontal part, the head of the bullet, should not rotate. Angus calculated several simple devices, but without the ability to experiment could not decide which might be the best.

Agreed, the review of these and many similar projects is a waste of time, the merger of fantasy with ignorance. Nevertheless, the process directed Angus' way of thinking. Angus continued on in this manner to the end of the winter, during which time he filled three draft-books with hundreds of sketches, and only then made his first and only experiment, which had shattered his hopes. He measured on scales separately the weight of a piece of iron, a magnet and the notebook. Next that of the iron and the magnet, separated by the notebook in different combinations. Alas, every variation gave the same result. The combined weight of the objects

together was exactly equal to the sum of the individual items, there was not the slightest difference. If there should be any, however slight, he could still hope perhaps a stronger magnet was necessary. However, as it was, he concluded that in his theory something was wrong, a sorry situation indeed.

In fact, he still had much to learn. For a time Angus preserved in secret all the notebooks, finally destroying them personally. Maybe among the drawings remained a rough diamond needing only some refinement, which he was so far too ignorant to notice. If these books should fall into unsuitable hands (for example during an arrest or a search), some enemy could make use of his ideas to a bad purpose. Nevertheless, this self-imposed winter's task left a deep imprint in Angus' psyche and spirit. In fact it determined the course of his second and indeed his third life (meaning a further way of life, after almost dying, but incompletely).

At the same time, Angus made a discovery of another type, this one to do with his own body. Those long days in bed between screens in the infirmary afraid to sleep, awaiting the moment when his mother might speak, the nerves – seeking any distraction, he began to watch his body, explore his reflexes.

In fact, Angus was still unripe sexually, prudish and unknowledgeable of the matter. Living in town, he had not had the opportunity to watch nature, the animals. His parents, and especially his mother, strongly restricted any unsuitable society, dirty talk or vulgar words. To be sure, even straight talk was monitored, as were unsuitable books or papers. With time he had conquered the family system about the personal right to read anything without supervision or control. Yet sex remained a taboo because his parents explained to him that it is a sin and he was very religious, in fact overzealous. Once he asked a schoolmate how babies are born (and to be honest, the other boy too had only trash information, mostly false). Angus' parents demanded an investigation in the school, a compromising and unpleasant trial. Afterwards, they told him a little of how the embryo grows inside the mother, but this was a misinformation by omission, as if a man had nothing to do with this phenomenon.

That's why Angus with wonder noted the special reaction of his sex organs, without any association with reproduction, nor any other relations between man and woman. He was not physiologically mature for masturbation, only for erection but was not even sure if the effects pleased

him or not, he was just curious. This was just the beginning, of course, but the interest remained.

After less than a full week, the situation changed. Mother got better and adapted to the hospital, began to feel at home and to connect with other patients. There was no need for him to care about her all the time. He had no more cold in his head, was no longer in danger of spreading microbes. At last, he could visit the wounded yeomen.

* * *

Capsule: The field hospital in Ostrowiec and the wounded soldiers.

The first rather timid visit to the wounded heroes on the upper floors consisted of a quick walk. Angus asked repeatedly whether he might be of any help, maybe by reading aloud, or fetching something, or even just sitting awhile to talk. Some said no, some yes; and so the first contacts and links connected.

In a few days, he already knew everyone by sight and spent every moment with the men, except for of meal and sleeping times. Many of the soldiers he came to know intimately, most interested in their history from the beginning of the war to their arrival in the hospital.

On the second floor from the stairway opened on both sides central corridors and of both sides of them appeared sickrooms with all doors open. The same arrangement on both sides of the stairs, two great halls with many rooms like side pockets. On the third floor alike, everything remained set up as it had been in the days of the early campaign, when the hospital was overcrowded with soldiers, not a scrap of floorspace left free. By now in the mansard-roofed attic there were fewer of the wounded, some had already transferred to the second floor, and into a few small rooms returned the offices. Now in the field hospital remained only about three hundred soldiers and the number dwindled to about two hundred at the end of the year. As field hospitals go, the building was not much overcrowded, but in comparison to its status before the war, yes.

Shored up here was not one officer, only soldiers, rather simple people. The injured officers and some warrant officers transferred elsewhere and after recovering rolled over to the POW camps. That is, if they failed to vanish from the hospitals by the end of September, exactly what the quick thinking did.

Even so the sergeants copied corporals, the corporals the privates and so on, the rank one grade below to be sure. The Germans had not much interest in ordinary soldiers, from the hospital they could return home. In the hospital remained just the worst cases now, though the mortality was already low. Those who were going to die had already done so. Nevertheless, many of them were disabled and not fit for work; if transported to Germany, they would be only a problem. Many a human tragedy, these invalids wished not to face the world anymore nor see their wives, did not want to show themselves to their families.

The records of these people were similar: all conscripted already during the war. The Reserve Army "Prusy" was just such a one, whose fate was so badly affected by the delay in mobilization, on demand of the Allies. The joint diplomatic intervention by the British and French ambassadors on 26th of August intended to show a conciliatory gesture to Hitler. This proved the most idiotic, suicidal notion. Army Prusy was to have been ready and concentrated on the ninth day of the mobilization, the 9th of September. Instead, it was already dismembered on the 6th of September, before about half of the men arrived and got arms. Already, the proxies of the Commander in Chief, facing a crisis, had removed some detached troops from the only forming Army to protect the western approaches. These detached troops managed for a few days rather satisfactorily. The attacking Germans paid at first a heavy toll, but next the Light Speedy Armored Corps of General Hoth outmotored the Polish infantry of the Army Krakow. Then turned north in the gap between the Polish Armies Krakow and Łódź, which retreated in divergent directions. Now the situation became desperate, and the Army Prusy found itself at the front before it was anywhere near ready. In fact, the Light Speedy Armored Corps took position directly at their backs, blocking the path of retreat.

The improvised defense from the west held unexpectedly well, the detached troops with some added relief of ad hoc volunteers temporarily stopped the Germans. But the competition between motors and infantry, again ended fatally for the men. General Hoth, whose name was to become famous with time, took Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski and Opatow. On the 8th and 9th of September the battle in the Iłża and Starachowice forests came to its end. The cut-off Polish troops tried to force a retreat to the Vistula River, but only a few stray troops and individual soldiers succeeded. The Poles, almost bereft of heavy weapons, were harmless before the German tanks and vans with motorized troops. The lion's share of the wounded

came to harm in the Iłża forest on the date 8th September. The transports arrived from the 8th to the 12th, some as late as the 15th of September.

The civic hospital expanded to a field hospital. Already earlier recuperated in the hospital many wounded, both soldiers and civilians, but after the 8th it changed into a bloody hell. It accepted over eight hundred of the wounded, some said at the peak there were eight hundred and fifty. There was no place, no beds for them, never mind treatment. The situation bettered by the loyal help of the community. Many people brought beds, supplies and materials, anything necessary. All doctors, nurses, even medical students volunteered and many men and women offered their help to the personnel. The numbers changed as the lightly wounded went on their way and the serious died, but fresh casualties continued to arrive. By the end of September the hospital contained up to 600 wounded soldiers, what to Angus seemed almost impossible.

The soldiers had a high opinion of the director of the hospital, although some thought Dr. Brandt's rules dictatorial, arbitrary, made with haste and high assurance. It may be so, but she surely had the situation in the hollow of her hand, never seeking a soft way for herself. In fact, she demanded as much from her as from others.

In this crisis, she pulled the hospital through and this was the main, few could be so effective. All the professional men, the surgeons and doctors, also deserved of high praise. After an exhausting, hectic training, days and nights performing surgery until they dropped by the tables, from this hospital emerged a group of exquisite professionals. Especially the surgeons after the war earned high positions, university chairs and outstanding reputations in Poznań, Warsaw and elsewhere.

Alas, many did not last to the end of war, did not survive. This concerns especially the Jews, who for a time represented the majority of the volunteer doctors since Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski had a high percentage of Jewish population. However, when Angus came there, the Jewish volunteers had already had to leave; the hospital management could not oppose the German ruling, it would be plain madness.

The little birds told that even Ms. Dr. Brandt was of a mixed blood; after the Nuremberg Racial Laws the Germans would consider her unfit for her position in the hospital. At the time, nobody yet imagined the more serious dangers. In fact, among the wounded soldiers and in the ward with civil patients were also some Jews. Yet now neither German control, nor

anybody else took any interest, there was no separation or segregation, all touched by the same bad luck and woe.

* * *

The only Angus noticed was the different slang, although it was not classic Yiddish – a sort of old German, mostly formed in the Dark Ages. The Jews in the Middle Centuries brought with them from the rest of Europe, seeking asylum in Poland. This old tongue, with a few changes in the original, anachronistic form, survived through the centuries that followed. In Poland it became common, as here there never existed any discrimination against the use of foreign or unfamiliar languages in public, as in Hitler's Germany. (Also in the former German Empire before 1914 and in contemporary Russia occasionally may be dangerous to speak aloud in Yiddish; the same in the later Stalin era).

The only what noticed Angus, was the specific slang, although it was not the classic Yiddish. (A category of old German, mostly formed in the Dark Ages, which in the Middle Centuries brought with themselves the Jewish elopers from the most of Europe, seeking asylum in Poland). This old tongue remaining with a few changes in the original, anachronism form, survived many next centuries. In Poland it become common, as here never existed any discrimination or pressure against using foreign or unfamiliar languages in public, as in Hitler' Germany. (Also before in the former German Empire before the 1914 y. and in contemporary Russia occasionally it could be dangerous to speak aloud in Yiddish; the same in late Stalin area).

Angus never heard Yiddish in Poznań, settled by few Jews, but had many occasions to hear it during vacations, especially in the little towns of east and south of Poland. He did not understand it at all, or the German language for that matter, but noticed the likeness in sounds between the two. With the murder of Polish Jews and in fact almost all European Jewry, Yiddish has become now a dead or dying language. It may be in use these days only between a few traditionalists living in the United States, but curiously enough, after WW II erupted an imposing literature thanks to the epigone writers.

Seemingly, the evolution of Yiddish developed not by change of the language exactly, because Yiddish itself remained in the shape of the old, medieval German, at least so said Angus' mother. Rather it changed by

addition of Polish words, probably words of other languages too. Such a mixture of words and languages happened so often that sometimes the amalgam appeared not only in everyday speech, but also in print, in the daily press. For example, about two years before the war, when on vacation in Druskienniki, into Angus' hands fell a daily newspaper. It had been edited in Yiddish, nevertheless there were fragments containing many Polish words, as in the following verse (he still remembered the beginning):

"Die łyżwes myt der kułkies
to jest ein feines sport
da łames rękes, nogies
und auch die kepeł dort.
Tam Tate wraz z małżonką,
bachores mit der tant ... "

Angus didn't remember any more. His mother, knowing the German language, explained to him it was a joke, a comic entertainment verse about roller-skates:

Skates with wheels,
It is a fine sport;
You can break an arm, a leg
Or even a head.
There goes Father with a spouse,
The children with their aunt....

Exotic or not, such composite texts may become the swiftest way to learn and understand languages. The modern linguists and teachers should try the old and natural way, exactly like the children do, mixing words and learning quickly. It would be even more effective to introduce this pattern in printed matter, books and newspapers. The most interesting fragments, the most gripping and attractive, to grab and retain the reader's attention, and step by step an increasing percentage of alien words and phrases. This way learning could progress smoothly with no barriers at all. Sure, it would give only a quick and rough understanding, not the correct use, and further study would be necessary for polishing, exactly as the children do.

To be sure in hospital Angus never heard straight Yiddish; anyway, he could not distinguish it from German, knowing neither the old nor the new

variant of the tongue. What is more, he never distinguished the mixture of words. Perhaps just because he had relatively few contacts, he met only people talking a good Polish, only sometimes with a poor grammar. This in itself was nothing extraordinary among rather simple people. Sometimes there was a distinct difference in the grammar, but he was not aware of meeting a Jew. One of the poor fellows spoke rather indistinct Polish words, but with an unusual grammar: "Signora Doctor, me must not bite this, me don't have the teeth."

The injured soldier had lost not only his teeth, but a great part of his jaw, and that he was able to speak at all betrayed the skill of the operating surgeon. Still, the soldier had to eat permanently only soft mash.

The point is, now TV and radio have made speech uniform, though simultaneously impoverishing it. Back then, there were many little differences and Angus was only just starting to distinguish them. This unlucky invalid with indistinct speech had small but characteristic linguistic differences and variations. It was this fellow's speech, actually, which taught Angus to notice the matter. Only after making this acquaintance, could Angus recognize several Jews among the wounded and some patients of the civilian ward where he and his mother housed. Much more important at the time, though, was that he also played chess well, much too good for Angus. There was never a question of equal chances even with big initial concessions for Angus, only of a master coaching an inadequate student.

Among the personnel and the volunteers, like the voluntary surgeons, all Jews had already pulled out after the worst period was over. It became obvious, it would be better to mind carefully all problems with the occupants. Also, all the male Polish volunteers vanished, only the women remained and kept on working with full devotion; one might say they didn't give a damn about themselves. They came from different societies, some of them genuine great ladies of special rank. Nevertheless, they took commands not only from the doctors, but also from the nurses and all the professional personnel of lower rank. They accepted doing any unsavory duty. The soldiers themselves preferred the help of simple folk women, and especially contested the help of the religious sisters. It's anyone's guess why, they were top of the top, they shone with insight and tried the best they could. Maybe the soldiers felt embarrassed in their presence, or maybe they served to remind about the second life after death. This was a theme most of the soldiers wanted to forget for a time.

Angus also offered his help (as for example with supplying the so-called "ducks" – meaning covered urinals for the wounded), but shortly discovered there was little demand. Already, there existed a fixed routine between the invalids. Demand for reading also was low, even checkers were not especially popular, although he found some partners and won the matches, gaining a good reputation. Unexpectedly, most of the soldiers played chess. This became a local specialty. In fact, about half of the patients had developed a raving madness about the game, although the greater number were only in the first stages of early apprenticeship. Among the beginners who had learned the game in hospital, the skill level did not soar high and with luck, Angus had a chance. He had played occasionally chess with his cousins in Podłoziny, but seldom because the older boys were not enthusiastic to partner with a kid who only knew how to move the figures and little more. Such occasions in a year, he could count on his fingers.

However here he differed from the norm not so badly, that given a handicap of one, or against good players two figures, he could just hold his own. Well, he more often lost than won, but this was not a point against him. Later, as he already began to play better, he sometimes lost on purpose, to humor his opponents. Moreover, with constant practice (he often played with a sweat on his brow from dawn to evening) he made sure a progress. He began the daily tour causally from any room and worked his way onwards, losing games steadily until dinner. Then the next ward or even floor and so on, till by bedtime he had lost umpteen games and won a few. Gradually the games became longer and more interesting. He found more willing to play, as many opponents as he could fit in and sometimes more, he would have to reserve a slot for the next day.

Occasionally meanwhile he impelled the partners to talk a little, to let him hear their war memories. With time, he became as familiar as the trivial utensils in the room, so they freely discussed not only their war experiences, which interested Angus the most, but also sometimes their whole lives. Angus silent worshipped them, these genuine heroes who had shed their blood and paid a heavy toll. Each one of them was worth more than dozens of such little stinkers as himself, he who could only dream, who was not adequate to fight for his country. However, right away began a more important business than chess or even memoirs. The injured in better health, who had regained mobility, prepared a great Christmas performance. This project now had top priority. The authors and the actors

were all deeply involved, earnestly read and memorized their parts, debated fragments. It was a dead secret, a scheme both private and emotional, but they came to accept Angus as part of the background, familiar as a chessboard.

Some of them, to be sure, refused to consider the project seriously, taking no interest either in the creative work or in the performance – like a children’s school play. Angus could understand both sides. These men had had bad luck, a clean wipe-out before they even knew what was happening. Before their life could begin it had already ended, whatever they wanted to achieve became impossible, all dreams unreal. Many did not write to their families, delaying the moment when the wife would see an invalid with no arm or leg, or an unfamiliar scarred and ugly face. Perhaps the mother would be happy to see her son return at all, never mind the hand or foot. But the parents in their older years should have the solace of a son in his prime, not care further for him. Would the children dread the sight of their father? In short, they preferred the family back at home wait for them further, than be forced to survive a shock and commiserate with them.

Temporarily they were among themselves. The field hospital became their haven and home, where to the best of their capacity they could survive, could sleep in some corner and be fed. Even more important than anything the doctors could do for them, was that around them were their fellows, other unlucky men. Together in a group, it was difficult to say whose fate was the worst, which suffered the worst calamity. In short, here they not only got care and medicine for their bodily wounds, but regained mental balance. As the field hospital advanced to liquidation, this time of limbo ended and the moment came when they had to say bye-bye and go, even if still not ready. Some of the wounded soldiers wanted to go home as soon as possible, whereas some panicked and given their preference would never leave, they expected nothing good “out there.”

In fact, one of the chess partners asked Angus about his experiences and after had Angus told him briefly, he commented:

“How much would you ask for an eye, hand or leg? Or how much would be a kidney?” And afterwards, to keep up his spirit, added: “Never mind the material loss; as long as you have all your body complete, you may consider yourself a rich man. Many of the wounded would be happy to swap their fate with any poor beggar, indeed.”

Angus, to be sure, did not need this remark; he never despaired about his present or future fate.

Just the same, the Christmas Eve ended with a triumph, after the supper the "Szopka" performance took several hours. It was the last great occasion, especially because all the performers would soon have to leave the hospital, which was to become again the civilian Community Insurance Hospital. The leaving soldiers recollected every detail of the performance, both the bad and good moments, but most of all the achievements. This was not a question of gratitude, more of wanting to keep up the spirit, singing when going away:

"...Wzniesiemy sztandar do gory!
Bodajby nikt nie doczekał
Powrócić w szpitalne mury!"

"...Heave-ho! Raise the banner!
We'll never again return
To the hospital walls!"

The next two days was the most hectic, Angus stood ever at the chessboard, some crazed nonstop marathon. There was much talk, but neutral, mostly about the performance, about its wheels within wheels. None talked about the future, none spoke about his plans and none said – "Farewell." As if time had stopped.

* * *

The horse-pulled sledges glided along a deep gully in the snow. On one of the high walls of rejected snow ran a path meant for pedestrians. There were stiff orders to keep the way passable and the snow cleared off, but on the path the snow simply trampled down, was higher. The snow cover was not equal, but with local banks and big drifts. The sledge path in its deep excavation lay straight and clear, but the footpath made its way through tunnels with a roof of snow overhead. The deep frost and uncommonly heavy snowfalls caused external life to stop; nobody walked outside unless having an exceptionally important errand. The day was half-free, the Saturday after Christmas. The winter was in the Poland of those days a lazy season, the tempo of life slowed down. There was not much

work, time for long sleep, leisure and regeneration, rebuilding the strength that would be again necessary in spring. "Let only the apple trees bloom again!..." The people fitted the cycle of nature, no bidden business, nothing by force. Angus, living in a big town, did not share this rhythm, but in the countryside the unsophisticated order was in accord with natural functions of the human organism. In the small towns, it was somewhere in the middle: the activity dwindled, but not too much, there would be more rest and more entertainment.

Especially this year when the winter came so fierce and rapid, the best course was to stay home, supposing one had enough wood for fire and could sit warmly by the furnace, making no exit. Supposing there were enough supplies. On this necessary excursion they rode alone; the sledge met no other carriage and no pedestrians. Today with the cart-man, urging the single, crafty horse, traveled two people, a woman and a biggish boy with several parcels.

"Close your mouth and breathe through your nose, or you may get pneumonia," responded Mother to Angus' every question. "You can talk when we arrive and at that point you shall see it all." It was all some sort of surprise. Mother had already made an excursion from the hospital yesterday. To be exact, that was the second time, but the first had been only for a few moments, and yesterday a whole half a day. Today again she vanished for some hours, telling Angus nothing, explaining no plans. Only now it became clear that she took a "dorojka," a passenger cab on which the cabdriver had changed the wheels to runners, and they toured the vicinity, searching for rooms to let. Downtown it was fruitless work, all places already taken earlier by the many refugees. However, Mother reasoned that with all the schools closed, there must be empty places, where normally students lodged. She instructed the cabdriver to visit the same places where every year he rode with parents escorting their children to schools and seeking homes for them to live when not attending classes. Mother was already herself again. The hospital had probably saved her life and in the quiet recess without stress she had recovered her mental balance, but they could not live there forever.

Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski had contained before the war several high schools, including two "gymnasiums and lyceums," (colleges). The people living in the surrounding countryside, the squires, the well-to-do peasants, the inhabitants of small towns – in short, everybody who could bear the expense brought their children here for further tuition. The percentage of

youth continuing their education after elementary school varied, but in the least years it stood at about one quarter on average. Now if the children lived not too far-off, there was no problem, they could walk or ride a bicycle. Some went daily in a cab. A few arrived riding a so-called "linijka," which was a small cart on wheels, pulled by a horse. However, that was a small minority. The normal course would be to seek accommodation for the children in the nearby houses. The hosts detached one or several rooms to make a small youth hostel, called a "stancja." Rarely one pupil would take a room alone, usually several roomed together. They ate with the hosts and were cared for like members of the family. The remunerations for such a place to live varied with the standard of living, but the average was 50 to 60 Zł. The fare was simple, but ample and sustaining, because in Poland supplies were cheap. A typical breakfast would instead of meat be dairy, cheese and eggs, often a soup of the local specialty, "zalewajka," or milk of which everyone took as much as they pleased.

The parents placing their child in such a hostel would generally trust the host with pedagogic functions, the host and his wife were "in loco parentis." Often the father on leaving announced loudly that if the need arose, he authorized the hosts to apply a sound beating to his son. It was obvious all-round that this was only a void, empty declaration – nothing doing, no host would consider this seriously. In fact, the older and especially well-to-do boys would not allow the host to direct them and often overexploited the position of the valuable paying-guest. Because of this general leniency, the schools, at least theoretically, were to supervise the youth hostels and usually the parents pleaded also for the control of the parish. It was a nominal supervision; the teacher of the class was obliged to visit every hostel twice a year and the parish rector did so usually once, after Christmas. Even if this was a mere formality, the opinion counted. The parents, especially of new students, went for information to the schools and often to the parish, as to where they might with full trust place their children. So the hostel hosts and their wives in their own interest took pains to merit the good opinion of school and parish, both.

The roadway to Starachowice took a left turn and entered the woods; about two hundred meters onward on the left bank was the Gimnazjum "bursa" (student boardinghouse). Just there on the corner to the right Piaski Street branched off. The title Street may be too much; it was a wide thoroughfare on one side of the forest fringe. There had begun recently the construction of a new church. Some distance after that lay the house and

garden of a former squire's estate. On the other side in succession stood the houses of the former inhabitants of the hamlet, the peasants. In addition, the area favored the clerks and employees of the Town or the Ostrowiec Ironworks who preferred to live a short distance from the town and build their houses on their own ground. These houses differed, the majority were two-level but some a single story, some had front gardens, some not. Such was the first impression, because in the deep snow it would be impossible to distinguish the border, only the most high fences were visible over the snow.

The greater of the two Ostrowiec colleges housed in a large, modern building off a main road near the west edge of the town. The location was well chosen, with plenty of room for yards and playing fields and for possible future expansion. Exactly opposite they had built a big new elementary school that would contain the pupils of several smaller, older schools. Around the school and the college stood only a few houses. It was felt that a walk or bike ride in the fresh air is good for young people. Besides, a little ways to the east the community had erected the "bursa," a cheap boardinghouse intended for the poorer students (preferably from the upper grades), which could comfortably contain about fifty students, and less comfortably more.

It was not at the bursa the sleigh stopped, however, but before a private house fenced by tall, densely spaced planks right along the street. Portal and gate were closed, but when they pulled at the bell, the loud baying of a dog acting as an amplifier, out of the house came a person. This was a woman in a green woolen shawl overhead and shoulders, who opened the wicket and helped Angus' mother up the wooden steps to the hall. The cabdriver followed with the baggage and then took his leave.

The host wife took off her warm wrap and opened one of the two doors opposite each other in the hall, and they stepped into the kitchen. This was lit by an electric lamp and the flames of the stove, visible through the metal grate although the twilight was not yet much advanced and both the window and the lamp supplied light. The host wife proposed the newcomers might start with viewing their room, taking off their warm clothes and washing, and meanwhile she would prepare the supper. The room was directly behind the kitchen stove, with the door almost touching it. The ceramic-tiled back wall of the stove warmed the small room – despite the sharp frost outside warmed it rather too well, they had to let some cold air in. Rectangular room was only some fourteen meters square;

before the war it was let to two students and now it seemed ample for the mother and son with very little baggage. Painted white and furnished sparsely but sufficiently, it contained two bunks, a clothing shelf, a small table with a pair of chairs, and a washstand with a basin and two buckets, one for pure and one for dirty water. More water, stored in two containers standing on an undersized ledge in the kitchen, came from a well in the yard, enclosed and provided with a windlass and a chain with a suspended pail. The dirty water had to be disposed of on the manure heap behind a fence, at the edge of the vegetable garden.

The whole site consisted of the yard with the house, then the outbuildings: bakehouse, woodshed, laundry, cowshed, stable and a small sty for the care of two pigs. Next came a low fence with a gate, entry to the vegetable garden ending at the manure pile, and further along a high fence around a large orchard. Overall, the property was an oblong terrain some fifty by two hundred and fifty meters, the yard and vegetable garden almost square, and then the extended orchard. The orchard had been brought into cultivation only recently, the trees didn't yet bear fruit. The house stood turned sideways to the road, oriented to the east, with the entry from the yard, via the wooden stairs and a porch into a hall. The host lived in the rooms on the left side, and all the family life concentrated in the kitchen, with the fire, lit in winter the whole day. In other seasons, it burned twice a day, morning and evening.

On arrival, Angus presented himself to the host wife Mary Misor as well as her two daughters – Violet, eleven, and the seven-year-old Anisia. As soon as they became familiar with the new housing and set down their belongings, Mother told Angus to hop into bed, because he might catch a cold after the journey in the deep frost. He had got soft in the hospital, playing chess all day with no fresh air. Even the supper, hot milk, village bread with butter and scrambled eggs, Angus ate in his bunk. Mother explained to Mrs. Misor that they were not particular about food and a similar breakfast would be quite satisfactory. Throughout the evening Angus rested with a book, but the door to the kitchen remained open and the conversation of the women continued. He occasionally also piped up to put in his two cents' worth.

Finally in drove a wagon. The householder first unloaded into the buildings the sacks with grain and other goods, saw to stabling and feeding of the horses, and only then came into the kitchen for supper. He washed very loudly and thoroughly in a special large washstand, mounted ad hoc in

the center of the kitchen. Fatigued and probably cold, he talked little, but in walking he tapped loudly with his right, wooden leg. Ian Misor was disabled, in fact a war invalid, having lost his leg and won a medal for courage in 1921 in the war with the Soviets.

Before the war the family Misor had prospered well, injury or no. The house and all they had was the result of their own hard work; they had begun from scratch. Not only diligent, they worked with sense. Ian Misor was the offspring of poor peasants without their own soil, but at least he choose well and wisely his time of birth. Too young for the first world war, he was exactly ripe and ready to volunteer to the army to defend his motherland at the critical moment of the Soviet offensive in 1920. He responded to the appeal of the popular peasant leader Witos. As a true peasant son he was strong and fierce, young and fearless, and fought bravely without regard for danger to him.

"A na wojnie świszczą kule, lud się wali niby snopy.
A najdzielniej biją krole, a najgęściej giną chłopcy."

(In the war buzz the bullets, the populace fall like sheaves,
Toughest fight the kings, most often perish the peasants).

Ian Misor survived, but lost one leg. In his own words (predictably, Angus would not rest before hearing a short summary): "The rapid-fire from the machine guns was ample, but the aim rather low, so we ran as fast as we could straight ahead. It was not worth falling to the ground, better get the bullet in the leg than in the head."

Invalids crippled in the war got little pension; the State, devastated by WW I and more so by the Soviet war, had not much income and there were many in need. The front several times had rolled over Poland; the terrain being open, it had tempted every conqueror for centuries and the resources of the inhabitants sometimes proved not enough for defense.

But Misor's pension was in some part augmented by a permit for selling alcoholic beverages (the monopoly over alcoholic drinks was binding for any drinks stronger than 4.5%). Under the law, a permit for liquor sales could be granted only to those with an unimpeachable reputation. This was meant to guarantee the consumption of alcohol would take place in proper and virtuous conditions, upholding law and order – a sound and reasonable principle which could be better observed today. Then as now, however, the law was largely about upholding appearances. It was effective only in

keeping juveniles away from alcohol; in case of violation the permit would be lost permanently. In fact the permit-holders rarely sold the drinks themselves. Usually they went into partnership with restaurant or shop owners, who paid them an agreed-upon monthly sum for the privilege (an agreement similar to today's franchise). The permit holder was in the position of an editor responsible for a newspaper; in case of offense he would be the one prosecuted, most likely losing the license. In his own interests, he had to care personally about the regulations.

Misior found such a business partner, who paid him at first fifty zloty monthly, later eighty and finally a full hundred. He chose his partner carefully, ignoring the potential of higher stakes, preferring business with an honest man and never risking his permit. In the end he had a steady income, nearly two hundred zloty altogether, which was about equal to the top pay of an unqualified worker; many a man kept his family and home for less.

But even before he arranged all this, just after he left the hospital, Ian's girlfriend pulled him straight to the altar and they married. She assumed that her boy, if even incomplete, was worth more than others in one-piece. All the time she was afraid that some other girl might be quicker. She would not wait and cared not for parental permission, despite the father, who strongly opposed accepting an invalid. After almost twenty years Mrs. Mary remained a buxom woman, strong and hardworking, goodlooking and formidable. An excellent wife – and still, as before, concentrated on her man and seeing the world only through his eyes.

To the little scrap of ground he owned, Misior added several hectares from the agrarian reform. The parceling out of the estates of the aristocracy and squires took unexpectedly long, but as a former yeoman, decorated for bravery and invalided in war, he was first in line. However, he left the land in the care of his parents until their death, adding a new barn and the stable. He settled in the town, where he found an opening for himself at the construction and development of the Ostrowiec Ironworks. He had two horses and a wagon, being himself as strong and healthy as a horse. In spite of the artificial leg, he managed well. The company of horses was for him a true leisure and pleasure, he understood them inside out. Earning well, he still found time to care for his land and help his parents. After their death he took on cultivating grain, using the barn and stable, but decided to build his house in Ostrowiec.

When the house was ready, his wife sold him on the idea that it would be a good business to run a youth hostel for the students of the nearby college. She not only had the good head to recognize the God-sent opportunity, but also in a whirlwind of activity made all the arrangements. They had a good reputation in the parish and with the school; there were no problems considering it was the family of a former volunteer, a war invalid and patriot. She set aside a room on the first floor, that occupied presently Angus and his mother, and two rooms on the second floor. This made two plus five places, but usually not all taken; on average there would be one or two paying guests downstairs and about four up above.

Angus in awe and amazement saw later how much work may accomplish daily one woman. First thing in the morning, she milked the cows, fresh milk necessary for breakfast. The beasts had breakfast too, giving something they had to get something. Now the time would come to make the fire in the kitchen stove and prepare food for the people. Angus' mother was in no hurry, but in the earlier days there were the students – five to seven ever-hungry growing youths with an especially wolfish appetite in the morning, the task must have been formidable. Afterwards there were more mouths to fill. She had a steady procedure, feeding first her husband, she attended to this herself and with full devotion. Angus noted this in wonder; in his family the father took his breakfast as they all did, without any special attention. Here it was quite a ceremony and at moments it seemed so intimate that Angus felt an outsider.

Only later, like a hurricane, did she prepare a common breakfast and eat herself with their two daughters. Not to mention that to prepare the breakfast and later the dinner it was necessary to fetch in much water, wood and kindle the stove. Also, to take away the dirty water and the ashes, meantime feeding the two pigs, boiling or rather simmering potatoes for them, adding in any leftovers remaining.

Once a week she baked her own bread. This was a regular rite, as if religious worship, starting the day before with kneading the dough in a wooden bowl on the carefully tended breed of microbes, then left overnight at an exactly regulated temperature until the following noon. First thing in the morning the bread oven by the yard was cleaned out and fired. About noon, when the temperature was right, the oven was carefully cleared of the red-hot coals, swept out, spread with flour, and in would be placed the beautifully formed loaves. The fresh baked bread was every time capital, Angus praised it to the sky; those who have never tasted such bread will

never understand the point. For her bread to be remarkable was the pride of every housewife, even if otherwise proud and glamorous. This was her tender spot, almost as it were an art of sorcery and she had proved her witchcraft repeatedly. The only moment when she might rebuke her daughters, and to be sure Angus as well, was if they behaved too loudly while the dough was set. It had to grow quietly until the morrow; a few seconds of disorder might break the spell.

The children found it well worth the trouble to stay a full day well-mannered, just for the pleasure of tasting their reward. Usually they could get a little surplus dough and form some small loaf pieces that baked with the main dish. In fact, Angus remembered to the end of his years the incomparable, unique taste, but never found it again.

Strange, but the home-baked bread remained fresh and savory a longtime, almost the whole week. The other benefit was that after this business ended, behind the bake oven there formed a queue. Obviously, without running water there was no bathroom. But on bake day there could be as much warm water as anyone brought buckets from the well, for the oven stayed hot a longtime. On the long bench was placed a large wooden washbowl and the willing could splash to their heart's content on the brick floor; not exactly a bath, but a thorough washing almost as good. In the winter, the only other opportunity to bathe would be to go downtown to the public bath. But if there was a strong frost, here one had only a short run, about twenty meters from the house, compared to about an hour's quick walk to the town.

The parents of Ian Misor were no longer alive, and when the new house was built Mrs. Mary installed her own parents. They lived on the opposite side of the hall in a small apartment consisting of a kitchen and one room. Mary with her sisters and mother had not had a happy life, the father and husband was a tyrant, in fact the worst Angus could imagine, an egoist and rogue. A tall, strong and impressive man, winning the good position of locomotive machinist with a high salary, he took an unwilling girl from a poor family for a wife, or rather unpaid servant. He demanded much, giving nothing, certainly no money for the house, preferring to spend all in merry company. Nevertheless he disciplined his family constantly if they could not manage to live on nothing, in short he made their life a hell. In his work he was accurate and disciplined (there was no other way if he wanted to remain with the railway) and probably servile to his chief and a bad bully as a boss to his men.

Before WW I he contacted the socialists and took part in the revolution of 1905/6 as a member of a fighting group of PPS. Between the wars he remained a member of PPS; but frustrated, expecting a much stronger position, become radical, contacting the communists. Still virile and popular, he had many colleagues and companions and liked to emphasize his superiority over them, allowed to do so as long as he had the money. He spent this more on the increasingly less merry company, than on the family. But his popularity waned as he began to spend less after retiring. Only then it occurred that his best chances lay with the daughter who against his will and bans had turned wooden-headed and joined in wedlock with a stupid peasant, a bare ash without money and invalid to boot. He was sure such a son-in-law became him not, reduced his importance. And after the fellow' unexpected lucky strike, he liked him less and less.

In the apartments kitchen slept in addition the older daughter, Władka, who had followed the father's advice and in result remained alone. She probably would not have had a chance of marriage anyway, she physically resembled the father, tall and strong, not at all womanlike. Despite his age, still the father held a fine form, straight as a mast, always in a fresh-brushed railroad uniform and shoes with tops knee-high and the railroad cap on head.

He lived now in peace with the son-in-law, but hated him because of his own secondary position, although having come to accept the obvious fact that he had misjudged the fellow's worth. Being a gifted mechanic (without this ability he could not have held so long the position of locomotive driver, rather a top one in the railway), he tried now to mend his image by doing the household repairs. As a handyman he was good, the best. Nevertheless, his pension he still spent exclusively on himself, the daughters took care their mother.

Angus at first hoped it might be possible to persuade the old man to help in his projected discoveries, because he himself had never had anything in common with mechanics. Not even a simple device could he operate, having two left hands, he was good only with theory. Some practical learning would be much desirable and here was a true golden hand to teach him. But it came to nothing; the old man treated him as a stupid kid, good for nothing (which was surely true). He told the boy that he who does not work, has no right to eat; and who does not know how, shall not be a bore impeding these who do know and are able to. In short,

to get lost and fast, because he was not only a no-good, but also a parasite. Well, but where did splendid men come from, if they were not to be given a chance to learn?

Angus was not aware that if this man had agreed to take him as his disciple, his first doing would have been to give him a hell of a time and break him. Exactly as he did to his apprentices, working on the railway. The mother of Mary Misior too was such a broken woman, but already composed with life, as if she was thinking already on the next life. This life had offered nothing, to be sure, her parents commanding her in marriage with an unwanted and evil man. With worse to come, as the monster oppressed her into obedience and tamed her with beating. She gave life to three daughters and as well to a son who died as child – and for this also her master punished her. At least now all had turned for the better, her husband could not bully her so much in the daughter's house, and the daughter family cared about her. Only her health was much worse and she now prepared for her death, turning religious, but without excessive bigotry.

Nowadays she hoped and lived for one event: that again at the wane of her life, she might see around her all three daughters. The third girl from the beginning had a better life, cared for not only by her mother but also by two much older sisters. Mary with her husband, although only at the start of their success, provided for the girl's education. Nina was the only member of the family to pass the high school examinations, graduating the Business Lyceum in Ostrowiec. At the end of the previous year, she had started her position in the office of Ostrowiec Ironworks; the whole family, even the father, were proud of her. There she met a young junior clerk, Henry Słoddek, and married him. In fact, she got all she could want from fate and from her family and took this as due tribute, for she was in fact an egoist as bad as her father. She and her new husband shared the same expectations and ambitions: make a career as quickly as possible, at any cost.

Angus at first had not the opportunity to see her, but heard much from Mrs. Misior, who praised her constantly: how pretty and beautiful she was, diminishing all other girls. How clever and educated, what high marks she got in school and what a splendid prospect lay before her. Now, she was to come to live again with the family, because during the war working conditions in the Ironworks got worse, the pay was frozen and the discipline increased, as in the Army. Anyway, there was now no question of

a career, because the Germans would take all the higher positions and the Poles would be forced to work as slaves. They got at best half of their regular pay (and it was rather naive, to expect that the Germans would stop at this, the reality turned much worse).

The husband and wife were equally freed up; the training period expired and they both received notice. From a married couple only one person could remain in the office and the decision should be up to them. So they took the opportunity to both leave, they refused to waste their time on a position with rotten prospects. They had not yet decided what they should do. Temporarily they would live with the family while seeking out an occupation meeting the high standards of their self-respect and demands.

They were to take the rooms on the second floor, once used for the youth hostel and now empty. Angus got to see them in the next days. The much-praised Nina was a pretty, perhaps beautiful woman with dark complexion and hair and fiery eyes, like Angus imagined the Spanish señoritas. Her husband was quite different, perhaps she consciously chose him as a contrasting background. He seemed as if pulled out after a long soaking in water, bleached and with quick-moving, hungry eyes. They came on Monday for a short visit and to leave their belongings, because Nina still had society bonds. They should go on some New Year's evening – not simple leisure, for they might well follow up some new opening for well-paid work.

The whole family regaled with enthusiasm their coming, admiring the youngest sister who had started so well and for sure would make it to the top. Poor fools! How could they suspect that if under this roof came Cain and Judas together, it might be as bad for this home, but not much worse.

* * *

The next day Angus acquainted himself with all the people in the house and the nearby environment and first of all with the children. Being the senior and more educated (by one level, having finished the fifth class of elementary school), he promised to help the girls further their education. In fact, he tried to appease to all – for example he revived from his memory a book from the last batch read in Poznań, about telling the future from the palms of the hands, chiromancy. He explained the drawings of lines and tried his luck, watching all the time the reactions of the people concerned. It was a charade, but he met with some success, if only among

the women. They told their friends and acquaintances and Angus felt he could turn professional, could even earn money. But if he accepted anything it would be dishonesty, so he did not.

The real cause for appeasement was, Angus wanted to make friends, because he had never resigned from the plan to contact any secret organization or create one. So far he had found no one with whom he might talk, the women seeming not to fit such a part, the girls much too young. Besides, the winter had got extremely cold and sharp, the frost and snow caused Mother to not allow him out. He could only look up and down the street and peer into the forest across it, especially examining in detail the courtyard and garden of the Kawiorskich site. This squire family had for a longtime owned the former village of Piaski, now the name of the street. On the Kawiorskich property was the best well for miles around, the best and healthiest water. Mrs. Misior went there for drinking water, only the water for general use she took from own well: she had a steady allowance, or one could say privilege. Other people did too, the Kawiorscy withheld the water from nobody. By this well met the cream of local society; people in doubt would go elsewhere. Really, tea brewed with this water was better, not to mention the social prestige. Angus many times went with Mrs. Misior and twisted the windlass (the well was of a considerable depth and this took some time), but was too weak to lift even one bucket, let alone two.

Angus developed friendships not only with the people, but as well with the beasts: pigs, cows and even with the "very bad" dog, an Alsatian wolfhound. The family, to show their political feeling, their sympathy for opposition, called him "Bek." This being the name of a minister, it was too much and it caused a police intervention and a fine, but the family, feeling rather strongly about their rights, held firm their ground and the name remained. Angus understood dogs, his whole life had been on amicable footing with them, much better in fact than with men, but this time he had to give up. Bek had been trained to be a bad dog, it was his duty and one little stinker could not be allowed to change his nature. Spoiling the long education would be not tolerated and any private contacts with the bad dog firmly forbidden, sorry. Because the pair had already won each other's heart, Angus not only received a total ban on contact, but in the evening, when Bek could run freely in the yard, Angus was prohibited to go out.

New Year's Eve and Day were not much of a holiday. All bid each other the swift end of war, the devil may take Hitler without delay, best before the twelfth hour. Ian Misior often drove his horse-drawn wagon to

his land and premises, to supervise, if the snow were not too heavy on the roof. Also to bring in more grain for the animals, to grind it in the mill for flour and so on. This time he got more talkative, mentioning something which seemed impossible:

"There are still Polish colors in the forest. There is hope that in the spring the French won't be alone in beating the German Army, nor we need wait for the Polish Army, regenerating in France."

Even the wife expressed some doubt:

"How do you know? You didn't see this with your own eyes?"

"There were some who did, whole troops, not only infantry, but horses as well. They are not evaders, regular troops in control of officers," flatly insisted Misior.

Angus did not know how to judge this news. He had produced in the past such comforting tales, yet this time it looked serious. On the other hand, such news was hard to contain in the head, so unlikely it seemed. Nevertheless later it was confirmed, a straight truth. This concerned detached troops of the Polish regular Army, the remains of a cavalry regiment, which later became the first guerrilla troop of the underground army. The fighting on Polish ground continued without stop, all the war long, if surely less intense after the calamity of 1939. Without doubt, the impact on Polish society was great.

Soon afterwards, in the New Year, Angus tried his best to convince Mother to allow him out for an excursion on the sleigh with Mr. Ian Misior. But his mother remained firm, he had not a chance.

"You do not understand what you are asking. There are terrible frosts, even at noon the temperature barely reaches thirty below. Often it is minus forty. For a child, like you (what an outrage!), it could be fatal. A big, strong man is another kettle of fish. In no circumstances, will I allow such madness."

Surely, Angus never mentioned his true purpose. He wanted on the way to talk one-to-one with Mr. Misior, next get in touch with the troops, or at least with those who know where find them. He wanted at last to fight! But to his mother, he dared only persuade her, how unique would be such an excursion, the wonderful regions, the beauty of the forest, the wonderful air. Never in his life might appear again such a capital opportunity. He would travel with the best care, with a patron who repeatedly made the journey. There was not any danger, not even of sickness, he would dress warmly indeed. He had long forgotten any cold or

cough; this way he would, indeed, get more health, it being well known that fresh air is the best source of this.

However, it was nothing to do. The cause was simple: it was the mother who was to take a risky expedition, decided on a dangerous voyage even with the exceptionally sharp winter, deep frost and snow. Still much more dangerous was the severe rule of the occupiers, prohibiting Poles to travel without a special permit from the district or town commissar. Even more so, the general law demanded a passport and a specific pass, to cross a border. But in fact, Mother wanted go to Great Poland, incorporated now into Germany and from where she had been deported, which meant that to return there was a war offense. If she was detected, she would end up, at best, in a concentration camp again, but not only temporarily, as before. In the worst-case scenario, she could be shot without any process. To be sure, she wanted not to visit her house or recover some of her property, this would be a very stupid and ugly suicide. She decided not show herself in Poznań, but only change trains there, to reach her sister and family in Podłoziny and ask for more help. It was a crazy adventure, which might turn deadly.

To tell it straight: The comparatively soft-landing in Ostrowiec (if the push with a rifle butt, throwing a woman from the train onto the rails may be so called) had been possible only because Mother has hidden some money. The rest of it, the German officers and soldiers had demanded and robbed at the point of a gun. Afterwards, her sister and niece, when supplying her in the concentration camp with the objects most necessary for survival, smuggled in as contraband some more money. She had had to pay for the most basic expenses, the hospital cure and now the deposit for room and board in the hostel. She never told Angus how much money she already used and Angus, knowing her, accepted there was no sense to insist. Probably, she was not satisfied with this, but no way to guess if it was too little or too much. Only once she answered his question indirectly, when asking, how much their lives might be worth.

The deposit for the hostel she calculated for six months, because even the worst pessimists never believed the war could last any longer. Without a wink of an eyelid she paid Mrs. Misior a fifteen hundred złoty deposit, two hundred and fifty a month, double what the students usually paid. She wanted to feel safe with a long-term agreement – and from her experience in WW I she was sure inflation would follow and so it happened shortly. Mrs. Misior expected this also, but even so, this family wanted the

money badly. For several months they had earned nothing and now they had an opportunity, but needed some investment capital right away.

The rest of her money Mother invested in a Misior business (described next), but she never reported anything to her son. The deal was a masterstroke, profitable for both sides and Mr. and Mrs. Misior proved honest and proper people. The loan plus the advance, was enough for the beginning of their business.

However, mother felt badly with little money in reserve, and her journey was an act of desperation. She saw much war misery. The primary eruption of solidarity here was splendid, but many of the deported, poor beggars, had a very hard time. She believed that if they did not have money, she would probably perish with her son. Only now did she tell Angus about the arrangements, that they had a place to live with board for half of a year, paid in front. If she were detained for longer, it would be good about a year for Angus alone. Afterwards he still would have back the loan and his share of the profit. To be sure, Mother never mentioned the possibility of no return, talking as if this would be a trip of leisure, no danger at all. The only possible cause of delay might be, she insisted, if the aunt should extend her hospitality.

- "I shall be back in a fortnight, possibly even in one week, supposing all the conditions remain favorable."

Only now did Angus realize what she was talking about (or at least, as much as he was able to) and was terrified, begging her not to do this. But all his arguments were for nothing, Mother remained as always stubborn and determined.

Now seem necessary a comment and some explanation. Never mind the appearances. This was not a crazy conception of a silly woman in distress. She had some experience and expertise, an exceptional skill, touch and competence, in the first place the perfect German language with the matchless Berliner accent. She had moved about in Germany frequently in the years after WW I.

It was only guesswork, but in later years Angus wondered whether she may be for a time have been a professional courier of Polish organizations from Poland to Westphalia and back again. She never said a word, but this seems the only logical explanation of her many journeys in the early twenties, some to the other border of Germany or even to northern France. Also, from her special knowledge of many small and unimportant details. The case of the papers burned in September 1939,

official thanks and testimonials from the National Council of Great Poland (mysterious, considering she returned after the 1918 rising, in late 1919). Obviously, she had become disillusioned about secret organizations. She considered that in conspiracy the directorates contain often irresponsible manipulators, reckless and thoughtless, who organize actions badly and the consequences fall on the simple people. The disaster falls on the heads of the most valuable idealists or the plain suckers. This opinion she held to the end of her days; alas, she could have done great deeds indeed, for example in the resistance, if not for this prejudice.

On some occasion years later she commented bitterly and harshly on the transfer of Polish mine workers from Westphalia to France. An action taken in the exclusive interest of the French, despite the harm to the Polish families, who had already found in Westphalia satisfying work and living conditions. They were free of any national persecution and already settled in. In France, they found worse conditions, not mentioning the Spartan pilgrimage. (However, maybe it was not such a bad deed after all, that many Poles left Westphalia before Hitler came there to power.)

Nevertheless, she knew a different Germany. There is not the smallest doubt that she greatly underestimated the dangers. If she were found out and caught, she hoped to talk her way back. If the worst came to the worst, she would tell her woe and explain that she was born in Great Poland and lived there. She would admit a mistake, supposing the German law, responding the international convention about the rights of civil populations living on the occupied territory in war, accepted and ratified by Germany, would allow her to return. Not to her confiscated former flat, she would never do this, but only to plead for help. She was only instructed never to come back to the flat, but not to her whole native land.

Such was her naive expectation, but it did not agree with the new reality of the times. If she were not executed on the spot and insisted on standing before the jury and repeat there this rigmarole about civil rights and international law, it would be adding outrage to offense. She probably would be sentenced for insult to the jury and the country ("Das tausendjaeriges Reich"). Possibly for "Landesverrat" (treason), which would entitle her to decapitation with an ax. Such punishment had become fashionable in Great Poland; it was an old law, not applied for many years, yet especially revived, which touched hundreds and thousands of Poles. In fact, Germany under Hitler had ceased to be a civilized and highly cultured state, and had returned to this savage, barbaric punishments, not only

informally – in the dungeons of the Gestapo – but also in the full majesty of law.

To be sure, Angus was unaware of these aspects. He had never had any documents, did not even know what is an ID and had never cared about such things, if only sometimes needing a card for a special rebate or some benefit in a shop. He had never saw a document control, before the war having twice crossed the borders to Gdańsk and Rumania, on the strength of a railway ticket. The point is he knew nothing at all about security policy, arrangements and security forces of the Germans. He imagined the only real danger for his mother's excursion would come from nature, the winter being exceptionally sharp, the frost and the snow deep. In fact, he considered it unfair that Mother had decided on such a longdistance journey in such dangerous weather, but would not allow him an excursion of only some fifteen kilometers. Even in the care of an experienced man who made the commute almost every day. Well, the world is an unjust place and there is not a hope to do anything of importance, before one becomes an adult.

Later he would see it as beyond imagination that his mother, without any passport, dared enter Germany, crossing one of the most controlled borders in Europe. A noble looking, elderly lady in company of high officers entered the "Germans only" train compartment without a pass. Buying a first-class ticket, without any certified permit; then back, again taking such a deadly risk, such a wild venture for the sake of the family, meaning her son. What potential she had, and why did she not use it for a better, common cause? She was like a lioness hunting to provide for her cub. Surely if he had suspected the truth, he would have only allowed Mother to step out of the house over his dead body. But he did not realize, and leave she did.

After her departure, Angus tried his best to achieve more freedom of movement than Mother had allowed him. And if he had not been so eager in pursuing his schemes, perhaps he would have been granted it. But as usual, Angus overdid the business; if he had not talked so eagerly about his plan, he could now have come to an understanding with his temporary guardian. As it was, the most he was to be permitted were walks along the street, some distance around. Never take a longer way.

About one kilometer from the junction of Piaski Street with the roadway to Starachowice, on the north was a great, almost empty meadow called "Błonia," with a large modern elementary school. On the opposite,

south side stood the already-mentioned college (Gymnasium and Lyceum in memory of Joachim Chreptowicz'a), which was not so big and modern, but with an old and respectable tradition. Now both the buildings were used by the German Army. The bigger one, the elementary school became "Deutsches Heim" (club and boardinghouse for the soldiers and officers). The college was a plain quarters for troops. This associated in Angus' memory with the time he amateurishly started the undercover reconnaissance in Poznań on Śniadeckich Street. There too, in the Business College the German Army had took place some important staff. His efforts were futile, but he was sure, the idea was correct, so why not take a little stroll there, to see what was what?

Despite the deep frost, he usually walked about in only a ski uniform (with warm underclothes). Sometimes on skis, sometime not, as he had only just begun learning to ski. One could almost say it was an unisex fashion, but at the time such an expression was unknown. Nevertheless, several times he heard it said that in these clothes one could hardly tell if he was a boy or a girl. This gave him an extremely stupid idea: perhaps he could conduct his mission posing as a girl.

Well, as the petty officer mentioned in the episode in Chapter 2 would say, "Boys are often silly and this is their privilege, but this is more stupid than the constitution allows." It was the matter of his upbringing, old fashioned, Victorian, or rather hypocritical with a pretense of good breeding, but he knew nothing about sex, less than any seven-year-old child from any village.

He never considered that if his plan succeeded and he could step into the building, the soldiers would not behave like white knights, treating the supposed girl with complete respect. Much more likely they would consider this is a professional visit and in no time discover they had their hands on not a girl but a boy. In the best-case, they would suspect him of espionage and turn him in to the Gestapo, in the worst, they would take him for a degenerate transvestite; in either case it would end fatally.

However, it happens sometimes that one calamity expels another, one death saves another life.

Angus started out in the late morning, after the second breakfast, because the frost was notable, but the sun shone from a clear sky. At distance of a few hundred meters from home he untied the square woolen scarf from around his neck and freed both ends, making himself like a maid. The street was empty and he had a clear run, anyway he was still

unknown there. To his astonishment, he saw a small group near the junction of the street with the highway and some person hurrying along. Strange, in such a sharp frost rarely did one meet even a single person. Yet the group stood immovable, the men with bare heads despite the cold, all looking at one spot. There lay some debris of clothes, what was so interesting in some tattered pieces of material?

He asked, "What happened? What's the matter?"

"The German soldier shot a small girl, a Jewess."

Jesus, Maria! – Angus only now noticed the child, those spread belongings covered a lean girl, smaller and probably younger than he was. She must have bundled herself warm because of the cold. The blood was almost invisible, it must have run under the snow, or maybe the snow came on the top.

He heard an account of the events of just a few minutes ago.

Three Germans walked along the roadway towards the city or the quarters. Suddenly one began loudly swear and shout, commanding the little girl to come, and she walked to him. After a short talk, without notice he lifted the pistol and shot, twice. Then he motioned to some person looking from the houses and stated his requirement the corpse should lie on the spot until the next day. That is, unless they wanted to see him here again, he might conduct a short business with them and with the houses too. He proclaimed that this girl, a little Jewess, had committed a crime against occupation law by going out without a visible mark, the yellow patch with a Star of David. The two companions certificated and confirmed his act, as well as admiring his accuracy and shrewdness of observation. Yet the poor girl might indeed have had the marking on, but as she bundled more and more clothes on top because of the cold had overlapped the badge.

Surely this was the deed of a special villain, but the most shocking was that he had acted strictly in accordance with German law. This action, instead of meeting with the blame due to a crime, a dirty felony, met with the full acceptance of the soldier's companions. "Ordnung muss sein" (order is necessary) – well, but it was the order of a graveyard. Agreed, such acts happened rarely then and were individual, but were a prophecy of a foul, black future.

Not a wonder that just this event and this corpse, although he had seen already many dead people, were like a kick in the stomach and remained in Angus' memory. It might have been the unexpectedness of it:

he saw a heap of rags and suddenly there was a dead child, but he could still picture this image in full detail after years. Now he remembered a book he had read, it was Captain Breakhead, an adventure novel about the second Boer War. The episode when the young boy touches the blood of the shot men and later his own forehead as a symbol for the rest of life. He wanted do the same. As some women knelt to pray, he knelt too but could not feel the blood in the snow, it had vanished below. On an impulse he took off a fine silver neck chain with a thin medallion, which had broken many times before, but which he somehow had always found and repaired.

Now he wedged this in the hand of the girl. Only years later he realized that his impulse might be an offense to the Jewish religion of this child. At the time, he never thought of this, he acted on the moment's notion and it was never his purpose to cause offense. He wished simply to express his sorrow and sympathy. But it may be hoped that no God would take this badly, anyway the Saint Mary on the medallion was a Jewess too. Just so, the prayers offered there in the snow for the deceased were well intended, all the men took off their hats, such an act would not offend any religion.

After some time, Angus continued the way to the college, but was so badly shaken that he soon gave up and returned home. He told what he had seen to Mrs. Misior and she asked him not repeat the news to her daughters. Mrs. Mary and her sister put on their shawls and went to the corner. The corpse remained on view the whole day, taken away only the next morning. Horrible dictu, the Germans genuinely wanted to show an example, a terrible lesson; maybe the "soldier" was an important Nazi, from the SS-unit. It was the first time, an unexpected case, whereas later, especially in 1944, often the dead were left as educating exhibition and nobody wondered.

At the spot where lay the body, appeared some flowers, which soon froze in the deep cold. Next they appeared several times more, odd, where the peoply may pick them, considering the sharp winter. Afterwards they appeared again in the spring, until bit by bit the incident settled into oblivion. However the fashion remained: in the places where public executions happened and the bodies were deposited (or hung, as for example in the city market), always appeared flowers. One could say, on a wholesale scale now, whereas the first time it was a small business. Most of this happened in the year 1944. In the first years of the war appeared only the announcements posted on the house walls, usually one after another,

with the names of the already butchered and the next to be butchered. In 1944 this changed, through the city ran the trucks called "suki" (the bitches) from which the escort dumped the hostages, shot them and left the bodies on the street till the next day. Each of the spots later covered the flowers.

Since the incident Angus panicked. Only now did he begin to recognize the deadly danger into which moved his mother. They had not suspected how bad the situation was, never correctly recognized the height of the terror. Only now did Angus realize she had gone straight into the wolf's jaws and he could do nothing about it. Instead in the direction of the city or the German quarters, Angus began walk now the other way, to a chapel run by the nuns, where the future parson celebrated many a temporary mass, before the church should be ready.

Angus prayed desperately and made promises to God, bids so great they were in fact virtual, he would be not able to fulfill them even if he could live twice. He never in his life was so pious, spent whole days in prayer, maybe not so desperate as the first morning in Ostrowiec, when he had run for the doctor. Once he lost consciousness in the chapel, the long stress got him down. As luck would have it, he was alone and this happened unnoticed. He lost all interest in anything beyond the daily or twice daily march to the end of the street and next about one and a half kilometers toward the dark line of Iłża forest. He trampled the snow, widening the path between the fields and a young detached forest to the chapel building and closure.

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