

*The higher goes the sun,
The nearer comes Sikorski...*

Chapter 6. The hope, expectations, and some private affairs.

In the sky whirled improbably huge swarms of birds. This performance repeated twice daily, morning and evening, but the second time was much more impressive. At dusk, probably all the crows in Ostrowiec gathered and flew for their night rest to the forest on the opposite side of Piaski Street. Mornings they flew off to daily business, but did so less spectacularly, a quick and decisive take-off. In the evenings, however, the arriving crows circled for some time, seemingly searching for and taking the most convenient places. Or perhaps it was a social ritual, big clouds of birds one after another, the whirlpools slowly turning, sometimes uniting, with thousands and thousands, tens, perhaps hundreds of thousands of birds. It seemed as if all the sky began to revolve, as if there had begun a cyclone.

Astoundingly, the deep frosts had not any influence on this everyday ceremony. And the frosts set on enormous and, though it seemed impossible, become stronger every day. After the first few days the mercury in the thermometers became solid and the temperature could be read only on the old alcohol thermometer hanging on the other side of the porch. This thermometer, probably dating from tsarist times, showed the temperature in the Reaumur scale, needing a conversion from Reaumur degrees to Celsius. And because over the years this thermometer became pessimistic and its dark-blue liquid constantly lowered, it was next necessary to add to the outcome a constant correction. Anyway, if the mercury solidified, the temperature must be lower than -39 degrees C, and by reckoning experienced alcohol thermometer readers, in the early mornings the frost dipped from -42 to as low as -46 degrees C.

Such frosts even the oldest people did not remember. The first winter of Angus' life, 1928/29, according to legend had also been extraordinarily cold, but Mother told him the temperature even in that winter had not gone below -30 degrees C, and the people considered that uncommon.

The people differently explained this astounding anomaly. A great majority blamed the German aviation, declaring the daily flights of thousands of aircrafts mixed up the atmosphere, changing the natural

circulation of air. Angus doubted this, more so when the next year, though the German planes flew now in an opposite direction, the winter remained sharp and crude. All the winters to the end of war were stinging cold, though becoming gradually gentler.

Others people, but these were the minority, considered more rationally that after a hot summer and an exceptionally warm, sunny and long autumn which seemed never-ending, the stinging cold winter was merely a natural return to equilibrium. It averaged out. If however this first cruel winter was followed by a similar one, though distinctly gentler, an autumn such as the one which so fatally played a part during the campaign in Poland, never repeated. This was unquestionably an exceptional event of nature.

In the time of the deep frosts, the Germans became invisible, as if they temporarily had all withdrawn from the country. The motorcars, despite the announced duty of clearing the snow from the roads, stopped driving; it was rumored, it became impossible to start the motors. Strange, the deep frost seemed to the Poles not especially painful, with calm air. The sun glared all the time, almost no wind, it improved the tune.

Children, especially urchins from poor families on Piaski Street every day ran to look at the German billet in the former grammar school and the big, modern preparatory school opposite. They brought droll news, making fun of the sentinels in front of the building, dressed comically thickly, almost unable to move. The most laughable impression made the bulky, more than half-a-meter thick boots woven from straw, in which nobody could walk properly. It reached a point, when groups of young brats with loud laughter directly provoked the sentinels, occasionally throwing snowballs at them. The soldiers tore off their rifles and threatened the youngsters, trying to shoot, but without result, the weapons did not fire.

The next time something similar happened the sentinels called a group of soldiers, who clearly expecting this were already waiting in the heated interior. All ran out, for sure it was a prepared ambush on the children, but unsuccessful. The brats ran away, and the soldiers quickly returned to the building without results. This time a few shots fell, but not from rifles, these as before were frozen so stiff they weren't even fit to light a cigarette, but from handguns. Maybe these were only shots in the air, to scare off the youngsters, although of course the children told another story. After the recent shooting of the Hebrew girl-child on the road, one could expect the worst. Anyway this was the end of the story, because

when word got around, the parents of the boys applied a manual lesson and categorical forbade so risky a tomfoolery.

Angus did not personally see these events, he knew of them only from hearsay, because these days he changed his direction. When he went out, he walked the opposite way, across the far field to the chapel managed by the nuns. Near the junction of Piaski Street and the roadway had already begun construction of a new church, but at the time had arisen only the foundations and nearby heaps of bricks. The anticipated parish-priest to be, father superior Młynkowski delivered the religious service temporarily in the chapel and lived also there. He did much better there, in fact, than later in the parish, because the sisters and all the neighboring "society ladies," as well as those aspiring to that position, rivaled to take care of him. The priest, at the time of the departure of Angus' mother, went around "with a carol" and visited the Misior home. Received with a great effort and reverence, he blessed all they brought, then sat down by the table in the great room, where he also talked graciously with Angus and recommended him to pray. Angus did this anyway, if anything overmuch, both in his room and going every day to chapel.

Despite the cold, the walk to the chapel was just wonderful. Under bright sun and clear sky, he followed a two-kilometer footpath deeply trodden in the snow, which occasional mounted over his head. Sometimes it enabled looking out, and sometimes was higher, creating a subway, overhead there mounted a vault of snow. However, Angus did not go for admiring the beautiful sights, but enormously disturbed about his mother. As for Father, although they had had no news of him for several months now, Angus was sure he would easily manage any danger. Father had already been in worse circumstances, Angus clearly remembered his narrations, in short considered his father a superman. But about Mother, he was disturbed strongly, and without the slightest influence on her fate, he could only pray. This he did so intensely that one day in the chapel he fainted and awoke lying on floor. With luck the chapel was empty and he did not make an exhibition of himself.

If not for this matter, which weighed in his heart like a heavy rock, life in this period would have been interesting and pleasant. Inside and out, the Misior household and farm seemed to Angus attractive, charming, properly roused his admiration. Angus felt in this circle so well that he decided that life in a town, even in best conditions, those he had known before the war, life was superficial, while here more full-blooded and interesting. For example, despite the daily need to bring in the freshwater and dispose of the dirty, to tend the fire, first chopping the

wood for it and so on, the near contact with nature was exhilarating. He felt he lived more intensely, in close connection with his surroundings. Even the morning sortie across the boards of the wooden porch, examining the frozen-stiff quicksilver thermometer on the left side of door and then reading the great alcohol thermometer on the right was an attraction. Next counting for example -42 degrees of Reaumur and calculating Celsius degrees, and then performing the correction for the untrue mark of the navy-blue fluid was some task. Spellbinding, even without the accessory applying of moist finger to door handle (only the first time did he consider using his tongue). And then one might advance to shovel the fresh snow from the porch and next clear the lane all the way to the little woodshed. As for chopping, alas, Angus never got permission, he could hurt himself, inexperienced with the ax.

Meantime Mrs. Misior milked a cow, one of the two, because the second soon would have a calf. She brought a bucket of milk, for a day it would be round twenty liters. Some of it went to her parents and usually she sold a few liters to neighbors. For breakfast there was always hot milk and some cooked milk dish, often with macaroni, barley or oats, but mostly a hasty soup with noodles, that specialty of the hostess, extra good. One bucket of milk a day was usually left to sour, then she gathered the sour cream and made cottage cheese.

The art of making butter belonged, without any question, the specialty of the grandmother living opposite, on the other side of the vestibule. This was all for the family's own use, as dairy was the basis their diet. Curds, soft cheese and other cheeses, mostly fried, this all in different guises and with various relishes, and then of course the eggs and occasionally a cock. Meat they ate only at dinner every second day and on Sundays, never at other meals. In sum a typical, simple rural diet, all fresh, filling and indeed tasty, the hostess had this gift. Previously meals, when she accommodated the students, had been eaten at a great table in the room beside the kitchen. Then gradually they accepted a custom that Mother with Angus took breakfast to their room and now when Angus was alone he ate with Mrs. Misior and her daughters at the table in kitchen. Mr. Misior always ate breakfast early and during the general breakfast he had either already left, or was at work around the place. Only dinners they ate always together, in the table room, supper different, but mostly in the kitchen. Another specialty of Mrs. Misior, besides the morning soup with noodles, was her noble potato soup. Angus until now had been familiar neither with the sour potato soup, nor all the collections of vegetable soups strongly whitened with cream. Meat appeared boiled or broiled, never roasted, even the

poultry birds. If not meat, there would be the stuffed vegetables, or "pierogi" (squares of pasta, filled with meat or almost everything, fruit, vegetables, mushrooms etc.), all with cheese and eggs. The food was altogether different from what Angus had known before, but agreeable to him. He praised it so much that Mother warned him he should not overdo his homage, if he wanted to keep eating well. She too had no reservations, but it was after all only a simple menu. Maybe so, but it exactly suited Angus. About bread baked by the hostess, there follows a separate special tribute. The wooden house despite the great frosts held the warmth astoundingly well. The rented room adjoining the kitchen and heated by the tiles of the kitchen oven was probably the warmest room indoors, beside the kitchen itself of course. In fact in this oven, with attached great hood (the similar Angus had rarely seen, only on holidays in the far countryside), the fire burned all the day round. After breakfast, they covered only the red heat with ashes, it remained so for hours. Then it would be enough to stir the ash and add a little finely chopped wood on the top. Similarly after dinner to prepare supper.

The dining room had its own oven, but a fire burned there only from time to time. Usually enough heat spread by the widely open doors from the kitchen, where the hood of the stove effectively pulled out any smells. Next, in the bedroom of the farm family separated by a tiny corridor, sometimes they too lit a fire in the stove. But this was rare, the bedroom was kept cooler, if not cold.

The live fire too has its charm, rarely experienced by a city boy. Angus, fascinated by the lighting of fires in the tiles stoves of the other rooms, sometime carried a full shovel of red heat from the kitchen stove to room' ovens. Sometimes he was allowed to kindle the fire in the kitchen, but could never equal Mrs. Misior, who perhaps knew a special magic. A few motions of her hands and the fire, lit as by itself, without fail.

The kitchen oven, besides the mentioned hood, had as structural part build in a rectangular kettle, always full of warm water (it contained two great buckets). Mother and Angus in their room had a wash-stand and usually they washed there. The farmer family washed in the kitchen. A small washbasin stood there permanently and for morning and evening ablutions they placed a great washbasin on a wooden stool between the stove and the kitchen table. Also, after the bread baking a few people in turn took a bath in the bake house, in the great wooden laundry tub, using the still hot bread-oven to warm the water in big pots. Sure, the water had to be carried from the nearby well in the garden, but it was about halfway, compared to the distance from the kitchen, and no stairs.

The floor, covered with bricks, could be splashed on to heart's content. No need to take care like in the house with its wooden floor.

Nevertheless, despite all these attractions, life was bad for Angus because he lacked books. Conditioned to reading like a user to drugs, he needed them desperately now, if he had to survive the days of anguish, of dread for his mother, loss of the country, despair and calamity. Yes, there remained a hope, expectations. But to wait passively for a change with all he loved at stake, and with a vivid imagination unrolling its display of worst eventualities, he had to read. Turn his mind from the bad world. He had some books, the textbooks he had bought as well as the novels on loan from the library, which he never returned, because there was nowhere to return them to. All libraries met the same doom, as before he saw in Poznań. The occupants closed them, confiscated all the books and destined them to be recycled for paper. This was why, in the last days, the librarian lent the books without limit, the only way the books might be saved. However, Angus had only adventure books, without essential context, enough for turning the mind. Yet no-good for reading, again and again, after he knew the action they became boring. So he decided to write a book, taking the example of Karol May, who too wrote at first about odds and ends he knew nothing about, taking the geographic descriptions from other books, adding action. He started with an imaginary escape from Siberia to use the splendid descriptions of Ossendowski, but no way, not a go. His memory was not good enough, he missed many details, for a successful half-plagiarism like this one needed access to sources, to a library, if only a prison library as May used.

In the house he found few books and of queer choice. On a small ornate table, obviously for representative aims, lay a great and bulky, carefully and richly edited folio Bible. Angus received a special permission for reading, which probably none of the residents ever took on. This was a full missal, well above a thousand of pages of a big format, generously illustrated. However suddenly it turned out that he was not fit to read this, or unable to digest it. Angus had not a blue notion there existed so many sins, offenses and crimes, a nightmare, a world not worth living in. Humanity appears an assembly of the worst scoundrels and monsters, between whom with trouble survive some normal people of a simple decency. But only few manage this, easily one falls in sin again, despite a direct intervention of God, meddling each moment. However, despite visible wonders and miracles, good examples and punishment, the mob at large pays no consideration, even if they became impressed it was not for long and quickly forgotten, they

continue to sin. The distinctly impatient Mr. God, in result reacts justly but cruel, no mercy for the wicked culprits. Many drastic descriptions bordering on sadism awoke fears not in accord with the basic Christian beliefs of Angus.

Angus thought that if Mr. God should now send two bears, to tear in pieces Hitler and Stalin, instead of the children, if even nasty, such an example would be more favorable and effective for all humanity. Of course, he harshly condemned himself for such a thought. Surely he could never rise to the level of Mr. God even enough to understand Him, let alone to advise Him. However, the only way to react to such thoughts was to stop reading, because reading caused improper and mutinous thinking.

Other books, which Violet rather privately loaned to him, were a strange set. Some were from the publishing house popular before the war, *Rój* (The Hive), like *Great Courtesans*, *Czarinas* and so on, others in ragged covers, like *The Worship of the Body*, *Soldier of the Heir*. He could make of them neither head nor tail. In fact they touched the border of pornography (if an open pornography, as today, officially did not exist then, only in the gutter underground). The descriptions stopped at the culminating moment and the reader had to guess the rest. But Angus could not, for him the matter was obscure. Why did some lady receive Lord Buckingham sitting on a night-pot, never mind if made from gold and with a mirror? And he, instead of reacting harshly for such lack of respect, strewed her with gems and gold? Or what aim may have the tsarina to choose for the night the most handsome soldiers, if by night anyway the view is dark? All this was absurd, as was caressing the interior of a flower with mouth and tongue, no sense at all.

As already mentioned, Angus' sexual knowledge amounted to zero. Victorian prudery is an inadequate term, his upbringing and education in the matter was so badly neglected, he imagined the masculine balls to be the seed. Conception would thus rely on tearing one off and planting it in the woman, where he supposed it grows and develops, becoming a child. The man's phallus might help to push this in. Obviously this must be painful, but so was giving birth by the woman, the parents must perform the sacrifice, if they wanted children, somebody to love. Obviously, the family had to love one another without reservations and this he took to be most natural. Nevertheless, he was not sure if he wanted to have children, he had still much time to decide, for now the parents were enough. Well, if he had been a country boy he would have known better, if only by noticing nature. But he lived-in town and in a circle where such talk never took place, considered improper.

Meanwhile just now he discovered and remarked in his body new feelings, impressions and happenings until now unknown, which he could not explain. Passive waiting, too much time which he could not fill, constant worry, this all caused him to continue the experiences begun in similar circumstances in the hospital. Then, he had stopped when he found a source of books and many other engagements and interests after his heart, he simply had no time left. But now the circumstances changed again. Premature and still not fully developed, he felt strange irritations but came only to erection, never to ejaculation. However even so the reactions became stronger and more strange. He felt as if this all was leading him to the brink of an abyss, which luckily he could not fall into. After Mother's departure and with the deep frosts, he spent too much time in bed, but anyway could not sleep. The vivid imagination, meditations and worry about possible fatality on the illegal journey depressed, well, almost drove him crazy. If he had only had books, he could have endured all, but without them it was just unbearable. So, to break the anguish, he turned back to the former experiments with his body. The opportunity was always present, and then exhausted he slept in.

Sometimes it seemed him that he must have now exceeded the possibility of himself, that this would end bad. Still, the fatigue stopped the vicious circle of thinking. He had some unclear presumptions, if what he was doing was proper, but had nobody to ask. To tell it short, so began the so called onanism, rather a universal happening with boys, if surely too early at his age. But at these times, this doing condemned in the extreme, a straight anathema, not the sin but rather the superstition almost cost Angus his life when he became aware of this.

Strange, but Angus never associated all this with sex and could not understand what might cause the attraction of women, except the life in the family. But for him, this was a distant future, it was not the right moment to bother now about girls. The war was a man's business, girls could only complicate it, distract and disturb the warrior, except if there happened some brave one, willing to fight too. In short, a female volunteer full of courage, who could share a common active fight. The main was, battling the Germans. Conspiracy, resistance, any undercover work or open combat, whatever may come first. He wanted to live or die only for this task. So it was necessary to forgo anything which might hold him back. It was most unfortunate, that he lived in a house where he had no company of boys, only of girls.

The younger, the seven-year-old Anisia was still a baby, who followed her sister like a quiet, silent shadow, next sometimes Angus

too, was good, obedient and agreeable and satisfied with an occasional stroke on the head. The elder of the sisters was nearly a year younger than Angus, but much more experienced and knowledgeable than he about the facts of life and love. Angus, for his age, was exceptional tall and big, however she was nearly equal, only a few centimeters less. Female teenagers on average grow and develop faster than the boys. Violet was a lanky, straight but fit fair blonde with blue eyes and long hair, which she plaited in a braid several times fastened round the head like a crown, or only in front like a diadem. Surely on the pretty side, she already had experience and expertise exceeding her age, but completely lacking in Angus. One may say, Angus like a fool missed the best opportunity to achieve a little education in the place of total ignorance, with the help of an outstanding female teacher. This although she was not ripe for sex, would not be for a few years more. Living nearby, Angus accidentally stepped once into the kitchen during the morning washing and saw Violet's torso identical with his own, or that of any other boy, not any smallest makings of breasts.

Of course a true lovemaking was impossible, however a grown and good-looking girl interested the students living in the small boardinghouse of her parents. At first occurred nothing improper, rather only fun with tickling and preliminary exercises, she became a sparring-partner of the older boys. Step-by-step, the matters progressed and her horizons and expectations broadened. The first plays started with an eight-year-old child, only two years later they progressed more seriously, if still within limits of safety. Violet with full enthusiasm enjoyed hours of close contact cheek by cheek, sitting on the knees, allowing intimate touching, stroking of skin beneath the dress or stocking. At the dinner table she placed her foot or pressed her calf to the boys'. Then, by special grace she allowed herself to strip and show herself, and only in the last year visited the boys' beds, if the parents were absent and the time convenient. Without intercourse, to be sure, but meanwhile she fully mastered the situation. She discovered the secret weapon of the woman, if somebody demanded too much, it would be enough to feel offended, for a time let him cool off and ignore him. Then, after a time, accept the plea and forgive.

The parents still did not watch the daughter overmuch, considering her a child, physically unable of intercourse, so any excess care seemed unnecessary. Besides, in this part of Poland the people appeared more full-blooded and tolerant. Angus, living in Poznań, knew only a strict Victorian morality, prudery and bigotry, any sexual liberty never mentioned, damning one right to hell. Here, sin still would be sin for the

church, but people took a natural view with a wink of the eye, and looked at good competitors with respect. Anyway, the church had less importance than in Greater Poland, and about sex, some priests gave not exactly the best example.

Violet from the start was interested in this play and next found more and more pleasure, learned all she could, dedicated to following progress from the elementary to developed tactics and strategy. Beginning as a diligent pupil and advancing speedily, now she felt like a princess, single among the boys trying hard for her favors. Of course, she had a privileged position as daughter of the host, no other girl could come to the students' boardinghouse. Nevertheless, she had a natural talent and needed much of it, at first it was not easy, even at the still-childish tickling contest stage. The much older and stronger boys had the advantage, especially if several of them attended the game, at the start she could not hold out for long, surrendered, but anyway there would be no mercy for the loser. It took some time before she learned to master her body and trained with full engagement to stay in control longer and longer, to hide any uncontrolled reactions and tender spots. Showing weakness meant an encouragement for the opponents. Still, it was a superb game, she got better, progressed from success to success and decided on the further study and future life career, in short to turn professional. This exactly explains the strange collection of books; she prepared for the task, also in theory, seriously indeed, wanting to exceed all the women most famous in history. If the chance of meeting a second Lord Buckingham was nil, nevertheless she planned to arrive at the top and believed in her talent and ability to become a big star.

All concerned had to preserve secrecy and be most careful, for if the matter became known there would be a bad scandal. So, the boys never surpassed the limits, never tried a full intercourse or penetration, anyway Violet was not yet ripe, physically premature. However, with a practical monopoly on her small, but convenient territory in the house, thanks to the rules of demand and supply, she became privileged and soon discovered her advantages.

One of them was, that she still did not feel a genuine sexual desire. She enchanted with new experiences, felt on top of the world as center of interest and liked please the boys, but never agreed to coitus or penetration, remained a virgin, at least formally. Anyway, from the time the games got more serious, it was a common agreement to be careful and not exceed the limits. The boys too wished for no complications. However, she was able to keep a cool head when the boys, excited, might lose theirs and act irresponsibly. A big point to her advantage was

that she liked her new role and rules. There was forbade the so-called by the Australians "stepping out in Redfern" (just before Sydney Central, which in the slang means coitus interruptus). No coitus and ejaculation ever happened. But if something happened involuntarily, it was up to Violet, how to deal with the culprit. Usual, she took offense and imposed a boycott, but after a time allowed the petition and pardoned the offender. In fact, this gave her a dominating position she liked much. So she played the good queen, generous to her subjects, and developed next a true empathy and altruism. In short, she was happy in the center of her small world, but learned also to care for the happiness of those around her, which is indispensable on the way to any great achievement.

But just when her life path seemed already happy and sure and she felt the taste of her successful career, the war canceled it all. Already in the vacations she missed the boys, not just as sexual partners, but also close friends. The later campaign catastrophe was for her not only an all-out national tragedy, but also a personal disaster. With the schools closed, there was no chance of the return of the students, her close friends. Now, in her house appeared some new boy, among the blind the one-eyed is a king, maybe for short he could console her. But the bad luck continued, this one was so stupid and obtuse, he not only knew nothing, but did not even want to learn about real life.

However, Angus had determined quite another life program: freedom-fighting, combat with the invader, protecting his country and managing great deeds, if yet not exactly precise. In such a plan, there was neither time nor place for dubious affairs with girls, which could result in some complications, not to say distract him from the more important matter.

Therefore he remained uninterested – and this even though Violet did appeal to him. To be sure so far he took not interest in girls, but here he liked what he met, she was pretty. Many times he rebuked himself severely, noticing that nevertheless he looked on her with pleasure and interest, which he ought better directed elsewhere. But it did no harm to anyone, did not cause any effects, if at times he looked at the line of her knee, preferably on the calf and the back part of the knee joint. He liked also seeing her barefoot, helping her to brush and to braid her hair, pleasing in touch and color. Properly it was several different colors, in separate strata, the darkest was of clear brass color but most was clearer, straw-golden-hued, downy and plentiful. But this, that he even learned to make a braid, was the end, he did not want to be pushed. Even this conduct needed tact and diplomacy, exactly what Angus was

lacking. He did not want to hurt the girl's feelings, had to keep friendly with the children and consistently also with their parents. This could not succeed for long and finally finished fatally. For a time he simply tried to play the fool. Angus did not realize that really not much in this was a play.

They spent much time together, so he tried to transfer the physical contacts to conversation. Because he had already finished the fifth class, but she only the fourth, Angus proposed help in learning the agenda of the fifth class. The girl agreed, but was not much interested, even when they began with descriptive and picturesque material, such as geography and the history of Poland, which for the beginning seemed the best. However when it came to the stories of his own adventures during the war, Angus surprised. Much of what he told, from descriptions of life in the big city, but particular the displacement, concentration camp and so on, she treated with disbelief. Completely, as if he told fairy tales. He had felt a similar impression when talking with adults. Perhaps she thought that someone can just come to our house and simply, without any right, take everything away and throw out the owner, appeared for normal people impossible. They began to guess that behind this story lay concealed something misunderstood. Maybe the victims gave some cause for such treatment.

A similar reserve Angus felt also, when speaking about the history of Poland, mentioning the role of Poznań and Greater Poland, the cradle of Poland. More so when memorizing that Poznań and Gniezno were the first capitals of Poland. Also then, when he described geography and the economy of the region, the high degree of development – after all the facts, closely following the textbook.

The essay of shifting the contact to the intellectual arena proved itself rather unfruitful. However from the side of Violet started the decisive offensive. Because Angus did not show any initiative, she tried to fill the long spells by digressions more tangible, from the strokes, kisses, touches, till the decisive reaching for his body. And this not only a hand, leg, neck or it may be torso, but gradually also in the regions most inaccessible and covered. Angus found himself in the defensive, but because like a stubborn ass he held to his first decision, had decisively to defend himself, until he felt stupid, comical and ill at ease. He didn't like this role. The crisis occurred when a few days after the departure of his mother and with Violet's parents also not home, she came in the morning when he was still laying in bed in the small room. Having ordered her younger sister to stay in the kitchen and look out for the mother's return from milking, she pushed straight into the bed. Angus

behaved like a simpleton, jumping out made a speech, like Joseph tempted by Putyfara (wife of Potifar). In the most ruffled, official and obtuse manner, he said:

"Miss Violet, will you behave like a lady, such behavior does not become you, is most improper..." and so on, to the conclusion: "If this not does not stop, our association must stop."

Well, probably Angus did not intend it so, he wanted only to not waste any time and diffuse energy, to put it all to the good cause, do big deeds. But as well-known, the way the hell is paved with good aims. Anyway, his behavior was not only stupid, but also crude, simply caddish and harmful, inadmissible for a man. Only, he was not a man, but only a dumb, slow-witted boy, who stiffly held to self-devised, idiotic theories that he called rules, with a moronic stubbornness. This event was not singular, later in life he committed similar mistakes, in the name of idiotic ideas. Often, if not in the same manner, he wounded people and found it difficult to uphold friendly relations. The women, when they had the bad luck to take an interest, usually suffered. However, he always considered, he was doing as he should.

All the more strange is, that in this case Violet received the reprimand with humility. Difficult to say which of them felt the most shame, Angus never to this day was to see such a red face, at least the books for once described it without exaggerating. They were both almost in tears. However they closed peace and fixed conditions: admissible were only innocent caresses, like hugging, kisses except mouth-to-mouth. Angus sincerely assured Violet that she appealed high to him and indeed would to any boy who had eyes. Also that he liked her and wished to keep comradeship and remaining sympathy. This in fact was true, if there was more. A future conspirator could not tell, besides he considered no girl would understand his plans.

From this moment relations stayed as negotiated. Angus treated both sisters alike, played with both at home, or in the yard if the weather was good. Anyway, he mostly went out, at least by bad frost, alone. Violet stopped any radical actions, but liked to talk or hear stories nestling by his side and cheek to cheek. To tell the truth, this was difficult to keep seated stiffly, first like a piece of wood and after a longer time it became uncomfortable and hot. Still, such was the agreement.

So he had to, not exactly suffer, but rather get numb in silence. From the tension the muscles began to ache and go numb, but this was a blessing in disguise, because it made it easier to bear the small kisses and light stroking. However despite all efforts, several times could not conquer shivering, kisses behind the ear or below the jaw caused

sometimes goose bumps which he could not hide. Therefore the uncomfortable position connected with the stiffness of muscles and the pain of bad circulation of blood, allowed him to concentrate on something else, forget the caresses.

Running out in the front of events, it is necessary to be clear that Angus persevered to the end in his mulish stubbornness. He was exactly like the most stupid burro which, the more encouraged to move, all the more firmly drives its hoofs in the earth. Much too late he recognized the boundless folly which pulled on the surroundings exactly those complications which he wanted to avoid. It permanently separated the families. Also warped, fortunately not permanently, Angus' spirit. It was a reaction typical for him: if the theory did not agree with real life the truth must be with the theory to which he should hold at all costs, instead of a natural analysis, critique and correction. In the Cervantes book Don Quichote simply brought on himself a flogging and so finished all problems. However Angus pulled troubles on those around him, wronged the lives of others, at the same time convinced that exactly so all ought and must keep on.

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On the eleventh day at nightfall, when Angus as usual, always fascinated, looked through the window on the sky full of rotating birds, before the house stopped the sledges and out came his mother. God had heard his plea, she had returned.

First she told to all what she had seen, but briefly. Fatigued, she withdrew to her little room. Only there, she determined to explain more to her son, the proper target and the sense of her expedition. Two times she had traveled through the border of Germany, making use only of her perfect knowledge of the language and distinct Berlin accent. In fact, mostly thanks to instinctive fast reactions and sheer insolence. That trains went so irregular and the journey, particular the breaks and stops were so difficult and took place in the most unusual conditions, everywhere reigned confusion and untidiness, made easier her task.

"In Poland," she commented, "you could set the clock according to the trains. Never, but never it happened, that any train came late. Well, in case of catastrophe or of natural calamity it might exceptional happen, some half an hour. To be sure we did not meet with earthquakes or eruptions of volcanoes, only with severe winters and sometimes the flood. But despite kneesprung bridges and undermined rail lines and detours, Poland State Railways got tense, almost stood on its head, but

trains arrived on time. What happened now? Complete untidiness and disorganization because of a common snow and frost. I went by train, not late by just several or even anywhere from ten to umpteen hours, but from yesterday and once even two days late. So how does that look for German organization? They are unable to keep up the civilized norms, they are simply common primitives. All eluded them, they were helpless."

Most interesting observations, but Angus had already noticed this too. He was firmly convinced, then and for the rest of his days, that if only one division of the Polish Army resurfaced, in the winter without much trouble she could take Berlin.

In Poznań Mother reasonably preferred not to show herself, but traveled along straight to Podłoziny. Her sister and family still lived on their estate, but had received already a German "Traeuhaender." This one, still badly oriented, did not do much harm, anyway they realized their days there were already few. Nevertheless, for the second time the family handed over as much material help as they could.

But even then, Mother did not return at once to Ostrowiec, but drove on to Warsaw and there received still more help from her brother, who besides managed a profitable sale of the mentioned before gold medallion. As a result she returned with a substantial amount of money, which in the present conditions easily would be enough for their survival to the end of war. However experience from a preceding war and the year following it convinced her that money soon would have only the value of paper. In fact, the first small movement of prices already had begun.

As usual, Angus immediately offered good advice. However this time, surely the only time ever, Mother not only heard it to the end, but even asked for many more details. So, gradually the idea developed in a true business-plan, which the mother agreed to think over. Angus' idea was not especially original, resulted simply from observations he had made meanwhile.

The reason the Misior family needed cash now and quickly, so gladly accepted guests, paying in advance, more so if they could borrow still an added sum, was simple. The concession for disabled people, war invalids, allowed them to buy alcohol. It became now a good business, but needing a starting capital.

Alas, in consumption and producing of alcohol, Poland located on high-level. In an agricultural country, producing was naturally simple and easily accessible. Admittedly, alcohol was not a Polish invention, nor its making a national industry. However, in fact the Poles were first, still in

the Middle Ages, to begin production of concentrated alcohol for the market. The Polish name of alcohol-water solutions, "vodka," became accepted around the world, and the product has become a Polish specialty. This of course is not a cause for pride. But on the other hand there is nothing blameworthy in a technical progress of the methods of producing and cleaning ethyl alcohol as a substance. Angus knew this from his uncle, who was an engineer in a refinery and in his free time had showed him the art gallery with famous paintings in the Palace Rogalin and taught him how to look properly at pictures.

And so now when inflation was beginning, first moved the price of alcohol, outstripping food and other commodities. This came about specifically because alcoholic products are enduring and can be kept a longtime, well, usually become better when aged. Admittedly still trust in that exceptional stable currency, the Polish "Złoty" (golden), was not seriously affected, but already more foreseeing people began to look for a possible reserve. And so alcohol and its products were best suited to thesaurization (in monetary, not logopedic sense).

This again was a specifically Polish event. Over hundreds of years, a barrel of "starka" (vintage rye vodka) buried under the threshing floor of barn, allowed rebuilding the barn if somebody burned it down. Never mind if this happened in the Napoleonic wars, or the insurgent rebels. Whether hundreds of years ago in Tartar invasions, or hundreds of years later by yet fiercer Cossacks.

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Capsule: "Starka" (Vintage rye vodka).

About a century ago, resulting from changes in legal rules and after establishing an institution of spirit monopoly, disappeared both the custom and the "Polish Cognac," the country's Vintage Vodka. No chance for it to appear again, because the time of ripening is a minimum of twenty years, but for the decent much more, the most esteemed product ought to have at least a hundred years. Unfortunately, now under the name of "starka" factories produce industrially only an indifferent imitation, over which experts only shake their heads and do not want try, even to sniff it. It is impossible to compare such fabricats with the genuine ancient "excavations." And not only this supposedly most valuable but surely now rarest alcohol stayed only in recollections, but also the experts died out. But once people said, that each vintage vodka had its own individuality and there were huge differences between them. With the most successful, an empty barrels could at times earn the same

price as the contents, because such old casks guaranteed the next vintage vodka also would be on the top. After centuries of experience, introduced with time a pattern, by which the casks were dug up every twenty years, half of the older brew became poured of and the cask completed with a younger batch. This next was filled from one still younger and so on. At the end people buried a fresh, with crude booze. And so, now the industrial factories make use of a similar pattern, a cascade of casks, but of course the period of operations became many times shorter, accelerating the process in artificial conditions. So much, that the product produced this way compares to a true vintage vodka, as an imitation does to the true piece of art. This digression refers to what is undoubtedly already one of the rarest curiosities of the world. I doubt whether in Poland or anywhere else it is possible to find now as many as several bottles of a true vintage vodka. Undoubtedly more easily even then, in 1940, for example, one might find a skeleton of a dodo bird. Now, the chances would be, as for meeting a dodo alive.

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Of course, the further matter does not concern the famous vintage vodka. Angus knew this only from hearsay. At the moment existed a demand simply for any vodka in bottles. To be sure, the wholesale warehouse in Ostrowiec from the beginning of the war was empty. But close by founded one of the most known and the largest factory of high-grade alcohols not only in Poland, but also in Europe.

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Capsule: Golden apple Łańcut, a treasure in substitute money.

The factory and bottling plant of vodkas, rosolis ("ros solis" = lat. a sun dew) and liqueurs in Łańcut, could supply all the background needed for a sensation novel. Angus listened to many such secret stories, told by Mrs. Maria Misior, born in Złoty Potok, a cradle of Potocki pedigree. Łańcut was the best kept, lordly residence in Poland, now Potocki property. Not so always, there were former some larger and more impressive in dozens. But with the others destroyed, Łańcut had much luck. In the second half of the last century one of the Potocki family, instead of losing a fortune in casinos abroad, which usually happened to Polish aristocracy, unexpectedly gained a large fortune. The main part he used on the renovation and decoration of his ancestral residence, but the rest invested in capital tasks. Among others, into existence came the

mentioned factory and bottling plant of quality alcohols, strangely, without any connection to Polish traditions. All this used the newest and best French experience, bought with all technology, know-how, bringing the most outstanding specialists, with a large impetus. Then he also bought the right to produce and use the original names of many beverages and noble liquors. For example the genuine Benedictine, in only this place in central Europe could be produced and ordered. Next, a known liqueur Chartreuse and many others. From the beginning, that impetus and finance was excessive, however these and other products gradually entered the market of countries, first of the Habsburg monarchy and then its neighbors. The company gradually proved a good investment and became remunerative.

In free Poland the company again had serious difficulty, because the Polish market was too small, the export unfortunately hindered, the borders closed. Properly speaking, it kept only the limited Hungarian market. The factory had troubles, particularly because of frozen large capital in high-grade reserve funds and most precious and expensive liquors, on which there was an inadequate demand. Also, there resulted a successful competition from another firm, Baczewski.

At the beginning of the occupation, the estate of Potocki and its industrial plant threatened the Germans by takeover and an immediate institution of German management. Although the temporary, stretched till the end of the war. Potocki managed miraculously well, using both foreign connections and relations with German aristocracy. The rest did the bribes, large finance operations and even often the snobbery of high officers and of officials. Better lose a part of money than all, if only keeping the rest for a limited time.

The large stock of noble liquors, for a longtime a deadweight, now became a true treasure. This treasure lay in full sight and at any moment could become robbed, or it could help for the salvage of other, more important values. In short, though of course on a much larger scale, it was a similar crisis as Angus had viewed in Poznań, at the local merchants. Better speedy exchange for anonymous cash, necessary at once and later to be used reasonably. The factory and bottling plant began therefore the sale of the reserve, or rather continued it as before. Only that earlier the market did not need so much, but now the demand grew and the market hit the sky, taking along the most costly beverages, collected for many years. Sales took place of course legally, according to compulsory rules of Polish law, to the exclusive entitled owners of licenses and on the unaltered prices from before the war. Only it was now unnecessary to look for customers, or to organize transport. Before

the gate waited the amateurs, who paid ready cash and without fussing, took all given, even the most precious and elaborate liquors.

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On the second day after receiving the money from Angus' mother, Jan Misior went to the station, and next he and his father-in-law, not considering the -40 weather, entered the train running in the opposite direction. This was a much shorter trip, no comparison really, just a hundred kilometers, but with two transfers, no one could expect, whenever should come the next train. Therefore the presence of the former railway machinist, who knew and was like a brother with most of the railroad men and in his older age still vigorous, proved worth taking. And as for strength, again Misior, never mind being without a leg, was able easily to lift two bags of grain, a hundred kilos.

They returned after two days. All the time, horse and sledge waited in the familiar stable near the station. They brought and carried home two wicker baskets strongly tied up with rope, and one trunk stuffed with hay and not only that, heavy. Jan Misior first let off and conducted to the stable the horse and gave it fodder. Only then he returned home, took off the cap and sheepskin, pulled off his gloves and bulky, woolen cap pulled around the head so there remained visible only a round gap for the eyes. Then took off further coatings, all the way to his trousers and lastly unfastened his wooden leg. In meantime, in the stove burned already a big fire, and on the stool before him stood a huge evaporating washbasin. Next the outsiders abandoned the kitchen.

Angus heard through the half open door noises of loud splashing and snorting interlaced with grunting, coughing and blowing the nose. To the kitchen he returned when the farmer, already dressed and having pinned on another leg ending with a hoof, sat down at the kitchen table. Misior combed before a little, standing mirror, the thin and still wet hairs, while his wife came already with the tureen of hot soup and a plate. This was however a man of iron health and forces. After such an expedition he did not catch a chill nor drop exhausted, but lay down only for an hour or so in the bedroom, with his wife running round. Next he stood up and inspected the farm, wanting still before the early dusk to look in on the animals and put all right.

His father-in-law also came undamaged, except his mustache, which he had slowly and patiently to defrost, luckily he suffered no frostbite. Only then Mrs. Misior served the late dinner. While they ate, Angus with impatience awaited stories about the trip and how the

railway was looking now and what they saw on the way, but it did not come to this, because exactly then they heard a knocking.

Mrs. Misior went to open the door and returned to tell that came visit by Moshek, the potential customer for the commodity. He was a man not still middle-aged, dressed in a town-like cloak and hat, despite the mighty frosts. Invited to table, he took off the cloak and hat and sat down, but asked only for tea.

"How did you know the commodity was here? After all we only just arrived and only now wanted to tell you. And how did you get in, all closed and the dog let out free. All people dread of the Bek."

"I ask, do not put me to shame," answered Moshek. "And the dog is terrible and big, but also wise, he recognizes a proper man."

Angus looked on with curiosity. He did not catch properly the name of the newcomer, all said Mr. Moshek or Mosiek. He spoke proper Polish, without such little grammatical stumbles as happened to some of the patients in hospital. Perhaps altogether consciously and on purpose adapting to a certain style, he threw in at times "uś" or "ai waj." At a question, what he thought about the general situation and if he would have to settle in the ghetto, as well as what might follow next, he answered only:

"Better do not speak and even do not think about this, while this time is yet to come."

Moshek lived a few houses off, also on Piaski Street, where he rented half a house from one of the farmers. He had a family and several children. Besides lived there still three elderly people, either his parents and the mother of his wife, or the reverse. Only these elder persons often went in a traditional Hebrew apparel, Moshek was always in formal dress, a town jacket with a tie.

Since a few generations, the grandfathers and great-grandfathers of Moshek had become trusted brokers, then called "the factors" or agents for the family of Kawiorski. This still in the times when Sands was a little village near Ostrowiec, belonging to the estate of Kawiorski. Since then much had changed, Kawiorski kept only the ancient manor-house with a great garden and a piece of forest beside, apart from this big forest, by the motor-road. Just before the war they had presented some land for the new church in construction. With the war they had received only the first payment on account.

The family of Moshek had a little shop, but this was not the main source of support, because not too many people lived around here now, so the shop had little turnover. Moshek as before was a broker, he dealt with everything that was going on and he settled not only the Kawiorski

affairs, traditional if now sparse, but also those of all the tenants in the neighborhood. He had an excellent reputation and took much care about this, because such an image was necessary in this profession. Mrs. Misior, who was the main source of information on this and many other affairs, a couple of times told Angus that Moshek was an exceptional Jew and in general a trustworthy man. On his word one could always rely. This was the main reason which made it worthwhile to use his agency. Of course, such a reputation – ruthless honesty – was necessary to him, but having succeeded in this, he took further care. In result, he managed well and properly kept all members of his family. He had also to be fit physically, if he did not look so. Angus was uncertain, if he or many other people would be able so easily to mount a three-meter-high fence, newly placed with strong, sharply truncated boards with adding barbed wire on top. Only about the dog, he also would be able quickly close a friendship, dogs he understood and they easily took one to the other.

A week later, Misior left for a second time, this time with father-in-law and brother-in-law. The youngest sister of Maria, Nina with her colorless husband came and they occupied the top floor. In default of better employment, they decided temporarily to help in these expeditions. Sincerely speaking, it would be difficult to fancy himself any more remunerative employment. This time they brought almost a double cargo, the Łańcut factory sold maximum up to a hundred liters of premium alcohols at once, anyway they had not any more money. This was all high-grade, expensive commodity. All in all the expense was above 1400 zł, again Moshek took it wholesale, paying a double price. Just in case both times Misior checked in the town the price and possibilities, however this was the best offer and most comfortable. Nearby, a convenient way and immediate receipt of payment. Prospects appeared fine.

That being so, after Mother told Angus her adventures and appreciated now the possibility of survival to the end of the war with the means at her disposition. He had a ready proposal: "Ma, try to get such a concession, as has Mr. Misior!"

Mother first cut him short : "Nonsense, I have not the grounds to be entitled. I am not even a disabled person..."

"That has no importance, nor is it a point against, sure it may be settled. After all, you saw, how the Germans are, they only wait for a bribe, corrupted through and through, they do anything for ready money.

"This still is half as bad when we know what to expect, because if not thieves or impostors, then common bandits. They came after all here, to

a conquered country, to get rich quick. The worst, most dishonest people. I am certain that many of the clerks have still not found the opportunity, because here almost nobody understands them, they also understand nobody.

"Previously they have received few offers of bribes, and not each clerk is in such a position that he may take anything, plunder or steal. The most easy would be blackmail, but for this they still have too little knowledge, they first must gather the necessary information. So now they are still hungry and want to find something, most accessible for corruption. Anyway, what can I teach you, you surely know better than me and if you try, you will probably find a way and will be able to settle this deal. Anyway one can try, if you feel something is going wrong, always you may turn the cat, the tail first and withdraw."

Angus normally would have considered such behavior ugly, evil, unworthy and dishonorable. In Poland, if this concerned a Polish official or clerk, only a thought, not to say a proposal, he would condemn as an offense and sin, probably mortal. His father had strong and harsh standards on the duties of any civil officer, his son even stronger, as children often do, more radical than the parents. So, he not only considered this a moral leprosy, he would have held it for a moral duty to prevent it, if by chance something similar ever happened. But for the Germans, one did not have such scruples. On the contrary, corrupting a German officer, inducing him to do something opposite to best interest of his country and superior authority, Angus held as fully excusable. After his experiences, he hated them all, if he could spread a physical, not only moral sickness, well, if there were already atom bombs, he would approve using them. No such doings possible, but at least making if only one minion disloyal, was surely a small plus.

At last, Mother treated Angus' suggestions seriously enough, she agree to talk with the farmer about all details. And when corroborated, she went to the town office for more information. Of course, this did not lie in local competencies, but the more necessary it was to know, where and how such affairs were now arranged. The until now existing Polish Voivodinshaft (province), centered in Kielce, did not exist. Now Ostrowiec belonged to District Radom and there she traveled to explore the possibilities. However, only at the end of January, when with her own eyes she had seen the next transport of vodka and the subsequent transaction with Moshek, again wholesale.

She returned depressed. She drove again through Skarzysko and when changing trains, she saw there wagons full of frozen corpses. Exactly such cattle-wagons as not long ago transported her and other displaced

people from the concentrating camp. In the carriages the prisoners still lived (or so she heard), but in the stock-cars they had no chance in the -40 frost. It was a difficult task to get them out, because the people tried to save one another to the end, and so the frozen stiff corpses tangled together.

The railway workers said, this is still nothing, they heard that to the Kraków-Płaszów station came two trains consisting of cattle wagons all full of frozen corpses, the displaced prisoners. Only the escort in the heated passenger carriages were alive, although the soldiers according to rumor were not too happy, they cursed the dog-kernel service.

It is necessary here to explain, that gradually for transporting displaced people passenger carriages were used in increasing numbers, and the cattle trucks gradually withdrawn. But it is a fact, that even in the time of greatest frosts, many transports of prisoners taken straight from their houses or camps were sent as before. With the unparalleled frosts, which altogether disorganized communication, the trips took longer. Angus had an occasion to speak later with people familiar with such transport and even in passenger carriages with trouble they survived, chiefly having with them little children. They told, the escort allowed the mothers with children to enter the warm carriage to thaw a little, although this caused a danger for the soldiers themselves, making up a violation of binding discipline and rules. One woman affirmed that without this her child surely would not have survived, many others too. On the other side the Germans distinctly were afraid, she did not know exactly what would happen to all them, if this affair came to light. But obviously they would be beyond getting any praise or pats on the head. In Radom, Mother did reach the German in whose competency lay now the matter of licenses, and managed to talk with him in private. However, the claims which he put out were unreal. Angus was not able to find out how much he demanded. But from what his mother said, he inferred that it surpassed all her capital. Or nearly all, but she had restraint, fearing to risk all her possessions. But she negotiated and in the second half of February had again to travel to Radom. She hoped, the German official had begun with high claims and therefore, as a new man he did not yet know the legal procedure. Certainly, he had the authority, but had to use the bureaucratic ways introduced by the Poles, now his employees. To cut it short, finally Mother, after some more journeys, closed a deal about the middle of March and in April became the owner of a concession, quite illegally. She paid a bribe of 2000 Reichsmarks (about 1000 dollars).

The nominal 4000 zł plus extra payments for exchange, amounted to 5000 zł in all. However, the possibility of buys straight from Łańcut ended shortly after that. The holders of concessions got assigned a monthly allowance for alcohol from a wholesale firm in Ostrowiec, which gradually decreased – the business was not so good as Angus had imagined.

Anyway, it enabled them to survive this and the next year of war. They gained little, if any, but at least did not lose from the violent inflation which Mother accurately anticipated. When the Germans displaced them to Ostrowiec and released, Polish money still held a good value. For example butter still cost 2 zł, but at the beginning of the next year already cost 4 zł, in spring 14 zł, by end of 1940 the price reached 40 zł.

If Mother had put the money in any other stable commodity, the result would have been the same without so much effort. On the other hand, first they had no idea what such a commodity might be, and next they had no place to keep it. Finally, Mother had already tried to do just that in Poznan only to lose all her stockpiled hoards, as well as the apartment taken by Germany. This experience discouraged her from the procedure. Instead of quick speculation, the expense recovered in a longer period. The same outcome, as if to buy something and then to receive it in installments. Just as – if they had not immediately paid for the room in front, their money would have lost about ninety percent of its value.

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In the first half of February, the cold stayed as before, but milder in the daytime. The returning sun already made a difference, especially as the sky was clear almost all the time. Angus dressed for warmth in bulky wool socks to the knees (those he got in the camp from his auntie and crammed with sand, and then practiced bumps on a pot imagining it to be helmets of German guards). As well he put on other bulky wool garments which Mother made on knitting needles, next a ski overall, and now tried to ski down the knolls in the forest on the other side of the street.

Alas, Mother did not allow him to go with Mr. Misor on the longer, all-day sleigh journey. As compensation, she bought skis for her son and at least let him make brief excursions in the neighborhood. Angus very-much wanted to keep fit, in form, get more strength, as he remained

steadfastly convinced that finally he would manage to make his contribution in freedom fighting, and this would need him to be strong and proficient.

However his skill progressed badly, admittedly on flat ground he learned to move without tangling the skis. But any downhill ride led to multiple collapses, he was unable to hold equilibrium. The cause of this was still the gunshot close to his right ear, when he had supported the carbine on his shoulder, in September 1939. The passage of time did help. Initially, he could hold straight only with open eyes. His balance got better, but it took years before he recovered full equilibrium. Skiing remained difficult, and later it turned out also that he was unable to bicycle, no way. Nevertheless he tried stubbornly, and the more he returned home exhausted, the more he persevered.

He also went on walking excursions. First, almost every day to the chapel. He had to fulfill all the promises he had made to God, when so horribly afraid about the fate of his mother. Now he composed still new pleas and promises, about his father, on whom still came no news. With all this he lived a period of increased religious faith. And besides this depressed him some dark apprehensions about his doings, though he still had hope unnecessarily so, but he put this aside the moment when he would be able to ask about the matter.

He went also in the opposite direction, to the road and along it, to the high school boardinghouse. Now this school boardinghouse contained not students, but many families banished from Poznan, and in the downstairs kitchen the Help Council organized a canteen with free meals for the displaced people.

Angus said that he and Mother were in a comparatively better circumstances and should not use this relief. Many folks surprised in the night had not had as much presence of mind as she, did not decide on risk of death to hide some coins, money or jewels. Also, not all had families which could help them in need, Angus and his mother were among the lucky ones. Finally Angus gave in, when Mother promised him that when she began to earn back some of the invested money, she would offer to the Council a matching gift. It would cover, with some sum more paid into the bargain, what they would now take. Having calmed his conscience in this manner, Angus daily brought from the canteen hot soup, usually cabbage soup or barley soup, on better days pea soup. This soup Mrs. Misior used to ameliorated by adding whatever she had boiled at home. For many people put in a worse crisis, such a soup at midday, along with hot dark fluid called coffee and a slice of bread morning and evening, were the only meals of this heavy winter.

But they all took comfort that later in spring, when sun warmed up, would begin the expected French offensive. Somehow they would keep alive for another month or two.

The Allies had a longtime to prepare, to gather forces, all fresh since they carried to date neither losses, nor any toll whatsoever, so now they quickly would beat the Germans. Then this nightmare would end at last, they could all return to their houses. The Germans would have to return what they took away, and if something were to be missing, this they would have to pay. "I shall not give them even one pot or a cushion," a woman shook the arm of anyone standing in the soup queue, "even if I have personally travel to Berlin and rebuke them. If anything indoors is missing, they will have to give me indemnification."

Angus did not comment, only moved his shoulders. This though he understood, not worthy to lose words on self-evident matter. Only, to do so, it was necessary to first beat the Germans.

This was also precisely his main personal problem. He did not came an inch closer to his aim; not only did he never find an organization engaged in freedom fighting, resistance, he could find no way to move towards this goal. He did not know the right people, had no contacts. It became urgent to do something decisive, if he in fact wanted to pay his share of duty.

He deliberated, whether not to try conversations with the house owner, Jan Misor, but after consideration decided against this. Misor had excellent qualities, but was a disabled person, had already paid his debt to the country and now it was unlikely he would engage again. Angus had still fresh in his memory the hospital. Invalids, the crippled, considered their way already finished, duty fulfilled even to abundance, now others were next in the queue. Angus heard this several times, when cautiously directing conversation to the subject of whether they, until recently soldiers, had any thoughts about continuing the war.

It would be another matter, if he could drive with Mr. Misor to his farm and village. Angus did not know exactly where these were, but somewhere towards Kunów. Misor affirmed with all certainty there were those in the village who had seen Polish Army squads. Surely Angus would be able to find some trace, if he had a chance to go there.

There was no sense to talk to the father-in-law of Misor, this much was clear after the first essays of conversation, so the only possibility left was to try Henry Słodek. Thanks to God, Angus never managed to reach him alone, he was always in his wife's company and so never available for a confidential talk. This in fact was a Divine favor, he never imagined this man was to turn informer to the Gestapo.

So with luck, Angus evaded the worst, but instead brought about the second most unlucky and compromising event in all his youth. He tried to repeat what formerly he had succeeded in Poznań, fix a loose organization, or rather an information agency, contacts with elderly women, if he knew no suitable men. Anyway, it would be a start, the first contacts would lead to the next, in Poznań this had looked promising, it might have developed into a secret society, if it had lasted a longer time. But this time the situation did not repeat, it ended idiotically. A couple of days earlier, Mrs. Misior had told a story about her acquaintance, Mrs. Wybylski.

"On the way, she picked up a few stones and hid them in the bag. And then, when we had to leave the road, she stopped and put down these stones in a carefully arranged heap, under a tree, where the snow was raked. Surprised, I asked her why she was doing this and she said: After all, when the Germans retreat in the spring, this is precisely the road they will have to take back to Germany. So what would I have to throw after them, wild flowers? I am picking out stones just the right size and I have them ready, right where I shall need them."

Then Angus heard she was a great patriot and the wife of a professional noncommissioned officer, who now had fallen into slavery. But without an officer's degree, and his noncommissioned officer's rank he declared lower, so there was hope he might return as wounded and sick.

Of course, Angus inquired where these stones lay and by this strategy found out the woman lived by Traugutt Street. This was a little side lane in the center of a young forest, little more than a hundred steps from the boardinghouse with the canteen.

On his next ski excursion, Angus sought out the lane, the house and next the probable door, and then he began to prepare a speech, what and how to tell. This time having heard the person he would be dealing with, he decided to present the matter straight from the beginning, with the need for immediate "direct action" against Germany. Admittedly he still did not know, what concretely he could do, but hoped they could decide this together. Maybe she would suggest to him, instead of starting a new organization, a contact with one existing, surely such organizations already existed here, and with her background it was probable she might know of them. All-day and sleepless night he sought to form the words and arguments, mostly expecting difficulties about his too young age.

He decided to begin with what he had heard about the hot patriotism of the whole family and her personally. That he had heard she

was ready to rush on the Germans if only with stones (which of course he treated figuratively, as a pronunciation of purpose). Next he would tell her all about his previous tries and plans. In Poznań he had made the mistake of beginning loose conversations and believing he was forming connections with a few elderly ladies, preparing for creating a secret organization. In fact they treated him merely as a child with whom they could chat from time to time, when they had nothing better to do. They did not take him at all seriously. In the critical moment they ignored his early warnings the whole street was to be taken from their houses by the Germans. To be sure he was mistaken by two days and then it happened – but the only comment he heard was that children sometimes have premonitions, just like dogs and cats! So exact, really too much, like dogs or cats! He did not deserve this, it was a great deal of hard work and luck, and for this, an insult added to offense!

So this time he decided from the beginning to put the matter clear. His former essays had not been senseless. All he had tried to do was right and if the people had treated him seriously, they would have been prepared, and for him it could have framed a beginning of genuine secret underground. He had come by honest-to-goodness genuine information, nevertheless had found no one prepared to accept it and act therefore. In short, struck gold, but had no one to deliver it to.

At last, after the long preparation of his speech in the forest, where on skis Angus had turned in thrilled whisper to many trees, polishing each sentence over and over, till further changes would improve nothing, he chose next day. Appraising his chances, he expected them to be reasonably good.

From the words of Mrs. Misior he inferred the person concerned, to whom he had to turn, shared his motivation. Of course, he did not expect to come to an immediate understanding. He thought most likely she would initially treat him with suspicion, after all who knew, if he might not be a German provocateur. He hoped that by giving in detail all data about himself, where he lived and how he came here (among those plundered and displaced by Germans, and having suffered a concentration camp, he had left recently – may vanish any doubts.

If need to be, he would wait for days and weeks until she could perform a check of his family, discreetly strike up an acquaintance with Mother, his story would be easy to corroborate. In the worse case, he would accept even a negative or noncommittal answer, on the assumption that after some time it would change. Deep in his soul he had hope the wife of a professional soldier would have contacts and at least would mention him to someone involved in freedom fighting. This

seemed logical, after all her near circle must include such contacts, or contacts of contacts.

So prepared and with his homework done, if under high-tension, Angus the next day before noon hid his skis in the forest and went straight on to the house. He knocked on the door and asked the woman in question, if he might have a few words in private. He announced that he was asking only a few minutes of conversation, but of necessity just between the two of them, because he had something important to say, all would be clear in a moment.

"But I have nothing to say and there is nothing I want to hear," answered she.

"But why, I haven't told you anything yet, you don't know what it's about?" Angus was crestfallen.

"Because that I conduct no secret conversations with single young gentlemen," and here the door latched.

Angus stood bewildered, he understood nothing. He had come here with the impression that he was falling straight on the target, like a stone. He was dumbfounded. For the first time in his life, his sense of inner certainty had prove wrong. He had hurried, he wanted spedy to tell all, everything he had prepared, everything he had anticipated, the detailed and premeditated scenario. He considered the introduction a mere formality and wanted as quickly as possible to pass to the essential part of conversation. However, he did not succeeded even to begin.

Flabbergasted, shaking his head and waving his hands, in a nonstop silent conversation with himself, he returned to the skis, continuously repenting that he had not said a couple of words more or different. Having reached home, he opened the gate, but then retreated and went in the opposite direction, to the forest, to think it over there, in solitude. He could not understand why he had met with such an unexpected reaction.

But there was more to wonder: when after less than an hour he returned home and opened the door to the kitchen, he stood surprised, not believing his eyes. At the table sat expectantly a judicial court. The woman he had tried to talk with, as well as Mrs. Misior and his mother. The interrogation began.

First Mother asked him, if he had been just now at the door of this women. He could not contradict this. The next question, what he went there for and what he wanted to tell, Angus met with silence. One was certain, he could not tell that he wanted to set up a secret organization, or to ask about contacts with one. It was not a matter of keeping a secret, because there existed still no secret to keep. But if he answered

this question now, it forever would close the way for him, never in his life could he count on acceptance to any secret organization. He had to keep silent.

At last he declared that he could not answer this question and it has not sense to repeat this, because until it lives he tells nothing more. Automatically, he used almost the same words which he had long since prepared in case, if in connection with his search, he was discovered and examined by the Gestapo. Then he closed up.

The next week was among the hardest in Angus' life. All the members of his household endlessly interrogated him and tried to induce him to talk. The only difference with the Gestapo was, nobody applied a genuine physical pressure; speaking straight, he did not get a beating, but would have preferred it a hundred times. He indeed felt that he would prefer in fact to be interrogated by the Gestapo, an experience for which he had for many months prepared. Here surrounded him a moral pressure from those closest to him people, making the stress worse.

More so, as he could not grasp, why the feeling, the hunch of successful action confused him so. Always before, when he had determinedly started on a single task, like a stone falling down, he had achieved his task. Well, Angus had no idea about sexual harassment, had never heard the expression, his knowledge of these matters was poor, as already discussed. Anyway, the woman was only a few years younger than his mother, rather resolute and strong, never a beauty, formidable rather than pretty. Probably a good companion in conspiracy, but not for any funny business.

Suddenly, after some days, Mother changed front and took his side. She said that knowing her son she was certain he had not had improper intents. Anyway he was still a child, only eleven and unripe, but a child of good base and sound tendencies. However he often had foolish ideas, usually taken from books. That was probably the case now and why he did not want to tell. But she knew – and this was not the belief of an uncritical mother, but an exact knowledge there was nothing more to it. So she considered the matter closed.

This made surviving easier, but for a longtime afterwards Angus felt surrounded by attentive surveillance, observed even by the children – like being under a microscope. Anything he did or said on any subject all treated with suspicion.

But slowly the sensation faded into oblivion.

* * *

“Not so merely stupid. He is so stupid that it is difficult to believe, even imagine such a fool. The most foolish child, of nine years, eight, maybe seven in comparison with him is.... No way to tell. He probably still believes in storks. Fancy, he still knows nothing, but altogether nothing about boys and girls – and not only that, he wants not to know, absolutely nothing reaches him. No way one can make contact with him, it’s as if he did not live on earth and suddenly fell here from the moon. He tells some nonsense, gives exaggerated praise to his Poznań, as if this was another world, much better than this one. Invents nonsense. Does ridicule himself, and is such a fool, doesn’t know anything, below a little baby. Who knows, maybe a loony?”

Angus did not hear all of what Violet said, only fragments occasionally. However he did not have the least doubt, whom it concerned.

He sat in his room, but instead of finding some occupation, glued his ear to the keyhole. He eavesdropped on what, with low voice but quickly and with great concern and engagement, Violet was saying to the boy sitting beside her.

For the last few days the big frost had relented, to be sure there lay still a multitude of snow, which at times melted then at night froze hard, but the roads were passable. At the house arrived one of the high school students who had lived here earlier, receiving a friendly greeted from all. The fellow had some business in Ostrowiec and on the long trip had stopped by, to take a little rest, to warm up and to eat breakfast. Violet in particular greeted him with a huge enthusiasm. When her mother after the breakfast went out to the property, nearly by force detained him and already for nearly half an hour had kept him seated by the kitchen table. The boy had already mentioned he must now drive on, but she held his hand and did not give up to stand up, her little sister also referred to something he had promised.

* * *

Capsule: A school of life, secrets of a prewar boardinghouse.

This was not her main boyfriend, merely one of the participants in the entertainments. Indeed, she deeply worshipped Stan Halpark, who always took a special place in the boardinghouse, with his high social position. The Halpark family had an estate umpteen kilometers from Ostrowiec, and although in Poland they formally did not belong to the Great Society, however they counted among the nobility. Though on the other hand, the family name was not much ancient.

Among a genuine long-standing nobility mixed so called social climbers and even (using the terminology of Z. Krasiński, who suggested a Jewish origin) fresh converts. Some arrived only a few generations back, many said. True that they had been absent in the Vienna battle, and only at the decline of the ancient Res Public had started their career as the managers of magnate holdings, then went on tenures. However, without doubt they were tied with the upper society, related to many known, wealthy families. Definitely the upper class of landlords.

Of course Halpark was a privileged and honorable paying guest in the boardinghouse. At first he lived at the same room which Angus currently occupied. He attended the high school with a colleague, in fact a so-called poor relative educated at the expense of the wealthy family. Ziętek Kopytkowski was Halpark's alter ego, his faithful man Friday, just as among the earlier forebears were trusted associates who fulfilled, one may say, different functions for the rich relations. So now, Stan Halpark was an unquestioned chief, but at least in principle they went to the same class and were colleagues. After several years, the older two boys took still one more colleague, who also recognized the authority of Halpark and the trio transferred to a large room on the upper floor, occupied now by Słodek. They had there not only a great deal more space, but also much more freedom. In the second room on the upper floor lived two other students also from the same class, on the ground floor down, the younger novices.

Probably still on the estate, these full-grown, strong and muscular boys had already met their first sexual experiences. However of course here not only the order of the parents but also the school rules excluded any possibility of any girl visiting the boardinghouse for boys. Even if the farmers themselves had held on this subject a more broad-minded, liberal opinion, they would not risk the loss of approval of the school on further housing students – it was necessary to keep a good reputation.

Access was had only by the children of the owner, two still immature daughters. So at began some innocent forms of play, like tickling competitions of whom should prove most able and who should hold out longest.

Only a year the older, Violet quickly shot up taller and grew pretty, although still unripe, she had neither the attitude nor the makings of a woman. As before she was friendly with the boys and visited them, also liked to amuse herself with tickling and now, in the great, separate room overhead the conditions became more favorable and easy.

One time, when the strongest Kopytkowski held her and tickled, but she held brave and with all her force tried not to show any reaction, Stan

Halpark noticed that even if she did not squeak or resist, she got tense. Researching this, he put his hand in front and below her collar, on the torso. Nothing indecent, considering she still as before had a boyish torso, not a trace of feminine breast. He did nothing more, did not move his hand or tickle additionally. Anyway, the single unexpected touch broke her endurance. It pierced her like a hundred electric currents, she not only squealed like a child (which she still was), but bit right through his jacket sleeve to his arm. The bite helped, but caused lack of respiration, she could not catch enough air. She panicked, cried she was going to die at once, unable to breathe.

"Quiet, quietly," persuaded Stan, "after all I did not do anything at all, did not even move my hands." In fact his palms almost did not push, but on feeling this slight touch, she could not keep still. Whenever the slow, barely moving hand triggered a new nerve she sensed the slow approach to the next, and with the merest motion she was not herself any longer, could not stand this moment, perhaps the world stopped to exist. When in interruptions she managed to catch a little air, with uncoordinated words she implored mercy, tried to explain that already she was unable to take any more, that she admitted defeat. That she was only a little, feeble baby-girl who would always be polite, but pleaded for release.

Then Halpark proposed a deal, if she would undress.

"Yes, I already know what you want to do! If I do undress, you shall tickle me to your heart's content, as long you like. I already now cannot get my breath, certainly I shall die."

"I promise that we will tickle you only a little, just as much as you can stand. If it is too much, you just have to say so and we will stop at once, well, not quite, but let off considerably. Besides you also may tickle us, we also shall undress."

As before full of suspicions and apprehensions, however at last she obeyed, because she could not do any different, have no choice. She agreed to everything, if they stopped only a moment and she could take air.

Stan Halpark kept his word, there was a little more tickling, but only so much as she could stand. If from time to time they crossed a limit and she had to press her face to a cushion to stop the squeak, she was relieved. But besides tickling, there was much hugging, stroking and caresses, and when already fatigued, the boys looked at her in detail and were full of praise, told her the time of beauty was coming. Violet from the beginning had not had time to think about shame, and then she stopped altogether to feel any, although formerly shy, as the children

are. Not because of sex, but preferring to never be seen with no clothes like a baby. Even a cat she drove away, if it dared to look at an improper moment. But here in bed and in the society of boys, also naked, she finished to feel restraint.

Only once afterwards, when the boys brought in their classmates living in the room next door and showed her also to them, for a moment she wanted to hide, but later the restraint passed.

The same day Halpark proposed a new set of rules. If she would agree, they could meet in secret and entertain a similar pleasure any time. He promised that he and the other boys would do to her nothing bad, never violate her and they would not try an intercourse. Maybe not using the exact words, but the matter was clear anyway. All of them from the beginning were familiar with nature. Living in the country it was enough to watch animals, to know the order of sexual affairs. Anyway all treated it as merely natural and nobody here hid anything, only the children from town could be brought up in ignorance.

So they decided not to push too far, did not want to look for trouble. Good entertainment and preparation for adult life, nothing more (although the boys masturbated next, without doubt they had also done so before, however all in secret).

As for Violet, this first experience was exhausting and strange, but gradually she began to take an interest, more so as they let her wait almost two weeks, till she asked first. Then they settled on a permanent day of the week, when their colleagues living in the next to room had other employment and they had the top floor all to themselves. Largely they stuck to this regime, except of course for accidental, private occasions. The girl felt glad and still gladder, more so, because Stan Halpark who subordinated and fascinated her, cared about her and tried to treat her well. Admittedly this was a fatiguing and often a hard task, for example the first time make her so tired that wanting to get back in shape before returning home she sat on a moment in a stable and fell asleep. She was woken up by the mother, who came to milk the cow, but explained this without trouble, as her mother still considered her a child.

Violet tried with all her might and was a quick learner. It was not easy, because although at first the boys tried to proceed gently, they gradually became more demanding. First she learned to suppress her voice, next to bite the cushion and as time went on to keep going, all the way. She encouraged the partners and betrayed her feeble points, because she wanted to satisfy the boys so they would praise her. She

complied with all recommendations and orders, and herself introduced many new ideas.

By now she was able excite a boy so effectively that many a time hastily he interrupted the entertainment and sprang out of bed like from a catapult. Supposedly to communicate with a colleague standing on guard in the bordering room, because two boys at a time went to bed with the girl while the third in turn stood by the doors. In short, she found that boys also have their feeble points and though they were stronger, she could manage them. Only Stan Halpark kept over her a ruthless superiority, his touch caused, just as at the beginning, a flow of electric current and this never changed. Of course she was physically still unable to attain the top peak, but merely his presence caused a great excitement. With all this, he was able to be sufficiently delicate and likable, not even expecting more. Strange, because especially for him, on a nod surely she would jump in fire and water, if he so wished.

Anyway he was the natural leader and soon or later everyone subordinated to him, even the boys. Now he proposed the rules of the game and the foundation of prudence. After some time he showed the nude Violet to the colleagues living in other rooms and invited them to common pleasure. The previously existing trio continued as before in deep secret every week. On the next occasions, Violet herself decided what she would allow, and to whom. Gathering experience, she managed better and better. On the new boys, they shared assured discretion, protecting themselves against accidental betrayal which in such as close neighborhood was possible, and in the long-term probable. New partners became the object of her experiences and experiments, and thanks to this she learned still more. She felt gorgeous, encompassed by boys competing for her, like a queen of bees among drones.

This last year before the war was the happiness in her life, not likely to repeat, she could already only yearn and remember. Lost war, the tragedy of the entire nation, yes, this disappointed her too, but it was not something she could fully understand. She was more concerned with her own misfortune. She came on her great chance, she went from success to success riding on the wave and saw before her an ideal future. She knew her needs and went straight to the goal. She felt herself well able to achieve the prize. And suddenly all vanished, all her world disappeared. There were no boys, she could not have that to which she had become used, that which formed the substance of her life. If even somewhere were any boys, first they were faraway,

inaccessible, and second they had now in their heads only the killing and the disgusting war, not love and girls.

When there should at last appear in her life a boy, he amounted to nothing, was strange, not interested, perhaps abnormal.

Angus in fact never did recognize that he had not only come near a girl who was deeply unhappy, but that he added to, was one of the sources of her great frustration. Violet tested all that she had learned to try to break the barrier which he erected so artlessly and at last began to doubt herself.

Now Violet did not want at all to tell malicious gossip beyond his back, she was merely trying to obtain good advice from one of her old friends and teachers. She wanted to inquire and know, what she was doing badly, why she got no results. Whether it was her fault, or whether she had unluckily happened on a type of wooden doll only superficially recalling a boy, maybe an individual with aberrations.

Poor girl, she had lost her luck in life. All good began early and still sooner ended. And now she did not have bad purposes and was not aiming for slander, her words included much truth (and some misunderstanding).

* * *

However, Angus heard only some fragments and nearly cracked from irritation. Altogether forgetting that he oneself had deliberately decided to ape a fool, to stay away from girls and concentrate on the main, the fight with Germany. Having so achieved his aim, he should have felt satisfied, that he had managed it all so well. His present rage was absurd, illogical.

All the girl spoke was clean truth and she had full right to say so. Angus was not only a stupid stripling needing a lesson, but a hideous egocentric, who in general noticed neither other people nor their spiritual life, their thirsts and needs. This feature unfortunately remained, even when he became aware of it.

Not to mention that actually he needed pretend not much, without a doubt he acted astoundingly foolish. Though to be fair this was not entirely his fault. All his former life he had grown up in the sanctimonious atmosphere of far-fetched lies, a false prudery. The so-called Victorian atmosphere being in comparison complete null. Today any normal man, even a child, would be unable to grasp, even to imagine this – and much better so. Not only did Angus know nothing, but this nothing concerned not only the affairs between men and

women, but almost all the most simple questions of biology and physiology. Even wounded, one might suffer in head or chest, eventually in arm or leg, but any other place would be improper.

But the worst moment of this madness and the worst behavior of Angus was yet to come. Angus boiled, gurgled with rage, but remained seated silently. Only when Violet mentioned his last imbecilic failure, besides with the comment that he had tried to catch an elderly woman, this was too much, the last drop which flooded the goblet. Angus pulled the door open and sprang from his room like a devil from a box.

In some degree, it was an artificial, calculated fury. From the beginning of the episode with Mrs. Wybylski, Angus had decided not to react, only take offense and retreat into silence, at least temporarily. But if he left this without answer, it would mean losing all dignity and self-respect. (Exactly such a funny thought went through the head of the child.) Appreciating admissible limit is relative and just about almost always, whenever he reacted on such a basis, it turned out to be an error. However, similar errors did commit whole nations.

He searched for words, did not know to assemble what he wanted to tell, he spoke in disorder and must have been largely incomprehensible:

"Violet is always talking about me, so I want to tell something about her too. First, she is hopelessly blunt, obtuse, knows nothing and will not use reason..." he began.

Kopytkowski also tore away from the table. All that which he had so far heard, interested him rather little. Now Violet was no longer useful, and only took away his time. But there existed a certain code of behavior and he could not tolerate a girl who was in his company to be offended.

Surely, Angus would get a good beating, in the present mood he would not withdraw rationally. Probably he would rush first on the boy some five years his elder. However now, to the kitchen returned Mrs. Misior. She had experience, having run for several years a student boardinghouse and now reacted instantly.

"Angus, go straight to your room. Close the doors behind you and sit there. You are not welcome in my kitchen and I do not want you here. Zentek, walk to the dining room. You are a guest and we should not receive you in the kitchen. Do it, now!" - she cried out.

Angus retired feeling deeply humiliated. Zentek and Violet with Mrs. Misior walked to the dining room, the door closed behind them and their conversation became inaudible. Next Kopytkowski said his good-byes and set off to town.

Kopytkowski, since childhood comrade in entertainments, next schoolmate and errand-boy of Halpark, also his distant relative, was condemned to this role by the fate which refused him an estate of his own, alas. But he did not doubt this situation was only temporary and he would undertake a career and assume a position such as justly belonged to people of his sort. He was a protégé of Stan and of the entire Halpark family and tried hard to prove his value.

In these spheres, the short way of making a career was profitable marriage, finding a rich and well positioned candidate for wife, so called making a good match. Zentek had the necessary conditions: he was tall, taller than Stan and stronger, although lacking the concentrated energy which marked Halpark, and bowing before him also intellectually.

However, no problem, he had many other qualities, for example was more handsome. Also cared about improvement of sociable talents, for example horse riding, hunting and in first place dancing. Once his mother told him the story about some bachelor of fortune, who at the ball best led a "mazur," did not stop dancing all the way to white morning and soon married a rich count's daughter. From this time the ability of dance he treated more seriously, even than school. Violet he paid attention as a sparring-partner, thanks to whom he could gain skill with girls and gain suiting technical skill. Without fondness, instrumentally, because though a likable girl, she was after all not to be aimed at. He did not show up again in the Misior house. There were no longer suitable conditions to continue training, and he had not time to waste on unraveling girls' problems or giving advice. By strange coincidence he met four years later with Angus. He did not recognize him then, because Angus had grown much taller and after strong illness looked like death on holiday. Kopytkowski was already an adult man, heavily good-looking, enormously promising and exuding, according to his own appreciation, irresistible charm. It was December 1943, and Kopytkowski with another gold boy of course not comparable with him, came by sledge to town and on the back road stopped at a wayside pub, to get something to eat. Angus did the duty of barkeeper and behind the counter served drinks and snacks, hearing out what clients had to say and at times adding a brief thought or just a murmur. Kopytkowski still had found no suitably match, although he was the favorite of many women and the spirit of the company. Also now he came to fill a few recommendations and small services which the ladies entrusted to him. He knew everybody and called all by name, often with the addition "cousin." Alas, from now on his position complicated, much effort wasted, he did not manage to bind with a suitable house, because his

market value shrank and he had less to offer. Probably he remained, as before, a promising boy.

His old patron, Stan Halpark was then in a German prison. Admittedly Kopytkowski asserted this to be only temporary and that soon he would be free, because the family already was trying to buy him out. Everybody knew how corrupt the Germans were, generally with suitably great money one could settle all. Clearly however Halpark had bad luck, because he died in transport. Left a good memory about him, supposedly had serious role in conspiracy, and fell casualty of Peters, chief of Gestapo in Ostrowiec.

* * *

A paradox, exactly when Angus, on his own notion, for rational cause, to concentrate on the main task of life, decided temporarily to take no interest in girls – he fetched much worse complications. Roaming in darkness, lacking the most simple information – or rather deliberately fed with false information, the mentioned pseudo-Victorian morality in Polish edition, believed in absurd untruths, a twisted picture of reality. This pushed him down a blind lane to the essay of suicide, taking away the next year of his life. Genuine hell on earth. Without doubt, never a most unlucky affair with a girl could so badly have kept him from his ideals, bungled and bereaved him of a sense of value, dignity and belief in own force.

Funny or sad, all these gigantic and always lost battles with himself, fought with despair and contempt for his person, the conviction that he was a useless trash, vermin unsuitable to big deeds – were not only unnecessary, but without sense.

Angus began explorations and observations, next experiments with his penis while still in the hospital and next continued this in the new house. As already mentioned, at first it delivered only a strange impression which however did not remind him of a feeling of bliss. Of course they did not end with ejaculation, because he was physically unripe. Probably this experiment dictated the curiosity.

Step-by-step, the reactions became stronger, until at some moment he met an invisible wall and had to stop. He felt as if he had reached the border of life, sometimes for a few seconds lost consciousness, or only breath and vision. Also, noticed becoming red in the face and perspiring. The impression was like coming near some danger, unknown risk, and so for a time he stopped. Supposedly, there appeared changes of blood pressure and heart action, but a young,

growing organism managed and all returned to the norm. Unsure of himself, he stopped for a time, but the break lasted not long, the experiment became a habit.

Sometime towards the end of January, unexpectedly he did not stop, but pierced the invisible wall and through several moments flew, fell into the abyss, but then occurred a sensation of relief and relaxation. At first he supposed this effect caused stretching of all the bones, especially those of the legs. Only after a time did he notice a few drops of a transparent, clear, watery liquid. At first he thought, under the influence of strong emotions had come about the release of some few drops of urine, particularly, as this occurred only after several seconds. After passing the invisible limit, his body reacted as if by itself, he could not stop, or hold back, break the once started mechanism.

Once or twice it happened that unexpectedly someone entered the room; Angus managed to turn round in bed and raise his arm over his head, but the started body reaction continued and nothing he could do would hold it back. After a brief moment, he turned round and asked what was up, pretending he had fallen asleep.

In short, Angus discovered masturbation independently, never realizing any association with sex. He never heard about sperm, spermatozoa, and did not know what animal this was. Besides most likely in the watery liquid were not yet any ripe spermatozoa. It seemed not imaginable, some little, imperceptible with the naked eye particle could cause fertilization and creating a child. He supposed the embryo of child to develop from one of the manly balls, placed somewhere on the location below the stomach of the woman, growing like a seed. The used man balls had to grow again or regenerate after a while. To be sure such a hypothesis did not explain the childbearing of triplets, at best only twins, not to mention the Canadian quintuplets so famous before the war. But such events happened extreme rarely, so perhaps happened also individual differences in the quantity of globules, men with more balls.

This goes to show Angus' ignorance, also, he never suspected that he was performing a sin against the religious rules. On the contrary, he was precisely in the most religious period of his life and often turned to God in different matters, like now the risky, properly mad escapade of Mother to Germany. Well, twice over, there and back through the border without any papers. Often he knelt to prayers, tried to deal with God, took promises and oaths right before or after masturbation, at times even ejaculating now, if rarely. Once even in brief interruption between long prayers.

Precisely this brought Angus' first doubts. He was dubious whether touching, grasping and so on, of preferably shy, inglorious places directly before or after prayer wasn't in default of respect. Also how with these physiological needs, preferably they should be separated by a time interruption, a quarter of an hour or more. If he had known the American churches, equipped with toilets, surely he would not have wondered, but in Poland were no such.

On the other hand, it might be an exaggeration. He decided to ask the priest at his next confession, to clear the matter up.

The local vicar, Młynkowski, categorically stated that according to rules, it is a deadly sin, always and with no exceptions. First he questioned in detail the exact description of his doings, because he obviously did not believe in Angus' ignorance. Angus, gradually coming to feel that something was wrong, answered with reserve, making necessary the application of pressure. He never expected to be treated so harshly, the priest delivered an unexpectedly severe opinion: it was a heavy sin, mortal and he was one of the worst sinners.

He had committed this sin unknowingly (however, the priest doubted this and therefore interrogated Angus at length, suspecting a hard-core, ugly liar). Anyway, from this moment on, the matter was clear.

Now there was no alternative other than to stop. Nobody can be simultaneously a practicing Catholic and continue at the same time to commit in quiet, without regret and penance, deadly sins. Either, or. He had to fight this filthy habit. This concerned not only his soul and the unavoidable judgment of eternal condemnation. He was directly offending Mr. God and besides, each time it wounded Jesus, who had already suffered, for him, death and torments...and so on

Angus was deeply impressed. He asked about nothing more, including further information. As before, he saw no connection between what he had done, and either the sixth or ninth Commandments, nor with adultery, sex and women. However, soon the priest Młynkowski affirmed, he had to know better, being an expert in such affairs (and so he was, more experienced than Angus supposed, but this is another story).

Anyway, if the priest explained that what he was doing was a terrible sin, he had to accept this and to accept the information. A stroke of luck, that he had committed the sin unknowingly. Thus, he did not have on his conscience a deadly sin, only common. It stood to reason that from now on he would never do this again. Of course he was sorry.

Wished never to offend God, or to increase the sufferings of Mr. Jesus. Ruthlessly he promised improvement.

Soon however Angus noticed that it would not be so easy break with the sin. He tried many times and largely managed to persevere for a week, at most up to ten days. It was not for lack of good intents, but among the days and hours which so slowly elapsed, inevitably occurred brief moments of weakness. Either he too persistently noted trying to check his reactions, or contrary, when he tried not think or to concentrate on something else to avoid improper visions, intruded a genuine mental importunity, and all steps went in one direction.

At next confession, he asked for advice.

"The moment of weakness, this is no excuse," he heard. "Each felon, offender could claim the huge majority of the time he lives a normal, orderly life. Only in a brief moment he gives in to evil, for example assassinating someone, or giving the order to murder people. This might last only a short time, a few seconds, before and after which he was good man, he fed the birds, liked children and may even have gone to church.

"It is clear you may expect a difficult path, after all this is Satan who is sending you temptations. Succumbing to a deadly sin, you lost your soul and the master of hell does not want to resign from his gain. You have to fight all the way to conquer. This not easily done, but the greater triumph, when you succeed."

So Angus as before tried, but without result. Because such continuous running to confession and repeating the same words was too embarrassing, after next adversity he decided first become better, persevere at any price and come again only then, when he had managed to conquer the temptation. He could not and did not want to believe that his will might not suffice, that he could break down, be so feeble. He persevered all week and when he judged himself to have won, again he went to confession and communion. However two days later he lost and again stained his pure, snow-white soul.

After similar breakdowns, when he judged that anyway all was lost, he sinned many times more. If already he had lost his soul again, he wanted to get some compensation. But alas, he convinced then, how crafty and false is Satan. First, when the sin happened despite his preferences, after long suspending, seeking support, gigantic struggles with himself, usually with the conviction that he would have just a brief rub or just touch his body. The part which was unbearably troubling to him, that he would manage to hold back – it delivered a startling impression. Pleasure crossing the ability of understanding, all

the way to a temporary loss of consciousness. But already the next time it seemed less pleasant, and at last, for example on the eighth or tenth time, only a reminiscence of what it had been, merely causing disappointment.

Then he had the idea of full exhausting his body, to the point of disappointment and of elimination any future need, forcing himself even when already he felt excess. It was effective, but only for a few days, and then again began the hopeless fight with himself.

Running on ahead, it can be told that Angus spent the second half of 1940 in this period of utmost breakdown, when after further months he began to fear that he could never succeed. This appeared straight impossible, improbable, however time beyond time he broke down, each new essay ended with bad luck. He did not want and just could not accept, having to admit being so weak.

Finally he concluded that in going to confession his promises of improvement could only be a lie and hypocrisy, never a chance, he was unable to drop the habit. Of course, he felt sincere remorse, but he did not feel he had the right to promise improvements already knowing he would not be able to keep the promise.

Angus felt for himself deep contempt and disgust. Never mind his soul, suppose it fried in hell, it was as much as he deserved. But he turned traitor to his God, he wounded Mr. Jesus – and then he went to yelp about pardon and afresh he did the same.

In the hour of test it had turned out precisely as in the depths of his subconscious he feared most: that he was a miserable creature without character, trash. If he turned traitor to his God and all he deeply believed in, this could happen also to other targets, he could not realize his goals and dreams. Likely as not he might turn traitor to his beloved country, his ideals of freedom fighting, and possible companions if he found them. If he would ever be found out by the Gestapo, as he sometimes imagined, unfortunately he would be unable to act like a hero. He could some time try be silent, but probably then he would sing all, turn traitor, saving at huge cost his disgusting body. How lucky, that he had never manage to make contacts with any secret organization, he would have become simply a public threat.

Already a longtime since he had decided that if so may ever appear he did not deserve to live, messing and making repugnant the world like a disgusting reptile. The need shall come, to free this world from the evil one. Maybe this time was coming.

But this of course was still in the future, at the time he did not give up and he still tried to fight. He lost, but he tried on and hoped still to win.

* * *

Meanwhile, the series of troubles broke a joyful event. When after an excursion he returned home – the snow already melted, in places partially, even the ice on the river blown out, and everywhere one waded in water – he was greeted with the news of his father's return. In that first moment he said, "After all, "Prima Aprilis" was yesterday!" However this was the truth. A last blessing, a huge gift from God, who had accepted his pleading and oaths.

Father looked simply awful, squandered, a sunken face, bad physical condition and miserably clothed, like a beggar or vagabond. The clothes and the overcoat he had taken with him when he left for the war were almost destroyed, and instead of the hat, he arrived in an old ski-cap with earflaps. All remaining rest he located in a small knapsack of military type. But he assured them that he was healthy, nothing bad had happened to him and he would soon recover.

First, Mother saw to some food and already at the table, Father told shortly, in what manner he had been able to find them, because this in fact appeared simply unlikely. Meanwhile, in the bakehouse burned fire warming water, so he could thoroughly wash and throw away the dirty clothes. Father changed himself, some closes taking from Angus and others borrowed from Misior. Fortunately, he had avoided lice.

He told how he had walked through the "green border" in a group of refugees from "paradise," led by a guide smuggler. Exactly where and how, he did not know, they went in the night. However, it might have even been close the place which Angus saw from the train, near Małkinia.

On terrains of German occupation, fortunately, Red Cross posts still continued their work. They refugees were fed and received the addresses where temporarily they found shelter. Here also they may give the last existing prewar address of their family. Because he had no way of knowing if his wife and son had been imprisoned and become displaced, he asked about messages and news from Poznań. Then he traveled to Warsaw and waited there two days more, not in Warsaw exactly, but close by, in the suburb Zielonka. It was there, also thanks the Red Cross, that he received word his wife and son were not living in Poznań, but had become displaced. Next, along on the way he got more

information, that they had been taken away in a transport to Ostrowiec. In the end he found their address and they registered in the canteen distributing food to the displaced people, which Angus took in the kitchen of the high-school boardinghouse. What luck, that Mother had decisively sent Angus for the meals. An exceptional multitude of exceptionally happy chances, one in a thousand.

Father never stopped praising the Red Cross, right to the sky. This organization had now finished its activity. Formally Germany had dissolved it and did not allow further work. However with liquidation, the Red Cross stated the need to finish various its already begun activities, to arrange the final documentation and so forth. Germans had bureaucratic genius and they liked order. In fact the Red Cross, in the disguise of finishing the paperwork, continued its blessed doings. Father affirmed that they had saved his life not once, but at least several times. Without this support he would have perished badly on the way. He could never have been able to find his family, surely he would have fallen in the clutches of the Germans, who suspected all refugees from "paradise" of spying (the Soviets also liquidated all refugees, even without suspicion). He got also some antedated (or rather prefabricated) ID papers, which sanctioned him to travel and various certificates, thanks to which he entered the railway. Strictly speaking, these should have had no legal authority, however the railroad men took them into consideration. These people, properly not actual, but former employees of Red Cross, merely performed miracles, though themselves having nothing and lived on nothing, merely burning in endless sacrifice. Already long ago they gave away anything they had owned, and now they continued with public charity. From the times of the first Christians nothing like this had existed on earth, anyone who had not seen it firsthand this would be unable to imagine and believe. (So sounded the report of Father, but then Angus corroborated this also from other sources. Alas he never made his own way to meet these heroes. Their initially half legal, and then illegal activity united with a high risk. Then on the remaining base, in great part launched the Żegota, also a high death rate organization.)

More detailed narrations followed in the following days. Almost public lectures, because not only family, but all the tenants of the house (though not all at once), came to listen. They all knew from their own experience how matters stood in this part of Poland, taken by Germans. But nobody had any idea of conditions in "paradise," the zone of Soviet occupation. There came from that direction most unlikely news, from

moderately bad to the terrifying worst, which might however be exaggerated.

In fact, Angus' father just loved this. Admittedly, he always underlined this, preferably modest, a reticent and restrained man, but when he did take voice, he liked it when all listened to him attentively. Almost like the last Saturday before the war in Podloziny, he was The Source of Inside Information and with satisfaction, kindly disclosed it to the unknowing people.

Because their room was too small, even the kitchen often could not contain all people, the quasi-conference transferred to the stairs in the vestibule, where on the wooden, always washed steps more people could comfortably find places.

There was yet another cause: Father now smoked many too many poor cigarettes. Father in this bad period of his life admittedly did not succumb to heavy drinking – as before he remained an abstinent – but he smoked at least four or five times more than before. First, he had become used to smoking in a world where all smoked, this was often the only safe pretext to speak to another man. Second, he who did not drink and smoke was suspect, and Father as an abstinent was already halfway there, so if he did not smoke, it would be a bad sign.

He became used to the worst cigarettes, such as which earlier would have inspired abhorrence. They had to be strong. He repeated a joke rumored to widely known in "paradise": In the "Konarmy" (Horse Army) they supply a terribly poor, rotten hay, all the way poor horses got sick. Next they rake this up, desiccate and produce precisely such cigarettes. Now he had somewhere found the "Machorkowe," by comparison luxurious cigarettes, if the most cheap. In all the house nobody else smoked, or only on rare occasions, and Mother demanded he do something about this, although he limited the cigarettes. On this he answered well, yes, but later, he had gone through a lot, and the cigarettes calmed him down. On staircase he could smoke without protests.

Of course, Angus was the most attentive and zealous listener, in the changing company. He lay on many questions, as did the others. There were neither lectures, nor any long monologues or narrations. It began from questions and so started the general conversation, in which woven in the fragments of authentic remembrances of an insult to sound reason, which Father contacted or saw with his own eyes or learned from trusted people. He preferred not to add commentary, judging that these would be self-evident, usually ceded to the common, generally shared opinions. At the most he would stress some paradox or

grotesque, difficult to believe event which according to common sense could not occur. An absurdity, but officially announced.

Angus persistently tried to imagine a coherent picture, this was a world such as he had never seen and did not know how to imagine. Even though many fragments and details were familiar from books and newspapers read before the war – it was difficult to compose them in any logical unity. Some key for understanding he found only a little later, when after the war Poland fell in Soviet arms and he had to live in the unlikely, absurd world.

The greatest difference in comparison to German occupation was a much more intense and almost immediate universal terror. The tone of Father's statements was something like: This here you call terror? So better enjoy, that you have not yet seen true, genuine terror!

In short, the evacuation train by which Father traveled a few times suffered air attacks, but only behind Warsaw, a few dozen kilometers, before Brest finally broke down under bombardment. A pair of days, or rather nights they took on a fiery task of repairs, but renewed bombardment settled the affair. After burning down the archive (comic, but Father still considered the loss of remaining documents the main distress), the transport dissolved, a situation of "Sauve qui peut" (save himself, who can). Brest he reached on foot, but the government and authorities had already left the town, the communication disrupted, the news told about a second ring of German encirclement. Soon struck a second, new foe, the Soviets. With all this happening, Father turned back and forcefully walked to Białystok and next Barszczewo, where his family lived. The arrival of the Soviets he experienced in Białystok.

Direct behind the entering Red Army, went the special forces of GPU. The Red Army soldiers felt a deathly fear of these forces. An average Russian soldier often was a proper man on his own, but in a group not anymore, being subordinated to true wolf laws and wolf hierarchy. Only in this manner, adapting, could they survive. They were accustomed to the worst, having for generations lived like serfs, and lately the task had become a little more difficult.

The Soviets demanded a universal and joyful greeting. A question, "Does something displease to you?" – or more concrete – "Do you not like the ustrój?" – marked a direct, serious threat to life. Soviets did not assassinate for show, demonstratively like the Germans, but quietly and effectively, much more. Had no reason to frighten because there was already plenty dread.

Father had occasion to survey a battalion of GPU motorcyclists, who stopped a few days in Choroszcz. Differences were plain at first glance,

the soldiers were well, even carefully clad, what is more always turned out correctly, clean despite the motorcycles. Smooth-chinned, many (perhaps only the ranks smelling of toilet water, though these perfumes had a penetrating smell and pretty odd. Also seemingly better nourished and orderly.

Unlike the Waffen SS, the GPU special forces never did contribute to any battles at the front, fought only their own army. They followed Red Army squads and if these did not manage effectively push the front, the GPU entered and made order, meaning either decimating or massacring the retiring troops.

In the war with Poland such need did not appear, as the Poles had a clear order not to fight the Red Army (it was a heavy error of Polish government both political and military, it increased the toll). However near Białystok, in Grodno the still mobilizing Polish troops stood a spontaneous and at first effective resistance, causing an intervention of GPU which did slaughter among the retiring squads of Red Army. Simultaneously they executed a mass of civil population suspected of helping the Polish troops. This admittedly was not firsthand information, but in Białystok Father came across news of this event and refugees from it.

The people whispered, the extreme bloody toll of Red Army in the Finish campaign resulted because the attacking Soviets, even in hopeless position had only a choice to perish from Finnish bullets from front or GPU bullets from behind. Therefore the battles proceeded in a manner contrary to sound sense. Worse than in WW I, crowds of infantry traversed a terrain shot through by machine fire and perished. Those in front had a slight hope some may escape, those who followed had not a chance. If true, perhaps this scenario repeated later at start the war with Germany. The Soviets at first specialized in extreme bloody attacks bringing no visible result, only losses. At least in the final phase of war they began to more reasonably manage the human material.

These military detachments which Angus' father saw, presented a different view. Some troops looked like an army, but there were also those which made a simply beggarly impression. For example he saw a group of infantry, where about half did not have any shoes, they went in slippers gathered on rubbish heaps. Some had on their legs genuine plaitings from the bast (woody tissue, best of lime-tree). (About the cause of such break-up of an Army still mighty only two or three years before, see Chapter III.) Father could not say how the proportions related, but did however consider the normal army was in the majority.

Like the Germans in Poznań, the Soviet soldiers surprised the abundance of food and all supplies in the shops. But unlike the Germans, at the beginning they bought only a few thistles, for example they went to several shops and in each they took a quarter or half a loaf of bread, as if they feared to buy more. They bought all they could at official prices but with worthless currency, fortunately even of this money of paper value they had little. Clearly they faced much with which they were unfamiliar and therefore occurred strange situations and miscarriages, of course maliciously commented on and ridiculed by the population. For example, the proverbial nightshirts mistaken for refined dresses, and suchlike. As time went on, the shops became empty, they lacked all goods.

Besides all this, Father saw something that made a startling impression: a penal battalion. Only one, but it was more than enough, something like this was never in the Polish Army. Such troops, if at all, are created on the spot, temporarily in wartime, but, although the Red Army invaded Poland with Hitler, Russia never declared a war, nor was there any real fighting. It was one-side aggression, met no organized resistance, only some spontaneous reaction, quickly over.

Such a battalion bivouacked for a few days on the fields near Barszczewo, because the soldiers were not allowed to seek accommodation in the village (only the command did). These poor creatures were clad in something looking like dirty uniforms with long wear and tear, instead of rifles they had shovels and nothing more, not even tents. They did not have a kitchen, at night they lay on earth in the fresh air. They could not wash or shave, or rarely, and surely did eat occasionally, if at all. They came to the cottages in a furtive manner, asking for boiling water and with this they sometimes received some food. But then it turned out that giving them anything made no sense. They hated all, both the strangers, but these that them gave them food still more, because they had something to give. Possible to say they changed in true Communists, did not have anything and ready of the kill each, that had anything. In fact they were like a company of sick, rabid animals. Difficult to explain to someone who did not see this.

However, the soldiers, whether Red Army or GPU, did not deal with the civilian population. They formed only the muscle, strength support, guaranteeing the efficient work of Special Weapons and Tactics, in short the GPU execution teams, without comparison more proficient than the Gestapo. During the period which Father was talking about, the end of 1939 and the beginning of 1940 the Soviets, concretely the GPU, killed many more victims than did the Germans. The Nazis began with bestial,

ostentatious assassination of hostages, but in all only a few thousand people, with several thousand more killed secretly. They only began preparations, started construction of the large factories of death.

The Soviets did not introduce any new technology of murder, as before applied handiworker methods of killing, considering the big number of personnel available the many separate outposts, which may be called workshops. The only improvement was introducing an element of competition.

Immediately after taking the country, the death services of GPU began work exactly as in Russia. They stopped the people, put them into confinement and after the normal, bureaucratic processing, killed them in the basement by a shot in the back of the head, systematically one after the other. Rules demanded ten daily, but a good working executioner produced four to five hundred percent of the norm, assuring him a good reputation, reward, bonuses and prospects of advancement. Nothing made for demonstration, quietly but successfully. Often people simply vanished, at least in the city (Białystok). Went out in the morning to work as usual, but from their institution came a question, why they had not come to work. They violated the discipline of work (a special, repressive statute, a worker had about as many rights as a slave on the plantations). If they did not show themselves, after a couple of days came penal dismissal for unjustified absence. And then nothing more was heard of the individual. Authorities usually answered inquiring family, that such a person had been never arrested and was not in any prison. Anyway, asking was unhealthy.

Father by chance met with one such case, as it concerned a distant relative from the nearby Choroszcz. The delinquent unexpectedly returned after a month, ill and in fatal standing, but even to the family he did not utter one word about where he had been and what had happened. He did not speak at all. He was an Orthodox Christian, from a family compulsorily "converted." The people had survived a genuine tragedy in a coercive russification by czar's orders and at last obeyed, had to change religion. Alas, necessary to relate that Polish society had behaved badly, cruelly, treating them as turncoats and renegades, applying ostracism. Polish Catholics broke all contacts with their Orthodox brethren, upheld no relations, suspecting them of betrayal of the nation and gaining a privileged status as compensation for a servile behavior to the national and religious enemy. No need to say, undeservedly, they were not dissidents, but victims of force, at gunpoint not everybody is able to perform an act of heroism – they showed wisdom, the alternative being to perish. In this case also, just because

the man was an Orthodox, some suspected that he had agreed on collaboration with the GPU and therefore was let free. Self-evident nonsense, as if the GPU recognized any religion. Later Father told Angus that his family and the family in question kept friendly contacts for many years, if in the bad years discreetly, and he convinced they all remained proper.

On the other hand Father commented, paradoxically, Stalin as the ruler of Russia was formally the head of the Orthodox Church, as had been the czar. He never exercised this authority directly and at his time the Orthodox Church suffered a terrible punishment, however, next he ceded the religious rule to his trustees.

To finish the matter, it is necessary to add the suspicions were groundless, the man in question never did any harm and behaved unimpeachably. Only much later his descendent may have left not such a good memory with the taxpayers, but this is another story.

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Meanwhile, besides these normal, already routine murders, happened two macabre mass actions, the first in November and December of 1939. The GPU took this time not single people, but groups, thousands and thousands. In the whole country hundreds of thousand and displaced them to Siberian gulags. Right from the start this was much worse than the atrocity of the Germans, if only because of the inhuman conditions, the great distance and pattern of travel resulting with high mortality. Hard to tell exactly, but the word was, it was about a fift-fifty chance, dead or alive. They arrived already in the worst winter and sure not in personal carriages. There was never a mass cemetery, but a long-line of burials along the railroad. First, the calamity fell on intelligence, public officials, but not only. Also all connected with the Polish State: professionals, medics, teachers, members of local self-government, common organizations and so on. At the time, Father kept a low profile, stopped any visits to Białystok, even to Choroszcz, working with his brother on the parents' farm in the village of Barszczewo. So the action lucky passed over.

Several months later, in February 1940 began the next, still larger action, with higher average mortality. Father received a warning, the local militia (still not the GPU) had become interested the unknown man, living and working on a rural property in the village of Barszczewo, having arrived in the area not long since. One might suspect, the fellow was not a farmhand at all, but an intellectual. Maybe one from these

most sought categories. If staying on in the place, he would expose all the family to danger for hiding a suspect. Next, make the excursion to Siberia not alone, but in company of all, or perhaps following him in the a next transport.

So, the family composed a rather high payment for a professional smuggler-guide who took refugees from the Russian to the German zone (Father with some pride joked, his life was worth a pair of cows and a calf).

The early warning which Father and his family received came from the local, familiar Jews, if Angus remembered right, living in Choroszcz.

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Capsule: Jews in the occupation zone of ZSRR.

It was the first news about the Jews there, before Angus had heard only imprecise rumors. Also some slander. Here is a need to explain this. As mentioned, the GPU was an institution employing many Jews, more so, the Jews took many controlling posts. Some people assumed the Jews directed and managed the GPU, a big exaggeration. The only grain of truth in it was, in fact the percentage of Jews in the GPU was higher in proportion to national composition in the ZSRR, mainly because few knowing the art of reading and writing survived the revolution.

Therefore, in the lands occupied by Soviets some Poles charged the Jews with a supposed treason. For years, such a reproach repeated many right extremists, unfairly, because treason surely happened, but by both the Poles and the Jews and mostly contained in the same community. Rarely occurred a case of treason to the Poles done by a Jew, or betrayal of the Jews by a Pole.

All in all, the Germans killed during the occupation over six million Polish citizens, the number of Soviet victims may amounted about one and a half million, fewer, but because they had less time for the crimes. At the beginning, the Soviets murdered the people much more efficiently and professionally and on a much larger scale. They were already in full swing, when the Germans began increase the rate of murders. The green light for German teams of trained murderers and the factories of death, appeared only after the first success on the west and increased after capitulating France. The conquerors feared no judgment and the worst bestiality stayed unpunished.

The Polish State was not uniform, on the contrary, it had a notable percentage of national minorities. First among these situated the Jewish minority with over ten percent of the population. The history of this shall be told separately. Now in abbreviation may be said that for almost a thousand years, and chiefly in the last seven hundred, Poland was only country in Europe where the Jews could settle and live free without persecution. If always between people may happen some irritating conflicts, they did never caused any open ill will or hostility between Poles and Jews.

This situation complicated in the Russian annexation, the so-called Kongresówka, when in the second half of the 19th century the czar's "ochrana" (secret police), busily fighting the Polish independence motion, introduced more refined methods of provocation. The first task was awakening antagonism between the many coexisting nations, if possible an open fight. Sometimes the effort turned successful, for example the Ochraha inspiration and money started an antagonism between Lithuanian and Poles. Next alas, it developed spontaneously, ending the almost five-hundred-year union of nations.

However, this method failed with the Poles and Jews, their mutual loyalty long remaining intact. This displayed among other instances, in the common defense of the so-called "Pogroms" (crushing defeats) organized in Russia by the authorities and so-called "black hundreds," attacks on Jewish population and often, also the Poles. Pogroms did never occur on the terrains taken by ethnically Polish population or, where the Polish and Jewish populations together formed a notable percentage.

On the other side, Polish Jews remained loyal and even voluntarily assumed an active participation in the freedom fighting, wars for the recovery of independence and national rebellions. (This despite that traditionally in the ancient Res Publica, the Jewish population was free from military service and did not take part in the wars.) However, from the days of Josek Joselewicz and the tragic defense of Prague, which during the Kościuszko rising was a typical Jewish suburb outside the borders of Warsaw, to Legions and POW, many Jewish volunteers shared the freedom-fighting. Also, they joined in the secret organizations and conspiracy. An inspiring example was, that after fall of the ancient Res Publica and the annexation of Lithuania to Russia, the Jewish Kahał in Wilno, at the time a leading authority in eastern lands, proclaimed a two-month public mourning. An act of rare civilian courage when, for example, the bishop Kossakowski tried to lick, say, the feet of Catherine the Great.

On the other hand, the Jewish population was not all uniform. There was a difference between the Polish Jews and the Jewish immigrants, especially the recent wave from Russia. The Jews settled on the borders of the ancient Res Publica. After taking over the eastern terrains by Russia they were not allowed to move further, only to stay in the lands in which they had born. Even there they suffered many restrictions.

Some tried as before to survive on the lands where they born, despite every persecution and danger. Others decided on emigration or rather re-emigration, because now the direction of travel changed back to the west. The first natural stage in this direction was again Polish earth. Here a part of the Jews stayed, a part continued to Germany, Western Europe, or even further, crossing the ocean. In such manner, to Poland flowed in a new wave of Jews, called Litvacs (Lithuanian Jews) because they descended mostly, if not entirely, from the former territory of Lithuania, connected at the time by union with Poland. However despite the name, these russicized Jews had for several generations lived under Russian rule and among the Russian population. They had never had any relations with the Poles, rather identified themselves with the Russian people and loyal to Russian authority tried to keep the best possible footing. So properly they should be never called traitors, they were alien newcomers who remained loyal to the primary authority. But of course this caused a negative reaction by some part of the Poles, more so as the aliens took on at times the role of police informers or even served as plainclothes or secret policemen.

Besides, these newcomers were in the majority uneducated and even primitive, in part renegades who broke too with Jewish tradition, also poor, without any property and source of maintenance. In short, some of them posed a high risk to Polish society, ready for anything in order to survive. The best historic sketch on the topic wrote an outstanding Jewish and Polish historian, Szymon Askenazy, who tried to explain the resulting 19th century anti-Semitic mood, formerly unknown.

With all due respect for the famous learned author, the explanation surely is not enough. Of course, national questions and conflict of mutual loyalty were accurately told, but surely more importance needs to be attached to economic causes. Simply, the extra load of the arriving people was too big, especially as the Polish State did not exist and the territory in an ethnographic sense shrank. The task exceeded the possibilities of the adaptation and of the economic self-regulation of society. After the recovery of independence and the recreation of the Polish State, as before continued the arrival of refugees from the east,

mainly primitive and poor. According to statistic data from the year 1921, soon after the recreation of the Polish State, in Poland lived about 1.8 million Jews, but by 1939 there were roughly 3.5 million. This despite a more distant emigration of a part of Jews immigrants. The numbers were probably too low, because refugees, often crossing the border illegally, tried to avoid at least for a time all lists and any contacts with authorities. A natural reaction, even though Poland never dropped any refugees, either from the east, nor, in recent years, from the west, from Hitler's Germany.

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Unfortunately, further emigration on the west became more difficult, the western countries drastically limited the access for the refugees at that point. In result Poland turned in a giant waiting room in this migration. Besides, the wealthy Jews who more easily managed the passports, visas and journey, relatively easily adapted to the Polish environment. Some even achieved big successes on a world scale (for example, the familiar case of the Bloch family).

However, hopeless remained the fate of the Jewish crowds in poverty. Even Jewish religious communities, on which first and main fell the traditional duty of aid, could not cope with this, with a small engagement of the State and not much more humane help from other Jewish organizations abroad. The huge area of human misery increased, as the poor Jews with trouble reached Poland and remained there, without exit, in despair. Here stopped their path, they could only try to survive.

The result of this was, in Poland grew an anti-Semitic mood due to economic causes. Also because of a sharp rivalry between the quickly growing Polish intelligentsia, in at least the free State, and the arriving Jews. In fact, the country could not assure the support of so many incoming Jews, who traditionally had undertaken small finance deals and services, fewer had been active in small business, still fewer cultivated free occupations. No Jew took work, for example, in farming.

What could they do, the unfortunate castaways? Properly they had no hope left, let's tell the truth, not much alternative except take to criminal activity. Before the war, a best-seller and literary hit was the diaries of one such Litwak known as a burglar and bandit, Urke Nachalnik. Most certainly not suitable for young people, but Angus still read it.

And in the most worse? It was a full reservoir of desperate people, some ready for anything. Now the pattern changed, the special services all over the world, for example the CIA, called for candidates at universities, also Russia is not exception. But then Stalin, and properly already Dzierzynski, GPU, GRU and other agencies took to recruitment on another basis. The primary condition was, the new collaborator has be at the point of despair, best about one step from suicide, or at least indifferent to death. The first chief of "Cherezvychajka" ("Extraordinary Commission," next GPU, NKWD and KGB) cared for homeless orphans, living after the revolution in terrible conditions, but not for humanistic reasons. Precisely therefore, from this true wolf pack with wolf law, to choose the most dangerous for service in the GPU.

A part of the refugees, despite all felt as before a tender connection with the people and environment in which they had grown up. It was an easy task to turn them to work for and with the Russians.

The Jews, meanwhile, who had decided to remain on the territory of the USSR found new possibilities arising from a fact, during the revolution the Russians had killed most of the intelligentsia. They simply did not have individuals with whom to replace them. Whereas, at least in words, they declared the removal of every form of nationalistic pressure; in fact they discriminated against all. To be sure the whole country became one large hell, but even in hell there are different degrees and different places in the hierarchy. Jews surely could not continue their previous economic activity, but could from this moment enter State service. In fact, some quickly made there a big career.

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Only now becomes clear the tale of Angus' father.

"So," Father related, "the Jews behaved different. It is a common knowledge, that many important, even top ranked, GPU were Jews, as were most of common officials. For example, in the militia, one could meet Byelorussian, Russians, Ukrainians, even renegade Poles, properly all nationalities living in the Soviet Union. In the GPU this was rarely the case. But there were not Polish Jews, if only a few renegades. The Polish Jews in large majority behaved admittedly careful, but proper. Commonly a Jew who had for a long time lived in Poland, more so a religious one, could be trusted and even sought out for relief in sudden need. Sometimes they would not help, because it might be too much risk – clear – but they would never betray the asking."

Anyway, what the people said about Jewish solidarity was merely fairy tales. Perhaps the Russian Jews scoffed a little and made fun of Polish Jews in between time treating them a little better, but in case of serious actions came down especially hard against the Jews. In the service, especially tried to display ruthlessness. (Angus later saw the Jewish police in the Ghetto, serving Germany, and only then understood this better.)

Necessary to explain, that Father couldn't of course know the greatest tragedy which happened to Polish Jews in the Soviet occupation zone. This followed only a few months later, in June 1940. Worse than anything the Poles had yet suffered, presumptions about any milder treatment turned out a big misunderstanding.

A supplement and short comment of the author:

For further information on this subject see chapters VIII, IX and XI, besides the short data scattered throughout the book. The report of Angus' father is the first source which Angus himself could treat with full confidence, as good or better than his own memory. All facts are plausible, yet the proposed interpretation and comments needs explanation. Angus' father had always had national-democratic convictions and then became a passionate partisan of the National Democratic Party in the version proposed by Dmowski.

As known, Dmowski radically changed the ideology of old Liga Polish, from an idealistic program, fighting for the freedom of all nations, to a pragmatic one leaning on a "rational" national egoism and in practice aimed at understanding with Russia. There resulted in this fall a conflict of interest between the Jews and the Poles. Dmowski logically had to incline on the side of restrained anti-Semitism, but never accept the predacious, murderous form engaged in by the bloody Russians.

Despite indisputable diplomatic abilities, Dmowski never did become a "Polish Bismarck" and did not achieve the position enabling realizing his program. Rather, the ideal of a universal war for the freedom of all nations, despite many defeats, build a good world opinion and finally contributed to the recovery of the freedom and of independence of Poland.

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Anyway the premonition, early warning received from the local Jews probably saved Father's life. But the affair was not so simple, he had to wait on the scheduled passage over the green border. The task of the smuggler conductors became increasingly risky and the guides would

no longer take large groups – and became choosy, setting their own conditions and carefully selecting the right time. No wages, however select the specialist, are worth death.

The rest of February and half of March Father spent sitting in the waiting rooms of different offices, where clients spent days awaiting settlement of various affairs, which the offices did not in fact settle, delaying any decision. The crowd pressed together in clouds of smoke on a dirty and spat-upon floor which nobody ever cleaned. Here one could most easily find shelter, it was necessary only to behave as did the rest, because naturally everywhere there were informers. The best was to take a place on a bench and chain-smoke, this habit remained. At least the GPU and the militia rarely searched there for anybody.

Meanwhile fate managed to secure permission for a railway journey to Brest and back in an invented affair, to higher stage office. This part of the journey he did by rail. However about the crossing point he would say nothing, never a word. Sensibly so, for many times unnecessary talk had had bad results for all concerned.

Maybe this moderation resulted not only from principles and maturity, but because each novel sensation slowly pales. To the conferences on the steps of the house came fewer and fewer interested listeners, others being busy. At last on the stairs, beside Father and Angus, sat only one or two people, even Mother did not appear. Nevertheless, the possibility of open, straight talking sure helped. Father psychically and slackened the tension, the rest recover of spirit achieved a regular proper food and rest.

It ended naturally, the fresh sensation pushed aside the former. A week after Father's return, newspapers wrote about the German aggression on Denmark and Norway. Thus finished the dead season, war returned to first place.

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