



Margit Zadok/13597

Papa didn't move.
He stood in the street
still as a lamppost
eyes locked on the nightmare
that had been his shop.
Windows smashed,
scattered glass winking in the sun,
the bottom half of his sign
Rosenberg's Fine Linens of Prague
blackened, burned.
Delicate handkerchiefs
now fallen white leaves.
Papa bowed his head
in prayer
or in despair—
I couldn't tell.
A white linen tablecloth

edged with pink roses—
Mama's favorite pattern—
flowed like a bride's train
from sidewalk to curb to gutter.
Papa stared at black boot marks
crossing it like sins.
A man and a woman walked from the shop
arms filled with linens.
"You!" Papa shouted.
"You cannot steal from me!"
The woman looked away.
The man smiled at Papa's rage.
"Know your place, Jew," the man snarled.
"Know your place."
As they walked off,
a napkin dropped from the woman's arms
falling to the ground
as noiselessly as snow.

Victor Lizik / 23790

Snow was in the air
as we marched from the station
that November afternoon
as solemn as the sky,
three hundred volunteers
packed into Transport Ca-114 from Prague
to ready the fortress
for those who would follow
to this place Hitler gave to the Jews.
The Nazis watched
as we measured, sawed planks for bunks
three high, sometimes four,
painted and plastered one barracks then another—
Magdeburg, Dresden, Hanover, Hamburg—
all with good German names.

We knew others would come to this place,
family, neighbors, strangers
to this place Hitler gave to the Jews
this “haven for the elderly.”
The Nazis told us
that our work would help protect us
and others we knew who would be arriving.
So we sawed, painted, hammered.

The Nazi promises proved to be nothing
when names appeared on the transport lists
first in summer
again when snow was on the ground
as they marched to the station
climbed into cattle cars
that trembled
as the impatient locomotive
dragged them into the dark
of no more promises.



I am Miklos.
The younger boys in L410
call me Professor.
Because I know many words?
Because of my large glasses?
Because I like to write
in a small notebook
that I conceal from the guards
in my shoe?

I am fragile
with fear.

Marie Jelinek / 17789

The doors of the cattle car rumbled,
opened.

We spilled
onto the platform,
eager even for snow and wind.

We found floodlights
barking dogs
vile shouts from SS soldiers.

Shoves and commands—

“Line up!

Hurry!” —

were met with screams
crying

names called in darkness.

Crammed through the *Schleuse*,
where papers were issued
and most of our belongings

stolen, replaced with promises.
Beasts of burden,
we shouldered bundles
of what pieces of the past
we were allowed to keep
as we joined the river of fear,
a current of shuffling feet, sobs, and whimpers
that crept past dark mouths
of archways and windows
to Terezín.

Erich Rosenberg / 43458

Bedbugs are not the amiable creatures
of nursery rhymes,
my lecture began.
Far from it.
Filled with blood
they are the size of an apple seed.
Unless engorged
they can move with the speed of an ant.
You will note
that their bites are often in clusters
or in a line of three—
breakfast, lunch, and dinner,
as they say—
although they feast only
in the last hours of night.

Each female can lay five eggs each day—
tiny, as you might imagine,

the color and size of a grain or two of salt—
but they hatch in two weeks.
We will never be rid of them.

They hide in tiny places—
cracks in the wall or floor
under your mattress
in your mattress—
until it is time to crawl over you.
Drawn by your warmth,
your breath,
they find a spot to suck your blood
injecting their saliva
leaving a blister, a rash
that must *not* be scratched.
That will bring passing relief
but blood as well
more blood
on bedclothes, sheets,
under fingernails.
You must resist.
You must endure.



*I see
Old Man Asher
a skeleton
holding a stick
thicker than his arm
to keep away the rats.*

Tomasz Kassewitz / 11850

For nearly sixteen years of Fridays
Willi and I played chess in the park
unless snow drove us
to the back corner of Bloom's.
Only for death—
when my beloved Helen passed,
when his son fell through the ice—
did we miss.
Willi brought a small brown paper bag
of white peppermints.
I hid two cigars
in my shirt pocket until later.
Two warriors, we said little
as move led to countermove.
Later, board and pieces put away,
cigars lit,

we talked the talk of old men
warmed on the park bench.

On a most glorious morning in October
Willi placed the peppermints on the table
but did not sit.

I looked up at the face of sorrow.

He picked up the white king
then laid it softly on its side.

"I can no longer play with you,"
said a false voice.

The sun is blue

would have made as much sense.

"It is forbidden, my friend,
to *fraternize* with a Jew."

I looked at his king.

"I must go," he whispered.

"They are watching."

Only when my bones chilled
in the darkening day
did I stand

and with a single swipe
clear the table
of chessmen, peppermints,
and walk into the new night.