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At last came the order for everyone in our part of the yard to prepare for departure. We were told that we could only take with us what we could carry in our hands. I started to sort through our things. Should I take warm or cool clothing? Which sentimental items could I not bear to leave behind?

The grandparents and Nick's old father were taken away first. All those too old and too sick to carry their own luggage were gathered in one spot, loaded on trucks, and driven off. Each clutched a prayer book, the most valuable item they could take with them. We waved goodbye, moist-eyed, not sure when we would meet again. The sight was heartbreaking and still haunts me.

Finally, near daybreak, it was our turn to go. We were ready and waiting. My mother was with me and I was very grateful for that. We didn't burden her with anything to carry. It was difficult enough just to walk through the fields in the dark. Our bundles grew heavier and heavier. As we walked, people began discarding some of their belongings. The guards shouted that anyone who stepped out of line would be shot.

The road led directly through Uzhorod to the railroad station, but we were detoured away from the city through the countryside. Why, I wondered, when no one would be awake to see us? But we were not going to the station. Our trains were waiting on a siding outside the city.

Despite all the horror of the past weeks, I was still shocked at the sight of the train. It consisted of an endless row of old, red cattle

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cars, standing against the green hills like a monstrous snake. Why cattle cars for humans? I wondered. Why does everything seem so frightfully uncertain and mysterious? We had ached to get away from the horrors of the brickyard, to start a new life. All of a sudden I felt lost. We were leaving our city of Uzhorod, but where were we going? The nicest years of my life had been spent here, surrounded by my relatives and friends. Where was everybody? How would we meet again? What was happening to our lovely house? Everything seemed to be slipping away from us.

I looked down at myself and noticed for the first time what a sad sight I had become. How very pathetic we all looked, dirty and disheveled, bent over with our bundles, our faces reflecting fear and hunger and despair. The SS men loomed around us. What could we do? Run home? Hide? Cry for help? It was hopeless, impossible. There was no one to care what happened to us.

We were ordered to climb into the cars. The first ones were boosted up through the doors. They, in turn, helped pull up those behind them. This is impossible, I thought. I'm not going to lie on that filthy floor. More and more people were pushed into the car until any hope of lying down at all was gone. Eventually some 80 of us and all our belongings were crammed into a space 40 feet long and 15 feet wide. Nick and I managed to get a spot under one of the two small windows that were high up in the sides of the car. They were no more than ventilation holes, two feet square with thick bars. We put our bundles on the floor and then tried to sit on them. Whichever way we turned, we touched other people.

My mother was near me and so was my childhood friend, Gitu. All through our school days Gitu had wanted to be close to me. Even now she had refused to go with her own family and had followed me. I felt sorry for her family, not having her with them, and a little angry with her too because it didn't seem the right thing to do.

My brother Bandi, his wife, and their little baby were also next

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to us in the car. So were Nick's brothers, sisters, and many of our relatives. The others that clustered around us were the older parents of our friends. For various reasons their children no longer lived in Uzhorod and so now, feeling very lonely and lost, they wanted to be part of our group too.

Our belongings consisted mainly of work clothes for both hot and cold weather. The decisions of what to take and what to leave behind had been painful for everyone. Of course we all had brought a good winter coat, a necessity for our frigid winters. I still remember my coat vividly, after nearly 50 years. It was of heavy black wool with a light brown fur collar. It had come with a matching fur muff, but I had not dared to bring it. They would never have allowed me to keep such a luxury.

My mind was made up about one thing. No matter what, I would never part with that coat. Tucked away in its lining were the two gold chains and the bottle of poison that we had taken from the mountains. I never let it out of my sight.

Before we had boarded the train, the SS soldiers told Nick he was in charge of our car. We were given one loaf of bread per person and one tiny chunk of margarine. This was our ration for three days. We were assigned two metal buckets per car. One was filled with drinking water and the other was to be used as a toilet. This meant that we all had to perform our most private needs in public, men and women alike. I remember thinking, "I will wait until dark—but in the dark accidents can happen more easily. What if I'm thrown off balance? What if several people need to go at the same time? I couldn't stop thinking about this one subject, about how lucky we were to be in the center of the car, away from the corner with the bucket. We were told that each time the train stopped, the door would be opened so the bucket could be emptied and the water bucket refilled.

We traveled all morning and into the afternoon in ever-growing heat. The lice we had brought with us from the ghetto added terrible

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itching to the effects of the heat and hunger. The drinking water was soon exhausted. Finally the train stopped.

Nick pulled himself up and looked out through the little window. Lots of SS men were watching our train and each carried a rifle. One of them stopped below the window and asked Nick if he were the one in charge. Nick said yes. The man spotted Nick's wristwatch and demanded it. Nick replied that he had special permission to keep it. The train began to move again as the SS man shouted something angrily after us.

The next time the train stopped, it was late afternoon. I was near the window, standing on a suitcase to get as close as possible to some fresh air. A soldier called up to me, asking for a warm knitted hat. Would I give him one? I told him I had only one and that I was keeping it for the winter. I will never forget this: With a big grin on his face he told me, "Don't be foolish. You won't need it. Just give it to me." Again I refused. Then he asked me to send the man in charge of the car to the window. Nick took my place on the suitcase. This soldier also demanded Nick's wristwatch. By now Nick didn't feel comfortable arguing, so he handed his watch through the bars to the soldier.

The large wooden doors of the cattle car were closed and locked from the outside and the train moved on. The heat inside the car made the air stagnant and foul. There was virtually no circulation and we could hardly breathe. We were constantly thirsty and each time someone ventured to take a drink from the bucket, everybody stared. Only the very young and very old were allowed to drink without criticism. New refreshments surfaced. We had started to judge the needs of others, who should drink and when and how much. We were all struggling with one another for survival.

The small squares of light in the tiny windows began to fade. The older people now spent most of their time praying loudly. Again and again the words of the Hebrew prayer, "*Sh'ma Israel*," were on many lips. The younger people were less tolerant of the

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inhuman conditions. They argued easily, yelled at the others to move over: "Don't step on me! Can't you stop that praying?" We were constantly touching each other and the closeness was unbearable in the intense heat and stench. As people fell asleep, they couldn't help toppling over on another tired body.

After dark the train stopped and the doors opened. This time two SS officers wanted to talk to the person in charge. They were very nasty and threatening. There was a look about the SS men that was different. No one else ever looked so cruel, or seemed to take such delight in cruelty. It was as if they had all given away their human faces and replaced them with a special mask, a devil mask.

The two men looked Nick up and down. Then they asked him where his watch was. It didn't occur to me to wonder how these men knew that Nick had had a watch. Nick told them why he didn't have it anymore. They ordered him to follow them to their own car, and to be prepared for the consequences if he didn't tell the truth. I watched him led away, their threats in my ears.

He had not returned when the doors were closed and locked again. We all sat there in the dark, everyone feeling the loss. For the first time I realized how everything in my life was now centered on Nick.

No one said anything. Everyone had become dependent on him. Now they felt too numb and helpless to speak.

There were certain thoughts I had been fighting off, but now they assailed me. The remarks of the soldier who had wanted my hat, of the guard who had almost shot me, of a hundred things I had heard but refused to absorb—now they began to fit together into a terrible, new picture. The twisted face of the SS officer as he shouted "I should kill you, you dirty Jew, but you'll be dead soon enough..." And the scornful laughter of the soldier who wanted my warm winter hat: "Don't be foolish. You won't need it."

The train bumped on and on. It seemed as if we'd go on forever. I ached for the train to stop, to get some water, some fresh air. Yet

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just as ardently I wanted it never to stop. As long as we continued like this, we existed.

Suddenly it seemed to me that merely existing like this was not worth it. What lay ahead for us anyway, but more pain, more degradation? I looked at my coat and thought of the poison in the lining. Why wait for those demons to murder me? Why not choose my own death?

My one concern was my mother. She had been in continuous agony since leaving the hospital. She had developed sores all over her body, which had become infected with lack of care. Her spirits were so low and she talked about not wanting to live any longer. I felt now that it had been no favor to rescue her from her suicide attempt.

Now I whispered to her very quietly that I had a plan—a way we could go together, painlessly. Nick was gone. We would never see him again. I was sure she would understand that without Nick there would be no point in my living on.

My girlfriend Gitu was half-dozing next to us. She overheard me and suddenly let out a long, wailing cry. Everyone around us roused themselves and stared in confusion at this scene. I was so startled by her outburst that it jarred me to my senses. I looked around at all those dear, tormented faces and realized how cruel and selfish it would be to take my own life in the midst of them.

I grabbed Gitu's arm and gave it a brutal squeeze. "Shut up!" I whispered harshly. She apparently understood because she stopped instantly. My mind was moving swiftly. I don't have to do it here; I don't have to do it now. There's always later.

There would be many times, both during the war and later, when the thought of suicide would come to me—alluringly and seductively. Always, I would resist with that same formula. Not here. Not now. There's always later. And "later" there would always be good reason to live.

It was many hours before the train stopped again and the door

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opened. Fresh air poured in and we filled our yearning lungs. Suddenly Nick was standing there. He teetered unsteadily on his feet, thin trickles of dried blood on his face and hands, wearing the same look of horror I had seen upon him outside the castle so long ago. Never mind. He was there.

The train was starting up again. We pulled him up into the car as gently as if he were a baby. We were together and that was all that mattered. Everyone sat and looked at him. Nobody asked any questions and he volunteered nothing. But he held my hand so tightly that I could feel my fingers swell.

I remember little of the next two days except the last night. Nick told me he thought we should get rid of my winter coat. I couldn't believe it. I stared at him for some clue, but all he could say was, "We'll do it during the night. It's too dangerous to keep it." I guessed it had something to do with the gold chains. Maybe the Germans who tortured him told him something that he didn't want to tell me.

The only way to get rid of it was to push it through the window. It hurt terribly to give it up. It was losing one more part of my past life. If only I had left an opening in my lining, I thought. Then we could have taken the chains out and simply gotten rid of them. Somehow, the thought never occurred to us that we might still be able to do that. It was set in Nick's mind that the entire coat had to go.

The rest of that evening, as the summer light faded, I kept stroking the soft fur collar. I loved its smooth, soothing touch—maybe I could get the fur collar off and keep it for warmth and sentiment? But it was stitched on tight and any extraordinary efforts to cut it loose would have attracted attention.

The opening over our heads was quite small. I began to worry that we wouldn't be able to get the coat through it, that it would get stuck and dangle half inside, half outside the hole, and we'd be caught. My fear grew with the darkness.

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We waited until everyone was asleep. Now, there was only that small square of dark gray above us. All else was blackness. It helped not to be able to see each other's faces. We pulled the suitcase over and both of us managed to balance on it, reaching up to the tiny window. Once we started to push the coat through the small square between the bars, I forgot my fear and focussed on just that. Fast, faster, just to have it finished and gone. The bulky coat didn't want to slip through, but we worked it inch by inch, shoving, shoving. At last Nick whispered to me, "I hope it's not stuck on the train, especially not close to our window." We both had had the same thought.

I never slept that night. When the first light appeared, we pressed our faces to the hole, to see if anything was dangling from the side of the car. The train began a gentle turn. We could see back the length of the train. There was nothing.

We had been aboard for three days and three nights when our train slowed and pulled into a large train station. Peeking out the tiny window, I saw SS soldiers everywhere. Just beyond the platform was a charming white cottage with potted geraniums on the windowsill. Across the station entrance was a large sign: "*Welcome to Auschwitz. Work makes one free.*"

The train stopped and the big doors opened. Everyone was tremendously relieved. At last we had arrived and could leave this stench, this suffocating, miserable cattle car. We could eat, drink, and work. I forgot for the moment that it would be slave work. I was thinking only of staying together with my family. My mother would cook and we would work. We could get rid of these horrible lice and not have our blood sucked out of us any longer. Here was a new start at last!

A powerful loudspeaker was blaring instructions: "Do not take any of your belongings with you. They will be delivered to your quarters." A German guard appeared at the door and shouted in to us: "You have arrived at your destination. Everyone will be assigned jobs, so please follow the orders given to you." We could already

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smell pungent smoke coming from the nearby chimneys of some sort of factory. "I smell tannic acid," someone said. "Perhaps it's a leather tannery." I wondered what sort of work I'd be assigned.

The train started to move again, very slowly. Through the frame of open doors we watched the station and little cottage roll past. A few hundred yards down the tracks and we made a new discovery. The track was lined with high, barbed-wire fences strung with high-voltage electrical wires. Strange shapes hung on the wire or huddled on the ground next to the fence. With revulsion I realized that these were human bodies in various states of decay. Blobs of flesh and tattered cloth swayed gently in the wind. We soon learned that these were the people who hadn't waited for Hitler's Final Solution.

The train stopped again. In the distance we could see a crowd of gaunt adults and children in striped uniforms, standing near a tiny wooden house behind the barbed wire fence. We waved to them, but they didn't move. They seemed almost lifeless.

We prepared to leave the car. A loudspeaker announced, "Physicians with instruments first." Nick took his fitted case, kissed me, and climbed down. As my eyes followed him, I saw him approach a group of doctors already assembled from the other cars. The loudspeaker sounded again: "Now everybody off! Don't bring your belongings. Men and women separately." I got off with my mother, Bandi's wife and Gitu, keeping my eyes always on Nick. Bandi, still weak from his months in the work camp, staggered along after Nick's brothers.

We filed in rows past an examining physician to receive our "work classifications." He looked at my mother first and said, "You go to the right." He said the same thing to Bandi's wife, who was carrying her baby. Then it was my turn. I was ordered to the left. I begged to stay with my mother, but was assured we would meet later. Reluctantly I did as I was told. Gitu was also sent to the left. Everyone in my group, I noticed, was young and strong.

I looked back. Nick's group had disappeared. For a moment I

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thought about our meager possessions still in the freight car, wondering whether they would be mixed up or lost, but then I realized that I no longer cared about such things. My thoughts were only of mother and Nick, about how and where we would be together again. I stood watching the last freight car being transferred into closed cars and taken away. Now the older women and young mothers were gone too.

Many of the women in my group were sobbing, but I was so numb that I hardly heard it. One young mother said over and over, "I want to see my children." Being separated from my family too devastated me. Looking up, I saw that some SS men were moving to surround us. Their rifles and machine guns were no longer on their shoulders but cocked and ready. Again the loudspeaker sounded: "In the evening you will meet your families and receive your possessions in the dwellings marked for each group. These groupings mean different work. That's why you have been classified."

From our transport of 2,000 people only 200 of us, all young, healthy women, were left on the platform. We began talking and joking among ourselves.

"What work do you suppose they'll give us?" one asked.

"Maybe we'll cook?"

"No, we'll wash dishes or milk cows," said another.

"I want to see my children," the young mother repeated.

The SS guards with rifles cocked ordered us to start moving. We approached an open field enclosed with electrified barbed wire 10 feet high. The arch and gate through which we passed were constructed of the same material, with a sign: "Dangerous High Voltage." We marched for a few minutes, then saw in the distance some buildings with more chimneys, and smoke curling against the blue morning sky. This must be the factory where we would be working.

We were turned over to SS women guards inside a fortified enclosure. We were close enough now to see the factory buildings clearly. It was still early but flames leaped from the chimneys.

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We were counted, numbered from 1 to 216, and ordered to undress for disinfecting. After unbearable heat during the train journey, the weather had suddenly turned quite cool. We took off everything but our panties, shivering with cold and hunger, for it was now afternoon and we had not eaten all day. An SS matron began shouting "You dirty pigs! I said undress and you are ashamed." As she shouted, she swung a braided whip at us. Long after we stood there totally naked she continued swinging her whip.

Soon several bald-headed young girls in prison uniforms arrived. They had been sent to shave us. I wanted to talk to the girl assigned to me, trying each of my five languages, but she couldn't understand me. Later I learned that the "N" insignia on her left breast pocket next to her prison number indicated she was a Norwegian prisoner. She left for a few minutes and returned with a Polish girl to finish the task. The Polish girl could speak a little German, so I asked her to leave some hair on my forehead. Somehow I still managed to muster a tiny remnant of human vanity: I would contrive some sort of hat with a curl coming out the back until my hair grew back.

As she shaved my head, the Polish girl leaned close to my ear and whispered, "Do you want to go in there?" With a slight nod of her head she indicated the building with the brick chimneys. "What's there?" I asked. An SS woman was approaching, but she managed to whisper, "The crematorium." I remembered the words of the soldier at the window of the train and I trembled. Where was my mother? Where was Nick? Where were all the rest of the 2,000 people from our train? The SS matrons had disappeared. I tried to question the Polish girl but she cautioned: "Don't be curious. You will find out when they burn us. You will get there too. My parents and my child died there."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because they were not as strong as you are. You will work until you are too weak to work, and then you'll go there. Sooner or later we all go there." As she spoke, her eyes burned strangely and her

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cheeks flushed. I was glad when she finished and went on to the next one.

Any hope I had of seeing anyone I loved was gone. The cottage with its flowers and the sign were a cruel Nazi joke. This was an extermination camp!

Nude and bald, we stood in the strong sun, looking up at the blazing chimneys with tears in our eyes. What was happening to the people we loved at this moment? There was little time to wonder because we were herded to a shower room. There we were washed with carbolic acid and then taken to a storeroom where we were each issued one shirt, one dress, and a pair of wood and fiber shoes.

What garments. With our bald heads and horror-stricken eyes, we no longer resembled human beings. Yet in some grotesque way we looked like merrymakers at a costume ball. One had been given an evening gown that reached to the floor, while another had a little girl's dress that hardly covered her hips. We were not allowed to exchange. Even in such tragic circumstances, some of us had to smile at our absurd appearance. And, strange as it may seem, most of us made some effort to look as good as we could. Many shared my idea about a turban, and surreptitiously tore pieces from hems to put on their heads.

I was lucky. I got a simple black dress and a long white slip. I tore a piece from the slip and fashioned a smart headpiece. I walked proudly out of the reception barracks in my black and white outfit, my swathed head held high.

I was almost alone in holding my head up. Most of the others had their eyes fixed on the ground. Because my head was up, I saw some men on the other side of a fence. One of them was Nick! Our eyes met and suddenly my heart was much lighter. He smiled for me, and his smile seemed to say, "Don't worry. I'm still with you." I smiled right back at him to say, "I'm all right. Take care of yourself. We'll meet again."

It is impossible to describe that moment, but that brief sight of

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Nick kept me going and gave me strength through all that was to come. It lasted but an instant. Next thing I knew there was a rifle butting my ribs, telling me to move on. But I turned back just once to look at him and smile at him again.

I thought of the chimneys and the smoke. Did he know about them too? Never mind. We were young and strong. There was plenty of work in both of us. They could use us for a long time.

My group was assigned to a barracks crammed with tiers of wooden benches for sleeping. There were at least three women for every sleeping place, so we had to lie on top of each other. Many had to stand through the night. The time would soon come when I no longer felt the hardness of the wood. A vision of those who had come before us, who had occupied these benches, lived and died, was always in my mind. My mother, I was certain, was gone. My sister-in-law and her little baby were gone. Bandi, and Nick's father, and Grandfather Kaufman, and my aunts and uncles and cousins—all up in smoke. And this was happening all over Hungarian territory, so my dear, crazy old Grosz aunts must be ashes too. No, not even their dogs and rifles would have kept the Nazis away.

I didn't even feel sorry for them. Their suffering was over. I was especially glad that my mother was out of this. But Nick was still alive. I lay awake all night, pressed tightly between the bodies of strangers, praying for Nick.

In the middle of the night when everyone had quieted down, I felt someone pulling at my feet. I thought she was trying to steal my shoes and grabbed at her hand. It was burning. I reached out to touch her face and it was like fire. I whispered to a woman next to me who had already been here two weeks: "She's sick. We must help her."

"Don't think about anyone but yourself," she replied. "Forget her. Go to sleep."

"But she's sick," I protested. "We have to help her today because we may be sick tomorrow, and then we will need her to help us."

"Nobody will help us," the woman said. "There are at least

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three down with fever now and they won't tell anyone. Only healthy people can exist. The sick ones are burned."

We were disturbing the others with our whispers, but she went on. "One girl in the next block complained to the SS that she was sick. The doctor said she had diphtheria and everyone in the barracks was burned. That's how they keep diseases from spreading. So if you're sick, don't tell. The others in the barracks will kill you in the night to save themselves."

Morning came at last. At first light, we were sent out into the yard and beaten. It was routine. It was cold and raining now, but we were forced to stand in line to be counted, our thin clothes plastered to our bodies by rain and trickles of blood. Suddenly the woman in front of me, a friend from my childhood, began to totter back and forth, sobbing. She turned and ran to the electrified fence and threw herself on it. Several others followed her. They died instantly. This didn't disturb the guards. They laughed, pulled the bodies off the fence with wooden poles, and threw them back in their places in line. The counting resumed.

We stood in the rain for hours. Our fibrous shoes quickly soaked through. Worse than the cold, the wet, the beatings, or even the horror of standing next to burnt bodies, was our hunger. I could no longer think of anything else. Finally, as it began to grow dark, we were ordered back into the barracks. A prisoner brought our food, a washbasin of foul-smelling soup. We each got a piece of bread too. There were no bowls or spoons. We bent our heads into the pan like animals at a trough. The liquid in the basin was vile, but we were told that anything left would be deducted from our next day's ration. I ate but then I vomited most of it.

Each barracks had a commander. Ours had been at Auschwitz long enough to have the full confidence of the SS and also long enough to have lost all human feeling. Her days were spent beating us and killing us. We stood outdoors from dawn to sundown, returning to the cramped barracks only at night. If anyone died that day,

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she got to eat her food ration, so she also saw to it that someone would die.

Our side of Auschwitz was a holding area for those going on to work camps. The elderly, the mothers with children and the sick were taken to the other side for extermination. There was a constant exchange on that side, killing those already here, bringing in new ones. Because we had to stand outdoors all day, we never stopped watching the chimneys and the smoke. We stood as if hypnotized, praying constantly for our dead. I felt so glad that my mother had been spared all this. Life had lost all meaning. We could barely grasp the reality of Auschwitz. Unceasing horror is all I remember. Horror after horror, busses unloading human skeletons, screams, smoke pouring from the crematorium. All we knew was hunger, suffering, shaking with cold and terror, and standing for four or five hours at a time as we were sorted out for the gas chambers.

We stayed at Auschwitz for three endless days. On the fourth day, we were ordered onto another transport train. I had arrived at Auschwitz with 12 relatives, Nick with even more. But after the initial selections, nearly all of them were gone—aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, cousins, parents, grandparents. Only Nick and one of his brothers, and I, survived Auschwitz.