On the ghetto's last morning—a Shabbat, as it happened, March 13—Amon Goeth arrived in Plac Zgody, Peace Square, at an hour which officially preceded dawn. Low clouds obscured any sharp distinctions between night and day. He saw that the men of the Sonderkommando had already arrived and stood about on the frozen earth of the small park in the middle, smoking and laughing quietly, keeping their presence a secret from the ghetto dwellers in the streets beyond Herr Pankiewicz' pharmacy. The roads down which they'd move were clear, as in a model of a town. The remaining snow lay heaped and tarnished in gutters and against walls. It is safe to guess that sentimental Goeth felt paternal as he looked out at the orderly scene and saw the young men, comradely before action, in the middle of the square.

Amon took a pull of cognac while he waited there for the middle-aged Sturmbannführer Willi Haase, who would have strategic, though not tactical, control of today's Aktion. Today Ghetto A, from Plac Zgody westward, the major section of the ghetto, the one where all the working (healthy, hoping, opinionated) Jews
The convalescent hospital was situated in a ward of the old mansion, where the old man lived.

The old man was a retired physician, a man of many virtues, who had lived a long and useful life. He had been a friend to many, and his memory was held in high regard by all who knew him.

He had always been a man of great kindness, and his gentle manner and gentle voice had won the hearts of all who had come to him for help.

The convalescent hospital was a place of tranquility, a place of quietude, where the sick could find rest and comfort. It was a place where the old man would spend his days, tending to the sick and the wounded, and giving them the care and attention they needed.

The convalescent hospital was a place of hope, a place of promise, where the sick could find comfort and solace. It was a place where the old man would spend his days, tending to the sick and the wounded, and giving them the care and attention they needed.

The convalescent hospital was a place of healing, a place of recovery, where the sick could find strength and courage. It was a place where the old man would spend his days, tending to the sick and the wounded, and giving them the care and attention they needed.
for an intestinal tumor had left him weakened and burdened with a colostomy.

The medical staff here, Dr. H included, were of the highest caliber. From this ill-equipped ghetto hospital would derive the first Polish accounts of Weil’s erythroblastic disease, a condition of the bone marrow, and of the Wolff-Parkinson-White syndrome. This morning, though, Dr. H was concerned with the question of cyanide.

With an eye to the option of suicide, H had acquired a supply of cyanic acid solution. He knew that other doctors had too. This past year depression had been endemic to the ghetto. It had infected Dr. H. He was young; he was formidably healthy. Yet history itself seemed to have gone malignant. To know he had access to cyanide had been a comfort for Dr. H on his worst days. By this late stage of the ghetto’s history, it was the one pharmaceutical left to him and to the other doctors in quantity. There had rarely been any sulfa. Emetics, ether, and even aspirin were used up. Cyanide was the single sophisticated drug remaining.

This morning before five, Dr. H had been awakened in his room in Wit Stwosz Street by the noise of trucks pulling up beyond the wall. Looking down from his window, he saw the Sonderkommando assembling by the river and knew that they had come to take some decisive action in the ghetto. He rushed to the hospital and found Dr. B and the nursing staff already working there on the same premise, arranging for every patient who could move to be taken downstairs and brought home by relatives or friends. When all except the four had gone, Dr. B told the nurses to leave, and all of them obeyed except for one senior nurse. Now she and Doctors B and H remained with the last four patients in the nearly deserted hospital.

Doctors B and H did not speak much as they waited. They each had access to the cyanide, and soon H would be aware that Dr. B’s mind was also sadly preoccupied with it. There was suicide, yes. But there was euthanasia as well. The concept terrified H. He had a sensitive face and a marked delicacy about the eyes. He suffered painfully from a set of ethics as intimate to him as the organs of his own body. He knew that a physician with common sense and a syringe and little else to guide him could add up like a shopping list the values of either course—to inject the cyanide, or to abandon the patients to the Sonderkommando. But H knew that these things were never a matter of calculating sums, that ethics was higher and more tortuous than algebra.

Sometimes Dr. B would go to the window, look out to see if the Aktion had begun in the streets, and turn back to H with a level, professional calm in his eyes. Dr. B, H could tell, was also running through the options, flicking the faces of the problem like the faces of riffled cards, then starting again. Suicide. Euthanasia. Hydrocyanic acid. One appealing concept: Stand and be found among the beds like Rosalia Blau. Another: Use the cyanide on oneself as well as on the sick. The second idea appealed to H, seeming not as passive as the first. As well as that, waking depressed these past three nights, he’d felt something like a physical desire for the fast poison, as if it were merely the drug or stiff drink that every victim needed to soften the final hour.

To a serious man like Dr. H, this allure was a compelling reason not to take the stuff. For him the precedents for suicide had been set in his scholarly childhood, when his father had read to him in Josephus the account of the Dead Sea Zealots’ mass suicide on the eve of capture by the Romans. The principle was, death should not be entered like some snug harbor. It should be an unambiguous refusal to surrender. Principle is principle, of course, and terror on a gray morning is another thing. But H was a man of principle.

And he had a wife. He and his wife had another escape route, and he knew it. It led through the sewers near the corner of Piwna and Krakusa Streets. The sewers and a risky escape to the forest of Ojcow. He feared that more than the easy oblivion of cyanide. If Blue Police or Germans stopped him, however, and dragged his trousers down, he would pass the test, thanks to Dr. Lachs. Lachs was a distinguished plastic surgeon who had taught a number of young Cracow Jews how to lengthen their foreskins bloodlessly by sleeping with a weight—a bottle containing a gradually increasing volume of water—attached to themselves. It was, said Lachs, a device that had been used by Jews in periods of Roman persecution, and the intensity of SS action in Cracow had caused Lachs to revive its use in the past eighteen months. Lachs had taught his young colleague Dr. H the method, and the fact that it had worked with some success allowed H even less ground for suicide.

At dawn the nurse, a calm woman about forty years old, came to Dr. H and made a morning report. The young man was resting well, but the blind man with the stroke-affected speech was in a
STATE OF ANXIETY. THE MUSICIAN AND THE ANAL-FISTULA CASE HAD BOTH HAD A PAINFUL NIGHT. IT WAS ALL very QUIET IN THE CONVALESCENT HOSPITAL NOW, HOWEVER; THE PATIENTS SNUFFLED IN THE LAST OF THEIR SLEEP OR THE INTIMACY OF THEIR PAIN; AND DR. H WENT OUT ONTO THE FREEZING BALCONY ABOVE THE COURTYARD TO SMOKE A CIGARETTE AND ONCE MORE EXAMINE THE QUESTION.

LAST YEAR DR. H HAD BEEN AT THE OLD EPIDEMIC HOSPITAL IN RESKAWKA WHEN THE SS DECIDED TO CLOSE THAT SECTION OF THE GHETTO AND RELOCATE THE HOSPITAL. THEY HAD LINED THE STAFF UP AGAINST THE WALL AND DRAGGED THE PATIENTS DOWNSTAIRS. H HAD SEEN OLD MRS. REISMAN'S LEG CAUGHT BETWEEN THE BALUSTERS, AND AN SS MAN Hauling HER BY THE OTHER LEG DID NOT STOP AND EXTRICATE HER BUT PULLED UNTIL THE TRAPPED LIMB SNAPPED WITH AN AUDIBLE CRACK. THAT WAS HOW PATIENTS WERE MOVED IN THE GHETTO. BUT LAST YEAR NO ONE HAD THOUGHT OF MERCY-KILLING. EVERYONE HAD STILL HOPED AT THAT STAGE THAT THINGS MIGHT IMPROVE.

NOW, EVEN IF HE AND DR. B MADE THEIR DECISION, H DIDN'T KNOW IF HE HAD THE RIGOR TO FEED THE CYANIDE TO THE ILL, OR TO WATCH SOMEONE ELSE DO IT AND MAINTAIN A PROFESSIONAL DISPOSITION. IT WAS ABSURDLY LIKE THE ARGUMENT, IN ONE'S YOUTH, ABOUT WHETHER YOU SHOULD APPROACH A GIRL YOU WERE INFATUATED WITH. AND WHEN YOU DECIDED, IT STILL COUNTED FOR NOTHING. THE ACT STILL HAD TO BE FACED.

OUT THERE ON THE BALCONY HE HEARD THE FIRST NOISE. IT BEGAN EARLY AND CAME FROM THE EASTERN END OF THE GHETTO. THE RAUS, RAUS! OF MEGAPHONES, THE CUSTOMARY LIE ABOUT BAGGAGE WHICH SOME PEOPLE STILL CHOSE TO BELIEVE. IN THE DESERTED STREETS, AND AMONG THE TEMPLATES IN WHICH NO ONE MOVED, YOU COULD HEAR ALL THE WAY FROM THE COBBLESTONES OF PLAC ZGODY AND UP BY THE RIVER IN NADWIŚLANSKA STREET AN INDEFINITE TERROR-SICK MURMUR WHICH MADE H HIMSELF TREMBLE.

THEN HE HEARD THE FIRST VOLLEY, LOUD ENOUGH TO WAKE THE PATIENTS. AND A SUDDEN STRENNICY AFTER THE FIRING, A BULL MEGAPHONE RAGING AT SOME PLAGENT FEMININE VOICE; AND THEN THE WAILING SNAPPED OFF BY A FURTHER BURST OF FIRE, AND A DIFFERENT WAILING SUCCEEDING. THE BEHEAVED BEING HURLED ALONG BY THE SS BULLETHORNS, BY ANXIOUS OD MEN, AND BY NEIGHBORS, UNREASONABLE GRIEF FADING INTO THE FAR CORNER OF THE GHETTO WHERE THERE WAS A GATE. HE KNEW THAT IT ALL MIGHT WELL HAVE CROSSED EVEN THE PRECOMATOSE STATE OF THE MUSICIAN WITH THE FAILED KIDNEYS.

WHEN HE RETURNED TO THE WARD, HE COULD SEE THAT THEY WERE WATCHING HIM—even the musician. He could sense rather than see the way their bodies stiffened in their beds, and the old man with the colostomy cried out with the muscular exertion. "DOCTOR, DOCTOR!" SOMEONE SAID. "PLEASE!" ANSWERED DR. H, BY WHICH HE MEANT, I'M HERE AND THEY'RE A LONG WAY OFF YET. HE LOOKED AT DR. H B, WHO NARROWED HIS EYES AS THE NOISE OF EVICTIONS BROKE OUT AGAIN SEVENTH BLOCKS AWAY. DR. B NODDED AT HIM, WALKED TO THE SMALL LOCKED PHARMACEUTICAL CHEST AT THE END OF THE WARD, AND CAME BACK WITH THE BOTTLE OF HYDROCYANIC ACID. AFTER A PAUSE, H MOVED TO HIS COLLEAGUE'S SIDE. HE COULD HAVE STOOD AND LEFT IT TO DR. B. HE GUSSUED THAT THE MAN HAD THE STRENGTH TO DO IT ALONE, WITHOUT THE APPROVAL OF COLLEAGUES. BUT IT WOULD BE SHAMEFUL, H THOUGHT, NOT TO CAST HIS OWN VOTE, NOT TO TAKE SOME OF THE BURDEN. DR. H, THOUGH YOUNGER THAN DR. B, HAD BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH THE JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY, WAS A SPECIALIST, A THINKER. HE WANTED TO GIVE DR. B THE BACKING OF ALL THAT.

"WELL," SAID DR. B, DISPLAYING THE BOTTLE BRIEFLY TO H. THE WORD WAS NEARLY OBSCURED BY A WOMAN'S SCREAMING AND RANTING OFFICIAL ORDERS FROM THE FAR END OF JÓZEFİŃSKA STREET. DR. B CALLED THE NURSE. "GIVE EACH PATIENT FORTY DROPS IN WATER." "FORTY DROPS," SHE REPEATED. SHE KNEW WHAT THE MEDICATION WAS. "THAT'S RIGHT," SAID DR. B. DR. H ALSO LOOKED AT HER. YES, HE WANTED TO SAY. I'M STRONG NOW; I COULD GIVE IT MYSELF. BUT IF I DID, IT WOULD ALARM THEM. EVERY PATIENT KNOWS THAT NURSES BRING THE MEDICINE AROUND.


"PLEASE, ROMAN," SAID THE DOCTOR, MEANING THAT THE OLD MAN SHOULD UNCLENCH HIS BODY. HE BELIEVED THE SONDERKOMMANDO WAS
coming within the hour. Dr. H felt, but resisted, a temptation to let him in on the secret. Dr. B had been liberal with the dosage. A few seconds of breathlessness and a minor amazement would be no new or intolerable sensation to old Roman.

When the nurse came with four medicine glasses, none of them even asked her what she was bringing them. Dr. H would never know if any of them understood. He turned away and looked at his watch. He feared that when they drank it, some noise would begin, something worse than the normal hospital gasps and gagging. He heard the nurse murmuring, "Here's something for you." He heard an intake of breath. He didn't know if it was patient or nurse. *The woman is the hero of this,* he thought.

When he looked again, the nurse was waking the kidney patient, the sleepy musician, and offering him the glass. From the far end of the ward, Dr. B looked on in a clean white coat. Dr. H moved to old Roman and took his pulse. There was none. In a bed at the far end of the ward, the musician forced the almond-smelling mixture down.

It was all as gentle as H had hoped. He looked at them—their mouths agape, but not obscenely so, their eyes glazed and immune, their heads back, their chins pointed at the ceiling—with the envy any ghetto dweller would feel for escapees.

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**Poldek Pfefferberg** shared a room on the second floor of a nineteenth-century house at the end of Józefińska Street. Its windows looked down over the ghetto wall at the Vistula, where Polish barges passed upstream and downstream in ignorance of the ghetto’s last day and SS patrol boats puttered as casually as pleasure craft. Here Pfefferberg waited with his wife, Mila, for the *Sonderkommando* to arrive and order them out into the street. Mila was a small, nervous girl of twenty-two, a refugee from Łódź whom Poldek had married in the first days of the ghetto. She came from generations of physicians, her father having been a surgeon who had died young in 1937, her mother a dermatologist who, during an *Aktion* in the ghetto of Tarnow last year, had suffered the same death as Rosalia Blau of the epidemic hospital, being cut down by automatic fire while standing among her patients.