SATURDAY, 21 APRIL 1945, 2A.M.

Bombs that made the walls shake. My fingers are still trembling as I hold my pen. I'm covered in sweat as if from hard labour. Before my building was hit I used to go down to the shelter and eat thick slices of bread with butter. But since the night I helped dig out people who'd been buried in the rubble, I've been preoccupied, forced to cope with my fear of death. The symptoms are always the same. First the sweat beads up around my hairline, then I feel something boring into my spine, my throat gets scratchy, my mouth goes dry, my heart starts to skip. I've fixed my eyes on the chair leg opposite, and am memorizing every turned bulge and curve. It would be nice to be able to pray. The brain clings to set phrases, fragments of sentences: 'Pass lightly through this world, for it is nothing'... 'and each one falls as God desires'... '*Noli timere*...' And so on, until this wave of bombers passes.

As if on command, everyone starts chattering feverishly, laughing, joking, shouting over one another. Fräulein Behn steps up with the newssheet and reads Goebbels's speech in honour of the Führer's birthday (the date had slipped most of our minds). She reads with a new intonation, a mocking, sarcastic voice we haven't heard down here before: 'Golden fields of grain... a people at peace...' 'How about that,' say the people from Berlin. 'That would be nice!' High–blown phrases that now fall on deaf ears.

Three in the morning. The basement is dozing away, several all–clears sound, immediately followed by new alarms. No bombs, though. I'm writing. It does me good, takes my mind off things. And Gerd needs to read this if he comes back – if he's still – no, cross that out, I mustn't jinx things.

The girl who looks like a young man just snuck up and asked what I'm writing: 'Nothing special. Just some private scribbling. Gives me something to do.'

After the earlier wave of bombs 'Siegismund' turned up, an elderly gentleman from the neighbourhood. His nickname comes from *Sieg*,

victory: he keeps talking about the victory at hand, the certain victory. *Sieg* this and *Sieg* that, which is presumably why he was kicked out of his own basement. Siegismund genuinely believes that salvation is at hand, and that 'that man' (as we now call A.H.) knows exactly what he's doing. Whenever he talks the people sitting nearby exchange silent, meaningful glances. No one challenges Siegismund. Who wants to argue with a madman? Besides, madmen can be dangerous. The only person who agrees with him is the concierge's wife, and she is fervent in her support, pronouncing through her fang–like teeth that you can count on 'that man' as if he were God himself.

Nine in the morning, up in the attic apartment. (I can only guess at these times, as long as there's no clock in sight my life is timeless.) Grey morning, pouring rain. I'm writing on the windowsill, using it as a standing desk. The all–clear sounded shortly after three. I came upstairs, took off my shoes, slipped out of my dress and collapsed onto my bed, which is always turned back and ready. Five hours of deep sleep. The gas is out.

Just counted my cash: 452 marks. No idea what I'll do with all that money – the only things left to buy cost no more than a few pfennigs. I also have about a thousand in the bank, again because there's nothing to buy. (When I opened that account, in the first year of the war, I was still thinking of saving for peacetime, maybe even taking a trip around the world. That was a long, long time ago.) Recently people have been running to the bank – assuming they can find one that's still open – to withdraw their money. What for? If we go down, the mark goes with us. After all, money, at least paper money, is only a fiction and won't have any value if the central bank collapses. Indifferent, I run my thumb over the wad of bills, which probably won't be worth anything except as souvenirs. Snapshot of a by gone era. I assume the victors will bring their own currency and let us have some. Or else they'll print some kind of military scrip – unless they decide not to give us even that, and force us to work just for a helping of soup.

Noontime. Endless rain. Walked to Parkstrasse and got some more paper money to add to my wad of souvenirs. The head clerk paid me last month's salary and made my 'vacation' official. The whole publishing house has dissolved into thin air. The employment office has also breathed its last, no one is looking for help any more. So for the moment we're all our own

bosses.

Bureaucracy strikes me as a fair–weather mend. The whole civil service shuts down at the first sign of shrapnel. (By the way, it's very peaceful just now. Alarmingly peaceful.) We're no longer being governed. And still, everywhere you look, in every basement, some kind of order always emerges. When my house was hit I saw how even people who'd been injured or traumatized or buried in the rubble walked away in an orderly manner. The forces of order prevail in this basement as well, a spirit that regulates, organizes, commands. It has to be in our nature. People must have functioned that way as far back as the Stone Age. Herd instinct, a mechanism for preservation of the species. With animals they say it's always the males, the lead bull, the lead stallion. But in our basement lead mares would be closer to the truth. Fräulein Behn is a lead mare, so is the woman from Hamburg, who keeps very calm. I'm not one, and I wasn't in my old basement either. Besides, back there we had a lead bull bellowing around, dominating the field, a retired major who brooked no rivals. I always hated having to huddle together down there, always tried to find a comer of my own to sleep in. But when the herd leader calls I follow willingly.

I walked alongside the tram. I couldn't get on, since I don't have a Class III ticket. And it was nearly empty, too, I counted eight passengers in the car. Meanwhile hundreds of people were trudging right next to it in the pouring rain, even though the tram could easily have picked them up – it has to run anyway. But no – see above under: Order. It's rooted deep inside us, we do as we are told.

I bought some rolls in the bakery. The shelves still appear to be stocked, you don't see any panic–buying. After that I went to the ration–card office. Today they were stamping potato coupons 75 to 77 for people with my last initial. The line went surprisingly quickly, although there were only two women on duty with rubber stamps, instead of the usual group. They didn't even look at the coupons, just stamped them automatically, like machines. Why all this stamping? No one knows, but we all go there, assuming that there's some sense in it. The last group – X to Z– is to report on 28 April, according to the posted schedule.

Carts covered with sopping wet canvas were trundling through the rain into the city. Under the tarpaulins are soldiers. That was the first time I'd

seen men from the real front line – dirty, grey–bearded, all of them old. The carts were pulled by Polish ponies, dark–coated in the rain. The only other freight they're hauling is hay. Doesn't look much like a motorized Blitzkrieg any more.

On the way home I went behind the black ruins where Professor K used to live and broke into his abandoned garden, where I picked several crocuses and tore off some lilac branches. Took some to Frau Golz, who used to live in my old apartment building. We sat across from each other at her copper table and talked. Or rather, we shouted above the gun fire that had just resumed. Frau Golz, her voice breaking: 'What flowers, what lovely flowers.' The tears were running down her face. I felt terrible as well. Beauty hurts now. We're so full of death.

This morning I wondered how many dead people I've seen in my life. The first was Herr Schermann. I was five at the time, he was seventy, silver–white hair on white silk, candles at his head, raised casket, the whole scene full of meaning. So death, then, was something solemn and beautiful. At least until 1928, when Hilde and Käte P. showed me their brother Hans who'd died the day before. He lay on the sofa like a bundle of rags, a blue scarf tied high around his chin, his knees bent – a piece of dirt, a nothing. Later came my own dead relatives, blue fingernails among the flowers and rosaries. Then the man in Paris who'd been run over and was lying in a pool of blood. And the frozen man on the Moskva river.

Dead people, yes, but I've never seen anyone actually die. I expect that won't be long in coming. Not that I think it could happen to me. I've had so many narrow escapes, I feel I lead a charmed life. That's probably the way most people feel. How else could they be in such high spirits, surrounded by so much death? What's clear is that every threat to your life boosts your vitality. My own flame is stronger, I'm burning more fiercely than before the air raids. Each new day of life is a day of triumph. You've survived once again. You're defiant. On one hand you stand taller, but at the same time your feet are planted more firmly on the ground. When the first bombs started to hit I remembered a verse from Horace, which I pencilled on the wall of my room.

Si fractus illabatur orbis,

Impavidum ferient ruinae

Should Nature's pillar'd frame give way,
that wreck would strike one fearless head

Back then you could still write to people abroad. I quoted those lines in a letter to my friends the Ds in Stockholm, flexing my muscles – in part to make myself feel strong– by telling them how intense it was to live here amid all the danger. I felt a kind of forbearance writing that, as if I were an adult initiated into the deep secrets of life, speaking to innocent children in need of protection.