

gradually recognized that they were satirical verses on the “March casualties”—those people who, after the Nazis had won, had suddenly become Nazis too. For a few moments I yielded to uncomprehending, hopeful illusions. Then I realized that the satire came from the opposite side to the one I had naively assumed.

In nineteen thirty-three
 The battle had been fought . . .
 In nineteen thirty-three
 The gentleman went out
 And from his tailor bought
 An outfit, made to measure.
 Now see the asshole strut about . . .

They were obviously pithy SA songs for the party faithful. It was ironic, though, that most of those singing these songs were themselves “March casualties”—or perhaps not even that . . . one could no longer tell the difference. They were all wearing the same gray uniforms with swastika armbands and they all sang equally jerkily. With hesitant glances, I tried to gauge my neighbors, all still wearing civilian clothes, and not yet singing; they were probably doing the same with me . . . “Is he a Nazi? Anyway, better be careful . . .”

Thus we waited, waited with interruptions for three or four hours. In the interruptions we were given boots, tin mess cups, swastika armbands, and a ladle of potato soup . . . After each of these events we had to wait another half an hour. It was as though we were inside a large, cumbersome machine

that creaked into movement once every half hour. Then there was a medical, one of those rough and insultingly summary military checkups: “Stick your tongue out. Drop your trousers. Have you ever had a venereal disease?” The doctor briefly put his ear to your chest, shone a flashlight between your legs, and hit you on the knee with a little hammer. That was all. Then we were assigned to “dormitories,” large barrack rooms with forty or fifty bunk beds, little lockers, and two long dining tables with benches on either side. It was all very military; the only thing was, we were not training to be soldiers, we just wanted to pass our *Assessor* examinations. Indeed, nobody said anything about our becoming soldiers; even now it was not mentioned, though we did get a speech.

Our dormitory headman made us form up. He was an SA man, but not just an ordinary SA man, a *Sturmführer*. (He had three stars on the collar of his uniform, and I learned that day that that denotes a *Sturmführer*, the SA equivalent of a captain. Apart from that he was a *Referendar* just like us.) I cannot say that he made an unpleasant impression. He was a small, dainty, brown-haired young man with lively eyes, not a bullyboy. But I noticed a peculiar expression on his face—it was not even particularly disagreeable, but it reminded me of something and it bothered me. Suddenly I remembered: it was exactly the expression of brazen audacity that Brock had worn ever since he had become a Nazi.

He gave the orders “Attention!” and then “At ease!”—or rather he did not give the orders, but spoke them in a gently cajoling tone, as though he were saying, “Look, we are playing

a game here, and in this game I have to give the orders, so don't be spoilsports and do what I say." So we did him the favor of obeying him. After that he gave a speech that made three points.

First, since it still seemed to be unclear, here in the camp there was only one form of address, namely the comradely *Du* and not the more formal *Sie*.

Second, this dormitory would be the model for the whole camp.

Third, "If one of you has smelly feet, I expect him to wash them thoroughly every morning and every evening. That is a rule of comradeship."

And with that, he declared, our duties for today and tomorrow were over. (It was Saturday afternoon.) Furlough would not be available yet, but we could spend our time as we pleased inside the camp. "Dismiss!"

So, apart from all the obscure and disturbing impressions that the day had brought, we now had the difficult task of filling one and a half days of nothingness.

We began to make hesitant acquaintances. Hesitant, because none of us knew whether any of the others was a Nazi or not, and so caution was necessary. Some people openly tried to strike up with the SA men, but they maintained a proud reserve toward their civilian colleagues. They clearly thought of themselves as a sort of aristocracy here in the camp. On the other hand, I started looking for faces that did not have a Nazi air. But could you rely on mere physiognomy? I felt uncomfortable and indecisive.

Then someone spoke to me. I glanced at him quickly. He

had a normal, open blond face—but sometimes one saw such faces beneath SA caps.

"I have the feeling that I have met you before," he said, stumbling a little because he started to say *Sie* and had to change to *Du*.

"I'm not sure," I said. "I have a bad memory for faces. Are you," stumbling in the same way, "a Berliner too?"

"Yes," he said, and introduced himself with a little civilian bow, "Burkard."

I also gave my name, and then we tried to find out where we might have met. That provided a safe topic of conversation for about ten minutes. Once we had determined that we really could not have met anywhere, silence descended. We cleared our throats.

"Well, anyway," I said, "then we have met here."

"Yes," he said.

Silence.

"Is there a canteen anywhere around here?" I asked. "Shall we have a cup of coffee?"

"Why not?" he said. We both avoided addressing each other directly.

"One has to do something, after all," I said. Then tentatively, "Funny setup here, isn't it?"

He looked sideways at me and answered even more carefully, "I haven't formed a definite impression yet. Rather military, eh?"

We looked for the canteen, had coffee, and offered each other cigarettes. The conversation dragged. We avoided saying "you," and we avoided saying anything compromising. It was a strain.

“Do you play chess?” he asked at last (correcting himself from *Sie* to *Du*).

“A little,” I said. “Shall we play a game?”

“I haven’t played for a long time,” he said. “But there seem to be chessboards here. We can give it a try—”

We borrowed a chess set at the bar and started to play. I tried to remember what I could of opening theory. I had not played for a long time, not for many years, and looking at the pieces and the development of the game irresistibly brought back a long-vanished era, when I had been an ardent chess player: my first student years, 1926, 1927, and the atmosphere of the period with all its youthful, unquestioning radicalism, its freedom and spontaneity, its open, heated discussions, its laughter and its exuberance . . . For a moment I saw myself sitting here like a stranger, seven years older, and playing chess again, for want of anything better to do, with an opponent I did not know, but had to address with the familiar *Du*, in a strange, remote place to which I had been ordered to go without knowing what for. I felt the humiliation and also the outlandishness of my position as I carefully moved a pawn, to prepare for castling. A giant Hitler portrait stared sullenly down at me from the wall.

The radio crackled in the corner. Military music as usual. Six or eight people were sitting at other tables, smoking and drinking coffee. The others were probably strolling around the camp. The windows were open; autumn sunlight slanted in.

Suddenly the radio broke off. The banal march tune that had been playing seemed to stop with one foot in the air. There

was a strained silence, in which we still waited for the foot to make contact with the ground. Instead, an oily-voiced announcer said, “*Achtung, Achtung!* Here is a special announcement from the wireless service.”

We both looked up from our game, but avoided looking at each other. It was Saturday, October 13, 1933, and it was the announcement that Germany had walked out of the disarmament conference and resigned from the League of Nations. The announcer used the style of speech that had been introduced by Goebbels. He had the oily smoothness of a trainee actor playing a conspirator.

There were a lot of other special announcements. The Reichstag was dissolved: yes, the harmless, docile Reichstag, which had given Hitler every dictatorial power. For what reason? At the new election there would only be one party: the NSDAP, that is, the Nazis. This still astonished me, in spite of all I had experienced. An election where there was no choice. An audacious idea. I glanced briefly at my opponent’s face. It was as noncommittal as he could possibly make it. The parliaments of the Länder were also dissolved, but they would not be reelected. This piece of news was an anticlimax after the others and seemed uninteresting, even though it entailed the end of such historical entities as Prussia and Bavaria. Hitler would make a speech to the German people that evening. My God, one would probably have to listen to that here, in public, with everyone else. “After that special announcement of the wireless service we return to our regular program of music. Dadum-da-da, Dadum-da-da . . .”

No one jumped up and shouted, “*Heil!*” or “Hooray.” Noth-

ing else happened either. Burkard bent his face so low over the pieces that he gave the impression that nothing in the world interested him as much as our game. At the other tables, people sat in silence and blew the smoke from their cigarettes, their serious faces giving nothing away. But there was so much to say! I felt sick with contradictory emotions. I was happy that now the Nazis had obviously gone too far, and I felt a despairing rage that I was caught on the wrong side, and I felt disappointed because the cause of the Nazis' downfall would be something where they were really in the right. The good old republicans had also all wanted "equal rights" and the "freedom to arm," and that in itself would have been quite all right. I noted with impotent irritation their cunning combination of a vote of confidence with a motion that nobody could disagree with, while the announcement of "elections" at which there would be only one party to vote for left me quite speechless, helplessly searching for some expression adequate to express their colossal effrontery and provocation. All that cried out for expression and discussion. Instead I said, "Quite a lot at once, don't you think?"

"Yes," said Burkard, bent over the game, "the Nazis never take half measures."

Ha! He'd given himself away. He'd said "Nazis." If you said "the Nazis," that meant you were not one of them. He was someone you could talk to.

"I think they'll fall flat on their faces this time," I began eagerly. He looked up with an expression of total incomprehension. He had probably noticed that he had given himself away.

"Difficult to tell," he said. "By the way, I think you're going to lose your bishop." In his confusion he used the formal *Sie*.

"Do you think so?" I said (also using *Sie*), and tried to concentrate on the game. I had lost my thread.

We ended our game with no further conversation except the occasional "check" or "*gardez*."

That evening we all sat in the same canteen and listened to Hitler speechifying on the radio, while his giant portrait stared sullenly down at us. The dominant figures were the SA men, laughing or nodding at the appropriate places almost as well as the members of the Reichstag. We sat or stood closely packed, and this closeness contained a horrible confinement. I was more at the mercy of the words that came from the loudspeaker than usual, packed in between neighbors whose opinions I could not be sure of. Some of us were obviously enthusiastic. Most were inscrutable. Only one person spoke: the invisible man in the radio.

The worst came when he had finished. A fanfare signaled the national anthem, and we all raised our arms. A few hesitated like me, it was so dreadfully shaming. But did we want to sit our examinations, or not? For the first time, I had the feeling, so strong it left a taste in my mouth, "This doesn't count. This isn't me. It doesn't count," and with this feeling I, too, raised my arm and held it stretched out ahead of me, for about three minutes. That is the combined length of "*Deutschland über alles*" and the "Horst Wessel Song." Most of us sang along, droning jerkily. I moved my lips a little and mimed singing, as one does with hymns in church.

But we all had our arms stretched out, and in this pose we stood facing the radio set, which had pulled these arms out like a puppeteer manipulates the arms of his marionettes, and we all sang or pretended to do so, each one of us the Gestapo of the others.

There was no Allied reaction to Hitler's resignation from the League of Nations, or to German rearmament, which from this moment onward was demonstratively pursued (though it was still occasionally denied in speeches). In the following days I experienced that blend of cowardly relief and deep disappointment that would become the common feeling of the next few years for me and those like me. It was repeated ad nauseam, and made life wearisome.

These days marked the beginning of our "ideological training." It took a remarkably indirect and subtle form.

We had been prepared for lectures, speeches, and interrogations in the guise of discussion groups. None of that occurred. Instead, on the Monday we were given proper uniforms—gray blowsy uniforms, rather like the ones worn by the Russians in the Great War, with caps, belts, and shoulder straps. In this military gear we tramped around the barracks yard, our only duty being to take the written law examinations—martial, field gray examinees.