

HELL AND OTHER DESTINATIONS

A 21st-Century Memoir

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WITH BILL WOODWARD

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Journal of Růžena Spieglová

1 January 1942

Dear Andulko!

Because I cannot write to you so that I can tell you all the events of my life, and because I don't know whether we will meet at some point again so that I can describe to you how we lived here during your absence, I want to note daily events for you every day and to describe the past life of our most beloved dead Maruška—I know that in case we never see each other, I would like you to know how your mother and sister lived through the war and nobody would be here who could tell you everything. Maybe Honza (Maruška's ex-husband) is the closest person. Perhaps you will meet with him and he will be able to answer your questions. On the eighth of February, it will be a year since Maruška died . . .

From your departure to the declaration of war, we wrote to each other fairly often . . . Maruška sometime in May got divorced. She did not make too much of that. We were in Poděbrady, we rented then an apartment to summer guests and M (Maruška) was for the most part the landlord and I was the hidden housekeeper. She was quite healthy. Honza used to come here and we lived quite peacefully. We talked about Madlenka. M remembered her and all the cute things she used to say. The first of January 1940 we rented an apartment in Prague Zitná 42. It was a pleasant small apartment and we liked it very much. It was however a new building and Honza blames it because M's illness got worse there. I think

however it didn't hurt because we did not live there that long and went often to P (Poděbrady).

You can understand that the people already feel the third year of the war. It doesn't concern me that much especially because I don't have my dear daughter here anymore. So I don't really worry about too much. I only pray that dear God gives you health and peace and also to M after her suffering. We here are waiting as we hear everywhere that we will be moved to a camp—about ten transports left from Prague already and that seven will go to Poland, the rest to T (Terezín), and now there is a break, and that it will be short and then it will begin again. We are all here getting ready, and the first concern has already passed, people, that is Jews, have partially gotten used to it because it is said, that it is terrible in those camps. You know me dear Andulko, and you must be able to imagine that what concerns me personally you should not have great worries about. We all our whole life were preparing for this kind of sadness and bad time but up till now nothing has been happening. I am living still in our villa in those two rooms, I have heat and I have food. So physically I am fine and spiritually I am calm, especially when I think how our M would be suffering with this and she would die from these worries. And so I thank dear God, and that you two are in good hands and that Madlenka our dear gift is probably healthy and happy. People here are sad and everyone is taking the war with difficulty. This includes Aryans and non-Aryans, to use this rather peculiar naming into which God's creation are now divided. We wear stars as you know, some proudly, some hide them even though you are not allowed to . . . Today, I celebrated the New Year and went for a walk to some field not too far away, since Jews cannot leave town and cannot go into any village. And if I had to write all the things that can't be done, it would take too long so again, some other time. Now I am sitting in that small room under the eaves. I am warm, and I am waiting for a visit from some ladies who visit me sometimes. I forgot to note that President Haha (Emil Hácha, president of the occupied Czech Protectorate)

announced a few days ago a statement that people should give warm underclothes and fur coats to the German military.

2 January 1942

Although there is nothing exceptional that I would write down today, I would still like to write down a few lines because I think in this current time every day is historic . . . From the window of my little room I can see the fields and once in a while a train. Today, one went by after another, and then another full of military train cars. There were many such trains during the summer of 1941. In the morning, I sorted through the potatoes, which I take care of every day because I know in the spring, they will be rare. Sometimes, I hear that they are already rare. I still have enough food, only there is not enough fat. You get 10.5 dkg (2.83 deagrams are equal to one ounce) of butter a month. Before Christmas, they added 6 dkg. That is the only thing that they gave Jews before Christmas. For the others, they get 5 dkg of raisins, one lemon, and some kind of cheese. Jews, however, cannot buy cheese but the others almost never find any, only rarely. You get 1/8 liter of milk daily per person. . . . The Jews have all their goods inventoried including footwear and underwear.

3 January 1942

Today, I practically didn't see anybody, only an old lady whose son had rented our apartment. They are Czechs but the son became a German and he is a clerk of the city government. I don't know why he did it. They are, despite that, good people and I regret if they will someday have a problem with this. In this very difficult time, a person stops being normal and doesn't know where to go. . . .

Mainly I thought about our dear M, and I want every day to write some memory of her. What she used to do and talk about at the time when you, dear one, were already abroad. When

she wanted to go somewhere to the movies or theater (that was, of course, early after your departure, because later that was all forbidden to Jews). She said: Aninka says that as soon as I feel better, I should go and amuse myself. You really did used to say that, you dear good daughter. In 1940, in the summer, M began to draw and she drew very well. We did not even know about this talent. Maybe I will save her drawings for you and Madlenka. She wanted afterwards to enroll in some course but because of her illness it was not possible—you know how sweet she was, sometimes even with her sickness, we laughed a lot because she really really was very amusing . . . so today I will end, since I don't know any new events. To listen to foreign radio is the death sentence, so I think people are listening less. Jews do not have radios and they took them away from others.

4 January 1942: not notable.

5 January 1942: It is said that soon Jews will be moved from Plzeň.

6 January 1942: In the store windows, you are mostly only able to see vinegar and things to polish shoes with. In stores with fabrics, the same story, with hardly anything for sale. Everything is on ration points, which Jews do not get . . . I am not hungry since I don't like to eat meat of which there isn't any anyway. I like to eat some kind of dumpling and soup and buchta (small roll, usually sweetened) and I have things for that . . . There is almost no fruit, a lemon is a big luxury, there is also a scarcity of any kind of alcohol, vegetable, marmalade, eggs, milk, cheese, cigarettes. That is what there is—in Prague, it is supposed to be even worse. They say that in these days they will move the Jews out of Plzeň. Tomorrow, I will go to the Jewish Center so I will learn something more certain. In the morning, I will go to the bank for money, there, Jews can only go 8–9 o'clock. On the street, Jews are not allowed to talk to non-Jews, not even to greet them. As far as the yellow stars are concerned,

nobody notices, only German boys when they were here called “Jew, Jew.” They were probably told to do it, because they didn’t do it at the beginning, only later.

8 January 1942—Today there is a decree that there is now an understanding that all warm clothes and underwear will be taken away from Jews. We will get specific instructions tomorrow . . . It’s now almost two years since Jews have been able to buy anything except scarves. There is a ration coupon to buy materials, which Jews didn’t get, they therefore only have what they had before.

10 January 1942—Today, they are taking away fur coats, hosiery, and wool underwear. I don’t have a lot, so it doesn’t cause me great worries . . . And what will they want in a while? From Jews not much more because they already took from them everything when they sent them to the camps. Yesterday, our tenant from the basement, Mr. Trybal, from Plzeň, came and said that the Jews . . . on Tuesday they will go to a camp somewhere . . . they are cutting women’s hair, they leave 4 centimeters, they get injections against disease . . .

11 January 1942—Just now I had a fright, someone called. It is evening around 8 o’clock; I thought that it’s some kind of official because it is constantly being promised that there will be some kind of inspection. I quickly stopped my writing and hid it and went downstairs. It was nothing like that. What it was, however, I cannot write here. It could harm somebody, but it was nothing important. Now I have taken this little book out of its hiding place which always gives me a little bit of work—a person lives all the time with one foot in the grave. And for every day we have to thank God. Our sad lady neighbor, beautiful young mother of three children has probably been arrested. How long will we still be in Poděbrady in our nice warm room. Yesterday, I heard how they are talking to Jewish men, that is how the German officers are talking to them. I

heard this indirectly. They say “ty Jew” (you Jew). M would bear this with great difficulty, thank God that she has calmness and peace.

14 January 1942: We don't learn a lot. I don't read the newspapers because I don't believe them and otherwise it is hard for a person to learn anything. We are not allowed to listen to foreign radio, so people are afraid. They already took a lot of radios away from Jews, about two years ago.

15 January 1942: Today, we were again called to the Jewish Center . . . they are going to take everything. In front of the Jewish Center, a moving car stood that they are probably going to load with fur coats and warm underwear tomorrow. There will be ten Jewish men loading up the truck and the Gestapo will come tomorrow to take it over. They are saying that there will be inspections of homes. I don't know where I will be able to hide this book. Weather: frost.

15/1: addendum: I forgot to write that Jews are forbidden from buying and reading Czech newspapers and magazines. Also, the coupons they gave us for food were cut in half.

16 January 1942—My friend, Mrs. F, who comes to visit me almost every day, was not here. She probably went for meat, which is sold once a week and that only several dkg per person. I don't even know how much, since I don't eat meat myself. I want to also write here that I want to systematically remember what has already happened to the Jews. I am the only woman in P who lives in her own house. The others have been moved out and they are afraid that even where they are now they will not be able to stay. I am here maybe because my apartment doesn't have any accessories.

18 January 1942: Today I have not said one word to anybody and did not see anybody . . . Today, again German children came

who were not here during the winter. I think that Jews heard something from them. Otherwise, Czechs don't make comments if they meet Jews; at least, it's never happened to me. Of course, from others I've heard that some old lady says something. I realize that we live in strange times and are viewed by some as members of a less valuable race. Of course, blacks are also underrated and yet the world is quiet about that, even Jews. When God enlightens our brains and we understand that we are all equal before God, it will be better. I do not hope that Jews can be recognized while other peoples are underestimated because of their race. Maybe this big war will bring justice. Today, there is again a great frost, there are poor people who have no protection from it. Apparently three transports are leaving Plzeň. The men, where they are taking them, sleep on wooden boards, women are always three on two straw mattresses, without comforters and only one pillow and two or three blankets.

20 January 1942—I heard that Jews are leaving for T, then further, many of them are dying. There is supposed to be a new government in the Protectorate. Mr. President stayed. Apparently not from here, two foreign parachutists landed. Parachutes were found.

21 January 1942—Today, a new government was started in the Protectorate. Why are they acting so strangely? I think that nothing works according to plan and some ideas are just spur of the moment—what will be tomorrow? Today, I also heard that Jews are no longer allowed to go to stores for their bread and their groceries where they used to go, they can go only to two specific stores.

8 February 1942—I didn't write for a longer time because there was nothing. The days pass the same and no special events take place. Today, it is a year that our lovely Maruška, my dear daughter,

left forever. I want today, dear Andulko, to describe to you her sickness, if for some reason I am not able to tell you this in person, certainly everything about us will interest you. As I already wrote, her sickness got worse in the summer of 1940. We were planning after the vacation, again moving to Prague and M wanted to attend a course in drawing that was given for Jews. That, however, did not happen because of her sickness. We, therefore, let the Prague apartment go, also because of great anti-Semitism that was in the building. It was a modern building occupied primarily by Jews. Later, Germans moved in and it was said that Jews would anyway have to leave soon—M's disease kept getting worse and so we then went at the end of October in Prague to Dr. Klein . . . At the end of November, somebody drove us by car to Poděbrady and we tried to get by without a doctor for a while. It was not possible, and we got Dr. Bodala who came almost every day and gave M an injection. She became very thin and could barely get beyond the bed. But nevertheless, the poor woman was able to sometimes enjoy herself with me. There were days when she felt a bit better and we ordered a wheel chair for sick people and we were looking forward to the spring when we could take her in the wheel chair for walks. About the 2nd or 3rd of February she got the flu, which somebody brought to her (I got it also). The doctor gave her an injection against the flu and that also probably hurt her. She then felt worse. About a week before the flu, I gave her a piece of meat that had a bit of fat with it. She ate and had big pains. That whole week that she had the flu she didn't eat anything and the last day before her death she had some kind of seizure, then a morphine shot, she went to sleep and in her sleep about 4 hours she died. She took her last breath from Friday to Saturday at 3 am in the morning. I sat with her and with old Mrs. Pardubská, mother of Lidusky Frybak, our tenant. Honza came as soon as I sent news, also Aunt Pavla. I do not know whether I can write anymore because it is getting dangerous when they examine the house.

22 April 1942: We were taken for departure and categorized for work. There were 4 health gradations. I was in the second category which means that my health is pretty good. Now they are saying that we will soon be moved out of Poděbrady and that is why all Jews are leaving by train to Cologne for registration. For me, it is not anything upsetting, on the contrary, it is calming me down because I see that for my dear child M, that she would not have lived for anything pleasant. I myself am pretty hardy, it is possible that the troubles, which await us, I will survive. Perhaps, we will see each other, dear ones, who are abroad. May God give you health. When I come back (I hope I will today, a person never knows), I will write down what it was like in Cologne. There is here a lot of arrests and the persecution of Aryans and non-Aryans.

[Journal ends]