

# KAFKA

FRANZ

LETTERS TO MILENA



EXPANDED AND REVISED  
IN A NEW TRANSLATION

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**"Writing letters is actually an intercourse with ghosts, and by no means just with the ghost of the addressee but also with one's own ghost, which secretly evolves inside the letter one is writing."**

**—Franz Kafka to Milena Jesenská**

In no other work does Kafka reveal himself as in the Letters to Milena, which begin essentially as a business correspondence but soon develop into a passionate "letter love." Milena Jesenská was a gifted and charismatic woman of twenty-three. Kafka's Czech translator, she was uniquely able to recognize his complex genius and his even more complex character. For the thirty-six-year-old Kafka, she was "a living fire, such as I have never seen." It was to her that he revealed his most intimate self. It was to her that, after the end of the affair, he entrusted the safekeeping of his diaries.

Newly translated, revised, and expanded, this edition contains material previously omitted because of its extreme sensitivity. Also included for the first time are letters and essays by Milena Jesenská, herself a talented writer as well as the recipient of these documents of Kafka's love, anxiety, and despair.

**"The voice of Kafka in his Letters to Milena is more personal, more pure, and more painful than in his fiction: a testimony to human existence, and to our eternal wait for the impossible. This is a marvelous new edition of a classic text."**

**—Jan Kott**

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*William S. ...*

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TO  
MILENA**

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**FRANZ**  
**KAFKA**

**LETTERS**  
**TO**  
**MILENA**

**TRANSLATED AND  
WITH AN INTRODUCTION  
BY PHILIP BOEHM**

**SCHOCKEN BOOKS NEW YORK**

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## INTRODUCTION

“The easy possibility of writing letters,” wrote Franz Kafka to Milena Jesenská, “. . . must have brought wrack and ruin to the souls of the world. Writing letters is actually an intercourse with ghosts and by no means just with the ghost of the addressee but also with one’s own ghost, which secretly evolves inside the letter one is writing or even in a whole series of letters, where one letter corroborates another and can refer to it as witness.” Kafka’s own ghost, or ghosts, still haunt his *Letters to Milena*. Nowhere else does he reveal himself more completely, for to no one did he bare his soul so utterly as to Milena Jesenská. “One can tell you the truth like no one else,” he wrote to her, “and one can tell you the truth both for one’s own sake and for yours; in fact, one can even discover one’s own truth directly through you.”

Franz and Milena’s relationship reflected the contradictions of Kafka’s Prague—Jew/Gentile, German/Czech—although between them these differences accounted for more concord than conflict, perhaps because both enjoyed “foreignness for its own sake.” As the letters prove, however, their bond ran much deeper than mere affinity—so deep, in fact, that Kafka gave Milena all his diaries but the one he was still writing. And in that last notebook he wrote: “Always M. or not M.—but a principle, a light in the darkness!”

Milena Jesenská’s profession amplifies her uniqueness: among the women in Kafka’s life she was the only writer. And although her letters were destroyed, we can still hear her voice, or at least its echoes, in passages quoted by Kafka, in letters she wrote to Max Brod, and in her own articles and essays, some of which appear here for the first time in English.

*Letters to Milena* was first edited by Willy Haas, a friend of

both author and addressee. Milena had entrusted them to Haas when the Germans occupied Prague, and he published them in 1952. "I have every reason to assume," he wrote, "that Milena would have had no objection to their publication after her death." Many years later, however, Milena Jesenská's daughter, Jana Černá, disputed Haas's statement, claiming that neither her mother nor Kafka "would have ever allowed the letters to be published." But by then the letters had already entered the Kafka canon. Moreover, in an article entitled "Letters of Notable People," Milena herself expressed the idea that as long as our understanding of art is so imperfect that we require more than just the artist's statement, "as long as we must place our fingers in the wounds, like Thomas, we have the right to convince ourselves the wounds exist, and that they are deep."

Haas, on the other hand, feared that the letters might expose wounds other than Kafka's, and he chose to cut many passages he felt would injure certain people still alive at the time of publication—including himself. He did not indicate the omissions, so that a fragmentary quality resulted, which was reinforced by the desultory arrangement of the letters; they had not been dated, and the editor was "far from trying to insist" that his proposed order had "succeeded beyond doubt in every detail."

A new German edition, published in 1986 by Michael Müller and Jürgen Born, reinserted the missing fragments, creating a substantially larger text. Only four omissions were maintained, and their publication would be unlawful as well as indiscreet. Because much of the new matter is mundane, the expanded letters seem more "human." Moreover, the restorations significantly facilitate reading, as does the new chronology devised by the editors, who had far better means at their disposal. The addition of an extensive critical apparatus further enhances the reader's understanding.

This is essentially an English version of the Born-Müller edition. The new material it contained called for a new translation, one which would show a more informal, more personal Kafka. By including some of her own letters and essays, this

book also hopes to convey a fuller portrait of Milena Jesenská, whose last name never appeared in the earlier edition.

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Milena Jesenská was born in Prague on August 10, 1896. Her father, Jan Jesenský, was a prominent and prosperous oral surgeon, a professor at Prague's Charles University. He was proud, an outspoken Czech nationalist, and anti-Semitic. At home he was short-tempered, egoistic, paternalistic—often tyrannical. Less is known about her mother, Milena Hejzlarová, who died of anemia when Milena was thirteen. Milena never forgot the contrast between her softspoken mother and her domineering father, a contrast exacerbated by the professor's habits of womanizing and gambling. Although Milena undoubtedly admired her father, her love for him was mixed with hatred, and their relationship remained ambivalent.

She received a broad education at the well-known and very progressive Minerva School for Girls, where she met her friends Staša and Jarmila, so often mentioned in the letters. Later she enrolled in medical school but soon dropped out, as she did from the music conservatory which followed. She devoted more time to her friends, often instigating escapades considered scandalous. She experimented with drugs stolen from her father's practice. She became involved with men. She spent her father's money lavishly on clothes, presents, flowers. She was emancipated, rebellious, extravagant, decadent, daring, and very much in love with beauty.

In his preface to the first edition of these letters, Willy Haas described Milena in her youth:

She herself sometimes struck one as like a noblewoman of the sixteenth or seventeenth century, a character such as Stendhal lifted out of the old Italian chronicles and transplanted into his own novels, the Duchesse de Sanseverina or Mathilde de la Mole: passionate, intrepid, cool and intelligent in their decisions, but reckless in her choice of means when her passion was involved—and during her youth it seems to have been involved almost

all the time. As a friend she was inexhaustible, inexhaustible in kindness, inexhaustible in resources whose origin often remained enigmatic, but also inexhaustible in the claims she made on her friends—claims which, to her as well as to her friends, seemed only natural.

If her wild antics reflected her unsupervised state—her father busied himself with his own affairs—it was not mere escape. Very much in the spirit of the times, she was consciously developing her own very spiritual aesthetic. She read widely and followed trends in art avidly. She despised the bourgeois provincialism that enfeathered Czech “society” in Prague, and cultivated friends from both the German and German-Jewish literati. Among the latter she found her first great love, Ernst Pollak. Although not a writer himself, “Pollak the Expert” exerted substantial influence on Franz Werfel and other writers who gathered in the Café Arco. It was he who introduced Milena to Franz Kafka.

The liaison with Pollak so outraged Jan Jesenský that he had his daughter committed to a sanatorium in Veleslavín for several months. During her stay, however, Milena came of legal age: she was released and the lovers were married and immediately moved to Vienna. For Pollak, this meant little more than leaving the Arco for the Café Central (and later the Herrenhof); social integration was more difficult for his wife, however, whose German was not impeccable. Moreover, while both partners adhered to the theory of free love espoused by Otto Gross (whom Kafka also held in high esteem), Milena restricted its practice more than did her husband, whose many romances caused her to suffer. “I am the one who pays,” she wrote. According to Haas, “She fitted poorly into and suffered under the erotic and intellectual promiscuity of the Viennese literary café society during the wild years after 1918.”

She was also beset with financial worries. Severe shortages, rationing, and extraordinary inflation made life in Vienna generally difficult. To earn money she taught Czech, and later even worked as a porter at the train station. She began writing for

periodicals based in Prague; her first "Letter from Vienna" appeared in the *Tribuna* on December 30, 1919. She also tried translation, and in 1920, at the age of twenty-three, she published a Czech version of "The Stoker" by Franz Kafka. This work led to their exchange of letters, almost all of which were written between April and November, 1920. During this time they met only twice; later she visited him when he was very sick, and in the end she relied on Max Brod to keep her informed. Her letters to Brod are included in the Appendix, as is her obituary for Franz Kafka, who died on June 3, 1924.

By that time Milena had broken with Ernst Pollak, and in 1925 she returned to Prague and became partially reconciled with her father. There she continued writing fashion articles and feuilletons, and entered the circle known as *Devětsil*, a group of artists that included the prominent architect Jaromír Krejcar. He became Milena's second husband, and in 1928 *paní* Milena gave birth to a daughter, Jana. During pregnancy, however, she developed a partial paralysis in her left leg from which she never fully recovered, despite drastic cures and long stays in sanatoria. Morphine treatments led to addiction, which ruined her ability to write; she lost her job, and her marriage disintegrated.

Membership in the Communist Party helped her to return to a more active life; she also resumed her writing, now for the party press. She formed another close attachment with her comrade Evžen Klinger—both eventually broke with the party, after the first show trial and the execution of Zinoviev and Kamenev in 1936. She joined the staff of the liberal-democratic journal *Přítomnost* (Presence), where in articles such as "There Will Be No Anschluss," she addressed the growing menace from Nazi Germany. She worked on refugee relief committees, and when Prague was occupied, she helped many Jews, including Klinger, escape to Poland. After the Nazis shut down *Přítomnost*, she continued writing for the underground press until her arrest in November 1939. She was sent to a camp for people who had consorted with Jews and ultimately transported to Ravensbrück. Her biographer (and fellow inmate in

Ravensbrück), Margarete Buber-Neumann, describes in detail Milena's resilience in the concentration camp, her inner strength, which was an inspiration to fellow prisoners, her constant concern for her daughter (then in Jan Jesenský's care), and her active resistance despite failing health. On May 17, 1944, after an unsuccessful kidney operation, Milena Jesenská died in Ravensbrück.

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Franz Kafka was thirty-six years old when Milena's translation of "The Stoker" appeared in the *Tribuna*. He had published two collections of short stories: *Meditation* and *A Country Doctor*, as well as "The Judgment," "The Metamorphosis," and "In the Penal Colony." He had written *The Trial*. Still, he was virtually unknown, and did little to advance his fame. "None of the authors with whom we are connected comes to us with wishes or questions so seldom as you do," wrote his publisher, Kurt Wolff, "and with none of them do we have the feeling that the outward fate of their published books is a matter of such indifference as it is with you."

He had passed through the major crises in his life. Much to his father's dismay he had twice broken his engagement to Felice Bauer, and again to his father's disapproval he was still involved with Julie Wohryzek. Following a diagnosis of tuberculosis in 1917, he had curtailed his duties at the insurance company. He often went away on cure, and in the spring of 1920 he traveled to Meran, where he wrote the first letters to Milena that have survived. What began as a business correspondence soon started to consume his sleep, as he noted in a letter to Max Brod from May 1920:

My health would be good, if I could sleep. It's true I've gained some weight, but recently my insomnia has been almost unbearable. This probably has several reasons, one of which may be my correspondence with Vienna. She is a living fire, such as I have never seen; incidentally, a fire that, despite everything, burns only for him. At the same time she is extremely tender, brave, intelligent, and



sacrifices everything, or if you prefer, acquires everything by sacrifice.

“Him,” of course, refers to Ernst Pollak. Kafka admired Milena’s husband—not least for his success with women—but his admiration was mingled with an awareness of Milena’s suffering, as well as with his own feelings of guilt. For his part, Pollak kept his distance, though in the letters we can sense his presence, a distant emissary of unseen powers, like Klamm in *The Castle*. In fact, much of Kafka’s last novel derives from his relationship with Milena. But, as Max Brod writes in his biography,

the version of the love affair as given in the novel is to be regarded as a bitter caricature. Reality was more generous and merciful than the novel’s picture of it; he felt compelled to distrust and denigrate his own emotions. Reality gave to Kafka those moments of happiness that shine forth from the glorious pages of the first letters, gave him the letters (unfortunately destroyed) of Milena and his own rapturous cries of gratitude.

If this rapture found any physical expression, it was confined to two trysts, the first in Vienna, from June 29 to July 4, 1920, and the next, six weeks later in the border town of Gmünd. Vienna came to represent an idyll of bliss, “the fragments of four days snatched from the night”; Gmünd, on the other hand, was a disaster of unfulfillment.

The letters themselves do not merely reflect the stages of the relationship, they *are* the relationship, and this fact explains their focus on mail, their apparent obsession with post offices, stationery, stamps. Along with certain logistical arrangements, these were the only minutiae that kept the couple bound to earth. No other jagged details of everyday life impeded mutual identification: Kafka soon felt trapped in an unhappy marriage; Milena felt his disease in her lungs. But it was precisely this empathy which ultimately mired Franz and Milena in each other’s problems—until the letters became “pure anguish,” the

anguish that “pulls its plow through sleep.” Breaking off the correspondence, Kafka again went away on cure, this time to the Tatra mountains, where he again wrote Max Brod:

I hardly slept myself, but two things consoled me. First there were heavy pains in my heart . . . and then, after a series of dreams, I had this one: A child wearing a little shirt was sitting to my left (I couldn't remember whether it was my own child or not, but this didn't bother me), Milena was on my right, both were cuddling up against me, and I was telling them a story about my pocketbook\* which I had lost but then recovered, although I hadn't yet looked inside, and didn't know whether the money was still there. But even if it had been lost it didn't matter, so long as the two were by my side . . .

As happiness receded into dreams, the passion ended where it began: in sleeplessness. The lovers never really recovered the four days spent in Vienna; these letters were their only progeny. And the ghosts consumed any consolation.

Philip Boehm

\**Brieftasche*: literally “letter-case” (German).

## A NOTE ON THE TEXT

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Kafka's text contains many enigmatic or ambiguous passages, responses to comments or questions that were lost with Milena's letters. Moreover, although he crafted his own letters more carefully than most of us, they are not free from mistakes, scribbling in the margins and unevenness of style. His unorthodox use of punctuation functioned more as a musical notation to the text than as a servant of convention. On the printed page, however, such irregularities impede the reader, and particularly in translation, faithfulness to the text must be tempered with clarity.

While some anomalies have been kept to convey the "roughness" of the letters, much of the punctuation has been standardized. Underlinings and bold print have been replaced with italics. An overstrike has been used to indicate words which were lightly crossed out but still legible. Passages which were made completely illegible have been indicated in the text wherever they obstruct its flow; otherwise such passages are marked only in the Notes. (In cases where only one or two words were struck, no indication seemed necessary.) Marginal comments follow the text they adjoined. Abbreviated names have been expanded except where the reduction seemed significant, as it often was for the creator of K. and Josef K.

Passages written in Czech pose a particular problem. Whereas Kafka generally wrote to Milena in German, most of her letters were in her mother tongue. Although her German was far from flawless, it was perfectly natural for them to switch from one language to the other. To preserve this flow I have restricted the use of Czech to those words which are the subject of Kafka's own linguistic analysis or which add flavor impossible to translate. Most of the Czech occurs in quotations

from Milena's letters; consequently, most (though not all) of the phrases presented in quotation marks were written in her native language. The Notes supply the original words for all Czech passages, according to page. They also contain glosses and amplifications designed to answer most of the questions that might arise in reading the letters, and have been revised to suit the needs of American readers. It should be stressed that this is not a critical edition; all revisions and additions are merely intended to make the letters more accessible.

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I would like to thank the staff of Schocken Books for bringing this book to press, in particular Sara Bershtel for her discerning and forbearing editing and Ed Cohen for his enthusiastic care of the text. Many thanks to Josef Čermák for his help with passages in Czech; I am also very grateful to Mark Anderson for his gracious and insightful assistance.

P.B.

LETTERS  
TO  
MILENA



*[April 1920]*  
Meran-Untermals, Pension Ottoburg

Dear Frau Milena

The rain which has been going on for two days and one night has just now stopped, of course probably only temporarily, but nonetheless an event worth celebrating, which I am doing by writing to you. Incidentally the rain itself was bearable; after all, it is a foreign country here, admittedly only slightly foreign, but it does the heart good. If my impression was correct (evidently the memory of one single meeting, brief and half-silent, is not to be exhausted), you were also enjoying Vienna as a foreign city, although later circumstances may have diminished this enjoyment, but do you also enjoy foreignness for its own sake? (Which might be a bad sign by the way, a sign that such enjoyment should not exist.)

I'm living quite well here, the mortal body could hardly stand more care, the balcony outside my room is sunk into a garden, overgrown and covered with blooming bushes (the vegetation here is strange; in weather cold enough to make the puddles freeze in Prague, blossoms are slowly unfolding before my balcony), moreover this garden receives full sun (or full cloud, as it has for almost a week)—lizards and birds, unlikely couples, come visit me: I would very much like to share Meran with you, recently you wrote about not being able to breathe, that image and its meaning are very close to one another and here both would find a little relief.

With cordial greetings,  
F Kafka

*[April 1920]*  
Meran-Untermals, Pension Ottoburg

Dear Frau Milena

I wrote you a note from Prague and then from Meran. I have not received any answer. It so happens the notes did not require a particularly prompt reply and if your silence is nothing more than a sign of relative well-being, which often expresses itself in an aversion to writing, then I am completely satisfied. However, it is also possible—and this is why I am writing—that in my notes I somehow hurt you (what a clumsy hand I must have had, if that should have happened against all my intentions) or else, which would of course be much worse, the moment of quiet relaxation you described has again passed and bad times have again descended upon you. In case the first is true I don't know what to say, that's so far from my thoughts and everything else is so close, and for the second possibility I have no advice—how could I?—but just a simple question: Why don't you leave Vienna for a little while? After all, you aren't homeless like other people. Wouldn't some time in Bohemia give you new strength? And if, for reasons unknown to me, you might not want to go to Bohemia, then somewhere else, maybe even Meran would be good. Do you know it?

So I'm expecting one of two things. Either continued silence, which means: "Don't worry, I'm fine." Or else a few lines.

Cordially Kafka

It occurs to me that I really can't remember your face in any precise detail. Only the way you walked away through the tables in the café, your figure, your dress, that I still see.

*[Meran, April 1920]*

Dear Frau Milena, You are toiling over the translation in the middle of the dreary Vienna world. Somehow I am both



moved and ashamed. You will have probably already received a letter from Wolff, at least he wrote to me some time ago concerning such a letter. I did not write any novella entitled "Murderers" (although this was apparently advertised in a catalog)—there is some misunderstanding, but since it's supposed to be the best one of the lot maybe it's mine after all.

Judging from your last two letters anxiety and worry seem to have left you once and for all, this probably applies to your husband as well, how much I wish it for both of you. I recall a Sunday afternoon years ago, I was creeping along the wall of houses on the Franzensquai and ran into your husband, heading toward me in much the same way—two headache experts, naturally each after his very own fashion. I don't remember whether we then went on together or passed each other by, the difference between these two possibilities could not have been very great. But that is past and should remain deep in the past. Is it nice at home?

Cordial greetings  
Kafka

*[Meran, April 1920]*

So it's the lung. I've been turning it over in my mind all day long, unable to think of anything else. Not that it alarms me; probably and hopefully—you seem to indicate as much—you have a mild case, and even full-fledged pulmonary disease (half of western Europe has more or less deficient lungs), as I have known in myself for 3 years, has brought me more good things than bad. In my case it began about 3 years ago with a violent hemorrhage in the middle of the night. I was excited as one always is by something new, naturally somewhat frightened as well; I got up (instead of staying in bed, which is the prescribed treatment as I later discovered), went to the window, leaned out, went to the washstand, walked around the room, sat down on the bed—no end to the blood. But I wasn't at all unhappy,

since by and by I realized that for the first time in 3, 4 practically sleepless years there was a clear reason for me to sleep, provided the bleeding would stop. It did indeed stop (and has not returned since) and I slept through the rest of the night. To be sure, the next morning the maid showed up (at that time I had an apartment in the Schönborn-Palais), a good, totally devoted but extremely frank girl, she saw the blood and said: "*Pane dottore*, you're not going to last very long." But I was feeling better than usual, I went to the office and did not go see the doctor until later that afternoon. The rest of the story is immaterial. I only wanted to say: it's not your illness which scares me (especially since I keep interrupting myself to search my memory, and underneath all your fragility I perceive something like a farm girl's vigor and I conclude: no, you're not sick, this is a warning but no disease of the lung), anyway it's not that which scares me, but the thought of what must have preceded this disturbance. For the moment, I'm simply ignoring everything else in your letter, such as: not a heller—tea and apple—daily from 2 to 8—these are things I cannot understand which evidently require oral explanation. So I'll ignore all that (though only in this letter, as I cannot forget them) and just recall the explanation I applied to my own case back then and which fits many cases. You see, my brain was no longer able to bear the pain and anxiety with which it had been burdened. It said: "I'm giving up; but if anyone else here cares about keeping the whole intact, then he should share the load and things will run a little longer." Whereupon my lung volunteered, it probably didn't have much to lose anyway. These negotiations between brain and lung, which went on without my knowledge, may well have been quite terrifying.

And what are you going to do now? The fact that you're being looked after is probably insignificant. Anyone who cares about you has to realize that you need a little looking after, nothing else really matters. So is there salvation here as well? I said already—no, I'm not in the mood for making jokes, I am not being funny in the least and will not be funny again until you have written how you are planning a new and healthier way of life. After your last letter I'm not going to ask why you

don't leave Vienna for a while, now I understand, but after all there are beautiful places close to Vienna as well, which offer many different cures and possibilities of care. Today I'm not going to write about anything else, I don't have anything more important to bring up. I'm saving everything else for tomorrow, including my thanks for the issue of *Kmen* which makes me moved and ashamed, happy and sad. No, there is one other thing: If you waste as much as one minute of your sleep on the translation, it will be as if you were cursing me. For if it ever comes to a trial there will be no further investigations; they will simply establish the fact: he robbed her of her sleep. With that I shall be condemned, and justly so. Thus I'm fighting for myself when I ask you to stop.

*Mr Frankl.*

*[Meran, end of April 1920]*

Dear Frau Milena, today I'd like to write about something else but can't. Not that this really bothers me; if it did then I would write something else, but now and then a deck chair really should be ready for you somewhere in the garden, half in the shade, with about 10 glasses of milk within easy reach. It might even be in Vienna, even now in the summer—but without hunger and in peace. Is this impossible? And is there no one to make it possible? And what does the doctor say?

When I pulled your translation out of the large envelope, I was almost disappointed. I wanted to hear from you and not the voice from the old grave, the voice I know all too well. Why did it have to come between us? Then I realized that this same voice had also come between us, as a mediator. But apart from that it is inconceivable to me that you would take on such a troublesome task, and I am moved by your faithfulness toward every little sentence, a faithfulness I would not have thought possible to achieve in Czech, let alone with the beauti-

ful natural authority you attain. German and Czech so close to each other? But however that may be, the story is in any case abysmally bad, which I could prove to you, dear Frau Milena, with unparalleled ease, except that my disgust would outweigh the evidence. Naturally the fact that you like the story gives it some value, although it also makes my view of the world a little dimmer. No more about that. Wolff will send you the *Country Doctor*, I have written to him.

Of course I understand Czech. I've meant to ask you several times already why you never write in Czech. Not to imply that your command of German leaves anything to be desired. Most of the time it is amazing and on those occasions when it does falter, the German language becomes pliant just for you, of its own accord, and then it is particularly beautiful, something a German doesn't even dare hope for; a German wouldn't dare write so personally. But I wanted to read you in Czech because, after all, you do belong to that language, because only there can Milena be found in her entirety (the translation confirms this), whereas here there is only the Milena from Vienna or the Milena preparing for Vienna. So Czech, please. And also the feuilletons you mentioned. Even if they are shabby, after all, you managed to read through the shabbiness of my story—how far I don't know. Maybe I can do the same; however, if I can't make it through to the end at least I'll get stuck in the best possible prejudice.

You ask about my engagement. I was engaged twice (or actually three times, twice to the same girl), so three times I have been separated from marriage by only a few days. The first is completely over (I hear there's already a new marriage and even a small boy), the second is still alive although without any prospect of marriage, so it really isn't alive or rather it's living an independent life at the cost of the people involved. On the whole I have found here and elsewhere that men may suffer more, or if you prefer, they have less resistance in these matters; women, however, always suffer without guilt and not just because they "can't do anything about it" but in the strictest sense of the word, which may nonetheless lead to the "can't do anything about it." Incidentally, brooding over these things is

useless. It's like trying to smash a single cauldron in hell; first, the enterprise won't succeed, and second, if it does succeed, one will be consumed by the glowing effluent, while hell remains intact in all its glory. The problem must be approached differently.

In any case the first thing is to lie down in a garden and extract as much sweetness as possible from the ailment, especially if it's not a genuine disease. There's a lot of sweetness in that

FranzK.

*[Meran, April–May 1920]*

Dear Frau Milena,

To begin with, so that you don't deduce it from my letter against my will: for about 14 days now I have had increasing insomnia, I generally don't take it badly, times like this come and go. They also always have a few more explanations than they really need (this is ridiculous, but according to Baedeker it can even be the air in Meran). And even if they frequently are just barely visible, all these causes can still make one as dull as a block of wood and at the same time as restless as a beast of the forest.

However, I do have one compensation. You have slept peacefully, even if somewhat "oddly," even if yesterday you were still "out of sorts"—nonetheless your sleep was peaceful. So when sleep passes over me in the night, I know where it is headed and accept this. Of course it would be stupid to resist, sleep is the most innocent creature there is and a sleepless man the most guilty.

And you thank this sleepless man in your last letter. If an uninitiated stranger were to read it, he'd have to think: "What a man! He must have moved mountains here." But meanwhile he hasn't done a thing, hasn't lifted a finger (except to write), is living off milk and good things—without always (although

often) seeing “tea and apples”—and in general he lets things take their course and leaves the mountains alone. Do you know the story of Dostoyevsky’s first success? It encompasses a great many things; what’s more, I cite it only because the great name makes it easy to do so, for a story from next door or even closer would have the same significance. Incidentally my memory of the story, and even the names, is inexact. When Dost wrote his first novel *Poor Folk*, he was living with his friend Grigoriev, a man of letters. The latter watched for months as the written pages accumulated on the desk, but didn’t receive the manuscript until it was finished. He read the novel, was delighted and took it to Nekrasov, a famous contemporary critic, without saying anything to D. That night at 3 o’clock the doorbell rings at D’s. It’s Gr and N, they push their way into the room, embrace and kiss D. Nekrasov, who hadn’t known him before, calls him the hope of Russia, they spend one or two hours talking mostly about the novel and don’t leave until morning. D, who always described this night as the happiest in his life, leans out the window to watch them leave, loses control and starts to cry. His basic feeling at that moment, which he describes although I forget where, was something like: “These wonderful people! They’re so good and noble! And *I* am so mean! If they could only see inside me! And even if I simply tell them they won’t believe me.” The fact that D later undertook to emulate them is merely embellishment, merely the last word that youth demands in its invincibility, and is no longer part of my story which consequently ends here. Do you, dear Frau Milena, see the mystery in this story; do you see what reason cannot grasp? I think it is this: As far as we can generalize, Gr and Nekr were certainly no nobler than Dost, but now leave the general overview aside, which even D didn’t demand that night and which is useless in specific cases, concentrate solely on Dost and you will be convinced that Gr and N really were wonderful, that D was impure, infinitely mean, that he would never even come close to catching up with Gr and N, let alone repay them for their monstrously kind, undeserved good deed. You can actually see them from the window as they

walk away, thereby indicating their unapproachability.—Unfortunately the meaning of the story is obliterated by the great name Dostoyevsky.

Where did my insomnia lead me? I'm sure to nothing that was not very well meant.

FranzK

*[Meran, May 1920]*

Dear Frau Milena, just a few words, I'll probably write you again tomorrow, today I'm writing just for my own sake, just to have done something for myself, just to dispel a little the impression your letter made on me; otherwise it would weigh on me day and night. You really are unusual, Frau Milena, living there in Vienna where you have to put up with this and that, and still finding time in between to wonder that other people—for instance myself—aren't doing especially well, and that one night I sleep a little worse than the night before. In this matter my 3 girlfriends here (3 sisters, the oldest 5 years old) have a healthier outlook, they want to throw me into the water at every opportunity, whether we're by the river or not, and not because I did something mean to them, far from it. When grown-ups threaten children that way then of course it's all in play and love and means something like: Now let's go ahead and say the most impossible things just for fun. But children take everything seriously and do not recognize impossibility, they can fail ten times in an attempt to knock something over and still be convinced that the next try will succeed; they don't even realize that their earlier attempts were unsuccessful. Children become uncanny whenever their words and intentions are furnished with the wisdom of an adult. When such a small four-year-old girl—still a little baby-bellied, at the same time strong as a bear—who doesn't seem to be there for any other purpose than to be kissed and hugged, attacks, and her two sisters join in on the right and on the left, and any retreat back

is cut off by the railing, and when the friendly father and the soft pretty fat mother (standing by the stroller of her fourth) just smile from afar without wanting to help, then it's practically all over and it's virtually impossible to describe how one managed to escape after all. Without any apparent reason, these sensible or intuitive children wanted to knock me over, maybe because they considered me superfluous, even though they knew less about me than your letters and my replies.

You don't have to be scared by the "well meant" of my last letter. It was a time of complete insomnia, by no means the only such time here. I had written down the story, this story I have often thought through in connection with you, but once I was finished I no longer knew why I had told it, with all the tension spanning my temples right and left; besides, most of what I wanted to tell you, as I sat outside on the balcony, had not yet crystallized in my mind, and so all I could do was refer to my basic feeling; even now there isn't much else I can do.

You have everything of mine which has appeared except the last book, *Country Doctor*, a collection of short stories which Wolff will send to you; at least I wrote him about that a week ago. Nothing is being printed at the moment, nor do I have any idea what might appear later. Whatever you want to do with the books and translations will be fine, it's a pity they aren't worth more to me, so that in leaving them in your hands I could really express my trust in you. On the other hand I am happy to be able to make a small offering with the few notes you requested on "The Stoker"; this will serve as a foretaste to that torment of hell which consists in having to review one's entire life with the knowledge that comes of hindsight, where the worst thing is not the confrontation with obvious misdeeds but with deeds one once considered worthy.

Despite all this, writing really is a good thing; I am now calmer than I was 2 hours ago outside on the balcony with your letter. While I was lying there a beetle had fallen on its back one step away and was desperately trying to right itself; I would have gladly helped—it was so easy, so obvious, all that was required was a step and a small shove—but I forgot about it because of your letter; I was just as incapable of getting up.



Only a lizard again made me aware of the life around me, its path led over the beetle, which was already so completely still that I said to myself, this was not an accident but death throes, the rarely witnessed drama of an animal's natural death; but when the lizard slid off the beetle, the beetle was righted although it did lie there a little longer as if dead, but then ran up the wall of the house as if nothing had happened. Somehow this probably gave me, too, a little courage; I got up, drank some milk and wrote to you.

FranzK

So here are the notes:

Column I line 2 *arm* here also has the secondary meaning: pitiable, but without any special emphasis of feeling, a sympathy without understanding that Karl has with his parents as well, perhaps *ubozí*

I 9 *freie Lüfte* is a little more grand but there's probably no alternative

I 17 *z dobré nálady a poněvadž byl silný chlapec* should be removed entirely.

No, I'd rather mail the letter, I'll send you the notes tomorrow, anyway there are very few of them, nothing for page after page, even though the truth of your translation is obvious it still continues to amaze me—hardly a single misunderstanding; which wouldn't mean so much in itself, but I find there is constant powerful and decisive understanding as well. I just don't know whether Czechs won't hold its very faithfulness against you, which for me is the nicest part of the translation (not because of the story but for my own sake); my feel for Czech—I have one too—is fully satisfied, but it is extremely biased. In any case, if someone should attack you on this point, try to balance the offense with my gratitude.

[Meran, May 1920]

Dear Frau Milena (yes, this heading is becoming burdensome, although it is something to cling to in this uncertain world, like

a crutch for sick people; but it's no sign of recovery when the crutches grow to be a burden), I have never lived among Germans. German is my mother tongue and as such more natural to me, but I consider Czech much more affectionate, which is why your letter removes several uncertainties; I see you more clearly, the movements of your body, your hands, so quick, so resolute, it's almost like a meeting; even so, when I then want to raise my eyes to your face, in the middle of the letter—what a story!—fire breaks out and I see nothing but fire.

It might tempt one into believing in that law you have laid down for your life. Naturally you don't want to be pitied for these rules to which you presumably adhere, for laying down the law is nothing but pure arrogance and conceit ("I am the one who pays"); however, the cases where you have put this law to the test require no further discussion, one can only kiss your hand in silence. As far as I'm concerned, I do believe in your law, but I can't believe that it could loom over your life so exclusively, forever and blatantly cruel, it is of course an insight, but only an insight along the way, and the way is endless.

But uninfluenced by that, it is frightening for the mundanely limited mind of a human to see you in the overheated oven in which you live. For the moment I only want to speak about myself. If we treat the whole thing as a school assignment, you had three possible ways of dealing with me. For instance, you could have refrained from saying anything at all about yourself, but then you would have deprived me of the good fortune of knowing you and the even greater fortune of being able to put myself to the test. And so you really weren't allowed to keep yourself locked away from me. Then you might have kept certain things from me or glossed them over and you could still do so, but in my current state I would sense this even if I didn't say so, and it would hurt me twice as much. So you aren't allowed to do that either. There remains only the third choice: to look out for yourself a bit. As a matter of fact, your letters show that this is a slight possibility. There's often talk about stability and calm, but I frequently read about other

things as well (although just for the time being) and recently even: "absolute horror."

What you say about your health (my own is good, just that I don't sleep well in the mountain air) does not satisfy me. I don't find the doctor's diagnosis especially favorable, it's really neither favorable nor unfavorable, your attitude alone can decide how it should be interpreted. Of course doctors are stupid or rather no more stupid than other people but their pretensions are ridiculous—still you have to count on their becoming more and more stupid from the moment you start dealing with them, and what the doctor is now demanding is neither very stupid nor impossible. Nonetheless it is and shall remain impossible for you to become really sick. How has your life changed since you spoke with the doctor—that is the main question.

But now please permit me a few questions on the side: Why and since when do you have no money? Are you in touch with your relatives? (I think you must be, because you once gave me an address from which you regularly received packages, has that stopped?) Why did you, as you write, once see many people in Vienna and now no one?

You don't want to send me your feuilletons, so you obviously don't trust me to place them properly in the picture I am forming of you. All right then, I'll be mad at you on this score, which incidentally is no great misfortune, as things balance out quite well if there's a little anger for you lurking in one corner of my heart.

FranzK

*[Meran, May 29, 1920]*

Dear Frau Milena, the day is so short, between you and a few other things which are of no significance it is over and done with. There's hardly any time left to write to the real Milena, since the even more real one was here the whole day, in the room, on the balcony, in the clouds.

Where does the liveliness, the good mood, the lack of worry come from in your last letter? Has something changed? Or am I mistaken and are the prose pieces helping? Or are you so much in control of yourself and other things as well? What is it?

Your letter begins like a judge pronouncing a sentence, I mean that in earnest. And you're right with your accusation "or not so entirely correct," just as you were basically right about the "well meant." This is obvious. Had I been as completely and incessantly worried as I wrote, I would not have been able to bear lying on the deck chair and would have appeared in your room the next day despite all obstacles. The only proof of sincerity, everything else is mere talk, this included. Or an appeal to the underlying feeling, which, however, remains silent, just twiddling its thumbs.

How is it that you're not fed up with the ridiculous people you describe (with love and therefore with magic), the inquisitive one, for instance, and many others. After all you must pronounce sentence, in the end it's always the woman who judges. (The legend of Paris obscures this a little, but even Paris is only judging which goddess has the strongest final judgment.) It doesn't matter that what they do is ridiculous, it might just be a temporary absurdity, which then becomes completely serious and good, is it this hope which keeps you bound to these people? Who can claim to know the judge's secret thoughts, but I have the impression that you condone these absurdities as such, that you understand, love, and ennoble them by your love. But they are nothing more than a dog's zigzag run, while its master goes right on walking, straight ahead, not exactly through the middle, but wherever the path happens to lead. Even so, there must be some reason for your love, I firmly believe this (only I still can't help asking you, and finding it strange) and it reminds me of a pronouncement made by one of the employees at my office, which I will relate just to stress one aspect of the problem. Some years ago I often went rowing on the Moldau in a small boat, I would row upstream and then float down with the current underneath the bridges, completely stretched out. Because of my emaciation

this probably looked quite comical from the bridge. This comic aspect was not lost on the clerk mentioned above, when he once saw me from the bridge, on my back in this way. He proceeded to summarize his impressions as follows: It looked like the Last Judgment was at hand, the coffins had just been opened, but the dead were still lying there, motionless.

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I took a small outing (not the long one I mentioned and which never materialized) and for nearly three days I was virtually unable to do a thing, not even write, due to (a not unpleasant) weariness. I just read, the letter, your essays, again and again, convinced that such prose does not exist merely for its own sake, but serves as a signpost on the road to a human being, a road one keeps following, happier and happier, until arriving at the realization some bright moment that one is not progressing, simply running around inside one's own labyrinth, only more nervously, more confused than before. But in any case: this was not written by any ordinary writer. After reading it I have almost as much faith in your writing as I do in you yourself. The only linguistic music I know in Czech (given my limited knowledge) is that of Božena Němcová, this music is different, but related to Němcová's in its resolution, passion, charm, and above all in a certain clairvoyant intelligence. And this is the result of just the last few years? Did you write earlier as well? Of course you can say that I'm ridiculously biased and of course you're right, but I am not biased by what I first discovered in the pieces (which incidentally are uneven, revealing the newspaper's detrimental influence in places), but what I rediscovered in them. You can immediately recognize the inferiority of my judgment, however, by the fact that I was misled by 2 passages into thinking the mutilated fashion article was also yours. I would gladly hold on to the clippings, at least long enough to show them to my sister, but since you need them right away I am enclosing them, I also notice some arithmetic is in the margin.

Apparently I had judged your husband differently. In the café circle he seemed to me the calmest, most reliable, understanding person, almost exaggeratedly paternal, although also

inscrutable, but not enough to cancel out the above attributes. I always respected him, I never had the occasion or the ability to get to know him better, but friends, especially Max Brod, had a high opinion of him, and this was always on my mind whenever I thought of him. At one time I especially liked his peculiar habit of receiving evening telephone calls in every café. Probably somebody was sitting next to the phone instead of sleeping, just dozing, using the back of the chair as a pillow, jumping up every now and then to call. A state I understand so well that it may be the only reason I'm writing about it.

Incidentally I think both Staša *and* he are right; I can justify anything I cannot attain myself; just that when no one is looking I secretly think Staša is more right

FranzK

What do you think? Can I still get a letter by Sunday? It should be possible. But this passion for letters is senseless. Isn't one letter enough, isn't one knowing enough? Of course it is, but nevertheless I am tilting my head way back, drinking the letters, aware only that I don't want to stop drinking. Explain that, teacher Milena!

*[Meran, May 30, 1920]*

Just how well, Milena, do you know human nature? I sometimes have my doubts. For example, when you wrote about Werfel you wrote with love and maybe only love, but this love is without understanding, and even if you ignore all that W is and just stick to the accusation that he is fat (which moreover seems to me unjustified; even though I only see him in passing, I think W is growing more and more beautiful and lovable from year to year). Don't you know that fat people alone are to be trusted? Only in strong-walled vessels like these does everything get thoroughly cooked, only these capitalists of airspace are immune from worry and insanity, to the extent it is humanly possible, and only they can go calmly about their

business and, as someone once said, they are the only useful citizens of this planet, for they provide warmth in the north and shade in the south. (Of course this can be twisted around, but then it isn't true.)

Then there's the question of being Jewish. You ask me if I'm a Jew, maybe that's just a joke, maybe you're only asking if I'm one of those anxious Jews, in any case as a woman from Prague you can't be as innocuous in this respect as was, for instance, Mathilde, Heine's wife. (Perhaps you don't know the story. It seems to me I had something more important to tell you, besides, I'm convinced I'll somehow harm myself, not so much with the story as with its telling, but you should also hear something nice from me for once. Meissner, a German-Bohemian writer—not Jewish—tells it in his memoirs. Mathilde was always annoying him with her outbursts against the Germans: the Germans are malicious, pedantic, self-righteous, petty, pushy; in short, unbearable. "But you don't know the Germans at all," Meissner finally replied one day, "after all, the only people Henry sees are German journalists, and here in Paris all of them are Jewish." "Oh," said Mathilde, "you're exaggerating, there might be a Jew among them here and there, for instance Seiffert—" "No," said Meissner, "he's the only one who isn't Jewish." "What?" said Mathilde, "you mean that Jeitteles (a large, strong, blond man) is Jewish?" "Absolutely," said Meissner. "But what about Bamberger?" "Bamberger too." "But Arnstein?" "The same." And they went on like this exhausting all of their acquaintances. Finally Mathilde got annoyed and said: "You're just pulling my leg, in the end you'll claim that Kohn is a Jewish name too, but Kohn is one of Henry's nephews and Henry is Lutheran." Meissner had nothing to say to that.) In any case you don't seem to be afraid of Jews. And that is rather heroic considering the last two generations of Jews in our cities and—all joking very far aside!—when a pure, innocent girl says to her relatives, "Let me go," and moves to one of these cities, it means more than Joan of Arc departing from her village. Furthermore you may reproach Jews for their particular type of anxiety, nevertheless such a general accusation shows a more theoretical knowledge

of human nature than a practical one, more theoretical because first the reproach does not—according to your earlier description—apply to your husband, second—according to my experience—it does not apply to most Jews, and third it only applies to isolated cases, but then very strongly, as it does to me. The strangest thing of all is that the reproach is generally unfounded. Their insecure position, insecure within themselves, insecure among people, would above all explain why Jews believe they possess only whatever they hold in their hands or grip between their teeth, that furthermore only tangible possessions give them a right to live, and that finally they will never again acquire what they once have lost—which swims happily away from them, gone forever. Jews are threatened by dangers from the most improbable sides or, to be more precise, let's leave the dangers aside and say: "They are threatened by threats." An example close to you. It's true I may have promised not to speak about it (at a time when I scarcely knew you) but now I mention it without hesitation, as it won't tell you anything new, just show you the love of relatives, and I won't mention names and details since I have forgotten them. My youngest sister is supposed to marry a Czech, a Christian; once he was talking with one of your relatives about his intention of marrying a Jew, and this person said: "Anything but that, just don't go getting mixed up with Jews! Listen, our Milena, etc." Where am I trying to lead you with all this? I've lost my way a little, but that doesn't matter, because if you've accompanied me, then we're both lost. What is particularly beautiful about your translation, that it is faithful (go ahead and scold me on account of this "faithful"—I know you can do everything, but maybe you scold best of all, I'd like to be your pupil just so you would constantly scold me; I'm sitting at my desk, scarcely daring to look up, you are bent over me and your index finger is glittering in the air, finding fault, isn't this the way it is?), as I was saying, your translation is faithful and I have the feeling that I'm taking you by the hand through the story's subterranean passages, gloomy, low, ugly, almost endless (that's why the sentences are almost endless, didn't you realize that?), almost endless (only two months, you say?) hope-



fully in order to have the good sense to disappear into the daylight at the exit.

A reminder to stop for today, to release my hand, that bearer of good fortune. Tomorrow I'll write again and explain why I—inasmuch as I can speak for myself—cannot come to Vienna, and I will not be satisfied until you say: He is right.

F

Please write the address a little more legibly, once your letter is in the envelope then it's already virtually my property and you should treat other people's property more carefully, with a greater sense of responsibility. *So!* Incidentally I also have the impression, without being able to ascertain anything more precise, that one of my letters was lost. Jewish anxiety! Instead of fearing that the letters might have arrived safely!

Now I will again say something dumb on the same subject, it's dumb of me to say something I think is correct when I know it will hurt me. And on top of that Milena is still going on about anxiety, striking my chest or asking: *jste žid?\** which in Czech has the same movement and sound. Don't you see how the fist is pulled back in the word "*jste*," so as to gain muscle power? And then in the word "*žid*" the happy blow, flying unerringly forward? The Czech language often produces such side effects on the German ear. For example, you once asked how it happened that I made my stay here dependent on one letter, and then you immediately answered your own question: *nechápu*. † A strange word in Czech and even in your mouth it is so severe, so callous, cold-eyed, stingy, and most of all like a nutcracker, pronouncing it requires three consecutive cracks of the jaw or, more exactly, the first syllable makes an attempt at holding the nut, in vain, the second syllable then tears the mouth wide open, the nut now fits inside, where it is finally cracked by the third syllable, can you hear the teeth? Particularly this final, absolute closing of the lips at the end prohibits the other person from expressing anything to the contrary, which is actually quite good at times, for

\*Are you Jewish?

†I don't understand.

instance when the other person is babbling as much as I am now. Whereupon the babbler replies, entreatingly: "But people only babble if they're a little happy for once."

In any event, no letter came from you today. And what I really intended to say in the end remains unsaid. Next time. Tomorrow I'd like very, very much to hear something from you, the last words I heard you say before the door slammed shut—all slamming doors are detestable—were terrible.

F

It's possible that the 3 syllables also signify the 3 movements of the Apostles on the Prague clock. Arrival, making an appearance, and angry departure.

*[Meran, May 31, 1920]*  
Monday

So now for the explanation I promised yesterday:

I don't want (Milena, help me! Understand more than I am saying) I don't want (this isn't stuttering) to come to Vienna, because I couldn't stand the mental stress. I am spiritually ill, my lung disease is nothing but an overflowing of my spiritual disease. I've been sick like this since the 4 or 5 years of my first two engagements. (It took some time before I finally understood why your last letter was so cheerful; I constantly forget the fact that you're so young, maybe not even 25, maybe just 23. I am 37, almost 38, almost older by a whole short generation, almost white-haired from all the old nights and headaches.) I don't want to unfold to you the whole long story with its veritable forest of details, which still scare me, like a child, except that I lack a child's power to forget. What all three engagements had in common was that everything was my fault, entirely and unquestionably my fault. I made both girls unhappy and, to be sure—here I am only referring to the first, I cannot speak about the second, she is sensitive, any word, even the friendliest, would be the most monstrous insult, which

I understand—and to be sure only because she (who might have sacrificed herself had I wanted her to) was unable to make me abidingly happy, calm, determined, capable of marriage, despite my repeated and entirely voluntary assurances that this was the case, despite the fact that I sometimes loved her desperately, despite the fact I knew of no worthier aspiration than marriage. For almost 5 years I kept battering away at her (or at myself if you prefer) but fortunately she proved unbreakable, a Prussian-Jewish mixture, a strong triumphant mixture. I myself was not so strong, anyway all she had to do was suffer, while I had to batter away *and* suffer.

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The end, even though I was just beginning, I can't write anything more, explain anything more; of course I should describe the spiritual illness, I should mention the other reasons for not leaving, a telegram arrived "Meet at Karlsbad eighth request letter." I confess it made a terrible face when I opened it, despite the fact that it was sent by the most selfless, tranquil, modest being and that it stems ultimately from my own desire. I can't explain this right now, since I cannot appeal to a description of the disease. But this much is certain: I'm leaving here Monday. Occasionally I look at the telegram and can scarcely read it—as if it contained a secret code, one which erases the above message and reads: Travel via Vienna!—an obvious order but without a trace of the terror orders always contain. I won't do it, even just at first glance it's senseless not to take the short route via Munich but one twice as long through Linz and then even further via Vienna. I am conducting an experiment: a sparrow is sitting on the balcony and waiting for me to throw him some bread from my table; but instead I toss it onto the floor next to me in the middle of the room. The sparrow is standing outside and sees the food of his life there in the semidarkness, enticing beyond measure, he shakes himself, he's more inside than out, but here inside is darkness and next to the bread am I, the mysterious power. Nonetheless he hops over the threshold, a few more jumps, but he doesn't dare go any further and suddenly frightened he flies away. But what

vitality lies hidden in this pitiful bird—after a while he's back, inspecting the situation. I strew some more crumbs to make it easier for him, and if I hadn't driven him off with a slight movement—intentionally-unintentionally (which is the way of secret forces)—he would have obtained his bread.

The fact is that my vacation will be over at the end of June and for a change I would like to go somewhere else in the country; moreover it's already getting very hot here. She wanted to go too; now we're supposed to meet there, I'll stay a few days, then perhaps a few more days in Konstantinsbad with my parents, and next travel on to Prague. Looking over these travel plans, and comparing them to my mental state, I feel a little like Napoleon must have felt if, while at the same time he was designing the Russian campaign, he had known exactly what the outcome would be.

Back when your first letter arrived—I believe it was shortly before the intended wedding (the plans for which, by way of example, were quite exclusively *my* doing)—I was happy and showed it to her. Later—no, nothing more, and I won't tear up this letter a second time, our characters have similar traits but I don't have any oven nearby and there are certain indications which make me fear that I once wrote to that girl on the back of one of these unfinished letters.

But all this is immaterial, even without the telegram I wouldn't have been able to go to Vienna, on the contrary, the telegram is more of an argument in favor of the trip. I will definitely not come, however if I should—it won't happen—find myself in Vienna after all, much to my terrible surprise, then I won't need either breakfast or dinner, but more likely a stretcher where I can lie down for a while.

Farewell, it won't be an easy week here—

F

If you'd like to write me a word in Karlsbad, poste restante, no, not until Prague.

What kind of monstrous schools are those where you teach, 200 pupils, 50 pupils. I'd like to have a seat by the window in the last row, for one hour, then I would forgo any meeting with

you (which won't happen anyway), forgo all trips and—enough, this endless white paper burns out one's eyes, which is why one writes.

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That was in the afternoon, now it's almost 11. I have arranged it the only way I can at the moment. I wired Prague to say I cannot come to Karlsbad, I'll explain this by my state of confusion, which is true on the one hand but not very consistent on the other, since it was precisely because of this confusion that I had wanted to go to Karlsbad in the first place. This is how I play with a real live human being. But I can't do anything else; in Karlsbad I would be incapable of either speech or silence, or more precisely: I would be speaking even with my silence, because at the moment I am nothing but a single word. Now there is no doubt that I will travel Monday via Munich, and not through Vienna—I don't know where, Karlsbad, Marienbad, in any case alone. I may write to you, but I won't receive your letters for 3 weeks, not until I'm in Prague.

[. . .] in order to make everything up to you.

[Meran, June 1, 1920]

Tuesday

I figure: written on Saturday, in spite of Sunday already arrived Tuesday noon, on Tuesday torn from the hands of the maid, *such* wonderful mail service, and Monday I'm supposed to leave and give it up.

You are so kind to worry, you miss my letters, yes, there were a few days last week when I didn't write, but I have every day since Saturday, so that you'll receive 3 letters in the meanwhile, which will make you praise the letterless time. You will realize that absolutely all of your fears are justified, namely, that I am very mad at you in general and in particular your letters contained many things I did not like, the feuilletons annoyed me, etc. No, Milena, you shouldn't be afraid of all that, but the opposite should make you tremble!

It's so wonderful to have received your letter, to have to answer it with my sleepless brain. I can't think of anything to write, I'm just walking around here between the lines, underneath the light of your eyes, in the breath of your mouth like in some beautiful happy day, which stays beautiful and happy even if my head is sick, tired, and if I have to leave Monday via Munich.

F

You ran home on my account, out of breath? Then aren't you sick and don't I have to worry about you anymore? It really is like that, I don't have any worries at all—no, I'm exaggerating as much now as I was back then—but it's the kind of worry I'd have if you were here under my supervision, if I were simultaneously giving you nourishment with the milk I drink, giving you strength with the air I breathe, as it wafts up from the garden; no, all that isn't enough, it would have to give you much more strength than it does me.

For various reasons I will probably not leave Monday, but a little later. However, then I'm traveling directly to Prague; recently they added a direct express train, Bozen–Munich–Prague. In case you still want to write me a few lines, you could; if they don't reach me they will be forwarded to Prague.

Stay good to me!

F.

I really am a paragon of stupidity. I am reading a book about Tibet; at the description of a settlement in the mountains on the Tibetan border my heart suddenly grows heavy, so hopelessly forlorn does the village seem to me, so far from Vienna. What I consider stupid is the idea that Tibet is far from Vienna. Would it really be far?

*[Meran, June 2, 1920]*  
Wednesday

Your two letters arrived together, at noon; they aren't there to be read, but to be unfolded, to rest one's face on while losing

one's mind. But now it turns out to be a good thing that it is partly lost, for then the rest will hold out as long as possible. And that is why my 38 Jewish years have this to say in face of your 24 Christian years:

How's this? And where are the laws of the world and the entire police force of heaven? You're 38 years old and probably more tired than mere age can possibly make you. Or more correctly: You aren't tired at all, just restless, just afraid of taking one step on this Earth teeming with pitfalls, which is why you always keep both feet in the air at once, you aren't tired, just afraid of the terrible fatigue which will follow this terrible restlessness and (after all, you're Jewish and know what it is to be fearful and anxious) which may—at best—be visualized as sitting in the garden of the insane asylum behind Karlsplatz, staring into space like an idiot.

All right, so that's your position. You've fought a few battles, making both friend and foe unhappy in the process (what's more, you only had friends, good, kind people, not a single enemy)—this has already transformed you into an invalid, one of those who tremble at the sight of a toy pistol and now, now suddenly you feel you're being called to join the great battle to save the world. Wouldn't that be very strange?

Also consider the fact that perhaps the best time of your life, which you haven't really discussed with anyone yet, was those 8 months spent in a village about 2 years ago, when you felt that you had come to terms with everything, that you were free of everything except what was unquestionably locked within yourself, free of letters, the 5-year-old Berlin correspondence, protected by your illness, requiring very little change, having merely to redraw the old narrow outlines of your character a little more firmly (after all, underneath the gray hair your face has hardly changed since you were six years old).

Unfortunately over the past 1½ years you have discovered that wasn't all, you could hardly have sunk any deeper (I'm excluding last autumn when I was respectably struggling for marriage), you could hardly have dragged another soul any further down along with you, a good, kind girl, self-effacing in

her selflessness, so that there was no exit anywhere, not even deeper down.

So far so good, and now Milena calls you with a voice that pierces your heart as strongly as it does your reason. Of course Milena doesn't know you, she has been blinded by a few stories and letters; she is like the sea, as strong as the sea with its masses of water, crashing down with all their might, but nonetheless by some mistake, following the whim of the dead and above all distant moon. She doesn't know you and perhaps her wanting you to come is an augury of truth. You can be certain your actual presence will no longer blind her. Is this why you don't want to go, tender soul, because that is exactly what you fear?

But granted: you do have 100 other inner reasons for not going (you really do) and another external one besides, namely that you won't be able to speak to Milena's husband or even see him, and you will be equally incapable of speaking to or seeing Milena if her husband isn't there—granted all of that, there are still two arguments against:

First, when you say you're coming, Milena may not even want you to come anymore, not at all out of fickleness, but merely exhaustion, which is understandable; she will be happy and relieved to let you travel as you want to.

In the second place, just go to Vienna! Milena is only thinking about the moment when the door is opened. Of course it will be opened, but what next? Then a lanky, emaciated man will be standing there, smiling amiably (which he will do incessantly, he inherited that from an old aunt who also used to smile incessantly, but in both cases more out of embarrassment than by design) and who will then sit down where he is told to. With that the ceremonies will be over, since he will scarcely speak, he lacks the strength to do so (my new tablemate here commented yesterday on the silent man's vegetarian board: "I consider meat absolutely essential for mental labor"), he won't even be happy, as he also lacks the strength for that.

So you see, Milena, I'm speaking frankly. But you are intelligent, the whole time you have been noticing that I do indeed speak the truth (the full truth, unconditional and accurate to a hair), but that I do so too frankly. After all, I could have shown



up without this announcement and disenchanted you without any further ado. But the fact I did not is only further proof of my candor, my weakness.

I'm staying another 14 days, mainly because I'm ashamed and afraid to go back with these results to show for my cure. At home and at work—which is especially annoying—they expect my leave to produce something approaching full recovery. Their interrogations are torture: How much weight have you put on this time? And I'm losing weight. Don't worry about spending money! (Directed at my stinginess.) And I do pay my board, but cannot eat. Jokes like that.

So much more to say, but the letter would never be sent. There is one more thing I did want to say: if toward the end of the 14 days you still want me to come as definitely as you did on Friday, then I'll come—

F.

*[Meran, June 3, 1920]*  
Thursday

You see, Milena, I'm lying on the deck chair in the morning, naked, half in the sun half in the shade, after an almost sleepless night; how could I have slept since I—who am too light for sleep—was constantly flying around you, and since I really was afraid (just as you wrote today) about “what had fallen into my lap,” afraid the way they describe the prophets, who were weak children (already or still doesn't matter) and they heard the Voice calling them and didn't want to and they were afraid and planted their feet on the ground and felt fear tearing through their brain and it's true they had already heard voices before and didn't know why this Voice had such a fearful ring—was it because their ears were weak or was the Voice so strong?—nor did they know, for, after all, they were children, that the Voice had already triumphed and that their fear was simply its scout, sent in advance to find lodgings and appropriate them.

But none of this meant they would necessarily become prophets, for although many hear the Voice, it is still objectively very questionable whether they are worthy of it; and the safest course would be to categorically say they aren't—this is how I was lying there when your two letters arrived.

I think there is one idiosyncrasy that we share, Milena: we are so shy and anxious that almost every letter is different, almost every one is frightened by the previous letter and even more so by the reply. It's easy to see that you aren't like this by nature, and I, perhaps even I am not like this by nature, but this has almost become my nature, passing only when I am desperate or, at most, angry, and needless to say: when I am afraid.

Sometimes I feel we have a room with two doors on opposite sides and each of us is holding his doorknob and, at the bat of one person's eyelash, the other jumps behind his door, and now if the first person utters a single word, the second is sure to close the door behind him, so that he can no longer be seen. He is bound to reopen the door, though, since it may be a room impossible to leave. If only the first person weren't exactly like the second, then he would be calm and pretend not to care in the slightest about the second; he would slowly go about ordering this room the way he would any other. But instead, he repeats the same thing at his door; occasionally even both people are standing behind their doors at the same time and the beautiful room is empty.

Agonizing misunderstandings are the result. Milena, you complain about some letters that you turn them in all directions and nothing falls out, but if I'm not mistaken those are precisely the ones where I was so close to you, my blood so restrained, restraining your own, so deep in the forest, so resting in rest, that nothing needed to be said, except perhaps that you can see the sky through the trees, that's all. And these words are repeated an hour later and there really is "not a single word which hasn't been well weighed." But this only lasts for a moment at the longest, the trumpets of sleepless night will soon sound again.

Consider too, Milena, how I have come to you, the 38-year journey I have traveled (and because I'm Jewish, another, much longer one as well) and if, at what appears to be an accidental bend in the road, I see you, whom I never expected to see, especially now, so late, then, Milena, I cannot cry out, nor does anything inside me cry out, nor will I utter 1000 foolish words, they are not inside me (I am excluding a different foolishness which I have in abundance) and I only realize I am kneeling because I see your feet right before my eyes and I am caressing them.

And do not demand sincerity from me, Milena. No one can demand it more than I do myself, and even so, I'm sure that many things escape me, maybe even everything. But cheering me on during this hunt does not cheer me up; on the contrary, it paralyzes me, everything suddenly becomes a lie and the pursued become the hunters. I am on such a dangerous road, Milena. You are standing fast by a tree, young, beautiful, your eyes are subduing the sorrows of the world with their brightness. We're playing *škatule škatule bejbejte se*,\* I'm creeping in the shade from one tree to the next, I'm halfway there, you call to me, pointing out the dangers, wanting to encourage me, you're scared by my faltering step, you remind me (me!) how serious the game is—I can't make it, I fall down, already prostrate. I can't listen both to the terrible inner voices and to you simultaneously, but I can listen to what the voices are saying and confide this in you, trusting you like no other person in the world.

F

[Meran, June 3, 1920]

Now that I've read this terrible letter—which isn't at all terrible deep inside—it isn't easy to thank you for the joy I felt upon

\*A children's game (Czech).

its arrival. Today's a holiday, regular mail would no longer have arrived, it was also doubtful whether anything from you would have come tomorrow, Friday, so as far as you were concerned there was a kind of oppressed quiet, though not at all sad; you were so strong in your last letter that I was watching you as I might watch mountain climbers from my chair, if I could make them out, up in the snow, from down here. And then it arrived after all, right before dinner, I was able to take it along, remove it from my pocket, lay it on the table, put it back in my pocket, just the way hands like to play with letters; you simply watch and enjoy the children. All this time, I didn't recognize the general and the engineer sitting across from me (excellent, friendly people), and heard them even less, the food I resumed eating today (yesterday I didn't eat anything) didn't upset me much either, and of the arithmetic tricks performed after dinner, the short problems were much clearer to me than the long solutions, during which, however, I did have a clear view through the open window: fir trees, sun, mountains, village, and above all an intimation of Vienna.

But then of course I read the letter carefully, that is, I read the Sunday letter carefully; I'm postponing a similar reading of Monday's until your next one arrives, because it contains things I can't bear to read more thoroughly, apparently I'm not yet fully recovered, moreover the letter is out of date, according to my calculation 5 letters should be on the way, at least 3 of which must be in your hands by now, even if another letter may have been lost or if registered letters do take longer. The only thing left for me to do is request that you *answer me here immediately*, one word is sufficient, but it must be a word capable of taking the bite out of all the reproaches contained in Monday's letter and making them readable. Incidentally, that Monday was precisely when I was giving my own reason such a shaking here (and not without consequence).

And now the other letter.—But it's late, after several indefinite promises I told the engineer that today I would definitely go and see the portraits of his children, which are too large to bring here. He is hardly older than I am, a Bavarian, a manufacturer, very scientific, but also insightful and great fun, he had

5 children, only 2 are alive (but because of his wife he won't have any more), the boy is already 13, the girl 11 years old. What a world! And he bears it with balance. No, Milena, you shouldn't say a thing against balance.

F

More tomorrow. But if it should be the day after, don't "hate" again, please, not that.

---

I reread the Sunday letter, it's even more frightening than I thought at first. One ought, Milena, to take your face in both hands and look you square in the eye, so that you would see yourself in the eyes of the other person, then you could not even think the kinds of things you wrote there.

[Meran, June 4, 1920]

Friday

To begin with, Milena: What's the apartment you wrote from on Sunday like? Full of space and empty? Are you all by yourself? Day and night?

In any case it must be sad to sit there alone on a beautiful Sunday afternoon opposite a "stranger" whose face is nothing but "stationery which has been written on." I am so much better off! Although my own room is small, the true Milena is here, the one who ran away from you on Sunday, and believe me, being with her is wonderful.

You complain about uselessness. It was different on other days and it will be different. The one sentence (*on what occasion was it uttered?*) shocks you, and yet it really is so clear and has already been spoken or thought with this meaning countless times. A man plagued by his own devils takes revenge on his fellow man without giving it a thought. At such moments you wanted to be the redeemer, and you called yourself useless if you didn't succeed entirely. But who is permitted such blasphemy? No one has ever succeeded in this, not even Jesus, for

example. He could only say: "Follow me" and then this great line (which I'm quoting completely incorrectly, unfortunately): act according to my word and you will see that it is not the word of man but the word of God. And he cast devils only out of those who followed him. And even that didn't last forever, for once they forsook him then even he became ineffectual and "useless." True—and this is the only point I'll grant you—he, too, succumbed to the temptation.

[Meran, June 4, 1920]

Friday

Toward evening today I took a rather long walk alone, for the first time actually, otherwise I've always gone with other people or mostly just stayed at home resting. What countryside! Good heavens, Milena, if you were here, and my pitiful, unthinking mind! And still I would be lying if I said I missed you: it's the most perfect, most painful magic, you are here, just as I am and even more so; wherever I am, there you are too, and even more intensely. This is not a joke; I occasionally imagine that you, who really are here, are missing *me* here and asking: "Where can he be? Didn't he write that he's in Meran?"

F

Did you receive my two letters in answer to yours?

[Meran, June 5, 1920]

Saturday

I keep asking myself whether you understood that my answer had to be the way it was, considering my state of mind; in fact it was actually much too gentle, much too deceptive, much too over-glossed. Day and night I keep asking myself this, trem-

bling before your reply, I keep asking myself, futilely, as if I had been commissioned to hammer a nail into a stone for a whole week, without resting at night, and I must be both hammerer and nail in one. Milena!

---

According to rumor—I can't believe it—all rail traffic with the Tyrol will stop tonight as a result of strikes.

[Meran, June 5, 1920]  
Saturday

Your letter came, the joy of your letter. Beyond everything else, it contains one central item: that you might not be able to write me anymore once I'm in Prague.

First of all, I'm singling that out for emphasis, for all the world to see—including you, Milena. So this is how one human being threatens another, and even while knowing that person's motives, at least from afar. And on top of that one pretends to treat this other human well.

But perhaps you'd be right to stop writing me, several passages in your letter point to such a necessity. There's nothing I can plead against them. Those are exactly the passages where I know perfectly well and acknowledge with the utmost seriousness that I am at a great height, but precisely because of that the air is too thin for my lungs and I have to rest—

F

I'll write tomorrow

[Meran, June 6, 1920]  
Sunday

This speech on 2 pages of your letter, Milena, comes from the depths of your wounded heart ("that hurt me" is what you wrote, and I have done this, to you), and it rings out as clearly and proudly as if I had hit steel and not your heart, demanding

the most obvious things and moreover misunderstanding me (for my “ridiculous” people are really none other than your own, and incidentally: when did I ever take sides between the two of you? Where is the sentence? Where would I have come up with this infamous idea? And who am I to condemn, I who am so far below both of you in every essential aspect—marriage, work, courage, devotion, purity, freedom, independence, truthfulness—that it disgusts me to even talk about it. And when would I have dared offer active assistance, and if I had dared, then how could I have actually assisted? Enough questions; they were sleeping soundly in the underworld, why call them up into the daylight? They are gray and sad and affect one the same way. Don’t be so certain that two hours of life are more than two pages of writing, the writing is poorer but clearer)—and so your speech misunderstands me, nevertheless: it is directed at me and I am not guiltless, but oddly enough precisely because the above questions must be answered with no and nowhere.

Then your lovely lovely telegram came, to comfort me against the night, my old enemy (if the comfort doesn’t last it really isn’t your fault, but the fault of the nights. These short earthly nights are almost enough to make one fear the eternal night)—of course the letter contains just as much wonderful solace, but on the whole it must be treated as one unit tyrannized by the 2 pages, the telegram on the other hand is independent and knows nothing about that. However, Milena, I can say this against the telegram: if, disregarding everything else, I had gone to Vienna and if you had given me the same lecture (which as I said doesn’t pass right by me, but hits me, and justly so, not a full hit, but strong enough) face to face—and if it weren’t said then it would have had to be thought in some way, glanced, twitched, or at least presumed—then with one blow I would have fallen prostrate and no matter how good a nurse you are, you could not have helped put me on my feet again. And if that hadn’t happened, then something worse would have. You see, Milena:

F



[Meran, June 10, 1920]  
Thursday

Right now I only want to say this: (moreover I still haven't read your letters thoroughly; just flown around them the way a fly circles a lamp, burning my head several times. By the way they are two separate letters, as I have already discovered, one to be completely imbibed, the other designed to horrify, the latter is probably the later).

If you run into an acquaintance and urgently ask how much  $2 \times 2$  is, the question will seem lunatic, on the other hand it's very appropriate in elementary school. With my question to you, Milena, both elements are present, both the asylum and the school—fortunately, the school is there too. I never could understand it when someone got mixed up with me, and there are many relationships (for example, the one with Weiss) which I destroyed with my logical disposition, my tendency to believe more and more the other person had erred, and less and less in miracles (at least in regard to myself). I thought: Why use such things to stir up the waters of life even more than they already are. I can see a stretch of the road ahead, the road which is possible for me, and I know how far—probably unattainably far—I would have to be from my current position to deserve even a casual glance (from myself, not to mention from others! This is not modesty but arrogance if you think it over) even a casual glance and now I receive—your letters, Milena. How shall I describe the difference? A man is lying in the filth and stench of his death bed and the Angel of Death, the most blessed of all angels, arrives and beholds him. May this man even dare to die? He rolls over, burying himself deeper and deeper in his bed, he is incapable of dying. In short: I don't believe what you write, Milena, and there's no way it could be proven to me (nor could anyone have proven it to Dostoyevsky on that night, and my life consists of one night). Only I could prove it to myself, and I can imagine being able to do so (just as you once imagined the man on the deck chair) but I wouldn't be able to believe myself either. Thus this question

was a ridiculous device—as you noticed right away of course—the kind a teacher sometimes uses when, out of exhaustion and yearning, he deliberately lets himself be deceived by one correct answer into believing that the pupil thoroughly understands the subject, whereas in reality the pupil only knows it for some irrelevant reason, and is in fact incapable of more thorough understanding, for only the teacher could teach him that. But not by whining, complaining, caressing, pleading, dreaming (do you have the last 5, 6 letters? You should look at them, they're all part of the whole) but only by—let's leave that open.

---

On glancing through your letter I see that you also mention the girl. So that there won't be any doubt: Beyond the momentary pain, you have done the best thing possible for this girl. I can't think of any other way she might have freed herself from me. Of course she did have a certain painful foreboding, but not the faintest idea where the place beside me acquired its warmth (uncanny, though not to her). I remember: we were sitting next to each other on the sofa in a one-room apartment in Wrschowitz (it was probably in November, the apartment was supposed to become ours a week later); she was happy to have acquired at least this apartment after so much trouble, her future husband was sitting next to her (I repeat: getting married was solely my own idea, I alone was pushing toward this end, she was merely scared and compliant against her will, but then naturally the idea began to grow on her). When I think about this scene with all its details, more numerous than heartbeats in a fever, then I believe myself capable of understanding every human delusion (in this case I myself was deluded for months as well, although it wasn't just delusion; I also had other motives—evidently it would have been a marriage of reason in the best sense of the word), capable of understanding every delusion to its core, and I am afraid to raise the glass of milk to my lips since it easily might burst right before my eyes, driving the splinters into my face—not by accident, but on purpose.

*One question: What exactly are you being reproached with?* Yes, I have made people unhappy before, but certainly they don't go on and on reproaching me, they simply turn silent and I believe they don't even reproach me inwardly. This is the exceptional status I have among people.

---

*But all this is unimportant* compared to an idea I had while getting out of bed this morning, an idea which so enthralled me that I found myself washed and dressed without knowing how, and I would have shaved the same way had a guest not awakened me (it was the lawyer who considers meat a necessary diet).

Briefly it's like this: You leave your husband for a while, that's nothing new, it's already happened before. The reasons are: your illness, his nervousness (you are also bringing him relief), and finally the conditions in Vienna. I don't know where you'd like to go, the best place for you might be some peaceful part of Bohemia. It will probably also be best if I don't interfere or even show myself in person. Whatever money you need you temporarily borrow from me (we'll agree on the terms of repayment). (To mention only one of the additional benefits that this would give me: I would become enraptured by my work—my job by the way is ridiculous and lamentably easy, you can't even imagine, I don't know what they pay me for.) If now and then there are months when this proves insufficient, you should easily be able to raise the difference yourself; I'm sure it wouldn't be much. For the moment I won't say anything more in praise of the idea, however, this does give you an opportunity to show me with your reaction whether I can trust your judgment concerning other ideas of mine (since I know what this one is worth).

Kafka

Now that I have written that, I am reading your comment on eating; yes, I'm sure in that case it could even be arranged for me, since I would have then become such an important man.—I am reading the two letters the way the sparrow is

pecking up the crumbs in my room: in trepidation, attentively, on the lookout, feathers all puffed up.

[*Meran, June 11, 1920*]

Friday

When will this crazy world finally be straightened out a little? I wander around with a burned-out head by day—there are such beautiful ruins everywhere in the mountains here, they make me think I have to become that beautiful myself—but once in bed instead of sleep I have the best ideas. Today for instance a thought occurred to me to add to yesterday's proposal, namely that you could spend the summer at Staša's, who, as you wrote, is in the country. Yesterday I made the stupid suggestion that the money might not hold out through every month; that's nonsense, there will always be enough.

The letter written Tuesday morning and evening only confirms that my suggestion is a good one; this is hardly a coincidence, since anything and everything would have to confirm it. If there happens to be any cunning in my proposal—and where is it not, that enormous beast, which can shrink according to need—I will keep it in bounds, even your husband can count on that. I begin to exaggerate. Nevertheless: I can be trusted. I won't see you at all, not now, not then. You will live in the country, which you love. (In this we are similar, rolling countryside is my favorite, not too mountainous, with forests and lakes.)

You misjudge the effect of your letters, Milena. I still haven't finished reading the ones from Monday ("but only fear for you"). I tried this morning, and even succeeded somewhat, although my proposal had to some extent rendered these letters obsolete—still I was unable to read through to the end. The Tuesday letter, on the other hand (and the unusual card as well, was it written in a café?—I still have to respond to your Werfel accusation, I really don't answer anything you write, you're much better at that, which makes me feel good), has left me sufficiently calm and self-assured today despite a night made

virtually sleepless by Monday's letter. Of course Tuesday's has its barbs as well, cutting their way through my body, but you\* are guiding them, and—naturally this is only the truth of a moment, a moment trembling with joy and pain—could anything coming from you be hard to bear?

F

Once again I'm taking the letter out of the envelope, there's room right here: Please say *Du* to me—not all the time, I don't want that at all—say *Du* once again.

If the occasion presents itself and you don't have anything against it, please say something nice to Werfel on my behalf.—Unfortunately there are some things you don't respond to after all, for example the questions concerning your writing.

Recently I had another dream about you, it was a big dream, but I hardly remember a thing. I was in Vienna, I don't recall anything about that, next I went to Prague and had forgotten your address, not only the street but also the city, everything, only the name Schreiber kept somehow appearing, but I didn't know what to make of that. So I had lost you completely. In my despair I made various very clever attempts, which were nevertheless not carried out—I don't know why—I just remember one of them. I wrote on an envelope: M. Jesenská and underneath "Request delivery of this letter, because otherwise the Ministry of Finance will suffer terrible loss." With this threat I hoped to engage the entire government in my search for you. Clever? Don't let this sway you against me. It's only in dreams that I am so sinister.

[Meran, June 12, 1920]

Saturday

You misunderstand me a little, Milena; I agree with you almost completely. I don't even want to go into the details.

\*Here, for the first time, Kafka employs the familiar *Du*, a form he adopts and uses consistently beginning with the subsequent letter.

I still can't say whether I'm coming to Vienna, but I don't think I am. If I had many reasons against it before, today I have just one, namely that it would tax my spiritual strength and—as a possible distant, second reason—because this is better for all of us. But I must add that it would be equally beyond my strength (if not more so) if you were to come to Prague under the circumstances you describe (“keeping a person waiting”).

My need to hear what you want to say about the 6 months is not just a temporary one. I am convinced it's something terrible, I am convinced you've experienced or even committed terrible things, I am convinced I could not have stood being part of them (even if about 7 years ago I could have endured practically anything) I am also convinced I couldn't stand such participation in the future—fine, but what does all this mean, is it your deeds and experiences which are important to me or isn't it really you yourself? Even without the story, however, I know you much better than I do myself, by which I don't mean to say I don't know what state my hands are in. Your letter is not opposed to my suggestion, on the contrary, for you write: “most of all I'd like to escape along a third road going neither to you nor with him, but somewhere toward solitude.” This is my suggestion, perhaps you were even writing it the same day I was.

Of course if the illness has reached this stage you cannot leave your husband even temporarily, but as you wrote it's not a disease which lasts forever; you mentioned only a few months, more than one has already passed and after one more you can be spared for a little while. By then it will only be August, September at the latest. Incidentally I confess: your letter belongs to those which I cannot read immediately and even if I have gulped it down four times in a row I still can't tell you what I think, at least not right away. Nonetheless I believe the above has some validity.

Yours

[Meran, June 12, 1920]  
once again Saturday

This crisscrossing of letters has got to stop, Milena, it's driving us crazy, one doesn't know what one has written, what has been answered, and in any case one is in constant trepidation. I understand your Czech very well, I also hear your laughter but I keep digging into your letters, burrowing between your words and your laughter—until I then hear one single word, one word which is, moreover, my very essence: fear.

I cannot determine whether you still want to see me after my letters of Wednesday and Thursday; I know my relationship to you (*you belong to me*, even if I should never see you again) [. . .] these I know, insofar as they do not fall into the indistinct realm of fear, but I don't know your relationship to me at all; this belongs entirely to fear. Nor do you know me—I repeat this, Milena.

You see, as far as I'm concerned what's happening is incredible—my world is collapsing, my world is rebuilding itself: wait and see how you (meaning me) survive it all. I'm not lamenting the falling apart, it was already in a state of collapse, what I'm lamenting is the rebuilding, I lament my waning strength, I lament being born, I lament the light of the sun.

How will we go on living? If you say "yes" to my letters then it is impossible for you to go on living in Vienna. Together with your letters today I received a letter from Max Brod, in which among other things he writes: "Something strange has happened which I 'report' to you at least by way of suggestion. Reiner, the young editor of the *Tribuna* (they say a very fine and really exorbitantly young man—perhaps 20 years old) has poisoned himself. This was while you were still in Prague—I think. Now the reason comes to light: Willy Haas had an affair with his wife (whose maiden name was Ambrožová, a friend of Milena Jesenská) which was however ostensibly kept within platonic bounds. No one was caught or anything like that, only the woman so tormented the man (whom she had known for years prior to getting married)

mainly with her words and her behavior that he killed himself in his office. Early in the morning she went with Haas to find out why he hadn't come home after the night shift. He was already in the hospital and died before they arrived. Haas, who was just about to take his last exam, broke off his studies, fell out with his father and is running a film magazine in Berlin. Apparently he's not doing very well. The woman is also living in Berlin and it is expected he will marry her.—I don't know why I'm telling you this gruesome story. Perhaps only because the same demon is causing us to suffer and so the story belongs to us just as we belong to it."

So much for the letter. I repeat you cannot remain in Vienna. What a terrible story. Once I caught a mole and carried him into the hops garden. When I tossed him on the ground he plunged into the earth like a madman, disappearing as if he had dived into water. That is how one would have to hide from this story.

That's not the point, Milena, as far as I'm concerned you are not a woman, you're a girl, I've never seen anyone who was more of a girl than you, and girl that you are, I don't dare offer you my hand, my dirty, twitching, clawlike, fidgety, unsteady, hot-cold hand.

F

In regard to the Prague messenger, it's a bad plan. You will only find an empty house. It's my office. Meanwhile I'll be sitting at my desk on the 3rd floor at Altstädter Ring #6 with my face in my hands.

No, you really don't understand me either, Milena, the "Jewish question" was only a dumb joke.

*[Meran, June 13, 1920]*  
Sunday

Today something which may explain a few things, Milena (what a rich, heavy name, almost too full to lift and which I didn't like very much at first; it seemed to me a Greek or



Roman gone astray in Bohemia, violated by Czech; the accent has been betrayed and yet the name is marvelous, in color and form: a woman to be carried in one's arms out of the world, out of the fire—I don't know which—and she presses herself into your arms willingly and full of trust, except the strong accent on the "i" is bad, doesn't the name jump right back away from you? Or might that just be a leap for joy, which you yourself perform with your burden?)

You write two types of letters; I don't mean the ones in pen and the ones in pencil, although this pencil itself is significant and enough to make one prick up one's ears but this is not a crucial difference. The last letter, with the map of your apartment, for instance, is written in pencil and makes me happy nonetheless; you see, the peaceful letters are the ones that make me happy (understand, Milena, my age, the fact that I am used up, and, above all, my fear, and understand your youth, your vivacity, your courage. And my fear is actually growing, since it is a sign of my retreating from the world; which causes the world in turn to exert more pressure, which causes a further increase in fear; your courage, however, indicates an advance, hence a decrease in pressure, hence an increase in courage)—I could sit at the feet of these letters, happy beyond measure; they bring rain on my burning head. But whenever these other letters come, Milena, even if they are basically more auspicious than the first ones (although on account of my weakness it takes me days to penetrate to their happiness)—these letters which begin with exclamations (and after all, I am so far away), and which end with I don't know what terrible things, then, Milena, I literally start to shake as if under an alarm bell; I am unable to read them and naturally I read them anyway, the way an animal dying of thirst drinks, and with that comes fear and more fear; I look for a piece of furniture to crawl under; trembling, totally unaware of the world, I pray you might fly back out of the window the way you came storming in inside your letter. After all, I can't keep a storm in my room; in these letters you undoubtedly have the magnificent head of Medusa, the snakes of terror are quivering about your head so wildly, while the snakes of fear quiver even more wildly about my own.

---

Your letter from Wednesday, Thursday. But child, child (this actually applies to me, saying Medusa like that) you're taking all my stupid jokes (with *žid* and *nechápu* and "hate") in earnest, I just wanted to make you laugh a little, we're misunderstanding one another out of fear, please don't force me to write Czech, there wasn't even a trace of reproach in that, I could sooner reproach you for having much too high an opinion of the Jews you do know (me included)—there are others!—at times I'd like to stuff them all, simply as Jews (me included) into, say, the drawer of the laundry chest. Next I'd wait, open the drawer a little to see if they've all suffocated, and if not, shut the drawer again and keep doing this to the end.—But what I said about your "speech" was in earnest (Earnest keeps intruding into this letter. Perhaps I am doing him a terrible injustice—I can't think about it—but equally strong is my feeling of being bound to him, more and more tightly; I almost said: in life and death. If only I could talk with him! But I'm afraid of him; he's far more than a match for me. You know, Milena, that in going to him you took one large step down from your own level, but if you come to me you will be leaping into the abyss. Do you realize that? No, that wasn't my "height" in that letter but yours)—I was talking about your "speech," you meant it in earnest, too—I can't be wrong about that.

---

Again I hear about your illness. Milena, what if you had to stay in bed? And perhaps you should. You may even be lying down as I am writing this. Wasn't I a better man a month ago? I worried about you (though only in my head), knew about your being ill—not anymore; now I just think about my own sickness and health: however, in any case both of them, the first as well as the second, are you.

F

Today I went on a small excursion with my favorite engineer to escape this sleepless air. I also wrote a card to you from there, but couldn't sign and send it. I can no longer write to you as to a stranger.

The Friday letter didn't arrive till Wednesday; express and registered letters take longer than regular mail.

[*Meran, June 14, 1920*]  
Monday

Shortly before waking up this morning, it was also shortly after having fallen asleep, I had a horrid, not to say terrifying (happily the impressions left by dreams fade quickly), thus only a horrid dream. Incidentally, I also owe it some sleep since you don't wake from such dreams until they're over, you can't wrest yourself away any sooner because they hold you by the tongue.

It was in Vienna, similar to the way I picture it in my daydreams in case I should travel there (in these daydreams Vienna consists only of a quiet square, bordered on one side by your house, opposite is my hotel, to the left is the Westbahnhof where I arrive, to the left of that the Franz Josefs Bahnhof from which I depart, and congenially located on the ground floor of my hotel is a vegetarian restaurant, where I eat not in order to eat, but to bring some sort of weight back to Prague. Why am I telling you this? It doesn't really belong to the dream, evidently it still makes me afraid). It wasn't exactly like that, it was a true metropolis, toward evening, wet, dark, an inconceivable amount of traffic; a long, rectangular public garden separated the house where I was staying from your own.

I had gone to Vienna suddenly, overtaking my own letters, which were still on their way to you (a fact which later caused me particular pain). Still you had been informed and I was supposed to meet you. Fortunately (though at the same time I also resented it) I was not alone, a small group was with me—including, I believe, a girl, but I don't know anything more about them, I considered them something like my seconds. If they had only kept quiet, but they went on talking and talking among themselves, most likely about affairs of mine; I could just hear their murmuring, which made me nervous: I could

not and did not want to understand anything. I stood on the edge of the sidewalk to the right of my house and studied yours. It was a low villa with a beautiful, simple, vaulted loggia of stone in front, reaching to the second floor.

Then it was suddenly breakfast time, the table was set in the loggia, I watched from the distance as your husband came, sat down in a cane chair on the right, still sleepy and stretching, arms extended. Then you came and sat down in full view behind the table. But I couldn't see you exactly, it was so far away, although I could make out your husband's features a lot more clearly—I don't know why, you just remained something bluish-white, flowing, ghostlike. You had also spread your arms out, but not to stretch; it was more a ceremonial gesture.

Shortly thereafter—but now it was once again the evening before—you were outside with me, you stood on the sidewalk, I had one foot in the street, I was holding your hand and now an insanely quick conversation began, all short sentences; it went bang bang bang and lasted almost without interruption throughout the dream.

I can't retell it; actually I only remember the first 2 and the last 2 sentences, the middle was one long torment impossible to convey in more detail.

Instead of a greeting I said quickly, in response to something, in your face: "You imagined me differently." You replied: "Frankly I thought you'd be a little more *fesch*"\* (actually you said something even more Viennese, but I forgot what).

Those were the first two phrases (on which subject it occurs to me: Do you know that I am completely unmusical, more completely than anyone I have ever known?) but with that everything had been decided; what more could there be? However, we then began negotiating another meeting: the vaguest possible expressions on your side, incessant pushy questions on mine.

Then my companions intervened, producing the explanation that I had also come to Vienna to visit an agricultural school in the vicinity of the city, and now it seemed I might

\*Viennese for elegant, dapper.

have time after all; they were evidently trying to take me away, out of charity. I saw through this, but went along with them to the train station, probably because I was hoping that such a serious intention to depart would impress you. We all went to the nearby station, but it turned out I had forgotten the name of the place where the school was supposed to be. We stood in front of the large timetables, they kept running their fingers over the names of the stations and asking me whether it might be this one or that one, but it was neither.

In the meantime I was able to observe you some, though it didn't matter to me in the least what you looked like—your words were all I cared about. You didn't resemble yourself very much, in any case you were much darker, a thin face—no one with plump cheeks could be so cruel. (But was it really cruel?) Your suit was of the same material as mine, also very masculine and I didn't really like it at all. But then I remembered a phrase from one of your letters (the verse: "I only have two dresses but I still look fine") and so great was the power of your words over me that from then on I liked what you were wearing very much.

But now the end had come, my companions were still looking through the schedules, we were standing off to the side and negotiating. Our last arguments went something like this: the next day was Sunday—it was incomprehensible to you, to the point of repugnance, that I could presume you might have time for me on Sunday. But finally you conceded and said you'd try to save 40 minutes for me. (The most horrible thing about the conversation was not the words, of course, but the underlying tone, the senselessness of it all, also your continuous, unspoken argument: "I don't want to come. So what good is it to you if I do come?") But I couldn't find out from you when you might have these free 40 minutes. You didn't know; in spite of all your apparently intense concentration you couldn't say. Finally I asked: "Maybe I should wait the whole day?" "Yes" you said and turned to face a group of people standing by, waiting for you. But your reply really meant that you wouldn't come at all and that the only concession you could grant me was permission to wait. "I won't wait" I said to myself quietly and since

I thought you hadn't heard me and since after all it was my last trump, I shouted the words after you in despair. You didn't care, however, you were no longer concerned. Somehow I staggered back into town.

---

But then two hours later came letters and flowers, kindness and consolation.

Your F

Milena, the addresses are again unclear, the Post Office has written over them and filled them in. After my first request the address was magnificent, a model collection of beautiful, varied, but not exactly legible styles of handwriting. If the Post Office had my eyes it could probably read your addresses alone and no others. But since it's the Post Office—

*[Meran, June 15, 1920]*

Tuesday

Early this morning I had another dream about you. We were sitting next to each other and you were warding me off, not angrily but in a friendly way. I was very unhappy. Not because you were warding me off, but because I was treating you like some mute woman, ignoring the voice that was speaking out of you directly to me. Or perhaps I wasn't ignoring it, but just unable to answer. I left more disconsolate than in the first dream.

At the same time something occurs to me I once read at somebody's house, something like this: "My beloved is a fiery column passing over the earth. Now it is holding me enclosed. But it does not guide those who are enclosed, just those who see."

Yours

(now I'm even losing my name—it was getting shorter and shorter all the time and is now: Yours)

[Meran, June 20, 1920]  
Sunday

After a short walk with you (how easy it is to write that: a short walk with you. I should stop writing out of shame, because it is so easy).

First of all what most terrifies me about the story is the conviction that the Jews are necessarily bound to fall upon you Christians, just as predatory animals are bound to murder, although the Jews will be horrified since they are not animals, but rather all too aware. It is impossible for you to imagine this in all its fullness and power, even if you understand everything else in the story better than I do. I don't understand how whole nations of people could ever have thought of ritual murder before these recent events (at most they may have felt general fear and jealousy, but here there is no question, we see "Hilsner" committing the crime step by step; what difference does it make that the virgin embraces him at the same time?) But on the other hand, I also don't understand how nations could believe that the Jew might murder without stabbing himself in the process, for that is what he does—but of course the nations don't need to worry about that.

Once again I am exaggerating, these are all exaggerations. They are exaggerations, because people seeking salvation always throw themselves at women, and these women can be either Christian or Jewish. And what is meant by the girls' innocence is not the usual chastity, but the innocence of sacrifice, an innocence which has just as much to do with the body.

There are some things I could say about the report, but I'd rather maintain my silence—in the first place I know Haas only slightly (although oddly his congratulations on my engagement were the warmest I received) and I don't know the others at all, moreover you might be mad at me if I were to get mixed up in this affair with my speculations, since it's really your own business and, besides, no one can help here anymore anyway; it would just be a guessing game.

(I'm still afraid you might condemn me unjustly concerning

the girl I was supposed to meet in Karlsbad and to whom I told the truth as well as I could following my telegram and two vague notes—in her mind I'm still going out of my way not to praise her in any way. My fear is all the greater since I should of course be condemned and very severely, but by no means according to the essence of what you wrote—in that case even more severely, you may say, fine, I'd rather bear the more severe condemnation I deserve than the lighter one which doesn't pertain. Excuse my unclear speech. It's something I have to come to terms with on my own: while doing so I will only be allowed to see you from afar).

As far as Max is concerned, I also think that—for the time being—one would have to know him personally in order to judge him in his entirety. But then one has to love him, admire him, be proud of him, and of course sympathize with him as well. Whoever does not act that way toward him (assuming goodwill) does not know him.

F.

*[Meran, June 21, 1920]*

Monday

You're right, just now when I read your reproach concerning "child, child"—unfortunately I didn't receive the letters until late in the evening and early tomorrow I'm planning to go on a short trip to Bolzano with the engineer—I really did say to myself: Enough, you can't read these letters today, you have to get at least some sleep if you want to go on the trip tomorrow, and it took some time before I went back to reading and understood and the tension passed and I could have laid my head in your lap with a sigh of relief—if you were here (and I don't mean just in body). This is surely a sign of sickness, isn't it? But I do know you, after all, and also know that "child, child" isn't such a terrible way to address somebody. I, too, can take a joke,



but anything can also become a threat to me. If you were to write me: "Yesterday I counted the 'ands' in your letter, there were such-and-such many; how dare you write 'and' to me and especially such-and-such many times"—and if you kept a serious face I might even become convinced that I had insulted you and would be sufficiently unhappy. And in the end perhaps it really does annoy you, it's difficult to find out.

Nor should you forget that although it's easy to distinguish between what is said in jest and what in earnest, when it comes to people who mean so much to us that our lives depend on them, then it isn't so easy after all, the risk is so great it turns our eyes into microscopes, and once equipped with those it's impossible to distinguish anything. In this respect I was never strong, even when I was at my strongest. For example in the first grade: Our cook, a small dry thin person with a pointed nose, hollow cheeks, somewhat jaundiced but firm, energetic, and superior, took me to school every morning. We were living in the house which separates the Kleiner Ring from the Grosser Ring. So you first had to cross the Ring, then turn onto the Teingasse, then proceed through a kind of vaulted gate on to the Fleischmarktgasse and down to the Fleischmarkt. And every morning for about a year the same thing happened. On our way out of the house the cook would say she was going to tell the teacher how naughty I had been at home. In fact, I probably wasn't all that badly behaved, but I was stubborn, good-for-nothing, sad, ill-tempered, and probably sufficiently so that she could always concoct something nice for the teacher. I knew that and so didn't take the cook's threats too lightly. But mainly I thought the way to school was terribly long and that many things could still happen along the way (anxiety and dead-eyed seriousness develop precisely out of such apparently childish nonsense, but gradually, since no way ever is so terribly long), moreover, at least while on the Altstädter Ring, I still doubted whether the cook would even dare speak to the teacher, who commanded the respect of the world; for although the cook commanded respect, she did so only at home. But whenever I would say something to that effect, the

cook would usually answer curtly, with her thin pitiless lips, that I didn't have to believe it, but she would tell anyway. Somewhere near the entry to the Fleischmarktgasse—which still has a slight historical significance for me (in which neighborhood did you live as a child?)—the fear of the threat prevailed. School in itself was a nightmare and now the cook wanted to make it even worse. I would start to beg, she would shake her head; the more I pleaded, the greater the danger. I would stop and ask for forgiveness, she would drag me along, I would threaten her with retaliation from my parents, she would laugh, *here* she was almighty, I would cling to the doors of the shops, to the cornerstones, I didn't want to go any further until she had forgiven me, I would pull her back by her dress (she didn't have an easy time either) but she would drag me on, assuring me that this, too, would be reported to the teacher. It was getting late, the Jakobskirche was striking 8, you could hear the school bells, other children would start to run—I always had the greatest terror of being late—now we had to run as well and all the time the thought: “She'll tell, she won't tell.” It turns out she never told, not once, but there was always the possibility she might, an ever-growing possibility (I didn't tell yesterday, but you can be sure I'll tell today) which she never gave up. And sometimes—imagine, Milena—she would be so angry she would even stamp her feet on the street, and sometimes there was a woman selling coal nearby, watching. Milena, what nonsense! And how much I belong to you with all these cooks and threats and this terrible dust, which has been stirred up by 38 years and is now settling in my lungs.

But that's not at all what I wanted to tell you, or at least I wanted to say it differently, it's late, I have to stop so I can go to sleep and I won't be able to sleep because I will have stopped writing to you. Sometime if you'd like to know what my earlier years were like, I'll send you from Prague the gigantic letter I wrote my father about a half a year ago, but which I have not yet given him.

And I'll answer your letter tomorrow, or if it should get too late, then not until the day after. Since I've decided not to visit my parents in Franzensbad, I'm staying a few days longer,

although simply lying around on the balcony doesn't really deserve to be called a decision.

F

And once again thank you for your letter

*[Meran, June 23, 1920]*

Wednesday

It's difficult to tell the truth, since there is only one truth, but that truth is alive and therefore has a lively, changing face ("never really beautiful, not by any means, perhaps pretty on occasion"). If I had answered you Monday night it would have been terrible; I was lying in bed as if on the rack, the whole night I kept formulating my reply to you, complaining to you, trying to scare you away from me, cursing myself. (Also because I had received the letter late in the evening and was too sensitive and upset by the nearness of night for serious words.) Then I left early for Bolzano, taking the electric train to Klobenstein, 1,200 meters high, right across the first chain of the Dolomites I breathed the pure almost cold air, to be sure not entirely in my right mind. Later, on my way back, I wrote you the following, which I now copy, although even this strikes me as far too harsh, at least today; so the days change:

At last I'm by myself, the engineer stayed on in Bolzano, I am on my way back. The fact that the engineer and the landscapes came between us didn't cause me too much suffering, since I wasn't entirely there myself. I spent last evening until 12:30 with you, with writing, and even more with thinking, then I stayed in bed until 6:00, hardly sleeping a wink. Afterward I jumped up, like a stranger pulling another stranger out of bed, and that was a good thing, since otherwise I would have written and dozed the day away in Meran without any consolation. It doesn't matter that this excursion has barely even crawled into my consciousness and that it will remain in my memory only as a very vague dream. The night passed the way it did because with your letter (you have a very penetrating

gaze, which wouldn't mean much in itself—after all, people run around in the street all but asking for such a gaze—but you have the courage to match your gaze and above all the power to see beyond it; this ability to see beyond is the main thing, and you have exactly that) you have once again awakened all the old devils who sleep with one eye closed and one open, waiting for an opportunity. Of course this is frightening and makes me break out in a cold sweat (I swear to you: only because of them, the impalpable forces). Nevertheless it's a good thing, it's healthy, one watches the antics of these forces and knows that they are there. Still your interpretation of my “you should leave Vienna” isn't entirely correct. I did not write this carelessly (but under the impression of the whole report; that context hadn't ever even occurred to me beforehand; at the time I was so beside myself that your immediate departure from Vienna seemed the most natural thing. This was because I consider—really very selfishly—that whatever even grazes your husband strikes me square on, ten times and a hundred times harder, cutting me to pieces. It's no different than with you) nor did I fear the material burden (I don't earn much, but it would easily be enough for both of us, I think, barring any illness, of course), and moreover I am sincere as long as I have the power to think and express myself (I was before, too, but you're really the first one to make that helpful observation). The only thing I do fear—and I fear this with my eyes wide open, I am drowning in this fear, helpless (if I could sleep as deeply as I sink into fear I would no longer be alive)—is this inner conspiracy against myself (which the letter to my father will help you understand better, although not entirely, since the letter is much too focused on its purpose), which is based on the fact that I, who am not even the pawn of a pawn in the great chess game, far from it, now want to take the place of the queen, against all the rules and to the confusion of the game—I, the pawn of a pawn, a piece which doesn't even exist, which isn't even in the game—and next I may want to take the king's place as well or even the whole board. Moreover, if that were what I really wanted, it would have to happen in some other, even more inhuman way. That's why the suggestion I

made to you means much more to me than it does to you. At the moment it's the only thing beyond doubt, the only thing not sicklied over, the only thing which makes me unconditionally happy.

---

That's the way it was yesterday; today, for example, I'd say I will certainly come to Vienna, but since today is today and tomorrow tomorrow I'm going to leave myself some freedom. In any case I will not surprise you, nor will I come any later than Thursday. If I am coming I'll send you a letter by pneumatic mail—I wouldn't be able to see anyone but you, I know that much—and certainly not before Tuesday. I would arrive at the Südbahnhof, I still don't know where I would depart, so I would stay somewhere near the Südbahnhof; it's a shame I don't know where you give your Südbahnhof lessons, since I could wait for you there at 5:00. (I must have read this sentence once in a fairy tale, somewhere near the other sentence: And they lived happily ever after.) Today I looked at a map of Vienna, for a moment it seemed incomprehensible to me that they would build such a huge city when you only need one room.

F

I may have also addressed poste restante letters to Pollak.

*[Meran, June 24, 1920]*

Thursday

One is a lot brighter unrested than after a good night's sleep. Yesterday I had slept a little better and immediately wrote certain stupidities concerning the trip to Vienna. After all, this trip isn't something trivial, isn't anything to joke about. I won't surprise you under any circumstances; I tremble at the very idea. I won't even enter your apartment. If you haven't received a pneumatic letter by Thursday then I have gone to Prague. By the way, I am told I would arrive at the Westbahnhof—yesterday I believe I wrote Südbahnhof—but this is immaterial. Although I am impractical, negligent, and difficult to

transport, I am not excessively so (provided I've slept some), you don't have to worry about that, if I board the car bound for Vienna then I will most likely get off in Vienna; just getting on is a little difficult. So *auf Wiedersehn* (but it doesn't have to be in Vienna, it can also be in letters)

F.

*Ropucha* is beautiful—beautiful, but not very beautiful—not very beautiful, the story is like a centipede, as soon as it has been fixed by wit it is paralyzed, no longer able to move, not even backwards, and all the freedom and movement of the first half is lost. But apart from that it reads like a letter of Milena J.—and if it is a letter then I will answer it.

And in regard to Milena, the name has nothing at all to do with Germanness and Jewishness. The people who understand Czech best (apart from Czech Jews, of course) are the gentlemen from *Naše řeč*, second best are the readers of that journal, and third best the subscribers—of which I am one. And as such I say to you that the only thing really Czech about the name Milena is the diminutive: *milenka* \* Whether you like it or not, that is what philology says.

[Meran, June 25, 1920]

We are indeed beginning to misunderstand one another, Milena. You think I wanted to help you, but it was me I was trying to help. No more about that. And as far as I know I didn't ask you for any sleeping pills.

---

I hardly knew Otto Gross; but I did notice that there was something essential in him, something which was at least attempting to extend a hand from amid everything so "ridiculous." The bewildered mood of his friends and relatives (wife, brother-in-law, even the strangely quiet infant between the suitcases—there so he wouldn't fall out of bed when left

\*Beloved, or sweetheart.

alone—who drank black coffee, ate fruit or anything else you care to name) was somewhat reminiscent of the mood prevailing among Christ's disciples as they stood beneath the Crucified. At the time I was just coming from Budapest, where I had accompanied my fiancée, returning to Prague and my hemorrhage. Gross, his wife and brother-in-law were all taking the same night train. Kuh sang and made noise through half the night, shy-unshy as always; the woman was propped up in a corner, surrounded by filth—we only had seats in the corridor—and was sleeping (very much tended to by Gross but without apparent result). Throughout most of the night, however, Gross was telling me something (excepting small interruptions when he was probably giving himself injections), at least it seemed that way to me, for I really couldn't understand a thing. He demonstrated his learning with a passage from the Bible I didn't know, a fact I did not admit due to cowardice and exhaustion. He kept on endlessly dismantling this passage, endlessly adding new material, endlessly demanding my agreement. I would nod mechanically, while he would practically disappear before my eyes. Incidentally, I don't think I would have understood if I had been awake either—my own thinking is cold and slow. In this way the night passed. But there were other interruptions as well. Occasionally he would stand and hold on to something above him, and would be joggled through and through by the train to the point where he would become completely relaxed and even sleep. Later in Prague I only saw him in passing.

---

Unmusicality is not as clearly a misfortune as you say—in the first place it isn't for me; I inherited it from my predecessors (my paternal grandfather was a butcher in a village near Strakonitz; I have to not eat as much meat as he butchered) and it gives me something to hold on to; being related means a lot to me. But it is definitely a general human misfortune, similar or equal to being unable to cry or sleep. And anyway, understanding people who are musical means almost the same thing as being unmusical.

F

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And in regard to Milena, the name has nothing at all to do with Germanness and Jewishness. The people who understand Czech best (apart from Czech Jews, of course) are the gentlemen from *Naše řeč*, second best are the readers of that journal, and third best the subscribers—of which I am one. And as such I say to you that the only thing really Czech about the name Milena is the diminutive: *milenka* \* Whether you like it or not, that is what philology says.

[Meran, June 25, 1920]

We are indeed beginning to misunderstand one another, Milena. You think I wanted to help you, but it was me I was trying to help. No more about that. And as far as I know I didn't ask you for any sleeping pills.

---

I hardly knew Otto Gross; but I did notice that there was something essential in him, something which was at least attempting to extend a hand from amid everything so "ridiculous." The bewildered mood of his friends and relatives (wife, brother-in-law, even the strangely quiet infant between the suitcases—there so he wouldn't fall out of bed when left

\*Beloved, or sweetheart.



alone—who drank black coffee, ate fruit or anything else you care to name) was somewhat reminiscent of the mood prevailing among Christ's disciples as they stood beneath the Crucified. At the time I was just coming from Budapest, where I had accompanied my fiancée, returning to Prague and my hemorrhage. Gross, his wife and brother-in-law were all taking the same night train. Kuh sang and made noise through half the night, shy-unshy as always; the woman was propped up in a corner, surrounded by filth—we only had seats in the corridor—and was sleeping (very much tended to by Gross but without apparent result). Throughout most of the night, however, Gross was telling me something (excepting small interruptions when he was probably giving himself injections), at least it seemed that way to me, for I really couldn't understand a thing. He demonstrated his learning with a passage from the Bible I didn't know, a fact I did not admit due to cowardice and exhaustion. He kept on endlessly dismantling this passage, endlessly adding new material, endlessly demanding my agreement. I would nod mechanically, while he would practically disappear before my eyes. Incidentally, I don't think I would have understood if I had been awake either—my own thinking is cold and slow. In this way the night passed. But there were other interruptions as well. Occasionally he would stand and hold on to something above him, and would be joggled through and through by the train to the point where he would become completely relaxed and even sleep. Later in Prague I only saw him in passing.

---

Unmusicality is not as clearly a misfortune as you say—in the first place it isn't for me; I inherited it from my predecessors (my paternal grandfather was a butcher in a village near Strakonitz; I have to not eat as much meat as he butchered) and it gives me something to hold on to; being related means a lot to me. But it is definitely a general human misfortune, similar or equal to being unable to cry or sleep. And anyway, understanding people who are musical means almost the same thing as being unmusical.

F

So if I do get to Vienna I'll wire you or write you at the post office, Tuesday or Wednesday.

I'm sure I put stamps on all the letters; can't you see on the envelope that the stamps were torn off?

[*Meran, June 25, 1920*]

Friday evening

What I wrote this morning was stupid, and now come both your letters, brimming with kindness. I will answer them orally; I'll be in Vienna Tuesday, if nothing unexpected happens inside or outside. It would be a very good idea to tell you today (I think Tuesday is a holiday, the post office where I would send you a telegram or pneumatic letter may well be closed) where I intend to wait for you, but I would suffocate by then if I were to name a place right now and then have to see this place for three days and three nights, empty, waiting for me to arrive Tuesday at a certain hour. Is there as much patience as I need, Milena, anywhere in the world? Tell me Tuesday.

F

*Vienna, June 29, 1920*

M. Jesenská

Vienna VIII

Poste Restante

Post Office Bennogasse-Josefstädterstrasse

Tuesday 10:00

This letter probably won't arrive before 12:00, or rather I'm sure it won't, since it's already 10. So not until tomorrow morning—perhaps it's just as well, for I am indeed in Vienna, sitting in a café in the Südbahnhof (what kind of cocoa is this, what

kind of pastry? And this is what you're living on?) but am not entirely here, I haven't slept for two nights, the question is will I sleep the third night in the Hotel Riva where I am staying, next to a garage at the Südbahnhof. I can't think of anything better to say: I'll wait for you Wednesday starting at 10:00 A.M. in front of the hotel. Please, Milena, don't surprise me by coming up from the side or from behind; I promise not to do this either. Today I'll probably see the sights: Lerchenfelderstrasse, the post office, the ring from the Südbahnhof to the Lerch-str., the woman who sells coal and things like that—as invisible as possible.

Yours

[Prague, July 4, 1920]  
Sunday

Today Milena, Milena, Milena—I can't write anything else. But I will. So today, Milena, just in haste, exhaustion, not-being-there (the last will be true tomorrow too). Why shouldn't I be tired—they promise a sick man vacation for a quarter of a year and give him 4 days and then only a fraction of Tuesday and Sunday and they even cut mornings and evenings. Am I not right not to have fully recovered? Am I not right? Milena! (Spoken into your left ear, while you are lying on the pitiful bed in a deep sleep of good provenance—slowly, unconsciously, turning from right to left toward my mouth.)

---

The trip? At first it was entirely uncomplicated, there wasn't a single newspaper on the platform. A reason to run back out; you were no longer there—that was all right. Then I re-boarded, the train pulled out, I started reading my paper, still everything was fine, after a while I stopped reading, *but then suddenly you were no longer there*; or actually you were there and I felt your presence with all my soul, although this kind of

being there was very different from the kind we knew during the 4 days and I first had to become accustomed to it. I resumed my reading, but the entry in Bahr's diary began with a description of Bad Kreuzen near Grein on the Danube. Then I stopped reading; however, when I looked out, a train was passing and on the car was written: Grein. I looked back inside the compartment. Opposite me a man was reading last Sunday's *Národní Listy*: seeing a feuilleton by Růžena Jesenská, I borrow it, begin reading aimlessly, put it down and then sit there with your face, looking just the way it did when we parted at the station. What happened on the platform was a natural phenomenon I have never observed before: sunlight dimmed, not by clouds, but of its own accord.

What else shall I say? My throat does not obey, nor do my hands.

Yours

So tomorrow the amazing story of the rest of the trip.

*[Prague, July 4, 1920]*

Sunday, a little while later

A courier has brought the enclosed letter (please tear it up at once, also the one from Max) and wants an immediate answer, I'm writing that I'll be there at 9:00. What I have to say is so clear—how I will say it I don't know. Good heavens: if I were married, I would come home and instead of the courier I'd find the bed, impossible to hide in and devoid of any subterranean passage to Vienna! I tell myself this so I'll realize how easy the difficulty ahead really is.

Yours

I'm sending you the letter, as if by doing so I could transport you next to me, especially close, as I walk up and down in front of her house.

[Prague, July 4-5, 1920]  
Sunday 11:30

3)

I'm numbering at  
least these letters,  
not one of them can  
miss you, just like I  
couldn't miss you in  
the little park.

No result, despite the fact that everything is so clear and so clearly expressed by me. I won't go into details, just that she didn't say a single word that was even remotely angry about you or me. I was so clear I wasn't even compassionate. The only thing I could truthfully say was that nothing had changed between her and me, and that it hardly ever would change, only—no more, it's disgusting, work for a hangman but not for me. Just one thing, Milena, if she falls seriously ill (she looks very bad and her despair is boundless, I have to see her again tomorrow afternoon)—anyway, if she gets sick or if something else happens to her, it's no longer in my control, for I can only go on telling her the truth, and this truth isn't merely truth, but more, it is my being dissolved inside you while I am walking next to her—so if something does happen then, Milena, you have to come.

F

Nonsense: of course you can't come, for the same reason.

---

Tomorrow I'll send the father-letter to your apartment, please take good care of it, I still might want to give it to my father someday. If possible don't let anyone else read it. And as you read it understand all the lawyer's tricks: it is a lawyer's letter. And at the same time never forget your great Nevertheless.

---

Monday morning

I am sending you the *Poor Fiddler* today, not because it means so much to me; although it once did years ago. Rather I'm sending it because it is so Viennese, so unmusical, so sad, because he was looking down on us in the Volksgarten (at us! You were walking next to me; just think, you were walking next to me), because he is so bureaucratic, and because he loved a girl who was good at business.

[Prague, July 5, 1920]

Monday morning

4)

I received the Friday letter early, later on the Friday-night letter. The first is so sad—sad, sad station-face—and it's sad not so much because of its content, but because the letter is old, because all that is past: the woods we shared, the suburb, the ride. Of course it will never fade, not ever, this ride we took together, straight as an arrow, up through the stone street, back along the avenue in the evening sun, it will never stop, and still it's a stupid joke to say it won't. Here there are various documents lying around, a few letters I just read, an exchange of greetings with the director in his office (not dismissed) and other colleagues here and there, and accompanying all of this is a little bell ringing in my ear: "She's not with you any more," of course there's also a mighty bell somewhere in heaven ringing: "She will not leave you," but after all, the small bell is in my ear. And then again there is the night-letter, it's impossible to understand how my breast could expand and contract enough to breathe this air, it's impossible to understand how you can be far away.

And nevertheless I'm not complaining, all this is not a complaint and I have your word.

---

Now the story of the trip and then you can go ahead and say you're not an angel: I knew for ages that my Austrian visa

had actually (and figuratively) run out two months back, but in Meran I was told it wasn't required for transit and indeed I had no troubles when I crossed the Austrian border. Because of that I completely forgot about this omission while I was in Vienna. In Gmünd, however, the official at the passport control—a young man, hard—discovered it immediately. The passport was set aside, everyone else allowed to pass through to customs control, everyone except me. That was bad enough (I am constantly being interrupted, after all it's my first day back, I don't have to listen to the office gossip, not yet anyway, and people are coming in all the time and wanting to drive me away from you, that is, you away from me, but they won't succeed, will they, Milena? Nobody will, ever.) So that's the way it was, but then you started working. A border guard comes—friendly, open, Austrian, interested, cordial—and leads me through stairs and corridors to the headquarters of the chief inspector. A Rumanian-Jewish woman was standing there with a similarly defective passport, strangely enough also one of your friendly emissaries, you angel of Jews. But the opposing forces are still much stronger. The large inspector and his small adjutant (both yellow, emaciated, sullen, at least for the moment) take possession of the passport. The inspector is finished in no time: "Return to Vienna and obtain the visa at police headquarters!" I can do nothing but repeat several times: "That is terrible for me." The inspector also repeats his answer several times, ironically and angrily: "You only think it is." "Can't the visa be obtained by wire?" "No." "Even if I pay all costs?" "No." "Isn't there a higher authority here?" "No." The woman, seeing my distress, remains magnificently calm and asks the inspector to let at least me pass. Your means are too weak, Milena. You won't get me through that way. I have to walk all the way back to passport control and fetch my luggage, there's no question of my leaving today. And now we're sitting together in the chief inspector's headquarters, the guard has little consolation to offer except that the train tickets may be extended etc., the inspector has said his last word and retreated into his private office, only the small adjutant is still there. I calculate: the next train to Vienna departs at 10 P.M.,

arrives in Vienna at 2:30 A.M. I'm still covered with bites from the Riva-vermin, what will my room at the Franz Josefs Bahnhof look like? But since I don't get a room, I go to the Lerchenfelder Strasse (that's right, at 2:30 A.M.) and ask for a room (that's right, at 5 A.M.). Anyway, whatever happens, I must obtain the visa Monday morning (will I get it right away or will I have to wait until Tuesday?), then go to your house and surprise you at the door, which you open. Good heavens. Here my thinking takes a break, but then continues: But what shape will I be in after such a night and the journey, and in the evening I'll still have to leave on the train that takes 16 hours, what will I look like when I arrive in Prague and what will the director say, whom I'll have to ask for sick leave once again? Certainly you don't want all that, but what do you really want? There's no way out. It occurs to me the only slight relief would be to spend the night in Gmünd and wait until morning before traveling to Vienna and so, already exhausted, I ask the quiet adjutant about a morning train bound for Vienna. There's one at 5:30 which arrives at 11:00 A.M. Good, I'll take that train and so will the Rumanian woman. But suddenly the conversation takes a turn, I don't know how, at any rate in a flash it's clear that the little adjutant wants to help us. If we spend the night in Gmünd then the next morning, when he's alone in the office, he'll secretly let us through onto the local train to Prague, where we would arrive at 4:00 P.M. But we're supposed to tell the inspector that we're taking the morning train to Vienna. Wonderful! Although just relatively wonderful, since I'll still have to wire Prague. But even so. The inspector arrives, we act out a small comedy about the morning train to Vienna, the adjutant then sends us off, we're supposed to pay him a secret visit later in the evening to discuss the remaining details. In my blindness I think that all this is your doing, whereas in reality it's merely the last attack of the opposing forces. So now we slowly leave the station, the woman and myself (the express train which was supposed to have taken us on is still standing there, customs control is taking a long time). How far is it into town? An hour. That too. But it turns out there are 2 hotels at



the station, we'll go to one of them. There's a track running right next to the hotel, we still have to cross it, a freight train is coming. I want to hurry across the tracks, but the woman holds me back and we have to wait. A minor contribution to our misfortune, we think. But precisely this moment of waiting, without which I would not have made it to Prague on Sunday, is the turning point. It's as if you had run up and down knocking on all the gates of heaven to plead for me, just as you ran up and down knocking at all the hotels of the Westbahnhof, for now your guard comes running after us down the long path from the station, out of breath, shouting: "Hurry up, come back, the inspector is letting you through!" Is it possible? Moments like that make one choke with emotion. We have to beg the guard ten times before he'll take any money. But now we have to run back, fetch our luggage from the inspector's headquarters, run with it to the passport control, and on to customs. But now you've already set everything aright; I cannot carry my luggage any further—by chance there's a porter next to me; at passport control I run into a crowd—the guard clears the way for me; at customs without realizing it I lose the little case with the gold cufflinks—an official finds it and hands it to me. We're aboard the train and leave at once, at last I'm able to wipe the perspiration off my face and chest. Stay with me always!

F

*[Prague, July 5, 1920]*  
Monday

5) I think

Naturally I should go to sleep, it's one o'clock at night; I would have written you long before, this evening, but Max was here, whom I really wanted to see and whom I couldn't see because of the girl and my worries concerning her. I was with the girl until about 8:30, Max had said he'd drop by at 9, then we went walking around till 12:30. Just think: he didn't realize

what I thought was blindingly clear in my letters: that you you you—again the writing stops for a moment—that it's you I'm talking about; he didn't realize, he didn't learn your name until today (after all, I hadn't ever spelled it out so bluntly, since his wife could have read the letters). And now once again, Milena, one of my lies, the second one: You once asked, shocked, whether I thought the Reiner affair in Mile (I wanted to write "Max" but wrote "Milena," then crossed out the name; don't condemn me for that, it really makes me hurt so much I want to cry) Max's letter was meant as a warning. I hadn't exactly thought of it as a warning, just something like a musical accompaniment to the text; however, when I saw how frightened you were I consciously lied to you (I had to get up, somewhere a member of that feared race of mice is gnawing away), denying there was any connection. Although it turns out there really wasn't any connection, I didn't know that and so I lied.

IN THE MARGIN: And despite everything, I think that if it is possible to die of happiness then I will certainly do so. And if someone destined to die can be kept alive by happiness, then I will stay alive.

The girl: she was better today, but at the high cost of my having allowed her to write to you. I'm very sorry I did. The telegram I sent to the post office in your name today is a sure sign of my anxiety over you: "Girl is writing you please answer kindly and"—here I really wanted to add a "very"—"firmly and don't abandon me"). On the whole, things went more smoothly today, I prevailed upon myself to talk peacefully about Meran, the mood became less ominous. But once the conversation returned to the main subject (her whole body went on shaking for minutes, next to me at the Karlsplatz) the only thing I could say was that next to you everything else—even if it hasn't changed in itself—disappears and turns to nothing. She posed her last question, against which I have never been able to defend myself, namely: "I can't leave, but if you send me away, then I'll go. Are you sending me away?" (There's something very loathsome, apart from the arrogance, in my telling you this, but I'm doing so out of fear for you.

What wouldn't I do out of fear for you. Look what a strange new type of fear.) I replied: "Yes." To which she said: "But I really can't go." And then she became talkative beyond her strength, poor thing, saying that she didn't understand it all, that you love your husband and still were talking with me in secret, etc. To be honest she also had some bad words about you, for which I would have liked to hit her and should have, but wasn't I bound to let her at least pour out her grievances? She mentioned that she would like to write you, and in my worry about her—and in my infinite trust in you—I consented, although I knew this would cost me a few nights' sleep. I was upset precisely by the fact that this consent calmed her down. Be friendly and firm, but more firm than friendly, but what am I saying, for don't I know that you'll write whatever's best. And isn't my fear, that in her distress she might write something insidious and turn you against me, a great dishonor to you? Of course it's a dishonor, but what am I supposed to do if this fear, and not my heart, is beating in my body? I shouldn't have consented after all. And now I'm going to see her again tomorrow, it's a holiday (Hus), she begged me so much to go off with her somewhere in the afternoon; she said I wouldn't have to see her for the rest of the week. Maybe I can persuade her not to write the letter, if she hasn't already done so. On the other hand, I then say to myself: Maybe she only wants an explanation, maybe your word will calm her precisely through its friendly firmness, maybe—this is how all my thoughts run now—she will kneel before your letter.

Franz

IN THE MARGIN: Another reason I allowed her to write. She wanted to see some of your letters to me. But I can't show them to her.

[Prague, July 6, 1920]  
Tuesday morning

6)

A slight blow for me: a telegram from Paris, informing me that an old uncle of mine—whom I am really very fond of, who lives in Madrid, and who hasn't been here for many years—is arriving tomorrow evening. It is a blow because it will take time and I need all the time I have and a thousand times more than all the time I have and most of all I'd like to have all the time there is just for you, for thinking about you, for breathing in you. My apartment is making me restless, the evenings are making me restless, I'd like to be someplace different. I'd like many things to be different and I'd prefer it if the office didn't exist at all; but then I think that I deserve to be hit in the face for speaking beyond the present moment, this moment, which belongs to you.

---

So may I go to Laurin? He knows Pick, for example. Won't it be easy for word to get out this way that I was in Vienna? Please write me about this.

---

Max is very upset over your news from the sanatorium concerning Přebram, he is reproaching himself for having thoughtlessly broken off what he had begun to arrange for Přebram. Moreover his relations with the authorities are now such that he might be able to obtain everything necessary without great difficulties. He urgently asks you to kindly summarize what there is to say concerning the injustice being done Přebram. If you can, send me this *short* summary when you get a chance. (The Russian's name was: Sprach.)

---

Somehow I can't write about anything but what concerns us and us alone, in the middle of the crowded world. Everything else is foreign to me. Wrong! Wrong! But my lips are babbling and my face is lying in your lap.

---

Vienna did leave behind one bitter aftertaste, may I say it? Up in the woods—I believe it was the second day—you said something like: “The battle over the front hall can’t last long.” And now in the next to last letter to Meran you write about your illness. How am I supposed to find my way out from between these two things. I’m not saying this out of jealousy, Milena, I’m not jealous. Either the world is so tiny or else we are so gigantic; in any case we fill it completely. Of whom should I be jealous?

[Prague, July 6, 1920]  
Tuesday evening

7)

You see, Milena, now I’m sending you the letter myself and have no idea what it contains. It happened like this: I had promised her that I’d be waiting in front of her house this afternoon at 3:30. We were supposed to go on a steamboat ride, but last night I got to bed very late and hardly slept; so this morning I sent her a pneumatic letter saying that I had to sleep this afternoon and could not come until 6:00. In my uneasiness, which would not be assuaged by all the safeguards of letters and telegrams, I added: “Do not send the letter to Vienna until we have discussed it.” But she had already written it early this morning, half out of her senses—she can’t even say what she wrote—and thrown it in the mailbox right away. Upon receiving my letter, the poor girl runs to the main post office, absolutely horrified, manages to intercept the letter somewhere, and is so happy that she gives the official all the money she has—only later is she shocked at the amount—and in the evening brings me the letter. What am I to do now? After all, my hope for a prompt and completely happy solution rests on this letter and on the effect of your reply: I admit it is an irrational hope but it’s the only one I have. If I now open the letter and read it, in the first place I will anger her and in the second it would

then be impossible for me to send it. I therefore place it sealed in your hands, wholly, utterly—just as I have already placed myself in them.

It's a little gloomy in Prague, I haven't received any letters, my heart is a little heavy. Of course it's impossible that a letter could be here already, but explain that to my heart.

F

Her address: Julie Wohryzek  
Prague II  
Na Smečkách 6

*[Prague, July 6, 1920]*  
Tuesday, even later

8)

No sooner had I mailed the letter than it occurred to me: How could I have asked you to do this? Apart from the fact that it's really just up to me to do what should and must be done, it's probably impossible for you to write and entrust such a reply to a stranger. So now, Milena, forgive the letters and the telegrams, attribute them to my reason made weak by parting from you; it doesn't matter if you don't reply, I'll just have to find another solution. Don't worry about this. It's only that I'm so exhausted from all the walks, today up on the Vyšehrad Escarpment. On top of this my uncle is arriving tomorrow, and I won't have much time for myself.

But on a better subject: Do you know when you were most beautifully dressed in Vienna, absolutely, absurdly beautifully dressed? There can't be any argument about it: on Sunday.

[Prague, July 7, 1920]  
Wednesday evening

9)

Just a few words to consecrate my new apartment, written in the utmost haste because my parents are arriving from Franzensbad at 10:00 and my uncle at 12:00 from Paris and both want to be met; new apartment because in order to give my uncle some room I've moved into my sister's apartment, which is empty while she is in Marienbad. An empty large apartment, how wonderful; the street, however, is noisier—even so it's not too bad a trade. And I have to write you, Milena, because you might conclude from my last lamenting letters (I tore up the worst one this morning out of shame; think, I still don't have any news from you, but it's stupid to complain about the mail—what do I have to do with the postal service) that I'm unsure of you, that I'm afraid of losing you: no, I'm not unsure. Could you be what you are to me if I weren't sure? I feel this way because of our brief physical closeness and sudden physical separation. (Why did it have to be Sunday? Why 7 o'clock? Why happen at all?) The whole thing can be a little confusing. Forgive me! And when you go to bed tonight, as a good night wish from me, take in—all in one stream—everything I am and have: all of which is blissfully happy to rest in you.

F

[Prague, July 8, 1920]  
early Thursday morning

10)

The street is noisy, moreover there's construction going on diagonally opposite; directly opposite is not the Russian church but apartments full of people. Nonetheless, while being alone in a room may be a prerequisite for life, being alone in an apartment is a—to be exact: *temporary*—prerequisite for happiness (*one* prerequisite, because what use would the apartment

be if I weren't alive, if I didn't have a home where I could rest—something like two bright, blue eyes, brought to life by some inconceivable grace). But as it is, the apartment is part of my happiness; everything is quiet: the bathroom, the kitchen, the front hall, the 3 additional rooms—not like those communal apartments: the noise, the lechery, the incest of dissolute bodies, thoughts and desires long uncontrolled, where improper, haphazard things take place, where illicit affairs occur, where illegitimate children are conceived, in every corner, behind every piece of furniture, and where it keeps going on and on, different from your quiet empty Sunday suburbs, more like the wild overcrowded suffocating suburbs on a relentless, unending Saturday night.

---

My sister has come the whole long way to bring me breakfast (which wasn't necessary, since I would have gone home myself) and had to ring several minutes before I finally awoke from this letter and my isolation.

F

The apartment does not belong to me, of course; my brother-in-law will also be staying here, off and on during the summer

*[Prague, July 8, 1920]*  
Thursday morning

11)

At last your letter. Just a few hasty words on the main subject, even though the haste may cause a few inaccuracies I will later regret: because we all three know each other independently, this case is unlike any other I know; so there's no need to make it bleaker than it is by citing experiences from other cases (corpses—torment for three; for two—some way to disappear). I am not his friend; I have not betrayed a friend—but I'm not merely his acquaintance either; rather I am bound to him, in some respects maybe more than to a friend. Nor have you betrayed him, since you love him—whatever you may



say—and if and when we unite (I thank you, my shoulders!) it will be on a different level, outside his domain. Consequently this is not simply our exclusive affair to be kept secret, nor is it just torment anxiety pain worry—your letter has shocked me out of the relatively calm state I was still enjoying from our being together and which may now be reverting to the turmoil of Meran, although there are powerful obstacles standing in the way of such a reversion. It is much more an open—and clear-cut in its openness—matter of the three of us, even if you should keep silent for a while. I, too, am very much against brooding over all the various possibilities (I am against this because I have you; if I were alone, nothing could stop me from such ruminations) since doing so transforms one in the present into a battleground of the future—and how is such devastated ground to bear the house of the future.

At the moment I don't know anything anymore, I've been back at work for three days and haven't written a line; maybe I'll be able to now. Incidentally, Max dropped by as I was writing this; it goes without saying that his silence is reliable; for everyone except sisters parents girl and him, I came back via Linz.

F

May I send you some money? Perhaps through Laurin, to whom I'll explain you lent me money in Vienna which he can send you along with your honorarium? I'm also a little frightened by what you promised to write concerning fear.

*[Prague, July 9, 1920]*  
Friday

All writing seems futile to me, and it really is. The best would probably be for me to go to Vienna and take you away; I may even do it, although you don't want me to. Actually there are only two possibilities, each more beautiful than the other, either you come to Prague or you come to Libešic. I crept up to Jílovský yesterday—mistrustful in the old Jewish tradition—

and caught him just before he left for Libešic; he had your letter to Staša. He is an excellent person: happy, open, intelligent, takes you by the arm, talks up a storm, is ready for anything, understands everything and a little more. Together with his wife he was intending to go see Florian, who lives near Brno, and from there on to Vienna to see you. He's coming back to Prague this afternoon and will bring Staša's reply; I'll speak with him at 3:00, then send you a telegram. Forgive the babble contained in the 11 letters, throw them out, now reality is on its way, bigger and better. At the moment the only thing to be afraid of—I think—is your love for your husband. The new task you write about certainly is difficult, but don't underestimate the strength I derive from being close to you. Of course for the time being I'm not sleeping, but I am much calmer than I thought yesterday evening when I was confronted with your two letters (by chance Max was there, which wasn't necessarily good, since it was, after all, too much my own affair—oh, poor Milena, the jealousy of the nonjealous man is already beginning). The telegram you sent today is also somewhat reassuring. I'm worried about your husband now—at least for the moment—but not too much, not unbearably. He had taken on a huge task, which he has in part (perhaps entirely) carried out with honor; I don't think he could carry it any further, and not at all because he lacks the strength to do so (what is my strength compared to his?) but because he is much too burdened with everything that has gone on before, much too oppressed, too deprived of the concentration such a task would require. Compared to this, it may actually come as a relief to him. Why shouldn't I write him?

F

*[Prague, July 9, 1920]*  
Friday

Just a few words concerning Staša's letter: my uncle, who is otherwise very kind but right now a little bit of a nuisance, is

waiting for me. Well, Staša's letter is indeed very warm and friendly, except it does have some slight defect, perhaps only a formal one (which is not to say that letters without this defect are more heartfelt, probably the opposite is true), still either it is missing something or else it contains too much. Maybe it's her capacity to think things over, which she seems to get from her husband, incidentally; he spoke with me yesterday in exactly the same way; today, on the other hand, when I wanted to apologize for yesterday's mistrust ("he dragged it out of Kafka") and pour my heart out a little, he virtually sent me on my way—as cordially as could be—with Staša's letter and the details concerning the rendezvous Staša is promising for Monday. But why should I speak this way about these really kind people? Jealousy, it really is jealousy, but I promise you, Milena, that I'll never plague you with it, only me, only myself. Nevertheless, the letter does appear to contain one misunderstanding since what you really wanted was neither Staša's advice nor for her to speak to your husband; nothing could substitute for what you most desired, that is, her presence. So it seemed to me. And the issue of money is unimportant, I already explained that to her husband yesterday. So Monday I'll talk to Staša (besides, Jilovský has a very good excuse today, he was in the middle of a business meeting; Pittermann and Ferenc Futurista were sitting at the same table, waiting impatiently to begin their conference concerning a new cabaret). Really, if my uncle weren't waiting I'd tear this letter up and write a new one, particularly because there just happens to be a phrase in Staša's letter which makes everything else acceptable, as far as I'm concerned: "to live with Kafka."

I hope to receive more news from you today. It turns out I'm a capitalist who doesn't even know the extent of his possessions. This afternoon at work, as I was asking for news in vain, they brought me a letter of yours which had arrived in Meran shortly after I had left (incidentally along with a card from Příbram)—reading it was strange.

Yours

[Prague, July 10, 1920]  
Saturday

14)

This is bad: the day before yesterday your two unhappy letters arrived, yesterday nothing but the telegram (even though it was indeed reassuring it still seemed a little patched together—the way telegrams are) and today nothing at all. And those letters weren't exactly very comforting for me—far from it—and in them you said you'd write again right away and you haven't written. And two evenings ago I sent you an urgent telegram with prepaid urgent reply, which also should have arrived long ago. I repeat the text: "It was the only right thing to do, be calm, your home is here, Jílovský and wife probably arriving in Vienna in one week. How shall I send money?" But there hasn't been an answer—"Go to Vienna" I tell myself. "But Milena doesn't want you to, very decidedly not. You would mean a decision, she doesn't want you, she has worries and doubts, that's why she wants Staša." Despite this I should go, but I'm not well. However, I am calm, relatively calm, calmer than I had never hoped to be again during these last years, although I do have a bad cough during the day and for fifteen minutes at a stretch during the night. It's probably only a matter of reacclimating to Prague and the consequence of the chaotic time in Meran, the time before I knew you and had looked into your eyes.

How dark Vienna has become and yet for 4 days it was so bright. What is being concocted for me there while I sit here, cease my writing, and lay my face in my hands?

F

Then I looked out of my chair through the open window into the rain, and various possibilities occurred to me: that you might be sick, tired, in bed, that Frau Kohler might act as a go-between and then—strangely enough the most obvious, natural possibility—that the door will open and there you are.

[Prague, July 12, 1920]  
Monday

15)

The past two days have been horrible, to say the least. But now I realize it wasn't your fault at all; some malicious devil was holding back all your letters from Thursday on. Friday I received only your telegram, nothing on Saturday, nothing on Sunday, today 4 letters—from Thursday Friday Saturday. I'm too tired to really write, too tired to sort out what remains for me from these 4 letters, from this mountain of despair, suffering, and love; one is so selfish when one is tired and has spent two nights and days consumed by the most awful imaginings. But nevertheless—and again this is part of your life-giving force, Mother Milena—nevertheless I am essentially less shaken now than I have been during the past 7 years, perhaps, excluding the one spent in the country.

Be that as it may, I still don't understand why I didn't receive any answer to my urgent telegram of Thursday evening. I then wired Frau Kohler, still no answer. Don't be afraid that I might write to your husband, I really don't have much desire to do that. The only thing I do desire is to go to Vienna, but I won't do that either—even if there weren't such obstacles as your opposition to my coming, passport problems, work, cough, exhaustion, my sister's wedding (Thursday). In any case, going to Vienna would be better than spending afternoons the way I did Saturday or Sunday. On Saturday: I wandered around a little with my uncle, a little with Max, and every two hours I'd run to the office to ask for mail. Things were better in the evening; I went to Laurin's, he hadn't heard of anything bad happening to you, he also mentioned your letter—which made me happy—and telephoned Kisch at the *Neue Freie Presse*. He hadn't heard anything either, but said he would ask—not your husband—about you and call back this evening. So I was sitting at Laurin's, heard your name mentioned several times and was grateful to him. Even so, talking to him is neither easy nor pleasant. He really is like a child, like

a not-too-bright child—he boasts, lies, puts on a show just like a child and one feels exaggeratedly sneaky and repulsively insincere sitting there listening to him. Especially since he’s not just a child, but a big and serious grown-up when it comes to kindness, sympathy and readiness to help. There’s no way out of this dichotomy and if I hadn’t kept saying to myself “one more time, I want to hear your name just one more time,” I would have left long before I did. He also talked about his wedding (Tuesday) in the same tone.

IN THE MARGIN: You misunderstood about the “level,” I didn’t mean it that way, I’ll explain soon.

Sunday was worse. Actually I had wanted to go to the cemetery and that would have been the right thing to do, but I spent the whole morning in bed and in the afternoon I had to go to my sister’s in-laws, where I had never been before. Then it was 6:00. Back to the office to ask if a telegram had arrived. Nothing. What now? Check what’s playing in the theater, since Jílovský had very briefly (he was in a hurry) mentioned that Staša was going to a Wagner opera on Monday. Next, I read that the performance begins at 6:00, but at 6:00 we have our rendezvous. Bad. What now? Go check the house in the Obstgasse. It’s quiet, no one going in, no one going out, I wait a little, first in front of the house and then across the street: nothing—houses like that are so much wiser than the people who stare at them. And now? Into the Lucerna building, where *Dobré Dílo* used to be on display. It’s no longer there. So maybe Staša’s house, an easy decision since I’m sure she can’t be home right now. A peaceful pretty house, with a small garden in back. Because a padlock is hanging on the front door, I can ring the bell with impunity. Downstairs a brief conversation with the building superintendent just in order to pronounce the words “Libešic” and “Jílovský”; unfortunately there was no possibility of saying “Milena.” And now? Now the dumbest part. I walk into the Café Arco, where I haven’t been for years, in order to find somebody who knows you. Fortunately no one was there and I was able to leave right away. Not many more Sundays like that, Milena!

F

IN THE MARGIN: Thank you very much for the pictures, but Jarmila does not look like you, at most only in a certain light, a certain glow which covers her face as well as yours.

IN THE MARGIN: Yesterday I couldn't write, everything in Vienna was too dark for me.

[Prague, July 13, 1920]

Tuesday, a little later

17)

How tired you sound in your letter from Saturday evening. There is a lot I'd have to say about this letter, but I'm not going to say anything to such a tired person—I am tired as well; to tell the truth my head is completely unrested and aching for the first time since I arrived in Vienna. I won't say a thing, just seat you in the armchair (you claim you haven't done enough nice things for me, but is there anything nicer, any greater honor you can show me than simply being with me and allowing me to sit in front of you?). So now I seat you in the chair, unable to grasp the scope of my fortune with words eyes hands and my poor heart, my happiness that you are here and really mine. And actually it's not at all you I love, but rather the existence you have bestowed on me.

I won't talk about Laurin today, or about the girl either; this will all take its course, how distant it all is.

F

What you say about the *Poor Fiddler* is entirely correct. If I said it didn't mean anything to me I was only being cautious, since I didn't know how you would like it, also because I'm ashamed of the story, as though I had written it myself and the beginning is indeed wrong and it does have a number of defects, ridiculous moments, dilettantish features, and deadly affectations (which are especially noticeable when read aloud, I could show you where) and particularly this way of practicing music is a lamentably ridiculous invention; it is enough to make the girl (and the whole world, too, myself included) so ex-

tremely angry that she hurls everything in her shop at the story, until it is torn to pieces by its own elements, a fate it richly deserves. Of course there's no more beautiful fate for a story than for it to disappear, and in this way. Even the narrator, that droll psychologist, will agree to this completely, since he himself is probably the real poor fiddler, playing this story as unmusically as possible, exaggeratedly thanked by the tears from your eyes.

[Prague, July 13, 1920]  
Tuesday

Your two telegrams are right here; I understand, as long as there were letters from Jarmila you didn't ask about mail for Kramer—it's all right; above all you shouldn't be the least bit afraid I might do something on my own without obtaining your approval beforehand. But the main thing is that, after an almost sleepless night, at last I'm sitting in front of this letter which seems to me infinitely important. None of the letters I sent you from Prague would have needed to be written, not even the last ones, and only this one has a right to exist, or rather the others might exist but this one would have to be considered the most important. Unfortunately I won't be able to tell you the smallest part of what I was saying to you yesterday evening after leaving Staša, or what I was telling you last night or this morning. Still the main thing is that no matter what the others—beginning with Laurin then Staša and on to people I don't know, extending in a wide radius with you at the center—no matter what they say about you in their pretentious wisdom, their bestial dullness (although animals aren't that dull-witted), their devilish kindness, their murderous love—I, I, Milena will know to the end of my days that you will do the right thing whatever you decide, whether you remain in Vienna or come here or stay hovering between Prague and Vienna or now do one thing now the other. *What in the world would I be doing with you if I didn't know that.* Just



as there is no place in the deep sea which isn't under the greatest pressure, so it is with you—but all other life is a disgrace and makes me sick. I used to think I couldn't stand living, couldn't stand people, and I was very ashamed of myself; but now you are confirming that it wasn't life which seemed unbearable to me.

Staša is awful, I'm sorry. Yesterday I wrote you about her but didn't dare send the letter. As you said, she is warm, friendly, beautiful, and svelte, but terrible. She was once your friend and so there must have been a heavenly light in her eyes at one time, but it has been utterly, frighteningly extinguished. One shudders with horror at her as if at a fallen angel. I don't know what happened to her, probably her husband has extinguished her. She is tired and dead and doesn't know it. When I want to imagine hell I think about her and her husband and repeat this sentence to myself, my teeth chattering: "Then we'll run into the forest." Forgive me, Milena, dear dear Milena forgive me, but that's the way it is.

IN THE MARGIN: I am very much in favor of the Chicago plan, under the condition that errand boys who can't run errands will also be employed.

Of course I was only with her for  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an hour—in her apartment and then on the way to the German theater. I was overly friendly, overly talkative, overly confident; after all, it was also an opportunity finally just to talk about you and you kept her true face hidden from me for a long time. What a stony forehead she has and how golden shines the inscription there which reads: "I am dead and despise anyone who isn't." But of course she was friendly and we discussed all possible aspects of going to Vienna, but I cannot convince myself that it would be a good thing if she went: perhaps for her.

Then in the evening I went to see Laurin, he was not in the editorial office—I was late—so I talked for a while with a man I know from before; we sat on the couch where Reiner lay down for the last time a few months back. The man had been with him throughout that last evening and told me a thing or two.

So the day was too much for me and I couldn't sleep; moreover my sister had come back from Marienbad with her hus-

band and child for 2 days—on account of the Spanish uncle—and the beautiful apartment was no longer empty. But see how kind people are to me (I'm just saying that, as if by mentioning it to you they might be repaid for their kindness). They left me alone in the bedroom, removed one bed, distributed themselves among the other rooms not yet cleaned up, and left the bathroom to me, confining their own washing to the kitchen, etc. Yes, I'm doing well.

Yours

Somehow I'm not at all in agreement with this letter; these are merely the last remnants of an extremely intense, extremely secret conversation.

*[Prague, July 14, 1920]*  
Wednesday

You write: "Yes, you are right, I do love him. But F., I also love you"—I am reading this sentence very exactly, pausing in particular at the also—it's all correct. You would not be Milena if it weren't correct and what would I be if you weren't, and it's also better that you write it from Vienna than say it in Prague. All this I perfectly understand, maybe better than you and yet out of some weakness I can't get over the sentence, it reads endlessly, and finally I'm transcribing it here for you to see as well and for us to read together, temple to temple. (Your hair against my temple.)

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That was written by the time your two letters in pencil arrived. Can you believe I didn't know they would come. But I really did know, though only in my depths, and we don't always live there, preferring instead to live on Earth, where life assumes its most pitiful form. I don't know why you are constantly afraid I might do something on my own. Haven't I written clearly enough about this? And I only wired Frau Kohler because I hadn't received an answer to my telegram or

any news at all for practically 3 days—and bad days at that—I was almost forced to think you were ill.

---

Yesterday I saw my doctor, he found me in much the same shape as I had been before Meran: the three months passed by my lung hardly leaving a trace, in the top of the left lung the disease is as fresh as ever. He considers this result bleak; I think it's pretty good, for what would I look like if I had spent this time in Prague? He also thinks I didn't put on any weight; according to my calculations, however, I gained about 3 kilograms. In the fall he wants to try giving me injections, but I don't think I'll be able to stand that.

When I compare these results with the way you're squandering your own health—because you don't have any choice, I hardly need add—it sometimes seems to me that instead of ever living together, we will just be able to lie down next to one another, comfortable and content, in order to die. But whatever happens it will be close to you.

By the way, I know—contrary to what the doctor thinks—that all I need to recover (at least halfway) is peace and quiet, although a special kind of quiet—or if looked at another way, a special kind of disquiet.

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Naturally I'm very happy about what you said concerning Staša's letter. She considers your current position a surrender, mentions your father as well—in her mouth this is enough for me to hate him, whom I basically love—in short, concerning all this, she says practically the dumbest thing that can be imagined, even if one were to strain very hard; she doesn't have to strain herself at all, however, it just pours out of those beautiful lips. And of course—this should not be forgotten—it is love through and through; she is holding out her arms to you even from her grave.

---

It's the French national holiday; below my window, troops are marching home from the parade. I feel—breathing your letters—there's something magnificent about it. Not the pomp,

not the music, not the marching, not the old Frenchman escaped from a (German) waxworks marching in front of his unit, wearing red trousers and a blue tunic—but some manifestation of forces calling from the depths: “Despite all this, you dumb people, marching and being shoved along, trusting to the point of savagery—despite all this, we will not abandon you, even in your moments of greatest folly, least of all then.” And I close my eyes to gaze into those depths, and am almost engulfed in you.

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At last they have brought me the stack of documents which had accumulated for me; just think, since I returned to work I’ve written exactly 6 official letters, and they tolerate this. To my immense satisfaction I was unable to get hold of all the work waiting for me until today, thanks to the laziness of the department which was keeping it for me. But now it’s here. None of this matters, however, if I’ve had enough sleep. But today it was still pretty bad.

F

[Prague, July 15, 1920]  
Thursday

Just briefly before I leave for the office: I didn’t want to say anything, at least not now, while you are fighting this terrible battle—I’ve been choking on it for 3 days—but it’s impossible not to, I have to, after all it’s *my* battle as well. You may have noticed that I haven’t slept for several nights. It’s simply the “fear.” It really is stronger than I am, it tosses me around at will, I don’t know up from down anymore or right from left. This time it began with Staša. There truly is a sign above her saying: “Abandon all hope ye who enter here.” Besides that, there were 2, 3 remarks which got mixed up in your last letter. These remarks made me happy, but only despairingly so, since although what you say about the fear is very persuasive—to mind, heart, and body all at once—I have an even deeper

conviction—I don't know exactly where—which evidently nothing can persuade. Finally—this really contributed to weaken me—the wonderful calming-uncalming effect left by your physical presence is wearing off as the days go by. If only you were already here! As it is I have no one, no one here except the fear, together we roll through the nights locked in each other's arms. This fear is really something very serious ~~which strangely enough was always only directed at the future, no, that's not right.~~ Moreover, it is partly explained by the fact that it constantly forces me to realize I must admit—and this is a great confession—that Milena, too, is only human. What you say about this is really very beautiful and kind—having heard that I wouldn't want to hear anything else; nevertheless, to maintain that the stakes here are not very high is a very questionable assertion. After all, this fear is not merely my private fear—although it also is, terribly enough—but it is also the fear inherent in all faith since time began.

Just having written you that cools my head.

Yours

*[Prague, July 15, 1920]*  
Thursday, later

The night-letter from the Weisser Hahn and the Monday letter have arrived, the first is presumably the later one, but it's not entirely clear. I only read through them once quickly; now I have to answer you immediately, and ask you not to think badly of me. What Staša wrote was empty, disgusting nonsense—how can you believe I might think she's right? How far Vienna must be from Prague that you can think such a thing, and how close it is to lie next to one another in the woods, and how long ago it has been. And this isn't jealousy, just a game with you in the middle, because I want to grasp you from all sides, and this means from a jealous point of view as well but I will stop since this is silly—simply the unhealthy dreams that

come from being alone. You also have the wrong idea about Max; yesterday I finally gave him your regards, annoyed (see above!) because he is always receiving your regards. He usually has an explanation for everything, however, so he explained that the only reason you keep sending him regards is because I never conveyed his warmest regards to you: it's about time I should do so, then you would probably stop and I would be reassured. Maybe so, anyway I'm giving it a try.

And otherwise don't worry at all on my account, Milena, the last thing we need is for you to be worrying about me. If it weren't for the "fear" which has been gripping me for a few days and which I complained about to you this morning, I'd be almost completely well. *Incidentally, why did you say, back then in the forest, that you, too, had not imagined it any differently?* It was up in the forest, on the second day. I divide the days very clearly, the first was unsure, the second oversure, the third day was full of regret, and the fourth was the good one.

I am sending right away to Frau Kohler 100 Czech krone in 50 K notes and 100 Austrian krone—all I have on hand right now. Next time it would be better if you knew another way of sending money other than registered mail. For example, it's also possible to wire money *poste restante*, although not under a pseudonym; you have to use your real name. And as far as the month in the country is concerned, why is your father's money or Laurin's better than mine? In any case, that doesn't matter, just never say that you're asking for much. And Jar-mila? Is she coming?

But now I have to go to my sister's wedding.—By the way, why am I a human being, with all the torments this extremely vague and horribly responsible condition entails? Why am I not, for example, the happy wardrobe in your room, which has you in full view whenever you're sitting in your chair or at your desk or when you're lying down or sleeping (all blessings upon your sleep!)? Why am I not that? Because I would break down with grief if I had seen your misery during these last days, or even if—you should leave Vienna.

F

The feeling that you will soon have a passport is very comforting.

Max's address is Prague V, Ufergasse 8, but because of his wife it wouldn't be a good idea for you to write there. He also has two other addresses—precisely because of his wife or, if you prefer, for his own sake: one c/o Dr. Felix Weltsch, Prague, Universitätsbibliothek, or simply mine.

[Prague, July 15, 1920]  
Thursday

Afternoon, myrtle in buttonhole, more or less about my wits despite my tortured head (separation, separation!), I managed to make it through the wedding feast sitting between my brother-in-law's two kind sisters. But now I'm exhausted.

Behold the stupidity of an unrested man! As I discovered at the post office, the registered letter would have to be unsealed—not a good idea, considering the money. Now I could have sent it another way or—if it were just regular mail—then at least I could have sent it directly to you, poste-restante. But there I was, already standing with the envelope in front of the mailbox and so I simply took a chance and sent it to Frau Kohler. I hope it arrives.

What an easy life it will be when we're together—I'm a fool to write about it!—question and answer, glance for glance. And now I have to wait till Monday at the earliest for your answer to the letter I wrote this morning. Understand me correctly and stay good to me—

F

[Prague, July 16, 1920]

Friday

I wanted to excel in your eyes, show my strength of will, wait before writing you, first finish a document, but the room is empty, no one is minding me—it's as if someone said: leave him alone, can't you see how engrossed he is in his own affairs, it's as if he had a fist in his mouth. So I only wrote half a page and am once again with you, lying on this letter like I lay next to you back then in the forest.

There was no letter today, but I'm not afraid, Milena, please don't misunderstand me; I'm never afraid about you, even if it sometimes seems that way and it often does—it's simply a weakness, a mood of the heart, which knows exactly why it's beating nevertheless. Giants have their weaknesses as well; I believe even Hercules fainted once. With my teeth clenched, however, and with your eyes before me I can endure anything: distance, anxiety, worry, letterlessness.

---

How happy I am, how happy you make me! A client came—imagine, I have clients too. The man interrupted my writing; I was annoyed, but he had a kind, friendly, fat face, at the same time a very correct face, as only Germans from the Reich have. He was gracious enough to consider jokes official business; nonetheless he had disturbed me, and I couldn't forgive him. On top of that I had to get up and accompany him to other departments, but even that was too much for you, my kind one, and just when I was getting up the attendant brings in your letter and I open it on the staircase—good heavens, there is a picture inside, something which is absolutely inexhaustible, something which makes this a letter for a whole year, for an eternity and which is so good, it couldn't be any better: a pitiful picture, which one may only behold through tears and palpitations of the heart, not in any other way.

---

And again a stranger is sitting at my table.

---



To continue what I was saying above: With you in my heart I can bear everything, and even if I did write that the days without letters were horrifying, it's not true; they were just horribly difficult—the boat was heavy and it's draught was horribly deep, but on your tide it floated nonetheless. There's only one thing I cannot bear without your express help, Milena: the "fear." I'm much too weak for that, it's so immense I cannot see beyond it—and this monstrous flood is washing me away.

What you say about Jarmila is precisely one of those weaknesses of the heart; your heart stops being true to me just for a moment and that's when such an idea pops into your head. In this sense are we still two different people? And is my "fear" much different than the fear of self-abuse?

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Again I am interrupted; I will no longer be able to write in the office.

---

The big letter you promised would almost scare me, if this letter weren't so reassuring. What will it contain?

Let me know at once whether the money arrived. If it got lost I'll send some more, and if that should get lost, I'll send still more, and so on, until we don't have anything left, and only then will everything be as it should.

F

I didn't receive the flower, at the last moment you must have considered it too good for me.

*[Prague, July 17, 1920]*  
Saturday

I knew what would be in your letter, it was lurking in back of all your letters, in your eyes—what could possibly hide in their clear depths?—in the lines of your forehead. I knew it all along, just like somebody who has spent the whole day behind closed

shutters, submerged in some kind of sleep-dream-fear, who then opens the window in the evening and is naturally not amazed—having known it all along—to now find it dark, a wonderful deep darkness. And I see how you are tormenting yourself and writhing and how you cannot free yourself now and—let's throw the match into the gunpowder—how you never will. I see all that but still can't say: Stay where you are. But nor do I say the opposite; I simply stand beside you, looking into your lovely poor eyes (the picture you sent me really is pitiful, it's torture to look at, a torture one submits to 100 times a day and—unfortunately—a possession I could defend against 10 strong men) and I am indeed strong, as you write; I do possess a certain strength which might be briefly and imprecisely described as being unmusical. On the other hand, this strength is not so great that I could go on writing just now. I am caught in a tide of sorrow and love which is carrying me away from writing.

F

*[Prague, July 18, 1920]*  
Sunday

Still on the subject of yesterday:

Concerning your letter, I am trying to look at the whole situation from the point of view I have most avoided up to now. From that angle it looks strange: I am not fighting your husband for you, this fight exists only within yourself; if the decision depended on a battle between your husband and me everything would have been decided long ago. I'm not overestimating your husband in the least—it's even very likely that I'm underestimating him—but this much I know: if he does love me then it is a rich man's love of poverty (which to some extent is also present in your relationship with me). In the atmosphere of your life with him I really am just the mouse in the "big house" which is allowed to run freely across the carpet once a year at the most.

That's the way it is and there's nothing strange about it, I am not surprised. But what does surprise me, and this probably cannot be explained, is that you who live in this "big house," you who belong there with all your senses, you who derive your strongest life from it, you who reign there as a great queen, that it is nonetheless possible for you—I am sure of this—not only to love me but also to be mine, to run across your own carpet. (But this is precisely because you can do anything: "after all, I never stop for—nor for—nor for—.")

But this isn't yet the summit of my surprise, which can be found in the fact that if you did want to come to me, if you wanted to give up the whole world—to judge musically—in order to descend to me, so far down your vision would not only be impaired, it would be completely obstructed; anyway, if you wanted to come to me, you wouldn't have to climb down (oddly, oddly enough), you would have to grasp *beyond* yourself, *beyond* yourself in such a superhuman way you might tear in the process, or plunge, or disappear (along with me of course). And all that just to attain a place with no attractions, where I sit without happiness or unhappiness, without merit or guilt, simply because that's where I was placed. On the ladder of mankind I'm something like a shopkeeper in your suburbs from before the war (not even a fiddler, not even that), even if I had fought or struggled to reach this position—which I didn't—it would not be any great achievement.

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What you write about the roots is very clear and correct. At any rate, in Turnau the main task consisted in first locating all the secondary roots and removing them; once just the taproot remained the real work was basically done, as the whole thing could then be torn out following a single stroke of the spade. I can still hear how it cracked. Of course there it was easy to tear things out, for one knew it was a tree that would thrive in other soil as well, and besides, it wasn't even a tree yet, but a child.

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In general I don't have the least desire to speak with Jarmila. Except if there's some errand particularly important to you, then of course I'd go there right away.

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Yesterday I spoke with Laurin once again. I think we're in complete agreement as far as he is concerned. He has several good qualities; for example, he's at his best whenever he talks about you—yes, he really is a good person deep inside. What did he tell me? I was with him twice and each time he basically told me the same story with many minor details. A girl, engaged to someone else, comes to visit and stays at his place for 8–10 hours, despite his utmost aversion (one girl in his apartment in the morning, another in his office at night, that's how he divides his waking time). She explains she absolutely has to have him and that she'll jump out the window if he refuses. He does indeed refuse and consequently clears the way to the window. Now of course, nobody jumps, although something terrible does happen; the one girl has a screaming fit, the other—I've already forgotten. But now who the girls are. The one (in the apartment) was Jarmila before her wedding, the other one in the office his wife to whom he has been wedded since Thursday (naturally he spoke a little more gently of her, but not much more—as he always speaks a little gently). Now I don't deny that all this, or worse, really happened the way he described; I just don't understand why it's so boring.

Incidentally there was one nice moment in the stories he told about his fiancée. For two years her father suffered from melancholia, she took care of him. The window in his room had to be kept open at all times, but it had to be closed for a moment whenever a car passed by below, since her father couldn't stand the noise. The daughter saw to it that the window was shut. When Laurin told this story he added: "Just think, an art historian!" (Which she actually is.)

He also showed me her picture. A probably beautiful, melancholic, Jewish face, flattened nose, heavy eyes, long gentle hands, expensive dress.

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You ask about the girl, I don't have any news about her. I haven't seen her once since the time she gave me her letter to you. It's true I did have an appointment with her at the time, but that was just when I received the first letters about your

conversations with your husband. I didn't feel capable of talking to her and canceled with a true but also truly friendly explanation. Later on I wrote her another note; however, she seems to have misunderstood *that one*, since she then sent me a didactic, motherly letter (in which she asked for your husband's address among other things). I answered her accordingly at once by pneumatic mail, but it's been over a week now; I haven't heard a thing from her since then, nor do I know yet what you wrote her and how it affected her.

IN THE MARGIN: I KNOW your answer, but I'd like to see it in writing.

You write you might come to Prague next month. I almost feel like saying: Don't come. Leave me the hope that you'll come *immediately* if I should ever be in urgent need and ask you to do so—but right now it would be better if you didn't come, since you'd only have to leave again.

---

As far as the beggarwoman is concerned, there was nothing good or bad in what I did; I was simply too distracted or too preoccupied with one thing for my behavior to be guided by anything except vague memories. And one such memory says for instance: "Don't give beggars too much, you'll regret it later." When I was a very small boy I once received a *sechserl* and very much wanted to give it to an old beggarwoman who used to sit between the *Grosser* and the *Kleiner Rings*. But the amount seemed enormous to me back then, bigger than anything ever given a beggar, so I was ashamed in front of the woman to do something so unheard-of. Even so, I felt I had to give it to her, so I changed the *sechserl*, gave her one *kreuzer*, ran around the *Rathaus* and all the adjacent buildings and the arcade along the *Kleiner Ring*, then emerged on the left as a completely new benefactor. Once again I gave the woman a *kreuzer*, once again began to run, and did this ten times (or maybe a little less, since I believe the woman later lost her patience and disappeared). In any case, by the end I was so exhausted—morally as well as physically—that I ran home right away and cried until my mother gave me another *sechserl*.

You see, I have bad luck with beggars, but I hereby declare

myself willing to present my entire past and future fortune—in the smallest Viennese banknotes, one by one—to a beggar-woman there in front of the opera, under the condition that you are standing next to me and I may feel you close to me.

Franz

[Prague, July 19, 1920]  
Monday

There are several things you misunderstand, Milena:

First of all, I'm not that sick and when I've had some sleep I actually feel almost better than I did in Meran. Pulmonary diseases are probably the kindest of all, even during a hot summer. How I'll be able to cope with the autumn later on is also a question for later. For the moment I only have a few complaints—for example that I can't get any work done at the office. If by chance I'm not writing to you, then I'm lying in my armchair, staring out the window. There's enough to look at, the view is open enough, since the house across the street is only one story high. I don't mean to imply I find this occupation particularly depressing—no, not at all—it's just that I can't tear myself away.

Second, I am not in any need of money; I have more than enough. Some of it, like the money for your vacation, even oppresses me because it's still just sitting there.

Third, you have once and for all already made the decisive contribution to my recovery, which you renew every minute by thinking well of me.

IN THE MARGIN: And besides, please rest assured about me; I'll wait on the last day just as I did on the first.

Fourth, all the doubts you so quietly express concerning the trip to Prague are correct. "Correct" is also what I wired,

although there it referred to speaking with your husband, and that was indeed the only correct thing to do. This morning, for instance, I suddenly began to *fear*, to *fear* out of love, to *fear* in anguish that you might come to Prague, misled by some trivial, accidental whim. But could such a trivial whim really have such influence on you, you who live life so intensely, down to its very depths? And you shouldn't even be misled by the days in Vienna. Isn't it possible we owed something to your unconscious hope of being able to see him again in the evening? No more on that. Or just this: I just now learned two new facts from your letter—first the Heidelberg plan, second the plan concerning Paris and fleeing the bank. The first demonstrates to me that I somehow do fit in the category of “saviors” and violent criminals. But then again I don't. The second makes it clear that your future-life exists there, too: plans, possibilities, prospects, your prospects as well.

Fifth, a part of your awful self-torment—the *only* suffering you inflict on me—consists in your writing me every day. Write less frequently; if you want I'll still send you a daily note. You'll also have more peace for the work you enjoy.

---

Thanks for the *Donadieu*. (Couldn't I somehow send you the books?) At the moment I'll hardly be able to read it—this is another minor complaint: I can't read, although this fact doesn't particularly pain me; it's simply an impossibility. I have to read a long manuscript of Max's (Judaism, Christianity, Paganism—a great book), he's already practically pressing me, and I've barely begun. A young poet brought me 75 poems today, some of them several pages long; no doubt I'll antagonize him again as I already did once before, incidentally. Back then I read Claudel's essay immediately, but just once and too quickly; my enthusiasm, however, was neither directed at Claudel nor at Rimbaud. I didn't want to write about it until after I had read it a second time, nonetheless I was very glad this was exactly what you chose to translate. Is it complete? (What does “*pamatikální*” mean?) Actually the only thing I

remember clearly is the Ave-Maria experience of some pious person in the first column.

I am enclosing the letter the girl sent by way of reply; it should enable you to reconstruct my own letter. This way you can see how I am rejected—not without reason. I won't answer anymore.

Yesterday afternoon wasn't much better than last Sunday. It actually began quite well; it was 36° in the shade when I left the house to go to the cemetery and the trams were on strike, but this particularly pleased me, since I was looking forward to the walk, as much as I had been looking forward to walking to the little garden next to the Stock Exchange that Saturday. But when I reached the cemetery I couldn't find the grave; the information booth was closed, no attendant and none of the women knew a thing. I also checked in a book but it was the wrong one, I wandered around for hours, completely befuddled from reading the inscriptions and left the cemetery in a similar state—

F

*[Prague, July 20, 1920]*  
Tuesday

Between dictation, for which I've pulled myself together today:

Letters like the two today, small and happy or at least spontaneous, are almost (almost almost almost) forest, and wind in your sleeves and a view of Vienna. Milena, how good it is to be with you!

Today the girl sends me your letter without a word—just a few passages underlined in pencil. Apparently she's not very pleased with it; well, like any letter adorned with pencil marks it has its defects; looking at it I realize what an inane, impossible



thing I asked you to do and beg you many times for forgiveness. Of course I should ask her to forgive me as well, because no matter how it was written, it was bound to upset her. When you write for instance, very considerately, "because he had neither spoken nor written about you," it must have hurt her, just as the opposite would have also hurt her. Again: forgive me.

Incidentally, with a different letter, the one to Staša, you helped me very much.

Afternoon

In the office I succeeded in keeping myself away from this letter, but this cost me so much effort there was nothing left for my work.

The letter to Staša: Jílovský came to see me yesterday morning and mentioned that a letter from you had arrived; he saw it on the table as he was leaving the house in the morning, but he didn't know what was inside—Staša would tell me in the evening. In the face of his friendliness I felt uneasy, thinking of all the things your letter might contain, things caused in part by me. But that evening it turned out the letter was very positive and both of them were satisfied, at least as far as its friendly mood was concerned (I didn't read it). Above all, it contained a brief word of thanks to the husband, which could have only originated in something I wrote, and which made Staša very happy and caused his own eyes to shine a little more than usual. They are good people after all—if one strains to forget certain things, makes oneself comfortable, and if one's stomach, one's nervous stomach can hold out—especially when they're together or if he is alone (Staša alone is a more dubious proposition) and Staša had a wonderfully beautiful moment as she studied your photograph, actually inconceivably long and very concentrated and silent and serious. Maybe I'll say more about the evening later; I was tired, empty, boring, deserving to be spanked, indifferent, and from the beginning all I wanted to do was go to bed. (They asked me to send you the enclosed

piece of paper, a drawing by Staša with explanations by Jílovský—we were talking about the layout of your room.) By the way they live very richly, require more than 60,000 K a year and say it's impossible to get by with less.

Naturally I am completely satisfied with your translation. Just that its relation to the text is like that of Frank to Franz, like your mountain climbing to my own, etc. And if the man can summon the power for *nutno* and *abych*,\* then things shouldn't have gotten that far in the first place and he actually could have married after all, the foolish, foolish bachelor. But in any case please leave it the way you wanted and grant me the pleasure of being able to sigh in relief from myself.

Yesterday I advised you not to write me every day, I still hold the same opinion today and it would be very good for both of us, and so I repeat my advice today even more emphatically—only please, Milena, don't listen to me, and write me every day anyway, it can even be very brief, briefer than today's letters, just 2 lines, just one, just one word, but if I had to go without them I would suffer terribly.

F

[Prague, July 21, 1920]  
Wednesday

One can get results after all, if one has the courage:

In the first place: maybe Gross is not so wrong, at least as far as I understand him—the fact that I am still alive speaks in his favor; otherwise, with the way my internal strength is divided, I actually should have stopped living long ago.

Furthermore: it's not a question of what will happen later on, the only certainty is that *I cannot live apart from you without completely submitting to fear, giving it even more than it demands, and I do this voluntarily, with delight, I pour myself into it.*

\**Nutno*: (it is) necessary; *abych*: so that I (Czech).

You are right to reproach me in the name of fear for my behavior in Vienna, but this fear is particularly mysterious; I do not know its inner laws, only its hand on my throat—and that really is *the most terrible thing I have ever experienced or could experience*.

Perhaps the logical conclusion is that we're both married: you in Vienna, I to my fear in Prague, in which case you're not the only one tugging in vain at marriage. For you see, Milena, if you had been *completely convinced* by me in Vienna (even agreeing to take that step of which you were unsure), you would no longer be in Vienna in spite of everything: or rather in that case there would not be any "in spite of everything"—you'd simply be in Prague. Moreover, everything you console yourself with in your last letter really is mere consolation. Don't you agree?

Had you come to Prague right away or had you at least decided right away to do so, it would still not have served as any proof for you—I don't need any proofs for you; there is nothing in my mind as clear and certain as you, but it would have been a tremendous proof *for me* and this is what I'm missing now. Occasionally the fear feeds on this lack as well.

In fact it may even be much worse and I myself, the "savior," may be tying you down in Vienna like no one else has ever done.

---

So that was the storm which kept threatening in the forest, still we were happy all the same. Let's go on living with its threats, since we don't have any choice.

Laurin telephoned to say that a translation had appeared in *Tribuna*, but since you hadn't mentioned it I didn't know whether you wanted me to read it and so I haven't yet. Now I'll try to find it somewhere.

I don't understand what you have against the girl's letter. So it succeeded in its purpose of making you a little jealous, what of it? In the future I'm going to compose similar letters from time to time and write them myself, even better ones than that, and without any final rejections.

Please, a few words about your work! *Cesta? Lípa? Kmen? Politika?*

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There's something else I wanted to say, but another young poet was here—I don't understand, the minute someone shows up I remember my office work and can't concentrate on anything else throughout the entire visit; I'm tired, can't think of a thing, and my sole wish is to lay my head in your lap, feel your hand on my head, and stay that way through all eternity—

Yours

Here, this is what I wanted to say: your letter does contain one great truth (among other truths): "that you're the one who doesn't have any idea about . . ." That's true word for word. It was all just filth, wretched abomination, drowning in hell, and in this respect I come to you as a child who has done something bad and is now standing before his mother and cries and cries and vows: I'll never do it again. But this is precisely where the fear derives all its strength: "Exactly, exactly!" it says. "He doesn't have any idea! Nothing has happened yet! So-he-can-still-be-saved!"

---

I jump up. The telephone! Off to see the director! For the first time since I returned to Prague I am called down on official business! Now at last the whole swindle will come out. I haven't done a thing for 18 days except write letters, read letters, and above all look out the window. I've held letters in my hand, put them down, picked them up, had a few visitors as well and apart from that nothing. But when I show up he is friendly, he smiles, tells me something official I don't understand and says goodbye since he's going on vacation: an inconceivably kind man. (For my part I mumbled inarticulately that I'm almost all through and tomorrow will begin dictation.) And now I'm quickly reporting this to my guardian angel. Strangely enough my letter from Vienna is still lying on his table, and on top of that another letter from Vienna; at first I almost thought, inarticulately, that it was about you.

[Prague, July 22, 1920]  
Thursday

Oh yes, this letter. It's as if one were looking into hell and a man below calls up to someone above and describes what his life is like and how he's settled in. He first roasts a while in one cauldron, then in another, and afterward sits in the corner to steam off a little. But I don't know her from before (I've just known that *pitomec*\* M for a long time, even Laurin calls him that, I didn't notice) maybe she really is confused or crazy. How could she not be confused by such a fate since it left even us confused, and I think I would be very upset to find myself standing next to her, for she isn't just a human being anymore but something else besides. And I can't imagine she doesn't notice this too, and that she doesn't feel your disgust at her letter herself. Our words are often those of some unknown alien being—but to have to talk that way incessantly, as may be the case with Jarmila!

Incidentally, Haas appears not to have left her entirely, if I understand it correctly—but it isn't a letter at all, just drunken sorrow and I don't understand it in the least.

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Milena, industrious one, your room is undergoing a change in my mind; the desk and the whole place really didn't look much like work before, but now it does, and so convincingly that I can feel this work; in your room it must be magnificently hot and cool and happy. Only the wardrobe remains as ponderous as always and sometimes the lock is broken and it doesn't yield a thing, desperately staying shut, and in particular it refuses to give up the dress you wore on "Sunday"; if you should ever set up house again we'll throw it out.

---

I'm very sorry for many things I've written lately; don't be angry with me. And please stop tormenting yourself with the thought that it's exclusively your fault you cannot free yourself, or that it's even your fault at all. I am much more to be blamed, I'll write about it sometime.

\*Blockhead (Czech).

[Prague, July 23, 1920]  
Friday

No, it really wasn't so bad. And anyway, how else is the soul to free itself from a burden except by a little malice? Besides, even today I consider everything I wrote correct. You misunderstood some of it, for instance the part about the "only suffering"; it is your self-torment which is this "only suffering," not your letters which every morning give me the strength I need to get through each day—so much that I don't want to miss a single one (not a single solitary one of these letters, that's obvious) of these days. And the letters lying on the table in the front hall don't contradict me in the least; even the possibility of writing them and putting them away has meant something. And I'm not at all jealous—believe me—but it really is very difficult to realize that jealousy is pointless, and I only occasionally succeed in doing so; on the other hand, I always succeed in not being jealous. Yes, still on the subject of "saviors." "Saviors," you see, are characterized by a tendency to keep hammering in whatever they want to extract, with bestial seriousness. And they deserve this characterization; I stand apart and rejoice at this—not about individual cases but about this general law of the world.

Now at last I have something to tell Max, your opinion—actually rather brief—about his great book. You see he's always asking about you and how you're doing and what's going on, and is always taking everything to heart. But there's hardly anything for me to say to him; fortunately language alone makes it impossible. I can't talk about some Milena in Vienna and then go on saying that "she" thinks and says and does this or that. After all, you are neither "Milena" nor "she"—that's utter nonsense—and consequently I can't say a thing. This is so obvious it doesn't even make me sad.

Of course I can talk about you with people I don't know; it's actually an exquisite pleasure to do so. If I allowed myself to make a little comedy out of it—which is very tempting—the pleasure would be even greater. Recently I ran into Rudolf Fuchs. I like him, but normally I would not have been so

overjoyed to see him, and I'm sure I would not have shaken his hand as ardently as I did. And even so, I knew that the result would not be that great—but I thought to myself: So what if it's small. Immediately the conversation turned to Vienna and the people he had seen there. I was very interested in hearing names, he began to list them, no, I didn't mean it that way, I was interested in hearing him name the women. "Well, there was Milena Pollak, whom I believe you know." "Yes, Milena," I repeated and looked down the Ferdinandstrasse, to see what it would say to that. Other names followed, my old cough returned, and the conversation fizzled out. How to revive it? "Can you tell me which year of the war it was that I was in Vienna?" "1917." "Wasn't E P in Vienna by then? I didn't see him at the time. Wasn't he married yet?" "No." That was all. Now I could have had him tell me a little about you, but I lacked the necessary strength.

---

How are you doing with pills right now and over the past few days? You mention headaches again for the first time.

What did Jarmila finally say to your invitation? Could you please say a few words about the Paris plan?

Where will you go now? (A place with good mail service?)  
*When?* For how long? 6 Months?

Always tell me right away where anything of yours is appearing.

How had you actually planned the two-day trip to Prague? (I'm just curious)

Thank you for the nevertheless, a magical word which enters my bloodstream directly.

[Prague, July 23, 1920]  
Friday afternoon

At home I found this letter. I've known the girl a long time: we're probably distant relations—at least we have one relative

in common, that cousin she mentions who was lying in Prague critically ill and whom she and her sister were nursing for months. Physically I find her almost unpleasant: her face is too big, round and red-cheeked, her body is small and round, her speech is annoyingly like a whisper. Apart from that I've heard good things about her; that is to say, relatives have always complained about her behind her back.

2 months ago my answer to such a letter would have been very simple: No, no, no. Now I don't think I have any right to do that. Not that I think I'll be able to help her in any way, of course; no less a person than Bismarck himself has already taken care of such letters once and for all with the observation that life is a poorly organized banquet where the guests wait impatiently for the appetizer, while the roast has already passed in silence, and then have to adjust themselves accordingly—this sagacity is so stupid, so terribly stupid!—it's more for my own sake than for hers that I'm writing to say I am willing to meet with her. You, Milena, have placed something in my hand—I feel I shouldn't keep it closed!

My uncle is leaving tomorrow, so once again I'll get out of the city, into the air, the water, at least a little—I need it badly. She writes that only I am allowed to read the letter; in sending it to you I am complying with her request. Tear it up. A nice line, by the way: women don't need much.

*[Prague, July 24, 1920]*  
Saturday

For about half an hour I've been reading the 2 letters and the card (not to mention the envelope, I'm surprised that the entire mailroom doesn't come up and apologize in your name), and only now do I realize that I've been laughing the whole time. Was there ever any emperor in the history of the world better off than I am? I walk into my room and find three letters waiting for me, and I don't have to do a thing except open



them—my fingers are too slow!—lean back and—be unable to believe that I am so fortunate, so happy.

No, I wasn't laughing the whole time, I won't say a word about your carrying luggage, since I really can't believe it, and if I can believe it, I cannot imagine it, and if I can imagine it you are as beautiful—no that wasn't mere beauty, but an aberration of heaven—as you were on "Sunday," and I understand the "Herr" (he probably gave you 20 K and asked for 3 K back). But then I still can't believe it and even if it might have happened, I admit it was as terrifying as it was grand. But the fact that you are hungry and are not eating anything (whereas I am fed to the gills here, although I am never hungry) and that you have circles under your eyes (after all, the photo can't have been retouched—these circles take away half the pleasure your picture gives me, which still leaves me enough to want to kiss your hand so long you'd never have to translate again or carry luggage from the station)—that I can't forgive you and will never forgive you and even if we're sitting in front of our hut a hundred years from now I'll still reproach you for that. No, I'm not joking. You claim to be fond of me, thus to be *for* me, but you insist on hungering *against* me and here is the leftover money and there is the Weisser Hahn.

For once I'll forgive what you say about the girl's letter because (at last!) you call me *tajemník* (I'm called that because what I've been doing here for 3 weeks is very *tajemné*\* and otherwise, too, you're right. But is it enough to be right? And above all: *I* am not right, so won't you also bear a small part of my wrong—it won't work, I know, it's only the willingness that matters—by reading past the girl's indifferent letter and focusing on my wrong, which is written there as clear as can be? Besides, I don't want to hear anything more about this exchange of letters which I caused so thoughtlessly. I sent your letter back to her with a few friendly lines. Since then I haven't heard a thing; I couldn't bring myself to suggest a meeting, hopefully everything will blow over silently and amicably.

\**Tajemník*: secretary; *tajemné*: secret (Czech).

You defend your letter to Staša and yet I was thanking you for it. I'm sure I keep doing both of them injustice and maybe someday I'll bring myself to stop.

You were in Neu-Waldegg? And I go there so often, strange that we never met each other. Well, you climb and run so quickly you must have whizzed right by me, just like you did in Vienna. What kind of 4 days were those? A goddess left the cinema and a small porter was standing on the track—and that's supposed to have been 4 days?

---

Max will receive your letter today. I didn't read any more of it than could be done in secret.

Yes, you really were unlucky with Landauer. And it still seems good to you in German? What did you make of it, poor thing (not child, please notice!), tortured and confused by my letters as you were. Am I not right in saying my letters upset you? But what good is being right? If I receive letters I am right and endowed with everything, and if none were to arrive I would be neither right nor endowed with anything, including life.

Yes, to go to Vienna!

Please send me the translation, I can't get my hands on enough of you.

There's a great stamp collector here, he grabs the stamps out of my hand. Now he already has enough of these 1 K stamps, but he maintains that there are other stamps, bigger, blackish-brown ones for 1 K. I am thinking: I get the *letters*, shouldn't I try to obtain the *stamps* for him? So if you could use these other one-krone stamps or some other larger ones for 2 K.

[Prague, July 26, 1920]

Monday

Well, the telegram was not an answer but the letter of Thursday evening is. So my insomnia was very justified as was my

terrible sadness this morning. Does your husband know about the blood? There's no need to exaggerate, it may not mean a thing, bleeding has many causes—but still it's blood and cannot be forgotten. And your response is to go on living your heroically happy life, go on living as if you were urging the blood on: "All right, come on, will you finally come." And so then it comes. And you don't give the slightest thought to what I'm supposed to do here and of course you're not an infant and of course you know what you're doing, but am I supposed to stand here on the shore in Prague and watch as you drown in the Vienna sea, on purpose, right before my eyes? And if you have nothing to eat, isn't that a need in itself? Or do you think it's more my need than yours? Well, there you're right, too. And unfortunately I won't be able to send you money anymore, because at noon I'm going home and stuffing all those useless bills into the kitchen stove.

So we've drifted apart entirely, Milena, and the only thing we seem to share is the intense wish that you were here, and your face as close to me as possible. And of course we also share this death wish—this wish to die "comfortably," but in reality that is a wish small children have anyway, like myself for instance, during arithmetic: I would see the teacher leafing through his notebook, probably looking for my name, and would compare my inconceivable lack of knowledge to this spectacle of power, terror, and reality. Half dreaming with fear, I wished I could rise like a ghost and run down the aisle between the desks, fly by my teacher as light as my knowledge of mathematics, somehow pass through the door, then—once outside—I would pull myself together and be free in the wonderful air which, in all the world known to me, did not contain any greater tensions than those found in that classroom. That would have been "comfortable" indeed. But that's not the way it happened. I was called upon, given a problem which required a logarithmic table to solve. I had forgotten my table; nonetheless I lied that I had it in my desk (thinking the teacher would lend me his), was sent back to my desk to fetch it, noticed its absence with an alarm I didn't even need to pretend (at school I never needed to pretend alarm), and the teacher (I ran into

him 2 days ago) said to me: "You crocodile!" I was immediately given an "Unsatisfactory" and that was actually a good thing, since it was only a formality, and unfair besides (although I had lied, of course, no one could prove it; is that unfair?)—but above all, I didn't have to show my shameless ignorance. So on the whole this, too, was quite "comfortable" and under favorable conditions one could even "disappear" in the room itself, and the possibilities were endless and one could even "die" while still alive.

WRITTEN DIAGONALLY ACROSS THE TOP OF TWO PAGES, IN LARGE LETTERS: I'm only babbling like this because I feel so good with you in spite of everything.

Just one possibility is missing—this is clear beyond all babble—for you to walk in right now and be here and for us to have a thorough discussion about how you will regain your health: and precisely this possibility is the one most urgently needed.

---

There was a lot I had wanted to tell you today, before I read the letters, but what can be said in the face of blood? Please *write to me at once what the doctor said, and what kind of man is he?*

Your description of the scene at the station is incorrect; I didn't hesitate a moment, it was all so obviously sad and beautiful and we were so completely alone that it seemed incomprehensibly comic how the people—who weren't there, after all—suddenly rose up in protest and demanded that the gate to the track be opened.

But in front of the hotel it was exactly as you say. You were so beautiful there! Maybe it wasn't you at all; in fact, it would have been unusual if you had gotten up so early. But if it wasn't you then how do you know so exactly the way it really was.

It's good that you also want stamps, for two days now I've been reproaching myself about my own request; even while writing it I was doing so.

[Prague, July 26, 1920]

Monday later

Oh, so many documents have just arrived. And what am I working for, and with an unrested head, at that? What for? The kitchen stove.

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And now on top of everything else, the poet, the first one—he also makes woodblocks, etchings, and doesn't leave and is so full of life that he unleashes everything on me and watches me tremble with impatience; watches my hand trembling over this letter, my head is already lying on my chest and he still won't leave, the good, lively, happy-unhappy, extraordinary boy who happens to be a terrible nuisance just right now. And you have blood coming out of your mouth.

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And it turns out we really do keep writing the same thing. I ask whether you're sick and then you write about it, I want to die and then you do, I want stamps and then you want stamps, sometimes I want to cry on your shoulder like a little boy and then you want to cry on mine like a little girl. And sometimes and ten times and a thousand times and always I want to be with you and you are saying the same thing. Enough, enough.

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And there's still no letter about what the doctor said, you slowpoke, you bad letter-writer, you wicked one, you lovely one, you—well, now what? Nothing—to rest in your lap, still.

[Prague, July 27, 1920]

Tuesday

Where's the doctor? I'm skimming through your letter without reading it just to find the doctor. Where is he?

I'm not sleeping, I don't mean to say I'm not sleeping be-

cause of that; true worries cause unmusical people to lose less sleep than do other things, but even so I'm not sleeping. Is the trip to Vienna already too long ago? Did I praise my luck too highly? Aren't milk and butter and salad any help at all, and do I have to have the nourishment of your presence? The reason is probably none of these, but these days are not very pleasant. Moreover for 3 days now I haven't been enjoying the happiness of the empty apartment and am living at home (which is also why I received the telegram right away). Maybe it's not at all the emptiness of the apartment which makes me feel so good, or maybe that's not the main thing; it might be having two apartments at once, one for the day and another, further away, for the evening and night. Do you understand this? I don't, but that's how it is.

Yes, the wardrobe. It will probably be the object of our first and last fight. I'll say: "We're throwing it out." You'll say: "It's staying." I'll say: "Choose between it and me." You'll say: "Just a second. Frank and *Schrank*,\* they rhyme. I'll take the *Schrank*." "Fine," I'll say and slowly walk down the stairs (which?) and—if I still haven't found the Danube Canal, I'll be living happily ever after.

And incidentally I'm all in favor of the wardrobe—you just shouldn't wear the dress. You'll wear it out and what will be left for me then?

The grave is strange. I was actually (*vlastně*) looking for it in that place, but too timidly, then I very boldly started making bigger and bigger and then huge circles around it and finally mistook another chapel for the right one.

So you're going away and you don't even have your visa. *And with that my assurance is lost that you'd come in the night if it were necessary.* And nonetheless you expect me to sleep.

[. . .]

And the doctor? Where is he? Still not there?

There weren't any special congress-stamps, I was also under

\*Wardrobe (German).

the impression that there had been some, and was disappointed today when someone brought me those "congress-stamps"—they're just ordinary stamps, only with the postmark from the congress. Even so, it is precisely this postmark which supposedly makes them quite valuable, but the boy won't understand that. From now on I'm only going to enclose one stamp at a time, first because of their cost and second so that I'll be thanked every day.

You see, you need a new pen nib, why didn't we make better use of our time in Vienna? Why didn't we spend the whole time in the stationer's shop, for example; it really was so beautiful inside and we were so close to one another.

And I trust you didn't read my dumb jokes aloud to your wardrobe? You know I love almost everything in your room to the point of swooning.

And the doctor?

Do you see the stamp collector often? There's nothing sly about the question although it looks that way; after a bad night's sleep one just asks who knows what. And one would like to go on asking forever; after all, not-sleeping means asking; if one had the answer, one would sleep.

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And this declaration of not being responsible for one's actions is really very bad. You did get the passport, didn't you?

*[Prague, July 28, 1920]*  
Wednesday

Do you know Casanova's escape from "The Leads"? I'm sure you do. It contains a brief description of the most horrifying form of incarceration: down in the cellar, in the dark, in the dank, on a level with the lagoons, one crouches on a narrow board—the water is almost up to it, and will actually reach it with the tide—but worst are the wild water rats, their scream-

ing in the night, their tugging, tearing, and gnawing (I believe the prisoner has to fight them for his bread), and worst of all is their impatient waiting for the prisoner to weaken and fall from the board. That's exactly what these stories in your letter are like. Horrifying and incomprehensible and above all as close and as distant as one's own past. And there one crouches, not the best thing for the back, and one's feet get cramps as well, and one is terrified but can do nothing except watch the great dark rats—their presence is blinding in the middle of the night—and in the end one no longer knows whether one is still on top or already down below, baring one's teeth, hissing through an open snout. Come on, don't tell stories like that, what for. I'll let you have these "little beasts," but only on condition you chase them out of the house.

IN THE MARGIN: The "*trotzdem*" on these letters really was necessary—but isn't the word itself also beautiful? The "*trotz*"\* contains collision, some "world" is still there; in "*dem*" one sinks, then there is nothing.

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And now there's no longer even any mention of the doctor? And yet you promised expressly that you'd go to the doctor and, after all, you always keep your word. Are you not going because you no longer see any blood? I'm not citing myself as an example; you are incomparably healthier than I am, I'll always just be the gentleman who has his suitcases carried (which still doesn't indicate any difference in rank, for first comes the gentleman who flags down the porter, next comes the porter, and only then the gentleman who asks the porter to carry the suitcase, because he would otherwise collapse. When I was recently—recently!—returning home from the train station, the attendant carrying my trunk began to comfort me—of his own accord, without my having said a thing about it. He was sure that I understood some things that were beyond him, he said, and carrying luggage was his job and he didn't mind it at all, etc. Now that was the—entirely insufficient—


\**Trotzdem*: nevertheless, in spite of that; *trotz*: defiance, spite (German).



answer to things I had been thinking about but which I had not expressed clearly)—anyway, I'm not comparing myself to you with all this, but I can't help thinking about how it was with me and that makes me worried and you should see the doctor. About 3 years ago: my lungs had never shown any signs of illness, nothing made me tired, I could walk endlessly and never reach the end of my strength (although thinking always exhausted me) and suddenly around August—it was hot and beautiful; everything was fine except my head—at the public swimming pool I spit up something red. You will agree that was unusual and interesting. I looked at it a while and forgot it immediately. And then it started occurring more frequently, and generally whenever I wanted to I could spit out something red. At that point it was no longer interesting but boring and I forgot about it once again. Had I gone to the doctor's right away—well everything would have probably happened exactly as it did without the doctor; just that no one knew about the blood back then, not even me, really, and no one was worried. But now someone is worried, so please, go to the doctor.

IN THE MARGIN: Why are you also getting Jilovský mixed up in the stories? On my blotter I still have a drawing of his that concerns you.

die Zeichnung ist etwa so:  
ein schweres  
Bildnis



---

It's strange of your husband to say he'll write me this and that. And what about beating and strangling? I really don't understand this. Of course I believe you completely, but it's so utterly impossible for me to imagine that I can't feel anything about it, as if it were an extremely remote, extremely alien story. As though you were here saying: "Right now I'm in

Vienna and there's shouting going on, etc." And we would both look out the window toward Vienna and naturally there wouldn't be the slightest reason to get excited.

But there is one thing: When you talk about the future, don't you sometimes forget that I'm Jewish? (*jasné, nezapletené\**) Even at your feet, Jews and Judaism remain dangerous.

[Prague, July 29, 1920]

Thursday

That's a very nice note from Staša. But there's no indication she was any different then than she is now; she's not even in the note, she's speaking for you. There's an incredible accord between her and you, something practically spiritual, like someone who simply passes on what he has heard, something he alone was allowed to hear and understand (and his awareness of this fact is also significant, since it accounts for the pride and beauty of the whole). He himself doesn't dare do anything more than mediate, and remains virtually unmoved. But I don't think she's changed since then; under similar circumstances, she might be able to write a note like that today.

It's strange about those stories. They oppress me, but not because they're Jewish, nor because each Jew has to take his share from the common, repugnant, poisonous—but also ancient and basically eternal—food, once the dish is placed on the table, that's not the reason. Won't you reach out across those stories to me, and leave your hand with me for a long, long time?

Yesterday I found the grave. If you look for it timidly it really is impossible to find; I didn't realize it was the plot belonging to your maternal relatives. Moreover the inscription can only be read if you bend down attentively—the gold has

\* *Jasné*: clear; *nezapletené*: uncomplicated (Czech).

almost all peeled off. I was there a long time: the grave is so beautiful, so indestructible in its stone, although completely devoid of flowers—but what's the good of all the flowers on graves, I've never really understood it. I laid a few bright carnations on the very edge. I felt better in the cemetery than in the city; this feeling lasted, too—for a long time I walked through the city as if it were a cemetery.

Jeníček, was that your little brother?

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And are you well? In the picture from Neu-Waldegg you're actually visibly ill; I'm sure it is exaggerated, but nonetheless only exaggerated. I still don't have any real picture of you. One shows a young distinguished delicate well-dressed girl, who will soon—in 1 or 2 years—be taken out of the convent school (as a matter of fact the corners of your mouth are bent down a little, but that's merely refinement and religious piety), and the second picture is exaggerated propaganda: "This is how we live in Vienna." Incidentally in this second picture once again you look uncannily like my mysterious first friend; someday I'll tell you about him.

---

No, I won't come to Vienna, outwardly it would only be possible by lying, by calling in sick at work—or else on two adjacent holidays. But those are only the outward obstructions, my dear boy (soliloquy).

Staša spent that much time with you in Veleslavín?

I've written daily, you'll probably still receive the letters.

The telegram, thank you, thank you, I retract all my reproaches, besides they weren't even reproaches to begin with, merely caresses with the back of my hand, since it has been jealous for so long. Just now the poet and graphic artist (but mainly he's a musician) dropped by; he keeps coming to visit, today he brought me 2 woodcuts (Trotsky and an Annunciation, you can see his world isn't small). For his own sake and to gain a better understanding of the things, I quickly produced a connection to you and said that I'd send them to a friend in

Vienna, which had the unexpected result that instead of one copy I received two (I'm keeping yours here or do you want them right away?). But then your telegram arrived; while I was reading it and reading it and finding no end to my joy and gratitude, he continued talking to me unperturbed (although without wanting to disturb me in the least, not at all; whenever I say I have something to do and say it loudly enough to wake him, he breaks off in midsentence and runs away, without taking the slightest offense). All your news is very important; the details, however, will be even more important. But above all: how are you supposed to take it easy, that's impossible, a doctor could not utter any greater nonsense, at least not to my mind. Oh, it is bad after all, but thank you in any case, thank you.

[Prague, July 29, 1920]  
Thursday, later

Just so there isn't any doubt, Milena:

Maybe my condition isn't the best it could be, maybe I could stand a little more happiness, a little more security, a little more abundance, although that is by no means certain, even in Prague. However, in any case I'm generally happy and free and doing well—completely undeservedly—so well it scares me, and if current conditions hold a while, if the upheavals aren't too great, and if I receive a word from you each day and see that this doesn't cause you too much torment, then this word will probably be enough to make me halfway healthy. And now please, Milena, don't torture yourself anymore, and I have never understood physics (or at most just the pillar of fire, that's also physics, isn't it?) and I do not understand the "scales of the world" and I'm sure they don't understand me any better (what could my 55 kilograms, undressed, begin to do with such monstrous scales; they wouldn't even notice, much less move),

and I am here just like I was in Vienna and your hand is in my own as long as you leave it there.\*

~~Franz~~ falsch ~~dem~~ falsch  
nichts mehr, stille, tiefer Wald

---

Werfel's poem is like a portrait that stares at everyone, including me, and above all at the Evil One, who has moreover written it himself.

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I don't understand what you wrote concerning your vacation. Where would you go?

[Prague, July 30, 1920]  
Friday

You're always wanting to know, Milena, if I love you, but after all, that's a difficult question which cannot be answered in a letter (not even last Sunday's letter). I'll be sure to tell you the next time we see each other (if my voice doesn't fail me).

But you shouldn't write about my traveling to Vienna; I'm not going, but every time you mention it you hold a little fire up to my bare skin, which is already a small pyre, one which burns and burns but never burns down; in fact the flames are even growing. I'm sure you don't want that.

I'm very sorry about the flowers you received—so sorry I can't even decipher what kind of flowers they were. And now they're in your room. If I really were your wardrobe I'd suddenly shove myself out of the room in broad daylight and wait

\*The signature reads: "~~Franz~~ wrong, ~~F~~ wrong, ~~Yours~~ wrong / nothing more, calm, deep forest."

in the front hall at least until the flowers wilted. No, that isn't nice. And everything is so far away and still I see the handle on your door as close before my eyes as my inkwell.

IN THE MARGIN: ~~No, the man is odd; he's only interested in Austrian stamps, maybe you could use smaller denominations, 25 h, etc., if you can't find the stamps for 1 K. But no, just forget it, please forget it.~~

Well, yes of course I have your telegram from yesterday, no, from the day before, but even then the flowers had not wilted. And why do they make you happy? If they are your "favorites," then all the flowers of this species on earth should make you happy, so why these in particular? But perhaps that question is also too difficult and must be answered orally. Right, but where are you? In Vienna? And where is that?

No I can't forget the flowers. The Kántnerstrasse, now that is a ghost story or a dream dreamt on a nightlike day, but the flowers are real, they fill the vase (an "armful" you say and hold them close to you) and they can't even be touched because they are your "favorite flowers." Just wait, when Milena finally leaves the room I'll tear you out and toss you down into the courtyard.

Why are you gloomy? *Did something happen?* And you aren't telling me? No, that is impossible.

IN THE MARGIN: And why are you sad?

You ask about Max, but he answered you a long time ago—I don't know what he said, but I saw him mail the letter Sunday. *By the way, did you get my Sunday letter?*

Yesterday was an extremely restless day—not agonizingly restless, just restless, maybe I'll tell you about it soon. Above all, I had your telegram and there was something special about walking around with it in my pocket. There is a particular human kindness which people do not realize exists. For instance I'm walking toward the Czech Bridge, and I take out the telegram and read it (it's always new; once it has been read, absorbed, the paper is empty—but as soon as it's back in my pocket it is immediately rewritten). Then I look around, ex-

pecting to see mean faces; not exactly envy, but nonetheless faces that say: "What? You of all people received this telegram? We'll have to report this higher up at once. At the very least, flowers (an armful) will be sent to Vienna right away. In any case, we are determined not to simply accept the telegram unchallenged." But instead of this, all is calm as far as the eye can see: the fishermen go on fishing, the onlookers go on looking, the children are playing soccer, the man at the bridge is collecting his kreuzers. If you look a little more closely you can detect a certain nervousness, as people force themselves to concentrate on what they're doing, so as not to betray any of their thoughts. But it is precisely this which makes them so lovable, this voice which comes out of the whole, saying: "It's all right, the telegram belongs to you, we agree, we're not questioning your right to receive it, we'll just look the other way, and you can keep it for yourself." And when I take it out again a little later, you'd think they'd be annoyed that I don't at least keep quiet and hide myself—but they're not annoyed, they remain as they were.

---

This evening I once again spoke with a Palestinian Jew. It's impossible for me to describe him to you in a letter, to explain his importance for me—a small, almost tiny, weak, bearded man with one eye. But thinking about him cost me half the night. More on this later.

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*So you don't have your passport and won't be getting one?*

IN THE MARGIN: And why are you sad?

[Prague, July 31, 1920]  
Saturday

At the moment I'm distracted and sad; I lost your telegram—that is, it can't be lost, but it's bad enough that I have to look

for it. Incidentally, it's all your fault; if it weren't beautiful I wouldn't have had it in my hands constantly.

However, what you say about the doctor gives me consolation. So the blood didn't mean anything: I said the same thing myself, old physician that I am. Now what does he say about the defect in your lung? I'm sure he didn't prescribe fasting or carrying suitcases. And did he concur that you should go on being good to me? Or wasn't I mentioned at all? But how can I claim to be satisfied if the doctor didn't even come up with a trace of me? Or is it my defect, supposedly, that he found in your lung?

And it really isn't serious? And he has nothing more to say except send you to the country for four weeks? That really isn't very much.

No, I don't have much more against the trip than I do against your life in Vienna. Go ahead and leave, please, leave Vienna. You wrote somewhere about how much hope you have in this trip, to me that's reason enough to wish it for you.

IN THE MARGIN: Do I read correctly? Is there a large T on the envelope? The postmark is right on top and I can't make it out exactly.

Once again you mention my traveling to Vienna. It's worst of all when you write about it seriously: then the ground here actually begins to quiver and I wait anxiously to see whether it will eject me. It doesn't. I've already written about the outward obstacle—I don't want to discuss the ones on the inside, for even though they are stronger than I am I don't think they would restrain me; not because I'm strong, but because I'm too weak to let myself be held—I could only travel if I lied, and I'm afraid of lying, not like a man of honor, but like a schoolboy. And besides I have a feeling or at least a premonition that I might someday—absolutely, inevitably—have to go to Vienna for my sake or yours, but I wouldn't be able to lie a second time (even like a silly schoolboy). Thus this possibility of lying is my reserve; I live off it as I do off your promise to come immediately. That's why I'm not coming—instead of being certain for just 2 days that I have the constant possibility. But please do not describe



these 2 days, Milena; that would practically torture me. It's not necessary yet, only infinite desire.

And the flowers? Naturally they've already wilted? Have you ever had flowers go down the "wrong pipe," the way these did to me? It's very unpleasant.

I'm not going to meddle in the fight between you and Max. I'm staying off to the side; I acknowledge that each person is right, and am safe. What you say is undoubtedly correct, but now let's trade places. You have your homeland and can renounce it, and that may be the best thing one can do with a homeland, especially because in doing so one doesn't give up that which cannot be renounced. But he does not have a homeland and therefore has nothing to renounce and must constantly think about it, search for it or build it—whether he's taking his hat off the rack or lying in the sun next to the pool or writing the book which you will translate (here he may even be least tense of all—but you poor dear, how much work you burden yourself with from a sense of guilt; I see you bent over your work, your neck bared, I'm standing behind you, but you don't know it—please don't be frightened if you feel my lips on the back of your neck, I didn't mean to kiss it, it's only love which can't be helped)—yes, Max, so he has to think about it constantly, even when he's writing you.

And it's strange how he defeats you in details although in general your defense against him is correct. He apparently wrote you about my living with my parents and about Davos. Both wrong. Certainly living at home is very bad, but it's not just the living there—it's the life, the sinking into this circle of kindness, of love—you don't know the letter to my father—the buzzing of the fly on the lime-twig. Of course it has its good side as well. It's just that one man fights at Marathon, the other in the dining room, while the god of war and goddess of victory are omnipresent. But what purpose would it serve for me to move out physically, even if I were to eat at home, where it is certainly best for me at the moment. Next on the subject of Davos. The only thing about Davos I approve of is the kiss before I leave.

IN THE MARGIN: Yes, please send me “Unhappiness,” I wanted to ask you before. Having someone at *Tribuna* look it up is unpleasant.

[Prague, July 31, 1920]

Saturday, later

However one chooses to look at today’s lovely happy auspicious letter, it’s still a “savior” letter. Milena among the saviors! (If I were one of them would she then be with me? No, in that case assuredly not.) Milena among the saviors, Milena who is constantly discovering in herself that the only way to save another person is by being there and nothing else. Moreover she has already saved me once with her presence and now, after the fact, is trying to do so with other, infinitely smaller means. Naturally, saving someone from drowning is a very great deed, but what good is it if the savior then sends the saved a gift-certificate for a swimming course? Why does the savior want to make it so easy for himself, why does he not want to continue saving the other through his constant presence, his constant willingness to be there? Why does he want to shirk his duty and leave it with the swimming instructors and hotel owners of Davos? And besides, I weigh 55.40 kg! And how can I fly away if we are holding hands? And what good is it for us to both fly away? And besides—this is actually the main thought of the above—I’ll never go so far away from you again. After all, I’m only now escaping from the “Leads” of Meran.

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Saturday evening

That was already written—today I had once again intended to write about something else, but now there’s no point. I came home and in the darkness I saw the unexpected letter lying on the desk. I skimmed over it, although I was constantly being called to supper, then ate something which unfortunately re-

fused to disappear from the plate unless it were swallowed. Afterward I read the letter thoroughly, slowly, quickly, wildly, happily, once in amazement, and finally in desperation, so desperate that my heart was pounding. It absolutely defies belief, but there it is; still, it cannot be believed. And still one swoons over it, and swooning counts as believing. "I can't come"—I knew that with the first line and with the last line, but in between I was in Vienna several times the way one has ten dreams—each lasting about a half minute—during an overly wakeful, sleepless night. Then I went to the post office, sent you a telegram, calmed down a little and now I am sitting here. Sitting here with the pitiable task of proving to you that I cannot come. Well, you say I'm not weak, so maybe I'll succeed; above all, maybe I'll succeed in getting through the next weeks, when every hour will be grinning at me (as it is right now) with the question: "You mean you didn't go to Vienna? You received this letter and didn't go to Vienna? You didn't go to Vienna? You didn't go to Vienna?" I do not understand music but unfortunately I understand this music better than all musical people combined.

I cannot come because I am unable to lie at the office. There are only 2 reasons for me to lie at the office: fear (in which case it's actually part of the job, it belongs there, at work I lie unprepared, by rote, inspired) or else out of dire need (in case "Else" should fall "ill," Else, Else—not you, Milena, you won't be sick, that would be the direst need of all, I won't even talk about that). Thus I could lie at once if I really needed to, in which case a telegram wouldn't be necessary—genuine need can hold its own against the office—since I would go whether I had permission or not. But I can't lie in any other cases, in cases where my happiness would be among the reasons for doing so, where the main reason is my own need for happiness. I cannot do this the same way I cannot lift dumbbells weighing 20 kg. If I took the Else-telegram to the director, I'm sure it would drop out of my hand, and if it dropped I'm sure I would step on it, step on the lie, and having done that, I'm sure I would run away from the director without asking for anything.

Consider, Milena, that the office is not just some arbitrary, stupid institution (although it is and very much so, but that's not the point; as a matter of fact it's more fantastic than stupid) but up to now it has been my life. Of course I can tear myself away from it, and that might not be a bad idea; nevertheless it has been my life up to now. I can shirk off and work less than anyone (I do); I can make a mess of things (I do), while still making myself important (I do); I can calmly accept the most special treatment imaginable as my due: but to lie just so I can suddenly leave—as a free man, since I'm just an employee after all—to go where “nothing else” is sending me except the natural beating of my heart—I just can't lie like that. Before I had received your letter, however, I had intended to write that I plan to renew or otherwise update my passport this very week, so that I can come immediately if I must.

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I'm reading this over and didn't mean it like that at all, and I must not be “strong” after all, since I couldn't say it correctly. (One more thing: it is possible that I'm a worse liar in the office than someone else who—like most clerical workers—considers himself a constant victim of injustice, who is convinced he's overworked—for me that thought would be tantamount to an express train to Vienna—someone who views the office as a stupidly run machine—he would run it much better—a machine in which he is in the wrong place precisely as a result of this stupidity. According to his abilities he should be a big-big-wheel and yet he is condemned to being a little-little-wheel, etc. To me, however, the office is a human being—just like elementary school, high school, university, family, everything—watching me with innocent eyes wherever I am, a living person to whom I have become attached in some way unknown to me. In reality this person is more of a stranger to me than the people I now hear driving their cars across the Ring—so much a stranger it's absurd, in fact. But this is exactly why I have to be considerate, and consequently I make virtually no effort to conceal the fact that I, too, am a stranger. But does such inno-

cence ever realize this? And so you see I cannot lie.) No, I am not strong and I cannot write and cannot do anything. And now, Milena, on top of this you are turning away from me, not for long, I know, but remember a human can't last for long without a heartbeat, and as long as you are turned away how can my heart go on beating?

If you could send me a telegram after this letter! That is an exclamation and not a request. But do so only if you can do it freely. Only then—you see, I'm not even underlining that.

I forgot a third possible occasion on which I could lie: if you were next to me. But then it would be the most innocent lie in the world, for in that case the only person standing in the director's office would be you.

*[Prague, August 1, 1920]*  
Sunday

I still don't know what you're going to say to the letter of Saturday evening and I won't know for a long time; in any event I am now sitting in the office on Sunday duty (another strange institution: it's enough just to sit here, so other people on Sunday duty do less work than usual—I do exactly as much). It's dreary outside; one minute it's about to rain, the next there's light coming through the clouds, disturbing my writing; that's exactly the way things are, too—sad and heavy. And though you write that I have a true desire for life, it's hardly true today; what does today matter to me, or tonight? Nevertheless (please keep coming back every now and then, good word), I essentially have this desire, but little of it is on the surface. Moreover I like myself so little: I'm sitting here in front of the director's door, the director isn't in, but I wouldn't be surprised if he came out and said: "I don't like you either, and that's why I'm firing you." "Thank you," I would say, "I

really need that so I can go to Vienna.” “In that case,” he would say, “now I like you once again and am retracting your dismissal.” “Oh,” I would say, “so now once again I can’t go.” “Oh yes you can,” he would say, “because once again I don’t like you and you’re fired.” And so it would go, a story without end.

Today I dreamt about you for the first time since returning to Prague, I think. A dream toward morning, short and heavy, something like sleep caught after a bad night. I don’t remember much of it. You were in Prague, we were walking down the Ferdinandstrasse, somewhere across from Vilimek, heading toward the docks. Some acquaintances of yours passed us on the other side, we turned around to face them, you spoke with them, you may have also discussed Krasa (I know he’s not in Prague; I’ll find out his address). You spoke the way you usually do, but there was something you were concealing, something that was impossible to grasp, some element of rejection. I didn’t mention it at all but I did curse myself, although in so doing I was merely repeating the curse already on me. Next we were in a café, probably in the Café Union (it was on our way; moreover it was Reiner’s last café that evening). A man and a girl were sitting at our table, but I can’t remember them at all, then there was a man who looked very much like Dostoyevsky—but young—with his deep black beard and hair, and everything incredibly pronounced, for example the eyebrows, the bulges above the eyes. Then you were there and so was I. Again nothing betrayed your inner attitude, but the rejection was there. Your face was—I couldn’t take my eyes off this agonizing peculiarity—powdered, and what’s more, too much so, clumsily, badly; it was probably also hot and whole designs of powder had formed on your cheeks; I can still see them. I kept bending over to ask why you were powdered; whenever you saw this question coming you would obligingly meet me halfway—as I said, the rejection was impossible to notice—and say, “What do you want?” But I couldn’t ask; I didn’t dare, and I had the feeling that this being powdered was a test for me, a very crucial trial, that I really should ask, I actually wanted

to, but just didn't dare. In this way the sad dream rolled on over me. The Dostoyevsky-man also tormented me. In his behavior toward me he resembled you; still, he was a little different. Whenever I asked him something he was very friendly, concerned, bent-over, candid, but when I ran out of things to say—which happened every minute—he would jerk back, sink into his book, and forget the entire world and me in particular as he vanished into his beard and hair. I don't know why I couldn't stand this; time and again I had to lure him over with a question, and time and again I lost him through my own fault—I couldn't help it.

I have one small consolation, you can't deny me this today; the *Tribuna* is lying in front of me, I didn't even have to disobey orders and buy it, I borrowed it from my brother-in-law—no, my brother-in-law lent it to me. Please grant me this pleasure. Anyway, I'm not even concerned about what's inside, but I hear the voice, my voice! Grant me this pleasure, surrounded as I am by the din of the world. And the whole article is so beautiful, too! I don't know how it happens, after all I only read it with my eyes, so how did my blood find out so quickly, so quickly that my veins are already hot from circulating its words? And it's fun. Naturally I belong to the second group; this weight on the feet is really my own property and I do not at all consent to the publication of matters of mine which are strictly private; someone once said I swim like a swan, although that was no compliment. But it is exciting. I feel like a giant who's keeping the public away from you with outstretched arms—it's difficult for him, he's supposed to hold the public back but, at the same time, he doesn't want to miss a single word or a single second of seeing you—this public which is probably pig-headed and utterly dumb—moreover female—which is probably shouting: "Where's the fashion? When's the fashion finally going to show up? So far we've 'only' seen Milena." Only, and I am living off this Only. In reality, I've taken the rest of the world and flung it into the mighty sea like Münchhausen did the gun-carriages of Gibraltar. What? The whole rest? What was that about telling lies? That you can't lie

in the office? Well, so here I sit, it's just as dreary as before and tomorrow there won't be any letter and the dream is the last news I have from you.

[Prague, August 1, 1920]  
Sunday evening

Very quickly, here's the possibility that we have every week; why didn't I think of it earlier? In any case, I have to have my passport first; that's not as easy as you think, and almost impossible without Ottla:

I leave here with the express on a Saturday afternoon, arrive in Vienna at about 2:00 A.M. (tomorrow I'll check the exact times). In the meantime you've already bought me the return ticket to Prague on the Sunday express, and wired me that you have it; without this telegram I couldn't leave Prague. You meet me at the station, we have over 4 hours together, I leave again Sunday at 7:00 A.M.

So that's the possibility, admittedly a little sad—just 4 tired hours together. (And where? In a hotel at the Franz-Josefsbahnhof?) But even so, it is a possibility, which you, however, can improve considerably—but is this possible?—by meeting me halfway in Gmünd, where we would spend the night. Gmünd is Austrian, isn't it? So you don't need a passport. I'd probably arrive around 10:00 in the evening, maybe even earlier, and leave Sunday with the express (on Sunday it should be easy to get a seat) around 11:00 A.M.—perhaps even later if there's a local train. But I have no idea how you would get there and back.

So what do you say? It's odd that I have to ask you now, when I have been talking to you all day long.

Krasa's address: Marienbad Hotel Stern



[Prague, August 2, 1920]

Monday

It turns out that according to the schedule it's much better even than I thought; I hope the schedule is correct. This is how it looks:

I. The far worse possibility: I leave here at 4:12 Saturday afternoon, arrive in Vienna at 11:10 P.M., we have 7 hours together, since I leave Sunday morning at 7:00. Of course the 7 hours are on the condition I have slept a little the night before (no easy task) otherwise you'll just have a poor sick animal on your hands.

II. The possibility which is virtually magnificent thanks to the schedule: I likewise leave here at 4:12, but am already in Gmünd by 7:28 P.M. Even if I leave with the morning express on Sunday, it's not until 10:46, so we have over 15 hours, some of which we could also sleep. But it gets even better. I don't even have to take that train; there's a local to Prague at 4:38 in the afternoon, so I would take that one. That would mean 21 hours together which we could (just think!) have every week, at least in theory.

There's only one catch, but I don't believe it's a serious one; in any case you'd have to check. Although the train station in Gmünd is Czech, the town is Austrian; does the passport nonsense extend so far that a Viennese needs a passport to enter the Czech station? In that case the people from Gmünd wanting to travel to Vienna would also have to have a passport with a Czech visa—but I can't believe this would be the case, that would be directed specifically against us. It's already so bad that I may have to wait an hour at customs control in Gmünd before being allowed to leave the station, and that would reduce our 21 hours.

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There's nothing to be added to these great things. In any case, thank you for not leaving me letterless again today, but tomorrow? I will not telephone because, first, it is too upsetting and second, because it is impossible (I've already checked once)

and third, because we are going to see each other soon. Unfortunately Ottla didn't have any time today to go to police headquarters for my passport, she'll take care of it tomorrow. Yes, you're doing excellently with the stamps (unfortunately I misplaced the special-delivery stamps, the man almost started crying when I told him that). Of course you have made it easy for yourself, with the way you thank me for the stamps, but even that makes me happy, as a matter of fact so happy that I'll send you some Legionnaire stamps, imagine. I don't feel like telling any fairy tales today; my head is like a railroad station, with trains departing, arriving, customs control (the Chief Inspector is lying in wait, ready to pounce on my visa, but this time it's in order; please, look right here: "All right, that's fine, here's the way out of the station." "Please, Herr Inspektor, would you be so kind as to hold the door for me, I can't get it open. Is it possible I'm so weak because Milena is waiting outside?" "Oh I'm sorry," he says, "I didn't know that." And the door flies open—

[Prague, August 2-3, 1920]  
Monday evening

It's already late, following a day that was fairly gloomy in spite of everything. There probably won't be any letter from you tomorrow. I have the one from Saturday; a letter written on Sunday wouldn't arrive until the day after tomorrow, so tomorrow will be free from any immediate influence of a letter. It's strange how your letters blind me, Milena. For a week now or even longer I've had the feeling that something has happened to you, something sudden or gradual, something fundamental or incidental, something clear or only half conscious; whatever it is, I know it's there. I don't detect it so much from details in the letters—although such details can be found—as from the fact that your letters are full of memories (very special memories) that, though you seem to answer everything as usual, you really don't, that you're sad without reason, that you

want to send me to Davos, that you want to get together so suddenly (after having immediately accepted my advice not to come here, after having declared Vienna inappropriate for meeting, after having said we shouldn't meet before you leave—and now in two, three letters this hurry. It should make me very happy, but it doesn't, because your letters contain some secret fear—whether for me or against me I don't know—and there is fear in this suddenness and haste with which you want to meet. In any case I am very happy to have found a possibility and it is indeed a definite possibility. If you couldn't spend the night outside Vienna, it can still be accomplished by sacrificing a few hours together. You take the Sunday express just before 7:00 A.M. to Gmünd—as I did that time—you arrive there at 10:00, I meet you, and since I don't have to leave until 4:30 P.M. we still have 6 hours together. You then return to Vienna with the evening express, arriving at 11:15—a short Sunday outing.)

That's why I'm so restless, or rather I'm not restless, so strong is the power you wield. Instead of being more restless because you're hiding something in your letters, or because you have to hide it, or because you are hiding it unconsciously—anyway, instead of being more restless, I remain calm: so great is my trust in you despite the way you may appear. If you are hiding something, then you are right to do so, I think.

But there is also another, really extraordinary reason why I am staying calm in the face of all this. You have a certain peculiarity—I believe it comes from deep inside your being, and *someone else is at fault* if it isn't always effective—which I have never seen in anyone else and which I can't even imagine, although I have found it in you. It is your inability to make other people suffer. Not out of pity, but just because you can't. No, this is unbelievable, fantastic. I've been thinking about it almost all afternoon, but now I don't dare write it down—the whole thing may simply be a more or less grand excuse for a hug.

And now to bed. *What could you be doing now, Monday, at almost 11:00 at night?*

Tuesday

So little knowledge of human nature, Milena. I've been saying that all along. Fine, Else's ill, that might be and it might mean one needs to go to Vienna, but old Aunt Klara in critical (condition)? All else aside, do you really think I could go talk to the director about Aunt Klara and still keep a straight face? (Of course—and this shows more knowledge of human nature—every Jew has an Aunt Klara, but mine departed this world long ago.) So this is absolutely impossible. Good thing we don't need her anymore: let her go ahead and die, after all she's not alone, Oskar is with her. On the other hand, who is Oskar? Aunt Klara is Aunt Klara, but who is Oskar? Whoever he is he's with her. Hopefully he won't fall ill himself, the old widow chaser.

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A letter after all, and what a letter! What I said in the beginning doesn't apply to the evening letters, but nor can they cause this (as I said, calm) unease to disappear. It's so good we're going to see each other. I may send you a telegram tomorrow or the day after (Ottla has already left today to take care of the passport) saying whether I'll be able to go to Gmünd this Saturday (it's already too late for Vienna this week, since by now you would have had to buy the ticket for the Sunday express). Then answer me by telegram whether you, too, can come. So keep going to the post office in the evening as well, in order to receive the telegram soon. Thus it will be like this: I'll wire: "impossible"—that is to say I can't come this week. In that case I won't expect an answer by wire and we'll discuss the rest by letter. (Whether we meet during the next 4 weeks of course depends on where you'll be in the country, you'll probably be even further away from me, in which case I guess we couldn't see each other for a whole month.) Or else I will wire: "Can be in Gmünd Saturday." Then I'll expect your reply to be either "Impossible" or "Arrive Saturday in Gmünd" or else "Arrive Sunday in Gmünd." *In these last two cases we're set, and no more telegrams are needed* (no: so that

you're sure I've received your telegram, I will confirm), *we both leave for Gmünd* and will see one another this Saturday or Sunday. It all sounds very simple.

---

Almost two hours lost, I had to put the letter aside: Otto Pick was here. I'm tired. When will we see each other? Why don't I hear your name any more than 3 times in 1½ hours? Even if I make concessions, admit that I was in Vienna, although I didn't speak with anybody—our being together wasn't "speaking," was it? Where are you? On the way to the village with the cottage? I'm also on my way there, it's a long journey. But don't agonize over that, please, whatever happens we're on our way, there's nothing left to do but leave.

[Prague, August 4, 1920]  
Wednesday

I prefer to overlook what you write about my trip ("you're waiting until *you* feel the need"), first because it's outdated, second because it hurts. Of course it's not without justification; why else would the letters of Saturday evening and Sunday morning have been so desperate? And third we're probably going to see each other as early as Saturday. (On Monday morning you don't seem to have had the first of the 3 telegrams; hopefully you'll receive the third on time).

I understand your despair over your father's letter only insofar as every new affirmation of this most agonizing relationship—which has been going on for so long—has got to cause you new despair. You can't read anything new out of his letter. Not even I, who have never read a single one of his letters, can read anything new out of it. He is heartfelt and cordial and tyrannical, and believes he must be tyrannical to satisfy his heart. The signature doesn't really signify much, just the sign of the tyrant, but above it are the words "sorry" and "terribly sad" which cancel everything.

IN THE MARGIN: The stamp collector is delighted, such honest joy.

Of course you may be frightened by the disparity between your letter and his; naturally I don't know your letter but, on the other hand, think of the disparity between his "obvious" readiness and your "incomprehensible" defiance.

And you have doubts as to your reply? Or rather had doubts, since you write that you now think you know what to say. That's strange. Had you already answered and then asked me, "What did I say?" I would be able to tell you without hesitation what I thought your reply had been.

Naturally for your father there's no difference between your husband and myself; there's no doubt about it, to the European we both have the same Negro face, but why does this belong in your letter, beyond the fact you can't say anything certain about it right now? And why should it be necessary to lie?

In my opinion, your only answer can be what another person—someone who has been watching your life with a pounding heart, tense, and with no eyes for anything else—would say to your father if he were to talk about you in a similar vein: "All 'suggestions,' all 'fixed and fast bonds' are useless, Milena is living her own life and cannot live any other. Admittedly Milena's life is sad, nonetheless it is as 'healthy and calm' as in a sanatorium. Milena is only asking you to finally realize this—she isn't asking for anything else, especially not for 'accommodation.' She's only asking you to follow your heart and speak with her as one human to another, on equal terms, and not close yourself off to her in a fury. Once you have done that, you will have removed much 'sadness' from Milena's life and she won't cause you any more 'sorrow.'"

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What do you mean that the reply to your father will fall right on your birthday? I'm really beginning to fear your birthday. Whether we see each other Saturday or not, in any case please send me a telegram on the evening of the 10th of August.

---

If you could only be in Gmünd Saturday or Sunday! It really is very necessary.

In that case this would actually be the last letter you receive before we see each other face to face. And these eyes which haven't had anything to do for a month (all right: reading letters, looking out the window) will see you.

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The essay is much better than in German, although it still has some holes—or rather entering it is like entering a swamp, it's so difficult having to pull out your foot at every step. Recently a reader of *Tribuna* conjectured that I must have done a lot of research in the lunatic asylum. "Only in my own," I said, whereupon he still tried to make a compliment out of "my own lunatic asylum." (There are 2, 3 small misunderstandings in the translation.)

I'm holding on to the translation for a little while.

[Prague, August 4-5, 1920]  
Wednesday evening

Just now around 10:00 P.M. I was in the office, the telegram was there—so quickly I'm almost inclined to doubt that it's the answer to the telegram I sent yesterday, but there it is: dispatched 4 Aug. 11:00 A.M. It was actually here by 7:00, so it only took 8 hours. One of the consolations inherent in the telegram is that we're close enough at least in space: I can have your answer in almost 24 hours. And this answer doesn't always have to be: Don't come.

There remains the smallest possibility you still haven't received my letter in which I explained that you don't have to spend a night away from Vienna and can nonetheless go to Gmünd. On the other hand, you must have found that out for

yourself. Even so I'm still considering whether I should obtain the ticket and visa, which is only valid for 30 days (your vacation), on the strength of this tiny possibility.

However, I probably won't, the telegram is so definite; apparently you have insurmountable objections to the trip. Now look, Milena, it doesn't matter. I myself would not have presumed to dream of seeing you "so soon" again after 4 weeks (although only because I didn't have any idea how easy it would be to meet). If we had met I would have owed it exclusively to you, and therefore you also have the right to cancel this possibility which you yourself created (this is disregarding the fact that if you don't come it's because it can't be helped, I know). I wouldn't have to mention this at all, it's just that I was so happy to find this narrow tunnel leading out of the dark apartment to you. I had thrown myself into it with all my soul, into this passageway which could (my foolishness immediately says: Of course it does! of course! of course!) lead to you but which instead runs smack into the impenetrable stone of Please-don't-come. So now I have to turn back, again with all my soul, slowly return through the passage I had dug so quickly, and fill it in. That hurts a little, you see, but it can't be all that bad, since I'm able to write about it in such a tedious manner. In the end one always finds new tunnels to burrow, old mole that one is.

IN THE MARGIN: I'm not at all against your vacation. How could I be and why do you think that?

Much worse is the fact that the meeting would have been very important for reasons I believe I indicated yesterday. In this respect it cannot be replaced by anything and that's really why the telegram makes me sad. But maybe your letter of the day after tomorrow will contain some comfort.

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I only have one request: Your letter of today contains two very harsh sentences. The first ("but you're not coming because you're waiting until *you* feel the need to come") has some justification, the second ("Farewell Frank"—I'll quote the rest



just so you can hear how this sentence sounds: “in that case it doesn’t make sense for me to send you the fake telegram, I’m not sending it.” So why did you send it?) This “Farewell Frank” has no justification whatsoever. Those are the sentences. Could you, Milena, take them back somehow, formally retract them; the first only in part if you prefer, but the second one in its entirety?

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This morning I forgot to enclose your father’s letter, forgive me. By the way, I also overlooked the fact that it’s his first letter in 3 years, only now do I understand the impression it made on you. This makes your letter to him much more significant; *it must have contained something new after all.*

By the way: I had always misunderstood you, thinking that your father had never spoken with your husband. Staša, however, mentioned that they talked to each other frequently. What might have been discussed?

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Yes, your letter has a third sentence as well, which may be directed against me even more than the ones I quoted. The sentence about sweets which upset the stomach.

Thursday

So today is—moreover unexpectedly—the letterless day I have feared so long. So seriously did you mean what you wrote Monday that the next day you were unable to write. But I still have your telegram to cling to.

[Prague, August 6, 1920]  
Friday

So you’re not doing well—the worst ever since I’ve known you. And this insurmountable distance between us, together with your suffering, makes me feel as though I were in your room and you were barely able to recognize me as I wandered

helplessly back and forth between the bed and the window, trusting nobody, no doctor, no treatment, and knowing nothing, simply staring at this dreary sky which now, for the first time—after all the playfulness of earlier years—reveals its true nature: forlorn and just as helpless as myself. You're lying in bed? Who's bringing you your meals? What kind of meals? And these headaches. Write me something about them when you get a chance. I once had a friend, an Eastern Jew, actor, who every three months had terrible headaches lasting for days. Apart from that he was entirely healthy, but on those days if he went out on the street, he would have to support himself against the house walls, and there was nothing else one could do for him but walk up and down for half an hour, waiting. The healthy forsake the sick, but the sick also forsake the healthy. Do the pains recur regularly? And the doctor? And since when have you been having them? And now you're probably taking pills as well? Bad, bad, and I can't even say child.

IN THE MARGIN: I'm enclosing the 6 Legionnaire stamps: one thanks is enough, but put it in a letter, since it's warmer there.

It's a shame your departure has been postponed again; now you won't leave until a week from Thursday. Well, I won't have the pleasure of seeing you revive among lake, forest, and mountains. But how much more pleasure do I want, greedy, greedy man? It's a pity you have to go on torturing yourself in Vienna for so long.

We'll discuss Davos another time. I don't want to go there because it's too far away, too expensive, and too unnecessary. If I do leave Prague, and I'll probably have to, it would be best for me to go to some village. But where will anyone take me in? I'll still have to give it some thought; in any case, I definitely won't leave before October.

Last night I met a certain Stein, you may know him from the cafés, people always compare him with King Alphonso. He's now an intern with a lawyer, was very glad to see me,

wanted to discuss some official business, and would otherwise have had to telephone me the next day. "Well what is it?" "It's concerning a divorce, in which I'm also somewhat involved, that is, I'm being asked to intervene." "In what way?" I really had to reach for my heart. But then it turned out it was only the parents of one of my poets who were getting a divorce, and that the mother, whom I don't know in the least, had asked Dr. Stein to ask me to work on the poet some so he would treat her, his mother, a little better and not revile her so.

An odd marriage, incidentally. Imagine—the mother had already been married once; she had a child, the poet, during this earlier marriage by her current husband. So the poet's last name is that of her first husband and not the father. But then they did marry and now after many years are separated once again, at the instigation of the husband, the poet's father. The divorce is already complete. Because of the current housing shortage, however, the woman cannot find an apartment for herself, so for this reason alone they continue living together as a married couple. However, this conjugal living (the result of not having an apartment) has not brought the husband to reconcile himself with his wife or even to abandon the divorce proceedings. Aren't we humans pitiful to the point of comedy? I know the husband: a kind, reasonable, very capable and affable man.

By all means send me the list of things you want done—the longer the better. I'll crawl into every book, into every item it contains just in order to travel inside it to Vienna (the director doesn't mind that) and please give me as many opportunities to travel as possible. You could also lend me the essays that have already appeared in the *Tribuna*. Incidentally, I'm almost looking forward to your vacation myself, except for the bad mail service. You will write me what it's like there, won't you—your life, your apartment, your walks, the view from your window, what you eat—so that I can share it all with you a little.

[Prague, August 7, 1920]  
Saturday

Am I really kind and patient? I don't know about that, but I do know that such a telegram does the whole body good, so to speak; still, it's just a telegram and not a proffered hand.

But it also sounds sad, tired, spoken from the sickbed. And it really is sad; what's more, no letter came today—another day without a letter, you must be doing very poorly. Who can give me any guarantee that you sent the telegram yourself and aren't spending the whole day in bed, cooped up in your room, which I inhabit more than my own?

Last night I committed a murder for your sake: a wild dream, bad, bad night. I hardly remember anything more about it.

---

So now your letter arrived after all. It's clear, all right. True, the others weren't any less clear, but one didn't dare press further to attain their clarity. By the way, since when are you capable of lying? Your forehead is not the kind that can tell lies.

I don't blame Max. Of course, whatever may have been in his letter, it was wrong: nothing, not even the best of people, shall come between us. This is also why I committed a murder last night. Someone, a relative, said in the course of a conversation I don't remember but which mainly concerned something this person or that could not accomplish—anyway some relative finally said ironically: "So maybe Milena." Whereupon I somehow murdered him and came home, all worked up. My mother kept running after me. Here at home a similar conversation was taking place; finally I cried out, hot with rage: "If anyone says anything bad about Milena, for instance Father (my father), I'll kill him too, or else I'll kill myself." Then I woke up, but there had been no sleep and no awakening.

To get back to your earlier letters, they basically resembled your letter to the girl. And the evening letters were nothing but grief over the morning letters. One evening you wrote that everything is possible, except my losing you; actually only a

slight push was needed and the impossible would have happened. And perhaps this push did occur and perhaps it did happen.

In any event: this letter is relief; one felt one was being buried alive beneath the earlier letters; at the same time one felt compelled to lie still, since perhaps one was dead after all.

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So none of this actually surprised me, I expected it, I prepared for it as well as I could, in order to bear it in case it came. Now that it is coming I'm still not sufficiently ready, naturally; but I haven't been blown over yet. Nonetheless, the other things you write about your situation and about your health are absolutely terrifying and much stronger than I am. Well, we'll talk about all that when you come back; maybe the miracle you're expecting really will occur there, at least the physical miracle. Incidentally, I have such faith in you concerning this that I don't even want any miracles to occur; I calmly entrust you to the forest, lake and to the food, you who are miraculous by nature, violated and inviolable—if it only weren't for everything else.

When I think your letter over—I've just read it once—what you write about your present and future, what you write about your father, what you write about me, the only conclusion which can be drawn is one I have already stated with perfect clarity: I am your real misfortune, and no one else but myself—except I must qualify this to say: your outward misfortune—for if it weren't for me you might have left Vienna as early as three months ago, and if not three months ago then now for sure. I know you don't want to leave Vienna; even if I weren't around you wouldn't want to, but that's exactly why it might be said—when seen from an extreme bird's-eye view—that my emotional significance for you consists in my making it possible for you to stay in Vienna (among other things of course).

But one doesn't even have to go so far as to get involved in sticky subtleties: it's enough to consider the obvious fact that you've already left your husband once, that it would be all the easier for you to leave him now, since the current pressure is

much greater, and that, naturally, you could only leave him just to leave, and not for someone else.

All these reflections, however, lead nowhere except to candor.

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Two requests, Milena—one small and one large. The small one: stop wasting stamps, and if you continue sending them I'll stop giving them to the man. I've underlined this request in red and blue, which is the greatest severity I am capable of—so that you know for later.

The large request: break off the correspondence with Max, I can't very well ask him to do so. It's fine in a sanatorium when, after the doctor has made his rounds, the guest asks in confidence how "our patient" is really doing. But even in the sanatorium the sick man is probably snarling at the door.

Of course I'll be glad to take care of everything. Only I'd think it would be better to buy the tricot in Vienna, since it will probably require an export permit (at one post office recently they didn't even want to take books without an export permit, at the next they accepted them without a word), well, maybe they'll know in the store.—I will continue to send a little money with the letters. I'll stop immediately when you say "enough."

Thank you for permission to read *Tribuna*. Last Sunday I saw a girl buying a copy at Wenzelsplatz, very obviously just because of the fashion article. She wasn't especially well dressed, not *yet*. It's a shame I didn't take more notice of her, so now I can't follow her development. No, you're wrong to underrate your fashion articles. I'm really grateful to you that I can read them in the open (since like a scoundrel I've been reading them in secret often).

[Prague, August 8, 1920]  
Sunday

The telegram. Yes, it's probably best we meet. Otherwise how long would it take to put things in order. Where did all this

break in on us? It's hard to see more than one step ahead. And how this must have made you suffer—in addition to everything else. And I could have stopped it long ago; I could see it clearly enough, but my cowardice was stronger. And wasn't I also lying by answering letters as if they belonged to me, when I clearly realized they did not? I hope it wasn't this kind of "lying" answer which blackmailed you into going to Gmünd.

I'm not at all as sad as you might think from my letter; there's just nothing else to say at the moment. It's grown so still; one doesn't dare break the silence with a single word. So we'll be together Sunday after all, 5, 6 hours—too little for talking, enough to share the silence, hold hands, look into each other's eyes.

[Prague, August 8–9, 1920]  
Sunday evening

There's something which has always bothered me in the way you reason, something which is particularly clear in your last letter—an undeniable fault you can check for yourself. When you say (as is the case) you love your husband so much you cannot leave him (even for my sake, I mean it would be horrible for me if you did it anyway), I believe you and agree. When you say that although *you* could leave him, he still needs you deep inside, and cannot live without you, and so therefore you cannot leave him, I also believe you and agree. But when you say he can't deal with the outside world without you and that is why you cannot leave (this having been made the main reason), then either you are saying this to cover up the reasons named above (not to strengthen them; those reasons don't need any strengthening) or else it is just one of the brain's pranks (you describe them in your last letter) which cause the body to writhe, and not only the body.

IN THE MARGIN: Thank you for the stamps; this way it's at least bearable, but the man isn't working at all, just looking at the stamps, enraptured,

as I am doing with the letters one floor below. The ones for 10 h, for instance, are available on thick paper and thin, but the thin ones are rarer; today you sent the thin stamps, kind soul.

Monday

I was just about to write some more along the lines of what I had begun above when 4 letters arrived—by the way, not all at once—first the one where you regret having mentioned your fainting spell, a little later the one you wrote right after you fainted, together with the one, well the one which is very beautiful, and still later the letter concerning Emilie. I can't make out in which order they were written, you've stopped writing down the days.

I'll try answering the question of "*strach—toucba.*"\* I probably won't succeed in my first attempt, but if I keep coming back to it, I may manage after several letters. It would help if you read my (incidentally bad and unnecessary) letter to my father. Maybe I'll take it along to Gmünd.

If we restrict "fear" and "longing" the way you do in your last letter, the question is not easy, but very simple to answer. *In that case I ONLY have "fear."* It's like this:

I recall the first night. At the time we lived in the Zeltnergasse, opposite a clothing store, a shopgirl was always in the door. I was constantly pacing back and forth in my room upstairs, a little over 20 years old, nervously preparing for the first State examination, trying to cram facts that made no sense to me into my head. It was summer, very hot, probably this time of year, completely unbearable. I kept stopping in front of the window, my mouth full of disgusting Roman law; finally we came to an understanding using sign language. I was to pick her up at 8:00, but when I went down that evening somebody else was already there. That didn't really change much, however; I was afraid of the whole world, hence afraid of this man as well; I *also* would have been afraid of him had he not been there. Although the girl did indeed take his arm, she nonetheless gave signs for me to follow them. This way we came to the

\**Strach*: fear; *toucba*: longing (Czech).



Schützeninsel, where we all drank beer; I sat at the next table. They then walked to the girl's apartment, slowly, with me in tow; it was somewhere near the Fleischmarkt. There the man took his leave, the girl ran into the house, I waited a while for her to reappear and then we went to a hotel on the Kleinseite. It was all enticing, exciting, and disgusting, even before we reached the hotel, and it wasn't any different inside. And as we walked home over the Karlsbrücke toward morning—it was still hot and beautiful—I was actually happy, but this happiness was only because my eternally grieving body had given me some peace at last, and above all because the whole thing had not been *more* disgusting, *more* dirty than it was. I met the girl once again—2 nights later, I think—everything went as well as the first time, but then right away I left for the summer holidays. In the country I played around a bit with another girl, and could no longer bear the sight of the shopgirl in Prague; I never spoke to her again, she had become (from my point of view) my evil enemy, although in reality she was friendly and good-natured. She kept on following me with her uncomprehending eyes. And although the girl had done something slightly disgusting in the hotel (not worth mentioning), had said something slightly obscene (not worth mentioning), I don't mean to say this was the sole reason for my animosity (in fact, I'm sure it wasn't); nonetheless the memory remained. I knew then and there I would never forget it and at the same time I knew—or thought I knew—that deep down, this disgust and filth were a necessary part of the whole, and it was precisely this (which she had indicated to me by one slight action, one small word) which had drawn me with such amazing force into this hotel, which I would have otherwise avoided with all my remaining strength.

And it's stayed that way ever since. My body, often quiet for years, would then again be shaken by this longing for some very particular, trivial, disgusting thing, something slightly repulsive, embarrassing, obscene, which I always found even in the best cases—some insignificant odor, a little bit of sulphur, a little bit of hell. This urge had something of the eternal

Jew—senselessly being drawn along, senselessly wandering through a senselessly obscene world.

On the other hand there were times when my body wasn't calm, when actually nothing was calm, but when I nonetheless felt no pressure whatsoever; life was good, peaceful, its only unease was hope (do you know a better one?). I was always alone at such times, for as long as they lasted. Now for the first time in my life I am encountering *such* times when I am *not alone*. This is why not only your physical proximity but you yourself are quieting-disquieting. This is why I don't have any longing for smut (during the first half of my stay in Meran I kept making plans day and night—against my own clear will—about how I could seduce the chambermaid—and even worse. Toward the end of my stay a very willing girl ran right into my arms; I more or less had to translate her words into my own language before I could even begin to understand her). More to the point, I just don't see any smut—nothing of the kind that stimulates from the outside, but there is everything that can bring forth life from within; in short, there's some of the air breathed in Paradise before the Fall. Enough of this air that there is no “longing,” but not enough that there isn't any “fear.”—So now you know. And that's also why I “feared” a night in Gmünd, but this was only the usual “fear” (which unfortunately is quite sufficient) I have in Prague as well; it wasn't any special fear of Gmünd.

And now tell me about Emilie, I can still receive the letter in Prague.

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I'm not enclosing anything today, not until tomorrow. After all, this letter is *important*, I want it to reach you safely.

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The fainting is only one sign among many. Please definitely come to Gmünd. You can't come if it rains Sunday morning? Well, in any case, I'll be there in front of the station Sunday morning. You don't need a passport, do you? Did you already check? Do you need anything I could bring? Does

your mentioning Staša mean I should go see her? But she's hardly ever in Prague. (Of course when she is in Prague it's even more difficult to go see her.) I'll wait until you mention her again, or until Gmünd. By the way, as far as I remember, Staša mentioned it as though it were completely obvious: yes, your father and your husband had spoken together, and often.

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You misunderstood my remark about Laurin (what a memory!—that's not irony but jealousy and not jealousy but just a dumb joke). It only struck me that all the people he mentioned were either "blockheads," "rogues," or "window-jumpers," whereas you were simply Milena and a very respectable Milena indeed. That made me happy and that's why I wrote about it and not because it saved your honor, but his own. To be exact there were a few other exceptions as well: his then future father-in-law, his sister-in-law, his brother-in-law, his fiancée's former husband, all were upright, "wonderful" people, [. . .]

IN THE MARGIN: So you arrive right after 9:00—since you're an Austrian don't let them detain you at customs; after all, I can't go on for hours repeating to myself the words I'm planning to greet you with.

Your letter of today is so sad and above all its pain is so tightly sealed inside that I feel completely excluded. Whenever I have to leave my room I quickly run up and down the stairs, just so I can return and find your telegram on the table: "I'll also be in Gmünd Saturday." But nothing has come yet.

*[Prague, August 9, 1920]*

~~Saturday~~ Monday afternoon

(apparently I'm thinking only about Saturday)

I'd be a liar if I didn't say any more than I did this morning, especially to you, with whom I can speak more freely than

anyone else, since no one else has ever taken my side as knowingly and willingly as you, despite everything, despite everything (distinguish the great despite everything from the great nevertheless).

Your most beautiful letters (and that's saying a lot, since in their entirety as well as in almost every line, they are the most beautiful thing that ever happened to me) are the ones where you accept my "fear" as justified and simultaneously attempt to explain why it isn't necessary. Because deep down I also probably accept my "fear" as justified, even if I sometimes resemble a defense lawyer whom it has bribed: it really is part of me and perhaps the best part. And since it's the best part it may also be the only part you love. What else about me could be so loveable? But this is worthy of love.

And when you once asked how I could have called that Saturday "good" with this fear inside my heart, it isn't difficult to explain. Because I love you (*you see, I do love you, you dimwit, my love engulfs you the way the sea loves a tiny pebble on its bed*—and may I be the pebble with you, heaven permitting) I love the whole world and that includes your left shoulder—no, the right one was first and so I'll kiss it whenever I want to (and whenever you're kind enough to pull down your blouse a little) and that also includes your left shoulder and your face above me in the forest and your face below me in the forest and my resting on your almost naked breast. And that's why you're right in saying we were already one and I'm not afraid of this; on the contrary, it is my only happiness and my only pride and I don't at all restrict it to the forest.

But between this daytime world and that "half-hour in bed" you once wrote of with disdain, as if it were men's business, there is an abyss I cannot span, probably because I don't want to. Over there lies an affair of the night, absolutely and in every respect; here, on the other hand, is the world which I possess, and now I'm supposed to leap across into the night in order to repossess it. But can anything be repossessed? Doesn't that imply losing it? Here is the world which I possess and I'm supposed to leap across to there, just for the sake of some

black magic, some hocus-pocus, some alchemy, a philosopher's stone, a wishing ring. Away with it; it makes me dreadfully afraid.

To resort to black magic at night—hastily, panting, helpless, demonically possessed—in order to capture what every day gives freely to open eyes! (“Maybe” there isn’t any other way to have children, “maybe” children, too, are black magic. Let’s skip that question for now.) This is why I’m so grateful (to you and to everything), and so it’s “natural” I am extremely calm and extremely uncalm, extremely constrained and extremely free whenever I’m next to you. This is also why, following this realization, I have renounced all other life. Look into my eyes!

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So I have to be told by Frau Kohler that the books have emigrated from the nightstand to the desk. There’s no question I should have been consulted first as to whether I approve of this emigration. And I would have said: No!

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And now be grateful to me. I have happily overcome the temptation to add something crazy in these last lines (something crazy and jealous).

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But that’s enough, now tell me about Emilie.

*[Prague, August 10, 1920]*  
Tuesday

I can’t say I’m very well prepared for your birthday, having slept even worse than usual, with my head warm, my eyes burned out, my temples causing me torment, and my cough. I don’t think I could offer congratulations of any length without coughing. Fortunately no congratulations are necessary, just a thank you for being on this Earth, where I wouldn’t have even begun to expect you might be found (you see my knowl-

edge of the world isn't very great either—only, in contrast to you, I admit it). And as a token of my gratitude (this is gratitude?) I kiss you just like I did at the train station, despite the fact you didn't like it (for some reason I'm being spiteful today).

Lately I haven't been feeling this bad all the time, occasionally it's also been very good, but the day of my greatest glory occurred about a week ago. I was taking the endless walk around the pool at the swimming school, as weak as always. It was almost evening, there weren't many people left, but still quite a few, when the assistant instructor—who doesn't know me—walks in my direction, looks around as if searching for somebody, notices me, evidently *chooses* me and asks: "Would you like to go for a row?" It turns out there was a gentleman (some *big* builder, I believe) who had come down from the Sophieninsel and wanted to be ferried over to the Judeninsel; they're constructing something enormous on the Judeninsel. Now there's no point in exaggerating the whole thing: the swimming instructor had simply spotted me and wanted to offer the poor boy (me) the pleasure of a free boat ride. In deference to the *big* builder, however, he had to choose a boy who looked not only sufficiently strong and skillful, but also reliable enough to return the boat immediately after having finished the job and not take it out for an unapproved spin. And he thought I was his man. Big Trnka (the owner of the swimming school—I should tell you about him sometime) joined us and asked if the boy could swim. The swimming instructor, who could evidently divine everything merely by looking at me, reassured him. I had hardly said a word. Next the passenger came and we set off. Being a well-behaved boy I hardly spoke. He said it was a nice evening, I agreed: "Yes"; then he added, but it's already cool, I said: "Yes"; finally he observed that I row very fast, and I was too grateful to say anything. Needless to say, I pulled up to the Judeninsel in the best style, he got off, thanked me kindly, but much to my disappointment forgot to tip me (that's the way it is when you're not a girl). I rowed back straight as an arrow. Big Trnka was astonished

to see me back so soon.—Well it's been ages since I was as puffed up with pride as I was that evening; I felt more worthy of you, admittedly only by a tiny bit, but nevertheless a tiny bit more worthy. I've been waiting at the swimming school every evening since then for another passenger, but so far no one else has shown up.

Last night, in a short half-sleep, it occurred to me that I should celebrate your birthday by visiting places that are important to you. And right afterward, I involuntarily found myself in front of the Westbahnhof. The building was very tiny; there couldn't have been much room inside, since an express train had just arrived and one of the cars didn't fit and was jutting out of the hall. I was very pleased that three very nicely dressed—but thin—girls (one had a ponytail) were standing in front of the station as porters. I realized that what you had done really wasn't so unusual. Nonetheless I was glad you weren't there now, although I was also sad. But as a consolation I found a small briefcase which a passenger had lost, and to the amazement of the passengers standing around me I started pulling out large pieces of clothing. Unfortunately there was no coat like the one demanded in the Sunday *Tribuna's* "Open Letter" directed at me; I'll have to go on and send mine after all, although it's not the right one.

Particularly the second part of "Typus" is excellent, sharp and angry, anti-Semitic and magnificent. I never noticed before at all what a sophisticated thing journalism is. You speak to the reader so calmly, so intimately, so urgently, you have forgotten everything else in the world, are concerned only with the reader, but in the end you suddenly say: "Is what I've written nice? Really? Nice? Well, I'm glad but I generally keep my distance and don't accept gratitude in the form of kisses." And then it really is the end and you're gone.

By the way, did you know that you were my confirmation present (there's also a kind of Jewish confirmation)? I was born in '83, so when you were born I was 13 years old; the 13th birthday is a special celebration. In the temple I had to recite a prayer—up by the altar—I had learned with difficulty, then

give a small speech (also memorized) at home as well. I also received many presents. But I imagine I wasn't completely satisfied, since one present was still missing; I demanded it from heaven, but heaven waited until the 10th of August.

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Yes, of course I'll be happy to read through the last 10 letters again, although I know them very exactly. But look over mine again as well, you'll find a whole girls' school of questions.

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We'll talk about your father in Gmünd. As usual when faced by girls, I'm helpless confronted by "Grete." Am I supposed to have had the slightest thought at all concerning you? I can't remember. I like holding your hand in my own, I like looking in your eyes. That's about it, exit Grete!—

As far as "not earning" is concerned—"I don't understand how such a person . . ."—I'm faced with the same riddle myself, and I don't think we'll ever be able to solve it together. Moreover it is blasphemous. In any case I don't intend to waste a single minute on it in Gmünd.—Now I realize you have to lie more than I would have had to lie. That depresses me. *If any serious obstacle crops up, go ahead and stay in Vienna*—even without informing me—I will have simply taken a trip to Gmünd and be closer to you by 3 hours. I already have my visa. You won't be able to wire me at all, at least not today, because of your strike.

[Prague, August 11, 1920]

Wednesday

I don't understand your asking for forgiveness. If it's over it goes without saying that I forgive you. I was only unrelenting as long as it was going on, and then you didn't care. How could I not forgive you for something if it's over! How confused your head must be to even think such a thing.

I don't like being compared to your father, at least not at the



moment. Am I supposed to lose you as well? (Besides, I don't have the strength to be your father.) If you're going to insist on this comparison, however, you'd better send me back the tricot.

Incidentally, buying and sending the tricot was a 3-hour affair which thoroughly refreshed me—at the time I needed that very much—and for which I am grateful to you. I'm too tired to tell you about it today; it's the second night I've hardly slept. Can't I pull myself together enough for me to receive at least some praise in Gmünd?

Really now, envious about the lady from Amsterdam? Of course what she does is beautiful, if she does it with conviction, but you're making one logical mistake. For someone who lives the way she does, life is compulsion; only for someone who cannot live that way would it be freedom. It's the same everywhere. Ultimately that kind of "envy" is really just a death wish.

By the way, where did "heaviness, nausea, disgust" come from? How was it compatible with "envy"? It wasn't at all compatible. Such elements of life can only be made compatible through longing, in death.

I said many more insidious things about "staying in Vienna" than the ones you mention, but you're right anyway. It's striking that your father keeps gaining power—at least I feel so—compared to earlier years. (So keep the tricot.)

Do what you like as far as Max is concerned. But since I now know your instructions to him, I will, when the end is near, have myself carried to him and discuss taking a trip together for several days "since I'm feeling especially strong," then I'll crawl home and stretch out for the last time.

Of course I talk this way as long as it hasn't come to that. As soon as I reach 37.5° (38° in the rain!), however, the telegram messengers will be tripping over each other up and down your long staircase. Hopefully they'll be on strike then and not at such an inappropriate moment as now, on your birthday!

The post office has taken my threat to deny the man his stamps too literally. The stamp on the special delivery letter

had already been removed by the time I received it. By the way, you have to understand the man correctly, he doesn't just collect *one* stamp of each kind. He has a large sheet for every kind and large albums for all the sheets and when one sheet is full of a certain kind he takes out a new one and so on. And he busies himself with this every afternoon and is fat and happy and lucky. And each type provides another cause for joy, for instance today the 50 h stamps: the rates are about to go up (poor Milena!) and the 50 h stamps will become rarer!

I like what you say about Kreuzen very much (not Aflenz, that's a real lung sanatorium; they give injections there, pfui! It was the last stop for one of our employees before he died of consumption). I like that kind of countryside and it also has historic memories. But will it still be open in late autumn, and do they take foreigners, and isn't it more expensive for foreigners, and will anyone but me understand why I'm moving to the land of hunger in order to fatten up? Nonetheless I'll write them.

Yesterday I spoke once again with that Stein. He's one of those people life generally treats unfairly. I don't know why people laugh at him. He knows everybody, knows all the personal details, but still he is modest, respectful, very careful in his judgments and endowed with a subtle mind; his worth is merely made greater by the others being a little too obvious, too innocently vain—assuming one is acquainted with people who are secretly, lasciviously, criminally vain. I suddenly started in on Haas, crept past Jarmila, then arrived at your husband and after a while—incidentally, it's wrong to say I enjoy hearing people talk about you, not at all, I just want to keep hearing your name, again and again, the whole day long. Had I asked him he also would have told me a lot about you; since I didn't ask him he was content to note, with sincere sorrow, that you're scarcely alive anymore, ruined by cocaine (how thankful I was at that moment that you're still alive). By the way, he also mentioned, cautious and modest as he is, that he hadn't witnessed this with his own eyes, just heard it. He spoke about your husband as if he were a powerful magician. He claims to have been together with Jarmila, Haas, and Reiner 2 days

before the suicide; Reiner was apparently very friendly to Haas and borrowed money from him. He also mentioned a name I hadn't heard before from your Prague days: Kreidlová, I believe.—He would have gone on like that a long time if I hadn't left, feeling a little nauseated, above all by myself, since I was walking beside him so silently and listening to things I didn't want to hear and which didn't concern me in the least.

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I repeat: Stay in Vienna if there is any obstacle that *might* cause you to suffer even *slightly*, if it can't be helped: even without letting me know. But if you do go, then break through the border crossing immediately. Should it happen that for some unforeseen insanity I was unable to leave and could no longer reach you in Vienna (I would wire Frau Kohler), there'll be a telegram waiting for you in the hotel at the train station.

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Did all 6 books arrive?

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Reading "The Café" was like listening to Stein, except you tell a story much better than he does; who else can tell a story so well? But why do you tell them to anyone who buys the *Tribuna*? While I was reading it I felt I was walking up and down in front of the café, day and night, year after year; every time a guest came or went I would peer in through the open door to check that you were still inside. Then I would resume the pacing and waiting. This was neither straining nor sad. And how could it be straining or sad to wait in front of a café when you are inside!

[Prague, August 12, 1920]  
Thursday

I'm going to Laurin's today, telephoning is too uncertain and too difficult. Moreover, I can only reach Pick by writing and don't even know his exact address; I probably won't be able to

find his last letter. He's in the country, was only in Prague a few days and then went back. I'm very glad Münchhausen did his job well; admittedly he has done much more difficult things before. And will the roses be given the same care as the other flowers (an "armful"!)? And what kind of flowers were they? And from whom?

I answered your question about Gmünd before you even asked it. The less you torment yourself, the less you'll be tormenting me. I didn't sufficiently consider the fact you have to lie like that. But how can your husband imagine that, having once seen you, I am not writing you and that I don't want to see you.

You write that you sometimes feel like testing me. That was only a joke, wasn't it? Please don't do it. It takes so much energy just to recognize someone; how much more would it take not to recognize!

I'm glad you find the advertisements tasty. Go on and eat, eat! Maybe if I start saving today and you wait twenty years, when furs will be cheaper (because by then all Europe may be laid waste and furry animals will be running through the streets)—maybe then there'll be enough money for a fur.

And do you perhaps know when I'll get some sleep at last—perhaps Saturday or Sunday night?

For your information, these surcharged stamps are what he truly desires (he only "truly" desires). "That's beautiful, beautiful!" he says. What things he must see in them!

And now I'm going to eat and go to the foreign exchange—a typical morning in the office.

*[Prague, August 13, 1920]\**

Friday

I don't exactly know why I am writing, probably because I'm nervous, which is why I answered the special delivery letter I

\*Written the day before Kafka left Prague to meet Milena in Gmünd.

received from you yesterday evening with a clumsy telegram this morning. After I check at Schenker's this afternoon I'll answer you immediately.

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Otherwise our correspondence on this subject will lead again and again to the conclusion that you are bound to your husband by a virtually sacramental, indissoluble marriage (how nervous I am, my ship must have lost its rudder somehow during these last days), and that I am bound by an identical marriage to—I don't know, but I often feel the gaze of this terrible wife. And the strange thing is that, although each of these marriages is indissoluble—so there's actually nothing more to be said—the indissolubility of one creates the indissolubility of the other or at least reinforces it and vice versa. But nothing remains except the judgment in your words: "It will never be," and let us never speak of the future again, just of the present.

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This truth is absolute, unshakable, the pillar supporting the world, and still I confess I feel (but this is merely a feeling; however, the truth remains, remains absolute. You know whenever I want to write something like the following the swords immediately begin to approach, slowly, their points forming a wreath around me—the most perfect torture; when they begin to graze me—not cut, just graze me—it's already so terrible I betray everything at once, with my first scream: you, me, everything)—so only on this assumption do I confess that writing letters about things like this makes me feel (I repeat for my life's sake: this is merely a feeling) as if I were living somewhere in Central Africa and had lived there all my life and wanted to share with you who live in Europe, in the middle of Europe, my unshakable opinions about the next political configuration. But this is just a simile, a stupid, clumsy, wrong, sentimental, lamentable, intentionally blind simile, nothing more: please, swords!

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You're right to quote your husband's letter, and although I can't say I understand everything exactly (do *not* send me the

letter), I can see that it is written by a "single" man, one who wants to "marry." What does his occasional "infidelity" matter? It isn't even "infidelity," since you both walk the same road, just that he veers a little to the left along the way. What does this "infidelity" matter, which will keep welling up in any case in your deepest sorrow as in your deepest happiness? What does this "infidelity" matter compared to my eternal bond!

---

I did not misunderstand you concerning your husband. You keep pouring the whole mystery of your indestructible unity, this rich inexhaustible mystery, into worrying about his boots. There's something about that which tortures me; I don't know exactly what. It's really very simple; if you were to leave him he'll either live with another woman or move into a boarding house, and his boots will be polished better than they are now. This is silly and not silly, I don't know what it is about these remarks that causes me such pain. Maybe you know.

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Yesterday I went to see Laurin; he wasn't in his office; today I spoke with him on the telephone and interrupted him right in the middle of correcting one of your essays. He says he wrote your husband yesterday, and that he should appeal directly to Masaryk's secretary, who is an acquaintance of Laurin.—Yesterday I wrote to Pick at Haindorf-Ferdinandstal.—

Your birthday wouldn't have had to be spoiled if you'd written me earlier about the money. I'm bringing it along. But we may not see each other at all; in this confusion it's entirely possible.

There's another thing. You write about people who share their mornings and evenings and those who don't. In my opinion, precisely the latter situation is the more favorable. They have possibly, or certainly, done something bad, and the filth of this scene derives essentially from their being strangers—as you correctly observe—and it is physical filth just like the filth in an apartment that has never been occupied and is suddenly, savagely torn open. This is bad but nothing crucial, nothing

actually decisive in heaven and on Earth has happened, it really is just “playing with a ball,” as you call it. It’s as if Eve had indeed picked the apple (sometimes I think I understand the Fall like no one else), but just to show it to Adam—because she liked it. It was the biting that was decisive; of course playing with the apple also wasn’t allowed, but neither was it prohibited.

[Prague, August 17–18, 1920]  
Tuesday

So it’ll be another 10–14 days before I get an answer to this letter; compared to the way it’s been, that’s almost like being abandoned, isn’t it? And just now I feel there are some things I have to tell you, unsayable things, unwritable—not to make up for something I did wrong in Gmünd, not to save something which has drowned, but to make it utterly clear to you how I am doing, so that you won’t let yourself be frightened away from me. After all, that can happen with people, despite everything. Sometimes I feel as though I had lead weights so heavy they’re bound to pull me down into the deepest sea in a minute, and anyone who wanted to grab me or even “save” me would just let me go, not out of weakness or even desperation, but simply out of sheer annoyance. Now, naturally this isn’t addressed to you, but to your pale reflection, barely recognizable by a tired, empty head (neither unhappy nor excited—almost a condition to be grateful for).

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So yesterday I went to see Jarmila. Since it was so important to you I didn’t want to postpone it by a single day—to tell the truth, the thought of having to speak with Jarmila at all made me uneasy, and I preferred to get it over with at once, despite my being unshaven (this time it wasn’t merely gooseflesh), which could hardly affect the outcome of my mission. I went

up there around 6:30; the doorbell didn't ring, knocking didn't help, the *Národní Listy* was in the mailbox, evidently there was nobody home. I stood around a little while, two women came in from the courtyard, one of them Jarmila, the other possibly her mother. I recognized J at once, although she hardly resembles her photograph, much less you.

[. . .]

We left the house at once and walked up and down for about 10 minutes behind the former military academy. What surprised me most was that she was very talkative, contrary to what you had foreseen, although admittedly just for these 10 minutes. She talked almost incessantly, reminding me very much of that letter of hers you once sent me. A loquaciousness that is somehow independent of the speaker—this time it was even more striking, since it wasn't about such concrete details as were in that letter. Her liveliness is partly explained by the fact that, as she said, she has been upset about the whole affair for several days now, she has wired Haas on account of Werfel, and (still without an answer) has wired you and written by special delivery. Following your request she immediately burned the letters, not knowing any other way she could quickly put your mind to rest, which is also why she had already thought of going to see me this afternoon, to at least discuss it with someone who also knew about the whole thing. (She is evidently under the impression that she knows where I live, because of the following: one autumn, I think—or maybe it was already spring, I don't know for sure—I went rowing with Ottlá and little Růženka, the girl who had prophesied my impending end in the Schönbornpalais. In front of the Rudolphinum we met Haas with a woman whom I didn't even notice at the time, it was Jarmila. Haas told her my name and Jarmila mentioned that she had occasionally spoken with my sister years ago at the swimming school; because the swimming school was very Christian at the time, Jarmila had remembered my sister as a Jewish curiosity. At the time we lived opposite the swimming school and Ottlá had pointed out our apartment. So that's the whole long story.) This is why she was honestly



glad I had come, why she was so animated—incidentally, also unhappy—about these entanglements which have most assuredly, most assuredly stopped and which, as she almost passionately assured me, will most assuredly, most assuredly have no further consequences. My ambition, however, was unsatisfied, I had wanted to burn the letters myself and scatter the ashes over the Belvedere—admittedly without seeing the importance of doing so, but I was so caught up in the task I had been assigned.

She said little about herself: she sits at home all the time—her face proves this—speaks to no one, only goes out on occasion to check for something in a bookstore or else to mail a letter. Apart from that she just talked about you (or was it me talking about you, it's hard to distinguish after the fact). When I mentioned how happy you had been when you saw—having received a letter from Berlin—that there was a possibility Jarmila might visit you, she said she could hardly understand how happiness was possible and least of all how it might come from her. It sounded simple and believable. I said old times can't just be erased and they always contain possibilities that might spring to life. She said yes, that might happen if people were together, and recently she had been looking forward to seeing you very much, and it seemed to her so obviously necessary for you to be here—she pointed to the ground several times; her hands were animated as well—here, here, here.

In one respect she reminds me of Staša; whenever they talk about you, both are in the underworld, speaking wearily about you who are alive. But Jarmila's underworld is definitely different; in the other case it is the person looking on who suffers, here it is Jarmila. I have the feeling she needs indulgence.

[. . .]

We said goodbye quickly in front of her house.

Beforehand she had also annoyed me somewhat with a tedious account of a particularly beautiful picture of you she wanted to show me. Finally it turned out she had had this photograph in her hand when she was burning all her papers

and letters before leaving for Berlin; she had looked for it again this very afternoon, but in vain.

Then I sent you an exaggerated telegram saying your instructions had been carried out. But could I have done more? And are you satisfied with me?

---

It's senseless to ask, considering this letter won't arrive for 14 days, but maybe this will only be a small addition to the general senselessness of my request: do not let yourself be scared away from me—if it is at all possible in this unsteady world (where, when one is torn away, one is simply torn away and can't do anything about it)—even if I disappoint you once or a thousand times or right now or perhaps always right now. Incidentally, that isn't a request and isn't directed to you at all; I don't know where it is directed. It's simply the oppressed breathing of an oppressed chest.

---

Wednesday

Your letter from Monday morning. Since that Monday morning or rather since Monday noon, when the beneficial effects of the trip had already worn off a little (apart from everything else, every trip is a recuperation in itself, a being-grabbed-by-the-collar, a being-shaken-through-and-through)—since then I have been singing one single song for you, incessantly; it's always different and always the same, as rich as a dreamless sleep, boring and exhausting, so that it even puts me to sleep sometimes. Be glad you don't have to hear it, be glad you'll be protected from my letters for so long.

---

O ye knowers of human nature! What do I have against your polishing his boots so beautifully: go ahead and polish them beautifully, then put them in the corner and let it be done with. It's only that you polish them in your mind all day long, sometimes that torments me (and doesn't clean the boots).

[Prague, August 19-23, 1920]  
Thursday

I kept wanting to hear a different sentence than you did, this one: "You're mine." And why that one in particular? It doesn't even mean love, just nearness and night.

Yes, the lie was great and I shared in its telling, but what's even worse is I did so in the corner, just for myself, playing innocent.

Unfortunately you keep assigning me tasks which have already been taken care of by the time I get there. If you have so little trust in me and are just trying to build my self-confidence a little, then it's too obvious a ploy. Pick writes he has already answered Frau Milena Pollak's request last week (who is this difficult three-footed creature?). By the way, he doesn't seem to have a publisher, but is coming to Prague at the end of August and will look for one then. I recently heard a rumor that Ernst Weiss is critically ill and without money and that a collection is being taken up for him in Franzensbad. Do you know anything about that?

I don't understand what Jarmila's telegram (which was sent before we met) has to do with me or even with jealousy. She did seem pleased that I showed up (because of you), but much more pleased that I left (because of me or more precisely herself).

IN THE MARGIN: Did Laurin write? And what did the lawyer say?

You really could have written a few more words about your cold, did you catch it in Gmünd or on the way home from the café? Incidentally, we're still having a beautiful summer here, even on Sunday it rained only in southern Bohemia; I was proud, the whole world could see from my soaking clothes that I was coming from the direction of Gmünd.

Friday

When read very close up it's impossible to understand the misery you're living in at the moment, it has to be held further away, but even then it's difficult to read.

You misunderstood what I said about claws, although it really wasn't understandable. What you say about Gmünd is correct and in the broadest sense. For instance, I remember you asked whether I hadn't been unfaithful to you in Prague. It was half in jest half in earnest half indifferent—again the 3 halves because it was impossible. You had my letters and were asking that. How was such a question possible? And if that wasn't enough, I go on and make it even more impossible. I said, yes, I had been faithful to you. How can it happen that one speaks like that? On that day we spoke and listened to each other often and for a long time, like strangers.

My Viennese friend's name is not Jeiteles, in fact he's not my friend at all; I don't know him, he's an acquaintance of Max's who arranged the whole thing. However, the ad will somehow make it into the *Presse*, that's easily taken care of here in a local advertisement office.

Jarmila came to see me late yesterday afternoon (I don't know where she got my current address). I wasn't home, she left a letter for you and a penciled note asking me to send you the letter because although she has your address in the country, it doesn't seem safe enough to her.

I haven't called Vlasta yet, I can't really bring myself to do so; after 9 I could only call her from the office, and I telephone so badly when surrounded by employees (we don't have a booth) that the switchboard operator generally refuses to connect me. I also forgot her surname and what would I do if your father answered? I'd rather write her; it would probably have to be in Czech?

You don't mention the lawyer?

The ad will appear Wednesday for the first time. Will possible responses be forwarded to Vienna?

Monday

So there, it didn't take so long after all, I've received the 2 letters from Salzburg—may things turn out well in Gilgen. Of course, it's already autumn, this cannot be denied. I'm doing badly, I'm doing well, whichever you prefer; hopefully my

health will last a little while into autumn. We'll still have to write or talk about Gmünd—that's partly why I'm doing badly—no, it's not like that at all, just the opposite, I'll write about it in greater detail—I'm enclosing Jarmila's letter. I responded to her visit with a pneumatic letter saying I'd be happy to send you her letter, but only if it didn't contain anything urgent, since I didn't think I'd have your address for another week. She hasn't written back.

If it's possible please send me a view of your apartment!

[Prague, August 26, 1920]

Thursday

I read the letter in pencil first. In Monday's letter I just skimmed over an underlined passage, then I preferred to leave it alone a while; I'm so anxious and it's such a bad thing one can't throw oneself with all one's being into every word; then, in case this word were attacked, one could totally defend oneself or else face total annihilation. But here, too, there is not only death, but also disease.

Even before I had finished reading the letter—you yourself write something similar in the end—it occurred to me you might be able to stay there a little longer, as long as the autumn permits. Wouldn't this be possible?

The letters from Salzburg came quickly; from Gilgen it takes a while, but I also get other bits of news here and there. Polgar's sketches in the paper about the lake—they're sad beyond measure, and perplexing, since they're funny nonetheless—well that's not much, but then there's also news from Salzburg, the Festival, the uncertain weather—now this news isn't funny; you left too late—then sometimes I make Max tell me about Wolfgang and Gilgen, he was very happy there as a boy, it must have been better in the old days. But all that wouldn't amount to much if it weren't for the *Tribuna*, this

daily possibility of finding something of yours, and occasionally actually finding it. Do you dislike my talking about it? But I enjoy reading it so much. And who should talk about it if not I, your best reader? Even earlier, before you said you sometimes think of me when writing, I felt it was connected with me, that is, I held it pressed against me; now because you have expressly said so, it almost makes me even more anxious and when for instance I read about a hare in the snow I can almost see myself there, running.

IN THE MARGIN: 100 K daily, so cheap, couldn't you stay there longer, in Gilgen, Wolfgang, Salzburg, or elsewhere?

IN THE MARGIN: I consider Max's intervention with Topič out of the question, that's really too clumsy of Pick to want to hide behind Max; he didn't write that to me, but promised he'd look for something himself when he comes to Prague.

I spent a good hour on the Sophieninsel with Landauer's essay; I understand how the details of the translation made you angry—but after all it was a loving anger as well—nonetheless it is beautiful and even if it doesn't go a step deeper, at least it shuts the reader's eyes enough for him to take this step. Incidentally, the material which attracts you is strange; the three essays (Clandel, Landauer, "Letters") belong together after all. How did you arrive at Landauer? (In this issue of *Kmen* there's also the first good original piece I've read there; I can't remember the author's name exactly—Vladislav Vančura or something like that.)

IN THE MARGIN: Yes, I knew I had skipped over something and, without being able to forget it, could not remember it: Fever? Real fever? Did you take your temperature?

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Now I've read the other letter after all, but actually just starting at: "I don't want you to answer this." I don't know what comes before that; but confronted by your letters today, which provide irrefutable proof for your being the you I carry sealed in my innermost self, I am prepared to declare it true unread, and even if it should testify against me to the highest

authorities. I am dirty, Milena, infinitely dirty, this is why I scream so much about purity. No one sings as purely as those who inhabit the deepest hell—what we take to be the song of angels is their song.

---

IN THE MARGIN: There's probably no swimming anymore? The view of your apartment, please.

IN THE MARGIN: Jarmila did write back after all, three lines: that her letter is neither urgent nor important and that she thanks me. Concerning Vlasta, I'm still waiting for your answer.

For a few days now I've been performing my "military service"—or more correctly "maneuvers," which is sometimes the best thing for me, as I discovered years ago. In the afternoon I sleep in bed as long as I can, then walk around for two hours, then stay awake as long as I can. But the catch is in this "as long as I can." "I can't for long"—not in the afternoon, not at night, and still I'm practically wilted in the morning when I walk into the office. The real treasure lies hidden in the deep of the night, in the second, third, fourth hour; but these days if I don't go to bed before midnight at the latest I am lost and so are night and day. Nevertheless none of that matters, this being-in-service is good even when there are no results. Nor will there be any; it takes me half a year to "loosen the tongue," and then I realize it's already over, that my permission to serve has expired. But as I said: it's good in itself, even if sooner or later the coughing intervenes tyrannically.

Of course, the letters weren't that bad, but I really don't deserve this letter in pencil. Is there anyone in heaven or on Earth who does?

[Prague, August 26–27, 1920]  
Thursday evening

Today I did practically nothing except sit around and read a little here, a little there—but mostly I did nothing, or else

listened to a very light pain working in the temples. All day long I was preoccupied with your letters: in agony, in love, in worry, and in an entirely indefinite fear of the indefinite, which is indefinite mainly because it is infinitely beyond my strength. At the same time I didn't at all dare read the letter a second time and there is one half-page I didn't dare read a first time. Why can't one accept the fact that the right thing to do is live inside this very special tension which keeps suicide suspended? (I tried to laugh at you when you occasionally said something similar.) Why does one attempt instead to ease it, in petulance, and then burst out of it like an irrational animal (even loving this irrationality like an animal), thereby bodily absorbing all the disrupted, wild electricity, so that one is practically consumed?

I don't exactly know what I'm trying to say with that; I'd just like to somehow intercept the laments coming from your letters, not the written laments, but the silent ones, and I can do this since they're basically my own. It's the strangest thing that even here in the darkness we are so much of one mind—I can believe it literally only every other moment.

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Friday

Instead of sleeping I spent the night with the letters (though not entirely voluntarily). That's still not the worst. Of course no letter arrived, but that in itself doesn't matter either. At the moment it's much better not to write every day; you realized this in secret before I did. The daily letters weaken instead of strengthen; one used to drink the letters to the last drop and immediately feel ten times stronger (I'm talking about Prague and not Meran) and ten times thirstier. But now it's all so serious, now one bites one's lips while reading and nothing is as certain as the small pain in the temples. But even that is tolerable, just one thing: don't get sick, Milena, don't get sick. It's fine if you don't write; (how many days do I need to cope with 2 letters like yesterday's? A stupid question—are days enough?) but it shouldn't be because you're sick. I'm only



thinking of myself here. What would I do? Most probably the same thing I'm doing now, but how would I do it? No, I don't want to think about that. And, at the same time, whenever I think of you, the clearest picture I have is always one where you're lying in bed, the way you were lying in the meadow in Gmünd that evening (when I was telling you about my friend and you weren't paying much attention). And this isn't an agonizing picture at all, but the best I'm capable of right now: you're lying in bed, I'm nursing you a little, now and then I walk over to you and place my hand on your forehead, I sink into your eyes whenever I'm looking at you, and feel your eyes on me whenever I'm walking around the room and all the time I am aware, with a pride I can no longer contain, that I am living for you, that I am allowed to do so, and that, in this way, I am beginning to thank you for the fact that you once stopped beside me and gave me your hand. Furthermore, this would only be a sickness which passes quickly, leaving you healthier than you were before, one which lets you arise once again in all your greatness; whereas I would just crawl under the earth: suddenly and soon, hopefully without noise and pain.—This doesn't cause me the slightest agony, but the idea you might fall ill far away—

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Here's the ad, it could probably have been a little wittier and easier to understand, particularly the "Vienna Schools of Business and Languages" are standing there senselessly, deserted; in any case, the comma after Teacher wasn't mine. By the way, tell me what you'd like to have improved and I'll have it changed for the next run. For now it has appeared on the 26th and will appear next on the 1st, 5th, and 12th.

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It turns out Max really isn't able to mediate. Topič did indeed publish *Tycho Brabe*; since then, however, another Jewish-political brochure was supposed to appear—it had already been accepted—but then because of lack of paper, printing costs, etc., it was once again rejected. So he's actually fallen out with Topič.

[Prague, end of August, 1920]

*What I said still holds, I cannot force it or myself*, but that only has to do with the following insofar as your suffering will still bring me some good; your suffering still cares for me, not by allowing me to approach with money, but by letting me participate in some way, from a distance, from very far away (when-ever I'm allowed to of course); still I'm not afraid you're going to refuse me, since there isn't any reason to do so—I'm just afraid you won't want to go to a sanatorium even now. And yet you liked Kreuzen so much, for example. You have 1,000 K from your father, correct? Or 1,200, right? 1,000 K is the least I can send you each month. That's 8,000 Austrian krone all in all. The sanatorium won't cost more than 250 K a day. And this way you can stay there through the fall and winter and if not in Kreuzen, then somewhere else. I confess: I'm hardly thinking of you—I'm so happy to breathe again with you so near. But that still doesn't affect what I said.

As a sign of this, instead of a card I'll send something in print to your house the next time I write.

[Prague, August 28, 1920]

Saturday

So beautiful, so beautiful, Milena, so beautiful. There's nothing so beautiful in the letter (from Tuesday)—but the peace, the trust, the clarity from which it springs.

There wasn't anything this morning; that in itself would have been easy to cope with; receiving letters now is very different, although writing letters has hardly changed—the need and the joy of having to write remain. Anyhow I could have coped with that; why do I need a letter, if, for example, I spent the whole day yesterday and the evening and half the night in conversation with you, a conversation where I was as sincere and earnest as a child, and you as receptive and earnest

as a mother (actually I've never seen such a child or such a mother), so all that would have been all right, I just have to know why you're not writing, so I don't keep seeing you sick in bed, in the small room, the autumn rains outside, you alone, with a fever (you wrote that), with a cold (you wrote that), also night sweats and exhaustion (you wrote about all of that)—so if it isn't all like this, things are fine and at the moment I don't want anything better.

I won't attempt to answer the first paragraph of your letter, I still don't even know the notorious first paragraph of the prior letter. Those are very complicated things which can only be solved in conversation between mother and child; perhaps they can only be solved there because they can't possibly come up. I won't attempt to do so because the pain is lurking in my temples. Did Cupid's arrow pierce my temples instead of my heart? I won't write about Gmünd anymore either, at least not intentionally. There'd be a lot to say, but in the end all it would come down to is that the first day in Vienna wouldn't have been any better had I left in the evening. Even so, Vienna had the advantage over Gmünd because I arrived there half-unconscious with fear and exhaustion, but when I arrived in Gmünd, on the other hand, I felt—although I didn't realize this, fool that I was—so grandly confident, as if nothing could happen to me anymore. I went there like a homeowner; it's strange that, with all the uneasiness constantly coursing through my veins, this weariness of ownership is still possible; in fact, it may be my only genuine flaw, in this matter and in others.

It's already 2:45, I didn't receive your letter until 2:00, now I'm stopping to eat, all right?

Not because it might have any significance for me, but just for the sake of sincerity: yesterday I heard that Lisl Beer may have a villa in Gilgen. Is that connected to any torment for you?

The translation of the final sentence is very good. Every sentence, every word, every—if I may say so—music in that story is connected with the "fear." It was then, during one long

night, that the wound broke open for the first time, and in my opinion the translation catches this association exactly, with that magic hand which is yours.

You see what's so agonizing about receiving letters—well, I don't need to tell you. Today between your letter and mine there is a clear, good being together, breathing deeply—as far as this is possible in the great uncertainty—and now I have to wait for the answers to my earlier letters, and these scare me.

Incidentally, how can you be expecting my letter Tuesday, if I didn't receive your address until Monday?

*[Prague, August 28, 1920]*

You also like conductors, don't you? Yes, that funny but lean conductor back then, so Viennese! But they're good people here too; children want to grow up to be conductors, so they too will be powerful and respected, so they can drive around, stand on the running board, and bend down so low over other children, and they have a ticket punch as well and so many tram tickets; but all these possibilities rather intimidate me—I'd like to be a conductor so I can be so happy myself, and so interested in everything. Once I was walking behind a slow tram and the conductor

(The poet has arrived to take me out of the office, let him wait until I'm finished with the conductors)

was on the rear platform leaning over and shouting something to me—which I couldn't hear due to the noise on the Josefsplatz; he was also waving his arms excitedly, wanting to show me something, but I couldn't understand what, and meanwhile the tram was moving further away and his efforts were becoming more and more hopeless—at last I understood: the golden safety pin on my collar had come undone and he had been trying to call my attention to it. I thought about that when I boarded the tram this morning as

dull as a sick ghost, following last night; the conductor gave me change for 5 K, and in order to cheer me up (not exactly me, as he hadn't looked at me at all; he just wanted to cheer up the atmosphere) he made some friendly remark which I couldn't hear about the bills he was handing me, whereupon a gentleman standing beside me also smiled at me in recognition of the distinction I had received. I could only answer by smiling myself and so everything became a little better. If it could only cheer up the rainy sky above St. Gilgen!

[Prague, August 29-30, 1920]  
Sunday

An unusual error yesterday. Yesterday at noon I was so happy because of your letter (from Tuesday), and when I reread it in the evening it turned out to be essentially the same as the last letters: it is *far more unhappy than it admits*. The error proves how much I think only of myself, how much I'm locked inside myself, how I cling to whatever part of you I can, and how I'd like most of all to run off with it somewhere in the desert, somewhere, so that no one can take it away from me. Because I had come running into my room after dictation, because your letter surprised me there, because I read it over greedily and gladly, because nothing seemed to be written against me in bold type, because by chance my temples were only quietly knocking, because I was just lightminded enough to imagine you bedded down in the peace and quiet of forest, lake, and mountains—for all these reasons and more, none of which had the slightest thing to do with your letter and your real situation, what you wrote struck me as happy and I replied with corresponding nonsense.

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Monday

Dear Milena, how uncontrolled, how much being tossed to and fro on a sea which refuses to swallow one up out of sheer malice. Recently I asked you not to write me every day; this was sincere—I was afraid of your letters. If on occasion one didn't come I felt calmer; whenever I saw one on the table I had to gather all my strength—which was far from enough—and today I would have been unhappy, if these cards had not arrived (I have appropriated both). Thank you.

[. . .] Office work.

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Of all the generalities I've read about Russia up to now, the enclosed essay made the greatest impression on me, or more accurately, on my body, my nerves, my blood. Incidentally, I did not take everything exactly as it's written there; first I rearranged it for my orchestra. (Since the whole thing is a fragment anyway, I tore off the conclusion; it contains accusations against the Communists which don't belong in this context.)

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This address with its short words, one underneath the other, sounds like a litany, a eulogy, doesn't it?

[Prague, August 31, 1920]

Tuesday

A letter from Friday, if none was written Thursday it's fine, so long as none is lost.

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What you write about me is terribly smart, I don't want to add anything, just leave it the way it stands. There's just one thing—something you also mention—I would like to state a little more openly: my misfortune is that I consider all human beings to be good—naturally above all the ones I consider the most eminent—both with my mind and with my heart (a man

just came in and was shocked because I was making a face which expressed these opinions to the void). My body, however, simply cannot believe these people will stay that good once they really have to; my body is afraid and would rather crawl slowly up the wall than await this trial, which really would—in this sense—redeem the world.

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Once again I'm starting to tear up letters, one last night. You're very unhappy because of me (probably combined with other things, it's all a mutual effect). Say it more and more frankly. Of course it takes time.

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Yesterday I was at the doctor's. Contrary to my expectations, neither he nor the scales find me improved; on the other hand, I'm no worse. But he thinks I should leave. After I explained why, he quickly agreed that southern Switzerland was out of the question, and immediately named two sanatoria in lower Austria as the best, without any coaching from me: Sanatorium Grimmenstein (Dr. Frankfurter) and Sanatorium Wiener Wald, although at the moment he doesn't have the address of either one. When you get a chance could you please find that out, at a pharmacist's, from a doctor, in a postal or telephone directory? There's no hurry. Nor does this mean I'm leaving. Those institutions are exclusively for the lung, houses that literally cough and shake with fever day and night, where you have to eat meat, where former hangmen dislocate your arm if you resist injections, and where Jewish doctors look on, stroking their beards, callous toward Jews and Christians alike.

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In one of your last letters you wrote something (I don't dare take these last letters out; it's also possible that in glancing over them I misunderstood this, that's the most likely possibility) about your situation there coming to its final end. How much of that was temporary suffering and how much abiding truth?

---

I reread your letter and take back the "terribly," some things are missing there and there are a few things too many, so it's

merely “smart.” It’s also difficult for people to play “tag” with ghosts.

---

You saw Blei? What’s he up to? I can easily believe the whole thing was silly—also that you were left with conflicting opinions. Of course, there’s an element of beauty as well, just that this is about 50,000 miles away and refuses to come, and if all the bells of Salzburg were to begin ringing it would cautiously retreat another several thousand miles.

*[Prague, September 1, 1920]*  
Wednesday

No letter today; it’s silly; I take exception when a letter doesn’t come, and when one does come I moan, but in this case I’m allowed to do that, you know that neither one nor the other is a genuine complaint.

---

Jarmila came by my office today, so I’ve seen her a second time. I don’t know exactly why she came. She sat at my desk, we spoke a little about this and that, then we stood at the window, then at the table, then she sat down again, and then she left. She was quite pleasant to me, calm, peaceful, just a little less dead than last time: somewhat flushed, actually not very pretty, especially while sitting down, when she was even ugly, with her hat clumsily pulled down into her face. But I honestly don’t know why she came; it may be that she is too much alone and since she essentially and necessarily does nothing, coming to see me must have also counted as doing nothing. Moreover, our whole time together had the character of nothingness and was as unpleasant as the void. Of course it got more difficult toward the end, since obviously an end has to have something of reality, something set apart from nothingness, but reality was kept away as much as possible: the only result was that on



some indefinite occasion, at some indefinite time when I'm taking a stroll in her neighborhood, I'll drop in and see if she's home, perhaps to take a short walk. As indefinite as it is, however, it's still much too much and I'd gladly get out of it. But now she's come by twice, and, after all, she isn't someone I'd want to offend so blithely, even from a distance, so *what should I do?* If you have a particularly good idea maybe you could send me a telegram, since I won't receive any answer by letter for another 10 days.

She also mentioned—with this peculiar quiet weak voice—she had received a letter from you. *Might this letter have been the reason for her coming?* Or is it her nature to constantly float through the world, touching down like that here and there? Or is this only in pursuit of you?

Please write about this, you often forget to answer questions these days. Although it's true you said yesterday: "I have an unbearable headache." I was happy to see good weather this morning and could see you in the lake already; now in the afternoon it's gloomy once again.

[Prague, September 2, 1920]  
Thursday

Your letters from Sunday, Monday, and one postcard have arrived. Judge correctly, please, Milena. I'm sitting here so isolated, so far away and nonetheless in relative peace; many things pass through my mind—fear, unease—and so I write them down, even if they don't make much sense, and when I'm speaking to you I forget everything, even you; only when two such letters arrive do I regain my awareness of the whole.

I'll telephone Vlasta tomorrow; I'll go to an automatic phone booth, it won't work from here. No answer at all from your father?

I don't entirely understand one of your apprehensions con-

cerning the winter. If your husband is so ill, with 2 separate diseases, and if it's serious then he can't go to the office, nor of course, as a permanent employee, can he be dismissed. He'll also have to arrange his life differently because of his diseases; this will simplify everything and at least make things easier on the surface, as sad as it all is otherwise.

But treating the problem of guilt seriously is one of the most senseless things on this planet, at least so it seems to me. I don't consider the reproaches senseless; obviously when one is in distress one makes reproaches all around (although not in the utmost distress, when no reproaches are made). I can also understand that such reproaches are taken to heart in a time of agitation and turmoil, but the idea that one can discuss this like any ordinary problem of mathematics and produce results so clear they may be used to define daily conduct—that I do not understand at all. Of course it's your fault, but then it's also your husband's fault and then yours again and then his again—just as it has to be whenever two people are living together, and the blame accumulates in endless succession until it reaches the gray original sin; but how does rummaging around in original sin help me get through the day, or you with your visit to the doctor in Ischl?

And outside it's raining and raining and doesn't want to stop at all. I don't mind in the least; I'm sitting inside, dry, and am only ashamed at eating my bountiful second breakfast in front of the painter, who is standing on the scaffolding outside my windows and who has spattered the windows unnecessarily because he is enraged at the rain which has let up a little and at the amount of butter I am spreading on my bread. However, this too is only my imagination, since he's probably 100 times less concerned about me than vice versa. No, now he really is hard at work in the pouring rain and lightning.

I subsequently heard about Weiss that he probably isn't sick, just without money—at least that's how he was this summer—and in Franzensbad a collection was taken up for him. I answered him about three weeks ago, by registered mail—to the Black Forest, incidentally—before I heard about the matter. He

hasn't responded. He's now at Lake Starnberger with his girlfriend, who sends Baum postcards which are gloomy-serious (that's the way she is) but not exactly unhappy (also the way she is). I spoke with her briefly about a month ago before she left Prague (where she had good success in the theater). She looked miserable—she's generally weak and fragile but unbreakable—was exhausted from acting. She mentioned Weiss more or less like this: "At the moment he's in the Black Forest, he's not doing well there, but we're about to go to Lake Starnberger, things will get better."

Yes, Landauer is appearing in *Kmen*, I still haven't read the second installment carefully; today is the third and last.

Today the Jarmila affair is much less important than it was yesterday; her second visit only served to frighten me; I'll probably neither write her nor visit. Every encounter with her conveys the strong feeling that she doesn't do what she does for her own poor self; she's really carrying out an assignment, and not a human one.

[Prague, September 3, 1920]

Friday

Milena, only in haste. No letter came today, I have to keep swearing to myself it doesn't mean anything extraordinarily bad. Last evening or more exactly last night I must have spent an hour reading your last letters.

The trick with the telephone worked: today I'm meeting Vlasta at 6:00 in front of the Repräsentationshaus. It wasn't easy; no telephone conversation ever is easy for me: this one was mostly a brief exercise in misunderstanding—why would I, a stranger, want to speak with her or meet her somewhere? It turned out she hadn't caught your name, but I didn't realize that and was wondering why she sounded as if she wanted to get rid of me. Once she understood what it was about, how-

ever, she was even very happy and it was very important to her and after having first suggested we meet Saturday she changed her mind and so we are meeting today.

Yesterday at Max's I saw a letter from your husband concerning the authorization. Calm writing, calm language. Here Max will probably be able to help.

I just now received a card from Pick—he's already in Prague but still hasn't seen me—in which he writes: "You probably know Ernst Weiss is safe and sound in Prague." I didn't know.

Yesterday Jarmila wrote me 3 lines apologizing for having been here a whole hour, although in reality it was at most not even half an hour. Of course I'll answer her now; it works out well, since this will give yesterday's conversation the conclusion it lacked.

On the other hand, I have no idea what I'll talk about with Vlasta, but I don't think there's any possibility of saying anything really damaging or foolish.

A bad paper, the *Tribuna*, still no news about *Everyman*.

[Prague, September 3-4, 1920]

Friday evening

Just to tell you the most important thing right away:

All in all it went pretty well, we took the tram to her brother-in-law's apartment on the Kleinseite, there wasn't anybody home, we sat alone for  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour and talked about you, then her fiancé arrived—a Herr Říha, who joined the conversation immediately (but amicably), as if your affairs were common knowledge, and so brought it to a premature end. As it happened I had already said what was most important, although I hardly asked her a thing; still, the telling was essentially more important.

She is quite pleasant, sincere, clear, perhaps a little absent-minded, not entirely attentive. First, however, my demands in

this respect are very great, and second this absentmindedness even has a certain merit, since I had secretly feared she might want to become very personally involved with every aspect of the matter, including your father's point of view, but that's not the case. Perhaps this absentmindedness is related to her being engaged; in any event I afterward saw her on the street with her fiancé in a conversation so lively it bordered on quarrel.

She first said she had intended to write you right away (everyone I talk to about you begins like this) but didn't know your address, then she accidentally saw it on the envelope of one of your letters (to your father); however, again she didn't know whether it was the right one—here she got confused for a minute, either out of absentmindedness or a small sense of guilt.

She went on to describe your father somewhat the way you do. Concerning you he's much more approachable compared to before, although only in comparison; at the same time he's always afraid of conceding too much to you. He has no desire to send you money beyond your monthly allowance (but I'm sure the allowance won't be lowered)—it would merely sink into the void and be of no use to anyone. After your letter Vlasta had suggested he might make it possible for you to recuperate for three months in a sanatorium: he answered yes, that might be a good idea (she tried using his own words to characterize his ponderous indecisiveness or obstinacy in this matter) but he didn't bring it up again and left on vacation.

I didn't understand exactly what his last demand entails. When I asked about it in passing, she only repeated those 3 lines from the letter and when I interrupted with a question she merely added that he doesn't mean you should live with him—at least, certainly not at first. When I observed that this had been the gist of his letter, she conceded as much and then said, "Yes, the letter he signed with Jesenský," which, taken in the context of everything else, really was intended—I hadn't wanted to believe you—as a special "touch."

When she next asked me to describe your situation, in other

words what I advised doing, what she should attempt to accomplish, I said something I'm actually afraid of admitting to you.

No, before I go on, I should say my portrayal was certainly bad as far as details are concerned, but I'm sure it was generally good, in what was visible to Vlasta. Above all, I didn't accuse a soul, not in the least. I'm not emphasizing this as any particularly superior way of thinking on my part, how could I even think of making accusations; besides, I'm sure a far better person than I wouldn't find any grounds to do so here. So that's not what I mean: I'm just stressing this as a rhetorical advantage, because in speech, after all—especially purposeful speech—it can easily happen one makes accusations against one's will. I don't think this happened to me, or at least if there was the possibility it might happen, it was immediately corrected. Incidentally, she was not in the least accusatory herself, but there her absentmindedness may have also played a part.

Apart from that I may have succeeded in making clear why you are *bound* to be short of money. This is not so easy to understand from the outside. Vlasta calculates (and so does everyone): your husband's large salary, 10,000 K from your father, your work, your modest demands and only 2 persons—why does there have to be any need? Vlasta herself once said something like—she may have been quoting your father again, I don't know exactly: "Sending money doesn't make any sense. Milena and money . . ." But I twisted her arm rhetorically. So I believe my presentation was good.

Moreover, they seemed to misunderstand your inward situation; except then I don't understand them—both of them—entirely. Your father and Vlasta think you're ready to leave your husband and move to Prague without further ado; in fact, they think you were ready to do so long ago and that the only thing tying you down is your husband's illness. Here I felt I shouldn't intervene and "enlighten," but if that's what your father believes, what more does he want? In that case doesn't he have everything he desires? So finally she asked me for advice. I thought the "sanatorium suggestion" was very good, but grumbled about it a little bit (probably out of jealousy since

it resembled my Meran suggestion) because you really don't want to leave your husband during his illness. "I see another way to help," I said, "in leaving everything essentially as it is, in other words without undertaking anything more extensive, but just increasing the money supply, raising the allowance or something like that. However, if one doesn't want to give money, being unsure it will be properly spent, there are then other possibilities, for example (this is entirely my own idea; it might annoy Milena very much and if she learns that it comes from me she may end up being angry at me; on the other hand, if I consider it halfway decent, and you Fräulein Vlasta ask me, then I have to suggest it, don't I?) a gift certificate for proper midday and evening meals at the Weisser Hahn, Josefstädterstrasse."

Then Vlasta had the good idea of writing you tomorrow without actually telling your father any of my news (at least so I understood) and would only talk to him as a result of this contact with you. I gave your Vienna address (which she suddenly recalled after having forgotten it until then)—I don't know the one in St. Gilgen exactly (although yesterday on your husband's letter I did catch a glimpse of Hotel Post) nor do I know how long you will be staying there, and naturally I didn't want to give the post office box number.

I felt the whole thing was sufficiently promising and that they are genuinely concerned about you (although unadvised and a little tired). Nonetheless, money does play a certain role. I still see the concern on her face (surely due to absentmindedness) when she wanted to calculate, out of the blue and without any promise of success, how much such a meal ticket to the Weisser Hahn might cost. But that's almost malice on my part and blatant injustice; had I been in her place observing me I'm sure I would have seen things incomparably more scandalous. She is, as I said, an excellent friendly willing unselfish girl (except that—once again the malice—as a reader of *Tribuna* she shouldn't powder herself, and as an assistant to a professor of dentistry she should have fewer gold fillings).

Well that's about all; I may remember some more if you ask.

This afternoon a Fräulein Reimann was here (according to my mother who is very unsure of names), seeking my advice in some matter; according to her description it might have been Jarmila. My mother, the guardian of my sleep, lied without any effort that I was not home, although I was actually in bed 5 steps away.

Good night, even the mouse in the corner next to the bathroom door is letting me know it's almost midnight. I hope it won't call my attention to every passing hour of the night the same way. How lively it is! It's been so quiet for weeks.

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Saturday

So as not to hide anything: I also read Vlasta a few passages from your last 2 letters and further advised that the monthly allowance be sent to you directly.

And as far as the mouse is concerned, nothing more was heard in the night, but when I took the sheets off the sofa this morning something dark and squeaky with a long tail fell out and immediately disappeared under the bed. That could have very easily been the mouse, couldn't it? Even if the squeak and the long tail were just in my imagination? In any case I couldn't find a thing underneath the bed (as far as I dared look).

Wednesday's letter is funny? I'm not sure. I don't believe the funny letters anymore, I almost said: I don't believe any letters anymore; even the most beautiful ones always contain a worm.

Be good to Jarmila, well that's obvious. But how? Should I go visit her because yesterday a Fr. Reimann said she wanted my advice on something? Even disregarding the loss of time and sleep, I'm afraid of her. She is one of the angels of death, but not one of the high angels who simply lay their hands upon us mortals; she is of a lower sort, one who has to resort to morphine.



[Prague, September 5, 1920]  
Sunday

Is the main thing what you claim to have written, Milena, or isn't it really the trust? You wrote about it once before, in one of the last letters to Meran; I could no longer answer it.

Robinson had to sign on, you see, had to make his dangerous voyage, had to suffer shipwreck and many other things—I would only have to lose you and would already be Robinson. But I'd be more Robinson than he. He still had the island and Friday and many various things and finally the ship that took him away and practically turned everything into a dream. I wouldn't have a thing, not even my name, since I've given that to you as well.

That's why I'm independent of you to a certain extent—precisely because the dependency transcends all bounds. The either/or is too great. Either you are mine, in which case it's good, or else I lose you, in which case it's not actually bad but simply nothing at all: no jealousy, no suffering, no anxiety, nothing at all. And of course it's blasphemous to build so much on another person, and that's why the fear starts to converge around the foundation, but it's not so much the fear about you as the fear that such constructions are dared at all. And that's also why your lovely human face has so much of the divine (although it was probably there to begin with).

So now Samson has revealed his secret to Delilah, and his hair, which she has been constantly ruffling in preparation, is now free for her to cut, but let her go ahead; it's all the same as long as she doesn't have a similar secret.

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For 3 nights I've been sleeping very badly for no apparent reason—and you're doing tolerably well?

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A quick answer, if it is an answer: the telegram has just arrived. It came as such a surprise (already opened, too) that I didn't have time to be alarmed. Somehow I really needed it

today; how did you know? Your natural intuition, which always has you send whatever's needed.

[Prague, September 6, 1920]  
Monday

No letter.

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As far as Max's essay is concerned, it depends on whether it's "only" your idea or Laurin's. In the latter case it would still be possible, but not as a lead article, just as a feuilleton. Incidentally, there are various political considerations at play which would be too boring to list.

I wired you the address yesterday: H J c/o Karl Maier, Berlin W 15 Lietzenburger (or Lützenburger-) strasse No. 32

Your telegram was very good. I wouldn't have gone to see Jarmila otherwise; following your telegram I did. So she was the one who had dropped by two days ago. Actually she didn't even say what she had wanted: she intended to send you a letter and wanted to ask me whether you could keep it safe from your husband (why keep it?), and now she's reconsidered and no longer intends to send it, but it's possible she might want to later after all, and in that case she'll either send it to me or bring it—that's how unclear it all was. But the main thing was that I was extremely boring (although very much against my will), as oppressive as a coffin lid, and my leaving brought her, Jarmila, salvation.

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Now some letters came after all (from Wednesday and Friday). (Also a letter from the *Woche* addressed to Frank K; how do they know my name is Frank?) Thank you for the addresses, I'll write them down. Oh yes, to be close to you . . . Otherwise I have too much to do to just lie in the sanatorium, be fed, and stare up at the eternal reproach of the winter sky.

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Starting today I'm no longer alone in the office: this is tiring after being by myself for so long, even if questions—oh, now the poet was here for almost two hours and left in tears. And he's probably unhappy about that, although, after all, crying is the best possible thing.

Yes, of course, don't write me if it's a "chore," not even if you "want" to write, and not even if you "have to" write—but then what's left? Just whatever's more than all that.

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I'm enclosing something for the naughty niece.

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Yes, I'll write to Staša.

[Prague, September 7, 1920]  
Tuesday

Misunderstanding through and through; no, it's worse than mere misunderstanding, Milena, even if you do of course correctly understand the surface—but what is there to understand or not understand. This misunderstanding keeps recurring; it already happened once or twice in Meran. After all, I wasn't asking you for advice the way I might ask the man sitting across the desk from me. I was talking to myself, asking myself for advice, sound asleep, and now you are waking me up.

Apart from that, there's nothing more to say about it, the Jarmila affair is over and done with, as I wrote you yesterday—you may still get the letter. Incidentally, the letter you are sending me now comes from Jarmila.

[. . .]

I don't know how I'm supposed to ask her for that, I don't know what you want; after all, I'll hardly see or write her anymore and the idea of writing her something like this—?

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I also understood yesterday's telegram to mean I shouldn't write Staša anymore. I hope I understood it correctly.

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Yesterday I spoke with Max once more about the *Tribuna*. For political reasons he cannot agree to have something appear in the *Tribuna*. But just tell me why you'd like to have something Jewish and I can suggest or send you many other things.

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I don't know if you understood my remark about the essay on Bolshevism correctly. What the author takes exception to is, as far as I'm concerned, the highest possible praise on Earth.

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Janowitz's address, in case you didn't receive the last letter: c/o Karl Maier, Berlin W 15 Lietzenburgerstrasse 32.—But I also wired it to you, I'm so distracted.

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Last evening I was with Přebram. Old times. He spoke of you kindly and well, not at all like you were a "servant girl." Incidentally, we (Max and I) treated him very badly, inviting him to join us for the evening, speaking innocuously for 2 hours about this and that and then suddenly attacking him (as a matter of fact, I led the attack) on the subject of his brother. But he defended himself brilliantly, his arguments were difficult to rebut; even invoking a former "patient" didn't help much. But the attempt isn't over yet.

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If someone had told me last night (when around 8:00 I looked in from the street on the banquet hall of the Jewish Rathaus, where well over 100 Russian-Jewish emigrants are being housed—the hall is packed as full as during a national assembly—while they wait here for their American visas; later, at about 12:30 at night, I saw them there all asleep, one next to the other; they were even sleeping stretched out on chairs, here and there someone was coughing or turning over or walking carefully between the rows, the electric light is on throughout the night) if someone had told me last night I could be whatever I wanted, I would have chosen to be a small Jewish boy from the East, standing there in the corner without a trace of worry, his father talking with the men in the middle of the hall,

his heavily clad mother rummaging through the bundles they have brought for the journey, his sister chatting with the girls and scratching in her beautiful hair—and in a few weeks one will be in America. Of course it's not that simple; there have been cases of dysentery, there are people standing outside shouting threats through the window, there's even fighting among the Jews themselves: two have already gone at one another with knives. But if one is small, able to grasp everything quickly and judge it properly, then what can happen? And plenty such boys were running around there, climbing over the mattresses, crawling underneath chairs and lying in wait for the bread which someone—they are all one people—was spreading with something—it is all edible.

*[Prague, September 10, 1920]*  
Friday

Your telegram just arrived. You're absolutely right, the way I took care of it was disconsolately stupid and clumsy, but nothing else was possible, for we are living in misunderstandings; our questions are rendered worthless by our replies. Now we have to stop writing one another and leave the future to the future.

Since I'm only allowed to telephone Vlasta and not write her, I won't be able to tell her until tomorrow.

*[Prague, September 14, 1920]*  
Tuesday

Today 2 letters came and the picture postcard. I hesitated to open them. You are either inconceivably kind or inconceivably

self-controlled; everything speaks for the first, some things for the second.

I repeat: You were absolutely right. And if you—this is impossible—had inflicted on me something as inconsiderate, pigheaded, childish, foolish, smug, and even indifferent as I have done to you by what I said to Vlasta, I would have lost my mind, and not just for the time it took to send a telegram.

I only read the telegram twice, once briefly when I received it, and then days later when I tore it up.

It's difficult to describe this first reading; so many things came together at once.

The clearest was that you were beating me; I think it began with "*sofort*,"\* that was the blow.

No, today I can't write about that in detail, not because I'm particularly tired, but because I'm "heavy." I have been overcome by the nothingness I once described.

I'm sure it would all be impossible to understand if I had considered myself guilty while doing all the above; in that case, I would have been justly beaten. No, both of us are guilty—and neither one.

After overcoming all justifiable resistance, you may nevertheless be able to reconcile yourself to Vlasta's letter which you'll find in Vienna. I went looking for her at your father's apartment the very afternoon I got your telegram. Downstairs was a note saying "*1 schody*,"† I had always taken that to be the first story and now it was all the way upstairs. A young pretty happy maid opened the door. Vlasta wasn't there; I had expected that but had wanted to do something and find out when she arrived in the morning. (According to an inscription on the door of the apartment, your father appears to be editor of the *Sportovní Revue*.) So next morning I waited for her in front of the house; I liked her even better than last time—intelligent, candid, to the point. I didn't say much more than what I told you in my telegram.

\**Sofort*: at once (German).

†*Schody*: staircase (Czech).

IN THE MARGIN: I can partly dispel your apprehensions concerning your father, next time.

Jarmila came to see me in the office three days ago, she hadn't heard from you in a long time, didn't know anything about the flood and came to ask about you. It went all right. She only stayed a little while. I forgot to pass on your request concerning her writing; I then wrote her a few lines about that.

I still haven't read the letters carefully, I'll write again when I have.

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Now the telegram arrived as well. Really? Really? And you're no longer lashing out at me?

No, you can't be happy about it, that's impossible; this is a telegram of the moment just like the other one and the truth is neither here nor there. Sometimes when one wakes up in the morning one thinks that truth is right next to the bed, like an open grave with a few wilted flowers, ready to receive.

I scarcely dare read the letters; I can only read them by spells; I can't stand the pain. Milena—and once again I am parting your hair—am I such an evil beast, evil toward myself and just as evil toward you, or wouldn't it be more correct to say the evil is hunting me, driving me on? But I don't even dare say that it is evil; just that when I'm writing you I think it is and then I say so.

Otherwise it's like I described. Whenever I write to you sleep is out of the question, both before and after; when I don't write I at least get a few hours of shallow sleep. When I don't write I'm merely tired, sad, heavy; when I do write I am torn by fear and anxiety. It seems we're both asking for sympathy; I ask you to let me crawl away somewhere; you ask me—but the fact that this is possible is the most terrible paradox.

But how is it possible? you ask. What do I want? What am I doing?

It's more or less like this: I, an animal of the forest, was at that time hardly even in the forest; I was lying somewhere in a dirty ditch (dirtied only by my presence, of course) when I

saw you outside in the open—the most wonderful thing I had ever seen. I forgot everything, forgot myself completely, I stood up, approached—admittedly anxious within this new but familiar freedom—I ventured even closer, all the way up to you. You were so good, I crouched down beside you as if it were my right, I laid my face in your hand, I was so happy, so proud, so free, so mighty, so much at home, again and again: so much at home—but in essence I remained a mere animal, just part of the forest, living in the open only by your grace. I was reading my destiny inside your eyes without knowing it (since I had forgotten everything). This couldn't last. Although you were stroking me with the kindest of hands, you had to recognize certain peculiarities pointing to the forest, my true home and origin. Next came the necessary and necessarily repeated discussions about the “fear,” which tortured me (and you, but you were innocent), to the point of touching my raw nerve; the feeling kept growing inside me what an unclean pest I was for you, disturbing you everywhere, always getting in your way. The misunderstanding with Max touched on this; in Gmünd it was already obvious, then came the understanding and misunderstanding with Jarmila, and finally my stupid-insensitive-careless behavior with Vlasta and many minor incidents in between. I remembered who I was, and saw that your eyes were no longer deceived; I had the nightmare (of feeling at home in a place one doesn't belong), but for me this nightmare was real. I had to return to the darkness, I couldn't stand the sun, I was desperate, truly like an animal gone astray; I started running as fast as I could and still could not escape the thought: “If only I could take her with me!” and the counterthought: “But can there be any darkness where she resides?”

You ask how I'm getting along; there's your answer.

*[Prague, September 14, 1920]*

My first letter had already been sent when yours arrived. Apart from whatever might be underneath—under such things as



“fear,” etc.—and which nauseates me, not because it’s nauseating but because my stomach is too weak; apart from all that, it may be even simpler than you say. Something like: when one is alone, imperfection must be endured every minute of the day; a couple, however, does not have to put up with it. Aren’t our eyes made to be torn out, and our hearts for the same purpose? At the same time it’s really not that bad; that’s an exaggeration and a lie, everything is exaggeration, the only truth is longing, which cannot be exaggerated. But even the truth of longing is not so much its own truth; it’s really an expression of everything else, which is a lie. This sounds crazy and distorted, but it’s true.

Moreover, perhaps it isn’t love when I say you are what I love the most—you are the knife I turn inside myself, this is love.

Incidentally, you say the same thing: “they lack the strength to love,” shouldn’t that suffice to distinguish between “beast” and “man”?

[Prague, September 15, 1920]

Wednesday

There’s no law preventing me from writing you again and thanking you for this letter, which contains perhaps the most beautiful thing you could have written me: “I know that you . . .”

Apart from that, however, you have been in agreement with me for a long time that we should now stop writing one another; it was only by accident that *I* happened to say it, you could have said it just as well. And since we both agree, it’s pointless to explain why not writing will be good.

The only bad thing is that I’ll then have no, almost no possibility of writing you at all (from now on you shouldn’t ask at the post office), or else just the possibility of sending you a postcard without any text, which means a letter is waiting for

you at the post office. *It goes without saying you should write to me whenever it's at all necessary.*

You don't mention any letter from Vlasta. But she suggested in your father's name that you visit a sanatorium of your choice (although one inside Czechoslovakia) for a few months. Since no one responded to your ad (which isn't strange, there's probably less interest in Czech this year) maybe you could accept this proposal. That isn't advice; the thought just makes me happy.

There's no doubt I handled the matter with Vlasta very badly, but not as badly as it seemed to you in your initial moment of fright. First of all, I didn't go as a petitioner, and even less in your name. I went as a stranger who knows you well, who has some insight into the situation in Vienna and who had, moreover, just received two sad letters from you. Admittedly I went to Vlasta in your interest, but every bit as much in your father's interest as well. The gist of my presentation, which was clear although not stated expressly, was: at this point Milena's father will not achieve the victory of her returning voluntarily, humbly, and convinced. That's out of the question, but I'm sure it's entirely possible for her to be brought back to him three months from now, critically ill. And that probably isn't a victory and is certainly nothing to strive for, is it?

That was one thing, the other was about money. I portrayed it just the way I saw it; in the face of those 2 letters, which canceled any further reflection on my part, it seemed to me that every time I falsified something in my account to Vlasta, I would bring you down another notch in Vienna. (It wasn't exactly like that; this is the Jewish lawyer speaking, always quick with his tongue, but still it was partly like that.) So I said something to this effect: "Her husband spends his own salary almost all by himself. There's nothing to argue about, Milena wouldn't have it otherwise; she loves him the way things are and doesn't want it any different; in fact, it's partly her own doing. In any case, she consequently has to take care of everything else, even including her husband to some degree (al-

though not his meals), since he doesn't even earn enough for himself, because of the monstrous inflation in Vienna. Now it's true she could nonetheless afford all that and would be happy to do so, but she only reached that stage last year; after all, when she left home she was pampered, inexperienced, without any real idea of her strengths and capabilities. It took her two years—not a very long time—before she got used to her new life, before she could provide for the household completely and by herself: giving private lessons, teaching in schools, translating, writing. But as I said, that didn't happen until last year; for two years before that, money had to be borrowed, and these debts in turn cost money; they are impossible to pay off from this work alone. Moreover, they cause pressure and torment, they make it impossible to put things in order and make it necessary to sell what they have; they force her to work excessively (and I didn't cover up your carrying wood, carrying luggage, the piano) and ultimately fall ill. That's the way it is."

I'm not saying goodbye. There isn't any goodbye, unless gravity, which is lying in wait for me, pulls me down entirely. But how could it, since you are alive.

*[Prague, September 18, 1920]*

You cannot, Milena, exactly understand what it's about, or in part was about, I don't even understand it myself, I am shaking from the eruption; you can torture me to the point of insanity, but what it is and what it ultimately wants I do not know. I only know what it wants at the moment: quiet, darkness, crawling off somewhere, and I must obey, I have no other choice.

It is an eruption and will pass and has already passed in part, but the powers which call it forth are always trembling inside me, before and after; indeed, this subterranean threat constitutes my life, my being; if it ceases, I cease. It's how I participate in life; if it ceases I give up living, as easily and naturally

as you close your eyelids. *Wasn't it always there, as long as we've known each other, and would you have even stolen a glance at me had it not been there?*

Obviously one can't turn this around and say: Now it has passed and I'm nothing but calm and happy and grateful in our new togetherness. This cannot be said, although it's almost true (the gratitude is absolutely true, the happiness only to a certain extent, and the calm is never true) because I will always frighten and be frightened, most of all by myself.

You mention the engagements and similar things: of course it was very simple, not the pain, but its effect. It was as if one had lived a dissolute life, and were suddenly arrested as punishment for all one's debauchery and one's head were placed in a vise, with screws on both temples. Then, as the screws were slowly tightened, one would be forced to say: "Yes, I'll stick with my dissolute life" or "No, I'll give it up." Of course one would bellow "No" until one's lungs burst.

You're also right to place what I've now done in the same category as the old things; after all, I can only go on being the same person and go on living the same life. The sole difference is that I already have experience; I don't wait with my screaming until they tighten the screws to force the confession—I start screaming as soon as the screws are brought out; in fact, I'm already screaming the minute something starts to move in the distance, so over-alert has my conscience become—no, not over-alert, not nearly alert enough. But there is another difference as well: you can stand the truth like no one else, and one can tell you the truth both for one's own sake and for yours; in fact, one can even discover one's own truth directly through you.

But you are wrong to speak bitterly of my begging you not to leave me. In this regard I was no different then than I am today. I was living off your gaze (this isn't any special deification of your person, in such a gaze anyone can be divine). I wasn't standing on solid ground, and this is what I feared so much. But I didn't realize it exactly; I had no idea how high I was floating above my Earth. This was not good: not for you,

not for me. One word of truth, one word of the inevitable truth was enough to bring me down a notch, another word another notch—until finally there's no longer any stopping and one is suddenly crashing to the ground and still it feels too slow. I'm not giving any examples of such "truth-words" on purpose; that could only lead to confusion and would never be wholly correct.

---

Please, Milena, come up with another way for me to write you. Sending fake cards is too dumb; also I don't always know which books to send you; finally, the idea you might wind up going to the post office in vain is unbearable, please come up with something else.

[Prague, September 20, 1920]  
Monday evening

So Wednesday you'll go to the post office and there won't be any letter—yes, there will be the one from Saturday. I couldn't write in the office because I wanted to work and I couldn't work because I was thinking about us. This afternoon I couldn't get out of bed, not because I was too tired but too "heavy," this word keeps recurring, it's the only one that fits me, do you really understand it? It's something like the "heaviness" of a ship that has lost its rudder and says to the waves: "I'm too heavy for myself and too light for you." But it's not exactly like that either; it can't be expressed by analogy.

But basically I didn't write because I have the vague feeling there are so many things—and of such importance—I would have to write you, that all the free time in the world wouldn't be enough for me to gather the strength to do so. That's the way it really is.

So since I can't say anything about the present, there's even less for me to say about the future. I literally just this minute

climbed out of my sickbed ("sickbed" seen from the outside), I'm still clinging to it, and would like most of all to return there. Despite the fact I know what it means, this bed.

What you, Milena, wrote about the people, "they lack the strength to love," was correct, even if you didn't think so while writing it. Perhaps their strength to love consists solely in their ability to be loved. And even this is weakened by a further distinction which exists for these people. When one of them says to his beloved: "I believe you love me," it's actually something completely different and much less than when he says: "I am loved by you." But these aren't really lovers, they're just grammarians.

"Imperfection as a couple" was actually a misunderstanding in your letter. I didn't mean to say anything more than: I am living in my dirt, that's my business. But dragging you down into it is an entirely different matter, not only as a transgression against you, that's incidental. I don't believe a transgression against another person could disturb my sleep, insofar as it only concerns the other person. So it isn't that. Rather the terrible thing is that you make me so much more aware of my dirt and—above all—that this awareness makes salvation so much more difficult for me—no, so much more impossible (it's impossible in any case, but here the impossibility increases). This makes my forehead break out in a fearful sweat; that it could be any fault of yours, Milena, is out of the question.

But it was wrong and I regretted very much making comparisons to older events in my last letter. Let's erase this together.

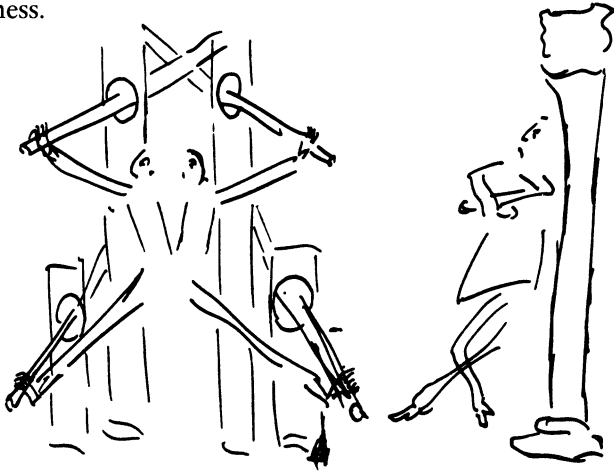
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So you really aren't sick?

*[Prague, September 1920]*

Of course, Milena, you possess property here in Prague, no one's challenging that except the night, which is fighting for

it, but it fights for everything. But what property! I'm not making it smaller than it really is—it's something so big, in fact, it could even eclipse a full moon up in your room. And you won't be afraid of so much dark? Dark without the warmth of darkness.



So you can see how I'm keeping myself "occupied," I'm enclosing a drawing. There are 4 posts, with poles running through the two middle ones to which the "delinquent's" hands are fastened; poles for the feet are run through the two posts on the outside. Once the man is thus secured, the poles are slowly pushed outward until the man is torn apart in the middle. The inventor is leaning against the column with his arms and legs crossed, putting on airs as if the whole thing were his original invention, whereas all he really did was watch the butcher in front of his shop, drawing out a disemboweled pig.

The reason I ask if you won't be afraid is because the person you write about does not exist and never did exist; the one in Vienna did not exist nor did the one in Gmünd, but if anyone did, it was the latter and may he be cursed. This is important to know because—in case we meet—the Viennese or even the man from Gmünd will reappear, in all innocence, as if nothing had happened, whereas down below the real person, unknown to all and to himself, who exists even less than the others but

is more real than anything (why doesn't he finally climb up and show himself?) will rise menacingly and destroy everything once again.

*[Prague, September 1920]*

Yes, Mizzi Kuh was here, things went quite well. But if it's at all possible I won't write about other people anymore; their getting mixed up in our letters is to blame for everything. But that's not why I'm no longer going to write about them (after all, they aren't to blame for anything, they merely cut a path for the truth and whatever wants to follow). I don't want to punish them with that—in case this might be considered a punishment—it just seems to me they no longer fit here. It's dark here, a dark apartment where only the inhabitants can find their way, and only then with difficulty.

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Did I know it would pass? I knew it would not.

When as a child I had done something very bad, although nothing bad or nothing all that bad in the public sense of the word, but something very bad in my private sense (the fact that it wasn't publicly acknowledged as bad didn't vouch for my merit as much as it showed the world was blind or asleep), I was amazed that everything continued along its course unchanged; the grown-ups, although somewhat gloomy, kept moving around me unchanged, and their mouths stayed shut and quiet, in a natural way, which I had admired from below since my earliest childhood. All this led me to conclude, after having watched a little while, that I couldn't have done anything bad, in any sense whatsoever, and that it was childish of me to fear that I had; consequently I could start once again exactly where I had stopped in my first moment of shock.

Later this notion of my surroundings changed. First I began to believe that other people paid careful attention to every-



thing, further that they expressed their opinions clearly enough, just that my eye wasn't sufficiently sharp, although I soon fixed that. But in the second place, although I was still amazed at how imperturbable the others were, if indeed they were so, this still could not be counted as evidence which might be used on my behalf. Fine, so they didn't notice anything, nothing from my being entered into their world, as far as they were concerned I was irreproachable; thus the way of my being, my way, led outside their world. If this being was a stream, then at least a strong branch flowed outside their world.

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No, Milena, please, I beg you to come up with another possibility for writing. You shouldn't go to the post office in vain, not even your little postman—where is he?—should do so, even the woman at the counter in the post office should not be asked unnecessarily. If you don't find another possibility I'll have to put up with it, but at least make some effort to find one.

---

Yesterday I dreamt about you. I hardly remember the details, just that we kept on merging into one another, I was you, you were me. Finally you somehow caught fire; I remembered that fire can be smothered with cloth, took an old coat and beat you with it. But then the metamorphoses resumed and went so far that you were no longer even there; instead I was the one on fire and I was also the one who was beating the fire with the coat. The beating didn't help, however, and only confirmed my old fear that things like that can't hurt a fire. Meanwhile the firemen had arrived and you were somehow saved after all. But you were different than before, ghostlike, drawn against the dark with chalk, and you fell lifeless into my arms, or perhaps you merely fainted with joy at being saved. But here the transmutability came into play: maybe I was the one falling into someone's arms.

---

Paul Adler was here just now, do you know him? If only the visits would stop; everybody is so eternally alive, truly immortal, perhaps not in the direction of true immortality, but down

to the depths of their immediate life. I'm so afraid of them. Out of fear I'd like to read his eyes in order to uncover his every wish, and out of gratitude I'd like to kiss his feet, if he would just leave without asking that I return his visit. Alone I am still alive, but whenever a visitor comes by he literally kills me, just so he can then revive me with his own power, except he isn't powerful enough. Monday I'm supposed to go see him, the idea makes my head spin.

*[Prague, September 1920]*

Why, Milena, do you write about our common future which will never be, or is that why you write about it? Even when we were discussing it in Vienna one evening, I had the feeling we were looking for somebody we knew very well and missed very much and whom we consequently kept calling with the most beautiful names, but there was no answer; how could he answer, since he wasn't there, nor anywhere nearby.

Few things are certain, but one is that we'll never live together, share an apartment, body to body, at a common table, never, not even in the same city. I almost said just now, it seems as certain to me as the certainty that I won't get up tomorrow morning and go to work—(I'm supposed to lift myself alone! I can see me carrying myself, as if I were carrying a heavy cross, pressed to the ground on my belly, I have to work hard just to crouch and lift the corpse a little bit above me)—it's true, too; I'm sure I won't get up, but if getting up requires strength which is just a little more than human, that much I can attain; I can lift myself that much, but just barely.

But don't take all this about getting up too literally; it isn't that bad; my getting up tomorrow is still more certain than the most distant possibility of our living together. Incidentally, Milena, you must agree when you examine yourself and me and take soundings of the "sea" between "Vienna" and "Prague" with its insurmountably high waves.

And as far as the dirt is concerned, why shouldn't I go on

exposing it, my sole possession (everybody's sole possession—I just don't realize this)? Out of modesty? Now that would be the only justifiable objection.

The thought of death makes you anxious? I'm just terribly afraid of pain. That's a bad sign. To want death but not pain is a bad sign. Otherwise one can risk death. One has simply been sent out as a biblical dove, and having found nothing green, now slips back into the darkness of the ark.

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I have received the brochures about the two sanatoria, they couldn't possibly have contained any surprises, or at most regarding prices and the distance from Vienna. In this respect they resemble one another. Excessively expensive, over 400 K a day, probably 500 K, and even that is subject to change. About 3 hours from Vienna by train and another half hour by carriage—thus quite far, too, almost as far as Gmünd, but with the local train. Incidentally Grimmenstein seems to be a bit less expensive and so in an emergency, but only in emergency, I would choose it.

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You see, Milena, how I neglect everything else and only think about myself incessantly, or more precisely about the narrow ground we share which both my feeling and my will say is so crucial for us. I haven't even thanked you for *Kmen* and *Tribuna*, although once again you have performed so beautifully. I'll send you my own copy I have here on the table, but you may also want a few comments, in which case I'll have to read it again and that isn't easy. I very much enjoy reading your translations of other people's writing. Was the Tolstoy conversation translated from Russian? [. . .]

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The enclosure. So that you also receive something from me that makes you laugh for once. “*Jé, ona neví, co je biják? Kindásek.*”\*

\*Czech: “You mean she doesn't know what movies are? They're flicks.” Presumably a caption from a newspaper cartoon.

[Prague, September 1920]

So you've had the flu? Well, at least I don't have to reproach myself for having had particularly much fun here. (Sometimes I don't understand how people came across the concept of "fun"; it was probably only abstracted as an opposite to sadness.)

I was convinced you wouldn't write me anymore, but I was neither surprised nor sad about it. Not sad because it seemed necessary beyond all sadness and because there probably aren't enough weights in the whole world to raise my poor small weight, and not surprised because I wouldn't really ever have been surprised before if you had said: "I've been friendly to you up to this point, but now I'm going to stop and leave you." Actually all things are surprising, but that would have been one of the least surprising; it's so much more surprising, for instance, that one gets up every morning. But this is not some surprise that inspires confidence as much as a curiosity which can occasionally cause nausea.

Do you deserve a good word, Milena? Apparently I don't deserve to tell you, otherwise I could.

We'll see each other sooner than I think? (I'm writing "see," you write "live together.") However, I think we'll never live together and never will be able to (and I see this confirmed everywhere, everywhere, in things which aren't even related, everything is saying the same thing), and "sooner" than "never" is still just never.

---

It turns out Grimmenstein is better anyway. The difference in price is probably about 50 K a day; besides, in the other sanatorium you have to bring everything you need for the rest cure (foot-muff, pillows, blankets, etc., I don't have any of these), in Grimmenstein all this can be borrowed, in the "Wiener Wald" you have to pay a large deposit, in Grimmenstein you don't, moreover Grimmenstein is at a higher altitude, and so on. Anyway, I'm not leaving yet. Admittedly I did feel bad enough for one whole week (a slight fever and such shortness

of breath, I was afraid to get up from the table, also a lot of coughing), but that just appears to be the result of a long walk during which I talked a bit; it's a lot better now, so once again the sanatorium has become less important.

Now I have the brochures right here: in the Wiener Wald the *lowest* price for a room with balcony and southern exposure is 380 K, in Grimmenstein the most expensive room costs 360 K. As disgustingly expensive as they both are, the difference is just too great. Of course the possibility of injections must be taken into account, the injections themselves cost extra. I'd be happy to go to the country, even more happy to stay in Prague and learn some craft; the last thing I want to do is go to a sanatorium. What am I supposed to do there? Have the head physician take me between his knees and use his carbolic fingers to stuff meat into my mouth and down my throat until I choke?

---

Now I went to see the director as well, he called for me, it happened that Ottla was here to see him last week against my will, against my will I was examined by the company doctor, against my will I will be given sick leave.

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“Kupec” is flawless. Apparently you assume there are mistakes because you can't imagine that the German text is really as helplessly bad as it is. But it is exactly that bad.

Just so you see I was reading it for mistakes: instead of *bolí uvnitř v čele a v spáncích—uvnitř na . . .* or something like that—the thought is namely that just as claws can work on the forehead from the outside, this can also happen on the inside; *potírajíce se* means to become confused? To thwart one another?—Right after that, instead of *volné místo*, it might be better to say *náměstí—pronásledujte jen*,\* I don't know whether “*nur*” is “*jen*” here, you see this “*nur*” is a Prague-Jewish *nur*, signifying a challenge, like “go ahead and do it”—

\**Bolí*. . . : pain inside the forehead and temples; *potírajíce se*: struggling with one another; *volné místo*: free seat; *náměstí*: place; *pronásledujte jen*: just go ahead and persecute (Czech).

the final words aren't translated literally. You separate the maidservant and the husband, whereas in German they merge.

You're right about "ghost letters." But they are real; they aren't just wearing sheets.

*[Prague, September 1920]*

I've just been lying down on the sofa for two hours now, scarcely thinking of anything but you. You forget, Milena, that we're really standing side by side watching this being which is me down on the ground; but in that case I who am looking am then without being.

By the way, autumn is playing games with me as well; I'm sometimes suspiciously warm, sometimes suspiciously cold, but I'm not going to look into that, it can't be anything bad. As a matter of fact, however, I've even thought about passing straight through Vienna, but only because my lungs really are worse than they were this summer—that's to be expected—and anything resembling talking outside is difficult for me and has unpleasant consequences. If I have to leave this room I'd like to throw myself onto the deck chair in Grimmenstein as quickly as possible. But maybe the trip itself will do me good; and the Vienna air, which I once considered to be the true air of life.

"Wiener Wald" may be closer, but the difference in distance can't be very great. The sanatorium isn't in Leobersdorf but further out and to get from the station to the sanatorium takes another half-hour by carriage. So if I could easily have gone from there to Baden—naturally against regulations—I can just as easily travel from Grimmenstein to Wiener-Neustadt, it probably doesn't make a great difference either to you or me.

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How is it, Milena, that you're still not afraid of me or disgusted by me or something like that? Is there any limit to the depth of your sincerity, your strength!

I'm reading a Chinese book, *Ghost Book*, which I mention because it deals exclusively with death. A man is lying on his deathbed and in the independence gained by the proximity of death, he says: "I have spent my life fighting the desire to end it." Then a pupil mocks his teacher, who talks of nothing but death: "You're always talking about death and yet you do not die." "And yet I will die. I'm just singing my last song. One man's song is longer, another man's is shorter. At most, however, they differ by only a few words."

That's true and it's unfair to laugh at the lead singer in the opera who sings an aria while lying on the stage, mortally wounded. We lie on the ground and sing for years.

I also read *Mirror Man*. What immense vital energy! Just a little sicklied over in one place, but it is all the more exuberant everywhere else and even the illness itself is exuberant. I finished it greedily in one afternoon.

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What is tormenting you now "there"? Before I always thought myself powerless to help you but it's only now that I really am. And you are sick so often.

[Prague, October 22, 1920]

Milena, I received this letter meant for Vlasta. Maybe it's a mix-up, a small misfortune, evidently designed to have me torment you this way once I've exhausted all other possibilities. At first I wanted to rush the letter to Vlasta, but that would have been extraordinarily dumb, since she would have realized she had my letter, if that were indeed the case. In any event it was extraordinarily intelligent of me not to do so or really not quite so intelligent, as it was mostly just the trouble involved holding me back. Anyway, the whole thing isn't all that bad, just a small entry in my catalog of faults.

Today, Friday, I received the enclosed letter from Illový; it's

completely insignificant in and of itself, but it can be seen as a slight intervention in our affairs and consequently I would have tried to stop it had I known about it earlier. (Illový, an exaggeratedly modest, quiet person—"and even little Illový" as it recently said in *Červen*, when they were listing the Jews of the rightist party—was in some of my classes in high school; I haven't spoken with him in many years and this is the first letter I've ever received from him.)

Now it's almost certain I will leave. My cough and shortness of breath are forcing me to do so. I'm also sure I'll stay in Vienna and that we will see one another.

[Prague, October 27, 1920]

You made me happy with the train schedule, which I'm studying like a map. At least one thing is certain. Nonetheless, I know I won't come for another 2 weeks, probably later. There are still some things in the office holding me up; the sanatorium, which used to answer me readily and willingly, is now silent on the subject of vegetarian diets. What's more, I am literally rising to the trip like a nation, calling for a little more determination here and there, giving a little more encouragement to this person or that, until finally everyone is ready, but unable to set out only because a child is crying. What's more, I'm almost afraid of traveling; who, for instance, will put up with me in a hotel if I'm coughing the way I was yesterday, from 9:45 to about 11 without stopping? (For the first time in years I was in bed as early as 9:45.) I then fall asleep but toss about in bed and around 12 I again start coughing and continue till 1:00. I wouldn't dream of taking a sleeping car, although I did last year without any problem.

Do I read correctly? Littyá? I don't recognize the name.

It isn't exactly like that, Milena. The person writing to you now is the person you know from Meran. After that we were



one, there was no more talk of knowing one another, and then once again we were split.

I'd like to say more about that, but I'm choking and can't get it out of my throat.

---

"But perhaps you are right, perhaps other people can translate it better"—I'm only repeating this sentence here so it won't get lost so unceremoniously.

Incidentally I received Illový's letter Friday, and it's strange that "Before the Law" appeared on Sunday.

---

It's not my fault, at least not entirely, that the ad was not in Sunday's paper. Today is Wednesday, a week ago yesterday I gave the ad to the advertising office (incidentally I had received your letter the day before). If the office had sent the ad in right away, as they had promised, it would have been in Vienna on Thursday and in the paper on Sunday. I was almost sad when I didn't see it Monday. Then yesterday they showed me the note from the *Presse* saying it had arrived too late. Since it's supposed to run on a Sunday, and because it's probably again too late for this Sunday, it will appear the Sunday after.

[Prague, November 8, 1920]

Yes, there was a slight lag, apparently because one of your letters got lost. So the ad finally appeared yesterday. It seems you wanted "Czech" up in the middle by itself; unfortunately this is impossible, instead they prefer putting a senseless comma between practicing and teacher. Incidentally, I treated the advertising office unfairly, I just came back from there and must admit: it's difficult to know human nature.

I accused the women working there of the following:

- 1) that despite the fact I've given them enough ads already, they take payment apparently well in excess of the actual

price, which they claim not to know, and they cannot be brought to calculate it correctly.

- 2) that it was their fault this ad was delayed.
- 3) that they didn't give me any receipt at all for the last payment, that is, for a payment on an announcement that is constantly being delayed and already half forgotten.
- 4) that they didn't pay any attention to me at all two weeks ago when I requested the ad finally appear on Nov. 8 and in bold type—although admittedly the office was full of people.

So I went there today convinced the ad had not appeared; I furthermore thought I'd have to go to great lengths to clarify the unconfirmed payment, that they wouldn't believe me and that I'd wind up having to go to another office, where I would be cheated even more.

Instead of that: the ad did appear, correct, almost the way I wanted it, and when I started to order further ads the girl said I didn't have to pay anything more at the moment, they'd settle accounts with me after the ad appeared. Isn't that wonderful? One decides to keep on living a little while, at least through the afternoon, until the matter is once again forgotten.

*[Prague, mid-November, 1920]*

Milena, forgive me, I may not have written enough lately, upset as I was about reserving the room in the sanatorium (which now turns out not to have happened). I really am intending to go to Grimmenstein, but there are still some slight delays which a man of average strength (who wouldn't be going to Grimmenstein in the first place of course) would have taken care of long ago—just not me. I've also now learned that, contrary to what the sanatorium had maintained, I do need a residence permit from the local authorities, who will probably grant it, but certainly not before I've sent off the application.

I've been spending every afternoon outside on the streets,

wallowing in anti-Semitic hate. The other day I heard someone call the Jews a "mangy race." Isn't it natural to leave a place where one is so hated? (Zionism or national feeling isn't needed for this at all.) The heroism of staying on is nonetheless merely the heroism of cockroaches which cannot be exterminated, even from the bathroom.

I just looked out the window: mounted police, gendarmes with fixed bayonets, a screaming mob dispersing, and up here in the window the unsavory shame of living under constant protection.

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This has been lying around for some time; I just couldn't bring myself to mail it, I was so locked up inside myself, besides I can only think of one reason why you aren't writing.

I've already sent away the application for my residence permit; if it's granted, everything else (room reservation and passport) will go quickly and I will come. My sister wants to accompany me as far as Vienna; she may come along, she wants to stay in Vienna for one or two days to take a small trip before she has her child, which is already in its fourth month.

Ehrenstein—well, according to what he wrote you, he's sharper than I thought. In light of this I'd be happy to revise my impression of him, but since I won't be able to see him anymore this won't be possible. I felt very much at ease with him—although it wasn't much more than a quarter of an hour—not at all like a stranger, although we didn't reach the loftiest spheres either; it was something like the feeling I had in school about the boy sitting next to me, a feeling of being relaxed and not a stranger. I was good for him, he was indispensable to me, we were allied against all the terrors of the school, I pretended less with him than with anyone else—but it was essentially a very pathetic relationship. It was similar with E, I didn't feel any exchange of strength. He means very well and speaks well and puts in a lot of effort, but even if speakers like that were installed on every street corner, they still wouldn't make the Day of Judgment come any sooner, although they would make the present day more unbearable.

Do you know *Tanya*, the conversation between the Russian Orthodox priest and Tanya? It is—without meaning to be—a paragon of such helpless help. We watch Tanya die under this incubus of consolation.

In himself I'm sure E is very strong; what he read aloud last night was uncommonly beautiful (again excepting a few passages in the book on Kraus). And as I said, he's also very observant, very sharp. By the way, E has almost grown fat—in any case he's massive (and downright beautiful; how could you fail to notice that!) and knows little more about thin people than that they're thin. But I'm sure that knowledge suffices for most people, including me for instance.

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The journals are late; I'll explain why when I get a chance, in any case they will arrive.

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No, Milena, we do not have the shared possibility we thought we had in Vienna, not by any means. We didn't have it then either: I had been looking "over my fence," holding myself up with just my hands, and then I fell back down, my hands completely lacerated. There must be other shared possibilities, the world is full of possibilities, only I still don't know what they are.

[Prague, mid-November 1920]

That's the way it is with me too. I often think: I have to write you this or that, but then it turns out I can't. Maybe Sergeant Perkins has hold of my hand and only when he lets go for just a moment can I write you a quick word in secret.

The fact you chose precisely this passage to translate is a sign we have similar tastes. Yes, torture is extremely important to me—my sole occupation is torturing and being tortured. Why? For much the same reason as Perkins and, just as thoughtlessly, mechanically, and in line with tradition; namely, to get the

damned word out of the damned mouth. I once expressed the stupidity contained in this as follows (it doesn't help at all to recognize the stupidity): "The animal wrests the whip from the master and flails itself in order to become the master, unaware that this is only a fantasy created by a new knot in the master's thong."

Torturing is pathetic too, of course. After all, Alexander didn't torture the Gordian knot when it wouldn't come untied.

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Incidentally this also seems to be in keeping with a Jewish tradition. The *Venkov*, which is now printing very much against the Jews, recently ran a lead article demonstrating that Jews ruin and corrupt everything, even! [. . .] flagellatism of the Middle Ages. Unfortunately it didn't explain in greater detail, only cited an English text. I'm too "heavy" to go to the university library, but I'd really like to know what the Jews were supposed to have in common with that (medieval) movement, which, after all, must have been very remote to them. Maybe some learned acquaintance of yours knows something about it.

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I sent the books. I state expressly that it does not annoy me—in fact it's the only even slightly sensible thing I've done in a long time. Aleš is out of print, and won't be available again until around Christmas, I took Chekhov instead. On the other hand, *Babička* is printed so badly it's practically illegible, had you seen it you might not have even bought it. But I had my instructions.

I'm only sending the rhymed spelling book to satisfy your immediate needs; first I have to find a good book for spelling and shorthand.

*Did you receive the letter I wrote explaining why the ad was delayed?*

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Did you read any more about the sanatorium fire? In any case, Grimmenstein will now become overcrowded and arrogant. How can H. visit me there? After all, you wrote he's in Meran.

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Your wish that I not meet your husband cannot possibly be stronger than my own. But unless he decides to come visit me—which he will hardly do—it is virtually impossible for us to meet.

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My trip is being postponed a little longer because I have things to do in the office. You see I'm not ashamed to write I "have things to do." Of course, this could be work like any other; in my case it's half-sleep, and just as close to death as sleep. The *Venkov* is very correct. Emigrate, Milena, emigrate!

[Prague, November 1920]

You say, Milena, you don't understand it. Try to understand it by calling it a disease. It's one of the many manifestations of disease which psychoanalysis claims to have discovered. I do not call it a disease and consider the therapeutic part of psychoanalysis a helpless mistake. All these alleged diseases, sad as they may seem, are matters of faith, anchorages in some maternal ground for souls in distress. Consequently, psychoanalysis also maintains that religions have the same origin as "diseases" of the individual. Of course, today most of us don't feel any sense of religious community; the sects are countless and limited to individuals, but perhaps it only seems that way from our present perspective.

On the other hand, those anchorages which are firmly fixed in real ground aren't merely isolated, interchangeable possessions—they are preformed in man's being, and they continue to form and re-form his being (as well as his body) along the same lines. And this they hope to heal?

In my case one can imagine 3 circles: an innermost circle A, then B, then C. The center A explains to B why this man is

bound to torment and mistrust himself, why he has to give up (it isn't giving up, that would be very difficult—it's merely a having-to-give-up), why he may not live. (Wasn't Diogenes, for instance, very sick in this sense? Which one of us would not have been happy, when at last favored with Alexander's highly radiant gaze? But Diogenes pleaded desperately to let him have the sun, this terrible Greek sun—constantly burning, driving people mad. That barrel was full of ghosts.) Nothing more is explained to C, the active human being; he simply takes orders from B. C acts under the greatest pressure, in a fearful sweat (is there any other sweat that breaks out on the forehead, cheeks, temples, scalp—in short, around the entire skull? That's what happens with C). Thus C acts more out of fear than understanding; he trusts, he believes that A has explained everything to B and that B has understood everything and passed it on correctly.

*[Prague, November 1920]*

I am not insincere, Milena (although I do have the feeling my handwriting used to be clearer and more open, am I right?). I am as sincere as "prison regulations" allow and that's a lot; also the "regulations" are becoming more and more lax. But I can't keep up "with that"; it's impossible to keep up "with that." I have one peculiarity which distinguishes me from all the people I know, not in essence, but very much in degree. After all, we both know numerous typical examples of the Western Jew; as far as I know I'm the most Western-Jewish of them all. In other words, to exaggerate, not one second of calm has been granted me; nothing has been granted me, everything must be earned, not only the present and future, but the past as well—something which is, perhaps, given every human being—this too must be earned, and this probably entails the hardest work of all. If the Earth turns to the right—I'm not sure it does—then

I would have to turn to the left to make up for the past. But as it is I don't have the least bit of strength for all these obligations; I can't carry the world on my shoulders—I can barely carry my winter coat. By the way, this lack of strength is not necessarily something to be lamented; what strength would be enough for tasks like these! Every attempt to get through that on my own power is madness and is repaid with madness. That's why it's impossible to "keep up with that," as you write. On my own, I can't go the way I want—I can't even want to do so. I can only be quiet; I can't want anything else, and I don't want anything else.

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It's a little as if instead of just having to wash up, comb one's hair, etc., before every walk—which is already difficult enough—a person is constantly missing everything he needs to take with him, and so each time he has to sew his clothes, make his boots, manufacture his hat, cut his walking stick, etc. Of course it's impossible to do all of that well; it may hold up for a few blocks, but then suddenly, at the Graben, for example, everything falls apart and he's left standing there naked with rags and pieces. And now the torture of running back to the Altstädter Ring! And in the end he runs into an angry mob on the Eisengasse, hot in pursuit of Jews.

Don't misunderstand me, Milena, I'm not saying such a man is lost, not at all, but he is lost the minute he goes to the Graben where he is a disgrace to himself and the world.

I received your last letter on Monday and wrote you back the same day.

---

I hear that your husband wants to move to Paris. Is this a new development within the old plan?

*[Prague, November 1920]*

Two letters arrived today. Of course you're right, Milena; I'm so ashamed of my letters I scarcely dare open your replies. As



it happens my letters are true or at least approaching truth—what could I possibly do, faced with your replies, if my letters were lies. The answer's easy: I would go insane. So I am not performing any great deed by speaking the truth; in fact this is too little; I keep trying to convey something which cannot be conveyed, to explain something which cannot be explained, something in my bones, which can only be experienced in these same bones. In essence it may be nothing more than that fear we have already discussed so often, but extended to everything, fear of the greatest things as well as the smallest, fear, convulsive fear of pronouncing a single word. On the other hand, maybe this fear isn't simply fear, but also longing for something greater than anything that can inspire fear.

“Dashed to pieces on me” is utter nonsense. Only I am at fault, because there was too little truth on my part, still far too little truth, still mostly lies, lies told out of fear of myself and fear of people. This pitcher was broken long before it went to the well. And now I'm keeping my mouth shut in order to stick with the truth a little. Lying is horrible, there's no worse mental agony. Therefore I beg you: let me be silent, now in my letters, in Vienna in words.

“Dashed to pieces on me” you write, but I see only that you are torturing yourself, that you find peace outside on the streets—as you write—and nowhere else, while I sit here in a warm room in my robe and slippers, as peacefully as my “watch spring” will allow (for I still have to “show the time”).

---

I can't say when I'm leaving until I obtain the residency permit. To stay more than three days a special permit is now required from the local authorities. I applied for that a week ago.

---

Why don't you need the journals any more? I sent the notebooks, also a small volume of Čapek.

Where do you know the girl from? I know two relatives who have the disease, and although it abated in both cases, it never disappeared entirely. Of course, it's a lot worse if the girl

is in misery. (In Grimmenstein there is a department exclusively for such diseases.)

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Again I'm thinking about "dashed to pieces on me," it's just as incorrect as, say, coming up with the opposite possibility.

This is neither my defect nor one of other people. It's just that I belong in the quietest quiet, that's what's right for me.

---

I clipped this story for you. Leviné was executed by a firing squad in Munich, wasn't he?

*[Prague, November 1920]*

Today is Thursday. Up till Tuesday I was honestly determined to go to Gr., though I did occasionally feel something menacing inside me when I thought about it. I also realized the continued postponement of my journey was partly caused by this, but I believed I could easily overcome the whole thing. Tuesday during the day someone told me it's not necessary to wait in Prague for the residency permit; it can very likely be obtained in Vienna. With that the path was clear. I then agonized on the sofa for a whole afternoon; in the evening I wrote you a letter but didn't mail it—I still hoped to be able to overcome my feeling, but I spent the whole sleepless night virtually writhing in agony. Two people were struggling within me; one who wants to go and one who is afraid to go—both just parts of me, both undoubtedly scoundrels. I got up the next morning like I did in my worst times.

I don't have the strength to leave; I can't bear the thought in advance that I might be standing before you—I can't bear the pressure in my brain. Your letter itself is one vast, inevitable disappointment in me, and now this as well. You write that you have no hope, but you do have the hope of being able to leave me completely.

I can't explain to you or to anybody what it's like inside me. How could I begin to explain; I can't even explain it to myself. But even this is not the main thing; the main thing is obvious: it is impossible to live like a human being around me; you see this and yet you don't want to believe it?

[Prague, November 1920]  
Saturday evening

I still haven't received the yellow letter, I'll send it back unopened.

I'd have to be horribly mistaken if the idea we stop writing one another doesn't prove to be a good one. But I am not mistaken, Milena. I don't want to talk about you, not because it's none of my business—it is my business—I just don't want to talk about it.

So I'll only say this about myself: What you are for me, Milena, beyond the whole world we inhabit, cannot be found in all the daily scraps of paper which I have sent you. As they are, these letters do nothing but cause anguish, and if they don't cause any anguish it's even worse. They can only evoke a day in Gmünd, produce misunderstandings and shame, a shame which almost never passes. I want to see you as clearly as I saw you the first time on the street, but the letters cause more distraction than the entire Lerchenfelderstrasse with its noise.

But not even that is decisive; the deciding factor is my increasing (letter by letter) inability to go beyond the letters: I am powerless toward you as well as toward myself—1000 letters from you and 1000 desires from me will not convince me otherwise—and (perhaps as a result of this powerlessness, but here all causes lie buried in darkness) what is equally decisive is the *irresistibly strong voice, literally your voice* calling on me to be silent. And now everything concerning you remains unsaid; of course it's mostly found in your letters (maybe in the

yellow one as well, or more correctly: in the telegram you sent—naturally with good reason—demanding I return the letter), frequently in the passages which I fear and avoid like the devil avoids a consecrated place.

---

Strange, I also wanted to send you a telegram. I played with the idea for a long time—in bed this afternoon, at the Belvedere this evening, but it would say only this: “Request explicit and affirmative reply to underlined passage in last letter.” But in the end that seemed to contain an unjustified and ugly lack of trust and I didn’t send it.

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So now I’ve been brooding over this letter until 1:30 at night without doing anything else, just staring at it, and through it at you. Sometimes—not in a dream—I see in my mind: Your face is hidden by your hair, which I succeed in parting right and left, your face appears, I run my hands along your forehead to your temples and now I’m holding your face in my hands.

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Monday

I wanted to tear up this letter, not send it, not answer your telegram, telegrams can mean so many different things—but now both the postcard and the letter have arrived; this card, this letter. But even when faced by them, Milena, and even if I have to bite my tongue to shreds, it wants to speak so badly—how can I believe you need my letters now, when the only thing you need is peace, as you have so often said, half unconsciously. And these letters really are pure anguish, *they are caused by incurable anguish and they cause incurable anguish*. Moreover it’s even getting worse—what good will my letters be this winter? The only way to live is to be silent and still, here as well as there. With some sadness, fine, what difference does that make? It renders sleep deeper and more childlike. But anguish pulls its plow through sleep—all through the day, too—and that is unbearable.

IN THE MARGIN: If I do go to a sanatorium, of course I will write you.

[Prague, end of March 1922]

It's been such a long time since I've written you,\* Frau Milena, and even today I am only writing as the result of coincidence. Actually I don't have to apologize for my not having written, after all, you know how much I hate letters. All my misfortune in life—I don't want to complain, just make a generally instructive observation—derives, one might say, from letters or from the possibility of writing letters. People have hardly ever deceived me, but letters always have, and as a matter of fact not those of other people, but my own. In my case this is a particular misfortune which I do not want to discuss further, but it is nevertheless also a general one. The easy possibility of writing letters—from a purely theoretical point of view—must have brought wrack and ruin to the souls of the world. Writing letters is actually an intercourse with ghosts and by no means just with the ghost of the addressee but also with one's own ghost, which secretly evolves inside the letter one is writing or even in a whole series of letters, where one letter corroborates another and can refer to it as witness. How did people ever get the idea they could communicate with one another by letter! One can think about someone far away and one can hold on to someone nearby; everything else is beyond human power. Writing letters, on the other hand, means exposing oneself to the ghosts, who are greedily waiting precisely for that. Written kisses never arrive at their destination; the ghosts drink them up along the way. It is this ample nourishment which enables them to multiply so enormously. People sense this and struggle against it; in order to eliminate as much of the ghosts' power as possible and to attain a natural intercourse, a tranquility of soul, they have invented trains, cars, aeroplanes—but nothing helps anymore: These are evidently inventions devised at the moment of crashing. The opposing side is so much calmer and stronger; after the postal system, the ghosts invented the telegraph, the telephone, the wireless. They will not starve, but we will perish.

\*Here Kafka has reverted to the formal *Sie*.

I'm surprised you haven't written about this yet, not in order to prevent or achieve something with its publication, it's too late for that, but at least to let "them" know they have been exposed.

Incidentally, "they" are also exposed by the exceptions, for it sometimes happens they let a letter through untouched, and it arrives like the light, kind handclasp of a friendly hand. But probably that also merely appears to be so; such cases may be the most dangerous of all, and should be guarded against more carefully than the others. On the other hand, if this is a deception, at least it is a complete one.

Something like that happened to me today and that's why I thought of writing you. I received a letter from a friend whom you also know; we haven't been writing each other for a long time, which is extremely sensible. A corollary of the above is that letters are an excellent antisleeping pill. What shape they're in when they arrive! Desiccated, empty, and provocative, a single moment of joy with long suffering to follow. While one is reading them and forgetting oneself, the little sleep one has gets up, flies out the open window and doesn't return for a long time. This is why we haven't written one another. But I often think about my friend, even if too much in passing. All my thinking is too much in passing. Last night, however, I thought about him a lot, for hours and hours; I spent the deep night hours in bed—these hours which are so costly to me because they are so hostile—using the same words over and over to keep repeating certain things to him in an imaginary letter, things which at that moment seemed extremely important to me. And in the morning a letter from him actually arrived, containing moreover the remark that for a month, or perhaps more correctly a month ago, my friend had had the feeling that he should come and see me, a remark which strangely coincided with things I had experienced.

This letter incident induced me to write a letter and as long as I've begun, how could I not write to you as well, Frau Milena, since you are perhaps the person I enjoy writing to most. (Inasmuch as writing can be enjoyed at all, which I only

add for the ghosts surrounding my table, who are waiting and lusting.)

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It's been a long time since I found anything of yours in the newspapers except the fashion articles which—with a few minor exceptions—have recently seemed happy and calm, especially the last one on spring. But it's true I hadn't read the *Tribuna* for 3 weeks beforehand (I'll try to find the copies)—I was in Spindelmühle.

[Prague, September 1922]

Dear Frau Milena,

I must confess I once envied someone very much because he was loved, well cared-for, guarded by reason and strength, and because he lay peacefully under flowers. I'm always quick to envy.

I think I was right to conclude from the *Tribuna*, which I read often although not constantly, that you have had a good summer. I once acquired a copy in Planá at the station; two women, summer guests, were conversing with each other, one was holding the supplement behind her, in my direction; my sister then borrowed it for me. If I'm not mistaken you had a very funny article attacking the German spas. Once you wrote about the happiness of spending the summer in places far removed by rail, that was also nice; or was that the same article? I don't think so. As usual when you appear in *Národní Listy* and leave the Jewish (fashion) school behind, your article about the window displays was grandly superior. Then you translated the essay about the cooks—why? Your aunt is peculiar: one time she writes how people should stamp their letters properly, next how they shouldn't throw things out the window, all matters beyond dispute—but hopeless struggles nonetheless. Occasionally, however, something lovely, moving

and kind creeps in anyway, if one pays close attention; she just shouldn't hate the Germans so much—the Germans are wonderful and will remain so. Do you know Eichendorff's poem: "O valleys wide, O mountains!" or Justinus Kerner's poem about the saw? If you don't I'll copy them for you some day.

There would be several things to say about Planá, but now it's already over. Ottla was very kind to me, despite the fact that she has another child apart from me. My lungs were all right, at least out there. I still haven't been to the doctor here, although I've already been back for 14 days. But it can't be all that bad if, for example, I was able—holy vanity—to chop wood outside for an hour and more without tiring, and was even happy while doing so, at least at times. Other things, sleep and the waking that accompanies it, were occasionally worse. And your lung, that proud, strong, tormented, unshakable creature?

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I just received the enclosed charming letter from your friend Mareš. A few months ago on the street—since our friendship is really just a street acquaintanceship—he asked me in a moment of sudden ebullience whether he might send me his books; I was moved and begged him to do so. The next day his book of poems arrived with a beautiful dedication: "for my friend of many years." A few days later, however, a second book came with a postal invoice. I did the easiest thing possible, neither thanked nor paid (by the way, the second book, *Poličejní Štára*, is very good; would you like it?) and now comes this invitation I cannot refuse, I'll send him the money with a small note on the invoice, whereupon I hope that you will move him to return twice the amount.

A tomcat belongs in the picture? Why is that? The splinter in the head is enough.

K



[Prague, January–February 1923]

Dear Frau Milena, I think it is better not to speak much about guarding one's rear and all that that involves, just as one avoids speaking of high treason in times of war. These are things one cannot fully understand, at best just guess at, things which reduce one to being a "nation." And as such, one can influence events, for without nations there is no war; this leads one to assume the right to a voice—in reality, however, events will be judged and decided solely in the unfathomable hierarchy of the authorities. And even if one did succeed in influencing events with one's words, it would only cause harm, because such words are incompetent, they are uttered uncontrollably as if during sleep, and the world is full of spies who are listening. In light of this the best recourse is to be calm, dignified, and inured to provocations. And here everything really is a provocation, even the grass where you sit beside the long canal. (Completely irresponsibly by the way, at a time when I feel I'm catching cold, although my room is heated and I'm lying in bed under a heating pad, two blankets and a down comforter.) After all, one can only have opinions about how outer appearance affects the world and in this respect my illness puts me at an advantage over your walks, which sound pretty terrible. Because if I talk this way about my disease no one will actually believe me, and as a matter of fact, it really is just a joke.

I'll start to read *Donadieu* very soon, but perhaps I should send it to you beforehand, I know what it is to have such longing and I know one bears a grudge against whoever withholds such a book. For instance, I was prejudiced against several people because, although I could prove nothing, I suspected each of holding on to that copy of *Indian Summer*—Oskar Baum's son came running home from an open-air school near Frankfurt because he didn't have his books there, especially his favorite one, *Stalky & Co.* by Kipling, which he had already read 75 times, I think. So if this applies to *Donadieu* I'll send it, but I would like to read it.

If I had the feuilletons I might not read the fashion articles

(where were they this last Sunday?). You'd please me very much if you would always indicate the dates. I'll get hold of the "Devil" once I can go out; for the time being I still feel some pain.

Georg Kaiser—I don't know much by him and haven't wanted to know more, although I have yet to see something of his on stage. Two years ago his trial made a big impression on me; I read the reports in the *Tatra*, especially the great defense in which he proclaimed his incontestable right to take things away from others, compared his place in German history to that of Luther, and demanded that flags in Germany be flown at half-mast if he was convicted. Here at my bedside he talked mainly about his oldest child (he has three), a ten-year-old boy whom he doesn't allow to attend school, but whom he won't teach either, so that the boy still can't read or write. However, the boy can draw well and spends the whole day roaming around in the forest and by the lake (they live here in an isolated country house in Grünhaide outside Berlin). When I said to Kaiser (as he was leaving): "Well that's a great thing to do in any case," he said: "It's also the only thing worth doing, everything else is pretty worthless." Strange and not entirely pleasant to see him like that—half-crazy, half-Berlin businessman, careless-happy. He doesn't seem completely shaken, although in part he seems too much so; supposedly the tropical climate ruined him and nothing else (as a young man he was employed in South America, returned sick, for 8 years lay on the sofa without doing a thing and then began to revive in a sanatorium). His face also reveals this dichotomy: flat with amazingly empty light blue eyes, which however twitch rapidly back and forth like several other features of his face, whereas other parts are so immobile they seem paralyzed. Incidentally, Max has a completely different impression of him, he considers him full of cheer and that's why in his friendly concern he probably forced Kaiser to come up to see me. And now he's taking up the whole letter. There are still some things I wanted to say. Next time.

*[Prague, January–February 1923]*

Dear Frau Milena, I have read the "Devil," it is admirable, not even mainly as instruction, not even as discovery, but because of the presence of an inconceivably courageous person and—this is even more inconceivable—a person who, as the final sentence shows, knows about other things than courage but stays courageous nonetheless. I don't enjoy making the following comparison, but it suggests itself too strongly. What you offer the reader is itself like a married couple or perhaps the child of a marriage: a Jewish nation is on the verge of self-destruction when it is seized by the mighty hand of an angel (the angel is no longer clearly visible, having been obscured on Earth by the marriage, but in any case it was probably impossible to see him earlier, since he is too large for human eyes), by the mighty hand of an angel who loves these Jews so much he marries the whole nation so it will not perish. And now the child of this marriage is standing here looking all around and the first thing he sees is the devil at the hearth, a terrible apparition which didn't even exist before the child was born. At any rate it was unknown to the child's parents. In general, the Jews who had reached their—I almost wrote: happy—end did not know this particular devil; they could no longer differentiate among various infernal things, they considered the whole world a devil and the devil's work—and that angel? What does an angel, as long as he's not a fallen one, have in common with the devil? But on the other hand, the child sees the devil standing over his hearth very exactly. And now the struggle of the parents begins in the child, the struggle of their convictions trying to escape the devil. Again and again the angel hauls the Jews on high, to where they should defend themselves, and again and again they fall back down and the angel has to return with them if he doesn't want them to be swallowed up completely. And there's no reason to reproach either side, both are the way they are, one Jewish, one angelic. Then the latter begins to forget his high heritage and the former, feeling safe for the moment, becomes haughty. Their

endless dialogue might be summarized in sentences like these, although it's inevitable that Jewry will twist the words of the angel whenever possible:

*Jewry:* "If there's anything that avenges itself in this world, it is calculation and accounting in spiritual affairs."

*Angel:* "The only good reason for two people to get married is if it is impossible for them not to."

*Jewry:* Well, so here are the calculations.

*Angel:* Calculations?

or

*Jewry:* "What lies deep down is deceiving, but you can know a person by the surface."

*Angel:* "But why don't people promise one another they won't scream when the roast is burned, etc."

*Jewry:* You mean a person's supposed to tell lies even on the surface. But that doesn't have to be requested, by the way; he would have done so long ago of his own accord, if he were able to.

or

*Jewry:* You're absolutely right: "Why don't they promise one another the freedom of silence, of space, of being alone?"

*Angel:* I'm supposed to have said that? I never said that, that would contradict everything I have said.

or

*Angel:* "Either accept your fate . . . humbly . . . or seek your fate . . ."

*Jewry:* ". . . seeking requires faith!"

At this point at last, at last, good heavens, the angel pushes the Jews back down and frees himself.

A wonderfully stimulating essay, where your lightning quickness of thought is particularly well aimed and hard hitting. Whoever hasn't been struck by it yet—and most people probably have—ducks down, whoever has been struck stretches out again inside a dream. And in this dream he says to himself: As trivial as these demands are, they are not trivial enough. There are no unhappy marriages, there are only incomplete ones and they are incomplete because they were made by incomplete human beings, human beings who have not fully evolved, who should be torn out of the field before the harvest. Sending such people into marriage is like teaching algebra in the first grade. In the corresponding higher grade, algebra is easier than one times one in the first grade, in fact it actually is one times one, but down here it's impossible and just confuses the entire world of children, and maybe even other worlds as well. But it seems that Jewry is speaking here and we should probably stuff his mouth.

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Then your letter arrived. It's a strange thing these days with my writing. You have to be patient with me—when didn't you? For years I haven't written a soul; I might as well have been dead, I felt no need to communicate with anyone. It was as if I wasn't of this world, but not from any other either; it was as if throughout the years I had done everything demanded of me just on the side, while in reality I was only listening to find out whether I was being called—until the disease actually did call from the next room and I ran in and started belonging to it more and more. But the room is so dark and it's hard to tell whether it really is the disease.

In any case, thinking and writing became very difficult for me; occasionally while writing my hand would run empty over the page; this happens now too—I won't even mention thinking (again and again I am amazed at your lightning thought, the way a handful of sentences gathers and then the lightning strikes). In any case, you have to be patient with me, this bud

opens slowly and is really only a bud, because closed things are called buds.

I've started the *Donadieu*, but have read very little, I'm not really getting into it; besides, what little of his I have read didn't say much to me. He is praised for his simplicity, but simplicity is at home in Germany and Russia. The old man is charming, but not compelling enough to prevent me from reading right past him. The most beautiful passages in what I've read to now (I'm still in Lyons) are in my opinion characteristic of France, but not of Philippe, a weak reflection of Flaubert, for instance, the sudden delight at a street corner (perhaps you remember the paragraph?). It's as if 2 translators worked on the translation, at times it's very good, at times almost incomprehensible. (Wolff is publishing a new translation.) In any case, I'm enjoying it very much; I've become a fairly good but very slow reader. Of course, my weakness of becoming very self-conscious around girls hampers me to the point that I don't believe the writer's girls really exist, because I can't believe that he dared approach them. It's a little as if the writer had made a puppet and were to name it Donadieu solely to distract the reader's attention from the real Donadieu, who is a completely different person and in a completely different place. And despite all their charm I really feel these girlhood years are very contrived, as if what's being told here didn't really happen, just what comes later, and that this was only an overture invented after the fact according to the laws of music and then attuned to reality. And there are books where this feeling lasts to the very end.

I don't know "On the High Road." But I love Chekhov very much, sometimes completely senselessly. Nor do I know "Will of the Mill," or anything by Stevenson, just that he is a favorite of yours.

I'll send you Franz. I'm sure you won't like it at all, except in a few minor places. This can be explained by my theory that living authors have a living relationship with their books. With their very existence they fight for or against them. The true, independent life of the book doesn't begin until the death of the

author, or more correctly some time after his death, for these zealous men keep struggling for their books even a while after they have died. But then the book is left all alone and has to rely on the strength of its own heartbeat. That's why, for instance, it was so sensible of Meyerbeer to want to assist this heartbeat by bequeathing something to each of his operas, perhaps varying the amount according to his confidence in each. But more (if not very important) things could be said about that. Applied to Franzi this means the book of the living author is really the bedroom at the end of his apartment, meant for kissing if he is meant for kissing and horrible in any other case. It is hardly a verdict on the book if I say I like it or if you—but perhaps not—say the opposite.

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Today I read further in *Donadieu*, but I can't get anywhere with it. (Nor is it likely I'll get anywhere with this explanation, since my sister is talking with the cook in the kitchen next door; of course I could interrupt them with my first slight cough but I don't want to, as this girl—she's only been with us for a few days, 19 years old, extremely strong—maintains she's the most unhappy creature in the world, without reason, she's only unhappy because she is unhappy and needs my sister's consolation, who by the way has always—as my father says—"preferred to sit with the maid.") Whatever I say superficially against the book will be unfair, because all objections come from the core, and I don't mean the core of the book. If someone committed a murder yesterday—and when could such a yesterday ever become the day before—he won't be able to stomach reading murder mysteries today. To him they mean everything at once: they are painful, boring, and inflammatory. The solemn unsolemnity, the partial impartiality, the admiring irony of the book—I don't want any of it. When Raphael seduces Donadieu it is undoubtedly very important for her, but what is the writer doing in the student's room, and there's even a fourth person, the reader, so that the little room turns into the auditorium of the School of Medicine or Psychology. And besides, the book contains little except despair.

I still think about your essay often. Strangely enough, I really do believe there can be marriages—to carry over the imagined dialogue into a real one: Jews! Jews!—and even lofty, conscious marriages that do not stem from the despair of loneliness, and I think the angel essentially shares this belief. For what is to be gained by marrying out of despair? If one loneliness is placed inside another, the result is not a home but a *katorga*.\* One loneliness is reflected in the other even in the deepest darkest night. And if loneliness is coupled with assurance, it will be even worse for the loneliness (unless it is a tender girlish unconscious loneliness). Assuming a clear and strict definition, however, getting married means: being sure.

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At the moment the worst thing is—not even I would have expected it—that I cannot write these letters anymore, not even these important letters. The evil magic of letter writing is setting in and destroying my nights, even more than they are already destroying themselves. I have to stop, I can no longer write. Oh, your insomnia is different from mine. Please let's not write anymore.

*Dobřichovice: 9.V.23*

Frau Milena Pollak  
Vienna VII  
Lerchenfelderstrasse 113/5

Many thanks for your greetings. Concerning me: I've come out here for a few days; it was getting bad in Prague. But it still doesn't count as a trip, just a flapping of my completely unsuitable wings.

K.

\*A punishment involving imprisonment, hard labor, and exile (Russian).



*Dobřichovice: 9.V.23*

Frau Milena Pollak  
Vienna VII  
Lerchenfelderstrasse 113/5

Dear Frau Milena, I trust you received my card from Dobřichovice. I'm still here, but am going back home in 2, 3 days—it's too expensive (they also don't return change correctly, sometimes too much and sometimes too little, it's hard to check since the head waiter is so quick and alert), too sleepless and so forth, although of course beautiful beyond all measure. As far as future trips are concerned, this one may have made me a little more able to travel, if only to destinations an additional half hour away from Prague. It's just that in the first place, I fear the costs—it's so expensive here, it is really just for spending one's last days before death, when there's nothing left—and in the second place I fear—in the second place—heaven and hell. Apart from that the world is open to me.

Cordial greetings  
K

(Incidentally it's the third time since we've known each other that—with a few lines—you have suddenly, at a specific, extreme moment, warned me or calmed me or however one might express it.)

*[Berlin, late November 1923]*

When you\* suddenly (but not surprisingly) disappeared after our last meeting, I didn't hear from you again until the beginning of September and then in a manner which was very bad for me. Meanwhile in July something great had happened to me—what great things exist! I had gone to Müritz on the Baltic with the help of my oldest sister. In any case, away from

\*In this letter Kafka again uses the familiar *Du*.

Prague, out of the closed room. At first I felt downright nauseous. Then in Müritz the Berlin possibility sprang up unexpectedly. I had, after all, wanted to go to Palestine in October—we talked about that—naturally it would have never happened; it was a fantasy, like the fantasy of someone convinced he'll never leave his bed again. If I'm never going to leave my bed why shouldn't I go at least as far as Palestine? But in Müritz I came across a summer colony of the Jewish Volkshheim in Berlin—mostly Eastern Jews. I was very attracted to it, it was on my way. I started considering the possibility of moving to Berlin. At the time this possibility was not much more real than the Palestine plan, but then it became so. Of course it was impossible (in every respect) for me to live in Berlin alone, and not just in Berlin, but anywhere for that matter. In Müritz, however, help in this matter sprang up as well, in its own way equally unexpectedly. Then in the middle of August I went to Prague and then stayed over a month with my youngest sister in Schelesen. There I happened to hear about the burned letter; I was desperate, I immediately wrote you to ease my burden, but didn't mail the letter after all, since I hadn't heard anything from you, and finally I burned my letter before leaving for Berlin. To this day I don't know a thing about the other three letters you mention. I was in despair about some terrible disgrace which had been inflicted on someone, although I didn't know exactly on which of the three people involved. But I'm sure I would not have avoided despair in any case, even if it were a different kind, even if I had received the letter in Müritz as I should have.

Then at the end of September I went to Berlin; shortly before leaving I received your card from Italy. I carried out my departure with the last scrap of strength I could find, or more correctly, completely devoid of strength, just like a funeral.

And so now I'm here; so far things in Berlin haven't been as bad as you seem to think; I am practically living in the country, in a small villa with a garden. It seems to me I've never had such a beautiful apartment, I'm also sure I'll soon lose it—it is too beautiful for me (incidentally, it's the second apartment I've had here). Up to now the food hasn't been essentially

different from the food in Prague, that is to say, my food. The same holds true for my health. That is all. I don't dare say any more; I've already said too much, and the ghosts of the air are gulping it down their insatiable throats. And you say even less in your letter. Is your general situation good, bearable? I can't figure it out. Of course one cannot even figure out one's own riddles; this is precisely the meaning of "fear."

*Berlin-Steglitz 25.12.23*

Frau Milena Pollak  
Vienna VII  
Lerchenfelderstrasse 113/5

Dear Milena, a piece of a letter has been lying here ready for you such a long time, but I am unable to finish it, for the old grief, the old pain has found me here as well, attacked me and knocked me down a little. Everything takes effort, every stroke of the pen, everything I put on paper seems to me too grandiose, out of proportion to my strength, and if I write down "cordial regards," then are these greetings really strong enough to enter the wild, noisy, gray, urban Lerchenfelderstrasse, where it was impossible for me and mine to even breathe? Consequently I do not write at all, just wait for better times or even worse ones, and by the way, I'm being cared for gently and well to the limit of earthly possibility. My only source of news about the world—but it's a very vivid source—is the rising cost of living; I do not receive any newspapers from Prague and cannot afford the ones from Berlin. How would you like to send me an occasional clipping from the *Národní Listy*—the kind that once gave me so much pleasure. Incidentally, for the past few weeks my address has been: Steglitz Grunewaldstrasse 13 c/o Hr. Seifert. And now my "best regards" after all—what does it matter if they collapse at your garden gate; perhaps your strength will be all the greater.

K.



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# APPENDICES



MILENA JESENSKÁ'S LETTERS  

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TO MAX BROD  

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[July 21, 1920]

Dear Herr Doktor:

You wanted me to provide some proof of injustice being done to Herr N.N. in Veleslavín. I'm afraid there's very little definite information I can report that would carry any weight with the authorities, although I would be very glad to do so. I was in Veleslavín from June 1917 to March 1918, I was living in the same villa, and all that I could do for him was occasionally loan him books and occasionally have myself locked in; you see he's not allowed to talk to anyone—if he is seen doing so, even if the conversation is of no significance and even if it takes place in the presence of an attendant, everyone is locked in and the attendant is fired.

[ . . . ]

Of course psychiatry is horrible whenever it is misused: everything can be abnormal, and every word is a new weapon for the torturer. I would swear that Herr N.N. is capable of a different existence in the world. On the other hand, I cannot prove anything.

[ . . . ]

I also have a big request to ask of you, Herr Doktor. I'm sure you know I can never find out from Frank how he is doing, since he's always "excellent," good man that he is, and since he's overly healthy, so to say, overly rested and so on. I would like to ask, request, *beg* you to write me immediately if you see, if you sense he is suffering, if he is in any physical pain because of me—I won't tell him I found out from you, and I'll be a little calmer if you promise me you'll do this. I don't know how I will help him if that happens, but I know for sure I *will* help

him. Frank says that one has to “love you, be proud of you, admire you,” and I do all of that and thank you many times in advance—not least for the fact that I can rely on you.

[July 29, 1920]

I really was very shocked; I didn't know that Franz's illness was so serious—he was really quite healthy here, I didn't hear him cough at all, he was bright and cheerful and slept well.

You thank me, dear, dear Max, you thank me instead of reproaching me for not having been with him all this time, for sitting here and *only* writing letters. I beg you—I beg you not to think I'm bad, that I'm making it easy for myself. I am in complete torment here, complete despair (don't tell Frank!) and don't know what to do or how to help myself. But the fact that you write that Frank does get something out of me and from me, something good—really, Max, that is the greatest happiness possible. I'm sure Frank will go somewhere, I'll do everything I can to this end, even if it means I have to come to Prague myself in the fall, and then we'll send him away, won't we, and I also hope he'll be rested there and that he'll be in good spirits. I—do I have to say it?—will do everything I can for that to happen.

The story of my marriage and my love for my husband is too complicated to tell here. It only means I cannot come now, perhaps not ever, I—no, words are just too dumb. But I'm constantly looking for a way out for myself, constantly looking for a solution, for the good thing to do, the correct thing. Max, please, be convinced I won't let Frank suffer, please, believe me when I say that this is more important to me than anything else in the world.

So you are with him now, and you'll tell me immediately should there be anything to say; you will be severe and truthful with me, won't you? Today it's a little easier for me because I have you, because I am no longer so entirely alone.



When you come back, please write to me about the practical requirements of the trip (for instance the office) and in general how and what must be done, and above all: does the doctor really have any hope that he can recover? This is all so unimportant, what am I writing here? The main thing is for him to leave, and I'm sure he'll do that.

Many, many thanks. I'm really deeply grateful to you, your letter was so good to me. Forgive me for calling you Max; that's what Frank calls you and I've gotten used to it already.

Best wishes  
Milena P.

*[beginning of August 1920]*

Your letter would take days and nights to answer. You wonder how it happens that Frank is afraid of love but not afraid of life? But I think it's something else. Life for him is something entirely different than for all other human beings; in particular, things like money, the stock market, currency exchange, a typewriter are utterly mystical to him (and they really are, too; just not for the rest of us), they are the strangest riddles to him, and his approach to them is completely different than our own. Can his office work be considered the customary performance of a service? Any official position, including his own, is something very puzzling to him, very admirable, like a locomotive is for a small child. He doesn't understand the simplest things in the world. Were you ever in a post office with him? After he composes a telegram and picks out whatever little counter he likes best, shaking his head, he then drifts from one counter to another, without the slightest idea to what end or why, until he finally stumbles on the right one, and when he pays and receives change, he counts it and discovers one krone too many, and so he gives one back to the girl behind the counter. Then he walks away slowly, counts once again, and in the middle of descending the last staircase he realizes that the miss-

ing krone belonged to him after all. So there you stand next to him, at a loss, while he shifts his weight from one foot to the other, wondering what to do. Going back is difficult; upstairs there's a crowd of people pushing and shoving. "So just let it go," I say. He looks at me completely horrified. How can you let it go? Not that he's sorry about the krone. But it's not good. There's one krone missing. How can you forget about something like that? He spoke about it for a long time, and was very dissatisfied with me. And this repeated itself with different variations in every shop, in every restaurant, in front of every beggar. Once he gave a beggar a two-krone piece and wanted one back. She said she didn't have anything. We stood there for a good two minutes, thinking about how to deal with the matter. Then it occurred to him that he could leave the two krone. But no sooner had he taken a few steps when he started getting very cross. Of course this same man would be eager and extremely happy to give me twenty thousand krone with no questions asked. On the other hand, if I were to ask him for twenty thousand and one krone and we had to change money somewhere and didn't know where, he would seriously consider what to do with the one krone I hadn't been allotted. His anxiety in the face of money is almost the same as his anxiety in the face of women. Or his fear of things official. Once I telegraphed him, phoned him, wrote him, begged him in God's name to come see me for a day. I really needed it at the time. I cursed him to high heaven. He didn't sleep for nights, tormented himself, wrote letters full of self-destruction, but he did not come. Why? He couldn't ask for a leave. He was unable to ask the director, the same director he admires in the depths of his soul (seriously!) for being able to type so quickly—he wasn't able to tell the director he was going to see me. And as for saying something else—another horrified letter—how could he? Lie? Lie to the director? Impossible. If you ask him why he loved his first fiancée, he'll answer, "She was so good at business," and his face begins to beam with admiration.

No, this whole world is and remains a riddle to him. A mystical secret. Something he cannot attain and something he

holds in high regard, with a moving, pure naïveté, because it is “good at business.” When I told him about my husband, who is unfaithful to me one hundred times a year, who holds me and many other women under a type of spell, his face lit up with the same awe he had shown the time he spoke about his director who can type so quickly and who is therefore such a superior person, and the time he spoke about his fiancée who was so “good at business.” All of that is foreign to him. A person who can type quickly and a man who has four mistresses are just as incomprehensible to him as the krone at the post office and the krone with the beggar; they are incomprehensible to him because they are alive. But Frank is unable to live. Frank isn’t capable of living. Frank will never recover. Frank will soon die.

Obviously, we are all capable of living, because at one time or another we have all taken refuge in a lie, in blindness, enthusiasm, optimism, a conviction, pessimism, or something else. But he has never fled to any refuge, not one. He is absolutely incapable of lying, just as he is incapable of getting drunk. He lacks even the smallest refuge; he has no shelter. That is why he is exposed to everything we are protected from. He is like a naked man among the dressed. Everything he is, says, and lives cannot even be called truth; actually, it is pre-determined being, being in and of itself, being with nothing added that might allow him to distort his picture of the world—whether into beauty or distress. And his asceticism is completely unheroic—hence all the greater and loftier. All “heroism” is lying and cowardice. This is not someone who chooses asceticism as a means to an end; here is a man who is forced to be ascetic because of his terrible clairvoyance, his purity and inability to compromise.

There are very intelligent people who also refuse to make compromises. But they don magic glasses and see everything in a different light. That’s why they don’t need any compromises. That’s why they are able to type quickly and have their women. He stands beside them and gazes at them in wonder, at everything, even this typewriter and these women. He will never understand.

His books are amazing. He himself is far more amazing. Many thanks for everything. I wish you all the best. I'm allowed to visit you when I come to Prague, am I not? I send you my most heartfelt greetings.

*[presumably beginning of January 1921]*

Dear Herr Doktor:

Forgive me for not being able to write in German. Perhaps you know enough Czech to understand me; forgive me for bothering you. I simply don't know what to do; my brain cannot handle any more impressions or thoughts, it can't take in any more, I don't know anything, I don't feel anything, I don't understand anything. I have the feeling that something terrible has happened to me during these months, but I don't know much about it. I don't know anything about the world at all, I just feel I would probably kill myself if I somehow grasped whatever it is that's eluding me.

I could tell you what brought it all about, how it happened and why; I could tell you everything about myself and about my life, but what good would that do: and moreover I don't know—I just have Frank's letter from the Tatra mountains in my hand, a very deadly request and at the same time an order: "Make it impossible for us to meet, and do not write; please fulfill my one request in silence, it is the only thing that can enable me to go on living, everything else causes further destruction." I don't dare write a word, a question; I don't even know what I want to ask of you. I don't know what—I don't know what I want to know. Jesus Christ, I'd like to press my temples into my brain. Just tell me one thing, you've been with him lately, you know: Am I guilty or not guilty? I beg you for God's sake not to console me, don't say no one is guilty, don't write any psychoanalysis. I already know all that, you see, all that you could possibly write me. I am trusting you, Max, in

what God knows is perhaps the most difficult hour of my life; I beg you to trust me too. Please understand what I want. I know who Frank is, I know what happened and I don't know what happened; I am bordering on insanity; I have strived to act properly, to live, think, and feel according to my conscience, but there *is* guilt somewhere. That's what I want to hear about. Of course I don't know whether you can understand me. I want to know whether I am causing or have caused Frank to suffer as he has with every other woman, so that his sickness only grew worse, so that he had to flee from me too into his fear, and so that I must now disappear as well, whether I am to blame or whether it is a consequence of his own nature. Is what I'm saying clear? I *have* to know. You are the only one who may know something. I beg you, answer me, please answer me with the full naked, simple, and, if need be, brutal truth; tell me what you really think.

[ . . . ] I will be very grateful if you reply. This will give me some direction. Also please send me news how he is doing. I haven't heard anything from him for months.

[ . . . ]

My Address: M.K. , Vienna VIII, Postamt 65, Bennogasse. Forgive me, I cannot rewrite this letter; I can't even read it. Thank you. Milena.

[January–February 1921]

Thank you for your kindness. In the meantime I have come to my senses somewhat. I can think again. Not that this has made things any better for me. Of course it goes without saying I won't write Frank. How could I! If it's true that people have a task to fulfill on earth, then, where he is concerned, I have fulfilled mine very badly. How could I be so immodest and hurt him when I was incapable of helping him? I understand his fear down in my deepest nerve. Furthermore, it was always

there, before he met me, all the time he didn't know me. I knew his fear before I knew him. I armed myself against it by understanding it. In the four days Frank was next to me, he lost it. We laughed about it. I know for certain that no sanatorium will succeed in curing him. He will never be healthy, Max, as long as he has this fear. And no psychic reinforcement can overcome this fear, because the fear prevents the reinforcement. This fear doesn't just apply to me; it relates to everything that is shamelessly alive, also to the flesh, for example. Flesh is too uncovered; he can't stand the sight of it. This is what I was able to dispel back then. Whenever he sensed this fear, he would look me in the eye, and we would wait a while, as if our feet hurt or we had to catch our breath, and after a moment it would pass. This didn't require the slightest effort, everything was simple and clear, I dragged him over the hills behind Vienna, I went on ahead since he was walking slowly, he came trudging on behind me, and if I close my eyes I can still see his white shirt and his sunburned neck and how he was straining. He kept hiking the whole day, uphill, downhill, in the sun; he didn't cough once, he ate an enormous amount and slept like a bagpipe; he was simply healthy, and during those days his disease was like a slight cold. Had I gone to Prague with him back then, I would have remained the person I was for him at the time. But I was also planted with two feet here, infinitely firmly in the ground; I was incapable of leaving my husband, and perhaps I was too much a woman to have the strength to subject myself to a life that I knew would demand the most rigorous asceticism, for the rest of my days. I have, however, an insuppressible longing, a maniacal longing for a completely different life than the one I am leading now or ever will lead, a longing for a life with a child, for a life that would be very close to the earth. And this is what probably won out over everything else inside me, over love, over my love of taking flight, over my admiration, and once again over love. (Incidentally, whatever one says on this subject will always turn out to be a lie—this is perhaps the smallest lie possible.) And then it was just too late. The conflict within me became too clearly

visible, and that scared him. After all, that is exactly what he was fighting against his whole life, from the other side. With me he could have found peace. But then it began to pursue him even with me. Against my will. I knew very well something had happened that couldn't be erased. I was too weak to be able to fulfill this task, to do the one and only thing I knew would help him. This *is* my fault. And you too know it's my fault. What people attribute to Frank's not being normal is actually his virtue. The women he was with were normal women and didn't know how to live any differently. I really think that every one of us, that everyone in the world, is sick, and that he is the only one who is healthy and understands things correctly and feels correctly and the only pure human being. I know he isn't resisting *life*, just *this type of life*. If I could have brought myself to go with him, he would have been able to live happily with me. But it's only today I realize all of this. At the time, I was an ordinary woman, like all women in the world, a small, impulsive female. And that is what led to his fear. It was correct. Is it possible for this man to feel anything that isn't correct? He knows ten thousand times more about the world than everyone else. This fear of his was correct. And you are wrong—Frank will not write me of his own accord. There isn't anything for him to write. There is literally not a single word he could say to me in his fear. I know he loves me. He is too good and retiring to be able to stop loving me. He would see that as a fault. After all, he always considers himself guilty and weak. And there's really not another person in the world with his enormous strength: this absolute, unshakeable need for perfection, purity, and truth. That's the way it is. I know it down to my last drop of blood. I just can't bring this knowledge fully into my consciousness. When I do, it will be terrible. I run through the streets, sit by my window for long nights on end, sometimes my thoughts jump around like sparks when you sharpen a knife, and my heart feels as if it were hanging on a fishhook, you know, on a very thin little hook, so that it keeps tearing with an extremely thin, horribly sharp pain.

My health has reached its limit, and if something is still

sustaining me, it is happening against my will, and it's probably the same thing that has carried me this far, something very unconscious, an involuntary love of life. I recently stumbled across some tracks, somewhere at the other end of Vienna; imagine streets that go on for miles, forming a great oblong pit—and at the bottom, tracks, red lights, trains, viaducts, box-cars; it was such a horrendous black organism; I sat next to it and felt as if something were breathing. I thought I'd go crazy out of sheer grief, longing, and a terrible love of life. I am as alone as mute people are, and if I'm running on here telling you about myself, it's because I am merely regurgitating the words, they are rushing out against my will, since I simply can't be silent any longer. Forgive me.

I won't write Frank, not a line, and I don't know what will happen further. I'm coming to Prague in the spring and I will visit you. And I'll be very happy if you write me now and then how he is doing—I go to the post office daily; I can't break the habit.

I thank you once again

M.P.

One more request: a very silly one. My translations of "The Judgment," "The Metamorphosis," "The Stoker," "Meditation" are appearing with Neumann in the *Červen* edition—in the same format as Charles Louis Philippe's *Bubu*, which you probably know.

Well, I'm finished with them—the last months have eaten away at both heart and soul; it was ghastly to be so forlorn, working on his books—but Neumann wants me to "send a few words about him for the Czech reading public." Jesus Christ, I'm supposed to write for people about him—? I just can't. I don't know whether you have something against it politically—*Červen* is communist, but the series is nonpartisan. Neumann is so willing and happy to publish the volume, and he is looking forward to its appearance—but of course your name would be on it—does that bother you? If not, then please do this. About three or four pages, I'll translate it and include it



as a forward. I once read something similar you had written, an introduction to Laforgue, done very very beautifully. Would you like to do that for me? I would be very glad. The book has to be superb, don't you agree? The translation is good. And your introduction would certainly be good. Please, if you don't have any political reservations, do this for me. Naturally it has to be some sort of information for the Czech reader. But don't write it for them, just for yourself as you did this Laforgue prologue. Wherever you love something, you are frank and very clairvoyant. And then it is, as you say, very very beautiful. It should be very soon, Max, and I beg you: do this for me. I would like to step before the eyes of the world with this book perfected to the best of our ability; you know, I feel as if I had to defend something, vindicate something. I beg you.

And don't tell F. anything. We'll surprise him, agreed? Perhaps—perhaps it will bring him a little joy.

[*Spring—Summer 1921*]

Dear Herr Doktor:

Forgive me for answering so late. Yesterday I got out of bed for the first time, my lungs have managed their last, the doctor gives me only a few more months if I don't leave immediately. At the same time I am writing my father; if and when he sends me money I'll go, although I still don't know where or when. But I'm sure I'll come to Prague first and will permit myself to look you up so I can find out more about Frank. I'll write you again when I get in. However, I firmly insist you don't mention anything about my sickness to F.

I have no idea when the book will appear, evidently this winter. It will be published by K. St. Neumann, in the Borový press, as a volume in the series *Červen*, Stefansgasse 37, perhaps you can inquire with him whether you may publish the prologue separately, before it appears in the book. There is a

shortage of paper and money, everything takes a long time, I didn't want to cut anything from your prologue. (It is so beautiful.)

I have the impression that you might somehow be annoyed with me? I don't know why I have an impression like this, from your letter. Forgive me for "analyzing" Frank, it's disgraceful and I'm ashamed I allowed myself to do it, but sometimes I feel I have to press my palms against my brain so it won't explode.

I thank you for everything and goodbye for now.

Sincerely yours, M.P.

*[presumably mid-July 1924]*

Dear Herr Doktor:

I'm returning the book to you with thanks, please forgive me for not looking you up. I hardly think I could talk about Franz right now, and I'm sure you won't want to speak with me about him at this time either. With your permission, I'll let you know before I come to Prague in September. Please remember me kindly and please convey my best wishes to your wife, whom I once probably wronged without intending to. When you have the opportunity, please make sure my letters which belonged to Franz are burned; I trust you will do so, although of course this is nothing important. His manuscripts and diaries (not at all intended for me, since they were written before he knew me, about fifteen large notebooks) are here with me and, should you need them, are at your disposal. This is as he wished; he asked me not to show them to anyone but you and then only after he died. Perhaps you already know them in part.

Most cordial greetings and I remain yours in friendship  
Milena Polák

[July 27, 1924]

Dear Herr Doktor:

I was unable to travel to Prague to give you the manuscripts, despite the fact I would have been very glad to do so. Nor did I find anyone I could entrust them to, and I trust the postal service even less. I will endeavor to postpone my trip to Prague until October, when, hopefully, you will be back and I'll be able to give you everything in person. I will also ask you to recover my letters from the Kafka family; you will be doing me a great favor. I don't want to ask them personally, I never was in good standing with his relatives.

Many thanks and, until after the first of October in Prague, *auf Wiedersehen!* If it should happen you won't be in Prague then, please write me in Vienna when you return from Italy.

Sincere greetings  
Milena Polák



## FOUR ESSAYS BY MILENA JESENSKÁ

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### V I E N N A

Vienna, December 27

The best thing to do is crawl into bed, cover yourself up to your ears, and not come out until after the holidays. That's how I proposed to celebrate Christmas! And it's odd: what would certainly have been considered a catastrophe in Prague, Berlin, or any other city, what elsewhere would trigger demonstrations, outcries, protests, and maybe even a revolution is tolerated here in perfect peace, with a dull, half humorous resignation. If a Viennese is talking about it, his very language will joke about everything, each word rolls off his lips easily and drolly, even when he curses, threatens, or is angry; in the end it just isn't meant all that seriously.

There is nothing to burn, no coal, no wood, no coke. The trains aren't running in the whole country, the factories stop every minute, businesses close at five o'clock, carbide lamps flicker in the restaurants and cafés from eight o'clock on. They say electricity for private use will soon be cut off, so that we'll have to use candles—which are impossible to obtain! There's nothing for heating or eating. Every day thousands of people look for fuel in the Vienna woods and bring home wet branches which literally boil in the stove and, naturally, provide no warmth. At the tram terminals in the suburbs masses of people wait patiently with bags, sacks, and backpacks full of wood: women, old people, children with heavy loads. In the darkness this throng looks so grotesque it makes you shudder, like a mysteriously moving forest. The people can scarcely be seen under the wood they carry. One after the other, they all

squeeze into the train with the patience of a donkey, their hands stiff with cold, their limbs scraped and bruised; with the same patience the driver endures all the bumps and injuries from the branches his back is exposed to. After two minutes the car looks as if it were stuffed full of wood. Of course people are yelling and cursing, they get mad and complain, but it's not all that bad, it's not meant like that, it's harmless in a neighborly way and silly and dull—it isn't a protest at all, just a verbal accompaniment to the daily routine, like singing while you work so everything progresses more happily.

The other half of the population sells the wood. For two krone a kilo. Young men stand at the train stations with hand-carts and sacks. Wagons loaded with wood drive through the streets. If you want to heat your room, go out on the street, stop the first little cart that comes along and pay, bargain, pay, and pay. Of course the wood is uncut, unchopped. Pay again to have it split. And again to have it carried upstairs. Before it reaches your apartment the wood has shrunk in half. Then you pay the good man a tip, give him a glass of wine, shake his hand, and thank him. And be glad you have anything at all.

It's the same with food. If you're extremely modest—with both quantity and quality—your weekly paycheck will cover a single, pitiful evening meal. There's one loaf of bread per person, and although I've been through two years' hard schooling here, I have never succeeded in getting down this yellow, hard, old, moldy "gift of God." There's no recourse but to buy food on the black market, which perhaps flourishes here more than elsewhere. There are delicatessens downtown with a few apples or some St. John's bread in the display windows—for the sake of propriety. The counter is empty, the baskets and barrels are empty, and still the store is full of people. But these people don't approach the counter demanding, the way they usually would: Give me this and that! On the contrary, they whisper something to the seller, who whispers something back and, after a short while of whispering, fetches a small package, takes the money which has been counted in advance, and the client leaves. A stranger won't receive a thing. But if you know

someone, you can get liqueurs, wine, chocolate, meat, ham, poultry, sausage, anything you like. Just don't ask how much it costs! Take the package, the price will be whispered, then pay and disappear.

Not long ago I went on a pilgrimage for bread. I visited all the shopkeepers, bakers, milkmen, waiters—entirely in vain. Until a woman advised me to go to the bread market on the Gürtel. At the address she gave me I found a wine bar which was in such a fog of blue smoke I could barely see a thing. The room was full of people, all standing. Now and then someone moved from one person to another. They were all talking, screaming, dealing. You can get anything here. You can get bread here—just one loaf, of course! One loaf of evil-smelling, mouldy bread for 50 krone! A kilo of flour costs 50 krone, a kilo of rice 80, an egg 8, a candle 8, a kilo of butter 200, a kilo of meat 150 to 250, a goose costs 1000 krone! Coal, wood, food, textiles, everything at astronomical prices. And the most remarkable thing is: without exception, all the people selling here are workers. I stood in the middle of the room, amazed that the world had turned upside down—not once but three times, so that no one really knows anymore what's top and what's bottom! The whole world revolves around the working masses: every newspaper, every assembly, every lecture. Everyone is crying for help: help for the proletariat, help for the children with rickets who are moldering five, eight to a room with two beds, help for women whom need has forced into prostitution! All of us, almost all, are in agreement, enthusiastic, ready to help—and here are workers with piles of money, who are selling items in great demand at the highest, most shameless prices; there are hundreds and thousands, and not the slightest hint of need. They have furs. They have good shoes, free time, and money. I know many households, including a family of thirteen. Their three rooms, which are heated every day, are a lot warmer than my single room, and they would never serve what I cook for myself—simply because they wouldn't like it. They drink café au lait for breakfast and eat white rolls, and all thirteen of them have full, ruddy faces—not the slightest trace

of malnutrition. The Viennese proletariat isn't doing badly, it really isn't! And of course this should not be begrudged. The civil servants, however, are worse off, people with lamentable salaries and large families: postal officials, etc. Here you'll find the greatest deprivation, even if it isn't visible! Because the many people who aren't workers, the many widows, cripples, street-sweepers, mailmen, small craftsmen—these families really are wasting away in musty rooms in Favoriten and Ottakring, with washlines full of rags. There poverty reigns, fearfully, nakedly! At the same time, there are fifteen theaters in Vienna which are sold out daily despite the enormous price of tickets. (A box seat for the premiere of Strauss's *Die Frau ohne Schatten* costs 1,000 K, for an orchestra seat in the opera the simplest performances cost 60 K.) Twenty cabarets, twenty bars, numerous restaurants where you can't eat for under 200 K—all full. Colorful advertisements promote entertainment of all descriptions. Cinemas and cafés on every block are overflowing. The fashion boutiques along the Kärntnerstrasse are crowded with people. Furs, dresses, material, hats, shoes. A pair of shoes costs 1,200 K! Horrendous prices for underwear, clothes, gloves. And meanwhile people are buying more and more wildly, greedily. There are people for whom nothing is expensive, modern, and new enough. Vienna revels, Vienna dances, Vienna enjoys itself, Vienna sings and plays waltzes and more frivolous operettas than ever before. And the same Vienna is languishing, dying away, full of reparation committees, and its political leaders travel the world over requesting aid. The trains don't run, the people don't have bread, flour, or potatoes; mail, telephones, and telegraphs all barely function, unbelievably slowly; in hospitals and clinics patients are lying in shredded linen, and in the prisons the poor criminals are howling so loudly with hunger and cold that those who live nearby can't sleep!

At the same time, clubs and casinos, which earn hundreds of thousands, are open until morning, and people are making amazing deals on the currency exchange. A thousand krone is nothing. Neither for a businessman nor one of the newly rich,



nor for a restaurateur, café proprietor, client, or thief. For a thousand krone you can buy a blouse, a pair of shoes, five kilos of pork fat. As recently as last year you could make do with a thousand krone a month; today it won't last a week.

Vienna is crazy—or is it the world? Vienna's fame is gasping its last, and the only thing keeping this city alive is its ancient tradition as a metropolis, the fact that everything has been running for so long, that public buildings, hotels, restaurants, bars, and theaters exist, that the entire mechanism keeps functioning even when it is idle. But it's worst for us Czechs. Our home is in Bohemia, and here we are forced to share other people's burdens, without our own people being able to help us a bit! Wouldn't it be possible to open the border a little for citizens of the Czech Republic, or to allow traffic and mail? We aren't even allowed to receive a piece of strietzel, or a few crumbs of flour for the holidays. So I had no other choice than to sleep through Christmas, like a log in my feather bed.

[M.P., *Tribuna*, December 30, 1919]

## L E T T E R S   O F N O T A B L E   P E O P L E

Because it is not essential, I am temporarily leaving aside the question whether one has the right to publish letters of notable people. It is not a matter of right as much as of determining the value we ultimately derive from the information and testimonies obtained by such a glimpse into the private lives of celebrities. Only then can the other, subordinate question be answered.

Very often one hears people say: Getting to know an artist personally is dangerous because it's often disappointing. Anyone who has inspired others with his music, poems, paintings, is bound to be a very unusual person, and one who possesses certain inscrutable traits; for example, he may be as greedy as

a hamster, as anxious as a hare, as uncouth as a bargehand, dirty and unshaven, even greasy, he may wear a nightcap or be enamored of his parrot.

The same man who has such a passionate relationship to eternity, truth, and great deeds wears a nightcap? Yes, my dear girl. Artists don't always look like Waldemar Psilander, unfortunately—or maybe fortunately. And if you are disappointed by an artist, by an artist as a human being, by an artist whose accomplishments provide irrefutable proof of his stature, then it is your fault alone, because you are looking at things so conventionally; you are looking at the artist as if he were a bank clerk, without realizing that what distinguishes the artist from the non-artist is not who they are, as people, but what they possess. A non-artist possesses only what he has: ten thousand krone, shares of stock, a pretty nose, two healthy hands. An artist, on the other hand, also possesses things he doesn't quite have. His desires, wishes, imaginings—the entire world provides material for his creativity. If you are disappointed by an artist, my dear girl, this is only because you haven't understood how to find him, and don't know how grotesquely strange the human soul is.

Or maybe it isn't grotesque that the great moralist of the "human comedy," Balzac, with his fine understanding of beauty and elegance, was dumpy, ugly, and fat, always carelessly dressed or even unkempt, a man his friends had to guard constantly so he wouldn't do something dumb, foolish, or embarrassing? Or that our sweet, starry-eyed Dvořák came from the country, was quite robust and given to habits that had nothing to do with the stars? Or that Maupassant was a surly, despairing, and mistrusting loner who tortured himself with feelings of inferiority for thirty years and for thirty years burned all his stories because he considered them imperfect? Or that Napoleon, terrible, brave Napoleon, the master of the world, was a small, frail, dwarfish little man afraid of the dark?

And so on; one could continue at will. The interest in the private life of important people stems from the fact that we

aren't just satisfied with their work, their creation. We want to know where it comes from, we want to understand the internal act preceding the creation. The more so since every great work of art is by definition inexplicable and new, for an artist does not say *what exists, but what does not exist—and by saying it, makes it exist.*

Ever since Shakespeare wrote Hamlet, the world knows the indecisive man unable to choose between being and not being. Ever since Dostoyevsky created Myshkin, the world knows the noble, clumsy, but thoroughly good man, the wonderful man, the idiot and savior of lives. Ever since Božena Němcová's grandmother we know the wise, radiant, rustic soul of an old woman. Ever since Zola's Nana, we know what it is to be a prostitute in the Parisian demimonde. Of course there was a Hamlet before Shakespeare and a Myshkin before Dostoyevsky, and the earth was turning before Galileo, and there was electricity before Galvani. But the world didn't know that; the world was unaware of electricity and went without it. It didn't count on it and didn't suppose it existed. Just like it didn't know a Hamlet before Shakespeare or an Onegin before Pushkin. That is the artist's possession: his exclusive world-view. His ability to see something *for the first time*, to see something new.

Naturally we ask ourselves: Good God, it's so simple, why didn't I know that before? How and why was he the one to discover it? Greedily we reach for the letters, expose the human element, gulp down the pages: How did he do it? Through what pain? What wish? What disease? What tension? The letters complete the work like a map completes the world. But a miracle is not enough for us doubters; we require a tangible explanation, and so we search the letters for motivations, logical clues.

Biographies are something completely different. Interesting in a completely different way. Stendhal's biography of Napoleon reveals the author's thoughts more than a portrait of its subject. It in itself is a work of art. We do not expect any art from letters; we expect something *human*.

Of course the ideas some outstanding people have about others are valuable and very much worth knowing. But reports "without any claim to artistic merit," written in order to interest the world, represent an absolute misunderstanding. The world *shouldn't* be interested in Miss Lola Seteliková, who deems it appropriate to give an exact account of what Milan Stefánik did, where he went, why he didn't marry, and what he said at someone's house. The simple facts cannot be interesting if they are not accompanied by some insight, some motivation, some explanation. The point is not to betray something to the world, but to enrich the individual, to provide the reader with a deeper understanding. The point is the logical connection between the world of the un-notable and the world of the chosen.

But as long as we are not quite so perfect, as long as the statement alone does not suffice for faith and understanding, as long as we must place our fingers in the wounds, like Thomas, we have the right to convince ourselves the wounds exist, and that they are deep.

[M.J., *Tribuna*, August 15, 1920]

## A D R E A M

*"Any where—out of the world."*

I was infinitely far from my homeland—in America? in China?—somewhere at the other end of the world, when a war or the plague broke out across the globe, or perhaps it was a deluge. I hadn't heard any details about the catastrophe. But I was torn away by a mad hurry—haste and excitement. I didn't know where we were fleeing. Nor did I ask why. Endless trains pulled out from a station into the world, one after the other, all of them overloaded. Panic seized the railroad employees; no one wanted to be the last one left behind. People fought for seats as if they were fighting for their lives. Immense crowds

stood between the station and me, and it was pointless to try pushing through. I was desperate.

“I’m young, I can’t die,” I cried.

But there were young people standing in front of me as well. And the tickets were all sold out. The train about to leave was the last one. The green and red lights of the station flashed in the daylight like omens of warning. There was no salvation.

Someone touched me on the shoulder. When I turned around, a man I didn’t know placed a piece of paper in my hand and said: “This will take you anywhere in the world. You can cross the border, and you will receive a place in the train. Fear not and be brave. So go now, go; it’s high time.”

Although I couldn’t recall where I had seen his face, I knew he was an old acquaintance and a good friend. Maybe he was my friend and I didn’t know him. I felt neither trust nor gratitude, nor even hope. But I obeyed like someone with no other choice. I wasn’t afraid. It was as if I had always expected something horrible to happen, and I breathed more easily because it had finally arrived.

I shoved my way through the crowd, and it occurred to me that saving myself in front of thousands of onlookers was a base thing to do. A malicious voice spoke within me:

“So you really hope you can save yourself?”

“Well, yes, possibly, maybe,” I thought.

And the voice: “If someone can be saved, is that person vile?”

“No, no, no, no,” I defended myself.

The catastrophe began as the train was pulling away. The earth sank into an abyss, and the world transformed itself into a network of railways, where people raced along, people who had lost their homeland. The tracks lay over the deep, and the trains stormed ahead in maniacal frenzy. Finally they stopped at the border.

“All out for control,” screamed a conductor.

The crowd spilled over to the customs booth; I alone stood off to the side, without a passport, without luggage. My hand clenched the piece of paper. Shivers ran down my spine. An

official approached me and demanded my papers. Seconds became an eternity. I unfolded the piece of paper. The official, stepping aside impatiently, stuck out his hand in expectation. He seemed determined not to let me through. I glanced at the paper. There, in twenty languages, were the words: "Sentenced to death."

My forehead broke out in an icy sweat. My heart stopped beating. A convulsive, painful horror balled up inside my chest. A mortal terror strangled my throat. And with a feeble hope, as I lay dying, with my last breath I said to the official:

"Perhaps it's just a password to make it easier for me *to get to the other side of the world?*"

[A. X. Nessey, *Tribuna*, June 14, 1921]

## THE DEVIL AT THE HEARTH

The question why all or almost all modern marriages are unhappy (as if only modern ones are unhappy and unmodern ones happy), is a question of style, a question at the center of a large, serious body of literature—and of every unserious chat at five-o'clock tea. Any question in the world can be the topic of a casual conversation as well as the subject of a serious philosophical treatise, and we journalists, too, pick themes up, so to say, off the streets. But this is a question I wonder about incessantly, not because I'm incapable of explaining why modern marriages are unhappy—what question would any journalist leave unchallenged? It's really because I keep asking myself, again and again: Why should they be happy?

This is where it begins. Two people—two small, lonely human lice at the mercy of life's many afflictions, general despair, and absence of prospects, two tiny human beings on this unimaginably, horribly, and disquietingly enormous planet, each unhappy by birth, nature, and right—are supposed to suddenly, all at once, at about 9:30 A.M., while locked inside an

apartment, a name, belongings, a fate, are supposed to be happy instantaneously, at a wave of the hand, simply because they are two?

The minute two people marry in order to be happy together, they are robbing themselves of the chance to do so. It's just as selfish to marry for happiness as it is to marry for two million, an automobile, or the title of baroness, and happiness won't make you any happier than the two million, the automobile, or the baron. If there's anything that avenges itself in this world, it is calculation and accounting in spiritual affairs.

The only good reason for two people to get married is if it is impossible for them not to. If they simply cannot live without each other. No romance, sentimentality, tragedy: it happens. It actually happens daily and, whether it's love or not, it is decidedly the most legitimate and strongest feeling in the world. Except how many people overlook precisely that, repress it, reduce it, avoid it, break it?

Two people marry in order to live together. Why, in addition to the overwhelming, extraordinary gift of this opportunity, do they also need to be happy? Why can they never be satisfied with true, unadorned greatness, preferring the well-polished lie instead? Why do they promise each other something that cannot satisfy them, and cannot satisfy the world, nature, heaven, fate, or life, and which no one has ever been able to fulfill? Why do they expand a very real and realistic, holy and worldly contract to include such a fantastic claim as happiness? Why do they demand from others more than they are able to give themselves, why do they demand anything at all, when faced by something as important, serious, and deep as a life together?

If we would consciously confront marriage before embarking on it, we would become aware of certain things we generally don't think about. For instance, that living together is not only easier, but also harder than living alone. Life alone has many compensations for the loneliness: half the responsibility or twice the freedom or independence or even the possibility of traveling to Australia. But marriage is difficult because, start-

ing the moment one binds oneself, one must renounce everything—in the deepest meaning of the word—that marriage does not offer. And that is the second point where modern marriages break down: *People marry without having positively decided for one another; or, to put it better, without having decided to renounce everyone else.*

Getting to know someone is inconceivably difficult. I don't think I'm exaggerating when I say you can get to know someone after a half hour of conversation, but to know them any better takes another ten years of living together. I also think it's practically out of the question that two people could have the faintest notion who they are and whom they are marrying. Even if you know about all the great deeds, ideas, passions, convictions, beliefs, and confessions of the other person, you still don't know anything about his socks, his puffed-up eyes in the morning, his method of gargling while brushing his teeth, and his peculiar way of tipping the waiter. For what lies deep down is deceiving; but you can know a person by the surface. A thousand risks of disappointment are hidden in each marriage, as well as every possibility of internal collapse, and there is only one weapon against them: to take them on from the very beginning. Global convention requires that any intrinsic difference such as nationality or political or religious affiliation be forgiven in the name of love, and it is forgiven. But let us go deeper: let's forgive what's on the surface. Let's leave the modern hysteria à la Anna Karenina aside and forgive each other for ears that stick out and ties that are crooked. Every person is a world unto himself. The more he stands out, the more he creates a whole. The fewer opportunities or talents he has, the more significant they are. And if he only has one, then he's the most outstanding. But no sooner can you ask a blond man to have dark hair as well—on Tuesdays and Fridays, for instance, for the sake of variety—than you can expect a pedant to gladly dance a shimmy, a dimwit to understand Kierkegaard, a painter to understand mathematics, a melancholy man to sing a little song, or an eccentric recluse to throw a party.

That's easy to understand, and it's strange so few people do.



They usually reproach one another for precisely those things which are determined by personality. It doesn't occur to them at all that being married really means accepting the other person so he will feel justified in being himself. After all, one person is always seeking confirmation of himself from the other. Proof that he is loved "nevertheless." Every one of us has such a "nevertheless" and that's precisely why we are unhappy. I will never believe that people live together because of sexual, erotic, pecuniary, or social necessity; people live together to have a friend. To have someone who will spare them from punishment, revenge, ill opinion, justice, or a bad conscience. Or do you really think a home is something else and serves purposes other than protecting, protecting, and once again protecting people, from the world and mainly from their own inner reflection? The greatest promise that husband and wife can give each other is that deep statement made, smiling, to children: *I won't let you go*. Doesn't that mean more than "I will love you unto death" or "I'll be faithful to you till death do us part"? I won't let you go. That says it all. Decency between people, honesty, home, loyalty, belonging, decisiveness, friendship. How infinitely vast such promises are compared with some miserable, shabby happiness!

In short, it almost seems to me that our marriages are so unhappy because we make it so damned easy for ourselves. It's very comfortable to accept a promise that can't be kept and then turn indignant and run away when the promise is broken a year later. I think it would be much more difficult to promise what can be kept, and then live up to such a promise. All the fantastic talk from the depths of one's soul is only an excuse; it won't survive the first truly difficult situation that demands simply that people act with human decency.

But why don't people promise each other they won't scream when the roast is burned, or if one of them is late to dinner? Why don't they promise one another never to be too lazy to bring home an orange, a bouquet of violets, a superbrandnew Kohinoor pencil, or a bag of raisins? Why don't they promise to show up at the breakfast table washed, smelling of soap and

water, carefully dressed in clean clothes, even on the day after their golden anniversary and every day until then? Why don't they promise to hit each other when they are angry rather than accuse one another of some minor atrocity, some little cowardice, some small repulsive act, or something slightly unappetizing? Why don't they promise each other they'll look out for themselves and their own interests, regardless of whether these interests are for art history, soccer, or collecting butterflies? Why don't they promise one another the freedom of silence, of space, of being alone? Why don't they promise each other these myriad difficult trifles, which can be fulfilled, and which are nonetheless constantly neglected, instead of promising something as incidental as happiness?

If marriage is to make sense it has to have a broader and more realistic basis than a longing for happiness. My God, let's not be afraid of a little bit of suffering, a little bit of pain and unhappiness. Try it, go out some night and stand face to face with the stars, look up carefully, sincerely, strain for at least five minutes. Or climb up some mountain where you can look down on the Earth almost as if you were in heaven. And after a while you'll find yourself believing in the importance of life, and in the insignificance of happiness. Happiness! As if being happy depended on us and us alone! As if there weren't a talent for being happy, just like there's a talent for singing, writing, politics, making shoes! You can give a person everything he asks, overwhelm him with love, advantages, and anything he desires, and still he won't be happy. And you can beat someone else until he can hardly breathe, and no sooner does he see a bunch of carrots, dripping with dew and fresh—bright carrots with green leaves—and he's already happy.

There are two ways to live: you can either accept your fate, make up your mind and cope with it, get to know your fate and bind yourself to its good sides and bad, to happiness and unhappiness, bravely, honestly, without bargaining, generously and humbly. Or you can seek your fate: but the search will not only consume your strength, time, illusions, instinct, and any proper, benevolent blindness; it will also consume your self-

esteem. You will become poorer and poorer, because what lies ahead is always worse than what you had.

Besides, seeking requires faith, and faith may require more strength than life.

[Milena Jesenská, *Národní Listy*, January 18, 1923]



## MILENA JESENSKÁ'S OBITUARY FOR FRANZ KAFKA

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Dr. Franz Kafka, a German writer who lived in Prague, died the day before yesterday in the Kierling Sanatorium, near Klosterneuburg bei Wien. Few people knew him here, for he was a recluse, a wise man in dread of life. He had been suffering a lung disease for years, and although he worked to cure it, he also consciously nourished it, and fostered it in his thoughts. He once wrote in a letter: when heart and soul can't bear it any longer, the lung takes on half the burden, so that it is distributed a little more evenly—and that's the way it was with his disease. It lent him an almost miraculous tenderness and an almost horribly uncompromising intellectual refinement. Physically, however, Franz Kafka loaded his entire intellectual fear of life onto the shoulders of his disease. He was shy, anxious, meek, and kind, yet the books he wrote are gruesome and painful. He saw the world as full of invisible demons, tearing apart and destroying defenseless humans. He was too clairvoyant, too intelligent to be capable of living, and too weak to fight. He was weak the way noble, beautiful people are, people incapable of struggling against their fear of misunderstanding, malice, or intellectual deceit because they recognize their own helplessness in advance; their submission only shames the victor. He understood people as only someone of great and nervous sensitivity can, someone who is alone, someone who can recognize others in a flash, almost like a prophet. His knowledge of the world was extraordinary and deep; he was himself an extraordinary and deep world. He has written the most significant books of modern German literature, books that embody the struggle of today's generation throughout the world—while refraining from all tendentiousness. They are true, stark, and painful, to the point of being naturalistic even

where they are symbolic. They are full of dry scorn and the sensitive perspective of a man who saw the world so clearly that he couldn't bear it, a man who was bound to die since he refused to make concessions or take refuge, as others do, in various fallacies of reason, or the unconscious—even the more noble ones. Dr. Franz Kafka wrote "The Stoker," the first chapter of a wonderful, still unpublished novel (which has appeared in Czech in Neumann's *Červen*); "The Judgment," the conflict of two generations; "The Metamorphosis," the most powerful book in modern German letters; "In the Penal Colony"; and the collections *Meditation* and *A Country Doctor*. The last novel, *Before the Law*, has been in manuscript form, ready to print, for years. It is one of those books which, upon reading, leaves the impression of a world so perfectly portrayed that any further comment is superfluous. All of his books paint the horror of secret misunderstandings, of innocent guilt between people. He was an artist and a man of such anxious conscience he could hear even where others, deaf, felt themselves secure.

[*Národní Listy*, June 6, 1924]

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# NOTES





## LETTERS TO MILENA

- p. 3 **Meran-Untermals, Pension Ottoburg:** Kafka had arrived in Meran at the beginning of April; after some searching, he moved into the Pension Ottoburg on April 8, 1920.  
**F Kafka:** At first Kafka signed his letters using the formal “Ihr” (Ihr F Kafka, “Ihres Kafka”). He later switched to the informal *Du*. In this translation, “Yours” always indicates the informal “Dein.”
- p. 4 **translation:** Milena was working on her translation of Kafka’s story “The Stoker,” which became the first chapter of his unfinished novel *Amerika (Der Verschollene)*. Her translation appeared in the journal *Kmen* on April 22, 1920; Kafka asked his sister Ottla to purchase twenty copies.
- p. 5 **Wolff:** Kurt Wolff (1887–1963), Kafka’s publisher, presumably wrote to Milena granting his permission to translate Kafka’s work into Czech.  
**your husband:** Ernst Pollak (1886–1947)—after 1938 he used the Czech spelling, Polák—had been married to Milena since March 1918.
- p. 6 **“Pane doktore, you’re not going to last long”:** In Czech: *Pane doktore, s Vámi to dlouho nepotrvá. Pane doktore* is the Czech equivalent of the German *Herr Doktor*.  
**the explanation I applied to my own case:** Kafka believed his lung disease to be a psychosomatic phenomenon, the result of an inner struggle brought on by his repeated attempts to marry, a struggle he could no longer bear. See his *Diaries* for September 15, 1917.
- p. 7 **[facsimile] “Ihr FranzK”:** Milena read this signature (which appears a few more times) as “Frank,” and soon adopted it as a nickname for Kafka.

- p. 8     **“Country Doctor”**: Kafka’s collection of stories *A Country Doctor*.  
**my engagement**: Kafka was engaged twice to Felice Bauer (1887–1960; elsewhere referred to as the “Berlin” correspondent), at the end of May 1914 and the beginning of July 1917; he was also engaged once to Julie Wohryzek (1891–1939) of Prague, in the fall of 1919.
- p. 10    **the story of Dostoyevsky’s first success**: Dostoyevsky himself describes the event somewhat differently in his diary: “As if I could have slept after that? What rapture—such a success! But above all—the feeling was dear to me, I still recall exactly: Another person has a success, well, so one is praised, well-received, congratulated; but these two came running with tears in their eyes at four in the morning in order to wake me up, for ‘that is greater than sleep! . . . Oh—is that ever beautiful!’ That’s what I was thinking then, how could I have slept!” By Grigoriev is meant D. V. Grigorovich, whose own version of the story was published in an appendix to an edition of Dostoyevsky’s letters, which Kafka owned.
- p. 13    **So here are the notes**: Kafka’s comments refer to the first two paragraphs of “The Stoker.”
- p. 14    **German is my mother tongue**: This was quite literally true, since Kafka’s mother (Julie) preferred to speak German, whereas his father (Hermann) preferred Czech.  
**“I am the one who pays”**: In Czech: *já jsem ten který platí*.
- p. 15    **“absolute horror”**: In Czech: *reelní hrůza*.  
**feuilletons**: Beginning in January 1920, Milena wrote regularly for periodicals in Prague, primarily the *Tribuna* and *Národní Listy*. These were mostly reflections on life and people in Vienna, friendship, marriage, and so on. In addition to her real name, she often signed the articles M., M.P., M.J., Js., A.X. Nessey, A.X.N., and Nessey. After March 1920 she stopped using her married name, Milena Pollak.

- p. 16 **“or not so entirely correct”**: In Czech: *či ne tak docela pravdu*.  
**“well meant”**: In Czech: *dobře míněno*.
- p. 17 **Božena Němcová**: The eminent Czech writer, whose most famous novel is *Babička* (The Grandmother). Kafka was also familiar with her letters.
- p. 18 **Max Brod**: The writer and critic (1884–1968), Kafka’s old and closest friend.  
**Staša**: Staša Jílovská (1898–1955), née Procházková, was Milena’s schoolmate and friend; she worked as a translator, editor, and journalist.  
**Werfel**: The writer Franz Werfel (1880–1945) was living in Vienna at the time. Ernst Pollak knew Werfel from Prague, and Milena occasionally translated his prose.
- p. 19 **then it isn’t true**: Approximately forty words following this passage rendered illegible.
- p. 20 **My youngest sister**: About three months later, Otilie (1892–1944), known as Ottla, married Dr. Josef David (1891–1962), a Czech Catholic, over the objections of her parents and relatives; only her brother Franz gave his unqualified support.
- p. 21 **So!**: In Czech: *Tak!*
- p. 23 **for almost 5 years**: Kafka’s letters to Felice Bauer, written from 1912 to 1917, and finally published in 1967, testify to his struggle for marriage, which Kafka described toward the end of the correspondence thus: “I can’t believe there is any fairy tale with a greater and more desperate struggle for a woman than the one for you inside me, from the beginning and constantly anew and perhaps forever.”  
**“Meet at Karlsbad”**: Julie Wohryzek, Kafka’s fiancée, sent a telegram suggesting a meeting in Karlsbad on June 8, 1920.
- p. 24 **I once wrote that girl**: Only once in these letters does he mention Julie Wohryzek’s full name—when giving Milena her address.

- p. 24 **What kind of monstrous schools:** Milena taught Czech at the Vienna Schools of Commerce and Language.
- p. 25 **in order to make everything up to you:** Preceded by several words that were rendered illegible.
- p. 27 **8 months spent in a village:** Kafka is referring to his stay in Zürau (northwestern Bohemia) with his sister Ottila, from mid-September 1917 to the end of April 1918. He had gone there to recuperate following the onset of his tuberculosis.
- a good, kind girl:** Julie Wohryzek
- p. 28 **vegetarian board:** Kafka had been a determined vegetarian since 1909.
- p. 29 **at work:** The Arbeiter-Unfall-Versicherungs-Anstalt, a part private, part government insurance agency, where Kafka had worked since 1908.
- p. 30 **“not a single word which hasn’t been well weighed”:** In Czech: *ani jediné slovo které by nebylo velmi dobře uváženo.*
- p. 35 **“that hurt me”:** In Czech: *to—mně rozbolelo.*
- p. 37 **Weiss:** Kafka considered himself to blame for the decay in his relationship with the writer Ernst Weiss (1882–1940), whom he had known since 1913.
- p. 40 **“but only fear for you”:** In Czech: *jen strach o Vás.*
- p. 41 **concerning your writing:** Approximately nine words following this passage were rendered illegible.
- the name Schreiber:** In German, Schreiber means “scribe” or, more generally, “that which writes.”
- p. 42 **“keeping a person waiting”:** In Czech: *nechat člověka čekat.*
- what you want to say about the 6 months:** Probably referring to Milena’s stay in the sanatorium Veleslavin.
- something terrible:** Approximately fifteen words following this passage were rendered illegible.
- “most of all I’d like to escape . . .”:** In Czech: *nejraději bych utekla třetí cestou která nevede ani k tobě ani s nim, někam do samoty.*
- p. 43 [ . . . ]: Approximately eleven words rendered illegible.

- p. 43 **Reiner:** Josef Reiner (1898–1920), an editor of the *Tribuna*, took his own life on February 19. He admired Kafka but did not know him; presumably, though, he knew Milena, since he was married to her friend Jarmila. Willy Haas first reported this incident in his memoirs *Die literarische Welt* (Munich, 1957). (In referring to Reiner, Kafka continued to use Brod’s misspelling “Rainer.”)
- Willy Haas:** The critic and essayist Willy Haas (1891–1973) was a central figure in the literary circle that included Franz Werfel, Ernst Pollak, and the brothers Hans and Franz Janowitz. Haas was also the first editor of *Letters to Milena*.
- p. 44 **Altstädter Ring #6:** Kafka’s parents’ apartment was located on the Altstädter Ring (Staroměstské náměstí), where the writer also kept a room.
- p. 45 **the accent has been betrayed:** “Milena” is accented on the first syllable.
- p. 46 **žid and nechápu:** Czech for “Jew” and “I don’t understand”; see the letter of May 1920, p. 21.  
**“Ernest”:** The German word for “earnest” is *ernst*, which was also the name of Milena’s husband.
- p. 47 **Westbahnhof:** *Babnhof* is German for “train station,” thus Westbahnhof is the “west train station,” Südbahnhof the “south train station,” and so on.
- p. 48 **Those were the first two phrases:** In German, *Satz* means both “sentence” and (musical) “movement.”
- p. 49 **“I only have two dresses . . .”:** In Czech: *dvoje šaty mám a přece slušně vypadám*.
- p. 51 **“Hilsner”:** Kafka is alluding to the so-called Hilsner Affair in which Leopold Hilsner, a Jew, was accused of the ritual murder of a Christian girl who had been found dead, in April 1899, near Polna, in Bohemia. The trial set off a wave of anti-Semitism.
- p. 54 **the gigantic letter:** Kafka is referring to the letter he wrote his father in November 1919, which his mother later withheld; Max Brod finally published it in 1953, and it is now translated as “Letter to His Father.”

- In manuscript form it is over one hundred pages long.
- p. 55 **“never really beautiful, not by any means . . .”**: In Czech: *krásná vůbec nikdy, vážně ne, snad někdy bezká.*
- p. 58 **Ropucha**: Czech for “Toad.” Milena had sent her translation of Gustav Meyrink’s “Der Fluch der Kröte—Fluch der Kröte” (The Curse of the Toads—Curse of the Toads).  
**Náš Řeč**: Czech for “Our Speech,” a journal dedicated to the research and cultivation of the Czech language.  
**Otto Gross**: Kafka returned to Prague with the psychoanalyst Otto Gross (1877–1920) and the latter’s brother-in-law Anton Kuh (1881–1941), a well-known man of letters. Milena had probably informed Kafka of Gross’s early death, generally considered a result of his drug addiction.
- p. 59 **my paternal grandfather**: Jakob Kafka was a butcher in southern Bohemia.
- p. 60 **Bennogasse-Josefstädterstrasse**: Kafka regularly sent his letters poste restante to this post office; Milena and Ernst Pollak lived at Lerchenfelderstrasse 113.
- p. 61 **and give him 4 days**: Kafka and Milena spent four days—including Kafka’s birthday—together in Vienna, taking extended walks in the woods around Vienna. Months later, Milena described to Max Brod how well Kafka felt at that time and how little his sickness was in evidence. (See Milena’s fifth letter to Brod, in Appendix.) Kafka’s own description of this time is a little different (see his letter of July 15, 1920, p. 89).
- p. 62 **Bahr’s diary**: The writer Hermann Bahr published his “Tagebuch” in the *Neues Wiener Journal*.  
**Národní Listy**: Milena’s aunt Růžena Jesenská (1863–1940) was a regular contributor to the Prague daily *Národní Listy*. Well-known for poetry as well as prose, she belonged to the literary circle surrounding the journal *Moderní Revue*, which also included Karel Hlaváček (1874–1898) and Julius Zeyer (1841–1901).

- p. 62 **I'm sending you the letter:** Julie Wohryzek's letter asking Kafka to see her that same day.
- p. 64 **Poor Fiddler:** Franz Grillparzer's novel *The Poor Fiddler*, a piece that Kafka especially liked to read aloud.
- p. 69 **Hus:** Under the Czechoslovak Republic, a national holiday commemorated the burning of Jan Hus in Konstanz on July 6, 1415.
- p. 70 **an old uncle:** Kafka's uncle Alfred Löwy (1852–1923), his mother's brother, was Director of Railways in Madrid.  
**Laurin, Pick:** Arne Laurin (Arnošt Lustig, 1889–1945) was chief editor of the *Tribuna* at the time. Otto Pick (1887–1940) was a poet, translator, critic, and a friend of Kafka.
- Příbram:** Karl Příbram (1887–1973) and his brother Ewald were old friends of Kafka. Karl had been a "patient" at the sanatorium Veleslavín mentioned earlier. (See Milena Jesenská's first letter to Max Brod, Appendix, p. 241.)
- p. 73 **my new apartment:** Kafka was staying in his oldest sister Elli's apartment.  
**the Russian church:** The Church of St. Nicholas lay opposite Kafka's room in his parents' apartment.
- p. 75 **Jílovský:** Rudolf Jílovský (1890–1954) was the husband of Milena's friend, Staša. By Libešic Kafka means Libčice, Staša's home.
- p. 76 **Florian:** Josef Florian (1873–1941) was a well-known publisher with a strong interest in spiritual matters. In 1929 he published the first Czech edition of Kafka's "The Metamorphosis," in a translation by Ludvík Vrána and František Pastor.
- p. 77 **"he dragged it out of Kafka":** In Czech: *z Kafky to vytábl*.  
**Pittermann and Ferenc Futurista:** E. A. Pittermann (1885–1936) was a well-known actor and theater director, as well as a close friend of the writer Jaroslav Hašek. Ferenc Futurista (František Fiala, 1891–1947) was a comedian and director.

- p. 77 **“to live with Kafka”**: In Czech: *s Kafkou žít*.
- p. 78 **Frau Kohler**: Milena’s friend Frau Kohler ran a small *pension* in Vienna where the Pollaks’ friends from Prague often stayed.
- p. 79 **Kisch**: Kafka’s schoolmate Paul Kisch (1883–1944).
- p. 80 **Dobré Dílo**: “The Good Work,” a series of books published by Josef Florian.
- Café Arco**: The most famous literary café in Prague, at one time the meeting place of a circle that included Franz Werfel, Willy Haas, Ernst Pollak, and, for a brief time, Max Brod. Kafka occasionally visited the café.
- p. 82 **mail for Kramer**: This was the pseudonym under which Kafka wrote to Milena *poste restante*.
- p. 83 **didn’t dare send the letter**: Presumably the letter numbered “16,” which has not survived.
- the Chicago plan**: Ernst Pollak, who was unsatisfied with his bank job, was toying with the idea of emigrating to Chicago.
- a man I knew from before**: Michal (Josef) Mareš (1893–1971), poet and screenplay writer, was an editor of the *Tribuna* and a longtime friend of Josef Reiner. He was convinced that Jarmila and Willy Haas had driven the young editor to commit suicide.
- p. 84 **“Yes, you are right, I do love him . . .”**: In Czech: *Ano máš pravdu, mám ho ráda. Ale F., i tebe mám ráda*.
- p. 87 **the Weisser Hahn**: The White Rooster, a restaurant close to Milena’s home.
- p. 88 **my sister’s wedding**: Ottla’s marriage to Dr. Josef David (see note to p. 20).
- p. 89 **Dr. Felix Weltsch**: Along with Max Brod and Oskar Baum, Weltsch (1884–1964) was one of Kafka’s closest friends.
- p. 93 **“after all, I never stop for . . .”**: In Czech: *já se přece nezastavím ani před—ani před—ani před—*.
- Turnau**: In late September 1918, Kafka was recuperating with garden work in Turnau, a place he frequently visited on business.



- p. 95 **the beggarwoman:** See Milena's third letter to Max Brod, in Appendix, pp. 243–44.  
**sechserl:** There were ten kreuzers to a sechserl.
- p. 96 **may feel you close to me:** Several words preceding this phrase were rendered illegible.
- p. 97 **two new facts from your letter:** Two of Ernst Pollak's numerous plans to give up his bank job.  
**Donadieu:** Charles Louis Philippe's novel *Marie Donadieu*.  
**a long manuscript of Max's:** Max Brod, *Paganism, Christianity, Judaism: A Book of Creeds*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1921).  
**a young poet:** Hans Klaus, presumably.  
**Claudel's essay:** Milena's translation of Paul Claudel's essay "Arthur Rimbaud" appeared in the *Tribuna* of July 8, 1920.  
**pamatikální:** a typographical error for *gramaticální* (grammatical) in the essay discussed. Because Milena's handwriting was quite difficult to decipher, it is likely that the printer misread the word.
- p. 98 **I couldn't find the grave:** Milena had asked Kafka to look after the grave of her brother Jeníček, who had died in infancy, when Milena was three years old.
- p. 99 **"because he had neither spoken nor written about you":** In Czech: *poněvadž o Vás nikdy ani nepsal ani nebovořil*.
- p. 100 **your translation:** Milena's translation of Kafka's story "The Bachelor's Misfortune" appeared in *Kmen* along with five other prose pieces from his volume *Meditation* on September 9, 1920.
- p. 101 **a translation had appeared in Tribuna:** Evidently Milena's translation of Kafka's story "Unhappiness," which appeared on July 16, 1920.  
**the girl's letter:** Probably the woman mentioned in the letter of July 23, 1920, a distant relative of Kafka.
- p. 102 **Cesta? Lipa? Kmen? Politika?:** Milena occasionally wrote or translated for all of these journals.

- p. 102 **another young poet was here:** Presumably Gustav Janouch, whose father was a colleague of Kafka's at the insurance agency.  
**"that you're the one who doesn't have any idea about . . .":** In Czech: *že vlastně ty jsi člověk který nemá tušení o tom . . .*
- Off to see the director:** Dr. Bedřich Odstrčil had a particularly good relationship with Kafka, whom he valued highly.
- p. 103 **that pitomec M:** "That blockhead M," that is, Michal Mareš, who had described the circumstances of Reiner's death to Kafka. Evidently Milena questioned the veracity of Mareš's report.  
**Haas:** Willy Haas was living in Berlin at the time; he married Jarmila at the end of March 1921—following the customary year of mourning.
- p. 104 **Rudolf Fuchs:** A poet and translator of Czech literature, Fuchs (1890–1942) belonged to the same literary circle as Willy Haas and Franz Werfel.
- p. 106 **women don't need much:** In Czech: *ženy nepotřebují mnoho.*
- p. 108 **Landauer:** Gustav Landauer (1870–1919) was a well-known critic and participant in the Munich Räte Republic. Milena was translating his lecture "Friedrich Hölderlin in His Poems," a difficult essay even for German readers, and one which caused Milena certain problems.
- p. 109 **infant:** In Czech: *nemluvně.*  
**in itself:** In Czech: *pro sebe.*
- p. 111 **the poet, the first one:** Gustav Janouch.
- p. 112 [. . .]: Several lines have been omitted due to laws protecting privacy rights.
- p. 118 **"scales of the world":** In Czech: *váha světa.*
- p. 119 **if I love you:** Kafka actually omitted the pronoun "I."
- p. 120 **"armful":** In Czech: *náruč.*
- p. 125 **in case "Else" should fall "ill":** "Else" was the code name to be mentioned in the "fake" telegram Kafka would use to obtain permission to travel to Prague.

- p. 128 **Krasa:** Hans Krasa (1899–1944) was a composer belonging to the circle of artists in the Café Continental in Prague.
- p. 129 **the *Tribuna* is lying in front of me:** Kafka is referring to an article Milena had written about bathing suits (“Plavky”) in which she distinguishes two types of swimmers: those who lie horizontally in the water, and those—unsportly ones—whose bodies “hang.”
- p. 130 **Ottla:** Kafka’s sister Ottilie often helped him with practical matters, especially after the onset of his illness.
- p. 131 **directed specifically against us:** Approximately ten words following this phrase were rendered illegible.
- p. 132 **you want to send me to Davos:** Milena and Max Brod were considering a plan to help Kafka procure a stay in a lung sanatorium in the Swiss resort town of Davos.
- p. 134 **mine departed this world long ago:** Klara Kafka, the wife of Franz’s uncle Filip, died in 1908.
- p. 135 **“you’re waiting until *you* feel the need”:** In Czech: *čekáš až to Tobě bude nutné.*  
**your despair over your father’s letter:** Milena had sent Kafka the first letter she had received from her father in three years.  
**“sorry,” “terribly sad”:** In Czech: *líto* and *strašně smutně.*
- p. 137 **The essay is much better than in German:** Evidently Milena had sent her translation of the Hölderlin essay, as Kafka had requested.  
**I’m holding on to the translation:** Presumably, the translation of “Unhappiness.”
- p. 138 **“but you’re not coming because you’re waiting . . .”:** In Czech: *a ty nepřijedeš poněvadž čekáš až to Tobě jednou bude nutné, to, abys přijel.*
- p. 139 **“in that case it doesn’t make any sense . . .”:** In Czech: *Měj se pěkně [Farewell] Franku . . . telegrafovat ti ten falešný telegram nemá tedy smyslu, neposílám bo.*

- p. 140 **a friend, an Eastern Jew, actor:** Yitzhak Löwy was a Yiddish actor whom Kafka had befriended in 1911, when Löwy's troupe (from Lvov) was performing in Prague.  
**your departure has been postponed again:** Milena had intended to recuperate at St. Gilgen, on the Wolfgangsee.
- p. 141 **a certain Stein:** Paul Stein, a Prague lawyer.  
**an odd marriage, incidentally:** Gustav Janouch's father, Gustav Kubasa, was Kafka's colleague at the insurance agency. Although his mother's first husband—Pavel Janouch—was officially "missing," Gustav Janouch could not legally bear his real father's surname because there had been no divorce.  
**the list of things you want done:** Kafka had offered to run various errands in Prague for Milena. As time passed, Kafka's "assignments" grew in number and difficulty.
- p. 142 **your letter to the girl:** Kafka considered Milena's letter to Julie Wohryzek too harsh and severe (see Kafka's letter of July 20, 1920).
- p. 145 **this kind of "lying" answer which blackmailed you:** At the time, several people in Prague had received anonymous letters written in a script deceptively similar to Milena's.
- p. 149 [ . . . ]: Approximately three lines rendered illegible.  
**(apparently I'm only thinking about Saturday):** Kafka is referring to the last of the four days he and Milena shared in Vienna.
- p. 151 **"natural":** In Czech: *Samozřejmě.*
- p. 152 **"Would you like to go for a row?":** In Czech: *Chtěl byste si zajezdit?*  
**"yes":** In Czech: *ano.*
- p. 153 **Sunday Tribuna's "Open Letter," "Typus":** The first refers to Milena's fashion article about rainwear, the second to her article "The New City-Type"; it is difficult to determine what Kafka considered anti-Semitic about the latter.

- p. 153 **a kind of Jewish confirmation:** Kafka's bar mitzvah took place on June 13, 1896, in Prague's Zigeuner-Synagogue.
- p. 154 **"I don't understand how such a person . . .":** In Czech: *nechápu jak takový člověk . . .*  
**because of your strike:** The *Neue Freie Presse* announced that telephone and telegraph workers would strike on August 9, 1920, "starting at noon today."
- p. 155 **"heaviness, nausea, disgust":** In Czech: *tíba, nevolnost, bnus.*
- p. 156 **what you say about Kreuzen (not Aflenz . . .):** Two Austrian sanatoria, Bad Kreuzen, near Grein on the Danube, and Aflenz in upper Styria.  
**ruined by cocaine:** Milena occasionally took cocaine to help overcome her headaches.
- p. 157 **Kreidlová:** Amálie Kreidlová, a former schoolmate of Milena.  
**"The Café":** In Czech: "Kavárna." Milena's article appeared in the *Tribuna* of August 10, 1920.
- p. 158 **"armful":** In Czech: *náručí.*  
**"That's beautiful, beautiful!":** In Czech: *To je krása, to je krása!*
- p. 159 **After I check at Schenker's:** Schenker and Co., in Prague.  
**"It will never be":** In Czech: *nebude tobo nikdy.*
- p. 160 **appeal directly to Masaryk's secretary:** Arne Laurin's immediate superior, Bedřich Hlaváč, the founder and editor of the *Tribuna*, was the secretary and friend of Tomáš G. Masaryk, first president of the Czechoslovak Republic.
- p. 161 **So it'll be another 10–14 days:** Shortly after meeting Kafka in Gmünd, Milena left Vienna to recuperate at St. Gilgen, on the Wolfgangsee.
- p. 162 [ . . . ]: Several lines omitted due to laws protecting privacy rights.  
**she has been upset about the whole affair:** Presumably, the affair of the "lying" letters (see letter of August 8, 1920).

- p. 162 **we lived opposite the swimming school:** From 1907 to 1913 the Kafkas lived at Niklasstrasse (Mikulášská tř.) 36, overlooking the Civil-Schwimmschule and the Belvedere park along the Moldau.
- p. 163 [ . . . ]: Several lines omitted due to laws protecting privacy rights.
- p. 165 **“You’re mine”:** In Czech: *jsi můj*.  
**Ernst Weiss is critically ill:** The rumor concerning Weiss turned out to be only partly true (see notes to the letters of June 10, 1920, and September 2, 1920.)
- p. 166 **The ad will somehow make it into the *Presse*:** Kafka composed the following text for an ad and placed it in Vienna’s *Neue Freie Presse*:  
 Czech language instruction  
 by teacher with university degree  
 Vienna Schools of Business and Languages  
 after Sept. 15  
 Address: Frau Milena Pollak, Lerchen-  
 felderstrasse 113, door 5
- I haven’t called Vlasta yet:** Vlasta was Jan Jesenský’s professional assistant and close friend.
- p. 167 **I’ll write about it in greater detail:** Approximately fifteen words following this phrase were rendered illegible.  
**Polgar’s sketches in the paper:** The Viennese writer Alfred Polgar (1873–1955), whose story “Theodor auf dem Lande” appeared in the *Prager Tagblatt* of August 24, 1920.
- p. 168 **I read about a hare in the snow:** Kafka is referring to Milena’s article “Výkladní skříně” (Show Windows) in the *Tribuna* of August 21, 1920.  
**Max’s intervention with Topič:** Probably because she wanted to surprise Kafka with an anthology of his stories in her translation, Milena turned to Otto Pick to help find a publisher. The latter hoped Max Brod could use his influence with his publisher F. Topič. Brod, however, declined because he himself was having difficulties with Topič.

- p. 168 **“Letters”**: See Milena’s essay “Letters of Notable People,” included in the Appendix.  
**Vladislav Vančura or something like that**: This issue of *Kmen* carried “*Vzpomeň si na něco veselého!*” (Recall Something Funny!) by Vladislav Vančura (1891–1942).  
**“I don’t want you to answer this”**: In Czech: *Nebci abys na to odpovídal.*
- p. 169 **my “military service”—or more correctly “maneuvers”**: After a hiatus of three years, Kafka resumed the writing he loved most of all, “in the deep of the night.”
- p. 171 ***Tycho Brahe***: Max Brod, *Tycho Brabes Weg zu Gott* (Tycho Brahe’s Road to God) (Leipzig, 1915); in 1917, Topič published the Czech translation by A. Wenig.
- p. 173 **Lisl Beer may have a villa**: Lisl Beer was an acquaintance of Ernst Pollak.  
**The translation of the final sentence**: Milena’s translation of “The Judgment,” which Kafka wrote “in one sitting” during the night of September 22–23, 1912 (see his *Diaries*, the entry for September 23, 1912).
- p. 174 **The poet has arrived**: Presumably Gustav Janouch.
- p. 176 [ . . . ]: Approximately fifty words rendered illegible up to the final words “Office work.”  
**the enclosed essay**: Presumably Bertrand Russell’s article “From Bolshevist Russia,” criticizing communist structures of social change, which appeared in the *Prager Tagblatt* of August 25, 1920.
- p. 178 **You saw Blei?**: Franz Blei (1871–1942) was a writer and the publisher of several literary journals.
- p. 179 **“I have an unbearable headache”**: In Czech: *blava nesnesitelně bolí.*
- p. 181 **his girlfriend, who sends Baum postcards**: In 1920, the actress Rahel Sanzara (Johanna Bleschke) performed several times in a series of plays by Frank Wedekind at the Deutsches Landestheater in Prague. The blind poet Oskar Baum (1883–1941) was a close friend of Kafka.
- p. 182 **still no news about *Everyman***: Kafka was probably expecting Milena’s report on Hofmannsthal’s

- Everyman*, which premiered at the Salzburg Festival on August 22, 1920.
- p. 186 **one who has to resort to morphine:** An allusion to Josef Reiner's suicide (see the letter of June 12, 1920).
- p. 188 **H J c/o Karl Meyer:** Hans Janowitz (1890–1954) was a writer from the circle of Franz Werfel and Willy Haas. His brother Franz Janowitz (1892–1917), a poet of this circle who was highly admired by Karl Kraus, died on the Italian Front.
- Thank you for the addresses:** In his letter of August 31, 1920, Kafka had asked Milena to find the addresses of several sanatoria.
- p. 189 [ . . . ]: Several words have been omitted due to laws protecting privacy rights.
- p. 190 **Přibram:** Ewald Přibram, whose brother Karl had been confined to the sanatorium in Veleslavin. Milena herself was the “former ‘patient.’”
- well over 100 Russian-Jewish emigrants:** On November 20, 1920, the *Prager Tagblatt* mentions these emigrants in connection with the anti-Semitic riots of November 16–19, 1920.
- p. 195 **“they lack the strength to love”:** In Czech: *nemáte síly milovat.*
- p. 198 **the gratitude is absolutely true:** Eleven words following this phrase were rendered illegible.
- p. 201 **[facsimile]:** The drawing Kafka enclosed in this letter appears to have been torn from a notebook. The writing on the back of the page, probably from an earlier date, has been made illegible. Due to the constraints of this book's format, the figures are slightly reduced, and the distance between them is diminished.
- p. 202 **Yes, Mizzi Kuh was here:** The wife of Anton Kuh (see the letter of June 25, 1920, and the note concerning Otto Gross).
- p. 203 **Paul Adler:** The writer (1878–1946).
- p. 205 **brochures about the two sanatoria:** Grimmenstein and Wiener Wald (see the letter of August 31, 1920).



- p. 205 **Kmen and Tribuna:** Kafka was thanking Milena for having written and published the translations, since she did not send them to him. Among them were Lev Tolstoy's "The Stranger and the Farmer," and some pieces from Kafka's collection of stories *Meditation*.  
[ . . . ]: Approximately forty words rendered illegible.
- p. 207 **Kupec:** Kafka's prose piece "The Merchant," which, along with five other pieces from *Meditation*, appeared in *Kmen*.
- p. 208 **"ghost letters":** In Czech: *bubácké dopisy*—probably a reference to the Chinese "Ghost Book," mentioned also below.
- p. 209 **Ghost Book:** In Czech: *Bubácká kniha*—the title of this book cannot be ascertained.  
**I also read Mirror Man:** Franz Werfel, *Spiegelmensch, Magische Trilogie* (Munich, 1920).  
**Illový:** Rudolf Illový (1881–1943) was a poet and the editor of an anthology (*Československá Poesie Sociální*) containing poems by Růžena Jesenská, S. K. Neumann, Josef Reiner, and Illový himself, among others.
- p. 210 **"and even little Illový":** In Czech: *i ten malý Illový*.  
**Jews of the rightist party:** a Zionist party was meant; *Červen* was a leftist journal.
- p. 211 **"But perhaps you are right . . .":** In Czech: *Ale snad máš pravdu, snad to jiní přeloží lépe*.  
**"Before the Law" appeared on Sunday:** Kafka's parable appeared in the Sunday supplement of the daily newspaper *Právo Lidu*, translated by Rudolf Illový's wife Milena Illová. Kafka is explaining this situation and conveying his regrets, since he had promised Milena Jesenská the exclusive right to translate his work into Czech.
- p. 213 **wallowing in anti-Semitic hate:** The anti-Semitic riots of November 16–19, directed above all against German-speaking Jews and their institutions. (See letter of September 7, 1920.)  
**a "mangy race":** In Czech: *prašivé plemeno*.

- p. 213 **My sister wants to accompany me:** Kafka's sister Ottla. **Ehrenstein:** Kafka's former schoolmate Albert Ehrenstein (1886–1950), the poet and short-story writer, gave a reading in Prague on November 8, 1920, in which he included passages from his pamphlet on Karl Kraus, the Viennese satirist.
- p. 214 **Do you know Tanya?:** Ernst Weiss's play *Tanya*, first performed in Prague on October 11, 1919, with Rahel Sanzara in the lead role.  
**Maybe Sergeant Perkins has hold of my hand:** A character in Upton Sinclair's novel *Jimmy Higgins*; Milena had translated a fragment, which appeared in *Kmen*.
- p. 215 **"a new knot in the master's thong":** Compare this with Kafka's story "Preparations for a Wedding."  
**Venkov:** The nationalistic organ of the agrarian movement; Kafka is referring to an anti-Semitic essay by Josef Říha, which appeared on October 3, 1920.  
 [ . . . ]: Approximately four words rendered illegible.  
**Aleš is out of print:** Mikoláš Aleš (1852–1913), a Czech painter.  
**Babička:** Božena Němcová's famous novel.
- p. 216 **In my case one can imagine 3 circles:** Compare this with Kafka's story "Preparations for a Wedding."
- p. 218 **Graben, Altstädter Ring, Eisengasse:** All were names of streets in Prague. Graben was a boulevard with fashionable restaurants, etc.; Kafka's parents lived on the Altstädter Ring; and the Eisengasse had been temporarily closed by the police during the anti-Semitic riots.
- p. 219 **"Dashed to pieces on me":** In Czech: *O mne rozbil*. **Čapek:** The Czech writer Karel Čapek (1890–1938). Approximately fifteen words which followed were rendered illegible.
- p. 220 **Leviné:** Eugen Leviné (1883–1919), a leader of the Munich Räte Republic and publisher of the *Münchener Rote Fabne*, was executed on June 5, 1919.

- p. 225 **especially the last one on spring:** Milena Jesenská, "Spring Hats: A Letter from Vienna," *Tribuna*, February 4, 1922.  
**I was in Spindelmühle:** From January 27 to February 17 Kafka was on a cure in Spindelmühle.  
**the essay about the cooks:** "The Cooks" by Paul Wiegler (*Národní Listy*, August 27, 1920).  
**Your aunt, Eichendorff, Kerner:** Růžena Jesenská had criticized the Germans very strongly in past years: "The hostility of the Germans against the Slavs and against France is rooted in envy, in the lust for absolute power, unchecked demands of an egoistic nature. And this led to the terrible war" (*Národní Listy*, January 30, 1921). Similar complaints in later articles apparently led Kafka to cite the poems as examples of a different German mentality. Eichendorff's poem from 1810 is entitled "Abschied" (Parting); Justinus Kerner's poem from 1830 is entitled "Der Wanderer in der Sägemühle" (The Wanderer in the Sawmill). Other German popular national poets whom Kafka especially admired included Matthias Claudius and Johann Peter Hebel.
- p. 226 **"for my friend of many years":** In Czech: *Dlouholetému příteli*.  
**Policejní Štára:** In Czech: *The Police Raid*.
- p. 227 **that copy of Indian Summer:** A novel by Adalbert Stifter (1805–1865).
- p. 228 **I'll get hold of the "Devil":** Milena's article "The Devil at the Hearth" (included in the Appendix, p. 264).  
**Georg Kaiser:** Milena had written an article about the trial of the dramatist Georg Kaiser (1878–1945) which appeared in the *Tribuna* of March 3, 1921.
- p. 230 **the words of the angel whenever possible:** The passages quoted in the dialogue below, from Milena's essay "The Devil at the Hearth," are in Czech.  
 "If there's anything that avenges itself . . .": *Mstí-li se něco na tomto světě, jsou to účty a cifry v duševních záležitostech.*

“The only good reason . . .”: *Dva lidé mohou mít jen jediný rozumný důvod proto aby se vzali, a to je ten že se nemohou nevzít.*

“What lies deep down . . .”: *v hloubce člověk klame, ale na povrchu ho poznáš.*

“But why don't people promise one another . . .”: *Proč si lidé neslibují, že nebudou třeba křičet, když se spálí pečeně atd.*

“Why don't they promise each one another . . .”: *Proč si neslibují, že si vzájemně ponechají svobodu mlčení, svobodu samoty, svobodu volného prostoru?*

“Either accept your fate . . .”: *buď přijmout svůj osud . . . pokorně . . . anebo hledat svůj osud . . .*

“seeking requires faith!”: . . . *na hledání je zapotřebí víry!*

p. 232 **“On the High Road”**: A one-act play by Anton Chekhov.

**“Will of the Mill”**: A story by Robert Louis Stevenson.

**I'll send you Franzi**: Max Brod, *Franzi oder Eine Liebe zweiten Ranges* (Franzi, or a Second-Class Love) (Munich, 1922).

p. 235 **with the help of my oldest sister**: Kafka went to Müritz with his sister Elli and her children in July 1923. There he discovered the summer colony of the Berlin Jüdisches Volksheim (Jewish People's Home), which he had first become acquainted with through Felice Bauer in 1916, and whose work he had promoted for some time.

p. 236 **help in this matter**: Kafka is referring to the companion of his last year, Dora Dymant (1898–1952), then twenty-four years old, who came from a religious family of Eastern Jews.

**in a small villa with a garden**: Kafka's apartment in Berlin-Steglitz, Grunewaldstrasse 13, where he lived with Dora Dymant from November 15, 1923, to February 1, 1924.

MILENA JESENSKÁ'S LETTERS TO  
MAX BROD

p. 241 **Milena Jesenská's Letters to Max Brod:** Max Brod included these letters, or in some cases excerpts, in the third edition of his Kafka biography (New York, 1954). Grammatical errors in Milena's German letters have been corrected in translation.

*[July 21, 1920]:* Written in German, dated and abridged (but not corrected) by Max Brod. Having learned from Franz Kafka that Milena had spent time in Veleslavín, Max asked her for information about his friend Karl Příbram ("N.N."), who had been sent to the same sanatorium. Compare Kafka's letters on pp. 70 and 190.

[ . . . ]: Here Brod relates Milena's portrayal of Příbram's general condition, choosing to cite only one passage as characteristic.

[ . . . ]: Here Brod skips to the conclusion of Milena's letter, where she turns her attention to Franz, whom she calls Frank. See Kafka's letter of July 20, 1920, p. 98.

p. 242 *[July 29, 1920]:* In his reply to Milena Jesenská's first letter, Max Brod had requested her to "treat the sick man more considerately." The following letter was written in German; Brod dated the letter and reproduced it word for word (omitting Milena's frequent underlinings).

**sleep well:** Milena is referring to the four days she spent with Kafka in Vienna. Compare Kafka's letters of July 4 and 15, 1920.

**will go somewhere:** This refers to Max's efforts to convince Kafka to give up his position and spend time in a sanatorium. Compare, again, Kafka's letters of July 4 and 15, 1920.

- p. 243 *[beginning of August 1920]*: Written in Czech and translated into German by Max Brod, who omitted the first lines of the letter, in which Milena praises a book he wrote.
- p. 244 **a beggar**: Compare Kafka's letter of July 18, 1920.  
**didn't sleep for nights**: Compare Kafka's letter of July 15, 1920.
- p. 245 **"good at business"**: In German in the original letter. Max Brod explains they represent a misreading by Milena; Kafka was using the words figuratively, in a reference to Grillparzer's *Poor Fiddler*, and not as a literal description of his fiancée, as Milena suggests. Nonetheless, the point Milena was making was quite valid; Franz Kafka admired in others qualities he believed he lacked. See letter of July 4–5, 1920: p. 63.
- p. 246 **am I not?**: The tone of this letter indicates it was written shortly after Kafka had requested Milena to break off her correspondence with Max. See letter of August 7, 1920: p. 142.  
*[presumably beginning of January 1921]*: Written in Czech and translated into German by Max Brod, who published the letter unabridged.  
**Frank's letter from the Tatra mountains**: Kafka had been on a cure in Matliary since December 18, 1920. Milena quotes Kafka in German; his letter was apparently lost.
- p. 247 [ . . . ]: Two lines rendered illegible.  
[ . . . ]: Two lines rendered illegible.  
**M. K.**: M. Kramer was Milena's pseudonym for poste restante.  
*[January–February 1921]*: Written in Czech, translated into German by Max Brod.  
**I won't write Frank**: Despite her promise, Milena did send a last letter to Kafka in Matliary, as he mentions in a letter to Max Brod.
- p. 248 **the four days Frank was next to me**: The four days spent together in Vienna. See letter of July 4, 1920: p. 61.

- p. 248 **flesh:** Brod translates using the word *Fleisch*, which also means “meat.”  
**how he was straining:** See letter of July 20, 1920: p. 98.
- p. 250 **“Meditation”:** “Betrachtung.” This was Kafka’s title for his first publication, a collection of short stories published in 1908 in the bimonthly journal *Hyperion*, edited by Franz Blei and Carl Sternheim. The collection Milena was planning never appeared, although Max did publish his “introduction” in the November 1921 issue of *Neue Rundschau*, under the title “Der Dichter Franz Kafka.”
- p. 251 **Laforgue:** Jules Laforgue, “Pierrot der Spassvogel,” (Leipzig, 1909).  
*[Spring–Summer 1921]:* Written in Czech and translated into German by Max Brod.
- p. 252 *[presumably mid-July 1924]:* Written in German on Milena’s father’s stationery.  
**manuscripts and diaries:** Kafka had given Milena his diaries at the beginning of October 1921.
- p. 253 *[July 27, 1924]:* Written in German and dated by Max Brod. This was Milena Jesenská’s last letter to Max Brod. They later met a few times; eventually Milena gave Max the “manuscripts” she mentions, including Kafka’s diaries and the unfinished novel *Der Verschollene*.

#### FOUR ESSAYS BY MILENA JESENSKÁ

- p. 260 **Waldemar Psilander:** Norwegian silent film star.
- p. 262 **“Any where—out of the world”:** Milena quotes Baudelaire’s English epigraph to book xlviii of his *Le Spleen de Paris*.
- p. 264 ***The Devil at the Hearth:*** See Kafka’s letter of January–February 1923: pp. 229–34.

MILENA JESENSKÁ'S OBITUARY FOR  
FRANZ KAFKA

p. 272 *Červen*: Milena means the weekly *Kmen*, also edited by S. K. Neumann.

*Before the Law*: Referring to *The Trial*, of which Milena knew only the parable "Before the Law." Evidently she did not know Kafka's last novel, *The Castle*.



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