

CZECH RADIO

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Ladislav Fuks, Lenka Veverková

# MR THEODOR MUNDSTOCK

A play about how fear can destroy a person.

**Radio dramatisation of the novel of the same name by Ladislav Fuks  
written by Lenka Veverková.**

**2023**

## **CHARACTERS**

**Mundstock (M), Mon**

**Simon Stern**

**Mrs Stern**

**Otto Stern**

**Old Mrs Stern**

**Čížek**

**Mrs Čížek**

**Mrs Hobzek**

**Butcher**

**Baker**

**Rabbi**

**SS1**

**SS2**

**SS3**

**Ruth Kraus**

**Vorjahren**

**Voices – male voices (V), female voices (FV)**

**Voice 1 (V1)**

**Voice 2 (V2)**

**Voice 3 (V3)**

**Voice 4 (V4)**

**Female voice 1 (FV1)**

**Female voice 2 (FV2)**

**Female voice 3 (FV3)**

**Voice German**

1. **DINNER FOR A HEN**

M: I've successfully returned from the shops, but my nerves are wrecked, hen. Every time white flashes in the letterbox I see a summons. While there's not even any official stamp on the letter.

M/Mrs Stern: Dear Mr Mundstock.

You care for all kinds of creatures on our mother Earth, but you do not remember to think of the Sterns. You have not come around in six months. And why do you not dress up properly now in the autumn? Simon met you on Havelská Street, with no coat on in the cold rain. He called to you, but you did not notice him. He wants you to come over for a visit. Mr Mundstock, I cry everywhere I go. And I'm not even thinking of the horrors we will have to endure. Have you any news? Please, come at once. Klara Stern

M: There you have it, hen. I was there yesterday and today they want me over again. Simon... could I have met him and not notice him? I haven't been in Havelská Street in three years, since the Germans came. How could I meet him and not see him? Is that even possible?

**Mon: Why do they want him over again today, when he was there yesterday, as he says.**

M: Hen, why don't I make dinner? You're hungry, aren't you – we'll feast tonight!

**Mon: Why do they?**

M: Because of Simon, obviously... I'll hurry, hen, don't worry. Good thing I've learned to cook so well.

**Mon: Why do they invite him?!**

M: ...that's it. Now I have to find the matches.

**Mon: Why?**

M: I got us millets for a mash, hen. Pazourek the baker gave me pudding powder! But we will save this rare treat for Hanukkah and tonight, I'll make millet mash with onions.

**Mon: Why do they invite him?!**

M: God, because of a happier past!

**Mon: That's not why, that's so long ago!**

M: Oh God, well maybe they invited me because I have news about the transports! Because I know that the first ones left recently to Lodz, that every one of us can expect a summons, but no one has to be afraid of it, for in the concentration camp you dull down and don't even feel the horror. That's why they invite me!

**Mon: Not at all! Where did you get these lies? It's because he claims everything is the opposite of how things are. Because he tells them that there are no transports to Lodz, that it is foolish to expect a summons, that's why they invite him! Because he's a cheat and a liar!**

M: Because I'm a cheat and a liar, a cheat and a liar! Hen, because the man cooking you dinner is a cheat and a liar.

**Mon: And he better stir, don't burn it!**

*(knocking on door)*

M: Don't worry, don't be afraid, it's not a summons, it's the Čížeks, they always knock instead of ringing the bell. Wait here. The neighbours don't like seeing you here, I don't know why... Good evening.

Mrs Čížek: Good evening. I've brought you some buns. So you'd eat at least a bit, Mr Mundstock.

M: Yes, thank you –

Mrs Čížek: Mr Mundstock! ... Do you have someone over?

M: Me? ... I don't, Mrs Čížek.

Mrs Čížek: Didn't you... didn't you leave the gas on?

M: Oh, yes! Yes, I guess so, thank you, good night... You know what, hen? We'll save the buns for Sabbath. We won't eat them tonight, since we have a feast. No, not today!... Almost done! You'll peck on the mash as soon as it gets a little colder.

**Mon: Did he even put the onion that he's chopped in it? He didn't even start the cooker!**

M: Oh, yes, onions, onions!

**Mon: And what's the bird, or whatever it is, doing here? Is it hungry?**

M: It is, it is, and it's going to get fed as soon as I finish cooking.

**Mon: What about the others though? Do they invite him over, because he distorts the truth too?**

M: They invite me over... because I used to go out a lot before the war. You see, hen, I've got to tell you... For a cup of coffee, Friday night a glass of wine, every now and then I took Simon to the ZOO... I worked for Mr Vorjahren at the ropemaker's-

**Mon: Good graces, don't burn it!**

M: All done, hen, I'll eat first and give you yours when it cools down.

**Mon: He says others invite him over too. All right, but who?**

M: The Bäckrs. To tell them, if they should hide their things in case they had to go. The Radnitzers, to say if I think that they will go. Kolb, to see what he should do with twenty thousand...

**Mon: What about Ruth Kraus?**

M: *Starts coughing*

**Mon: God save his soul, what is he eating? Good graces! He's eating pudding with onions!**

M: Hen...

**Mon: Thank God he didn't give it to the hen.**

M: The mash was good, but I forgot that you shouldn't have it before sleeping. Have some buns and peck away. They would go stale anyway...

## 2. NIGHTMARE

FV1: The Neufelds will go soon, they've already hidden their clothes at Mr Kopyto's.

V1: My doctor's gone too. He left yesterday with the Jewish transport...

V2: All it takes is one informer in the building, and that's it!

FV2: It doesn't matter if I get poisoned here or die there, there's only one death...

Ruth: Theo, I don't have any strength left to fight fate in some camp...

V3: They see it as a stashing of Reich property!

V4: Go to the municipal office for allocation of new streets that will need sweeping from next week on!

VOICES: Mr Mundstock! Mr Mundstock! Mr Mundstock!

## 3. ON THE WAY TO THE STERNS

**Mon: He got drunk, drunk!**

M: It's strange, I really haven't visited the Sterns for a long time.

**Mon: Out of fear! So no one would ask why he goes there!**

M: I guess I shy away from visiting them, now there's war.

**Mon: Is he not feeling well? What if he is going to throw up?**

M: Haven't I taken pills just so I would be alright there?

**Mon: If he had only taken one, he could have saved two more for next time. Swiss tranquilliser pills! And he takes all three!**

M: Still, there is something drawing me to the Sterns... The image of an open door. The image of someone I can take care of, someone to protect.

**Mon: What is he going to tell them anyway?**

M: Transports are real. But I'll say that they're not. "Oh Lodz," I'll say, "pure fabrication!" Although I've heard that it's only the beginning...

**Mon: And then... what will he say?**

M: The war will be over soon, by spring at the latest. And there will be sabotage. Yes, sabotage and strikes! People will start to riot.

**Mon: Riot? But where?**

M: In Bavaria, obviously. Or in East Prussia and Rhineland. To have both East and West.

**Mon: Will the Sterns believe all this nonsense? Shouldn't he save it for the time when the Germans actually start losing?**

M: That's true... Then I'll tell them – that there are big losses on the offensive lines. Yes! Great losses of life, and from that dissatisfaction in the home country, and from that sabotage and strikes. When you find the right way, everything in the world can be explained,

**Mon: Fantastic, good graces, fantastic! We'll blow those Sterns away today. They'll be at a loss for words!**

#### **4. VISITING THE STERNS**

M: There. That's the situation. Just until next spring. That's the purest truth.

Old Mrs: This is where truth cries in the corner, Mr Mundstock, these ones have lost their minds and believe everything to be just the opposite. And on top of it all, may God forgive us, they believe those posters down at the cinema...

**Mon: Why can't he look them in the eye? He should see the helpless looks on their faces!**

Otto: Not the posters by the cinema, everyone knows that's just propaganda. But news from the front! Victory, victory, or have you heard of any defeat?

**Mon: Even Otto, who's usually silent, speaks!**

Mrs Stern: Now I'll tell you something: We won't go anywhere! We won't even pick up a suitcase. We won't get out on the street. It will all suffocate us in this flat...

Simon: Mum still thinks that we're done for. She keeps seeing herself in some concentration camp. But they'll lose and we won't go anywhere, right, Mr Mundstock!

M: They'll lose!

Mrs Stern: They'll lose, you say. But when! When!? Can't you see the country?

**Mon: Nothing left but to go for the nonsense about Rhineland and Prussia.**

M: There is, thank god, disruption in the country. Don't you know about Rhineland and Prussia?

**Mon: All he has to do is repeat his own words just like he said then on his way here.**

Mrs Stern: Upheaval in Rhineland and Prussia. Say Mr Mundstock, is that even possible?

M: It's like this, Mrs Stern. They are winning, but look at the losses in the offensives! That's why they riot!

Otto: Theo's right. Now we just have to wait a couple of months.

**Mon: Now that's done. First victory.**

Old Mrs: Well, you're such a calm person, Mr Mundstock. You're not even afraid at all. If one didn't know you, one would think that nothing can ail you. Only the paleness, are you not sleeping well?

**Mon: The pills are wearing off! Change the subject, quick!**

M: And where is Frieda?



Mrs Stern: Oh, our Frieda! I've sent her to go shopping with food stamps. She's still like in a dream.

Simon: She's weird all the time now!

Otto: Simon! Don't talk like that!

Old Mrs: This is how it is, Mr Mundstock! Mr engineer told our Frieda, that it would be better if they broke up. You know, because of her "non-Aryan origin"...

**Mon: See, how Simon asks with his eyes, what he thinks about that?**

M: That's sad that he broke up with her because of her origin. Nevertheless, we can't expect every person to be great. The engineer might be scared. Maybe he was influenced by his family.

Mrs Stern: Mr Mundstock, unfortunately, it's like you've read it somewhere.

That's what he said to her. That his parents are against the wedding.

M: There you go, no need to regret anything. Who knows what kind of a family Frieda might have gotten into.

Simon: I wouldn't make a big deal out of it.

Mrs Stern: Oh you be quiet! And stop rocking on that chair!

**Mon: Why is he silent? Can't he advise them?!**

M: Everything fades in time. Tell Frieda that the engineer is right and that his intentions are good. If you manage to convince her, it will help her,

Mrs Stern: And what if we don't, Mr Mundstock, she's very sensitive...

**Mon: He must say something that will save them!**

M: Don't worry, Mrs Stern, Frieda will get over it. I'll give you some advice. Like this... It's a kind of a procedure. You know, pro-cedure.

## **5. ON THE STREET**

**Mon:** What a wondrous accomplishment! Shame that was the last of the pills.

M: *gasping for air*

**Mon:** What? The miraculous effects of the pills are wearing off?

M: Did I ask, Mon, about Ruth Kraus? Did I ask what happened to Mr Vorjahren?

**Mon:** He doesn't remember? Maybe he did ask! And maybe he didn't!

M: How did it happen, that I guessed everything so correctly at the Sterns? Maybe I am clairvoyant?!

**Mon:** Oh, so he's seeing clairvoyance in himself?

M: I'm so hot all of a sudden, Mon. I caught a cold as I was walking to the Sterns.

**Mon:** It's the pills!

M: Of course... It's the pills. Of course. But I know that I am clairvoyant.

**Mon:** A horrific discovery! He should go home! Quickly, through the park!

## 6. ON THE WAY HOME THROUGH THE PARK

Mrs Hobzek: Mr Mundstock! Mr Mundstock!

**Mon:** One of the beggars...

Mrs Hobzek: Mr Mundstock, it is really you...

**Mon:** ...who knew him from the time he still had money.

Mrs Hobzek: I'm shivering all over.

**Mon:** Well, she's not a beggar, but he doesn't know this woman.

Mrs Hobzek: Do you know if the master sees a doctor?

**Mon:** If he went the other way, he never would have met her!

Mrs Hobzek: Mr Mundstock, the master is trading tobacco food stamps for food.

**Mon:** Who is it? Who is it?

Mrs Hobzek: He smokes and shines the light long into the night and when I come to clean in the morning! He's got ten ashtrays in his room and he says: "I have to shine a light and smoke at night, can't you see I'm writing a will?"

**Mon: A will? Everybody writes them these days! Who is she talking about?**

Mrs Hobzek: He said to me one time, that he doesn't know if he'll come back from the concentration camp and he wants his conscience clear. "I am leaving you this house and the twenty thousand."

**Mon: Why, that's Mrs Jarná, from Mokropsy!**

Mrs Hobzek: And he also said to me, that if he were to ever come back, he'd take me to his villa in Klánovice –

**Mon: But... she's been dead for fifteen years!**

Mrs Hobzek: Mr Mundstock, the master's been making his will for weeks and he's poisoned himself with nicotine.

**Mon: He was rushing home through the park... And where is he now? Where did that crone drag him to? Why are there black branches all around?**

Mrs Hobzek: The master's hands were turning blue and his fingers were swelling, so in the end he decided to go to see a doctor.

**Mon: Is it the pills?! Pre-war, Swiss!**

Mrs Hobzek: When he came to the doctor's, he said to him, just as soon as he saw him, he said: "Oh Mr Kolb, you smoke too much, don't you?"

**Mon: Kolb! God! She's talking about Kolb, who doesn't know what to do with his twenty thousand!**

M: Mrs ... Hobzek?!

Mrs Hobzek: And then what happened! It's been a week since the master rushed home. You know what's new, dear Emilie?! That doctor of mine has gone too.

**Mon: Why are the trees doubling? Where is the tree line to lead him home? He'll crash here and that will be the end!**

Mrs Hobzek: Mr Mundstock, if you could kindly advise me what to do...

**Mon: Oh God, let it end!**

M: Lock the tobacco food stamps in the desk, Mrs Hobzek, and tell Mr Kolb to go see some new doctor. And tell him I send my regards! But I'm in a hurry now, you know.

Mrs Hobzek: Thank you for the good advice, Mr Mundstock!

**Mon: Who are those two in the leather coats? Is it the Gestapo?!**

Mrs Hobzek: You always give such good advice. And I almost didn't recognise you...

**Mon: Home, quick! Quick!**

Mrs Hobzek: Are you ill?

**Mon: Quick!**

## 7. LETTER FROM VORJAHREN

**Mon: What did he get from the letterbox? Could it be...?!**

M: A summons?

**Mon: Open it, quickly! What is he waiting for? For God's sake, what is he waiting for?**

M: It's not a summons, Mon. It's Mr Vorjahren writing...

Vorjahren/M: Dear Mr Mundstock.

They do not know how much it distresses me. I am going tomorrow. I wonder if we shall ever meet again? If not, I hope they think of their old colleague from hemp, ropes and threads sometimes. And if they were to ever meet Miss Ruth, even though that is unlikely, they should give her my regards.

God be with them.

Samuel Vorjahren.

M: Lodz? Terezín? Where did he go? Why didn't he write that?

**Mon: For God's sake, they're all going to end up in a ghetto!**

M: The Bäckers are already arranging the keeping of their things, no one's counting on Haus anymore, he'll go crazy soon enough. Then there's still the Sterns...

**Mon: It might be his turn soon!**

*Whirlwind of voices.*

SS1: Also was denn, du Hure, worauf wartest du noch. Bist du Theodor Mundstück oder Mundstock, eh?<sup>1</sup>

Rabbi: Our life cannot be without suffering. Suffering is our privilege. We are eternal in suffering. Our current enemy, who screams for the death of all of us, beats us down and burns our synagogues, but we will survive them.

SS2: Du judische Sau, dismissed, what are you looking at, get out of here!

**Mon: It might be his turn soon!**

Rabbi: How is it possible? By the unshakable speakers of ideas, which are themselves eternal. Ahavat haterjot!<sup>2</sup>

**Mon: It might be his turn soon!**

Mrs Čížek: *(thumping on door)* Mr Mundstock, what's wrong? Open the door!

Čížek: Mr Mundstock, dear God! Get me a lock-pick! Mr Mundstock!  
Hello! Open the Goddamn door, Mr Mundstock!

Mrs Čížek: There... Mr Mundstock, what's wrong?

Čížek: Oh!

Mrs Čížek: Dear God!

Čížek: Don't just stare and loosen that rope!

Mrs Čížek: Is he breathing?

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<sup>1</sup> Well, what are you waiting for? You are TM..?

<sup>2</sup> (hebrew) love for people

Čížek: Mr Mundstock! Come on!... Are you feeling better Mr Mundstock?

M: Where is...?

Mrs Čížek: Mr Mundstock, what matters is that you're alright.

Čížek: Those were some loud bangs, as if you were banging your fists on the wall...

Mrs Čížek: You must have been dreaming and while dreaming you got up...

M: Dreaming?

Čížek: We live in hard times, Mr Mundstock.

Mrs Čížek: But it will get better!

Čížek: Taking your own life won't solve anything.

Mrs Čížek: Your neck is all bruised. Thank God we were just next door and heard you.

M: Where's my hen?

Čížek: Hen?

Mrs Čížek: He means the pigeon...

Čížek: Mr Mundstock, the bird... I mean the hen... unfortunately it got crushed by that bookcase.

Mrs Čížek: Thank God you're alright.

Čížek: Everything will be alright, Mr Mundstock.

Mrs Čížek: Just knock if you don't feel well again!

## **8. MEMORY OF RUTH**

**Mon: It's snowing outside. Hanukkah's almost here and he's just lying here. Why didn't he go to the Čížek's, since they invited him?**

M: I'd ruin their mood. Scare their children.

**Mon: Why does he mumble so much? He barely sleeps at night! He keeps counting who's gone and who isn't yet. Why is he sitting all alone?**

M: I wouldn't be here alone. I wouldn't be here alone if my hen was here.

**Mon:** It was a pigeon! Its grey feathers were matted with blood!  
If he didn't act crazy, he wouldn't have flung the bookcase on top of it.

**Why does he still sit here feeling sorry for himself?**

**Every night he holds those yellow papers in his hands.**

**He leans on his knees, buries his head in his hands. What is he reading? Does he even hear me?**

**M:** It's a letter... from Ruth Kraus. She wrote it to me two years ago.

**Mon:** But he knows it all by heart! Why is he reading it over and over?!

**Ruth:** *Dear Theo,*

*I feel we will all end badly.*

*We have sunk into a horrible hell. I heard that there will be concentration camps, like those they already have in the Reich for political dissenters. And there they will, in a manner which we know nothing about, destroy us.*

**Mon:** He has wasted his whole life!

**Ruth:** *Theo, I don't have any strength left to fight fate.*

**Mon:** He never had the courage to do anything!

**Ruth:** *If I am forced to leave, I will not go.*

**Mon:** Why did he never visit her?

**Ruth:** *Now I am asking you for this one thing:*

**Mon:** Well, why?

**Ruth:** *do not try to rescue me.*

**Mon:** He should get up and go do something.

**Ruth:** *Your last attempts would crash just like your first one thirty years ago.*

**Mon:** Like sweep the streets!

**Ruth:** *I want to thank you for all the good. May God reward you. I have ruined your life.*

*Happy Hanukkah, Ruth*

## **9. ON THE STREET: RISING TO THE STARS**

M: Madam...

FV3: Leave me alone!

M: Madam, please, would you know when Hanukkah starts?

FV3: I wouldn't.

**Mon: He probably scared her with those tortured eyes! What about that one, he surely knows!**

M: Please, sir...

V1: Get away from me!

M: Do you know when Hanukkah starts?

V1: I don't have any money!

**Mon: They must think he's a beggar! Did he look in the mirror?**

M: I probably won't find out here on the street. And I'm so cold...

**Mon: If he was sweeping instead of standing around, he wouldn't be cold!**

M: Mečířská Street! It's like the street's gone mad. Like everybody's decided to go cleaning.

**Mon: Don't talk and sweep properly!**

M: Ash, glass, pans, rakes...

Voice: Im Namen des deutschen Volkes, Reiches und Reichskanzlers...

**Mon: The Bäckers packed their bags and went to a concentration camp!**

Voice: Im Namen des deutschen Volkes...

**Mon: The Radnitzers have disappeared.**

M: ...stove plates, pipes, sofa springs, metal junk...

**Mon: The Grünwalds hung themselves. The Streckers poisoned themselves with gas.**



Voice: Im Namen des deutschen Volkes...

M: ...rusty shovel, bald broom...

**Mon: Albína Schick jumped out of a window, Kohn jumped under a speed train in Chuchle.**

Voice: Im Namen des deutschen Volkes, Reiches und des Führers und Reichskanzlers.

M: I can't carry all that! Old bottles and rags, tins, buckets...

**Mon: Even Ruth Kraus is done for! And Vorjahren's gone too! Only the Sterns remain.**

M: A piece of rope... it looks like it's from Mr Vorjahren...

*Voices emerge*

Vorjahren: Well, you're such a practical man, you know Mr Mundstock, a prac-ti-cal man...

Rabbi: Mr Mundstock won't be a clairvoyant or a messiah and take his own life, when he has always been a sober, logical person. He always had his own procedure for everything.

M: *Don't worry Mrs Stern, Frieda will get over it. I'll give you some advice. Like this... It's a kind of a procedure. You know, pro-ce-dure.*

M: Dear God! I *did* used to be like that! I used to be like that! If I had only kept my calm and considered everything! I'm doing it all wrong.

Simon: Mr Mundstock! Do you want any help? You want any help?

M: I could carry the whole Mečířská Street and with the houses, if I tried a practical approach! I even have to store the garbage methodically.

Simon: Mr Mundstock! Wait, you'll drop all of that!

M: I mustn't put the garbage into the cart, I must leave it in the tins and buckets as it is. And put those tins and buckets on the cart hooks!

Organise the bricks and tiles so they fit into each other and take up as little space as possible. Push the ash and garbage to the sides. The garbage of Mečířská street! All on my cart!

I've passed!

... Like this. I must keep thinking the way I thought today.

Method and procedure saved me today.

Who can survive a concentration camp?

One who approaches it practically, with a procedure and a method.

One who is perfectly, strategically and properly ready.

Plan. Method. Pro-ce-dure.

Now I just hope there's not an official letter at home! Not today, not yet!

It's not here. It's not here!

There you have it, my dear Mon.

I've found the self I used to be, when you didn't know me at all yet.

Mon?

Where are you, Mon?! Mon?! Mon?!

## **10.            PREPARATION**

*Mundstock is in his room, but at the same time he is standing in the train station.*

M: No, this is not my room.

This is not the round night table and the writing desk with the lamp, the mirror by the window – this is...

This is the train station!

How could I not recognise the train station, when I'm standing on the platform?

A very long train, ready to leave, waiting nearby...

**SS3: You swine, du eine Sau! Get out or I'll break your legs!**

**Vorjahren: Yes, yes. Of course!**

Who is the uniformed man shouting at?

Oh well! I know him! That's Mr Vorjahren!

He's dragging a fifty kilogram trunk to the train.

He's still forty steps away, a terribly long way.

**SS3: Tu es! Worauf wartest du? Pick it up! Come on!**

**Vorjahren: Yes, of course. I'm sorry.**

Platforms didn't use to be like this. Someone shouting at people they're swines and kicking their luggage. Whoever's seen something like this?

But Mr Vorjahren is going to a concentration camp. And that is a big difference.

**SS3: Schnell! Mach schon! Schnell! Schnell!**

**Vorjahren: I... Yes, of course. I'm going, I'm going!**

How is Mr Vorjahren carrying his trunk anyway?

Like a horse whose legs wobble and he's about to fall down.

It's too heavy!

He must have taken all the approved fifty kilograms!

Well, Mr Vorjahren is switching hands, he wouldn't carry the whole fifty kilos in one hand all the time!

So what does it signify, that he switches hands and it still slips from his hands?

It is best to switch hands every five steps with a trunk like that!

Later, when the destination is forty steps away, the hands can be switched every three steps.

But why is Mr Vorjahren's other hand idle?

God forbid, dangling it like that along his side!

He has to shake the other hand!

I won't flail around here with an empty trunk!

A paperweight, shoes, iron, piece of stove metal. Books.

A trunk full to the brim.

Close.

You have to hold the trunk properly. Hold it properly.

It must not hang on the fingers, or they'll get strangled and weak.

**One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Switch the trunk from the right hand to the left.**

**1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Switch to the right hand.**

**1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Switch to the left hand.**

My left hand is weaker!

Oh, yes: everyone's left is weaker, you only have to realise that in time.

Mr Vorjahren didn't realise it in time.

I'll train. I'll train every day starting tomorrow. An hour of lifting with my left hand.

***Voice: Gertrude Bäcker, Richard Bäcker, Rebeka Brat, Anna Grünwald, Jindřich Grünwald, Moše Haus...***

And to stop the trunk from slipping, I'll need to hold the handle in a handkerchief.

But not a soft silk one, of course.

Flannel is better than a handkerchief.

Because it is not only strong, but also soft.

***Voice: Olga Hekše, Emilie Hobzek, Judith Hohenstein, Menachem Löwy, Jiří Knapp, Kamil Kohn, David Korka...***

Flannel will come in handy!

But, oh my God, what is happening on the platform?

***Voice: Ruth Kraus, Bertha Kolb, František Kolb, Antonín Propper, Eliška Radnitzer, Hana Radnitzer, Heřman Radnitzer, Albína Schick, Anna Schleim...***

All of a sudden... a terrible throng.

Heat and thick darkness.

*Voice: Adolf Steiner, Richard Strecker, Martha Strecker, Otto Stern, Simon Stern, Frieda Stern, Klara Stern, Růžena Stern, Emila Taussig, Samuel Vorjahren, Jolana Weber*

Poor Mr Vorjahren is squeezed in a crowded compartment.

Is he gasping for air, or is it because of hunger? He's trying to crouch, to reach his awful trunk, where he has some bread. But a soldier is just then walking through the alley.

**SS: You revolutionary scum, what are you doing in that compartment?  
Was machst du da? I'll throw you under the train!**

Mr Vorjahren goes pale, shivers and leaves the trunk alone.

So foolish, putting bread into the trunk, why didn't he think of that?

When I go, I have to put some bread in my pocket.

And when you gradually take pieces from your pocket, it fills you up better.

The train is slowing down. It slows, until it stops completely.

**SS3: Heraus, Schweine, heraus! Alle heraus! Out, pigs, out!**

People are flooding out of the carriage.

The uniforms are screaming like mad and start beating people. Everyone going their way gets beaten like on a conveyor belt.

The ones on the sides of the stream get it the worst.

Or those, who are noticeable in some way.

**SS3: Du, lie down! Down!**

And now we're in the barracks.

It's evening. Everyone is getting ready to sleep.

**SS 3: What are you squirming in the corner for? Lie still bitch!**

**Vorjahren: Yes!**

Oh, but everything they have here is wooden, the walls, floor, ceiling and – bunks!

Mr Vorjahren isn't used to sleeping on a bunk.

It's hard. Of course it is!

But... I'm not used to it either.

A soft bed? Oh no. Such nonsense, I'm done with that.

The sun is coming up!

A uniformed beast comes up to Mr Vorjharen and starts dragging him out.

**SS3: Du, faule Sau, you lazy swine, move, will you?**

**Vorjahren: I just can't anymore, I really can't.**

Being able to lay on the planks isn't enough. I need to be able to get up properly and I need it now.

And suddenly it's like lightning has hit.

All around are poor people half naked and with them there are uniforms in high boots. Sweat is glistening on their backs.

**SS3: Worauf starrst du? Renn weg!**

Would I even be able to handle a slap?

It didn't used to be a norm to hit someone in the face...

On the lower lip... blood.

He might have clenched his teeth too much and bit it.

I mustn't clench my teeth and bite down.

The main thing is to never look the soldier in the eyes after.

That might look like a challenge for him to do it again.

But what if the uniform knocks my tooth out? What then?

Then it would be good to spit it out immediately, the madman would see that he hadn't missed his target and he might stop. Maybe I should...

Maybe I should have a tooth ready in my mouth for such occasions.

God, I have a few false teeth! Dentures!

I can spit that out, then pick it up and put it back when the beast turns around.

But... I don't have any training for that.

How could I get training?

**11. TO THE BUTCHER**

M: Key. Handkerchief. Wallet with a few crowns.

But mainly a food stamp from the Čížeks for fifty grams of meat.

It will be five o'clock soon. The shops are usually the most empty at this time.

Black coat. Yellow star.

Perfectly thought-out plan.

How could I have forgotten that I am a practical person, who has a method for everything?

I have caused these three miserable years for myself!

I even created some sort of a shadow...

Mon?!

Mrs Čížek: It's just me Mr Mundstock, good afternoon...

M: Mrs Čížek! Good afternoon. Where am I going? Oh, just to the butcher's. I have my last food stamp here. For fifty grams of meat.

Mrs Čížek: To old Klokočník? That old delinquent? Since the Germans came, he might have gotten even more irritable. But fifty grams of meat will do you good. Tell him hello from me.

M: I will, I will!

**To say hello to the butcher is completely impossible today.**

He's actually very brave, that man, very dangerous.

**12. AT THE BUTCHER'S**

M: Good afternoon.

**A fat, robust giant is standing with his back to me, standing with legs apart, in a white apron.**

Good afternoon.

Butcher: Hello. ... Oh but Mr Mundstock, good afternoon.

M: Hundred grams of ham, this one, for four.

Butcher: Right away.

**Klokočník's moustache twitched – maybe he's wondering about the way I speak today – and he gets to cutting the ham. The scales show more than a hundred grams. And he doesn't even blink.**

Butcher: I'll give you this cutting too, it's on me. There you go.

M: Here. *(passes him the food stamp)*

**He barely looks at the food stamp for fifty grams and puts it straight into the drawer. But I anticipated that!**

Why are you looking at the food stamp, like I want to swindle you? Didn't I give you a hundred?

**The fifty gram food stamp is tiny in his massive hand. He's probably feeling awkward about having to show it as proof.**

Butcher: But you gave me –

M: I gave you a hundred, you must have switched them in your huge mitt!

Butcher: I beg your pardon?

**M: The butcher's eyes bulge. Now I must not even breathe!**

Here's your crowns. Four is enough for a ham like yours. It's all gone off anyway.

Butcher: Dear me, Mr Mundstock, it's war! You know, I'd be done with it if I could, but gone off, Mr Mundstock, it is not!

**M: He should have gone red, and instead he's apologising! I must carry on according to plan. So, let's act like he's gone red and yelled: Mr Mundstock, what do you mean by gone off?**

What did I mean? That you're not even a proper butcher. A proper one would be ashamed of goods like that.

Butcher: It's war, Mr Mundstock. You know how it is, there's no chickens and geese. They ate it all. To hell with it...



**M:** He was supposed to shout! Where has his rage gone today? All that's left is to get him on the right track!

Everyone is using them as an excuse nowadays! That's easy, selling spoiled meat and washing their hands like that... Take your ham and go... to hell!

Butcher: What do you mean, Mr Mundstock? I never... Nothing like this has ever happened to me!

M: What I said! And you should chew on your own ham, if you want me to spell it out.

**His moustache is twitching, that's a good sign.**

You can't even cut the meat right...

Butcher: How dare you? Mr Mundstock! Mr Mundstock!

M: *(painfully howls)*

**I've been through worse, haven't I survived working in the quarry?**

Butcher: Jesus Christ, Mr Mundstock, what have I done? That's awful, if you're hurt, are you bleeding? What happened to you?

M: It's alright, Mr Klokočník, it's nothing.

You don't even know how much you've served me! And don't worry about the teeth, they are fake anyway!

**So, that's that done. The worst thing and just like that, it's over.**

It's alright. It's alright.

**Look at how it's working out. With God's help and thanks to a well-developed plan.**

**Poor Klokočník, how rattled he was... but what else could I do?**

**And now I have two hundred grams of ham plus a food stamp for another two hundred as an apology.**

**Tomorrow I have to go for bread.**

**13.        AT THE BAKER'S**

Baker: ... twenty five, twenty six... A moment!

**M:        Why is he looking at me like that?**

It's fine, Mr Pazourek, take your time.

**Maybe because it's been a long time since I was here.**

Baker: Twenty eight, thirty... Bloody hell, Mr Mundstock, how you've changed! Are you eating yolks or getting the mountain sun? You don't see a complexion like that every day. Forgive me for making you wait so long.

**M:        A man with such manicured hands and a gentle, well-kept face.**

M: You were counting loaves and I made you muddle it up.

Baker: Oh no, Mr Mundstock, you didn't. Hold on, I'll get the basket.

**M:        If he only knew why I came. I wonder what he'll say...**

Baker: My, that's heavy! One could ruin his hands on these things.

M: Of course, they don't have flannel.

Baker: Beg your pardon, what don't I have?

M: Flannel. Flannel, Mr Pazourek, that's the most important thing.

**It seems that Mr Pazourek is befuddled and at a loss for words.**

**Well of course, how could he not be, when he doesn't know what flannel is for.**

Baker: Is that some sort of a French ointment, this flannel?

M: Where would I get a French ointment, Mr Pazourek! Simply... simply flannel.

Baker: Yesterday... Yesterday one customer told me about a certain Mr Haus. That man is doing all kinds of peculiar things in his apartment. Last week he wanted to drown himself in a bathtub, she says.

**M:        I must be patient. To make sure he's obliging and accepts my suggestion.**

Baker: Well... you're probably not expecting a summons, since you look so

well...

**M:** **When I tell him why I came in a moment, he'll be surprised.**

Oh no, Mr Pazourek, of course I am. Who wouldn't be?

Transports leave every day after all.

Baker: Oh yes, every day.

M: One must be ready.

Method, method, that's what it's about! One must not live in a fantasy!

Well, give me half a loaf of bread...

Baker: I'll cut it for you.

M: Well, Mr Pazourek, to finally tell the truth, bread is not the reason I came here today.

Baker: Oh?

M: What would you think about me helping you out in the shop? You know, like carrying the brackets, since they're too heavy for you, or watch over the oven over there, where you bake, and take the bread out, you know, that would suit me...

Baker: Oh Mr Mundstock – here's your bread...

M: Of course I would not want any wage. I'd just do it as, you know, just something extra...

Baker: But you'd get completely wrecked by the oven. It's too hot in there, the heat is just radiating from it!

Woman: Good afternoon!

M: We'll talk about it later then.

In return, I'll tell you what flannel is and what it means to use it.

Goodbye!

Baker: Goodbye, Mr Mundstock, goodbye!

#### **14. VISITING THE STERNS**

Old Mrs: Thank God you came, Mr Mundstock, the family is doubting that this will all be over by spring again...

Mrs Stern: I just can't anymore. By spring? Isn't it spring? Isn't it April? Hasn't the Pesach passed already?

Old Mrs: Let God not punish you for that!

Otto: Oh please, stop...

Mrs Stern: God punish me? Do you know that Haus wanted to drown himself?

M: I do. Pazourek told me.

Mrs Stern: Otto went by to see him just two days ago!

Otto: Oh yes. He's getting worse and worse. I think he's lost his senses.

Mrs Stern: He said that there actually isn't any war going on and we all live on some sort of a star... and being on Earth and the war is just a dream.

M: But does he have news from the community?

Mrs Stern: He does, but that's another misfortune. He thinks even that it is a dream!

Otto: Stop it now.

M: Oh, I almost forgot... I've brought you a food stamp for flour and margarine. And here is something sweet for little Simon. For the youngest.

Simon: Wooow, chocolate.

Mrs Stern: Don't eat it all at once! Simon saw Frieda roaming around Růžová Street. Like a body without a soul!

Old Mrs: Well you also have to say that that's where Mr engineer lives, since you want to be telling everyone about it.

Mrs Stern: Mr Mundstock knows that already!

Simon: She wasn't even exactly roaming. She was just walking along the wall and looking up.

M: I hope she's at least not crying over him?

Simon: I wouldn't tear myself apart for some woman.

- Otto: You've still got time for girls! You're not even sixteen yet!
- Old Mrs: Why should he wait more time for a girl! He is fifteen. Better than listening to all that talk about concentration camps.
- M: Simon, when are we going to go to the ZOO again, hey?
- Simon: To see monkeys and elephants, if they didn't all die on them there.
- Old Mrs: When you were there last, he was still so small, dear God, it was so long ago...
- M: We'll go there soon, you'll see.
- Mrs Stern: Do you know that an officer stopped our Simon on the street?
- Simon: That was in autumn.
- Mrs Stern: And he also saw you going down the street with some strange overloaded cart, but didn't see him.
- M: When was this?
- Simon: In January. Mečířská Street.
- M: Well, there you have it.
- That joyous Friday in Mečířská. I'd completely missed Simon for all the joy.**
- M: So you don't believe it will all be over by spring anymore?
- Mrs Stern: The war isn't over and spring is here. We're going to go to a concentration camp!
- M: No, you won't! You won't!  
This won't fix anything.  
One falls into despair and everything looks bleak.  
It's good to take everything into account. Even if we went there a week before it's all over.  
Step by step, gradually, methodically, considering one fact after another and getting ready.  
**I am, for example, getting ready constantly.**  
You see, the secret lies in not living in a fantasy.

**15.        METHODIC PREPARATION**

M:    Face the wall.

Put a bandanna over the eyes. Tighten. See nothing.

Tie the hands with rope. It cuts.

Clacking on boots and loading of rifles...

Over and over.

Why don't they pull the trigger?

Why do they load and aim, but not pull the trigger?!

They do it on purpose, to unnerve me!

Clacking of boots and loading of rifles.

Why don't they pull the trigger?

There. Well. It's my turn now.

This death isn't enough.

This one was too common, superficial.

There can be a different death, much stranger.

Can there be, really?

Yes, there can. And I mustn't give up. I'm at the finish line!

Those beasts can come up with unbelievable things.

In concentration camps, they put people in cells without windows and the people then suffocate because of lack of air.

But there can be even worse things.

They can pump gas in those cells!

They're beasts. They come up with things that no normal person would do.

One must prepare for that, too.

I wonder who breathed this gas?

Vorjahren, Bäckers, Radnitzers, Grünwalds, Mrs Hekš, Kolb... and poor Ruth Kraus...

Why did I never visit her during the occupation?

Because I was stunned with fear that I would find her flat empty.

That she's gone. And then... it was too late.

Then it was too late.

Ruth Kraus left with a transport.

She left with a transport at the start of spring...

I realise I've probably lost my whole bitter life with Ruth... Eine unverheiratete jüdische Sau<sup>3</sup>...

Please, turn off the gas for a moment.

I just need to breathe... a little.

Or open... the window.

**SS1 and SS2: Open the door! House inspection! Öffne die Tür!**

M: At last! It's not over yet.

**SS 2: Jemand hier?<sup>4</sup>**

**SS1: Was stinkt das hier? Spürst du es auch?<sup>5</sup>**

**SS2: Das ist Gas!<sup>6</sup>**

**SS 2: Bist du Mundstock?<sup>7</sup> Reden!**

M: Yes, I am Theodor Mundstock.

*M: There you have it, I'm not against a little move on with the story. But where is it said that this is the end of my preparation?*

**SS 1: What's that plank you have here? You sleep on the ground?**

**Get up! Aufstehen!**

**SS 2: Was ist das für Stricke? Hast du eine Seilerei gehabt? Oder wolltest du dich damit umbringen?<sup>8</sup>**

SS1: Come on. You understand? Why are there ropes everywhere? Did you want to hang yourself?!

---

<sup>3</sup> Unmarried jewish swine.

<sup>4</sup> Is anybody here?

<sup>5</sup> What's that smell? Do you smell that?

<sup>6</sup> It's gas!

<sup>7</sup> Are you Mundstock? Speak!

<sup>8</sup> What are all these ropes? Did you use to be a ropemaker? Or did you want to hang yourself?

M: I... I used to sell hemp, ropes and threads...

SS1: **What about the gas?**

M: *I turned the gas on to prepare!*

SS2: **Du wolltest euch wegmachen, du Schweinhund! <sup>9</sup>**

SS1: **You wanted to off yourself! You swine!**

M: *Perhaps they take revenge for me thwarting their rifle loading.*

SS2: **Guck mal!**

SS1: **Ich hatte das als Kind! A frog. You have kids? You don't! I'm confiscating this toy!**

M: *Let them rage, they won't take me by surprise.*

SS 1: And what are these letters?

SS 2: Vorjahren, Mrs Stern, Ruth Kraus. Richtige Sau, nicht wahr? Unglaublich! Der ganze Stapel! <sup>10</sup>

M: *I don't care, I've done the epilogue now. This is a piece of cake compared to that.*

SS1: Here's one letter for your collection. Take it.

M: *Well, that's that. That's enough methodical preparation for today. There was even more than I anticipated.*

Mrs Čížek: Mr Mundstock! Are you alright? Mr Mundstock?

M: Yes, Mrs Čížek, I'm alright.

Mrs Čížek: You're all beaten up, come, I'll take care of you.

M: No, really, what are you thinking? That was just a small dress rehearsal.

Mrs Čížek: Jesus Christ, Mr Mundstock, how things turned out! I'll go to the locksmith for you tomorrow.

M: Oh, but that's nothing. I won't need a locksmith anymore.

Mrs Čížek: Did they give you... a summons?

---

<sup>9</sup> You want to off yourself, you filthy dog!

<sup>10</sup> Pureblooded swine eh? But that's incredible. It's a whole pile!



M: Up to fifty kilograms, assembly point – Trade Fair Palace, leaving with a transport.

Mrs Čížek: Are you... smiling? You know, Mr Mundstock, there's another letter for you. I found it in our letterbox, but it's for you.

M: The Sterns? ... Excuse me, Mrs Čížek, but I have to start cleaning up. Do you have a weighing machine? You know... for the trunk?

## 16. HOME: THE STERNS LEAVE FOR TEREZÍN

Mrs Stern: *8 June 1942. Dear Mr Mundstock,  
The verdict just came. We are going to Terezín.*

**M: The Sterns have left for Terezín.**

*Mrs Stern: We are so afraid. Have there ever been parents, whose children got ripped away from them to be separately sent to their deaths?*

**M: The Sterns I have known for thirty years have left for a concentration camp.**

*Otto: The only one not going is Simon. Simon is staying, Mr Mundstock, they separated us. They told us he will go with the next one.*

**M: Everyone but Simon, who trusts in me like in a god...**

*Mrs Stern: The bravest one of us is Frieda. Consider, Frieda! She does not speak, but quietly sings some foreign songs and she smiles from time to time.*

**M: Frieda sings and smiles. At least I helped her.**

*Mrs Stern: I beg of you, go check on Simon sometime. We are leaving the poor boy the green suitcase, he has everything in it, including his shoes.*

**M: Simon is left all alone like a small tree in a storm. He'll be waiting for them to come get him...**

*Old Mrs: Dear God, Mr Mundstock, I think we will never meet again. Only in Heaven, if the Lord be merciful to our souls.*

**M: Simon... But I've never really done anything for that boy in my life!**

*Mrs Stern: With deepest regards, your Sterns. We wish you to survive it better than these poor souls.*

**M: I am a fool! Don't I know that we're not dying?  
Is the transport some sort of disaster that ends in death?  
How could I think that?  
It's not by far too late. I can still make up for lost time.  
I'm not a saviour, but God will not rip you out of my hands.  
I'll teach you all my methods and procedures...  
I'll teach you to know reality, to conquer it...  
Well, and when we return from the camp...  
My life will not have been useless and in vain after all!**

## **17. DREAM**

Vorjahren: Have you heard, Mr Mundstock, that Kolb is back? I'm going to see him in his Klánovice villa tomorrow.

M: Mr Vorjahrene!

Mrs Stern: Mr Mundstock, I'd like to invite you to a wedding! Frieda is getting married in just a month!

M: That's great news!

Simon: Mr Mundstock, come with us!

M: Simon! There, there my boy, we've made it through. You are here and so am I. My life has not been useless and in vain, no. And back then, nothing was actually hopeless...

## **18. ON THE WAY TO THE TRANSPORT**

M: **1, 2, 3, 4, 5.**

Street. Early morning.

The corner of the house is a milestone.

A chance to turn around, smile softly, wave.

And carry on.

**1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Switch to the left hand.**

The butcher's signboard. It's snow white and the letters are dazzlingly red.

Stop for a little? Maybe, if I weren't in a rush!

Better to clutch the flannel in my palm, grey like a young pigeon.

**1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Switch to the right hand.**

Jakub Pazourek, bakery.

I said my goodbyes to the baker yesterday when I was buying the last piece of  
bread.

**1, 2, 3, 4, 5.**

Now walk through the city park.

What a magic morning.

**1, 2, 3, 4, 5 Switch to the left hand.**

I feel like I'm floating.

Like I have wings instead of legs...

Truly, like I don't even walk on the ground.

**1, 2, 3, 4, 5 Switch to the right hand.**

The trunk? I don't even feel it there, as if something is lifting it.

There's not fifty, or even forty kilograms in the trunk. Only fifteen.

The result of a late, yet wise decision.

**1, 2, 3, 4, 5**

Hurry up. I must be there as soon as possible. He might...

Yes, he'll be there too. Maybe he already is.

Of course, the poor boy is there and waiting...

This is the first next transport.

I hope he dressed well for today's journey.

**1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Switch to the left hand.**

Mečířská Street. A place where my salvation was born.

And not only my salvation. Not only mine!

Sacred, blessed pavement of Mečířská Street.

Who's going to clean it now?

It's just been half a year!

Blessed methods and procedures.

**1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Switch to the right hand.**

They're even in this good old trunk here.

In the grey flannel.

In the piece of bread in my pocket.

In the counting, switching, shaking...

**1, 2, 3, 4, 5.**

In the fact that there is no shadow running alongside me.

The one that used to be bound to me.

A shadow of a worn out, split person.

It was a long time ago, when I used to be like that.

**1, 2, 3, 4, 5.**

I wonder if I managed to practise everything with the boy in these three days?

Did I forget to tell him not to smile too much and provoke them?

**1, 2, 3, 4, 5.**

Did I forget anything? Did he understand it all?

God, I should have started to train with him sooner...

**1, 2, 3, 4, 5.**

Here comes the moment of my greatest triumph.

All it takes is just to walk over the sidewalk.

**1, 2, 3, 4, 5.**

On the broad sidewalk in front of the Trade Fair Palace stands a lot of people with  
trunks, suitcases.

But where is Simon?

Everyone is marked with yellow stars, just like me.

So where is he?

These are all the people that will come with me. All these people.

The poor souls have it all yet to come. They don't know what awaits them.

But I already know all of it.

I've already been through all of it. Nothing can take me by surprise anymore...

There! Aside from the huddle.

He stands there solitarily. A boy with big black eyes and a green suitcase.

Yes. That's him. Simon. It's him. Simon.

This is one thing I forgot to practise with him.

This. To not stand there solitarily, but to be more like the others, that's what I forgot...

Poor boy, he doesn't see me yet, but I must not call out to him!

I'm still in the middle of the street, just before the finish!

**1, 2, 3. 1, 2, 3.**

Don't count to ten here, now count to three!

I must abide by the method precisely, otherwise it's useless.

**One --- Two**

God, what happened?

We couldn't prepare for everything after all.

It all must have been some mistake of mine, I must have got it all terribly wrong...

God, does the boy see it? Does he understand, God, that poor...

Mon, Mon...

People:       The car hit him!

                  Help me turn him on his back!

                  It was like he was walking in a dream!

                  He didn't look around at all.

                  Is he breathing?

Rabbi:         Jisgadal vejiskadaš šmé rabbo...

Simon:        Mr Mundstock!

Voice:        Boy, get out of the way. This isn't for your eyes.

M:            Mon? Is it you?  
               My shadow is shivering in fear. He's all shaking.  
               Mon?  
               Dear god, it's Si...Mon.