

823
S 454



ANNA SEGHERS

THE SEVENTH CROSS



Translated from the German by
JAMES A. GALSTON

LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY · BOSTON

1942

Stanley John

THE SEVENTH CROSS

LIST OF PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

GEORGE HEISLER, a prisoner escaped from Westhofen Concentration Camp

WALLAU	} also escaped
BEUTLER	
PELZER	
BELLONI	
FUELLGRABE	
ALDINGER	

FAHRENBURG, commander of Westhofen

BUNSEN, lieutenant at Westhofen

ZILLICH, sergeant at Westhofen

OVERKAMP	} police commissars
FISCHER	

ERNST, a shepherd

FRANZ MARNET, George's former friend, a worker at the Hoechst Die Works

LENI, George's former sweetheart

ELLY, George's wife

HERR METTENHEIMER, her father

HERMANN, a friend of Franz's, working at the Griesheim Railway Shops

ELSE, his wife

FRITZ HELLWIG, a gardener's apprentice

DR. LOEWENSTEIN, a Jewish physician

MADAME MARELLI, a former artiste

PAUL ROEDER	} friends of George's
LIESEL ROEDER	

KATHARINA GRABBER, Roeder's aunt, owner of a garage and trucking business

FIEDLER, a fellow worker of Roeder's

GRETE, his wife

DR. KRESS

FRAU KRESS

REINHARDT, a friend of Fiedler's

A Waitress

An Upright Man Willing to Run Considerable Risk

THE SEVENTH CROSS

Chapter I

Never perhaps in man's memory were stranger trees felled than the seven plane trees growing the length of Barrack III. Their tops had been clipped before, for a reason that will be explained later. Crossboards had been nailed to the trunks at the height of a man's shoulder, so that at a distance the trees resembled seven crosses.

The camp's new commander, Sommerfeld by name, immediately ordered everything to be cut up into kindling wood. There was quite a difference between him and his predecessor, the gallant Fahrenberg, conqueror of his own home town, Seeligenstadt, where to this day his father runs a humble plumbing shop on Market Square. The new commander had seen service in Africa as a colonial officer before the war, and afterward he had marched upon Hamburg with his old major, Lettow-Vorbeck. All this we learned much later. The old commander had been a fool given to unpredictable fits of cruelty; the new one was a methodical, matter-of-fact fellow whose every action was dictated by cold calculation. Whereas Fahrenberg might suddenly have had us all battered to bits, Sommerfeld would have the men lined up and every fourth one beaten to a pulp. That, too, we did not know as yet. What if we had known it? What would it have amounted to, compared with what we felt when the six trees, and finally the seventh one, were cut down? A small triumph, assuredly, considering our helplessness and our convicts' clothing; but a triumph nevertheless—how long was it since we had felt the sensation?—which suddenly made us conscious of our own power, that power we had for a long time permitted ourselves to regard as being merely one of the earth's common forces, reckoned in measures and numbers, though it is the only force able suddenly to grow immeasurably and incalculably.

That evening was the first time our barracks were heated. It coincided with a change in the weather. Today I am no longer sure whether the billets we fed to our little castiron stove actually came from that kindling. At the time, we were convinced of it.

We crowded about the stove because our clothes were wet and because our hearts were deeply moved by the unaccustomed sight of an open fire. The SA guard turned his back upon us and looked indifferently toward the barred window. The slight gray drizzle, no more than a fog, had suddenly turned into a sharp rain, hurled against the barrack by gusts of wind. After all, even an SA man, be he ever so hard-boiled, can see autumn's entry but once a year.

The billets crackled. Two little blue flames appeared—the coal had caught fire. We were granted five shovelful of coal, hardly enough for a few minutes' warmth in the drafty barrack, let alone for drying our things. But we were not thinking of that as yet. We only thought of the wood burning before our eyes. Softly, with an oblique look toward the guard and without moving his lips, Hans said: "Crackling!" Erwin said: "The seventh one!" On every face there was a faint strange smile, a mixture of heterogeneous elements, of hope and scorn, of helplessness and daring. We held our breaths. The rain beat fitfully against the boards and the tin roof. Erich, the youngest of us, glanced out of the corners of his eyes, in which were merged his own inmost thoughts as well as ours, and said: "Where is he now, I wonder!"

i

Early in October, a few minutes before his usual time, Franz Marnet started on his bicycle from his uncle's farm in the township of Schmiedtheim in the Lower Taunus. Franz was a thick-set fellow of medium height, about thirty, with a quiet face which, when he was with other people, looked almost sleepy. Now, however, on the steep downgrade between the fields to the main road, his favorite stretch, it bore an expression of a strong and simple joy of life.

Perhaps it will be hard to understand later how, considering

circumstances, Franz could have been in high spirits. No matter. He was; he even gave a happy little grunt as his bicycle bounded over two ridges in the road.

Tomorrow the flock of sheep, which had been manuring the neighboring field since yesterday, would be driven on to his uncle's large meadow with the apple trees. That's why they wanted the apples gathered today. Thirty-five gristly tangles of branches, curling vigorously into the bluish air, were hung thickly with golden globules. They were all so bright and ripe that now in the first light of the morning they sparkled like innumerable little round suns.

Franz had no regrets about missing the apple picking. He had dawdled away enough time in return for the paltry pocket money his uncle had given him. Still, he ought to have been thankful after all the years he'd been out of work, for surely his uncle's farm was far better than a work camp. Since the first of September he had been one of those who worked in the factory. He was glad of it for many reasons, and so were his relatives, seeing that now he would be a paying guest for the winter.

Passing the neighboring farm of the Mangolds, Franz saw them adjusting the ladders and poles and baskets under their mighty pear tree. Sophie, the eldest daughter, a strong girl, stoutish but not ungainly, with very slender ankles and wrists, was the first to jump up on the ladder, calling out something to Franz as she did so. Though he could not make out her words, he turned toward her briefly and laughed. He had the overpowering feeling that he belonged here. People of feeble sentiments and feeble actions will not understand him easily. To them, "belonging" means a definite family, or a community, or a love affair. To Franz it meant simply belonging to that piece of soil, to those people, and to that early shift bound for Hoechst—above all, to the living.

When he had skirted the Mangold farm, he could look down upon the gently sloping land and the fog. Down a little farther, beyond the main road, the shepherd was opening the sheepfold. The flock came shoving out, immediately nestling close to the slope, still and thick like a little cloud, disintegrating at times into smaller

cloudlets, contracting or puffing up at others. Ernst, the shepherd, a fellow from Schmiedtheim, also called out to Franz, who smiled. Ernst, with his fiery red neckcloth, was quite a bold and unshepherd-like rascal—in chilly autumn nights, compassionate farmers' daughters would come from the villages to his movable little hut.

In back of the shepherd, the land sloped down in placid, long-drawn waves. Though one cannot as yet see the Rhine from here, it still being an hour's train journey away, everything indicates the nearness of the great river: the wide, largely swelling slopes with their fields and fruit trees and, farther below, their vines; the factories' smoke, which could be smelled even up here; the south-westerly curve of the railroad tracks and the roads; the glistening and blinking spots in the fog; yes, even Ernst with his red neckcloth, one arm on his hip and one leg put forward as if he were watching an army, not merely a flock of sheep.

This is the land of which it is said that the last war's projectiles plow from the ground the projectiles of the war before the last. These hills are no chains of mountains. A child can have coffee and cake with relatives on the farther side and be back home when the evening bells toll. For a long time, though, this chain of hills meant the edge of the world; beyond them lay the wilderness, the unknown country. Along them the Romans drew their *limes*. So many races had perished here since they burned the Celts' sun altars, so many battles had been fought, that the hills themselves might have thought that what was conquerable had finally been fenced and made arable. It was not the eagle, however, nor the cross that the town down below retained in its escutcheon, but the Celtic sunwheel—the sun that ripens Marnet's apples. Here camped the legions, and with them all the gods of the world: city gods and peasant gods, the gods of Jew and Gentile, Astarte and Isis, Mithras and Orpheus.

Here, where now Ernst of Schmiedtheim stands by his sheep, one leg forward, one hand on his hip, one end of his shawl sticking straight out as if a little wind were blowing constantly—here the wilderness called. In the valley at his back, in the soft and vaporous sun, stood the peoples' cauldron. North and south, east

and west, were brewed together, and while the country as a whole remained unaffected by it all, yet it retained a vestige of everything. Like colored bubbles, empires rose up from that country, rose up and as soon burst again. They left behind no *limes*, no triumphal arches, no military highways; only a few fragments of their women's golden anklets. But they were as hardy and imperishable as dreams. So proudly does the shepherd stand there and with such complete placidity that one might well think him aware of all that glorious past; or perhaps, though he may be unaware of it, it is because of it all that he stands thus. There, where the main road joins the motor highway, the armies of the Franks were assembled when a crossing of the Main was attempted. Here the monk came riding up, between the Mangold and Marnet farms, proceeding into the utter wilderness which from here no one had entered before—a slender man on a little donkey, his chest protected by the armor of Faith, his loins girded with the sword of Salvation. He was the bearer of the Gospels—and of the art of inoculating apples.

Ernst turned toward the cyclist. His cloth felt hot around his neck; he tore it off and threw it on the stubble field, where it lay like a battle pennant. One could have thought it a gesture watched by thousands of pairs of eyes. But there was only his little dog Nelly to see it. He resumed his inimitably scornful, haughty attitude, but now his back was toward the road, his face toward the plain where the Main flows into the Rhine. At the rivers' confluence lies the city of Mainz. Thence hailed the arch chancelors of the Holy Roman Empire. And all the flat land between Mainz and Worms was covered by the encampment of the imperial election. In this land something new happened every year, but every year the same thing: the apples ripened, and so did the wine under the gently befogged sun and the effort and care of man. The wine was needed by all and for all things: the bishops and landowners used it when they elected their emperor; the monks and knights when they founded their orders; the crusaders when they burned Jews—four hundred of them at one time in the square of Mainz which to this day is called the *Brand*—the ecclesiastical and secular

electors when the Holy Roman Empire had crumbled but the feastings of the high ones were merry as never before; the Jacobins when they danced around their liberty poles.

Twenty years later, an old soldier had stood guard on the floating bridge of Mainz. As the last ones of the Grand Army, ragged and dismal, dragged past him, he thought of how he had stood guard here when they marched in with their tricolors and their human rights, and he sobbed aloud. This guard, too, was withdrawn. Things quieted down, even in this part of the country. Then came the years of '33 and '48, thin and bitter, two little threads of congealed blood. They were followed by another Empire, which today is called the Second. Bismarck had his internal boundary posts put up not around the country but crossing it so that Prussia could take a piece in tow, for while the inhabitants were not downright rebellious they were altogether too indifferent, like people who had had all manner of experiences and would have more of them in future.

Was it really the Battle of Verdun the schoolboys heard as they lay on the ground beyond Zahlbach, or was it merely the continuous trembling of the earth caused by railroad trains or the marching of armies? Later, some of these boys had to stand trial → some because they fraternized with the soldiers of the army of occupation, some because they placed fuses under the rails. On the court building fluttered the flags of the Interallied Commission.

Hardly ten years ago these flags were hauled down and exchanged for the black-red-gold ones the Empire still had in those days. Even children were reminded of it the other day when the 140th Infantry Regiment once more marched across the bridge behind its merrily playing band. And the fireworks that night! Ernst could see them way up here. A burning and roaring city beyond the river! Thousands of little swastikas twistedly reflected in the water. Watch the little flames whisk across! In the morning, when the stream left the city behind beyond the railroad bridge, its quiet bluish-gray was in no way altered. How many field standards had it lapped against? How many flags? Ernst whistled to his little dog which brought him his neckcloth in its teeth.

We have now arrived. What happens now is happening to us.

Where the country road joined the Wiesbaden Highway stood a roofed little soft-drink stand. Franz Marnet's relatives grew irritated every Sunday evening over their failure to lease it, for the brisk traffic had turned it into a veritable gold mine.

Franz had left home early because he much preferred riding by himself; he detested being wedged into the crowd of cyclists from the Taunus villages who made for the Hoechst Die Works every morning. He was therefore somewhat put out when he saw a chap he knew, Anton Greiner of Butzbach, waiting for him at the soft-drink stand.

The strong, simple joy of life disappeared from his face at once. He became narrow and dry, so to speak. This same Franz, who might have been ready unconditionally to offer his whole life, could not help feeling irritated because Anton Greiner never seemed to be able to pass the little stand without spending some money. He had a faithful little sweetheart in Hoechst to whom he would later slip his chocolate bars and little bags of candy. Greiner stood with his eyes toward the country road. "What's the matter with him today?" thought Franz, who, in the course of time, had become a fine judge of facial expressions. He knew that there must be some reason for Greiner's waiting for him. Greiner jumped on his bike and joined Franz. They hurried to get out of the crowd, which became denser and denser as the downgrade increased.

"Listen, Marnet, something's happened this morning," said Greiner.

"Where? What?" asked Franz, his face assuming the expression of sleepy indifference it always wore.

"Marnet, something *must* have happened this morning."

"What is it?"

"How should I know?" answered Greiner. "But something's happened sure."

"Ah, you're goofy. What could have happened so early in the morning?"

"I don't know, I tell you. But you take my word for it, some-

thing quite crazy must have happened. Something like on June 30th."

"Ah, you're crazy yourself . . ."

Franz stared straight ahead. How thick the fog still was down below. Quickly the level land came to meet them, with its factories and streets. Around them they heard cursing and the tinkling of bells. Suddenly the cyclists were split into two groups by two motorized SS men, Greiner's cousins, Heinrich and Friedrich Messer of Butzbach, who also were on this shift.

"Why didn't they take you along?" asked Franz, as though he were no longer curious to hear what Anton had to say.

"*Verboten!* They'll be on duty later. So you think I'm crazy . . . ?"

"Why, what makes you think so?"

"Aw, cut it. Listen. My mother, you know, has to go to see her lawyer in Frankfurt today because of the inheritance. So she took her milk across to Kobisch, seeing that she wouldn't be home for the milk collection. Young Kobisch was in Mainz yesterday, buying wine for the farm. So he got to drinking and didn't start for home until early this morning. They wouldn't let him pass at Gustavburg."

"Nuts, Anton!"

"Why nuts?"

"You know there's been a control station at Gustavburg for a long time."

"Listen, Franz, Kobisch isn't altogether a fool. He said the control was extra strict . . . and guards at the bridgeheads . . . and what a fog! 'Rather than run afoul of one of them,' said Kobisch, 'have them make a blood test, find I have alcohol in me—and I might as well kiss my driver's license good-by—no sir—back to the inn in Weisenau and another bottle or two for me.'"

Marnet laughed.

"Go ahead, Franz, laugh! Do you think they'd let him go back to Weisenau? The bridge was closed. I'm telling you, Franz, there's something in the air."

The downgrade lay behind them. To the right and left, but for

turnip fields, the level land lay bare. What could be in the air? Nothing but the motes in the golden sunbeams, turning gray and into ashes above the houses of Hoechst. "All the same," Franz thought, for suddenly he knew that Anton Greiner was right, "something *is* in the air."

They tinkled their way through the narrow, crowded streets. The girls screamed and scolded. At the street crossings and the entrances to the works a few acetylene lamps were burning. Perhaps it was because of the fog that they were being tried out for the first time. Their hard, white light deadened every face. Franz brushed against a girl who muttered angrily and turned her head his way. He felt as if her glance had pierced him deeply, even to the place he kept barred to himself.

The fire brigade's shrilling sirens over on the Main side, the crazily glaring acetylene lights, the cursing crowd, pressed against the wall by a lumbering truck — hadn't he yet become accustomed to all that, or was it somehow different today? He searched for a word or a glance for interpretation. He had dismounted from his bicycle and was pushing it. In the crowd he had long since lost both Greiner and the girl.

Once more Greiner joined him. "Over there at Oppenheim," said Greiner over his shoulder, bending over so far that his bicycle was almost torn from him. Their gates were at so great a distance from each other that after they had passed the first control station they might not see each other again for hours.

Marnet kept on the alert, but neither in the locker room nor in the yard nor on the stairs could he detect the slightest trace of an agitation other than the one that came every day between the second and third blasts of the whistle. Perhaps there was a little more confusion and squabbling, as there was every Monday morning. Franz himself, looking desperately for even the minutest sign of disquiet in the words he heard and the eyes he scanned, growled like the others, asked the same questions about the past Sunday, made the same jokes, and changed his clothes as gruffly. If someone had been watching him as persistently as Franz watched the others, he would have been equally disappointed. But Franz felt a pricking

of hatred for all these people who were quite unaware of the fact that something was in the air, or refused to be aware of it. After all, had anything happened? Greiner's tales were pure gossip as a rule. Could his cousin, Messer, have set Anton to spy on him? "He surely wouldn't have noticed anything," thought Franz. "What was it he told me, anyway? Gossip, nothing but gossip. No more than that that fellow Kobisch got drunk while buying wine."

The last whistle put a sudden stop to his thoughts. As he was still new at the works he had not yet got over a strong feeling of tension, even fear, at the beginning of the day. The first purring of the transmission belts made the roots of his hair tingle. Now the belts had assumed their clear steady humming. Franz's first, second, and fiftieth plate had long been punched; his shirt was sticky with perspiration. He drew a light breath. His thoughts became connected again, though but loosely, for he was meticulously exact in his work. Franz's work could never have been anything else, even if the devil himself had been his employer.

Up here there were twenty-five of them, and Franz watched with tortured attention for any sign of agitation around the stamping hammers. He would have been irritated if any of his stencils were inaccurate, not only because of a complaint that might do him harm but because the stencils themselves had to be accurate, even today. All the same, he thought: "Anton said Oppenheim. Why, that's the little town between Mainz and Worms. What's to happen there, of all places?"

Fritz Greiner, Anton Greiner's cousin, who was the foreman up here, stopped briefly at Franz's side, then went on to the next man. When Fritz parked his motorcycle and hung up his uniform in the locker he was just a stenciler among stencilers—except, perhaps, for the singular sound of his voice, noticeable only to Franz, when he called out to Weigand. Weigand was a middle-aged, hairy little man, nicknamed Noggin. It was a good thing that his little voice whirled high and thin, blending with the belts, for while removing the waste dust he said without moving his lips: "Have you heard? In the Westhofen CC [concentration camp]." Looking down, Franz saw in Noggin's clear eyes those tiny bright

points for which he had so desperately waited: as if deep inside a person a fire were burning, and the last little sparks came flashing out of the eyes. "At last," Franz thought. Noggin was already at the next fellow's side.

Carefully Franz shifted his piece, placed it on the marked line, pressed down the lever again, again, and again. If only he could leave now and see his friend Hermann. Suddenly his thoughts snapped to attention again. There was something in this news that had a very personal meaning for him. It had shaken him powerfully, had hooked itself to his inside and kept gnawing, though he was still ignorant of the why and what. "A camp mutiny, eh," he said to himself, "perhaps even a big jail break." Here he realized suddenly what it was that affected him particularly: "George . . . What nonsense," he thought almost immediately, "to connect such news with George." Perhaps George was no longer even there. Or, what was equally likely, he was dead. But his own voice was joined by George's, far off and scoffing: *No, Franz, if anything happens in Westhofen I'm sure to be in it.*

During the past years he actually believed he was thinking of George as he did of all the other prisoners, as he did of any one of thousands of whom one thinks with rage and mourning. He actually believed that what tied him to George had long ceased to be anything but the firm bond of a common cause, one of their youthful stars of hope. No longer that other bond which at the time had so painfully bitten into their flesh and at which they had both tugged so violently. He had firmly persuaded himself that those old things were forgotten. George had become a different person, hadn't he, just as he himself had become different? For a second he caught a glimpse of the next man's face. Had Noggin said anything to him? Was it possible that he could continue to punch, carefully inserting one piece after the other? "If anything has happened there," thought Franz, "George is in it." And then: "Probably nothing at all has happened; it's just Noggin jabbering again."

When he stepped into the canteen during the noon hour for his glass of light beer (he brought his lunch from home for he

was saving up for a suit of clothes, though God only knew how long he would be permitted to wear it) he heard people at the bar say: "Noggin's been arrested . . . Because of last night. He got stewed good and proper and shot off his mouth . . . No, it wasn't that, it must be something else . . ." Something else? Franz paid for his beer and leaned against the bar. Since all had suddenly lowered their voices, a confused sound reached his ear. "Noggin, Noggin . . . He's put his foot in it," someone said to Franz. It was the man who worked next to him, Felix, a friend of Messer's. He looked at Franz fixedly. On his regular, almost beautiful face there was an expression of amusement. His strong blue eyes were too cold for a young face. "How's that?" asked Franz. Felix shrugged his shoulders and jerked up his brows, as if he were suppressing a laugh. "If only I could reach Hermann immediately," Franz thought again. But there was no chance of speaking to Hermann before the evening. Suddenly he discovered Anton Greiner trying to make his way to the bar. Under some pretext Anton must have procured a pass, because he never came to this building or to this canteen. "Why is he always looking for me of all people," thought Franz. "Why does he want to tell his tales to me?"

Anton took him by the arm, but released it at once as though the gesture might make them conspicuous. He stood next to Felix while he swallowed his light beer; then he went back to Franz. "He has decent eyes, hasn't he?" thought Franz. "He may be a little dense, but he's sincere and feels drawn to me as I do to Hermann . . ." Anton put his arm under Franz's and muttered, his voice cloaked by the noise of the general exodus at the end of the noon hour: "Over there on the Rhine, in Westhofen, some fellows have bolted, some kind of punishment squad. My cousin hears of these things. They say most of them have been caught. That's all."

iii

No matter how long he had pondered his escape, alone and with Wallau, no matter how many minute details he had weighed, or how much he had thought of the mighty course a new existence