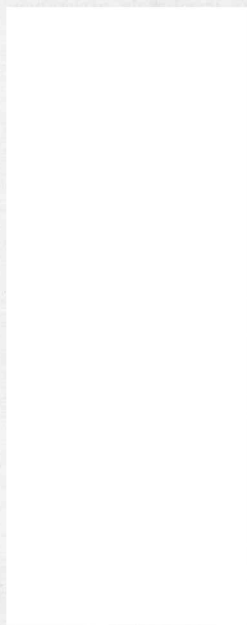


GERDA LERNER

No Farewell

A NOVEL

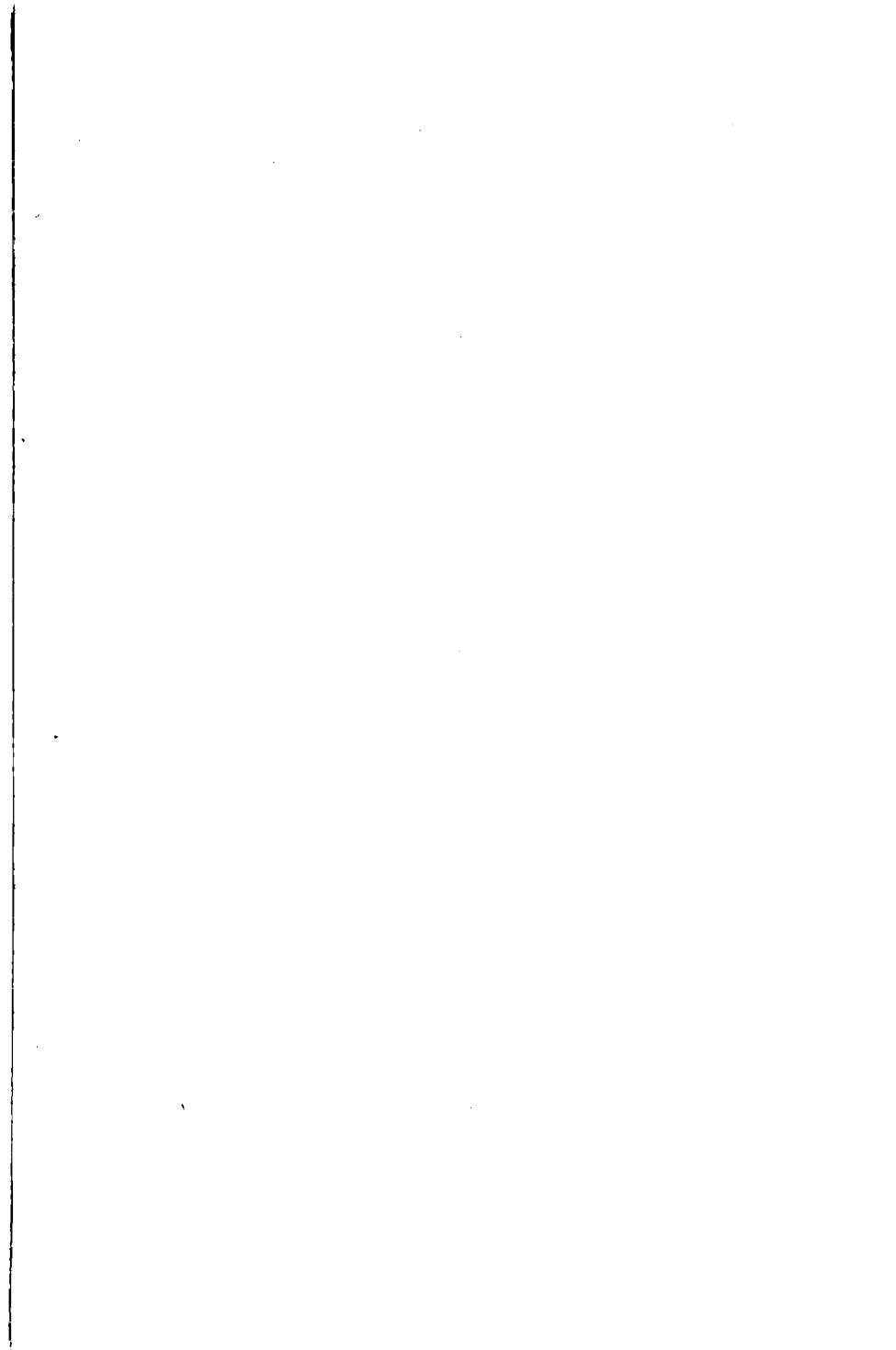


New York

ASSOCIATED AUTHORS

PART ONE

February 1934 to March 1935



One

"I don't know why I let myself be dragged into these arguments in my own home," Dr. Bergschmidt's voice snapped. "It's bad enough all day long at the office—"

"You never used to run from an argument before." Gustl sat atop the desk, his long legs dangling against the mahogany drawers. All around him his father's dark law books lined the walls in oppressive order, the heavy Turkish rugs seemed to swallow the grey morning light, the bearded portraits of famous politicians and orators stared at him from their accustomed places. But Gustl noticed none of this. "You haven't answered me yet—will there be a general strike?"

"It's very easy to talk general strike—" Dr. Bergschmidt stopped in front of his son and waved a finger in his face. "Very easy sitting here when you have none of the responsibility. A general strike means bloodshed, mark my words."

"Not necessarily."

"Not only bloodshed but civil war. You might as well get this clear—the Social Democratic party will never be provoked. We built Vienna into the finest city in Europe—"

"And now you're handing it over to fascism without a struggle."

Dr. Bergschmidt sank into an easy chair. His stocky body seemed foreshortened, almost shrunken. There was a layer of fatigue over his face which, for a moment, made his son regret his harshness. "I'm sorry if I hurt you," Gustl said softly, "but there's too much at stake. I feel I've just got to convince you."

It was strange how Gustl's attitude upset him. He heard the same story day after day from shop stewards, delegations, rank and file committees. Protest the *Heimwehr* provocations—the workers are behind you—call a general strike—resistance. . . . Radicals, amateurs! What did they know of professional politics?

What did they care about balance of power, international obligations? But Gustl, his own son, his hope. . . . All the years, the many talks, the careful cultivating of a mind. . . . Gustl was the only one who could make him regret that he had ever become a deputy, tied himself to the inexorable realities of political life.

"There's too much at stake, that's just the point." Dr. Bergschmidt catalogued his arguments mechanically. "Dollfuss controls the Army, police, *Heimwehr* storm troops. There's no telling what Mussolini will do or Hitler. The Austrian Nazis are also a factor to be reckoned with. You keep ignoring the situation in the provinces—except for a few industrial towns they're behind Dollfuss, and if not for him they're certainly against us."

"And why?" Gustl argued. "Because with each compromise we get weaker. With each compromise democracy loses followers. Last year we could have stopped Dollfuss and saved parliament. This year it's that much harder. . . ."

"When you're in a bad position you have to compromise."

"You mean lose our rights and crawl on our knees! I don't understand you. It's the *Heimwehr* that's provoking civil war. Sure, nobody wants bloodshed, but we have to make a stand somewhere. . . ."

"All right." Dr. Bergschmidt walked over to the window, his face averted. "We can't agree. That's that."

His father was not usually given to flat statements, final words that cut the thread of argument beyond the possibility of continuation. All his youth Gustl had been surrounded by magnificent words, words like rainbows opening new worlds, shiny bricks to bright dreams, glittering swords fighting darkness and reaction. As a child he had had no need for fairy tales. His father's accounts of world war and struggle, the underground papers, the street corner speeches, that unforgettable moment when the republic was first proclaimed—these were tales enough to grow on and mold his heroes after. Then year after year the elections, the stump speeches, the debates, the growing row of titles, the posts held, the distinctions—till the day when the boy could say with his pride safely tucked behind the casual words, "my father's a deputy, that's right." He remembered it now, the

simplicity of boyhood when there was no doubting of words, no questioning of actions. How long ago it seemed. Yes, it had been quite a career for a simple poor man's lawyer. . . . Deputy Dr. Bergschmidt, a trifle heavy now and very eloquent before the committees, a man no longer fit for the choices expected of him. There was too much at stake. . . .

"Gustl." The deputy's voice was low now and careful and the son waited just as cautiously.

"Yes, father?"

"You've invested a lot in your lifework already. You will be a doctor—better than most. Gustl—will you promise me. . . ."

There was absolute silence.

"We don't agree—very well. But stay out of trouble, Gustl. Promise me."

He tried to remember now when it began to happen, the doubting of the idol, the testing of the words. Long ago and slowly, like the process of growing—he was a gentle boy, very much like his mother, he did not seek out struggle. Neither would he run from it. The way he could see things now, it was his father who had changed, not he—or perhaps not even his father, but the times, the world. . . . We don't agree but stay out of trouble. It was no longer as simple as that. Something had been shattered, a confidence smashed and broken, not just in this room between the two of them, but outside there, where angry men stood helpless and without leaders, waiting for the axe that would fall upon their homes.

"I can't promise you," said Gustl. "I'm sorry."

His father nodded, keeping his eyes turned to the peace and loveliness of his garden and house.

The dead old words floated about them in the room like bubbles.

The Blue Danube

Where the Danube is a river, a broad axe cutting through the green hills, there the Danube is not blue. It is grey with shipping, brown with sewage, green with the reflection of forests, but too fast and too busy to hold the light of the sky.

Where the Danube is a river the stories and songs of the land are water of its waters, soil of its soil. Grinding giant rocks to pebbles in centuries of motion the river carries past and present from the hills to the ocean. The long procession of Eastern invaders—Huns, Avars and Turks—flooding peaceful valleys with their murder-pestilence-rape, yet halted each time by the river's natural shelter, the guards of rock, the people's wrath. The robber barons looting the Danube traffic, their moated castles towering over villages and plains. Downstream march mighty columns of God-seeking Crusaders, clinking their armor and chanting their hymns. Decades later they return upstream, bloodspattered and weary, to their solid alpine burghs. In Durenstein Fortress, Richard, the Lion Hearted, lies imprisoned, languishing to the sound of waves on rock, so much like his own England's sounds.

And the waters carry the legends of the river. The Danube maidens luring fishermen to suicide, the dancing fog lights misleading the wanderer's footsteps, the gnomes and the elves and the Black Forest witches. . . . The victims of the plague lowered to the river bottom, the Ghetto Jews set out on the water in leaky boats, the countless dead of the river's countless battles, the suicides, the criminals, the innocent drowned children. . . . The proud gothic churches and the broad baroque abbeys, the rococo palaces and the ancient cloisters, the Roman aqueducts and Marc Aurelius' highway. . . . The hunters and the brewers, the artisans and the monks, the farmers and the archdukes and the long-forgotten minstrels—all these are water of the Danube's waters and soil of Austria's soil.

In all its ages and years, though, the Danube was never blue. . . .

Where the Danube has been channeled stocky bridges span the water, tired eyes of slum apartments rest wistfully on the river's burdened flow. Under the bridges live the unemployed, the homeless sleep there hearing waves rush even in their dreams, boys learn of love in the gaslights' yellow pools. On foggy nights cries of brawling stab the air and drunks stagger home when the morning mists rise. At night the river belongs to the troubled, it washes their wounds and gives them final rest.

And to them the waters of the Danube are black like their lives.

But beneath the stone wall the embankment grows green. When workers rush to their jobs, lunchpails swinging, the dry sand of the riverbank feels good under their shoes. When children play hopscotch or count the cars of the many freight trains, they know even in their games that there are hills on the horizon. After work, families gather in their small and weedy sand lots, planting vegetables and fruit that remind them of the country. Young men and their girls walk slowly by the river, sit in small wineries at wooden tables, holding hands and sipping the tart new wine. Always, in the quiet, there is the rushing of the water, the fresh touch of moist grass, the tangy smell of wood and apples.

It is then that the Danube is blue like a holiday.

Two

The sparse strip of grass sloping down to the Danube canal, the hills on the horizon and the clean thin lines of the radio tower on Bisamberg had the quiet and peace of a day in the

country. Leni and Gustl walked side by side. On the opposite embankment the ugly rear of tall apartment houses fenced off the water, defacing the sky with sagging clotheslines and disorderly smokestacks.

"I like walking here," said Leni. "That was a nice surprise." Gustl was always doing unexpected things like picking her up at school for a walk, a short talk. It was flattering—and yet a little disturbing. She had used to climb trees with him and play cops and robbers in the park—this new Gustl with his serious discussions and sudden manliness embarrassed her.

"You see I couldn't give him my promise, don't you?" He was sharply intent, as though her reaction might somehow be decisive.

"Yes, of course—why should you let your father make decisions for you?" How agitated Gustl could get about politics. Was it really that important? "Frankly, I don't see why you want to get involved so deeply. Aggie thinks you are getting as bad as your father. . . ." Leni taunted him lightly with his sister's name, hoping he would take it as a signal to drop into the safe old pattern of their childhood. It had been a triangle from the day they first met as small children, during one of those hot late summer weeks when country vacations are over and school has not begun. Aggie and Gustl were inseparable, more like twins than elder brother and younger sister, although there was this unlikeness, too—his lanky shyness, her quick and haughty self-assurance. Their crazy games that summer fitted the torpor of the days, the over-long vacation with its boredom and lack of order, the lassitude of governess and maid in whose care they had been entrusted. It was, for all of them, a memorable time. Before two weeks were out Leni and Gustl had found a secret language and innumerable ways of bypassing Aggie's up-to-then undisputed leadership. But the balance was restored each night when brother and sister returned to their common room, leaving the final word always to Aggie. In later years when the girls went to school together, the balance shifted. Aggie was Leni's best friend and Gustl entered the world of young men. . . .

"Forget Aggie. She's become so superficial. . . ."

There had been a time when Aggie was his world. He was a

shy child and Aggie was brilliant, he was slow and silent, she forever creative. When Leni entered their lives it had been for Gustl the first step out of an enchanted forest. Now he had grown and changed so rapidly, he sometimes looked on himself in wonder, as though he were a stranger. He remembered the time, like a turning point, when Aggie invented The Game. The three of them had taken to reading aloud, mostly poets—Verlaine, Heine, Shelley. Aggie discovered that it was fun to dance to poetry, barefoot and eyes closed, guided only by the rhythm of the words. Soon all three of them, taking turns at reciting, developed a knack for barefoot dancing in the dark. They played The Game with the fierce concentration of adolescents, dancing each alone and sometimes all together in weird choreography. One night in the darkness, he and Leni collided and stood very still before tearing loose from each other and dancing hand in hand. That was how The Game stopped, for Aggie insisted on turning on the light as soon as she discovered the new partnership. Neither Leni nor he would consent to dance with the lights on and, strangely enough, did not insist on keeping up The Game in darkness. To Gustl, this was the time when growing up started in earnest and all relationships began to change.

He felt no loss now at having outgrown Aggie. Leni, however, was so much a part of his new freedom that he expected her beside him and was astonished when he found her unable to understand him. Why were changes so painful? From the new-found pinnacle of his twenty-one years he looked down on her seventeen as though a generation lay between them.

"Do you know I envy you," said Leni. "You seem so sure of everything. Fighting your father to make your own decisions. . . . How do you know what are the right decisions? For me everything's tied up in a knot, a skein of wool all messed up, impossible to unravel. What's made you this way, Gustl, so different?"

How could he explain it. . . . Stepping out of the narrow world of home, knowledge opening like a gate. Medicine—the mysterious human body full of ills and wonders. New people, strange ideas—his father's words crumbling in the testing ground of

life, the University so unexpectedly a battlefield of ideologies and organizations. Again he asked himself, where did it all start, and found no answer. Those long nights of discussions with Paul and Mario over bitter tea and endless cigarettes, the fist fights with Nazi students in dark laboratory rooms, the leaflets in textbooks and the noisy demonstrations. . . . Surely, he had told Leni of these things, much as he had come today to tell her of his decision. Yet she had not understood him. Would words always fail him? "Perhaps it's mostly that I am a few years older."

"I doubt it." Across the canal a little dog trotted from trash can to trash can. Two boys pulled a wagon loaded high with junk. In the distance, beyond the bridge, the broad green Danube became visible. "What's wrong with me, Gustl? What is it?"

"There's nothing wrong with you, Leni. Don't be silly."

"I'm always so lonely. I have no friends at all. . . ."

"Aggie and I. . . ."

"Don't say that, Gustl. We've grown up together. You and Aggie are like family to me, sure. But now you each have your own life, the way it should be. Only I have stood still. Sometimes I think there is really something wrong with me."

She was almost his height, tall and big-boned, with fine slender fingers. Always her face was a little too serious, her mouth a trifle heavy, her mien very sober. He had met smiling girls, pretty ones with dimples and twinkling laughter, beauties molded and stately, with empty repose in their faultless features. There was nothing he knew to compare with the look of searching, the honest torture and tense concentration on Leni's face when she found herself wanting. Poor Leni. . . . Somehow her problem failed completely to measure up to the moment. "The only thing that's wrong with you is that you're still all bound up with your father and mother."

"I listen at their door all the time, Gustl. Why don't they separate if they can't get along? Why all this quarreling? I tell myself it's their affair not mine. When I hear the girls talk about love—and they talk about nothing else—it seems like a trap to me. I want to run. I don't think that's normal, is it?"

"Oh, Leni, honestly—"

"Well, I'm serious, believe me. You're about the only person I can talk to without embarrassment. I wish I were thirty years old. . . ."

"Now of course you're going to say I'm dragging in politics. But my considered psychological and medical opinion is, Leni—"

"You're dragging in politics."

"—that you are too wound up in yourself and your problems. If you were working for a living—"

"Now call me a parasite and I'll never talk to you again."

"If you were working for a living, or preparing for a profession, or taking an interest in the broader world around you—you wouldn't have time for all this preoccupation with yourself. I've been trying to tell you all afternoon what's going on in this country. All you can see is yourself and your nose—psychologically speaking, that is."

"Brilliant," said Leni.

"And true," said Gustl.

"Well, see if you can catch me, then. . . ." She ran like a boy, track style, her short hair flying in the wind, her schoolbooks clamped tightly to her side. He had to run hard to catch her. When he tagged her she threw herself on the grass of the embankment, laughing delightedly. "You're winded, old man. . . ."

"Meet the track champ of 1934," blared Gustl. "Tatata. . . ." imitating trumpets.

Amidst their laughter they did not hear the first shot. Ringing out from the other embankment, it rolled up against the hills and returned with a flat final sound. It was caught up again by a burst of quick explosions coming from behind them. By the time they turned there were small wisps of smoke disappearing in the sky behind the railroad bridge.

"It's started," Gustl whispered. The explosions continued, now steadily, now in violent outbursts.

Leni looked uncomprehendingly at the opposite embankment. Nothing was changed, the clothes still fluttered from the many clotheslines, the dog sniffed at trash cans, the river kept on flowing. Only the people had disappeared as though the houses had snapped them up. Gustl took her hand and pulled her away

from the embankment. Under the arch of the elevated he paused briefly and spoke to her, but Leni did not hear him. She had no realization of danger, only a hard and bitter curiosity. Something terrible had happened and it had happened so fast, bearing no relation to anything she could understand or had ever experienced, that it seemed merely staged and unreal. But the sounds behind them were growing in fury and as they ran down the narrow streets of Heiligenstadt the rifles opened up ahead of them, to their left and right, and suddenly all around them. "Not so fast," Leni muttered, wanting only to find out what was happening. "What are you running for?"

He did not pause to answer, running mechanically. Now it had begun—it was too late for words. If there's fighting, I'll be in it. . . . In the back of his mind these words had lain in readiness. Now he tried to judge from the sounds and the distance where the fighting might be and it became all at once no longer simple. Where was he to find his place, his gun? Paul would know, perhaps Gretel. . . . But where to find them? He cursed himself for not having foreseen this, not having planned beyond the decision of participation. I never truly believed this could happen, Gustl thought.

On Heiligenstadter Street there was no traffic. Not a car, not a bus, only two street cars standing dark and idle in their tracks. The shops were closed and the curtains drawn in the windows. The suddenly silenced street had an uneasy look, like a hastily dressed woman. Baskets of potatoes and carrots were spread out stupidly in front of a tightly shuttered vegetable store. At another door an empty baby carriage stood deserted, while through the windows of a candy store huddled figures could be seen in the darkness. Here and there people were hurrying down the street, pressing close to the houses as if fleeing from a storm. In this closeted silence, the sound of shooting became exaggerated and personal. Gradually it penetrated to Leni that Floridsdorf, the housing projects, the streets and alleys on both sides of the canal had become involved in something immense and real, some warfare of their own bearing no relation to her. The sounds became identified with injured bodies and crackling guns. She felt grateful for Gustl's arm now, for his closeness, his hurried step. It seemed clearer every moment that it was

only his presence that kept the buildings from falling on top of them.

In front of them there was a cluster of trucks, grey soldiers, machine guns directly in the path of their flight. The guns seemed to aim at the exact spot from which they were fleeing. Swerving sharply into a sidestreet, Gustl pushed Leni into the shallow shelter of a doorway. Crouching against the wall, he halted for a moment undecided. Bullets struck the ground at their feet and the house against which they were standing. There was a sound of splintering glass, then a woman's sharp cry. Leni, he thought, suddenly touched with a pain like burning, my darling—and stood above her. Inside the house, the woman's cry broke, choked off by the louder sounds of violence in the street, but Leni was unharmed, clutching his arm half blind with terror. He pulled her up and they ran once more, away from the bullets, down unknown streets.

Gustl stopped. "I must go, Leni—I can't run away."

The woman's cry was still in her ears and it would not be silenced. Go with him, it urged, find out, get the answer. But Leni closed her eyes. The street was reeling.

He waited for an instant. She was safe now. She would not join him. "Go home, Leni, go home. . . ." Good-bye Leni, good-bye childhood and sweetness. He turned away sharply and plunged back into the warring streets.

"Come back!" she cried. "Gustl—what are you doing?" But she knew what he was doing and her feet started moving as though of themselves and movement was magic and movement was safety and Leni ran panting through the empty streets toward home.

At last her own street, the old brown doorway so firm and solid. But even the walls gave no support. Leni felt herself tremble. Her whole being was focused on the violence she had escaped, the cry she had not heeded, the conflict she had not understood.

The stairs were a mountain. The street now had entered her house. She could leave Gustl, but never those sounds. Walking upstairs slowly, Leni did not look back. There was no safety, even in coming home.

Marx Hof I

Once it was a hope. A dream that men might live in homes with sunlight, warmth and shower baths. A dreamer's dream: spacious blocks with green between, apartments with windows in every room, a balcony with a square of sky and the rent low enough for every worker. Not one such house, but blocks of them, planned with playgrounds and shrubbery and flowers. And all of it for workers.

Once it was a platform and later it was a program. Then it was a plan and a lot of headaches. Who will pay for it? Who will live in it? Who will own it? Will there be enough of it?

When it stood the city owned it. The elected city government owned it and workers lived in it. Taxes on landlords and real estate owners paid for it and that was not fair, for the real estate owners could not live there nor rent there nor make money there. Those who lived there came from homes without water and toilets, homes without light and rooms without windows. Those who lived there had to prove they were wage earners and that was a new way of administering housing. A very new way.

Therefore those who lived there called it by a proud name, after one they admired—Karl Marx. And the workers who did not live there found there were not enough such houses. They filled the waiting list for vacancies with their names, many, many names for few vacancies.

For as long as they could remember there had never been such a plan, a plan which actually worked.

In front of Marx Hof there was a bronze statue, a naked youth sowing the seed of the future. The children played in the nursery in the second court and the buildings they looked up to were painted yellow and pink and a delicate green. The

big arches between the buildings were blue like the sky and on every balcony people grew flowers and kept birds in cages.

To the children these were the most beautiful houses in the world.

Once they were just houses. Later they became symbols. Then the dying began.

Three

Early that afternoon Dr. Bergschmidt left the office of the Social Democratic party with a splitting headache. Driving home in his car he first realized how desperately tired the last few days had left him. In twenty-three years of public service he had known many struggles, many seemingly hopeless situations, but nothing had ever been quite like this. Fighting your opponents in parliament was one thing, fighting your own electorate, the men who built the very ground you stood on, was quite another. . . .

As he drove along the Ringstrasse the magnificent beauty of the buildings lining the avenue struck him with more impact than usual because of the deserted stillness of the city. The Opera, Hofburg and, best of all, Heldenplatz with its noble expanse—all these were more to Dr. Bergschmidt than impressive historic monuments. To him there was a breadth and life in these walls that meant a future as well as a past, a culture and history more precious than any one group of people, a way of life, a proud and struggling land. As the deputy took in the well-known sight of his favorite buildings and noticed with horror the small groups of soldiers preparing battle stations in their shadow, he felt justified more than ever in the position he had taken. Civil war in this magnificent city—it was an unthinkable calamity that must be avoided at all cost. The very thought of the wide streets barred by barbed wire, the monuments

blackened by flame and smoke hurt him physically. From the trucks racing towards the workers' districts he could catch the tail end of a shout or a song, and his heart contracted as he thought of the destruction of years of work and planning, the certain annihilation of the magnificent housing projects.

What had happened less than an hour ago now took on a stronger, more painful significance. The message had arrived from Linz that fighting had broken out between the *Schutzbund*—the workers' defense corps, and the *Heimwehr*—the government storm troops. Momentous decisions had to be made. The executive committee was in constant session. For several days now the police had been arresting trade union and party functionaries. The factories were up in arms about this and the news from Linz, and demanded a general strike. The *Schutzbund* was assembled, awaiting fighting orders. While the executive committee was still deliberating, messages were coming in from all sides that this or that shop or factory had gone on strike. "Wildcat strikes," the trade union presidents cried, but there was nothing they could do about it. The rank and file refused to be restrained any longer. Finally, the committee decided to send two mediators to Chancellor Dollfuss in a last effort to avoid civil war. The men selected were two conservative trade union bosses who had the *Heimwehr's* full confidence. The message they carried was the final offer of the Social Democratic party to the government.

At the very hour of their mission the employees of the gas plant and power station went on strike. Street cars and busses stopped running. Sporadic fighting had already broken out in various parts of the city and the provinces. After a few hours the mediators returned, red-faced. They were middle-aged, paunchy men who had seen a great deal and were not afraid to dirty their hands. Now they simply came in and sat down without looking at anyone. "We never got to see him," one of them said after a while. But everybody knew by that time that it was too late. Afterwards when the executive committee had voted to give fighting orders and the very existence of the mediators had already been forgotten, the other one said slowly and to no one in particular: "They want a fight, they're provoking