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INTRODUCTION

The author of this extraordinary document was in her early thirties when she began her diary on April 20, 1945. In Jean-Jacques Rousseau's introduction to his *Confessions* – considered in their day the most daring self-accusation – we find the following words: "I am commencing an undertaking, hither-to without precedent, and which will never find an imitator." No sentence could be better suited to introduce this work. When I held the manuscript in my hands for the first time, comparisons began to crowd in on me – comparisons with other diaries, confessions, and revelations. After a few pages it was no longer the sensual exhibitionism of Rousseau that sprang to my mind, but memories of Knut Hamsun's *Hunger*; I came across horrifying passages that made me think of Louis-Ferdinand Celine's *Voyage au Bout de la Nuit*, and others of stark realism reminiscent of Henry Miller. I even found a connection with the confessions of the unfortunately all but forgotten Norwegian Hans Jäger, whose *Sick Love* is one of the most despairing and candid books ever published.

The conjuring up of great names, however, is not meant to suggest a literary comparison; it is rather to emphasize the uniqueness of a book written during many horrifying days and nights – not (like the above-mentioned confessions) as literature, but as self-therapy: for certain experiences can be exorcised only by putting them into words.

Since we are faced, then, not with a literary creation whose author has an eye on the public, but with a document, it may be advisable to say a few words about its authenticity, I have known the writer for many years. She comes from a good middle-class family, a background which fifty years ago would have led a young girl to marriage – and no further. She was given an excellent education and soon showed talents allowing her an early independence. Sketching, photographing, studying, she travelled throughout the greater part of Europe. Personal taste and experience prevented her from becoming involved in any of the organizations of the "Third Reich." Although free to make decisions, a job she had just accepted kept her tied to Berlin during the last year of the war—until it was too late to leave that city. And when the Red apocalypse overwhelmed the capital – which, despite the large-scale evacuations, still harboured four million people – the author began her diary. From Friday, April 20, until Friday, June 22, she jotted down in old ledgers and on loose pages what happened to her and the inhabitants of the house where she had taken refuge. These pages lie before me while I write. Their vividness as expressed in the furtiveness of the short pencilled notes; the excitement they emanate whenever the pencil refuses to describe the facts; the combination of shorthand, longhand, and secret code (to keep such a diary was extremely dangerous), the significant abbreviations – all this will probably be lost in the depersonalizing effect of the printed word. But from the language itself I believe the reader should be able to sense something of the emotional climate of the original script.

I know the house described here. I lived in the neighbourhood myself and as a result became fairly well acquainted with several of its inhabitants.

When I returned to Berlin in 1946 in search of lost friends, I revisited the house. I was met on the staircase and showered with a flood of stories about past events. They were forced upon me – not only by men but by

women and young girls, too – with such a passion to confess that I very nearly reacted as did the author's friend who returns at the close of her book. Only the fact that I myself had had similar experiences elsewhere, and knew the purging effect confessions can have, prevented me from doing so

Six months later I met the author again in another place. Here, from some hints she dropped, I learned of this diary's existence. When, after another six months had passed, I was permitted to read it, I found described in detail what I already knew from the accounts of others. It took me more than five years, however, to persuade the author that her diary was unique that it simply had to be published.

What I have written here should make it amply clear that this book contains the truth, and nothing but the truth. Thus it cannot be prefaced by the well-worn slogan: "All characters in this book are entirely imaginary; resemblance to any person living or dead is purely coincidental." For political reasons, however, and out of consideration for others, all names and numerous details have been changed.

The reason why the author prefers to remain anonymous is too obvious to require explanation.

The reading of this book arouses many conflicting emotions – which can be explained by the author's character. What strikes us as most shocking is the cold objectivity with which she makes her reports, until we realize that this is not a deliberate, artificial objectivity (on the lines of Dos Passos's literary invention of the "Camera Eye") but a coldness that was bound to develop because the emotions were frozen – frozen with horror. "I think it was despair that steeled my nerves," drily reports the sailor after narrowly escaping the maelstrom in Edgar Allan Poe's story. Nor can the author's attitude be described as fatalistic, although in the early part of the diary her character does show certain fatalistic tendencies. To the possible question whether she could have acted differently in this or that Situation, I can only say that, to the best of my knowledge of the milieu, the question is inappropriate I feel it my duty to point out a fact which the author does not even hint at: because of her knowledge of the Russian language she was cast in die role of mediator for a house full of people. In a war between the East and West the white flag has never proved to be a true protection, and more than one voluntary mediator died between the fronts.

Who, confronted by such a collective fate, could claim the right to use a moral yardstick applicable only to an individual fate? No man could – for there were too many who, faced with a loaded gun, were compelled to say to wife or daughter: "Go along, for God's sake!" And those who have never had to face a gun should hold their tongues. And no woman has the right to pass judgment either – unless she has been whirled along at least once on the rapids of collective fate. From an armchair it is all too easy to judge.

What strikes one as strange in this book is its absence of hatred. But where all the emotions are frozen, hate cannot flare up either. From Sigmund Freud (though I'm on guard against making easy generalizations couched in the current psychoanalytic terms) – from Freud we learn that instincts can be redirected, that energy can be withdrawn from one instinct and infused into another. I don't think any reader will fail to observe that among the inhabitants of this Berlin house one instinct dominated over all the rest: hunger. This, however, is the instinct for survival – no matter what the price.

In conclusion I should like to repeat a remark the author made to me in 1947. "None of the victims will be able to wear their suffering like a crown of thorns," she said. "I for one am convinced that what happened to me

balanced an account." This search for justice amidst all the inhumanity seems to me the most remarkable feature of this document – a "*document humain*" and therefore not a "*document politique*."

And so the author escaped the whirlpools, was able to rise secretly triumphant from the depths of the maelstrom – not through the aid of any physical law, but because although she had to surrender she never surrendered herself.

C. W. Ceram *August* 1954

4p.m., Friday, April 20, 1945 Chronicle begun on the day Berlin saw battle for the first time

No doubt about it, the war is rolling towards Berlin. What yesterday was a distant rumble is today a permanent roar. One inhales the noise of guns. The ear is deafened; all it can hear is the firing of the heaviest artillery. It can no longer detect the direction. We live in a circle of guns which contracts by the hour.

Every now and again lulls of sinister silence. Suddenly one remembers it's spring. Through the fire-blackened ruins the scent of lilac comes in waves from ownerless gardens. The stump of acacia in front of the cinema is bursting with green. Freshly tilled soil surrounds the shacks on the Berliner Strasse: between air raids the allotment owners must have spent some time digging. Only the birds distrust this April; there are no sparrows on the gutter of our roof.

At about three o'clock the newspaper boy arrived at the kiosk. A couple of dozen people had been lying in wait for him. Instantly he was invisible behind heads and hands. Gerda, the janitor's daughter, snatched a handful of night editions and let me have one. No longer a real newspaper, just a single sheet printed on both sides, and still wet. While walking away the first thing I read was the Wehrmacht's report. New place names: Müncheberg, Seelow, Buchholz. Sounds damned near. A fleeting glimpse at news of the Western Front. What's that got to do with us now? Our fate is rolling towards us from the east and is as sure to change our climate as did the Ice Age once upon a time. Why? How on earth did all this happen? One torments oneself with questions. Pointless. I'll think only of today, of immediate Problems.

All round the kiosk groups of people, dead-white faces, murmuring:

"God, who'd have thought it would come to this?"

"There goes our last shred of hope."

And about Western Germany: "They're all right. They're over the worst. The word "Russians" is no longer mentioned. The lips won't pronounce it.

Back again in the garret. It's not my home. I no longer have one. The furnished room which was bombed from under me wasn't mine either. But in the course of six years I had filled it with my atmosphere, with my books and pictures and the hundred odd things one accumulates: starfish from the last summer in Norderney, the Kelim which Gerd brought me from Persia. The battered alarm clock. Snapshots, old

letters, sketch-books, my coins from twelve countries, the half-finished knitting — all the souvenirs, layers, skins, deposits, the familiar odds and ends of the years.

Now all that has gone and I've nothing left but a suitcase full of old clothes; I feel naked and light. And as I no longer own anything, everything belongs to me. For instance, this unfamiliar garret. Actually, it's not entirely unfamiliar. The owner is a former colleague; I often came here to see him, before he was called up. We used to carry on little business deals befitting the times: his Danish canned meat for my French cognac; my French soap for the stockings he received via Prague, I just had time to let him know I had been bombed out and got permission to move in here. Last time I heard from him was from Vienna where he was working as a censor for the Wehrmacht. Where he is now— ? In any case, garrets are not much in demand. Besides, the rain comes in, as the tiles are partly smashed or blown away.

I can't und any peace up here, keep pacing through the two rooms. I've systematically gone through all the cupboards and drawers in search of something useful—i.e., something edible, drinkable, burnable. Alas, found almost nothing. Seems that Frau Weiers, the owner's former char, has already done a thorough Job. Nowadays everything belongs to everyone. One is only vaguely connected with things, doesn't distinguish clearly between one's own property and another's.

I found a letter addressed to the owner stuck behind one of the drawers. I felt ashamed to read it, but read it I did. A love letter; I flushed it down the drain. (We still have water most of the time.) Heart, longing, love. Passion; What remote, unfamiliar words. Presumably a refined, fastidious love life presupposes regular and ample meals. My centre, while I'm writing this, is the stomach. All my thinking, feeling, desires, and hopes begin with food.

Two hours later. The gas is burning with a little dying flame. The potatoes have been on it for hours. The country's most miserable potatoes, they disintegrate into a watery pulp and taste of cardboard. I swallowed one of them almost raw. I've been filling myself up since early this morning. Went to Bolle's to use the light-blue milk tickets which Gerd sent me for Christmas. I wasn't a moment too soon. The woman behind the counter was already tipping the can and told me there wouldn't be any milk coming to Berlin. This will mean death to the children.

I drank a few gulps right there in the street. When I got home I filled my stomach with gruel and followed that up with a crust of bread. Theoretically I'm fuller than I've been for a long time; in reality I'm tormented by bestial hunger. Eating only had the effect of making me really hungry. I'm sure this fact can be explained scientifically – for instance, that food stimulates the secretion of the stomach, making the juices eager to digest. And by the time they are in full swing, the little that was in reserve has already been digested. Then the juices really begin to give trouble.

Which reminds me of something odd. While rummaging through the owner's little library of books here, I opened a novel at random. The following sentence from a description of an upper-class English family:"... threw a furtive glance at the untouched meal, got up and left..." I had read on a further ten lines when, magnetically attracted, I returned to the words quoted above. After reading them about a

dozen times I suddenly caught myself clawing at the words with my nails, as though I could scratch the untouched meal (previously described in detail) out of the book.

Crazy! Beginning of a slight hunger madness. Pity I can't read about it in Hamsun's novel *Hunger*. Even if I hadn't been bombed out I wouldn't have the book. Two years ago it was stolen from my shopping bag in the subway. It was covered in raffia and the thief obviously took it for a wallet containing my ration cards. The poor man, he must have been disappointed. A story, incidentally, that would have pleased Hamsun.

At the baker's this morning there was a rumour: "When they get here they'll take everything we have to eat. They won't give us anything. They've decided to starve the Germans for eight weeks. In Silesia people are already digging for roots in the woods. Children are dying right and left. Old people are eating grass, like animals."

So much for the *vox populi*. Actually, one knows nothing. The *Völkischer Beobachter* no longer lies on the staircase. There is no Frau Weiers to read to me at breakfast the long list of rapes. "Seventy-year-old woman ravished. Nun violated twenty-four times." (Who counted?) These are the headlines. Are they meant to encourage the Berlin men to defend and protect us women? Ridiculous. In reality it only urges more thousands of helpless women and children to take to the arterial roads towards the west, there to die of starvation or be killed from the air.

While reading these reports Frau Weier's eyes always grew quite round and shiny. Something in her enjoyed the horror. Or maybe her subconscious delighted in the fact that she was not affected. For afraid she is, and determined to get out. Haven't seen her since the day before yesterday.

The radio has been dead for four days. Once again one realizes what doubtful gifts technology has bestowed on us. They have no value in themselves, are of use only provided there's a place to plug them in. Bread is an absolute value. So is coal, provided I can set fire to it. And gold was gold in Rome or Peru or Breslau. A radio, on the other hand, a gas stove, central heating, an electric plate, all the great benefits of modern times – they're all so much useless ballast when the main breaks down. We're now on the road back to bygone centuries. Cave dwellers.

Friday, 7 p.m. Took one last ride in a tram, in the direction of the Rathaus. Rumbling and roaring, ceaseless thunder of guns. The conductress shouted plaintively against it. I scrutinized the faces of the people round me. Everything that no one expresses is written on them. We have become a nation of dumb people. Only in the familiar cellar do people still talk to one another. When shall I travel by tram again? Ever? The paper says that from tomorrow travel permits, Class I and II, with which they have been pestering us for the past few weeks, will be cancelled – and that only holders of the red card of Class III will be allowed to use public conveyances. In other words one in four hundred, perhaps – or no one, so that's the end.

A cold evening, taps dry. My potatoes are still simmering on the tiny flame. I rummaged about, putting peas, barley, flour and ersatz coffee into paper bags which I then packed into a card-board box. One more

piece of luggage to be taken down to the cellar. When I realised I had forgotten the salt I had to undo the whole thing. Without salt the body cannot exist, at least not for any length of time. And it looks as if we shall have to prepare ourselves for a long siege in the cellar.

Friday, 11 p.m. in the cellar by the light of a kerosene lamp, the ledger on my knees. – At about ten o'clock three or four bombs fell, one after the other. Instantly, the siren started howling. They say this now operates by hand. No light. Down-stairs in the dark, it has been like this since Tuesday. Groping and slipping. The wind blows through the broken windowpanes and rattles the blackout blinds which no one uses any more – there's no point.

Shuffling feet. Suitcases knocking against walls. Lutz Lehmann cries "Mummy!" The way leads across the street to a side entrance, then down some steps, along a corridor, across a courtyard with stars above and the hornet-like droning of planes. Some more steps down, thresholds, corridors. Finally, behind a heavy, rubber-rimmed iron door which can be locked by two levers, our cellar. Officially called Shelter, we call it by turns cave, underworld, catacomb of fear, mass grave.

The ceiling is supported by a forest of tree trunks which are only roughly barked. Even in this airless atmosphere they smell of resin. Old Schmidt, "curtain" Schmidt, babbles on every evening about statistical calculations, according to which the forest of beams will stand up even if the house collapses – provided the debris falls at certain angles and with a certain distribution of weight. The landlord, who should know about this, cannot enlighten us – because he has "demoted" himself to Bad Ems and is already American.

In any case the cellar tribe in this house is convinced that its cave is one of the safest. There's nothing stranger than a strange cellar. I have belonged to this one for more than three months and still feel a stranger in it. Each cellar has its own tabus, its own tics. In my old cellar they had the extinguishing-water tic; everywhere one bumped into buckets, pitchers, pots, and barrels filled with a muddy brew. It didn't prevent the house from burning like a torch. The whole extinguishing brew would have been as much use as spitting into the blaze.

Frau Weiers told me that in her cellar they have the lung tic. As soon as the first bomb falls they all bend forward and breathe very carefully, at the same time pressing their hands against their bellies. Someone had told them that this would prevent the tearing of the lungs Here they have the wall tic. Everyone sits with his back against the wall; the only place where the row is interrupted is under the air-hole. At the first bang the towel tic begins: everyone holds a towel, kept ready for this purpose, over mouth and nose and knots it at the back of the head. This tic I haven't seen in any other cellar. I haven't the remotest idea against what the towel is meant to protect them, but if it makes them feel better – !

Otherwise the usual cellar tribe on the usual cellar chairs among which, from the kitchen chairs to the brocade armchair, every style is represented. The people: middle- and lower-middle class mixed, with a sprinkling of the Proletariat. I gaze about me and make notes:

First the baker's wife, two fat little cheeks above her

fur collar. The chemist's widow who has completed her course in nursing and who occasionally tells two other women their fortunes from cards which she spreads out on two chairs. Frau Lehmann, her husband

missing on the Eastern Front, the pillow with the sleeping baby in her arms, on her lap four-year-old Lutz, whose long shoelaces are dangling down. The young man in grey trousers, and horn-rimmed spectacles who, on closer investigation, turns out to be a young girl. Three elderly sisters, seamstresses, who squat together like a black pudding. The refugee girl from Königsberg in her patched rags. The bombed-out Schmidt, curtain manufacturer without curtains, and in spite of his considerable age a non-stop talker. The bookseller couple who have spent some years in Paris and who occasionally talk French in undertones...

I've just been listening to a woman of forty from Adlershof who has taken shelter with her mother in this house, describing how she was bombed out. A phosphorus bomb had landed in her neighbour's garden, and her own house, the result of years of saving, had been transformed into kindling wood, their fattening sow flung up into the rafters. "It was no longer fit to be eaten." The neighbours, a married couple, had also departed this life. Among the wreckage and the earth in the garden their remains had been salvaged—what could be found of them here and there. It had been a beautiful funeral; a male choir of the Tailors' Guild had sung at the graveside. Towards the end, how-ever, there had been some confusion – the sirens had suddenly drowned the singing of the "*Lied von Gottes Rat*" The grave-diggers had to drop the coffin in a hurry; its contents could be heard rattling inside. And now came the point of the story, the woman already giggling in advance: "And – imagine! Three days later, while the daughter is rummaging about in the garden in the hope of coming upon something useful, she actually finds, behind the raintank, one of the arms of her papa!"

A few people laughed shortly; most of them didn't. Did the arm also have a funeral?

To continue about the cellar tribe. Opposite me, in blankets, an oldish man in a feverish sweat, a merchant. Beside him his wife from Hamburg and eighteen-year-old daughter, Stinchen. Then the recently evacuated blonde whom no one knows, hand in hand with her equally unknown lodger. The mousy ex-post-office official and wife, she invariably with an artificial leg in her arms, an elaborate contraption made of nickel, leather, and wood – an incomplete *Pietà*. Her one-legged son lies – or lay, one doesn't know – in a hospital in Breslau. In an armchair huddles, gnomelike, the hunchback chemist from the lemonade factory. Then there's the janitor's family consisting of two daughters and a fatherless grandson, child of the elder girl, And Erna and Henni, from the baker's shop, who lodge with the owner. Then Antoine, the black-haired Belgian, who impersonates the baker's apprentice and carries on with Henni. The housekeeper left behind by the landlord, an elderly woman who, defying all regulations of the air-raid shelter, holds in her arms a mangy fox terrier. I myself, pale and blonde and always in the same accidentally rescued winter coat – "released until further notice" by the Publishing house where I have been jack-of-all-trades since the calling up of almost all the other employees.

Here we sit, a motley crowd, the residue whom neither the Front nor the Volksturm can use. Absent: the master baker, who as the only one in this house to have received the red travel permit Class III, has taken the tram to his allotment to bury his silver. Absent: Fräulein Behn, post-office employee, unmarried and daring, who has just dashed upstairs to fetch the daily paper. Absent: a woman at present in Potsdam where she is burying seven members of her family who were killed in the last great air raid. Absent: the engineer from the second floor with wife and son. Last week he boarded a barge which is supposed to take him and his furniture via the

Central Canal to Braunschweig, whither his armament works have been transferred. All industry is moving toward the centre. The overcrowding there must create a great strain—provided the Amis haven't got there first. Midnight. Still no light. The kerosene lamp on the beam above me is smoking, the heavy droning outside increasing. The towel tic has gone into action, all noses and mouths are covered. A ghostly Turkish harem, a gallery of half-veiled death masks. Only the eyes are alive.

2 a.m., Saturday, April 21,

Bombs, the walls swayed. My fingers are still trembling round the fountain pen. I'm drenched, as though after heavy work. At one time I used to eat thick Sandwiches in the cellar. Ever since I myself was bombed out and during that night had to help rescue the buried, I've been attacked by the fear of death. The Symptoms are always the same. The palms of my hands begin to sweat. Then a circle of sweat round the scalp, a boring sensation in the spinal cord, a twitching pain in the neck, the roof of the mouth dries up, the heart beats in syncope, the eyes stare at the chair leg opposite, memorizing its carved knobs and curves. To be able to pray now. The brain gropes for fragments of sentences: "Let the world go by, it's nothing . . . And no one falls out of this world . . . *Noli timere* . . ." Until the wave subsides.

As though by command a feverish babbling broke out. Everyone began to laugh, to shout the others, to crack jokes. Fräulein Behn stepped forth and read the Goebbels speech in honour of the birthday of the Führer, a day most people seem to have forgotten. She read with a special emphasis, with a new, jeering, and malicious voice which until now hadn't been heard down here. "Golden wheat on the fields . . . People living in peace . . ." Imagine! says the Berliner. And: "Sure would be nice." Music out of the past which no longer reaches the ear.

3 a.m. The cellar is dozing. There have been several All Clears, but immediately afterwards new Alarms; no bombs. I'm writing; it does one good, diverts. And I want Gerd to read it, in case he returns – in case he's still – no, crossed out, one mustn't think of such things.

The young girl who looks like a young man has sidled up to me and asks what I'm writing. I: "Diary." She glances inquisitively over my shoulder, is disappointed at seeing nothing but shorthand. I: "It's of no value—just some private scribbling to give myself something to do."

After the first wave had passed Siegismund turned up, an old gentleman from the neighbourhood whom they eased out of his own cellar probably because he will keep talking about the approaching "Sieg," which led to our giving him that nickname. Siegismund actually believes that our salvation is at hand, victory certain, and that "that one" (most recent name for A.H.) knows exactly what he's doing. The chair community look at one another significantly and in silence. No one wants to start an argument with Siegismund. Who wants to argue with a madman? Besides, madmen are sometimes dangerous. Only the janitor's wife agrees passionately and through her two tusks announces that one can rely upon "that one" as upon the Lord.

9 a.m. Back in the garret. Grey morning, drizzling rain. I'm writing at the windowsill which is my desk. Shortly after three o'clock came the final All Clear. I came upstairs, took off my dress and shoes and fell into bed, which is always ready to be slept in. Five hours of deep sleep. The gas has gone off.

I've just been counting my ready cash – 452 Marks; don't know what to do with so much, since the few purchases still possible can be bought with pennies. In addition there's my account at the bank, approximately a thousand Marks, untouched because there has been nothing to spend them on. (When starting this account during the first year of the war, I was still planning for peace and a trip round the world. This seems very long ago.) Nowadays some people rush to the bank, to those that are still functioning, and draw out their money. What for? When we go down, money will also go down the drain. Money, after all, paper money, has only a fictitious value and once the Central Government collapses, is just so much paper. I leaf through the roll of notes without any emotion whatever. Seems to me that at best this stuff could serve as a Souvenir. As little pictures of bygone days. I assume the conquerors will bring along their own money, or they will print some military money – that is, if they let us get that far and we aren't condemned to work for a bowl of soup.

Noon. Endless rain. Went on foot to the Park Strasse and got myself another roll of notes to add to my pile of "little pictures." The clerk paid me my last month's salary and gave me a "vacation." The whole publishing firm is dissolved. The Labour Exchange has also given up completely; no one is interested any longer in available labour. In this respect we are now all our own masters.

Bureaucracy seems to flourish only in good weather. In any case, all public Offices close down as soon as it rains shells. (Right now, by the way, it's very calm – a sinister calm.) We are no longer governed. And yet some kind of order always asserts itself, everywhere, in every cellar. When I was bombed out I noticed how even those who had been buried alive, the wounded, the scared, left the place of action in good order. This cellar is also ruled by some spirit of order and organization, which must be deeply rooted in human nature. Even in the Stone Age humanity must have functioned on these lines. Instinct of the herd and preservation of the species. In the animal world it's the bull or the stallion which is supposed to be the leader. In this cellar it would be more correct to talk of the leading mares. Fräulein Behn is one of them; also the very calm woman from Hamburg. I am not. Nor was I in my previous cellar where, as a matter of fact, the field was dominated by a continually bellowing leading bull, an ex-Major against whom neither man nor woman stood a chance. I always disliked this compulsory sitting together in a cellar. I always kept to myself and looked for a corner to be alone in. But when the leading animal calls I am quite willing to follow.

On my way back from the Park Strasse I kept pace for a time with the tram; I couldn't board it as I don't have the Class III permit. The tram was almost empty, I counted eight passengers in it. Dozens of people walked past it in pouring rain; the tram could have taken them all, since it had to go anyway. But no – the principle of order has to be adhered to. It's deep inside us. We obey.

I bought some rolls at the baker's. The shelves are still well stocked. So far no signs of hysterical buying. Afterwards I went to the Food Office. Today my letter came up for the stamping of the potato coupons, numbers 75 to 77. Although only two women were serving, instead of the usual crowd, it went surprisingly fast. They hardly looked at the coupons, just stamped them automatically, like machines. What is all this

stamping really for? No one knows, yet everyone trundles there, convinced it must have some deeper meaning. According to an announcement, the letters X to Z are due to come up on April 28.

Carts came rolling through the rain in the direction of the city, covered by sodden tarpaulins, under them soldiers. Filthy, grey-bearded faces, typical "front" types, all of them old. All the carts drawn by small Polish horses, black and shiny with rain. Their loads: hay. It no longer looks like a motorized *Blitzkrieg*.

On my way home I sneaked into Professor K's deserted garden behind the black ruin of his house and picked some crocuses and lilac. I took some of them to Frau Golz, a neighbour in my previous house. We sat opposite one another over her coffee table and chatted – or rather, we bellowed against the newly started barrage. Frau Golz, with breaking voice: "The flowers the beautiful flowers . . . And the tears pour down her face. I too feel miserable. Beauty hurts, nowadays. One is so full of death.

This morning I tried to remember how many dead people I have seen in my life. The first was Herr Schermann. I was five at the time, he seventy—silver-white hair on white silk candles at his head, dignified and raised. So death was solemn and beautiful. Until 1928 when Hilde and Käte P. showed me their brother Hans who had died the previous day. He was lying on their sofa like a bundle of rags, his jaws hold together with a blue handkerchief, the knees bent – a mess, nothingness. Later on dead relatives, blue fingernails among flowers and rosaries. Then in Paris the man who had been run over, smashed to a bloody pulp. And die frozen man on the river Moskwa. And lastly Father – angry, hard.

Yes, I have seen dead people, but not dying itself. No doubt this experience too will soon come my way. But I doubt that it will get me, I've so often given death the slip, and feel I'm to be spared. Probably most people have this feeling. How could they be so cheerful otherwise, surrounded as they are by so much death? There's no doubt that the threat to life enhances the will to live, I myself am burning with a more intense and larger flame than before the war of bombs. Each new day of life is a day of triumph. It's a challenge. One raises oneself, so to speak, higher and stands firmer on the ground. That day when we were shaken for the first time by bombs, I wrote in pencil on the walls of my room a Latin couplet which I still happen to remember:

Si fractus illabatur orbis,

Impavidum ferient ruinae.

At that time one could still write to people abroad. I quoted the above lines in a letter to my friends D. in Stockholm, telling them about the intensity of our threatened existence, possibly in order to bolster my own courage. In doing so I also felt a slight pity for them, as though I, now grown up and feeling admitted to the centre of life, were corresponding with innocent children who had to be spared the naked truth.

I a.m., Sunday, April 22, 1945

I lay on my bed dozing, the wind blowing through the broken windowpanes, my feet on a brick which had taken hours to warm on the tiny flame. At about 8 p.m. Frau Lehmann knocked on my door: "Come down quick! There won't be any Alarm, the sirens aren't working. The others are in the cellar." Nearly broke my neck going downstairs, my heel got caught in a stair-rod. I was just able to catch hold of the banister in time. Went on with wobbly knees. I could feel my heart beating as I groped in utter darkness along the corridor before I at last found the levers of the cellar door.

Inside, the picture had changed. Everyone who could had made a bed for himself. Pillows, eiderdowns, deckchairs everywhere. I fought my way with difficulty to my chair. The radio was dead, no longer any time-signals from the airport. The kerosene lamp flickered weakly. Several bombs fell, then it was quiet.

Siegismund appears, still holding up the flag. Curtain Schmidt mumbles something about Bernau and Zossen, where the Russians are supposed to be. Siegismund, however, announces the imminent turning point. We sit huddled together; the hours creep slowly by; artillery pounds, sometimes from a distance, sometimes near. "Don't go back to your fourth floor," the chemist's widow advises me, and offers me a bed for the night on the first floor. We climb up by the back staircase (formerly "for servants and tradesmen"). The stairs form a narrow spiral. Glass splinters grate under my feet; the wind whistles through the dormer Windows. I lie down on a couch in a little room next to the kitchen and snatch a couple of hours' sleep under a blanket with a peculiar smell. Towards midnight bombs begin to fall nearby and once more we dash down to the cellar. Wretched long night hours; I'm too tired to go on writing down here. . . . Next morning, about 10 a. m., in the garret. We stayed in the cellar until about 4. I came up here, warmed up a turnip soup on the feeble gas, peeled some potatoes, boiled my last egg – i.e., I ate it more or less liquid, then squirted the remains of the eau de cologne on my body. Funny how many things one does nowadays for the last time. For the last time until further notice, for an indefinite time. Where would I get another egg, some more perfume? As a result I enjoy these pleasures very consciously and piously. Afterwards I crept fully dressed into bed, slept in bouts with fitful dreams. Now I must go shopping. . . .

Back under the roof, 2 p.m. There was splattering rain outside and no more papers to be had. People nevertheless flocked punctually to the distribution of rations which had been announced on some special poster. We now have a kind of oral news Service; everything travels by word of mouth. We are to receive advance rations, as they are called officially – meat, sausage, cereals, sugar, canned fruit, and ersatz coffee. I fell in at the end of one queue, stood for two hours in the rain, and finally received 250 grams of oats, 250 grams of oats, 2 pounds of sugar, 100 grams of ersatz coffee, and one can of kohlrabi. I'm still owed meat, sausage, and coffee beans. There's a crowd Standing at the butcher's on the corner, endless queues, four abreast on both sides, in pouring rain. My queue is bristling with rumours: Köpenick is supposed to have surrendered; Wünsdorf occupied; the enemy at the Teltow Canal. Incidentally, as though by arrangement, not a single woman talked about "it."

After such queue conversations, during which one automatically lowers oneself to the general level of form and content and wallows in mass emotions, I always feel a bit sticky and uncomfortable. And yet I have no wish to put up any barriers against it, want to join the mass experience, want to share, to participate in it. Conflict between the haughty detachment in which my private life normally is passed and the urge to be like the others, to belong to the people, to experience history.

What else can I do? I'll have to wait. Flak and artillery rule our days. I sometimes wish everything were over. These are strange times. One experiences history in the making, things, which one day will fill the history books. But while living through it, everything dissolves into petty worries and fears. History is very tiresome.

Tomorrow I'm going to look for nettles and try to find some coal. All that separates any of us from starvation is our recent store of provisions. They worry me much as money worries the rich man; they could be bombed out, stolen, eaten by mice, plundered by the enemy. Finally I stow them away in another cardboard box for the cellar. Even so, it's easy for me to carry all my possessions up and downstairs.

Late in the evening, nightfall. I paid another visit to Frau Golz. Her husband sat with her in overcoat and scarf, as it was cold and windy in the room. Both were silent and despondent. They no longer understand the world. We hardly talked. Outside a continuous kind of tinny crackling, interspersed by the rico-cheting of the flak, sounding as though someone were beating a gigantic carpet between heaven and earth. The echo of the shooting was trapped in the courtyards. For the first time I grasp the meaning of the phrase "thunder of guns" – which until now I'd always associated with bombastic terms like "the courage of a lion" and "the breast of a hero." Actually, the phrase is most appropriate.

Outside, showers and storm. Standing in the door of the house I watched a troop of soldiers march by, dragging their feet. Some of them were limping. Stubble-faced, sunken-eyed, weighed down by their packs, they trudged silently, out of Step, towards the city.

"What's going on?" I called to them. "Where are you off to?" No one answered. One man mumbled something incomprehensible, another said aloud to himself: "Führer, command – we'll follow you to the death!"

All these creatures are so wretched, they are no longer men. One neither hopes nor expects anything from them any more – one feels only pity for them. They already give the impression of being defeated and taken prisoner. They looked past us with expressionless faces. Evidently we – we the people, the civilians, Berliners or whatever we are – have no interest for them what-so-ever. Nor do I believe that they feel any shame about being down-at-heel. They are much too exhausted. Fed up. I didn't want to look at them any more.

On the walls were some smudged letters in chalk apparently meant to direct the troops to some place of assembly. To a maple tree opposite two posters were nailed with drawing pins – sheets of cardboard neatly written on with blue and red pencil and "signed" by Hitler and Goebbels. One poster warned against surrender, threatening offenders with death by hanging or shooting. The other poster, entitled: "Summons to the Berlin Population," warned against unruly foreigners and commanded every man to fight. The posters

attracted no attention whatever. The handwriting looked so pathetic and unserious, so whispered. Yes, technology has spoiled us. What is not served to us by the rotary machine seems to us miserable and primitive. Something written by hand or shouted by a single mouth – what importance can that have? Technology has multiplied the effect of writing and speech a thousandfold – and in doing so has devalued writing and speech themselves. Once upon a time revolutions were started by single shouts and hand-painted posters. For us nowadays it must be laid on thicker, must draw wider circles, must be multiplied through machines, in order to take effect. A woman who was studying the posters expressed this in one sentence: "That goes to show how low they've sunk!"

10 p.m. in the cellar. After my evening soup I went to bed for a while, then trudged downstairs. The cellar tribe was already assembled. Not much firing today and, although it's the time for them, no air raids. A nervous gaiety breaks out. All kinds of stories are making the rounds. Frau W. screeches: "Rather a Russki on the belly than an Ami on the head!" – a joke not quite fitting her morning crêpe. Fräulein Behn shouts through the cellar: "Now let's be frank – I'll bet there's not a virgin among us!" No one answers, I find myself wondering. . . . Probably the janitor's younger daughter, who is only sixteen and who, ever since her sister's *faux-pas*, has been strictly watched. And certainly, if I know anything about the faces of young girls, the eighteen-year-old Stinchen, who is sleeping, peacefully in the corner. More doubtful seems to be the case of the young girl who looks like a young man. But she looks to me like a special case.

There's a newcomer in the cellar, a woman who until recently went to the public bunker six blocks away which is considered very safe. She lives alone in her apartment; whether she is widowed, deserted, or divorced I don't know yet. On her left cheek she has a suppurating eczema. She announces first in a whisper and then aloud that she has tied her wedding ring to the elastic of her panties. "Once they've got that far I shan't mind any more about the ring!" General laughter. As a matter of fact a suppurating eczema on the cheek might be helpful in such situations. Worth having these days.

9 a.m., Monday, April 23

Amazingly calm night, hardly any flak. A new cellar inmate, husband of the bombed-out woman from Adlershof who took refuge here with her mother. The husband arrived rather mysteriously and in uniform; an hour later he was in mufti. Why? No one mentions it; no one pays much attention to him. Hardboiled soldier from the front, gives the impression of being still rather fit. He is welcome.

Desertion suddenly seems quite natural, in fact almost creditable. Makes me think of the three hundred Spartans of Leonidas who at Thermopylæ held out and perished as they were bidden. That's what we were taught in school; we were encouraged to admire this spirit. Maybe here and there three hundred German soldiers would behave in the same way; three million would not. The greater the crowd the less chance for schoolbook heroism. By nature we women haven't much appreciation of it, either. We're sensible,

practical, opportunistic. We prefer men alive. (And yet I wrote the above in my private shorthand, comprehensible to myself alone. We still bow to the laws and threats of our time, although by now the arms of our government cannot reach very far.)

Towards midnight I almost slipped off my chair from exhaustion (where could I get something to lie down on?), and then stumbled up the glass-strewn staircase to the first floor. There I slept on the chemist's widow's couch until around six o'clock. To my surprise I learned that a number of bombs had fallen in the meantime. I'd slept through them. At the baker's we managed to get some rolls; the last ones. I also used my last bread coupons. No sign of new ration cards. All in all, no more orders, no more news – nothing. No one gives a damn for us. All of a sudden we're individuals, no longer a community of people. All old ties between friends and colleagues are gone, so long as we are separated by a distance of than three houses. The cave tribe, the family, as in prehistoric times. Our horizon is no more than a hundred yards away. At the bakers a rumour that the Russians have now reached Weissensee and Rangsdorf. I have often bathed at the Rangsdorfer beach. I say to myself aloud: "Russians in Rangsdorf." The words don't quite fit. Today in the east a flaming red sky, endless fires.

1 p.m., just back from a coal search. Walking south one is aware of approaching the front. The city railroad tunnel is already blocked. People Standing in front of it said that at the other end a soldier in underpants is hanging, a sign saying "Traitor" dangling from his neck. They said he is hanging so low that one can twist his legs. This was reported by someone who saw it himself and had chased away some boys who were amusing themselves twisting the dead man's legs. The Berliner Strasse looks fantastic, half torn up and blocked by barricades. Queues in front of the shops, flak roaring overhead. Lorries moving citywards. Filthy mud-covered figures with vacant faces covered in blood-smeared bandages trudging along between them. In the rear hay carts driven by grey-heads. The barricades guarded by Volksturm men in patched uniforms. Soft-faced children under huge steel helmets, horrifying to hear their high voices. So tiny and thin in their far-too-loose uniforms, they can't be more than fifteen.

Why is one so outraged by this abuse of children? If they were three or four years older one would take their being shot or torn to pieces for granted. Where is the dividing line? When the voice breaks? For what tortures me most in my memory are the bright, high voices of these babies. Until now soldiers and men were identical. And a man is a procreator. The fact that these boys have to be wasted before they have matured must violate a law of nature, must outrage the instinct for the preservation of the species. Like certain fish or insects which devour their progeny. This mustn't be. That it is so, is a symptom of madness. In the Publishing house, now utterly deserted, the cellars were still full of coal. The woman billeted in the basement showered me with questions as to what was going to happen now. It seems that her eldest daughter, mother of an eight-weeks-old child, has had no milk since yesterday; suddenly she herself has gone dry and the baby is howling. Now, since there's no longer any cow's milk, everyone is worried as to how the children are going to survive. I suggested that the young mother should try some wild herbs and field plants, which might bring her milk back again. Together

we bent over the rain-soaked grass in the garden, filling our handkerchiefs with nettles and as many dandelion leaves as we could find . . . The smell of herbs, of moist earth, of cowslips, hawthorn blossom, spring. But the flak is roaring.

I filled my rucksack with coal, dragged away more than a hundredweight. Despite my burden I overtook a troop of soldiers on my way back. For the first time in all these days I saw weapons – two bazookas, a machine-gun, cases of ammunition. Young men wore their ammunition belts like savages their war regalia.

At about noon there was a funeral in our street. I was told that the chemist's widow was present. A seventeen-year-old girl, her leg torn off by shrapnel, had bled to death. The parents buried her in their garden behind some red currant bushes. For a coffin they used their broom cupboard.

We now have the freedom to bury our dead where we like, as in prehistoric times. This reminds me of the day when, some time ago, a great Dane died in my old building and was finally buried in the garden. But the fuss that was made before this could be done! The landlord, the tenants – everyone fought against it. And now that it's a question of human beings, no one gives it a thought. I even suspect that the parents are comforted by the daughter's proximity. And I find myself unconsciously dividing the little garden between our houses into graves.

4 p.m. in the garret. Just had an extraordinary experience. While paying a visit to Frau Golz I started for fun testing her telephone. To my amazement I heard some sounds – which has not happened for days. I then dialled Gisela's number, and actually got on to her although she lives a good hour from here, in the west of Berlin. An avalanche of words; we could hardly stop talking. Gisela's firm has closed down, her boss having slipped off in the direction of Western Germany. After delivering a stirring farewell speech, he had left his employees to fend for themselves. We are all forgotten and deserted, strain our ears for some sound from the void, and are alone.

Over the phone Gisela told me she is almost to a day the age her father was when he fell at Verdun during the First World War. She had never set eyes on her father. Said she'd found herself thinking a great deal of him lately, having long conversations with him in her mind – as though it were now her turn and she would soon be meeting him. Never before have we talked so openly to one another; hitherto we'd have been far too embarrassed to reveal our hearts like this. Now one's innermost thoughts rise to the surface. Good-bye, Gisela – we've both managed to live for thirty years; maybe one day we'll meet again in good health.

8 p.m. Monday. Back in the cellar. Today, toward evening, our corner suffered its first artillery attack. Hissing, whizzing, a howling sound: whooooo-eeeeee. Flashes of fire. Terrified screams in the courtyard. Stumbling downstairs, I learned in the cellar that the shells had landed in front of the cinema. It looks, by the way, as though the Russians are firing only guns of small calibre. We're gradually beginning to doubt the rumour of the last much-feared American "carpet."* By this time it would hit the Russians as well.

Now there's a new rumour circulating in our cellar: the wife of the liqueur distiller Claims to have it from a completely reliable and secret source. With heaving bosom she announces that Ami and Tommy have fallen

out with Ivan and are now trying to ally themselves with us so as to keep him out of the country. Loud jeers, discussions. The distiller's wife is offended and in her annoyance falls back

* Mass attack

into her native Saxon dialect. Only yesterday she left her (rather small) distillery behind the Moritz Platz where she had been spending the nights with her husband. Now she has returned to her flat and our cellar in order to hold her fort. Her husband has stayed behind with the bottles and barrels and, as everyone in the cellar knows, his red-headed Elvira.

Shortly before the stores closed I went shopping, acquired 150 grams of semolina. Suddenly there was shouting at the corner and people began running: at Bolle's they were unloading a lorry, barrels of butter were being carried into the house – rancid stuff to be distributed immediately, one pound per person and, what is disquieting, free! Cards are simply to be stamped. Is this the first sign of panic, or unheard-of common sense? In no time there was a crowd in front of the store, people beating one another with fists and umbrellas. I joined the crowd for a few minutes and on this occasion overheard some talk about reserves, reinforcements, and German tanks on their way from somewhere. A woman claimed to have heard this last night over her "detector." I then decided to let butter be butter. I have no desire to fight over it, at least not today. No doubt I'll soon have to learn. A quiet night. Distant rumbling. The cellar tribe today is quite exhausted. There's no longer any noise; no one speaks. Only snores and the breathing of children.

Noon, Tuesday, April 24

No news; we are cut off. There's a little gas, but the taps are dry. From my window I see crowds in front of the shops. They're still fighting over the rancid butter, although by now there's only a quarter-pound per person. Four M.P.s are trying to restrain the crowd. It's raining.

At the moment I'm sitting at the window on the first floor. Just now the chemist's widow rushed in all excited. A direct hit on the meat queue at Hefter's. Three dead, ten wounded – but the queue had already formed up again. The widow imitates the people wiping the blood from their meat coupons with their sleeves. Then she adds: "Well, only three dead. What's that compared to the raids?" Yes, we're spoiled.

All the same, I'm surprised. With a few beefsteaks and loins of pork in sight, even the shakiest old grandma will hold her ground. There they stand like walls, those who not so long ago dashed into bunkers the moment three fighter planes were announced over Central Germany. Nowadays this kind of woman puts a bucket or steel helmet on her head, if that. Whole families take turns standing in line, each member doing a shift of several hours. I still can't make up my mind to join the meat queue, it's too long for me. In any case meat – it has to be eaten right away – can be enjoyed only once. Strikes me that all these people dream of having one last good meal – a condemned man's breakfast.

2 p.m. Just now there was a ray of sun. Without thinking, I went the balcony and basked for a while on a wicker chair until a formation of bombers roared over me. The explosions merged into one another. I had quite forgotten about the war. Altogether my head is strangely empty – just now, while writing this, I jumped, there was a crash nearby, a windowpane clattered down. Once more I'm plagued by hunger, in spite of a full stomach, I long to chew on something. I wonder what the milkless infant is living on now. Yesterday an old woman in the queue, when talking of child-mortality, recommended well-chewed, saliva-softened bread for babies without milk. What a miserable little thing a city infant is when the complicated system of milk distribution breaks down. Even if mothers still have half enough to eat and can feed their babies, the moment they are faced with what is inevitably in store for us all, their milk will promptly dry up. Fortunately the youngest baby in our house is already eighteen months old. Yesterday I noticed someone secretly handing the mother a few cakes for the child. But that was probably the only instance during the last days of someone handing anything on. As a rule everyone hides or buries all he has and never dreams of parting with so much as a crumb.

9 p.m. Back in the cellar. Toward evening a woman unknown to me arrived and asked the widow and me to come and help in the hospital.

The horizon is smoking and red. The east is on fire. They say the Russians have already reached the Braunauer Strasse. Braunau of all places – where Adolf first saw the light! Which reminds me of a cellar joke I heard yesterday: "Boy, if only that had been a miscarriage!"

In the hospital we were shown into a ward filled with cigarette smoke; wild confusion of men, shouts and squabbles. "I have a case with a bullet in the lung out there!" – "Get out of here! Can't you see we haven't a free bed?" – The ambulance driver rages: "They sent me here!" – "Get out of here or – " The sergeant-major threatens him with his fists. The driver goes off, cursing.

Light cases were creeping down the corridor, one with bare feet, a bleeding hand wrapped in his socks; another, also barefoot leaving behind him traces of blood, the soles of his feet making a squelching sound as he lifted them from the floor. Waxlike faces wreathed in blood-stained bandages. We passed through two more wards, everywhere an atmosphere of men, stale air and nervousness. "What are you doing here?" someone snarled at us.

The woman who had fetched us answered timidly that she had been told women were needed to help in the hospital.

"Nonsense! There's nothing for you to do here. Go home."

Strange the contemptuous tone with which female assistance is refused here – as though we were trying to butt in and compete with men. In this respect too I must try to rid myself of some old-fashioned ideas. In former wars the woman's role consisted of playing the angel, making bandages at home, laying a cool hand on a man's feverish forehead, always at a safe distance from the line of fire. Nowadays there are no longer any safe hospitals behind the front. The front is everywhere. As a matter of fact this hospital tries to remain a kind of island amidst the great confusion: enormous red crosses are painted on the roof, and on the lawn in front of the house sheets are laid out in the form of crosses. But blockbusters show no preference and there

are no holes of mercy in a “carpet”. And of this they are well aware; otherwise the cellars wouldn’t be so jammed. Everywhere there are men’s faces peering out from behind the barred basement windows

10 p.m., in the cellar. Feverish atmosphere here today. The tribe is excited and nervous. The woman from Hamburg reports that she managed to put through a phone call to friends in the Müller Strasse, in northern Berlin. “We’re already Russian,” her friend had shouted into the phone. “At this very moment the tanks are rolling in. The Ivans are laughing. The people are massing on the pavement, laughing and waving, holding up their children” “This may be true. That’s the district of Wedding, old Communist neighbourhood. At this news a violent discussion breaks out. Maybe propaganda, say some of the tribe, has just made us stupid. Maybe “they” aren’t quite what we’ve been led to believe. . . . But at that moment the refugee girl from East Prussia, who as a rule never opens her mouth, shouts a few short sentences in her dialect, can’t find the right words, gesticulates with her arms, and finally bursts out: “You wait, you’ll see for yourselves!” – and says no more. Whereupon the whole cellar falls silent.

The distiller’s wife has produced a new rumour: Ribbentrop and von Papen are said to have flown to Washington for a heart-to-heart talk with the Americans. – No reaction.

The cellar is gloomy. The kerosene lamp flickers. The tribe has a new member: The bookseller couple have brought down their canary. Outside, the firing continues; inside, it’s quiet. Everyone is asleep or dozing.

Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin*

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