

None of Us Will Return

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## STREET FOR ARRIVALS, STREET FOR DEPARTURES

There are people arriving. They scan the crowd of those who wait seeking those who wait for them. They kiss them and they say that they are tired from the journey.

There are people leaving. They say good-by to those who are not leaving and they kiss the children.

There is a street for people arriving and a street for people leaving.

There is a café called "Arrivals" and a café called "Departures."

There are people arriving and there are people leaving.

But there is a station where those arriving are the same as those leaving

a station at which those arriving have never arrived, to which those leaving have never returned  
it is the biggest station in the world.

This is the station at which they arrive, wherever they come from.

They arrive here after days and nights  
after crossing whole countries  
they arrive here with children, even babies, who were not supposed to have been taken

They have brought their children because you do not part with children for this journey.

Those who had gold brought it along because they thought that gold might be useful.

Everyone brought his dearest possession because you must not leave what is dear to you when you go far away.

Everyone has brought his life along, above all it was his life that he had to bring along.

And when they arrive  
they think they have arrived  
in Hell

possibly. Still they did not believe it.

They did not know that you could take a train to Hell  
but since they are here, they steel themselves and feel ready  
to face it

with women, children, aged parents  
with family keepsakes and family documents.

They do not know that you do not arrive at that station.  
They expect the worst—they do not expect the unthinkable.

And when the soldiers shout to them to line up by fives,  
men on one side, women and children on the other, in a  
language they do not understand, they understand the blows  
of the truncheons and line up by fives since they are ready  
for anything.

Mothers clutch their children—they shudder at the thought  
that the children might be taken away from them—because  
the children are hungry and thirsty and crumpled from not  
having slept across so many lands. At long last they are  
arriving, they will be able to take care of them.

And when the soldiers shout to them to leave bundles and  
blankets and keepsakes on the platform they leave them be-  
cause they ought to be ready for anything and do not wish  
to be surprised at anything. They say "We'll see"; they have  
already seen so much and they are tired from the journey.

The station is not a station. It is the end of a line. They  
look and they are stricken by the desolation about them.

In the morning, fog hides the marshes.

In the evening, spotlights illuminate the white barbed-wire  
fences with the sharpness of stellar photography. They be-

lieve that this is where they are being taken, and they  
are terrified.

At night, they wait for daylight with the children weighing  
down their mothers' arms. Wait and wonder.

In the daytime they do not wait. The lines start moving  
right away. Women and children first, they are the most  
weary. The men next. They are also weary but relieved that  
wives and children are being taken care of first.

For the women and children always go first.

In the winter they are gripped by the cold. Especially  
those who come from Crete. Snow is new to them.

In the summer the sun blinds them as they step down from  
the dark boxcars that were sealed shut at the start of the  
journey.

At the start of the journey from France from the Ukraine  
from Albania from Belgium from Slovakia from Italy from  
Hungary from the Peloponnesus from Holland from Mace-  
donia from Austria from Herzegovina from the shores of the  
Black Sea from the shores of the Baltic from the shores of  
the Mediterranean and from the banks of the Vistula.

They would like to know where they are. They do not  
know that this is the center of Europe. They look for the  
name of the station. It is a station without a name.

A station which for them will never have a name.

There are some who are traveling for the first time in  
their lives.

There are some who have traveled to every part of the  
globe, businessmen. All landscapes were familiar to them but  
they do not recognize this one.

They look. Later on they will be able to tell how it was.

Everyone wants to recall what his impression was and how  
he had the feeling that he would never return.

It is a feeling one might have had already in one's life.  
They know feelings should not be trusted.

There are those who come from Warsaw with big shawls  
and knotted bundles

those who come from Zagreb, women with kerchiefs on  
their heads

those who come from the Danube with garments knitted  
by the hearth in multicolored yarns

those who come from Greece, bringing black olives and  
Turkish Delight

those who come from Monte Carlo

they were in the casino

they are in white tie with shirt fronts that the journey has  
completely ruined

pot-bellied and bald

they are bankers who played at banking

newlyweds who were leaving the synagogue with the bride  
dressed in white, wearing a veil, all wrinkled from lying on  
the floor of the boxcar

the bridegroom dressed in black and top hat with soiled  
gloves

the relatives and guests, women with beaded bags

who all regret that they were not able to stop off at their  
homes and change into something less fragile.

The rabbi holds his head up high and walks first. He has  
always set an example for the others.

There are little girls from boarding school with their iden-  
tical pleated skirts and their hats with blue streamers. They  
pull up their stockings carefully as they alight. They walk  
demurely five by five as though on a Thursday outing,  
holding one another by the hand and not knowing. What can

they do to little girls from boarding school who are with  
their teacher. The teacher tells them: "Be good, children."  
They have no wish not to be good.

There are old people who have had news from their  
children in America. Their knowledge of foreign lands came  
from postcards. Nothing looked like what they see here. Their  
children will never believe it.

There are intellectuals. Doctors or architects, composers  
or poets, recognizable by their walk, by their glasses. They  
too have seen a great deal in their lifetimes. They have studied  
a lot. Some have even imagined a great deal in order to  
write books and nothing they have ever imagined resembles  
what they see here.

There are all the furriers of the big cities and all the  
gentlemen's and ladies' tailors all the clothiers who had emi-  
grated to the West and who do not recognize in this place  
the land of their forebears.

There are the inexhaustible multitudes of the cities where  
each man occupies his own pigeonhole and now in this place  
they form endless lines and you wonder how all that could  
fit into the stacked pigeonholes of the cities.

There is a mother who slaps her five-year-old because he  
does not want to give her his hand and because she wants  
him to keep still at her side. You run the risk of getting lost  
you must not become separated in a strange place in such a  
crowd. She slaps her child and we who know do not forgive  
her for it. Besides it would make no difference if she were  
to smother him with kisses.

There are those who journeyed eighteen days who went  
mad and killed one another in the boxcars and

those who had been suffocated during the journey because  
they had been packed in so tightly  
of course they do not get off.

There is a little girl who hugs her doll to her heart, you can smother dolls too.

There are two sisters in white coats who went out for a walk and did not return for dinner. Their parents are still worrying.

In ranks of five they move along the street for arrivals. They do not know it is the street for departures. You only pass this way once.

They move in strict order—so that you cannot fault them for anything.

They come to a building and they sigh. At last they have arrived.

And when the soldiers shout to the women to strip they undress the children first taking care not to wake them up completely. After days and nights of travel they are fretful and cross

and they begin to get undressed in front of their children, it can't be helped

and when the soldiers hand each one of them a towel they worry if the water in the shower will be warm because the children might catch cold

and when the men come in to the shower room through another door naked too the women hide their children against their bodies.

And then perhaps they understand.

And it is useless for them to understand now since they cannot tell those who are waiting on the platform

cannot tell those who are riding in the dark boxcars across all the countries on the way here

cannot tell those who are in detention camps and are apprehensive about their departure because they fear the climate

or the work and because they are afraid of leaving their belongings

cannot tell those who are in hiding in the mountains and in the woods and who no longer have the patience to stay in hiding. Come what may they will return to their homes. Why would they be taken away from their homes they have never done any harm to anyone

cannot tell those who did not want to go into hiding because you cannot go and leave everything

cannot tell those who thought they had put their children in a safe place in a Catholic boarding school where the sisters are so kind.

A band will be dressed in the little girls' pleated skirts. The commandant wants Viennese waltzes on Sunday mornings.

A blockhova,\* to give her window a homey touch, will make curtains out of the holy cloth the rabbi wore so that he would be ready to perform services no matter what happened wherever he might be.

A kapo† will dress up in the morning coat and top hat and her girlfriend in the veil and they will play bride and groom at night when the others have collapsed in their bunks from exhaustion. The kapos can have a good time they are not tired in the evening.

Black olives and Turkish Delight will be distributed to the German women prisoners who are sick but they do not like Calamata olives nor olives in general.

And all day and all night  
every day and every night the chimneys smoke with this

\*A prisoner who is the head of a block.—*Trans.*

†A prisoner who is the foreman of labor detail, responsible to the detail leader.—*Trans.*

fuel from all the countries of Europe

men assigned to the chimneys spend their days sifting the ashes to recover melted gold from gold teeth. They all have gold in their mouths these Jews and they are so many that it makes tons.

And in the spring men and women spread the ashes on the marshes drained and plowed for the first time and fertilize the soil with human phosphate.

They have bags tied to their bellies and they stick their hands into the human bone meal which they scatter by the handful over the furrows with the wind blowing the dust back into their faces and in the evening they are all white with lines traced by the sweat that has trickled down over the dust.

And no fear of running short train after train arrives they arrive every day every night every hour of every day and every hour of every night.

It is the biggest railway station in the world for arrivals and departures.

It is only those who go into the camp who find out what has happened to the others and who weep at having left them at the station because that day the officer ordered the younger people to form a separate line

there has to be someone to drain the marshes and to scatter the ashes of the others

and they say to themselves that it would have been better never to have entered and never to have found out.

You who have wept for two thousand years  
for one who suffered three days and three nights

what tears will you have  
for those who suffered  
many more than three hundred nights and many more than  
three hundred days  
how much  
will you weep  
for those who suffered so many agonies  
and they were countless

They did not believe in resurrection to eternal life  
And they knew that you would not weep.

O you who know  
did you know that hunger makes the eyes sparkle  
that thirst dims them

O you who know  
did you know that one can see one's mother dead  
and not cry

O you who know  
did you know that in the morning one wants to die  
that in the evening one is afraid

O you who know  
did you know that one day is more than a year  
one minute more than a lifetime

O you who know  
did you know that legs are more vulnerable than eyes  
nerves harder than bones  
the heart firmer than steel

Did you know that the stones of the road do not weep  
that there is only one word for terror  
only one word for anguish

Did you know that suffering has no limit  
horror no boundary  
Did you know it  
You who know.

My mother  
she was hands  
she was a face  
They set our mothers before us naked

Here mothers are no longer mothers to their children.



All were marked on the arm with an indelible number  
All were to die naked

Tattooing identified the dead men and women.

It was a desolate plain  
at the edge of a town

The plain was icy  
and the town  
had no name.

DIALOGUE "You are French?"

"Yes."

"So am I."

She has no F on her chest. A star.

"Where are you from?"

"Paris."

"Have you been here long?"

"Five weeks."

"I've been here sixteen days."

"That's already a long time, I know."

"Five weeks. . . . How is it possible?"

"You see . . ."

"And you think we can last it out."

She begs.

"We must try."

"You, you can hope but we . . ."

She points to my striped jacket and she points to her coat, much too big, much too dirty, much too tattered.

"Oh, our chances are the same, you know."

"There's no hope for us."

And her hand makes a gesture and the gesture evokes rising smoke.

"We must fight with all our strength."

"Why. . . . Why fight since all of us have to . . ."

The hand completes the gesture. Rising smoke.

"No. We must fight."

"How can we hope to get out of here. How could anyone ever get out of here. It would be better to throw ourselves on the barbed wire right now."

What is there to say to her. She is small, sickly. And I am unable to persuade myself. All arguments are senseless. I am at odds with my reason. One is at odds with all reason.

The chimney smokes. The sky is low. Smoke trails over the camp and billows downward and engulfs us in smells of burning flesh.