

tery driver had vanished from the scene and had not been located. The story also related that the passenger in the mystery driver's car had been taken to the hospital to be treated for minor head injuries. Barbara tucked the paper snugly under her arm as though it were the most precious thing she owned and started quickly for the hospital.

The figure that ascended the steps of City Hospital early that morning exhibited a glow that seemed to spread to everyone around her. She had found a doorway to freedom.

## The Autumn of Shame

Gundars Grislitis

THE second World War was at its hottest point in Europe. The western front was slowly moving toward the boundaries of Germany; Belgium, the Netherlands, and France were already free from the Nazis' forces. On the southern front the American troops were marching toward Rome, the capital city of Italy, but the heaviest action was on the eastern front. The Russian army, armed mostly with American equipment, pushed the Germans back from Leningrad in the north, from Minsk in the middle section, and from Kiev and Odessa in the southern part. By the autumn of 1944 the Russian troops had crossed the eastern boundary of Latvia and, as there was little or no resistance at all by the Germans, moved on rapidly, leaving no hopes for the Latvian people. By the end of September, Riga, the capital city of Latvia and one of the old cities of Hanza, was in the hands of the Reds; and a few weeks later their forces stood only two miles east of Priekule, the city where I was born and spent my childhood.

It was the morning of October 13, 1944. The first gleam of the rising sun was just appearing over the roofs of the houses; the autumn wind, not strong, but cold enough, was rushing through the streets; the air was still wet and cold. But what was unusual was the monotonous noise of cannons and guns shooting, and bombs exploding. We turned on the radio. The only one of the four Latvian broadcasting stations still in the German hands was just playing the hated "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles" and praising Adolf Hitler and his Wehrmacht. But we did not believe them. The cannons, coming nearer and nearer, the airplanes, both the Russian and the German Luftwaffe, told us undoubtedly the real situation. All of a sudden the streets were crowded with people—men and women running, carrying boxes and sacks, soldiers, tired, hungry, and hopeless, walking slowly, their guns unloaded, their uniforms half gone. Horse-pulled wagons rolled through and from the city like an endless stream—farmers with sacks of grain in their wagons, cattle and horses tied to the corners of their wagons; there were also the city

people who had to leave almost everything they had. A box or two was all that they could carry with them. Everything else had to be left, everything that was the result of hard labor, saving, and hard-ship through years and years. It seemed that not even the slightest hope was left, but there *was* something . . . something that was hard or even impossible to define. It seemed that somebody was saying: "You have to return! It can't last forever! Don't worry!" Who was that? Was that just imagination, nonsense, or even stupidity, or a wish that never would come true? Maybe it was hope; just a slight bit of it, though sincere and true . . .

We had to leave. Forever? Nobody was able to answer that, but all of us had a hope. And hope is a thing men really need. What would life be without a bit of hope? A dark past, a darker present and an even darker future. And by that time our future was really dark. What was going to happen? We did not know. All we knew was that we had to go. And so we did. A week before, we had already packed some of the boxes we thought we were going to take with us. All that we had to do now was to take them out and put them into the wagon. The sun was bright and warm, the wind had slowed down, and there was a smell of something fresh and spring-like when we were ready to go. Once more we walked through the house; once more I sat down on the sofa and turned the pages of a book that I bought just a day before. My father took the mandolin and played a folk song. Maybe it was the last time he would play, we thought, and we were right. With tears in our eyes, our voices broken, our chests breathless, we took off. We did not look back; we almost did not see the endless stream of wagons, cars, and other vehicles; we almost did not hear the cannon, the bombing. There was just one thought in our minds: we have to part. And that was all . . .

And now, as I turn back and look over those days, my eyes are filled with tears. The autumn of shame—October, 1944—will never be cast out of my mind. I have learned during these eight years I have been out of my country in exile to glorify and to praise the name of Latvia. As an American is proud to be an American and a Frenchman is proud to be a Frenchman, I am proud to be a Latvian. I am proud to be what I am. And I have also learned in these years that there is not a place except one's native country where one can be really happy and say: "Now everything is all right. I am satisfied." No, these words. And I hope, sincerely and truly, that the day will come when I will be able to go back to a free and independent Latvia. But I do not merely hope; I am almost sure that the day will come. But until that day I have to keep close in my heart that autumn of shame that—I hope—will never be repeated. *Ubi patria, ibi bene.*