

Chapter Five

“Dolce Vita” in the Small Ghetto

A. Longing for the “Eldorado” Ghetto

In every camp under the Nazi regime, the possibility of survival was linked to two main factors - the physical and mental resilience of the prisoner and mutual aid in the camp. Such aid, in all its forms, depended on the interrelationships between the various parts of the team.

However, in Apparatebau, because the factory was still undergoing changes that caused the turnover of workers, the process of rapprochement between the team members was extremely slow. Trade with the Poles was still weak and aid was not even discussed. At work, it sometimes happened that a German builder brought a piece of bread to his Jewish assistant, but in general – every individual took care of himself.

After some time, another search was conducted at the factory. Szymon Gelbard recounts,

“The Germans apparently realised that, thanks to our connections with the outside world, we had managed to get ‘rich’ again.

“Klemm arrived once more, accompanied by the *Werkschutz*, and they began searching us for luxury items. In front of me stood Karol Gotlib, who already wanted to hand over his wedding ring. I could not bear that the Germans would fill their pockets with our property again, and with his consent, I hid the ring in my portion of bread. The Germans found nothing and I was able to return it to Karol. In the morning, he managed to buy a cheesecake and we devoured it together...”

There were also a few brave men, such as Dawid Sandler and Symcha Moneta, who did not hand over everything. While still at *Metalurgia*, Symcha, together with his brother Mordche, managed to load three suitcases, containing clothes, onto the truck and, now in Apparatebau, they had something to sell to the Poles. Mordche Moneta, who worked in the main warehouse, accompanied the truck, which brought bread from the city every day and managed to sneak a loaf of bread for his own consumption.

And there were some who tried to escape to the “Small Ghetto”.

The prisoners heard that people lived there more or less normally, and that it was possible to obtain clean clothes, which were smuggled out of the warehouses... a real paradise! Some did not want to wait and looked forward to the next opportunity. This opportunity arose with the arrival of “new” Jews to the factory - what could be simpler than joining them and returning to the ghetto with them?

Mordche Haberman did not think twice and escaped, together with five friends.¹

¹ M-1/E/915, Haberman, YVA

A month later, the Germans also realised that the workers would collapse from the cold and filth and brought them to a bathhouse located in the former *mikveh* building, where they were given a shower and their clothes were disinfected. For Ruben Munowicz, this was an irreplaceable opportunity to escape, because he knew the building well. He found a hiding place in one of the dark corners and waited. In the meantime, a group of female HASAG workers arrived at the building and one girl escaped. She hid in Ruben's hiding place and, with him, waited for a convenient time to come out. With immense excitement, Munowicz recounts the first erotic experience of his life, which he had under unusual circumstances:

“The hiding place was narrow and, for the first time in my life, I felt a woman's body next to me... She was crying and trembling with fear: What will happen to us? I put my coat on her saying, ‘Don't cry’ and I saw that, for the first time in my life, I had noticed the colour of a person's eyes... She had beautiful blue eyes. It was the first time I had contact with delicate skin, with female skin. And I decided that I was committing a crime and I knew that I was not allowed. I knew that I was committing a crime before God... And I touched her, I touched a woman... Suddenly we heard a group of women from the ghetto arrive, so the girl gave me a kiss and disappeared...”²

This little story proves that, even in times of terror and fear, youthful charm and a longing for love did not disappear.

Henia and Norbert knew this too. Henia, (Mina Lewenberg), the spoiled daughter of wealthy parents, ended her eighteenth year of life at the outbreak of the War.

When the decrees hit the family, when her mother was sent to the death wagons, Henia often asked herself why. Why is our life a long series of terror and tension? Why are they persecuting us, what do they want to take revenge on us for? No one knew how to answer her. The only ray of light was Norbert's love. They were in love and even thought about getting married... But how was that possible?

She was in the “Small Ghetto”, working in the warehouses on ul. Garibaldi, and poor Norbert was doing hard labour in HASAG. Once, when a group of workers arrived from HASAG for the bathhouse, Henia managed to gather some bread and cigarettes in a basket and ran to the place - maybe Norbert would be there too. She was frightened when she saw the unfortunate people, dirty, in rags. In an instant they snatched up the contents of the basket.

Together with her father, she repeated the aid operation several more times. One of the prisoners, Bril, a friend of the family, told of the impression the “Small Ghetto” made on him, “You live here in paradise, there in HASAG we live in inhuman conditions!” Once Henia managed to see Norbert in one of the groups, but again they had to part...³

² Monowicz, YVA, 0.3/10366, p. 22

³ Henia (Herta) Lustiger-Szmulewicz, Pamiętnik Częstochowianki YVA, 0.3/772, ch.13, pp.36-43