

2. From War and Remembrance, by Herman Wouk (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1978), 2:946-48.

A long trudge in cold air under the moon; a silent trudge, except for the crunch of foot falls on frozen muck, and the sleepy whimpering of children. The line arrives at a beautifully kept lawn, bright green under tremendous floodlights, in front of a long low windowless building of dark red brick, with tall square chimneys which fitfully flare. It might be a bakery or a laundry. The baldheads lead the line down broad cement steps, along a dim corridor and into a big bare room brightly lit with naked electric lights, rather like a bathhouse at a beach, with benches and hooks for undressing along the walls, and around pillars down the middle. On the pillar facing the entrance a sign in several languages, with Yiddish at the top, reads:

UNDRESS HERE FOR DISINFECTANT BATHS.
FOLD CLOTHES NEATLY.
REMEMBER WHERE YOU LEAVE THEM.

It is disconcerting that men and women must undress in the same place. The striped prisoners herd the few Prominente off in one corner, and to Aaron's surprise, they help the women and children undress, chattering apologies all the time. It is the rules of the camp, they say. None of this takes long. The main thing is to hurry, fold clothes neatly, and obey orders. Soon Aaron Jastrow sits naked on a rough wooden bench, murmuring psalms, his bare feet on chilly cement. One must not pray naked or utter God's name bareheaded, but this is a shat hadhak, an hour of emergency, when the law is lenient.

A second group of women comes crowding into the disrobing room, with many more men behind them. He cannot tell if Natalie is there, it is such a mob. Strange brief reunions occur between naked women and their clothed husbands: joyous cries of recognition, embraces, fathers hugging their bare children. But the baldheads cut these scenes short. There will be plenty of time later! Now people must get on with the undressing.

German voices soon call flat harsh orders outside: "Attention! Men only! Proceed by twos to the showers!"

The striped prisoners shepherd the men out of the disrobing room. . . . Some women are crying. Some, Aaron can see, must be stifling screams, with hands clutched to their mouths. They fear being beaten, perhaps, or they do not want to alarm the children.

It is cold in the corridor; not for the armed SS men who line the walls, but certainly for the naked Aaron and the men marching with him. His mind remains clear enough to note that the fraud grows thin. Why this cordon of