

armed booted men in uniforms for a few Jews going to the showers? The faces of the SS men are ordinary German faces, mostly young, such as one might see on the Kurfurstendamm strolling on a Sunday with their girls, but they frown in an unpleasant way, like police facing a disorderly crowd and watching for violence. But the naked Jewish men, young and old, are not at all disorderly. There is no violence on this short walk.

They are led into a long narrow room of raw cement floors and walls, almost large enough to be a theatre, though the ceiling filled with hundreds of shower heads is too low for that, and the rows of pillars would be in the way. On the walls and the pillars—some of solid concrete, some perforated sheet iron—are soap racks with bars of yellow soap. This chamber too is lit to almost uncomfortable brightness by bare bulbs in the ceiling.

So much registers on Aaron Jastrow's consciousness, as in his detached and fatalistic frame of mind he murmurs Hebrew psalms, until physical discomfort erases his tightly controlled religious composure. The prisoners in stripes keep pushing the men farther and farther inside.

"Make room! Make room! All men to the back!" He is being jammed against the clammy skin of other men taller than he is, a miserable sensation for a fastidious person . . . He can see nothing but the naked bodies pressing in around him. Some children are bawling, some women weeping, and there are random forlorn shrieks amid distant German shouts of command. Also many women's voices are soothing their children or greeting their men.

The crowding, ever tighter, throws panic into Jastrow. He cannot help it. He has always had a fear of crowds, a fear that he would die trampled or smothered. He absolutely cannot move, cannot see, can hardly breathe, packed in on all sides by naked strangers in a gymnasium reek, jammed against a chilly perforated iron pillar, directly under a light that shines in his face as an elbow jams under his chin and roughly forces his head up.

The light suddenly is extinguished. The whole place goes black. From far down the chamber comes a slam of heavy doors, a screech of iron bolts, turning and tightening. In the huge chamber a mournful general wail rises. Amid the wail there is terrific shrieking and yelling: **"The gas! The gas! They are killing us! Oh, God have mercy! The gas!"**

Aaron smells it, strong, chokingly strong, the disinfectant smell, but far more powerful. It is coming from the iron pillar. The first whiff burns, stabbing into his lungs like a red-hot sword, shooting alarm through his frame, racking him with cramps. He tries in vain to shrink away from the pillar. All is howling chaos and terror in the dark. He gasps out a deathbed confession, or tries to, with congesting lungs, swelling mouth tissues, in breath-stopping pain: "The Lord is God. Blessed be His name for ever and ever. Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one God." He falls to the cement. Writhing bodies pile on top of him, for he is one of the first adults to go