

The bridge.

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My grandfather had a factory for the manufacture of anilyn dyestuffs for foodstuffs like sausages and ice cream. In fact, it was more a place where various powders were mixed according to the needs of the customers. The colors were shown in the form of sugar stars displayed on a card board, and my sister and I used to eat the stars when my grandfather was not looking. The "Factory" with its French inscription "Fabrique des colorants inoffensifs", (something incredibly elegant in Prague between the wars), was located behind the building where I was born. It was a three-storied "Art Nouveau" building, of which my grandparents occupied the first floor, a German judge with the Tochech name Lastovicka occupied the second, and my parents the third, with my own room looking toward the Factory in the back yard. There was a barber's shop on the ground floor, and the barber used to go every morning to shave my grandfather and have his moustache adjusted. But the most important thing was this: There was a bridge which connected my grandparents' kitchen with the roof of the Factory, and the roof was a Garden! A roof garden just like Semiramis' Hanging gardens. The roof was, of course, cemented, but there were flower beds, a swing for us children, and a somewhat tropical hut where my grandparents lived during "Sukkoth", (the Jewish feast of the Huts), although of course they lived there only symbolically, as my grandmother was affraid to catch cold during the nights. From the garden there was a sort of ladder which led to the yard of the factory, but the ladder was forbidden to be used by us children. Whenever it was a rainless day, we did not go from school directly to our apartment, but we went to our grandparents' apartment instead, straight into the kitchen, and from there over the bridge into "our" garden. On the way through the kitchen we used to steal something to eat, if the maid did not catch us. If she did, we were always fascinated by the drop which hang constantly from her nose when she scolded us in her almost malphabetic Prague slang. (Czech with many German words in it, and with almost no recognizable grammar.)

From the kitchen we went to the garden, which had a view on the balconies of the other bourgeois buildings ouround ours. These balconies were called "Pavlače", and carpets were hanging on them for cleaning. But we were not interested in this. We stared from the bridge into the court yard, where my grandfather's workers, (about 15 of them), were playing football or eating their sausages with beer. There was an enormous Sanct Bernhard in the yard, called naturally "Barry". Sometimes he came up into the garden and we used to ride on his back. He was very kind to us children. One day a worker played with him while we were watching from the bridge. All of a sudden the dog went crazy. He attacked the worker and bit off

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his right leg clean above the knee. A stream of blood gushed from the wound, the worker lay on the ground, the leg remained in the mouth of the dog, and we children were standing on the bridge, watching. I do not know what happened then or later. I never saw the worker after that. His name was "Anton". But I know what the bridge meant to me after this had happened. It meant sudden transformation of kindness into brutal aggression. It was, I believe, 1926, but it was also 1989 for me. The sudden change of Prague after the Nazi occupation. In my mind Prague is like the Sanct Barnhard "Barry". The change of Prague did not surprise me when it came: I had seen in from the bridge in a kind of prophetic vision. I do not like dogs ever since, nor do I like bridges.