

## About Uwe Johnson's *Anniversaries*

*The End of Summer, 1967* is an excerpt from *Anniversaries: From a Year in the Life of Gesine Cresspahl*, the masterpiece of its author, Uwe Johnson, and one of the great German novels of the last century. In the course of the twentieth century, Germany and Austria produced such extraordinary novels as Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* and *The Magic Mountain*, Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*, and W. G. Sebald's *The Emigrants*. German readers and critics regularly place Johnson's *Anniversaries* in the company of these world-renowned works.

In German the title of the novel is *Jahrestage*, which means both “anniversaries” and, literally, “days of the year.” This reflects both the subject and the design of the book, which spans a year, from August 20, 1967, to August 20, 1968, with a chapter for each day. One layer of the novel takes place in New York City, chronicling a family's day-to-day life: schools, subways, cityscapes, taking the Staten Island Ferry on Saturdays. Gesine Cresspahl, a character from Uwe Johnson's earlier novels, is working as a translator for a bank and living on the Upper West Side with her ten-year-old daughter, Marie. Marie's father died before Marie was born. Gesine is thirty-four years old—born in 1933 as Hitler took power in Germany.

The story of the Cresspahls' life in New York is counterpointed with the “anniversaries” of events from Gesine's and her family's past, some of which Gesine tells Marie about and some of which she records on tape for Marie to listen to when she gets older. We hear about Gesine's politically savvy German father, who emigrated to England, disillusioned after serving in World War I. On what was meant to be

his last trip home, he met a young German woman, whom he married and brought to England; she prevailed on him to return to Germany because she wanted to give birth in Jerichow, her hometown, and in Germany they stayed. Gesine hates and resents her mother for making her be German, making her bear the weight of Nazi guilt, at the same time as she is well aware that she is choosing to raise her own daughter in a country wracked by its own systematic racial oppression and pursuing its own questionable, increasingly destructive war in Vietnam. Gesine's account of small-town life in northeastern Germany from the 1930s through the 1950s, packed with brilliantly fleshed-out characters from every walk of life, is an utterly absorbing and masterful novel in its own right that only increases in subtlety and interest as, over the course of the year, Marie gains the ability to question and even revise her mother's version of the story.

There is another persistent presence in the novel: *The New York Times*. Gesine is a dedicated, if sometimes skeptical, reader of the paper, whom she even personifies. Reports from the *Times* are quoted and paraphrased throughout the novel—Vietnam, racial unrest, Prague Spring, the RFK and MLK assassinations, city life—giving the book a topical immediacy and breadth to match its historical depth.

The book weaves together these three different strands, juxtaposing American history in the making with the history of Nazi Germany—a big story we now all know the tragic end of, but here filled out by Jerichow's numerous smaller personal tragedies—while through it all, the Cresspahls move toward their own open-ended futures. Marie becomes best friends with the token black girl in her school; Gesine is being wooed by another German émigré, D. E., and groomed by her bank to go back east to the emerging market in Czechoslovakia. For all the book's scope, its encyclopedic treatment of History and Memory, at its heart are a mother and daughter together. And as Gesine remains more German than she is American, while by age ten Marie is more American than she is German, their relationship dramatizes different stages of immigration and what it means to take on a new culture.

Johnson's book as a whole is its own act of literary immigration,

an incomparable love letter from one language and culture to another. It recreates nonfictional New York as painstakingly as it does its fictional Jerichow; it brings into playful, capacious German everything from New York street life to *New York Times* prose to the mobile kiosks in Central Park selling *heisse Hunde* (dogs who are hot). The real Uwe Johnson lived with his wife and daughter in New York from 1966 to 1968, in the Riverside Drive apartment he would make Gesine's. He appears as a character in the book: giving lectures to Jewish organizations in New York, and having conversations, even conflicts, with Gesine, who has given him permission to tell a year of her life, but not without certain conditions. Gesine's reflections on memory and forgetting, the past in the present, and the cross-currents of living in two cultures gain still more resonance from Johnson's own.

Johnson chose August 20, 1967, as his start date and began writing the novel in late 1967; he had no idea what the rest of the year would bring. A volume covering the first four months of Gesine's year was published in 1970, with volumes 2, 3, and 4 following in 1971, 1973, and 1983. But the audacity, scope, and richness of Johnson's achievement was clear as soon as the first volume came out.

This is the wonder of it: Here is one of the most vivid and detailed accounts of life in New York City, and it was written by a German, while one of the finest modern German novels is set on the Upper West Side. Here is a book about Nazism that also peers over the Iron Curtain to examine the persistent legacy of Stalinism (something that Johnson, who came of age in East Germany like Gesine, knew well) while reckoning with the escalating violence of the late 1960s in America and Vietnam. Here, finally, is one of the truest and tenderest depictions of a mother and daughter relationship in literature, and it is written by a man. *Anniversaries*, which continues to be remarkably topical even today—with its right-wing terrorists stockpiling guns in the Bronx; race riots and police violence; John Sidney McCain III, shot down over Hanoi and captured—is a novel about the burden of history and about history in the making, as well as a sustaining vision of the big challenges and small pleasures of family life.

An abridged version of *Anniversaries*, barely half the length of the

original, came out in English in two volumes in 1975 and 1985. The present translation, to be published in fall of 2018, is entirely new. On the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the year in the life of Gesine Cresspahl that *Anniversaries* unforgettably records, Uwe Johnson's magnum opus will finally be available in vibrant English, complete.

August 24, 1967 Thursday

Five American war planes have been shot down in North Vietnam. Seventeen military personnel were killed in combat in the South, among them Anthony M. Galeno of the Bronx.

Police in the Bronx have discovered a cache of weapons: submachine guns, an antitank gun, dynamite, ammunition, hand grenades, rifles, shotguns, pistols, detonators. The four collectors—private citizens, patriots, John Birch Society members—had planned to kill the Communist Herbert Aptheker first, then protect the nation from its other enemies.

When Gesine Cresspahl came to this city in spring 1961, it was supposed to be for two years. The porter had put the child on his luggage cart and dashed her exuberantly around the somewhat run-down French Line terminal; when he doffed his cap and held out a hand, the child put both of hers behind her back. Marie was almost four years old. After six days at sea she had lost heart and no longer expected the new country to have the Rhine, her Düsseldorf kindergarten, her grandmother. Gesine still always thought of Marie as “the child,” and the child of course was powerless to stop her. Gesine was worried—this child, squinting darkly, shyly, from under a white capote hat into the grimy light of West 48th Street, could thwart the move.

She had twenty days to find an apartment, and the child resisted New York on every last one of them. The hotel found a German-speaking babysitter for her, an elderly, stiff-necked woman from the Black Forest in a tar-black dress, all ruffles and buttons. She could

sing lieder by Uhland in a thin soprano voice, but she had retained more of her local dialect than she did the High German spoken in Freudenstadt twenty-five years ago; the child did not answer her. The child marched through the city with Gesine, not letting go of her hand, pressing against her in buses and subways, watchful to the point of suspicion, and letting herself be tricked into sleep by the monotonous movements of some vehicle only late in the afternoon. She hunched her head between her shoulders when Gesine read to her from the apartment listings in *The New York Times*: she couldn't care less about doorman buildings or air conditioning; she asked about ocean liners. She looked around with a kind of satisfaction in the apartments Gesine could afford, with their stingily chopped up, shabbily furnished rooms, three windows looking out on a courtyard black as night and one on the bleak hard facade opposite, expensive because it was free of Negro neighbors; they were nothing compared to the garden windows in Düsseldorf, she didn't have to stand for these.

The child did not take in one single English word, letting the shouts and hellos and compliments in hotel lobbies in buses at snack counters pass over her as though she had lost her sense of hearing entirely. She answered only with a delayed furious shake of the head, eyelids lowered. She was so silently bent on going back that people called her well-brought-up again and again. She started to refuse her food, because the bread, the fruit, the meat tasted different. Gesine permitted herself to resort to bribery and told her she could watch cartoons on TV; the child turned away from the screen, and not defiantly. The child stood at the window and looked down at the street, dark between the high buildings, where everything was different: the packs of taxis in blazing color, the whistling uniformed porters under their baldachins, the American flag on the Harvard Club, the policemen playing with their sticks, the white steam coming out of the central system vents, glowing in the strange and foreign night. She asked about airplanes. Gesine was relieved when the child, after days of observation, asked why some of the people here had dark skin color, or why old women from the Black Forest were Jews. Most of their conversation was wordless, conducted in looks, in thoughts:

*Is there any way you'd change your mind, for me?  
 Give me these two years. Then we'll go back to West Germany for as  
 long as you want.  
 So you are considering changing your mind*

For the child's sake, Gesine stopped looking in Manhattan on the twelfth day and tried one of the nicer residential parts of Queens. The train clambered out of the tunnel under the East River onto the tall stilts opposite the United Nations, and the child, dispirited and bossy, looked at the jagged, superhumanly high skyline of the other shore and then at the low squalid boxes, the single-story wasteland (as a writer once said), on either side of the tracks. In Flushing, though, they found wide park boulevards between grassy slopes in the shade of old trees, loosely encircled by white wooden houses keeping their distance from one another, rustic-style slate roofs, and Gesine was no longer secretly apologizing to the child. The child said: Shouldn't we look near the water instead?

The broker on the main street was a staid man with a soft voice, over fifty, white. When he took off his glasses, he looked experienced. Age made him seem reliable. He had some furnished apartments in the wooded areas, with steps down to the gardens, swimming pools around the corner. Gesine could afford to live here. The man smiled at the child, who was stiff with anger now that the move seemed really to have happened. He talked about the area, called it respectable and Jewish, and said: Don't worry, we keep the *shwartzes* out. Gesine snatched the child from the chair and her bag from the table in one motion and was out on the sidewalk, making sure to slam the glass door with a bang, too.

That evening they sat in a restaurant at Idlewild Airport and watched the planes taxi out onto the runways and start out across the ocean against a swarthy sky. She tried to explain to the child that the broker had thought she was Jewish, thought she was a better person than a Negro. The child wanted to know what *You bastard of a Jew* meant, and realized that miracles are possible. She saw the suitcase with her toys being wheeled out of the hotel, felt herself on

the plane already, back home tomorrow. Gesine was ready to give up. You can't live among such people.

The West German government wants to completely eliminate the statute of limitations for any murder and genocide committed during the Nazi regime, maybe.

Light artillery can be ordered by mail, but a license is required for a handgun, and she doesn't want to go to the police.

August 25, 1967 Friday

Rain has been falling in the city since last night, the thudding sound of the cars on the Hudson River parkway muffled to a low whoosh. This morning, the slurping sound of the tires on the dripping wet pavement under her window wakes her up. The rainy light has hung darkness between the office buildings on Third Avenue. The small stores tucked into the base of the skyscrapers cast meager, small-town light out into the wetness. When she switched on the overhead fluorescent light in her office, its glow hemmed in by the darkness painted a picture of homeyness in her boxy cell, for a moment. Today the child is coming back from summer camp.

In the evening, the bank building's brow, not far above her floor, is draped in fog. Seen from the street, the executives' windows give a watery twinkle. Sinking ships.

Later that evening, she is waiting for the child at the snack counter of the George Washington Bridge bus station, smoking and chatting lazily with the waitress, newspaper under her arm. The paper is folded along the same crease as when she fished it out from under the canopy of the newspaper stand, saved up for the hour she has to wait. She gives herself permission not to start on the front page, and instead to choose articles from the table of contents.

A federal court has indicted twenty-five persons in connection with the \$407,000 worth of travel checks that disappeared from J. F. Kennedy Airport last summer. They have tracked down the man

who resold the checks for a quarter of their face value, as well as the man who disposed of them at half their value, and the people who cashed them, but have yet to find whoever actually knocked the package of checks off the luggage truck; the man who presumably gave officials the information was found on July 11, shot dead in a ditch outside of Monticello. A little message from the mafia.

The child had sent her a postcard with her arrival time: on the front is a photo showing her in a rowboat with other children. Marie has one leg trailing in the water and a wide dark bandage around her shin. She looks quiet and fearless amid the others' grimaces. She'd banged her shin against her waterski binding. She is not one meter forty-seven: she is four foot ten. Her handwriting has the curves and loops of the American standard. When she multiplies, she writes the multiplier under, not next to, the multiplicand. She thinks in Fahrenheit, gallons, miles. Her English is better than Gesine's, in articulation, intonation, accent. German is for her a foreign language, which she uses with her mother to be polite, in a flat tone, pronouncing her vowels the American way, often not sure of the right word. When she speaks English the way she does naturally, Gesine does not always understand her. She wants to be baptized when she turns fifteen, and she has managed to make the nuns in the private school farther uptown on Riverside Drive call her M'ri instead of Mary. She was supposed to be expelled from that school anyway, for refusing to take off her GET OUT OF VIETNAM button in class. She changes out of her blue school uniform with the coat of arms over the heart as soon as she gets home; she likes to wear sneakers and tight pants made of white poplin, whose hems she's cut off with a kitchen knife. She has lost almost none of the friends she's made during her six years here, and she still talks about Edmondo from Spanish Harlem, who even in kindergarten could express his feelings only with his fists and who was institutionalized for life in 1963. She has slept over in many apartments on Riverside Drive and West End Avenue. She is in demand as a babysitter for small children, but she is strict with them, occasionally rough. She knows Manhattan's subway system by heart, she could work at an information booth. What she types in her room

she keeps in a portfolio tied with knots that cannot be reproduced. She secretly looks in Gesine's box of photographs, and used her own pocket money to make a copy of a picture that shows Jakob and Jöche in front of the train conductor's school in Güstrow. She has forgotten her Düsseldorf friends. She knows West Berlin from the newspapers. A lot of businesses on Broadway are obliged to pay her tribute—Maxie's with peaches, Schustek's with slices of bologna, the liquor store with chewing gum. When she slips up and says that after all Negroes are just Negroes, she bobs up and down and makes a gesture with her outturned palms as though pushing back against Gesine and says: OK! OK!

On page two of the paper is a photograph showing an American pilot pointing to a map to show where he'd shot down two North Vietnamese pilots and their planes; he is shown in profile, his lips pulled back from his teeth in what looks to be a tired, satisfied smile. The official death toll of Americans is on page twelve today, seven lines, with no connection to the news immediately above it. "Long Island Man Among War Dead" reads the headline. The report, then, lists twenty-eight.

Marie says:

- My braids are my property, I'll cut them off when I want to.
- My grandfather was a rich man.
- Mrs. Kellogg shaves.
- I don't mind the sight of blood. I want to be a doctor.
- My mother thinks Negroes have the same rights, and that's where she stops thinking.
- Negroes have different bodies than us too.
- President Johnson is in the Pentagon's pocket.
- James Fenimore Cooper is the greatest.
- My father was a delegate at the International Railway Timetable Conference in Lisbon, representing the German Democratic Republic.
- Düsseldorf-Lohausen is an international hub for air travel.

- My friends in England write to me twelve times a year.
- My mother is in banking.
- My mother is from a small town on the Baltic, but don't rub it in.
- My mother has the best legs on the whole 5 Bus above 72nd Street.
- Fathers have such a starved look.
- Bring our boys home!
- Sister Magdalene is an old bag.
- John Vliet Lindsay is the greatest.
- My mother always flies in the same plane as me so that we'll die together.
- If John Kennedy were still alive, everything would be better.
- My best friends are Pamela, Edmondo, Rebecca, Paul and Michelle, Stephen, Annie, Kathy, Ivan, Martha Johnson, David W., Paul-Erik, Mayor Lindsay, Mary-Anne, Claire and Richard, Mr. Robinson, Esmeralda and Bill, Mr. Maxie Fruitmarket, Mr. Schustek, Timothy Shuldiner, Dmytri Weiszand, Jonas, D. E., and Senator Robert F. Kennedy.
- My mother knows the Swedish ambassador.
- Fine, get married, but I don't want a father.
- I speak Spanish better than my mother.
- My mother wanted to go back to Germany after two years, and I said: We're staying.

*The New York Times* reports as national news the death of an industrialist who started as an errand boy in 1895 working for \$1.50 a week and died with assets of \$2.5 billion, and the paper devotes more than two hundred lines to his memory.

The child walks past the glass wall of the restaurant. She hasn't turned her head, she just keeps walking amid the crush of parents and goodbyes. She has gotten skinny; her skin is tanned and dry. She looks older than ten. She is wearing the Vietnam pin on the collar of her windbreaker. Her braids swing a little from side to side when she

tries to look back in the glass panes of the exit. She stops and turns around without letting her left shoulder slip out from under Gesine's outstretched hand.

*Ich ha-be dich ge-se-hen:* she says, stressing every syllable, speaking every word equally slowly. She repeats: *I sawwww you!* and this time gives the verb its own separate, triumphant soprano pitch. She does not look like her father.

August 26, 1967 Saturday

Two U.S. Army sergeants have been arrested and charged with delivering classified documents to Mr. Popov of the Soviet embassy and Mr. Kireyev of the United Nations—in shopping centers, in restaurants, just like in the movies. The Soviet gentlemen have now left the country, by air.

U.S. fighter bomber raids came within 18 miles of the Chinese border, and the U.S. lost its 660th plane, and the U.S. Secretary of Defense tells astonished senators that North Vietnam cannot be bombed to the negotiating table.

Consumer prices rose so much that we had to pay 4.6 percent more in July for fruits and vegetables than we did in June, and a member of the American Nazi Party shot and killed his leader in the act of taking his clothes to a coin-operated laundromat in Arlington, Virginia, and a swirl of soapflakes fluttered down around the dead man.

Would she have stayed in this country if not for the apartment by the river? She probably would not have. But, after giving up the search, she found the tiny ad promising three rooms on Riverside Drive, "all with a view of the Hudson," available for one year at 124 dollars a month. The voice on the telephone seemed surprised at Gesine's questions. Of course the apartment was overrun with applicants, "but we're waiting to find someone we like." Children were permitted. "If you happen to be colored, come anyway, don't worry about that." On her first trip to New York, Gesine had ridden the 5 Bus down River-

side Drive, the inner edge of a wide artificial landscape that starts with a promenade along the river, then continues, as you move inland, with a multilane divided expressway and practically horticultural onramp loops, then a spacious, hilly park fifty blocks long, with monuments, playgrounds, sports fields, sunbathing lawns, and bench-lined paths for strolling. Only then comes the actual street bordering the park, curved in numerous places, rising gently over graceful knolls and hills, stretching out slender exit fingers toward apartment buildings behind further green islands: a rarity in Manhattan, a showpiece of the gardener's art and a street with views of trees, the water, a landscape. Back then, Gesine had hoped to live in one of these towering fortresses of prosperity someday, richly ornamented in Oriental, Italian, Egyptian, in any case magnificent style, their weatherbeaten state making them if anything even more dignified. She had thought she could never afford it.

Broadway, where it crosses 96th Street, is a marketplace of mostly small buildings with lots of foot traffic to the Irish bar, the drugstore on the southwest corner, the restaurant across the street, the newsstand. Now as then, scruffy men stand leaning against the buildings: thieves and fences, drunks, crazies, many of African descent, jobless, sick, some begging. This Broadway is polyglot, with accents from every continent confusingly tackling American English: as you walk along you can hear Spanish from Puerto Rico and Cuba, Caribbean French, Japanese, Chinese, Yiddish, Russian, various vernaculars of the illegal, and again and again German as it was spoken thirty years ago in East Prussia, Berlin, Franconia, Saxony, Hesse. The child heard a high-bosomed matron, in an old-fashioned dress with a large flower pattern and ribbons, harangue in German a short downcast man in a black hat creeping alongside her, and she stood there, forgetting all else, and noticed Gesine's tugging hand only after a while. It was a whitish gray morning, with lots of people on the street moving carefully through air thick with moisture, and the intersection promised a memory of Italy on many mornings to come. 97th Street, sloping down to the west, was gloomier between the decrepit, emaciated hotels, dirty with slimy garbage in the gutter and splotchy bags

and dented garbage cans on the sidewalk, and at the end it opened out up onto a wide, undulating field made up of the swift-flowing roadway of Riverside Drive, grassy slopes, wooded parkland. In the playground, children were jumping and frolicking under sparkling jets of water. In the shade by the park fence, families sat and lay on the cool grass. Behind puffy clouds of leaves hung the blue-gray picture of the mile-wide river and the opposite bank. They stood on the street for a while looking up at the building: yellow bricks, a band with an exotic bull pattern winding around it not far from the ground. To live here seemed so out of reach that Gesine began mentally to parcel out her savings into bribes, imagined herself entering into complicated and shady dealings.

*If only I could send you in ahead*

*You say: You won't regret it, sir. You say: The advantages of this apartment move me to offer you a token of my gratitude.*

*You would never be able to talk like that.*

The apartment door opens into a tiny hallway. There is a kitchenette in the wall on the left, with the massive refrigerator at the end. On the right the hallway opens into a large room. Two women Gesine's age, one with a Danish accent and one with a Swiss, were packing paperbacks into cardboard boxes; they said hello to the child first, serious, polite, as though speaking to a real person. The room has two windows out onto the bright open space above the street, over the park. The apartment continues to the right with a smaller room, behind curtained glass double doors, with another window facing the park. That was the Dane's bedroom. On the other side of the apartment, behind a sturdy door, next to the bathroom, which has a window looking out over the park, is what was the Swiss woman's room, with a window looking out over the park. In winter the rocky coast of New Jersey is visible through the bare branches, and the breadth of the river and the hazy air can blur the architectural wasteland on the other side into an illusion of unspoiled countryside, a phantasm of openness and distance.

Both women were stewardesses being transferred to Europe. They wanted to be able to leave their furniture behind for one year. They wanted to give up the apartment right away. It would not cost anything besides the rent. They asked Marie if she wanted to stay here, and Marie said an English word: "Yes." The superintendent, a heavy-set, somewhat formal black man with a resplendent British accent, gave Gesine exact change, to the penny, for her deposit. The women took them out to lunch and let them help with the packing and helped them bring the suitcases from the hotel, and the child seemed sad when the women left for the airport that night. They did not come back after a year, but we visited the Danish one on our vacation. We had an apartment and didn't ask any questions.

Over the next seven years, handmade pieces replaced much of the factory-made furniture, first in Marie's room (the Swiss room), then in the middle room too: dark wood, a lime-green bookshelf with glass doors, blue burlap curtains, a fleecy rug on which the child reads the newspaper out loud, lying on her belly, chin in her hands, swinging her legs back and forth. All day long an even, regular sonic field of rushing rain surrounds the apartment. Here there will be no flooding.

Marie is collecting pictures from the newspaper, and today she cuts out the one that shows the body of the Nazi leader lying on his side in the foreground, next to his car, and in the background, on the roof of the laundromat, a policeman standing where the sniper had shot him from. "Rabbi Lelyveld," she reads out loud from the article, "said that Rockwell was a nuisance rather than a menace." Then the child says in English, in a lecturing tone: I can hear in the rabbi's distinction what he's not saying.

August 27, 1967 Sunday

The East Germans in power say: We are introducing a 5-day work week, 43¾ hours, a unique socialist achievement. The American Nazi Party says: Our leader's body belongs to the Party. The wife of the

arrested army sergeant says: It can't be true, my husband isn't a spy. *The New York Times* says: In the U.S.A. the forty-hour work week was introduced in 1938.

And the weather in North Vietnam has cleared up enough to allow bombing to resume, and the Pentagon suggests that the North Vietnamese are tucking away planes of their own in China, and yesterday morning three men raided the Schuyler Arms Hotel on 98th Street, shot and wounded the night clerk, and got away with \$68 in cash. It was about 3 A.M., two blocks from here.

And *The New York Times* devotes more than eight full columns, starting on the front page—184 inches—to Stalin's daughter. This wayward daughter of Attila was sitting, according to the *Times*, among the Goths on Long Island, in a garden chair under a black oak tree, and she said: She is in favor of freedom, as a general principle.

She says: *The New York Times* relays: I believe that when people have freedom to do whatever they want, and to express whatever they like, and to have even freedom to have riots—they do it.

She means the race riots in Detroit.

She was wearing a simple white dress and beige flats as she sat there, in a small group of friends and journalists, expressing her thoughts in a relaxed and cheerful way. *The New York Times* considers it necessary that we know this.

This hope of salvation says: I like dogs better than cats. I used to have a dog—but no more.

When asked whether she has a bank account, the daughter of the leader of the socialist camp answers yes. Then she giggles and asks back: Do you?

*The New York Times* vouchsafes us the information that this voluntary refugee has had to learn how to write checks.

The daughter of the most powerful socialist statesman says: Although I always felt a personal attachment to my father, I was never an admirer of what was called "Stalinism" as a system.

Then she asked for a glass of water, "with ice, please."

When she spoke of her children, she lowered her voice and looked off into the woods at the edge of the lawn.

She says: The chief evil influence in my father's life was what made him leave his priesthood and become a Marxist.

She says: I think a religious feeling is inborn, just as a person is born a poet.

*The New York Times*, says *The New York Times*, will print excerpts from Stalin's daughter's book starting on September 10. It says so neither at the beginning, nor at the end, but in passing, just by the way. *The New York Times* trusts its readers.

August 28, 1967 Monday

In an article on coordinated Vietcong attacks throughout South Vietnam, *The New York Times* reports the losses on our side (killed or wounded) as 268 (later 248) in Cantho, 79 in Hoian, 1 in Hue, 53 or more in Quangda and Dienban, moderate casualties near Pleiku, 13 at Ban Me Thout, and light casualties near Saigon, and gives the total as 335.

In the early thirties, Jerichow was one of the smallest towns in Mecklenburg-Schwerin: a market town of 2,151 inhabitants, located near the Baltic Sea between Lübeck and Wismar. It was a backwater with low brick buildings lining a cobblestone street, from the two-story town hall with fake classical fluting to a Romanesque church with a tower like a bishop's miter, high and sharply pointed and with small protruding gables on all four sides, like a miter. On the north side of the market square, toward the sea, stood a hotel, the mayor's office, a bank, the credit union, Wollenberg's hardware store, Papenbrock's house and business, and the old town center, with side streets branching off from there: Kattrepel, the Bäk, Short Street, School Street, Station Street. To the south was where the original town had been, around the church and the cemetery, five lanes of half-timbered houses, until it burned down in 1732, rebuilt only in the nineteenth century with squat red-brick buildings, shoulder to shoulder under skimpy roofs. Now the post office was there, the co-op department

store, the brickworks past the churchyard, the brickworks owner's villa. A lot of barns still stood on the outskirts of town, the side streets quickly became country lanes, and farmyard gates of old wood stood next to shop windows on the main street. Townsman-farmers lived there, on three hundred acres, along with merchants and tradesmen. Cresspahl came from the south, on the Gneez country road, and drove up the main street past the market square and out the other side of Jerichow, just thinking that this must be the start of the town when it was actually where the town ended. There were fields all the way to the sea.

Jerichow was not in fact a town. It had a town charter dating back to 1240, it had a municipal council, it purchased electricity from the Herrenwyk power plant, it had an automatic telephone exchange and a train station, but it belonged to the nobility whose estates surrounded it. This was not because of the fire. The nobility had taken away the farms of the peasants who had made the land arable, annexed them to their own land, and made the peasants serfs; the weak princely house of Mecklenburg, up to its ears in debt, had confirmed their right to do so in the Constitutional Inheritance Law of 1755. Of the villages that had made Jerichow strong, only three remained—tiny, impoverished settlements. In this corner of the world, the gentry, in the form of employers, mayors, judges, ruled over their day laborers, gained fame as robber barons, grew wealthy as industrialists. Jerichow, for its part, had all but reverted to its original state as a village clearing. Its distance from the sea, and the existence of and the larger Baltic harbors were insurmountable obstacles to a shipping trade. Where a Jerichow harbor might have been lay the fishing village of Rande, rich enough even at the turn of the century for a Grand Hotel, an Archduke Hotel, a City of Hamburg Hotel. Jerichow had remained a way station on the road to Rande, somewhere that the carriages, now the omnibuses, never dropped off their big-spending summer visitors. Trade did not travel along the narrow country lanes; the large roads bypassed Jerichow far to the south. The nobility liked Jerichow the way it was, as an office, a warehouse district, a trading post, a loading station for their wheat and their sugar beets. The

nobility had no need of a town. Jerichow got its train line to Gneez, on the Hamburg–Stettin main line, because the nobility needed a means of transportation. Jerichow was too poor to build a sewer system; the nobility did not need one. There were no movie theaters in Jerichow: the nobility did not approve of that particular invention. Jerichow's industry, brickmaking, belonged to the nobility, as did the bank, most of the buildings, the Lübeck Arms. The Lübeck Arms had a septic tank. The nobility bought replacement parts for their machines in Jerichow, made use of the municipal administration, the police, the lawyers, Papenbrock's grain silos, but they took care of their important business in Lübeck, sent their children to boarding schools in Prussia, held religious services in their own private chapels, and had themselves buried behind their manor houses. At harvest time, when Ratzeburg or Schwerin was too far away, the gentlemen rode to the Lübeck Arms of an evening and played cards at their own special table—ponderous, affable, droning men wallowing in their Low German Plattdeutsch. They thought Cresspahl, with his beer, was a traveling salesman because of the big-city license plate on his car.

Jerichow called its main street, a narrow cutting from when the forest was being cleared, Town Road.

At breakfast, Cresspahl asked about the weather. He stepped inside the little shops, bought stationery or shirts of a better sort, asked casual questions. He stood for a while on the path behind Heinz Zoll's yard—it was he who did the higher-end woodworking around here—and had a good long look at the lumber stored in the open shed. He started taking his beer in at Peter Wulff's pub. Wulff was his age, less fat in those days, a hands-off tight-lipped bartender who observed Cresspahl's patient waiting the same way the latter did him. Cresspahl wrote a postcard for all to see and gave it to the hotel porter to mail to Richmond. He stopped by Jansen's, the lawyer. He walked to Rande and had dinner in the City of Hamburg Hotel. He read all the advertisements on the page for the Jerichow area in the *Gneez Daily*. He did not slow down when he passed by Papenbrock's gate, but his walks did take him past it, and after a while he knew

that the young man in charge of the unloading sacks in the yard was Horst Papenbrock, the son and heir, then thirty-one years old. Between its receding chin and its receding brow, Horst's face was as sharply pointed as a fish. Through the open window, Cresspahl saw old Papenbrock at his desk, sweating above his comfortable, delicate stomach, his polite nods so vigorous that he seemed to be bowing in his seat. Apparently he did not like bargaining with his aristocratic clientele, or not for long, this Papenbrock who was so cheap that he never bought a car and drove his family to Travemünde for coffee in the delivery truck. Cresspahl did not see my mother. Cresspahl did see my grandmother helping out behind the counter in the bakery, a submissive and spry old lady with a rather treachery way of speaking, especially to children. Here he did nod hello through the open door as he walked past.

*and I was never a sheep, Gesine.*

*They threw you down on your side, they tied your hooves together, they pinned your neck to the barn floor with their knees, they stripped off your wool with dull shears, and you never once opened your mouth, Louise née Utecht from Hageböck Street in Güstrow, you sheep*

Cresspahl knew that Horst Papenbrock and farmer Griem were Nazis who had to go to Gneez for their streetfighting because the Social Democrats in Jerichow were their neighbors, their relatives, their city councilmen. He knew that Papenbrock, with his grain business, his bakery, his deliveries to the surrounding countryside, was the richest man in Jerichow, and a moneylender. He knew that history had left no trace there except a Napoleonic entrenchment on the coast, five miles away. He knew that Jerichow could not support a second master carpenter.

Jerichow is surrounded by wheat fields. To the south, past the marsh, are the Countess Woods, then meadows bordered with hedges above head height. The weather is maritime. The wind mostly comes from the west, especially in midsummer and in winter. It's cool here. There are more overcast days per year here than anywhere else in the

country. It rains less often here than elsewhere in Mecklenburg, and storms are rare. The apple trees blossom late, in mid-May; the winter rye is ripe on July 25th. The frost sets in later and leaves earlier than in the rest of the county, but it barely penetrates the soil, because the air is always in motion from the wind, here.

August 29, 1967 Tuesday

There are still townhouses dating from the last century on Third Avenue north of 42nd Street: four or five stories high, once elegant brownstone or expensive brick facades now greasy with grime, the windows smeared and covered with dust and only the ground floors occupied, with small businesses, snack shops, bars, whose neon signs and awnings conceal the corpses of the buildings above them. The businesses have enough walk-in customers, they could hardly get by on the tenants. The street's future is supposed to lie in the glass-and-steel office buildings set back atop block-wide ten-story pedestals, stacked up high in identical strata starting from the twentieth story, still sixty-five feet wide on the fiftieth floor. The frosted glass and metal between the ribbon windows can look dark blue, gray, green, or yellow; some buildings have brick columns stuck onto the facade at the bearing struts; another distinguishing feature is the names on the ground-floor marble facing. The buildings are easy to dismantle, their names neither inscribed on nor inlaid in the walls, only stuck on or screwed on, for easy removal.

The building in which Miss Cresspahl earns her salary consists of a block-long, twelve-story plinth with a terrace atop it, set back, crowned by a smooth tower. The glass between the shining ribs has blue-gray stripes wrapping around it. Most of the windows show the slats of Venetian blinds but a little fluorescent light still shimmers through the cracks. From across the street, with her head tilted all the way back, she should be able to make out which two windows are hers, but she always loses count. At street level, half of the front of

the building is laid out as a normal bank, behind plate-glass windows taller than the people inside and out, neither tinted nor curtained nor ribbed with blinds, drawing a passerby's gaze in to the fake-leather seats, low tables, desks on islands of carpet, counters, teller windows under the eye of automatic cameras, and brightly polished giant-frying-pan vault door. This parlor as big as a train station's waiting room is still empty. The other half of the ground floor is a restaurant, shielding its customers from the light of day with lime-green curtains. The building's main entrance with its four swinging doors pulls in so many people from the sidewalk that the rest hurrying past get out of step. Behind a wall of pale marble, the foyer opens onto three elevator lanes to the left, the building's maintenance area branches off in the back, and the right wall is taken up by a long counter selling newspapers, candy, and tobacco products. Every elevator lane is managed by its own supervisor, whose blue-gray uniform bears the company's name in embroidered script above the heart. She manages to nod to him. As she enters an elevator car, its green light indicating an upward course, she sees the building's street number set into the floor, intended to alert the passenger if he has made a mistake. Among the approximately twenty-five occupants today, she sees no one she recognizes. When the steel double doors snap shut before her, it is nine minutes to nine o'clock.

The death toll for today is twenty Americans, fifteen South Vietnamese, and ninety-eight North Vietnamese, the latter estimated. The newspaper gives only two names from the list of the dead, who happened to be from the state of New York, as though the exact total counted for nothing really compared to the hundred and ninety-five million citizens of the country. The slain Nazi will be permitted a burial of honor at a national military cemetery, since his only crime was incitement to the murder of Negroes and Jews. A Mrs. Hart is opposed to having his grave next to the graves of those who fell in the war against the Nazis. Four Germans have gone on trial in Westphalia on charges of having drowned prisoners and tortured them to death under ice-cold showers at the Mauthausen concentration camp. At least one million American housewives are alcoholics. And this

time Stalin's daughter is in the paper for not wanting \$250,000 for a television interview. She'll do it for free. She seems to have substantial future earnings in view.

—How was work today, Gesine?

Mrs. Williams is back in the office, she didn't go to Greece after all, she was afraid of the military. A third memo has requested that employees lock their desks during lunch hour and keep their handbags with them at all times because of more thefts on the tenth floor. The latest rumor is that we've bought Xerox. My boss had to leave for Hawaii this afternoon, his son is being sent there from South Vietnam for R&R.

—And what did the paper say?

Mahalia Jackson was taken to a hospital in West Berlin.

August 30, 1967 Wednesday

Vietcong guerillas broke into a jail in the northern city of Quangngai and freed 800 prisoners. The paper gives the names of four men from the New York/New Jersey area killed in action, but not the total count. The soldiers on guard at the Culpeper National Cemetery in Virginia denied the dead Nazi burial because the Party refused to take their swastika off of the hearse; now he is back in the funeral home.

Dear Gesine,

I waited for you till eight, then Pamela Blumenkranz invited me to sleep over. Please don't call.

No mail, except for me.

What you need is in the fridge.

Mrs. Ferwalter is mad at you or at me. She hasn't called for a week.

We need to do something about D. E. He doesn't believe that you were in New Jersey alone.

The phone lines got crossed again. This time he said his name was George and that he wanted to talk to a Luise. He was calling from Rhode Island.

Were you alone in New Jersey?

If there's any news about Mahalia Jackson's condition, bring it for me.

This Griem, from Jerichow, did you know him? Is he still alive?

The truth is I only waited until seven thirty. What kind of office is that, where people have to stay working till eight at night? Is that worth it for us?

With affectionate greetings,  
Mary Fenimore Cressp. Cooper

She uses a British slang word, "fridge," out of loyalty to London SE.

What are the Chinese doing? In London they are starting a fight with the police, attacking them with baseball bats, iron bars, and axes. The one holding the ax is lanky, with glasses, still a schoolboy.

How did the Chinese find a baseball bat in England?

August 31, 1967 Thursday

The Vietcong are continuing their attacks in the South. The Soviets are conducting a secret trial of three writers. The Chinese forced a British chargé d'affaires in Peking to bend his head by pulling down on his hair; in retaliation, they say. Six other cemeteries rejected the body of the Nazi leader; the Party has had him cremated and his ashes are under armed guard.

What kind of person does Gesine picture when she thinks of *The New York Times* as an aunt?

An older person. Teachers at the high school in Gneez used to be called “Auntie”—ladies of a certain age, humanistically educated, good-naturedly disapproving of the course of things but only in one-on-one conversations, helplessly. They had wanted to change the course of things once: by studying at the universities under the Kaiser, by camping out and canoeing with men and without marriage certificates, by earning their own living despite the concerns of their middle-class families whose articles of faith they themselves defended against the changing times once they reached the same age and their hair turned gray and they tromped around in comfortable shoes and slacks whenever possible: It doesn't do to put a revolution in the saddle, it might not have had enough riding lessons. And you have to think of the horse, too. It's true that expressing such an opinion during class would have led to their dismissal. They were called Auntie with a certain indulgence, not unkindly, not unsympathetically. The term was malicious when applied to kindergarten teachers, those champion caregivers. Unathletic boys and overly timid girls were called Aunties, too, as a term of contempt.

That said, *The New York Times* strikes Gesine as like an aunt from a good family that has acquired a certain fortune on the backs of others but not in any brutal way, simply as the age dictates. It has rendered services to every government, and every government is in the history books. This surviving aunt carries on the family tradition. Gesine pictures age, a gaunt figure, a deeply lined face, a bitter twist to the mouth, but elegant dark clothes, an insistence on hairpins, a scratchy voice, smiles only in the corners of the eyes. Never, never losing her temper. In her bearing, the way she holds her legs, she flirts with her age—a sign of her experience. She has been around, looked life straight in its tight-lipped face; no chance of anyone pulling the wool over her eyes. She has had her affairs, but was certainly no adventuress; it all took place as befit her station in the best hotels in Europe; that's all in the past now. She so obviously expects respect

that she almost invites one to refuse it. She is a little stubborn, almost pushy when she feels excluded by younger people. She likes the young people to have their fun as long as she is the one doling it out. Gesine pictures a living room, a salon, furnished in Empire style, where the aunt holds court. Everything proceeds in civilized fashion; one listens to one's elders first. Tea is served, whiskey is served. Then tea again. Old lovers come for memory's sake, the younger generation for instruction. The servants are fanatically discreet. Auntie smokes (cigarillos), and drinks, the hard stuff too; she gets jokes, except when forced to pronounce them unacceptable in the interests of the public. She keeps up with the times. She can cook, she can bake. Auntie has remained unmarried, a tacit indication of the requirements one would have had to meet. She gives advice on marital questions; she can imagine what it's like to be married. (Anyway, a music critic's job is to criticize music, not write symphonies. Not even sonatas.) She is modern. (Gesine has no such aunt in her family.) This is someone you can go steal horses with whenever the law demands horse thefts.

And yet this person is not only pleasant.

Her bearing is useful, educational.

She does not raise her voice, she delivers a lecture.

On fifteen by twenty-three inches, over eight columns, she offers more than twenty stories for you to choose from.

She does not call an accused person guilty, not yet. Of the two murders a day in the city, she mentions only the instructive ones.

She does not use the president's first name, at most a murder victim's.

She describes hearsay as hearsay.

She lets even those she despises have their say.

She talks to sportsmen in the language of sportsmen.

Changes in the weather, too, she points out.

She helps the poor with charitable donations, and investigates poverty using the latest scientific methods.

She decries disproportionate sentencing.

At least she has pity.

She is impartial toward all forms of religion.

She safeguards purity of language—even correcting it in her clients' advertisements.

She offers the reader at most two pages of ads without a news story (except on Sunday).

She never swears or takes the Lord's name in vain.

She occasionally admits to errors.

She can restrain herself and call a murderer a controversial figure, from brigadier general up.

She drank in propriety with her mother's milk. Why shouldn't we trust her?

September 1, 1967 Friday

The American commander in South Vietnam says: The North Vietnamese are lying. Radio Hanoi reports U.S. losses (killed, wounded, missing) as 110,000 for the first six months of this year. He says: 37,038.

As of today, the state's divorce law of 1787 is no longer valid. Those who marry now have to wait two years before they are free again.

You don't have to marry me: D. E. says: you should just live with me.

D. E. sends flowers, telegrams, theater tickets, books. He takes Marie out to eat, has made friends with Esther, listens to Mr. Robinson's stories about his military service in West Germany. D. E. lives in New Jersey but spends a lot of time in the bars around 96th Street and Broadway, two blocks from Riverside Drive. On the phone he can almost always say: I'm in the neighborhood. D. E. is almost forty, tall, in Italian jackets and Irish tweed, with a long, fleshy, patient face above which he wears his gray hair long and parted, as if trying to conceal his age. D. E. weighs two hundred and twenty-five pounds and moves nimbly on small feet. D. E. drives a large English car, the colors of his suits are carefully chosen, he lacks for little. D. E. works in the arms industry.

D. E. says: I work for the Defense Department.

Gesine first heard D. E.'s name in Wendisch Burg, in 1953. He had gone to the same school that Klaus Niebuhr and the Babendererde girl had to withdraw from that spring; he was about to be expelled from his physics program in East Berlin after standing up in a faculty meeting and calling the Babendererde case a violation of the constitution of the German Democratic Republic (on the part of the German Democratic Republic). Not then, but after the June 1953 Uprising, he left the country. He will have made his decision using a list of positive and negative factors, the same kind of list that he draws up today when he can't make up his mind between different cars or houses or political opinions. Back then, what stood in one column was Wendisch Burg, socialism in the East German fashion, and a drawn-out love affair with Eva Mau; on the other side of the balance sheet was: The prospects for my education here are not good. So he hadn't had to make up his mind himself.

Gesine had seen him for the first time in the Marienfelde Refugee Center in West Berlin: a skinny young man with a slim steep head, blond hair at the time, paying somewhat absentminded attention to her by asking her questions about Jerichow and holding forth on political theories with extensive recourse to physics vocabulary. The only thing they could talk about easily was the Babendererde incident. He made no effort to be assigned to the same city as her. She saw him for only two days, before he was flown out to West Germany. He apparently told the immigration board: I chose the lesser evil. So they sent him to Stuttgart; he finished his doctorate in Hanover, moved from West Germany to England, and Defense bought his way to the U.S.A. in 1960. He did send postcards, sometimes letters, mainly about the actions and exploits of Eva Mau; from Stuttgart, young Mrs. Niebuhr née Babendererde sent reports of D. E.'s string of quick love affairs in a marveling, almost devoted tone. Even today, she talks about D. E. as though about an older relative, as though grateful to him for something. Gesine had been in New York for eleven months before he found her, flipping through the phone book, and he invited her out to their first dinner, a hulking, uncommunicative, rather solemn patron. After meeting Marie he proposed marriage.

D. E. works in a place called Industrial Park, New Jersey, for a firm involved in the DEW Line. D. E.W. stands for Distant Early Warning, a line of radar stations around the territories of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, designed to detect Soviet rockets in time for an American counterstrike. He will have assured the military more than that he had chosen the lesser evil before they let him join their work and felt their secrets would be safe with him. He is barely a scientist anymore, he is a technician. He earns twenty-five thousand dollars a year by this point, and his duties include inspection trips to England, Italy, France, Denmark, and Norway, and an embassy representative is waiting for him at passport control. According to D. E., his Soviet opposite number sits locked in a military airport, buying and selling technical literature on the black market. His firm can count on government contracts for the improved systems of the seventies, and D. E. can count on the firm's confidence in his abilities. D. E. does his best to impair these abilities through the regular intake of alcohol.

The house D. E. offers us stands alongside a wide stream in a wooded area of New Jersey. It is an old Colonial wooden house, white clapboard and a blue slate roof. He owns almost half of it so far. D. E.'s mother keeps house—a shy, bony, finicky woman who learned her English from her maids. D. E. was one of the few people smart enough to get their families out of East Germany before the open border in Berlin was closed down. The place where they now live consists of a few scattered houses, and D. E.'s mother has arrived at her image of the U.S.A. from a certain similarity to the landscape around Wendisch Burg, and mostly from TV shows. She is so proud of her son that she wants to be buried where he became successful. Around Gesine her behavior is careful, almost formal, as though trying to dispel some kind of fear. She sighs over D. E. when he betakes himself to his study in the evening with the French red wine that he orders from an importer by the case, but she says nothing, and every morning she has two new bottles ready for him. D. E. sits at his metal behemoth of a desk, a heavy, sorrowful figure in the night, and phones the island of Manhattan. He says: Dear Miss Mary, quite contrary, come see me, the weekend is so long. We'll have a cookout in the yard. I'll take you

to the shore. He says: If she doesn't want to, let me come see the two of you.

*You just don't want to die alone.*

*But with me the child would be taken care of.*

Unfortunately, D. E. has won over the child. Marie laughs at his funny faces, especially the wounded dignity one; she laughs at his demonstrations of drawling Mecklenburg German, where to amuse her he ends every other sentence with a squeaking “*Nich?*,” and at his performances of Southern or New England dialects, and she envies him his English, because D. E. is like a parrot with languages. Marie believes his stories full of sudden twists and turns—about the lady who beat a policeman over the head with her shoe in front of St. Patrick’s Cathedral, about his cats who can count, about the vice presidents of his firm waging war against each other on the eighth floor. Marie designs secret codes ever since he taught her ciphering systems. Marie admires his behavior in restaurants, and the fact that he can afford restaurants on the 52nd floor. Marie keeps her door open a crack on nights when D. E. is sitting at the table, with his bottles, and talking about lasers, about the political history of Mecklenburg, about Tom’s Bar. Marie thinks of the two upstairs guest rooms in D. E.’s house as her inalienable personal property. She even gave D. E. this name, because she liked the little hiccup between “Dee” and “Ee.” She doesn’t hold his drinking against him (he doesn’t lie on the steps in front of the emergency exit of the movie theater on 97th Street, dressed in rags, crusted with dirt, unshaven, snoring loudly, hand still on the bottle in his brown paper bag; he is not a Broadway bum, he’s a professor). Once, when D. E. said he was coming over, Marie went to the phone and ordered a supply of red wine and Gauloise cigarettes and paid with the housekeeping money. But D. E. arrives with bags in both hands, flowers tucked under his arm, chocolate bars clamped between his fingers, and you can already hear his booming teasing voice in the hall, saying something to Mr. Robinson, and Mr. Robinson stands in the elevator door to watch D. E. enter the Cresspahl

residence, head raised, sniffing the air, shouting in awe and wonder: Smell That Dee-li-cious Meck-len-burg Cooking! And Marie laughs.

September 2, 1967 Saturday

Through the night, till the early morning hours, cars were inching bumper to bumper along the river into the long weekend, sending short bursts of dull noise into the open windows along Riverside Drive. D. E. could not be dissuaded from a comparison with approaching artillery fire. Now the weekenders have left silence in their wake, and up to 660 of them, it is predicted, will have died in traffic accidents by the evening of Labor Day.

The morning is cool, bright, and dry in the park. This playground, sprinkled with white light, is a part of Gesine's earliest days in New York; here is where Marie brought her together with her first neighbors. This morning, she is sitting on one of the benches around the edge of the arena and looking down at the half-naked children running in circles in the taut, intersecting jets of water from the three sprinklers. She is waiting for Mrs. Ferwalter, who spends Sabbath mornings here during the summer. If she half turns around, she can see between the leaves the window with the blue curtain, behind which D. E. is sleeping off his wine, spread out across the whole bed, naked, arms at his sides, breathing shallowly with angrily protruding lips, alone in the apartment.

Mrs. Ferwalter, Rebecca's mother, is a short, fat woman—a stocky individual who likes to wear red, loose-fitting dresses. Her cheekbones are wide, her forehead is narrow above almost black eyes and eyebrows, and the curve with which her head tapers to a narrow chin recalls her face as a girl. Now that face is in the firm grip of age, and locked in a rigid expression of disgust that she doesn't realize it has. She was born in 1922 and looks like she's sixty. Six years ago, here in this playground, Mrs. Ferwalter heard Gesine speaking German to her child and stood up from the neighboring bench, walked heavily over

on her pudgy legs, and sat down next to Gesine. —Maybe with yours can my child play, she said good-naturedly, in an accent that made her German sound almost Russian. She looked like someone who had recently been through a dangerous illness. Her coarse brown hair was cut short, unevenly, as if after a skull operation. She was wearing a sleeveless dress, and when she held the back of the bench for support as she sat down Gesine saw the number tattooed on the inside of her left forearm. She looked away, at the woman's plump legs, but there she saw varicose veins bulging out.

*You stay sitting right there. You don't know why I had to send Gronberg away. You don't know anything.*

*If only I'd known how easy it is for the dead to talk. The dead should keep their mouths shut.*

—I'm from Germany, Gesine had said, and Mrs. Ferwalter had answered, with a sigh, from the dry heat or perhaps of longing: I heard. Europe . . .

She had already called Rebecca over, who was five years old then, a well-behaved child with her mother's hair, doll-like with her small suspicious mouth, dark eyebrows, wide starched collar, ironed jacket-and-skirt set, and like a puppet she made a jerky curtsy to Gesine. Marie came warily over, feet swinging in slow wide arcs, half turning away altogether from time to time, but her curiosity was too much for her. The two children held their hands behind their backs and looked scornfully at each other, but Mrs. Ferwalter ordered severely: Go and play nicely! and Rebecca obediently took the strange child over to the swings. Mrs. Ferwalter started to praise Marie: Your child is so quiet. She doesn't race around. Doesn't scream at her mother. She's not American, she's European. It's a good way to raise children, the European way, she had said, in her broken English, her broken German, following both children with her always narrowed, almost squinting eyes, her thin lips pursed in disgust.

Mrs. Ferwalter is from a Ruthenian village in eastern Slovakia, "where the Jews lived a comfortable life." She emphasizes that it was

a “good” village. The Christians tolerated those of different faith, and the fifteen-year-old girl was not harassed even at night by the teenage boys on the Christian side. We can’t ask her about her parents. “I wasn’t pretty. They said I looked striking.” “My hair hung down to my waist.” In 1944, she was handed over to the Germans, probably by the Hungarians (we can’t ask her about that). The Germans took her to Mauthausen concentration camp. “One of the wardens, she was so nice, she had five children and had to, everything, yes.” She means a female SS guard. We can’t ask her about that. In a photograph from 1946 she has the face of a smooth-skinned thirty-five-year-old woman. She tried to stay in Czechoslovakia and in 1947 she married a leatherworker with a small leather goods shop in Budweis. The Communist putsch made the country where she had grown up unsafe, and she arrived in the U.S. via Turkey, Israel, and Canada in 1958. The doctors say that the fat in her shoulders, her neck, her whole body is a manifestation of concentration camp syndrome, whose symptoms also include her anxiety, her insomnia, and a chronic inflammation of the respiratory tract which she has only one way of dealing with: sucking mucus down into her throat with a harsh, scratching sound. All of these facts are things we didn’t ask her about. She has mentioned them casually and in passing over the course of six years, the way friends bring up pieces of their lives.

Mrs. Ferwalter was the first of the European emigrants on Riverside Drive to give Gesine advice about the neighborhood. She recommended a kindergarten for Marie, showed her the stores selling imported food, warned her away from the ones run by “bad Jews,” and always pointed out everything “European” on Manhattan’s Upper West Side. She is homesick for the taste of the bread in Budweis. Maybe she has clung to Gesine for these six years, with phone calls and walks and conversations in Riverside Park, because this German knows what the bread she misses tastes like.

On Saturday mornings she waits in the park for her husband and son who have gone to synagogue. She herself takes certain liberties with her God, but she makes sure that Rebecca does not break the Sabbath and, for instance, start running around with other children

or get too close to the ice cream man. When she shouts for her daughter, her voice can be heard across the whole playground, a shrill shriek, and Rebecca sulks and trudges around the bench from which Mrs. Ferwalter reigns. When Mrs. Ferwalter thinks no one is watching, though, she leans over to Gesine and says, with a wink in Rebecca's direction and a conspiratorial smile: Look at her sauntering around, that child. She's got long legs, that child.

She lets Gesine read to her from the newspaper; she would never spend money on a paper herself. Rebecca's school is expensive, and her husband doesn't make much as manager of a little shoe store on Broadway. She arranges her legs this way and that, crosses and uncrosses her ankles, fidgets on the bench. She cannot sit still. She nods with her fat chin—disgusted, sickened—at the news that the Soviets have expelled two U.S. diplomats because the U.S. had previously expelled two Soviet diplomats. She nods, as though she knows all about espionage.

The latest news about the mafia. Apparently all five mafia families in the New York area have gotten out of the drug-dealing business for good. They now prefer to use their cash reserves to seize power in legitimate undertakings. The prison sentences for some members of the families, up to forty years, were deterrent enough. For another thing, the Corsican and French heroin suppliers were mad that the mafia refused to pay for a shipment worth 2.8 million dollars (100 million retail) on the grounds that they did not receive the delivery, the FBI did. Heroin trafficking now seems to run via Cuban and South American middlemen. The French like to pack the stuff in oscilloscopes.

Mrs. Ferwalter has stood up and walked over to the playground entrance, where, between her husband and her son, both formally dressed in black suit and stubby black fur hat, Marie wheels up the grocery cart with the provisions for next week, intent, lips pursed tight with responsibility, and Mrs. Ferwalter leads her into the playground, one arm affectionately around her shoulder, and deposits her in front of Gesine, and cries: She's a sport! Just like a real Czech!

And her mouth is relaxed now, her eyes wide open.

September 3, 1967 Sunday

On a day like this, thirty-six years ago. On a white day like this, cool under a hard blue, in clean, briskly moving air. On the beach promenade in Rande, by the gray and green sea, across from the sharp, dark contour of the Holstein coast. Keeping on the sunny side under the flickering leaves. Cresspahl's voice must have been a deep bass then, vowels starting way back in the throat in the Malchow version of Plattdeutsch; my mother's voice small, supple, a high alto. Sometimes a turn of phrase in High German creeps into her speech, "God willing" or "for my mother's sake." She has lagged behind her parents, and Louise Papenbrock keeps turning her head to look back at the stranger who is asking her daughter something, maybe what time it is.

*But what'll happen then?  
Shouldn't we wait and see?  
But they're planning something.  
That's what I'm waiting to find out.*

Page 1. From *The New York Times* Special Correspondent in Bonn. Ilse Koch, "the Beast of Buchenwald," was found dead in her prison cell yesterday. Her neck hung in a noose made from bed sheets and tied to the door latch. She was sixty.

*My name is Cresspahl. I'm forty-three years old. My father was a wheelwright on the Bobzin estate near Malchow and is now dead. My mother has an annuity in Malchow. I am a carpenter.*

*A cabinetmaker.  
I can make wagon wheels too.  
I'm twenty-five and supposed to marry someone in Lübeck.*

Ilse Koch, a plump woman with vivid green eyes and flaming red hair (according to the description in *The New York Times*), was born in Dresden and married a friend of Hitler's in 1937, the commander

of the Buchenwald concentration camp, in a spectacular nighttime outdoor pagan ceremony. The Kochs then lived in a mansion not far from the camp.

*"Would you care to be my wife?"*

*Yes, I learned my English at boarding school. Rostock accent.*

51,572 political enemies of the Nazis, Jews, and forced laborers from all over Europe died in Buchenwald. On morning rides through the camp, Ilse Koch beat prisoners she ran across with her riding crop. She ordered others beaten and killed, and forced prisoners to participate in orgies involving sadism and perversity. She ordered the killing of tattooed prisoners for her collection and made lampshades, gloves, and book covers from their skin and their bones.

*Will we change our names when we become British citizens?*

*If you want.*

*I'd like to keep your name.*

During the trial of Ilse Koch in 1947, a Dr. Konrad Morgen, an investigator, prosecutor, and judge for the SS, was called as a witness. He had investigated the Koch case in 1943, on orders from the SS authorities. According to his findings, she was an incurable moral degenerate, a perverted, nymphomaniacal, hysterical, power-mad she-devil. Her handicrafts disappeared after this investigation. Karl Koch was later shot by the Nazis.

*My older brother didn't do too well. He's in South America. My sister is in Cracow*

*married to a lawyer, who embezzles money.*

*And Horst doesn't have much going for him. So now I'm the favorite, unfortunately, and I'm supposed to move up to the city. You have to say you make four thousand marks a year.*

*I can say six.*

*And that Hitler is an Austrian.*

*Say that to Horst?  
To my father.  
If you want me to.*

During her detention, Ilse Koch became pregnant, and the Allies sentenced her merely to life imprisonment. Later her sentence was reduced to four years (in the opinion of one witness: because she had helped the Allies gather incriminating evidence for the Nuremberg trial). The West Germans arrested her in 1949 when she was released from Landsberg, and sentenced her to life imprisonment in a new trial.

*Do you sleep with a pillow? Do you believe in God? Is Richmond far from the sea?*

In October 1966, the Bavarian government rejected Ilse Koch's application for a pension. In 1962 she had even appealed to the European Commission of Human Rights.

*Do you want children, Heinrich Cresspahl?*

September 4, 1967 Monday, Labor Day

We're supposed to believe that? That more than 300 Czechoslovak intellectuals in the world have appealed to Western writers to join a protest against their own censors? To John Steinbeck, of all people? We'd prefer not to believe it. Steinbeck paid a visit to Vietnam to see the war, and nothing there bothered him. Still, *The New York Times* seems to believe the news, and prints it on the front page.

The Vietcong marked election day in South Vietnam by staging a series of terrorist attacks and shellings against voters in 21 provinces. At least 26 civilians are dead. The Americans bombed near Hanoi.

*The New York Times* would like to draw our attention to the

weather. It offers as evidence a photograph showing the corner of 89th Street and Riverside Drive: thick lumpy treetops surrounding a monument bathed in light, hardly any pedestrians, cars parked. Nearer, Arcadia, to thee.

The city is completely quiet. The ear misses the sounds of car engines, helicopters, sirens. The light is white, like yesterday. The wind from the Great Lakes has pushed all the dirty clouds above the city out to the Atlantic, the chimneys have been idle for two days, and the air is clear, cool, and brisk. It is the first weekend this summer that it hasn't rained. From Riverside Drive, seen across the whole width of the Hudson, the brownish boxes and cylinders on the New Jersey side are sharp and undeniable: modern architecture, the view set aside for Riverside Drive in the 1880s destroyed.

The buildings on this street, hardly any of them less than ten stories tall, were built for the new aristocracy of the nineteenth century, for the new money—railroad money, mining money, natural gas money, oil money, speculation money, all the money of the industrial explosion. Riverside Drive was meant to surpass Fifth Avenue as a residential area, with its magnificent entryways, formal lobbies, eight-room suites, servant's quarters, hidden service entrances, liveried employees, and private views of the river, of the forest of wild clouds atop the other shore's cliffs, of nature. There is not a single store or business along all of Riverside Drive, and only two or three hotels, even these residential hotels for long-term guests. The dwelling places of Business were meant to be Noble. Figures such as William Randolph Hearst lived here, in fact on three floors that he later converted to a three-story hall with his own private elevator, then on still more floors, until by 1913 he had bought all twelve. In that era, an address on Riverside Drive meant wealth and credit, power and princely status. It was a street for Whites, Anglo-Saxons, Protestants. After the First World War, they were joined by the Jews from Harlem who felt that their formerly exclusive neighborhood no longer befitted their station, as well as by immigrants from the Lower East Side whose income sufficed by then for the prestige of this address—emigrants who had made it. In the thirties, the Jews from Germany

came, first with their household belongings in crates, then without any luggage, then from the German-occupied countries of Europe, and after the war came the survivors of the camps, and finally the citizens of the state of Israel, inveterate Europeans who had not been able to cope with Israel's climate and besiegement. As a result, a Jewish colony had formed on Riverside Drive and West End Avenue just behind it, joined by religion, blood ties, and memories of Europe.

*The Belgians called me Madame, and the Americans say Darling. In Europe children bow to grownups. My family was in Germany for five hundred years. My father used to come home with long baguettes under his arm. My father—*

*Your father was killed by the Germans, Mrs. Blumenroth.  
My father died young, Mrs. Cresspahl.*

Riverside Drive did not overtake Fifth Avenue as a residential address; President Kennedy's widow does not live here. Retirees live here, middle-income people, office workers, students with roommates. Countess Seydlitz lives here. Ellison, the writer, lives here. (The assistant at Schustek the butcher's refuses to move here; he believes in having his own lawn in front of his own house.) Most of the buildings still consider themselves too genteel to rent to dark-skinned citizens: Negroes are permitted to superintend them, keep them clean, operate the elevators, polish the brass. And old age lurks in these monuments of prosperity, like a neglected disease. Many of the elegant suites have been divided up into stingy little apartments; neighbors complain about leaky pipes, rattling plumbing, repeated malfunctions in the elevators, and a sheen of grime on the marble paneling and antiquated furniture in the lobbies, against which broom and water are powerless. In some buildings, the rents have been frozen by law since the war. Doormen, meant not only to greet the tenants but also to scare away burglars and child-snatchers, are a rare sight nowadays; often, the manned elevators have been replaced with automatic ones, in which the passengers eyes strangers warily. Apartments here are still much sought after, and change hands privately. There are high

ceilings, old-fashioned floorplans; the walls dampen sound nicely; the management takes care of the garbage and repairs. The street is considered practically safe. (On the park benches, there is a lot of talk these days about the homosexuals cruising each other at the Soldiers and Sailors Monument, which they call the Wedding Cake.) And the street is one of the quiet ones. At most it sees two parades a year. Long grass grows in the cracks between the squares of the sidewalk. For half the year, the sound of cars from the highway along the Hudson is filtered through leaves in the park, and except during rush hour Riverside Drive carries only local traffic, it is empty and noiseless at night until six in the morning, when the first people will drive to work and the hollow whistles of the railroad under the hills of the park will force their way into our shallow sleep, tomorrow. This is where we live.

UWE JOHNSON (1934–1984) grew up in the small town of Anklam in the German state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. At the end of World War II, his father, who had joined the Nazi Party in 1940, disappeared into a Soviet camp; he was declared dead in 1948. Johnson and his mother remained in Communist East Germany until his mother left for the West in 1956, after which Johnson was barred from regular employment. In 1959, shortly before the publication of his first novel *Speculations About Jakob* in West Germany, Johnson emigrated to West Berlin by streetcar, leaving the East behind for good. New novels, *The Third Book About Achim*, *An Absence*, and *Two Views*, followed in quick succession. A member of the legendary Gruppe 47, Johnson lived from 1966 until 1968 with his wife and daughter in New York, compiling a high-school anthology of postwar German literature. On Tuesday, April 18, 1967, at 5:30 P.M., as he later recounted the story, he saw Gesine Cresspahl, a (fictional) character from his earlier works, walking on the south side of 42nd Street from 5th to 6th Avenue alongside Bryant Park; he asked what she was doing in New York and eventually convinced her to let him write his next novel about a year in her life. *Anniversaries* was published in four installments—in 1970, 1971, 1973, and 1983—and was quickly recognized in Germany as one of the great novels of the century. In 1974, Johnson left Germany for the isolation of Sheerness-on-Sea, England, where he struggled through health and personal problems to finish his magnum opus. He died shortly after it was published, at age forty-nine.

DAMION SEARLS grew up on Riverside Drive in New York City, three blocks away from Gesine Cresspahl's apartment. He is the author of three books and has translated more than thirty, including six for NYRB Classics.