

Prologue

On a dismal day, October 16, 1944, a freight train moved lazily from Terezin to an unknown destination somewhere in the East. Perhaps the sun was shining brightly, but it was dismal inside the cattle cars filled with a strange cargo. This was a normal sort of day, especially in the few weeks between September 28 and October 28 of that year, with a number of similar trains heading in the same direction, always with the same purpose: to transport thousands of prisoners from the "anteroom to hell" to the real hell in Auschwitz,¹ thousands upon thousands of people whose only "crime" was that they were born of Jewish parents.

Suddenly a piece of paper appeared in the air alongside the train, gliding slowly to the ground. A postcard with a terse message had been dropped from the cattle car with the hope that some bystander would put a stamp on it and mail it. And somebody did.

A few days later the postcard reached its destination. It expressed concern about several people:

¹When referring to the concentration camp, the German name, Auschwitz, will be used, rather than the Polish name, Oświęcim, to indicate the Nazi involvement and responsibility.

Dear Olinka,

Sofie Fischer has promised me today that she will visit our mother frequently. All of us think today very much of Leouš and Klárča. Be well. Let the dear God protect you.

Love and Kisses

Egon

There was no concern expressed about the sender himself. Egon Ledeċ, former assistant concertmaster of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, a fine artist and equally fine person, always worried about others and lent a helping hand wherever possible. For almost three years the sound of his beloved violin poured like a healing balm into the hearts of his fellows in misery, and only a few days earlier he had participated in the world premiere of a composition written for the Terezin orchestra. Today the composer, the conductor, and many members of the ensemble, together with hundreds of yesterday's audiences, were on their way to the fearsome Unknown. On a little postcard Egon Ledeċ wrote his own most fitting epitaph, the last sentence of the last chapter of his life story. There were only a few more words to be added, but that he could not do personally. Next day, in Auschwitz, he was led from the station platform directly into the gas chamber.