

Chapter 10

The Beginning

Schlemmer agreed to Paul's proposal, and Paul set out to find a suitable location for the factory. There were lots in which every inch was filled with the sounds of workers hammering and soldering. Factory sign after sign for coats and barley coffee, sewing machines and feeding troughs, umbrellas and reupholsterers. He wanted to move into a building like this, set up machines, and begin manufacturing screws. But there was nothing available in these lots. Far outside the city, however, there was an old, vacant farriery. At the front was a low, one-story house with six windows and a gable spanning its whole breadth. In the middle was a wide gate above which hung a large golden horse's head. The farrier had lived in the front house, while the forge, along with stalls for carriages and horses, had been in the courtyard. This was where horses had been shod for the wagons from Pommern and Mecklenburg. Wagoners had stopped here before entering the city gates. The railroad had put blacksmiths out of business, and Balthasar the farrier wanted to rent out his smithy.

Paul thought to himself that he hadn't come to Berlin to draw wire in an abandoned smithy and make screws in a Biedermeier house with a large linden tree in the yard. He wanted to be in the thick of it in a big building with wings leading off in all directions, and more courtyards behind them, each with their own further wings, in short, an 'industrial lot.' But then he admitted that he would save on transportation costs at the farriery because it was all at ground level, and that there was nothing more beautiful than an old farriery with a linden tree. Yesterday a farriery, today an ironworks, and one would always be reminded of impermanence.

Ever since humans had stopped believing in God, he mused, they thought themselves so clever. They are drunk on faith in progress and an ever-brighter future. If the price per square

meter seems right, everything else is in working order, and the rent isn't too high, I'll take the farriery.

The golden horse head remained over the gate. He put up a sign on the roof: Schlemmer & Effinger. Paul ordered a magnificent screw-cutting lathe from England, and hired a mechanic whom Ben had chosen.

On October 1, 1884, the employees came. Steffen the accountant, a pedantic, smart fellow whose own father was a manufacturer who'd gone bankrupt; red-haired, freckled Meyer, in charge of correspondence; and Eberhard, the errand boy. Mr. Smith, the mechanic, also arrived. Here was a fellow who looked at everything with tremendous disdain, never took his pipe from his mouth, and took very long breakfast breaks.

On October 1, 1884, Steffen opened the ledgers for the first time, on which were written, in large Gothic letters: "God with us!"

On October 1, 1884, Karl paid a visit to his brother and wondered if being a factory owner wouldn't be even better than being the senior employee of a company as well-respected as Zink & Brettschneider. "Where's your office?" he asked, and was shown a chair at a wooden desk.

On October 1, 1884, a letter from Kragshheim arrived:

"Dearest son!

May God bless your new beginnings on this day. May he give you power, strength, and peace. Amen.

We are glad to hear that you are making such good progress toward your goals. If you continue to be diligent, work hard, and save every penny, nothing can go wrong.

I hope the starting capital will suffice. There may be setbacks, and you cannot know whether C. L. Schlemmer will continue to support you. May you have God's blessing, and greetings from your loving Father."

On October 1, 1884 came a poem, a beautiful work of print, the engagement notice of Mary F. Potter to Ben K. Effinger (where did the K. come from? Paul wondered), announced by William V. Potter and his wife Winifred, née Beverly, London W.

On October 1, 1884, the firm of Schlemmer & Effinger sent out leaflets:

“Herewith, Schlemmer & Effinger is honored to announce that we have established a factory for the production of screws of all kinds at the following location, Schönhauser Allee 144.

Equipped with the best and newest machines, we can offer products to fulfill even the most stringent demands at the lowest prices. Samples and catalog available upon request. We would be honored to fulfill your orders, and our only aim is your satisfaction.

We respectfully offer the enclosed designs for your inspection, and remain,
yours faithfully,

Schlemmer & Effinger

Paul Effinger.”

On October 1, 1884, Schlemmer arrived, a tall man with a full brown beard, and glanced casually about the factory. Then he slapped Paul on the shoulder and said, “Well, young man, let’s toast to this,” and went off to drink a bottle of wine with him.

Chapter 11

Oppner the Banker Buys a House

It was on Sunday, the 22nd of March, on a beautiful day in early spring, that Oppner said to his wife Selma, “You’re sitting and stitching away, just like Penelope. We wanted to look at the house on Bendlerstraße. It’s the Kaiser’s birthday, so it’s an auspicious day for his Majesty’s subjects. The house is a bit outside of town, but the Tiergarten is nearby, and I can take the horsecar to work. It’s banker Mayer’s house, by the way.”

“Oh, the one who went bankrupt,” said Selma. “I believe he lived quite lavishly—I always prefer simple things.”

“I don’t believe that’s why he lost his money, though I grant you that everyone has been living above their means since 1870.”

“And you want to buy a house!”

“But Selma dear, this neighborhood is turning into a commercial area. And the children are growing up, and they’ll need their own rooms. Where do you intend to find rooms for all four of them? Let me show you how much it costs...”

Selma listened as she continued to stitch red cross-stitches into a canvas. “Excuse me,” she said, “I know nothing about any of this, and I have to count my stitches.”

She counted, and pulled through a red thread through to where she was to begin next. “Honestly, I’d rather leave everything as it is. Moving is a great deal of work. The chandeliers won’t work there, nor will the curtains. We’ve lived on Klosterstraße for twenty years, I don’t see why we can’t keep doing so.”

“But you’re not an old woman yet—you’re beautiful and thirty-eight years old. And *I’m* saying this—I’m fifty-four! We have daughters. We have to show our standing. You’ve always been satisfied with very little, but that’s a mistake.”

“Just the opposite,” she said proudly. “We don’t need it. Everyone knows who we are.” She stood up, folded the large canvas cloth with a heavy, sorrowful sigh, put on a small black bonnet with feathers and flowers, a black velvet coat with a large bustle and said, with a face as if she were accompanying her husband to a funeral: “All right, now we can go and have a look at your house.”

They walked through the Tiergarten on a sandy path, along which stood just a few country homes in pale plaster with green shutters. Herr Brinner was already waiting in front of the gate with an elderly, distinguished-looking gentleman.

“Ah, Herr Mayer,” said Frau Oppner, with the appropriate reserve vis-à-vis a man who had gone bankrupt.

“Allow me to show you my house personally,” said Mayer.

“Yes,” said Brinner. “Even the most honest broker cannot know a property as well as its owner.”

They went over to the other side to see the house properly. It was a beautiful, light grey, classical house, with an oriel window with Corinthian columns and a Grecian gable. The plaster was peeling.

“It’s been a bit neglected, sadly,” said Mayer. “The house was very beautiful when my father had it built. It was designed by Persius. I assume you have the blueprints, Herr Oppner. We haven’t changed anything since 1840.”

“So it seems,” Selma said uncharitably.

Herr Mayer maintained his composure. He was an elegant banker of the old sort. He had traveled to Paris often, attended horse races in England, gambled in Baden Baden and Monte Carlo. Now this was over. The payout was seventy-five percent, and that was bad enough.

“Isn’t the house too bright and cold and austere?” Selma asked.

“Yes, it’s old-fashioned,” said Mayer. “My father was somewhat conservative in his tastes.”

“It could be modernized,” Oppner added placatingly.

“Let’s give it a once-over,” Brinner said in his Berliner cadence. “Step inside, lady and gentlemen, step into the parlor. We can talk business afterward, when madame is gone.”

“Of course,” said Oppner. “Fortunately, my wife doesn’t have a head for business at all.” Immediately beyond the front door was a small staircase, which was graced by a large bronze statue of Flora holding a lantern. They moved through the foyer, past a white cloakroom, and into a large salon. On the walls was a painted pergola alongside green trellis-work with climbing roses and doves. The room was furnished with white Empire furniture, and seemed very feudal and old-fashioned. Next to it was the dining room with a terrace from which a few steps led into the overgrown garden. The dining room was done in a graceful gothic style, with a blue ceiling

with golden stars and mahogany furniture upholstered in blue repp cloth. Next to it were two other rooms. One had a semicircular extension with glass doors that reached from floor to ceiling. The upstairs had five more rooms. It was a fine, spacious, bourgeois house with a simple, straightforward layout.

Frau Oppner said, "It's too austere for me. You may be attached to it, but for us, the house would have to be significantly redone. We have four children, and I'm not much for parties, I prefer things simple."

"But Selma dear," said Oppner, "we'll cover up that foolish pastoral mural with red silk, and put gold-embossed leather wallpaper in the dining room."

Mayer attempted to salvage the situation: "But the murals are very good."

"But completely outmoded," said Oppner. "Please don't take it personally, but these days one wants cozy and warm—bourgeois, in other words, even slightly opulent. But green trellises with shepherds and roses—no, Herr Mayer, the proprietor of Oppner & Goldschmidt can't have that in his home. It would look as if we wanted to travel back into the eighteenth century and dance a minuet. *Là ci darem la mano* every day won't do for an old Berliner."

"Of course, that's quite doable," said Brinner. "And as to the neighborhood, Herr Oppner, let me tell you, this neighborhood is the future. Grunewald may be going fast, and it may be nice to live where the owls hoot good night to each other, but it's no investment. And an investment is always a good thing."

"Yes, yes, of course," said Oppner, somewhat embarrassed that Brinner was saying all of this in front of Mayer.

"And where are the rooms for the help?" Selma asked.

"In the souterrain."

They went downstairs.

"Down here," Oppner said, "we should put in an old-fashioned German taproom, a green tiled stove, everything with wood paneling, and a large cask. It only feels properly cozy when you can tap your own beer. When I imagine having a real taproom down here, and a little staircase leading up into the dining room, I think we could have lovely gatherings. And the whole house could be made quite cozy, Selma, believe me. We can get large stoves, make everything nice and dark, put in coffered ceilings. In short, I like it a great deal."

Selma went to look at the kitchen and cellar.

“By the way, Herr Mayer,” said Oppner, “forgive me for speaking so plainly, but you’re in financial difficulties. Doesn’t the house belong to the estate?”

“Of course, Herr Oppner,” the old banker said. “It will be auctioned off. We are not accustomed to owing anything to anyone. We were unlucky. The Gotthardt tunnel is a magnificent triumph of the human spirit. But a banker shouldn’t be enthralled by such things.”

“Don’t take this the wrong way, but I think it’s a grave mistake for bankers to lose themselves in fantasies.”

“Unfortunately, that’s what I did. That magnificent transformation of the Alps. Once the mule sought its way in the fog; it does so no more. Now one can travel comfortably in the bed of a sleeper car on a route our ancestors had to wearily climb, fearing robbers all the way. The Gotthard tunnel wasn’t simply a stock or a piece of paper, it was a human undertaking worth supporting. I didn’t put my money into some lead mine, in which the locals lead inhumane lives under terrible conditions, or invest in the dividends of a rag-sorting shop, but into a great work of the human spirit. But with the powers of destiny can no eternal bond be forged, and misfortune strides swiftly. There was an inrush of water, the great project suffered a terrible disruption, and the stocks plummeted.”

“I know,” said Oppner, “I was at the stock exchange when the news broke. It was a black Friday. Fortunes were lost in an hour.”

“My first thought was: keep the stocks. The tunnel will be built one day, and they will rise in value again. But you know how it is—I was told to sell them as quickly as possible, before they became worthless. I did. I sadly did. Since then, my fate has been sealed. The business couldn’t handle the loss of a quarter of a million, and we owed another fifty thousand marks to a young manufacturer. I was very careful in my business dealings. But times are uncertain. Everyone is founding businesses, talking them up, and then one day, they’re bankrupt. The terrible crash of ‘73 still haunts us all. I fought and fought; now, I’m a lost man. Your star is rising; my sun has set. But I hope no one will lose so much as a penny because of me.”

“I hope so too,” said Oppner sternly. “One banker’s insolvency damages the reputation of the entire branch. But let’s come back to the house. Herr Brinner said three hundred thousand.”

“And not a penny less. The house is worth it. I’m trying my hardest not to sell it below cost. Every penny less is a penny taken from my creditors and from my honor.” The two men rose from their chairs. Oppner extended his hand to Mayer.

“Allow me to say one more thing: I do not scorn you.”

“Thank you,” Mayer said, touched, and led the three out of the house, not without graciously kissing Frau Oppner’s hand.

Herr Brinner opined, “Nice house, isn’t it? I’ll offer it to you for three-fifty.”

“It would have to be renovated, quite a bit, in fact. But it’s a beautiful house. Do you like it, Selma? You’re very quiet again. You’d have to live here as well, after all.”

“Oh, it’s fine. But we won’t have any peace and quiet with all the workers.”

“The workers won’t be too bad, my dear Selma. I’ll come by your office later, Herr Brinner. I’ll take my wife home first. Ho, cabbie!”

Oppner and Brinner quickly settled on an agreement. An hour later, Oppner took three hundred brown thousand mark bills from his briefcase and laid them on Brinner’s desk.

Chapter 12

Biedermeier Makes Way for the Eighties

The house on Bendlerstraße was painted a shade just shy of dark brown. The striped pale blue wallpaper in the hallway was torn down and replaced with dark red. A hat rack was installed that resembled a tree trunk with small wooden bears climbing it or sitting at its base. Next to it was a table with a silver bowl for calling cards. The cloakroom remained on the right. Oppner found it quite charming with its white paint and golden stripes, but the children were strongly in favor of doing away with this sign of outmoded classicism.

“If you’re going to buy such an old-fashioned house,” said Annette, the beautiful eighteen-year-old, “instead of building a modern villa with a turret and a cupola and a separate oriel, then at least paint everything dark and make it cozy instead of such a cold, harsh, bright house.”

Theodor, the aesthete, barely seventeen years old and apprenticing at Oppner & Goldschmidt, rarely agreed with his sister Annette because he thought she was a silly goose. In this case, however, he was also in favor of dark.

The pastoral mural in the large salon was covered with red silk damask, and only the ceiling remained with its clouds and cherubs, which Annette considered silly enough. The dining room, in which the vaguely gothic furniture had stood and the blue sky with golden stars had been, was now decorated with lavish, golden-brown leather and red coats of arms. A pair of antlers strewn with artificial grapes were hung up as a chandelier, and high-backed carved chairs were placed around a heavy oak table. At the wall stood a credenza with towers and gables whose nooks were filled with carvings of fish, birds, and other dead wildlife. The ceiling was artificially blackened and large beams were added. Dark ebony furniture covered in red damask was put in the large salon. In the middle, surrounding a palm tree, was a circular sofa upon which one could sit back-to-back, since the sofa was not intended for conversations but for waiting for a dance partner. The small salon was decorated with furniture in silver velvet and Gobelin tapestries. The oriel window was raised by one step. The windows, which spanned from floor to ceiling, were replaced by ones that were set higher. The old furniture from Klosterstraße was now only suitable for the children’s rooms. They put the curved mahogany sofas from the sixties there, along with the small nutwood commodes and the long mirrors.

But the bathrooms needed the most work. Oppner decided to install a water closet. Inside the white bowls the English coat of arms was painted in blue: “Dieu et mon droit!” Oppner thought it a bit funny, “Dieu et mon droit!” in the toilet bowl. But if it was good enough for the English, it was good enough for the Germans. The English sales representative offered him various other essential accessories for a first-class WC. A bronze plate which could be affixed to the wall and held a roll from which one could remove perforated paper strips, for example. On the bronze plate was a relief with a lion and a unicorn, the heraldic beasts of Great Britain, and underneath stood, “The Crown’s Fixture.” It was very expensive.

An English foreman oversaw the installation. “Look at this newfangled stuff,” said old Hoff, the master painter. “In the old days we went out into the courtyard and that was fine, now they’ve got all this new stuff, flushing and fayence bowls and all these other things.”

“What’s that?” he asked, when they brought in “The Crown’s Fixture.”

“You put on it rolls of paper,” the Englishman said in his broken German.

The master painter shook his head. “We had to cover up the beautiful murals in the old salon, and now they’re having the Englishman install all kinds of things that we did perfectly fine without for years. God’s gone, but we’ve got flushing toilets instead. That’s our new world!”

“That’s not our new world,” said Kärnichen, the woodworker’s apprentice, a bit of an upstart. “You know what our new world is? That we’re making window frames as piecework, two a week—including the moldings—according to plan.”

“No good can come of that,” the master painter said. “That’s a pile of garbage.”

“Yeah, that’s what I say. Then the windows don’t fit, they have to be taken out again and sent back to the workshop. And who pays for it? The company. But do they ever learn? And we get peanuts for it!”

“Well, you won’t be an apprentice forever. How old are you?”

“Eighteen.”

“You’re a spring chick, still wet behind the ears, finished your schooling last year, didn’t you. Give it some time, you’ll have your own business one day.”

“My own business? You must be new around here. With no backers? You’re kidding. A man without money’s just a chump and won’t ever amount to anything. Coalition’s the word, strikes for higher pay. My own firm! Brother. Capitalism’s on the march. This villa is built on

surplus gains. No, I'm for revolution! You call this a life? I've got a place to sleep but no bed of my own, and if I want to take my Grete out, I don't know where to go."

"If you really save, you'll have your own capital to get yourself going. How'd you think we did it? Mother and I took every penny to the bank, I bought my tools with my savings, and now I have two assistants."

"That was then. But now? Twelve hours of work, and if you get sick, you're out on the street, and if you don't have a job, you're out on the street, and if you start begging, they lock you up, and if you been locked up, you get no work, because you were locked up. I've got an older brother in the party."

"Then you'll never amount to nothin'," the master painter said. "You young people are all spoiled. No God, no king, no country."

"That's right, old man. You old folks betrayed the revolution. But youth is on the march!"

"Well, finish up your windows and don't go crazy, you could be thrown in jail for that kind of talk!"

Chapter 13

The Crisis

Emmanuel Oppner was at the office. “Have you seen the newspaper?”

“Not yet,” said Ludwig. “It just arrived.”

“Copper’s down two percent again, cotton three percent. We have to plan carefully now. Stock prices are falling everywhere. I would likely have gotten the house for twenty thousand marks less now.”

Emmanuel Oppner was at lunch.

“I’d like to buy some linens for the kitchen,” said Selma.

“Wait a little longer,” said Emmanuel. “The prices will go down. I’d also like to wait on the carpets.”

In Neckargründen, Helene Mainzer, née Effinger, wrote to her suppliers: “I would like to cancel this year’s order of cotton fabrics, both plain and figured. Our clients are reluctant to buy and are asking for lower prices.”

On the slag heaps in England, coal piled up. In the ironworks, bar stock piled up. In America, they harvested. Just as they always had, black slaves picked cotton, cloth wraps on their heads. Just as they always had, the farmers in Canada harvested wheat. The cotton was gathered into great bundles and sent off on ships, the wheat was gathered in great silos and sent off on ships. The harvest was huge, the earth bountiful. Prices sank. Red-faced men in top hats stood in the Liverpool stock exchange. How much was cotton? It was getting cheaper. Everything was getting cheaper. The merchants weren’t buying. They were waiting for everything to get even cheaper.

On October 1, Schlemmer & Effinger received twenty-one marks for one hundredweight of screws. On April 1, fifteen marks. Schlemmer had paid forty-four marks for the wire. On April 1 the price was thirty-two marks.

“Things can’t go on like this,” said Paul. But even for fifteen marks no one wanted his screws. Was no one building anything anymore? Did the world have all the screws it needed?

Steffen said, “The ironworks in Halden are selling screws for thirteen marks. They’ve finished their new factory. They want to avoid a standstill.”

“What can you do? It’s always better for people with capital to operate at a loss than put production on standstill.”

“You have to get out of the contract with Schlemmer,” said Steffen.

“Yes, but how? Only I have something to lose in this contract. Have you already written to the locksmiths in Witte? They’ll want to know. And Eberhard’s got to hurry over to Kosterlitz and tell them that their screws will be ready in four hours. Get Mr. Smith.”

“Will the screws be finished in four hours?”

“I assume so, sir.”

“What does that mean, you assume so?”

“By God, sir, it’s not that easy. We don’t know how many will be defective and how many will be good. I’ll go take a look.” With every word, he made it clear that Paul was at his mercy. If he didn’t feel like it, the screws wouldn’t be finished in four hours.

“We never took on such rush jobs in Birmingham. If they get their screws in six hours, they’ll survive.”

Paul wanted to take out an advertisement that very afternoon to find a new foreman. Did he really need him, this Mr. Smith, this stuck-up fellow who always made him feel as if he had done everything wrong? Whatever the case, right now it was even more important to speak with Schlemmer. He had to hang on. He couldn’t lose those ten thousand marks in savings. He couldn’t bear the thought. Not in front of all Kragenheim, in front of Ben, Helene, Karl, Willy. Why was everything so easy for Ben and so hard for him? Why was he having such difficulties? Ben and Karl never did. He took the ledgers home and pored over them again and again. But the longer he continued to make his calculations, the more hopeless everything seemed. In these six months, he had lost everything. He noticed the black walls. The lamp was smoking, the stench of petroleum rose. The room was cold. Should I talk to Karl? The thought only crossed his mind for a moment. At most, I’ll speak with Steffen. They were twenty thousand marks in debt. And prices were sinking. The expensive raw materials were lying there. Every screw was a loss. Liquidate, Paul thought. After six months. My own company. No! I must fight for survival. He wouldn’t let his relatives in Mannheim win. Young people must become independent! He was too impatient, they’d say. And weren’t they right? A debtor! Yes, that’s what he was. A debtor who squandered people’s money. He stood with his forehead pressed against the window pane, one hand on the latch. God, it wasn’t my fault. I worked from morning till night every day, I

never granted myself any luxuries, and still I'm almost bankrupt. I can't help that the price of a hundredweight of screws has sunk from seven to five thalers and that the iron I have is more expensive than the finished screws. But no one pities a bankrupt businessman. A businessman who has debts he can't repay is a scoundrel. Other unlucky souls are pitied, a businessman is scorned. No one asks what kind of person you are. My life is ruined at twenty-three. And what do I care for screws, these little things, ten different kinds? Did I come to Berlin to make screws? I wanted to make gas motors; you can move everything with a gas motor—on earth, over the sea, through the air. One day, the air carriage will arrive, and it will park on people's roofs. With a small gas motor one can plough and harrow the land. People will no longer be beasts of burden with bent backs.

But maybe it was thoughts like these that were leading him to bankruptcy. By the sweat of your brow you shall eat your bread. Did God want man to rise up and outwit him? God? Who believed in God anymore? That's why life had become so dreadful. God comforted the weak. But modern life is only for the strong. Those who can't survive the fight are thrown to the dogs. That's what they call survival of the fittest. With what means one survived was becoming irrelevant. Humans think they are clever because they've learned to control the elements. but no one is prepared for the next deluge. Nothing good can come of this.

He went back to his ledgers.

Eberhard, the green-faced Berlin errand-boy, ran to Schlemmer the next morning to ask whether Herr Effinger could pay him a visit at ten thirty.

Schlemmer barely shook Paul's hand. "It took you long enough to come to me, Herr Effinger. You're finished, I hear. From others." Schlemmer was dripping with disdain. He threw the words "mass fabrication, reduced prices, costs," in Paul's face.

Paul didn't take the bait. "Herr Schlemmer, I'd like to ask you to dissolve the contract."

"Well, isn't that wonderful," said Schlemmer. "The machines and raw materials with which you didn't manage to make any money are mine, and instead of me coming to you and saying: dear sir, let's put an end to things, I'll find another man for the business, *you* want to cancel the contract?!"

"I thought you wouldn't want the contract anymore. You can have the machines and raw materials back."

"Right, now that everything's worth half of what it once was. I'd like a deal like that too."

“Herr Schlemmer, my apologies for saying this to such an experienced businessman as yourself, but you don’t seem to quite grasp the situation. If I were to go bankrupt, the machines and raw materials would belong to the assets to be liquidated.”

They negotiated, and Schlemmer left him the raw materials and machines. But Paul had to pay very dearly for them.

“And the indemnity?” Schlemmer asked.

“What do you mean, indemnity?”

“Listen, young man. I shared all your concerns and gave you your start, and now I’m generously stepping back and leaving the field to you. It goes without saying I should receive an indemnity.”

Shared my concerns, thought Paul, wonderful, he showed up once, stuck his nose in, drank a bottle of wine with me, and now he’s shared my concerns. “I can offer you two thousand marks indemnity.”

“What?” said Schlemmer. “You dare offer me a mere gratuity? Now, that’s going too far.”

“I’m sorry, but I have limited means. We can say two thousand five hundred.”

Schlemmer thought for a moment. The raw materials had been calculated fifteen percent above their current going rate, plus two thousand five hundred, and the hefty price on the machines.

“I’m no businessman,” said Schlemmer. “None of this is all that important to me, so let’s agree to that. I just wanted to say, for the sake of correctness, that I delivered one more glass inkwell and office chair than accounted for.”

Paul wanted to respond, I accidentally itemized one of my own ink blotters, for the price of fifty pfennigs. But he remained silent.

When Paul returned to the factory, scores of men stood in front it.

“If I had money, I would give you work,” Paul said. “But I have none, I’m very sorry.”

“Herr Karl Effinger is waiting in the office,” said the porter, holding onto the dog’s collar.

“What happened?” asked Paul. “Did Zink & Brettschneider go under?”

“Yes.”

“That old company? How’s that possible?”

“Yes, they placed a huge order of wheat, and we can’t cancel it. The harvest is incredible. The world will be flooded with wheat. It’s dreadful. There are men out of men standing in front of your factory, too. There’s talk of riots in the Rhineland. I don’t want to beat around the bush:

will you take me on? I have five thousand marks, and Father will give me another five thousand to start.”

“But you can’t put your money into a business that might not be able to save itself from bankruptcy.”

“Yes, but to be honest, where am I going to find a position? I’ve looked, but there’s nothing out there.”

“Your money would be an enormous help. But you’d be taking on a terrible mess. Think long and hard about it. Steffen will show you the books.”

“There’s not much to think about.”

“Well, Steffen will show you the books anyway. One day, you’ll come complaining to me.”

“The only thing I want is an office to myself.”

“But Karl, we have to count every penny just to get by, and all you can think about is having your own office?”

“Look, when clients come, you want a little alcove where you can open up a bottle, have a cigar...”

“First off, we don’t get clients coming to us, only people who want to sell us something, and the biggest deals were made in the least presupposing places. You should see the offices in Britain. They discuss global production on old, black leather sofas with white buttons in rooms with soot-stained walls.”

Karl did not get his office. But he found himself a carved chair with cherub’s heads and a brass writing set with several inkwells.

Paul paid off the most pressing debts. Only a few thousand marks remained. If prices stayed broadly where they were, they would pull through.