

I was leaning against the track railings and gazing at the green turf. Ksiezak was sitting on a bench beside me. He was playing with the stop watch that hung around his neck and also staring at the green turf.

A silent contest was in progress between us as to who would speak first.

A helicopter clattered above the stadium, pigeons flew by and darted away toward the outline of the Kosciuszko Mound, which was turning blue in the fading light of the spring afternoon. But suddenly they turned back and fluttered in the direction of the gleaming towers of Wawel castle.

Migdalski was running around the track at an easy trot. He'd completed most of his laps. There was an absurd expression of concentration on his face.

"Why's that ass running like that?" I thought.

I didn't despise Migdalski. I knew that within a year he might surpass me. He was hard-working and ambitious. But first of all his running was damn important to him. But at this time I'd have thought the same of anyone who ran in a circle. Everything seemed stupid to me, but this was the stupidest thing of all.

Not far from us Dorota was practicing broad jumps. You could hear the stamping of her feet and her shrill cries. I didn't look in that direction. Generally speaking, I liked to watch her jumping. At this moment it didn't interest me in the least.

"Migdalski!" shouted Ksiezak.

Migdalski stopped with an inquiring smile. Ksiezak began to shout at him for raising his legs too high. He shouted coarsely. Migdalski stared in amazement, because Ksiezak was usually polite toward us.

Migdalski hadn't been lifting his legs too high, and even if he had, what of it? Besides, Ksiezak couldn't have seen him, since he hadn't shifted his gaze from the green turf. I sometimes glanced at Migdalski. Because he got on my nerves. Ksiezak, furious because I didn't want to be the first to speak was taking it out on Migdalski. Then he shouted at him to stop. But after all, he had to in order to find out what Ksiezak wanted. After a brief moment of hesitation, Migdalski started running again. I felt sorry for him. I

wasn't all that fond of him, but it was because of me that Ksiezak had shouted at him.

"God damn sad sack," Ksiezak muttered. As though to himself. In fact he was begging me to speak. I said nothing. I was growing increasingly angry with Ksiezak. But when I realized how base that was on my part, I felt nauseated. Still, I couldn't do anything about it.

Dorota came up. She straightened the legs of her shorts. They certainly weren't too tight. She was doing it on purpose.

"Sir," she said, "I have some problems."

Ksiezak glanced at her sternly.

"I'd never have thought it of you," he said.

Dorota often took what was said to her literally, and so it was sometimes difficult to find a common language with her. But she had one virtue: she never took offense. The fellows would make bets and think up the most appalling insults. She accepted them all with a smile. Quite simply, such things as insults didn't exist as far as she was concerned. I liked Dorota. I relaxed in her company.

She gazed at me, then at Ksiezak, and asked:

"What wouldn't you have thought of me?"

Ksiezak sighed.

"What sort of problems do you have?"

"But what did I do? What wouldn't you have thought of me, sir?"

"You didn't do anything," said Ksiezak. "I was just babbling."

"That's not so. You never just babble, sir."

It irritated me that she kept calling him "sir." Everyone spoke to Ksiezak like that. Usually it didn't bother me. But this day even that irritated me.

"I always just babble," he shouted.

Dorota's power of naïveté was omnipotent. Ksiezak let himself be drawn in by it. But he controlled himself quickly:

"Well, go on, what problems do you have?" he asked in a weary voice.

"I must be measuring my paces wrong or something. I can't reach the bar. Or something like that . . ."

"Come on," Ksiezak interrupted.

He took her by the hand. They walked off in the direction of the jump.

I wondered what to do next. It was awkward to walk away. Likewise, to remain.

Migdalski stopped and called:

"Come on, Marek! Take off your sweat suit and run a while. What are you hanging around for?"

This was the best way out of the situation. But so that Migdalski shouldn't think too much of himself, I kept my sweat suit on.

I played the fool as I ran. I passed him, then let him get ahead, and so on in turn. He got mad and impatient, since he wanted to run his five thousand paces quietly and steadily. This was precisely why I did it. After I had passed him again and again, he called out:

"Hey you, drop back a bit, your ears are blocking my view of the stadium."

"Henryk," I said, "don't try such complicated malice, it's beyond you. You'll get inflammation of the brain."

This wasn't witty, but it was sufficient for Migdalski. He opened his mouth, didn't know what to say, shut it again and, adopting his expression of concentration, ran on.

The truth is, I did have slightly protruding ears. But girls said they suited my face.