

Dear Friends,

The Memoir goes to some 340pages, which is a lot to read. (though I hope that at some time the whole memoir might be read) therefore I've selected some 60 pages to start us off, which, I hope, might give the gist of the whole.

Prologue

In August of 1939 I was eight years old, and I and my family were on the North German Lloyd's 30,000 ton steamship *Caribia*. We had left Germany and were now on our way to the country of Ecuador. Three weeks later our ship let down its anchor in the harbor of Guayaquil. The day was steaming, and I remember the odor of cocoa on the dock. The day was September 1st, it was the day the German army began its invasion of Poland; it was the day that World War 2 began.

In the spring of 1940 my family and I arrived in New York City from Ecuador on the Santa Rosa, a sleek Grace Liner with sparkling green and white smoke stacks. That day, then, was glorious; the million windows of downtown Manhattan gleamed and sparkled a greeting as the great ship moved slowly up the Hudson to its mooring. Once moored I leaned over railings, and saw faces down on the dock, faces jumping up and down, excited, waving handkerchiefs, anticipating happy reunions.

Now, it was the spring of 1953, and I was on a ship again, an Army transport, the dull-gray General Buckner, along with a thousand other GI's. The day was gray, but a band played marches as the ship pulled out of its Staten Island dock. The Sousa sounds faded away as the Buckner nosed out into the harbor. The million windows of distant Manhattan were now gray, and without sparkle. I saw them disappear as we rounded Fort Wadsworth and as gray clouds dropped like a curtain over the island's sky-scrapers.

As our ship moved out into the Atlantic I began to feel fear. Not a powerful fear, just the beginning of a small knot in my stomach. Somebody said, "...those lights; that's Cape Cod." The Buckner tended north to make its way along the great circle route; tended back to swallowed anxieties and to angers long denied, tended back to Bremerhaven and Germany.

As I leaned over the ship's railing, what I had neglected or denied for so very long began to assert itself. The knot grew larger. It took me a while, staring over the railing into the foam, to realize that it was not simply a memory of fear that stimulated the knot, but that it now was the real thing; a reassertion of all those fears generated by all those many absences, threats and abandonments that threaded themselves through all those

early years. These fears; fears so powerful, fear-makers so powerful, that for all too many years, a substitution had to be found; a way to translate what had been imprinted onto the nerves of a child in order that their living threat might be diminished. I found that substitute, telling myself and all about me that it had all been a wonderful adventure. But now I was on a ship again, I was returning to Germany, the place where all those fears began.



In 1936, shortly after my fifth birthday I was given a new pair of shoes. They were ankle high, hobnailed, black. Instead of eyelets they had little metal hooks around which leather laces were wound. The

shoes were shiny, not from polish but from a black greasy covering that I was told would make them water-proof. They were just like my father's: work-day shoes; farming shoes, shoes for the meadow and the cow stall. I walked out of our house, out through the flower garden that looked like a bright apron in front of our house, out onto the cobbled street and with sharp downward kicks with my metal-hobbled soles struck white, yellow and red sparks from the cobble stones. I could make lightning.

I walked the streets of our village, striking the cobblestones, confirming my power. I walked to exhibit the shoes, to show off, but every once in a while, I would hack at the cobblestones, checking the power. With each step I lifted my shoes high in the air. I thought that there was a string that connected the tips of my shoes all the way up to where God lived, where someone, maybe God himself, pulled on the strings like a puppeteer, helping me to get my feet high up in the air so that everyone in the village might get to see the wonder. Mrs. Schumacher, our neighbor saw me and said, "Very nice new shoes." Mrs. Schumacher was a widow, tall, always in black with a white, rice pudding kind of face. Her son had a car. He had knobs on his cheeks, especially when he pulled his teeth together. Every Easter she hid colored eggs out in the meadow behind her house. And even though we were Jewish, my brother and I were invited to hunt, along with other village children, among them my friends, Willibald, Horst and Daniel, to search for eggs, running from one possible hiding place to next, with my friends, laughing, screaming on cold April mornings among the pale and frosty green hummocks of the Schumacher's meadow. I looked forward to it with great excitement. If there was talk of Passover in the air I knew that the hunt for eggs was close. I wanted to hunt for those eggs, I think, even more than to hunt for the *aphikomen* and the gifts that always went with it. I walked through streets lined with chestnut trees. That one was my tree. Under its enormous canopy I could stand dry and secure while the blue rain fell and from whose shiny brown nuts I could make, with the insertion of just a skinny twig, pipes. And sitting outside, leaning back on the last house step, pipe in hand, legs crossed, I could imagine being like my tall father, driving a herd of cattle to market.

I walked past our synagogue which was made out of large square cut field-stone.



I say our synagogue but it was really my synagogue where my grandfather, my Opa, led the service, and in whose hand my hand rested when we walked Friday night and Saturday morning to his service.



We'd walk and sometimes he'd ask me questions.

"How did God create the world?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"Well, He said..."

"That's right, He said. And how did He say?"

"I don't know."

"Of course you don't know. When He spoke, when He said let there be..., it sounded just like a blast from the Shofar. With that sound of the Shofar, he made the world."

“Nice.”

“That’s how he did it. And when He speaks again, sounds it again, the world is going to be destroyed.”

“That’s not very nice.”

“But that’s not going to be for a very long time.” He picked me up, held me and carried me. “You don’t have to worry your head. Not for a very long time.”

Gustav Gartner, the white-haired butcher, stood, with his bloody apron, in front of his store. He lifted me up, hugged me, and made me come into the store. From behind the counter he handed me slices of salami. “I saw your shoes all the way down by the synagogue. Very nice; here, they deserve another slice.”

Then I heard the tune of the blacksmith’s hammer. The iron tympani called me. The blacksmith was next to the butcher shop. The hammer rang more beautifully on the anvil than the bells from either the Catholic or Protestant churches. One strong and powerful ring, then many fast, light ringing repetitions, gentle touches in a slightly higher octave that faded to silence; and then again a hammer blow and the great ringing; were I sent on an errand and was overdue at home someone was sure to come and get me from in front of the blacksmith’s. His shop was a vast black hollow of a barn open to the street. It allowed entrance to the farmers and their plow horses, enormous Belgians and fiercely snorting Percherons. At the very rear was the high black furnace with its small round opening glowing fire red. The blacksmith was at the furnace pumping the bellows and with each heave thin blue wreaths of flame shot out of the furnace mouth and with each blast of air the coals bubbled a fiercer red. The smith reached into the furnace mouth and with his iron tongs drew out a glowing orange horseshoe. He placed it on the anvil and began beating. Red and white sparks flew from the beaten horseshoe, the same sparks that I made with my hobnailed shoes. The tongs lifted the glowing iron and immersed it in the nearby trough of water with a great hiss and boiling; smoke and bubbles rose from the water. The annealing process was repeated several times and then the smith lifted the enormous fore-foot of the great Belgian, rested it in his leather-aproned lap and fitted the hot iron onto its gray hoof; then a hiss from the iron doused in water, smoke and an odor like that of burning hair. I knew the smell. After my mother cut my hair she would gather all of it up and throw it into our coal stove. “Why do you do that, Mamma?” “So no one can make magic with your hair.”

The hammer pounded, and the iron was nailed into the horse’s hoof. The smith straightened up, came over to me and ran his rough hand through my hair. “He’s going to be my apprentice.” The farmer holding his horse’s halter said, “A Jew working in a smithy? I want to see that one before I die.”

The cobbled street ran upward, past my Aunt Lydia’s house, a large half-timbered house with a pear tree orchard in back. Aunt Lydia’s mustached husband Fred had been pruning a tree. He fell from the ladder, and, reaching out a hand to ease his fall, cut that hand on a shard of glass that was just lying there on the ground.

Tetanus, whatever that meant. Two weeks later he was dead. I was sorry that he died because often, on a Saturday afternoon visit, he would let me have a taste of the Kümmel he was sipping. He would be reading a book and the glass was in front of him resting on a hassock. I would stand and wait till he looked up and nodded. The liquor was thick as oil and sweet; it scratched my throat, raising white sparks as it went down, raising sweet fumes that smelled like the seeds on rye bread, and the fumes went up my nose and out of my eyes.

Prayers were recited in Aunt Lydia's house instead of in the synagogue and for three nights the men of the congregation watched over the body and recited psalms. The women of the congregation, including my mother, laid him out, washed and dressed the body before the funeral. Why would they want to wash a dead body? Very strange. I wanted Aunt Lydia to see my shoes but I didn't have the courage to enter a house where, for three days, a dead body had lain. Mrs. Shumacher's son lent his car to drive the casket to the little hillside cemetery. He drove very slowly while all the rest of us followed slowly behind the car to the hillside cemetery where my great-grandfather, Oma's father, Jacob, had been buried just a little while before. My great-grandfather had a white goatee, and never paid any attention to me, but he was famous. Our town had a picture postcard, Mamma said it was for tourists, that showed a long stretch of our main street, the mountains in the distance, the gas station on the right side, and right in the middle of the picture, right in the middle of the street, was a little man with a goatee.



Every time I looked at the picture, Mamma had it stuck in the mirror of her bedroom, she would say, "that's your great-grandfather. That picture is sent all over Germany, maybe the world." And I always thought "he is so small." He was the first person that I ever knew who died.

I was on my way to Regensburgers but decided to stop first at Schorn's store. This was the local market, the big grocery store in town. I clambered up the long stone stairs and breathed in the well mixed odors of flour and soap and chocolate. I stood in front of the counter for what seemed a very long time when Mrs. Schorn came looming over me, "Well, Wolfgang, what are you here for."

"Nothing." My face burned with embarrassment and I ran out. "Wait. Wait. Come back here." The voice was commanding and I came back, afraid. "Close your eyes and hold out your hand." Now I knew what was coming. "Open your eyes." A handful of non-pareils were in my palm. "What did you call them when you were a baby? Little pearls with sugar? Go. Regards home." She didn't say anything about my shoes.



Regensburger's bakery was across the street. Harry sat in one corner reading a newspaper. Harry was strange; he had white hair like my Opa, but he wasn't old. If he saw me looking at the counter, he'd say, "what? You never saw flour before? I'm a baker and that's flour." It was strange. I didn't know what to think.

I was hoping that his father might be in the store but he wasn't. It was afternoon and the store had its cold-baking smell. If you came in the mornings it had the hot-baking smell because all the baking was done early in the morning even before dawn came up. Harry put the paper down. "Here comes Mr. Wise guy." I hated him calling me that. Once, at some holiday party, I had seen him looking very peculiarly at Gertie Nathan. Gertie used lipstick and smoked cigarettes right out in the open, out on the street where everybody could see. I had piped out loudly, "He's looking at Gertie." From then on, to him, I was Mr. Wise Guy. Nevertheless, that day I walked up and down in front of his counter lifting my legs high, showing my shoes.

"Who are you today, Mr. Wise Guy, one of Hitler's soldiers?"

“No, that’s not nice to say.”

I knew from what I had picked up at home from overheard adult conversations, conversations they thought were guarded, that Hitler was not nice. I think what I heard was the anger in their throats. The mention of his name made me feel afraid.

“Well, what do you want?”

“Nothing,” and I kept on high-stepping in front of him.

“We don’t sell ‘nothing’ here. We sell bread and rolls.”

“Cake too.”

“And cake. I got enough people buying nothing these days; I don’t need you as a customer. Take your shoes and get out of here.” At least he noticed the shoes. I made my way to the door.

“Where are you going?”

“You said I should go.”

“Yes, but where are you going?”

“To Willy’s.”

“Here,” and he pulled out a sugar-coated jelly donut from under the counter. “You shouldn’t starve on the way.”

I thought that was very funny. Willy was only two streets over and one street up and I wouldn’t starve going there.

In the whole town, except for my younger brother Karl, Willy was the only Jewish boy near my age, he was almost two years older and my best friend. I played with Willy all the time. We were in each other’s houses, together in the synagogue, together at all the holiday celebrations. From time to time, I might play with my Christian friends. If I played with my Christian friends was I then disloyal to Willy who had no one else? My memory is that I played with a Christian friend out in the open air but I don’t remember ever being inside one of their houses. Poor Willy.

Willy and I were both going into first grade in the fall, Willy for the second time; he had been left back. Reading was difficult for him; he was awkward and somewhat slow. “You read newspapers when you were still little,” I was told. I read when I was sick, and that was often. There were mumps and measles and colds and then there were tonsils. The throat pained and things were hard to swallow. There was tenderness and fever. The ears hurt, the jaw hurt and when the doctor came to look at my tongue and to feel my neck I always knew what he was going to say, “The tongue is coated and the glands are swollen. Give him aspirin.”

“Those germs just love you,” said my mother when she anointed my throat with eucalyptus ointment and bound my neck with a red woolen scarf that scratched even more than the enlarged tonsils. And my Oma

called me her “delicate child.” This happened sometimes two or three times a year, maybe more often. Reading books eased the worst of the initial hurt and made the convalescences easy. My favorites were *Robinson Crusoe*, Carl May and *Shatterhand*, and the books of travel by Sven Hedin. I can still hear, on distant Persian mountain deserts, the howl of hyenas in the night.

My friend Willy's father was a cattle dealer just like mine, and though they both followed the same trade there was a difference in the culture of the two households. We had indoor plumbing and they had an outhouse. But our plumbing didn't always work, so we too, sometimes, used the outhouse. My father played the flute and Willy's father distilled, in their kitchen, a terrible smelling liquor from a copper retort. They had a meadow in back of their house and a cow stall attached to their house and they had a small pond on which ducks floated, and their goose. I was afraid of the goose which was almost as tall as I, and probably heavier, and which, one day, fiercely waddled at me with a grim hissing of its yellow beak, and an angry waving of its tall neck. After that, visiting alone, I would stand some distance from their house and call out "Willy." He'd come then, and tell me that the goose had been penned; he'd then take my hand and lead me into their compound.

This day they saw my shoes; Willy, his mother and his somewhat older sister, Lera. They were all properly impressed. I waited; thought that some chocolate was due but praise was the only food forthcoming. We played with hoops on the street outside their house. We were Auto racers on the Neuburg Ring. He was Chepan, I was Cutzorra, two names that were famous for something; maybe auto racers, maybe soccer players. Finished with hoops Willy called me over to their outhouse. He looked through a knot-hole in the wooden structure, stepped back and invited me to look. There sat Lera. My face burned. I was awed, awed also by the fact that Lera wiped herself only in front while I knew that I wiped myself only in back. How could that be? For the rest of the afternoon we played Parcheesi.

It was almost dusk when my father picked me up. Willy's house stood on the rim of the bowl that was my village. Standing in front of Willy's house we watched as several stars appeared. Below, the familiar houses and streets began to darken. My father took my hand and we walked toward home. In day-light I had always made this walk by myself but now it was getting dark. We passed houses where, in the light, on the white-washed walls crossed by black timbers, I saw thin black lines, fine cracks that looked like snakes, complicated letters, strange birds and wild forest animals. But now my father held my hand and as we walked in the darkening light, past houses, their windows that had been reflecting silver, now, one after another, turned orange.

Chapter 2

If I approached our house from the street, I first walked up three broad brick steps, and then I passed

through Oma's flower garden. There were brick towers at the corners of the garden that were connected by a surrounding black spiked fence. There were two wooden benches in the garden and tall lilac bushes at the fences. The front of our house looked like a face. My mother said it had the face of a man who needed to be tickled. Upstairs the two side windows were staring eyes and the third, the middle one was a nose; the front door was a mouth. The dark moldings over the two side windows were eye-brows. The two downstairs windows were a problem but I said to myself that they were cheeks; the cheeks of a skinny man; a skinny man wearing a dark suit and tie. The front door of our house had a large oval glass in a dark wooden frame. The glass had incised curlicues and frosted wreaths of interlocking leaves. I could stand in front of our door for long periods of time tracing the course of this white streaming strangeness. "Dreamer," said Fat Liesl the girl who



sometimes worked for us. "My dreamer," said my Oma.

In back of the house there was mud and a barn for the cows, a manure pile from the top of which the rooster crowed, and off to one side a small chicken house. But the chickens never laid their eggs in the house as they were supposed to do, so my grandmother, my Oma, whose province the chickens were, had always to look for the eggs in the grass of the meadow that bordered the barn-yard. The barn was timbered; great areas of white plaster between black beams that looked like they wanted to make block letters but couldn't. The barn was two storied. Hay was stored in the rafters above the cow stalls and I would climb the ladder to lie in the odor filled hay and read my book.

The meadow in back of our house rose to a small hill and then stretched ever backward to meet with a pine wood in which Oma and I sometimes searched for mushrooms. There were small and contorted apple trees that dotted the meadow and at the border of the wood there were several tall pear trees. This meadow was a kind of holding place where my father and grandfather kept a cow or two or three that had recently been bought before they were sold again or later added to the herd.



Sometimes they kept a few sheep there and once, I remember, two brown coated colts.



One day at supper my father told me that I would have to get to bed early that night. Why? Because in the morning he would be driving cows to market, to the market in *Waldbröl* and he thought that I should go with him. I looked to my mother and she nodded. Four-thirty in the morning; we'd have to get up in the dark. I ran to bed.

My father shook me, woke me, and held a finger to his lips. I was to be quiet, my brother Karl slept in the same room. My father held up clothes for me. He went downstairs to the kitchen and I washed and then dressed on the darkened landing to the stairs. I was struggling to get into my shoes when I sensed, by his dark sweet sweat, my father's being there. He was squatted down, down to my size and was quietly, benignly,

smiling at my labor. We went to the kitchen and where there was black coffee and large slabs of farmer bread slathered with fresh butter. We went into the barn and I saw white steam streaming from the skin of the cows. Out on the meadow coils of fog wove and dipped like dancers. We released the half-dozen cows from their stanchions and herded them down the street where their padding raised echoes over the dew-wet cobbles. We herded them onto the narrow macadamized highway whose ordinary surface, its day-to-day blackness, seemed, this early, wet morning, streaked with silver and pewter. It was still dark as we entered the highway but there was a patch of milky whiteness out beyond the hills on the right. Soon the patch turned as red as the flames from the blacksmiths' furnace, then orange. In full light the sky seemed very high and light blue. It was eight miles to *Waldbröl*, a five-hour walk.

The macadam road ran through a green valley. A green wood bordered the road on both sides and through openings I could see meadows, and beyond the meadows the sloping hills, and from their green tops, banks and braids of gray fog slid down into the valley bottom. On the left, dodging in and out of the woods ran a small brook.

We walked through the green, the cows plodding in front of us, and I watched the rhythmic rise and fall of their bony behinds. My father darted down into the woods where the stream ran and disappeared. I stopped, afraid. He came back smiling, with a long, thin willow switch in his hand. He snapped it in the air. It whistled. He handed it to me, "You can guide the cows with this. Make sure they don't go off the road, down into the brook. They like the water."

"After we sell these, when are we going to get more cows?"

"Of course, soon. That's the business. We sell cows. We get money; and with the money we get more cows. That's how it works."

It was important that we get more cows. My grandfather did the evening milking, and I made it my business, usually, to be there with him. He sat on his stool and stripped milk from the cows. I hunkered down beside him. "In the barn, right with the swallows," and he'd say, "watch it. Don't get caught." He meant the swishing of the cows' tails. He'd get angry when the swinging tails caught and stung his face, then he'd push the cow hard and yell and curse at it. I waited, sitting on my haunches till he said, "ready?" Then I opened my mouth and Opa, with a turn of his wrist, directed, from the teat he was holding, a stream of warm, sweet milk right into my mouth. We needed more cows.

Cars and trucks clattered by. Sometimes they waved. Sometimes they honked. Sometimes the loud noise startled the herd and then they veered off, down toward the brook. I looked at my father, he nodded and I ran down after the cows. I touched their sides lightly with my willow. I waved my arms and yelled like my grandfather. The cows stopped, slowly turned their great necks, looked back at me with their shiny black eyes

and then, as if their joints were badly connected, strained or heaved their bodies forward in separate successive sections till they reached the flat landing of the road, clattering down the asphalt, their bony back-sides riding up and down like the cars on a roller coaster. My father said, "Good. Well done." I looked down at my shoes, embarrassed at the praise.

Waldbröl on market day was large, busy and full of color, not gray busy like Bonn or Cologne where I had been several times. *Waldbröl* had the feel of a village very much like ours only many times larger and in its center was the cobbled market square. To get to the square our cows passed flower stands and farm stands; farmer's wives with their aprons attended. The houses ranging the square were large, three, sometimes four stories high. The shops carried awnings of red and brown, gold and blue. Little tables and spidery metal chairs clustered in front of the cafes, and in the center of the market stood curved metal cattle stanchions like so many motionless and sullen teenagers at school, hands in their pockets. Round the area of stanchions were large carts and wagons holding bleating sheep and calves. Farmers were throwing hay and straw into the wagons. My father found empty stanchions and fed the heads of our cattle into them. Now the German farmers gathered round my father. Some wore knee length boots, others long gray coats.

"Well, Oscar, how goes it? And who is this sparrow? Learning the business? Gonna get his nice shoes all covered with cow flop?"

"Your Pappa is a good guy. Not one of those cut throats. Not one of those putting our acres into his strong box." My face turned red, embarrassed. He meant, I knew, that there were other Jews who were doing this, and whatever it was, it wasn't nice.

"You tired? Later, after we do some business we'll have a Coca Cola over there. Yes?" He nodded toward the spidery tables. He dug a strong hand into my shoulder and released. "Your oldest, Oscar?"

The German farmers went round to all the cattle, felt their wattles, dug their hands into the shoulders of the cows, passed their hands under the udders and felt for knots, slapped them on their rumps. "No. Not there," my father called out. "She kicks."

Their bargaining was something I had only seen once before when a Christian farmer came to our house and bought a cow. Opa and the farmer stood across from each other, in front of the barn. They slapped, hard, into each other's palms and each time they did they called out the price that they were willing to pay and to get. They kept on slapping till they came to an agreement. Later I asked Opa how come the farmer talked in Hebrew when he was a Christian. Opa said "we've been in this town for a very long time."

"How long?"

"Well, before my great-grandfather, and before his great-grandfather and before his great-grandfather."

"Is that long?"

“Long enough for us to learn German and long enough for them to learn a little bit of Hebrew.”

Now, at the market, a farmer and my father stood close together and looked straight into each other’s eyes. They then started to slap their hands together, hard, from the shoulders down their palms crashed into each other. And with each slap, each man would, in turn yell out a number. And their calling out was in Hebrew or German Yiddish; both of them. “Kaph Nun,” slap, “Mem Lamed,” slap. With each slap a number was called. My father started out high, the farmer low; my father came down, the farmer up. They met somewhere in the middle, where both knew they’d meet and the deal was done, a cow was sold. They both shook their hot hands from the wrist and smiled. The two then walked over to the spidery tables and celebrated the sale with a schnaps. My father came back and then, with another farmer, and the slapping began all over again.

By noon, all the cows were sold and I was looking forward to my Coca Cola. The farmer who had offered it was gone, he had forgotten but my father had not. “Come on, you deserve a drink.” We both sat on the spidery chairs in front of the spidery tables, at ease, sipping our drinks, my legs crossed just like my father’s and we watched all those others who still had animals to sell. All through the market square one could hear the slapping of palms and the Hebrew numbers called out.

One day at school, in the yard during recess, someone called out, “look down there. Smoke.” We all ran to a low wall that ran the edge of the playground. From the wall we could look down on the roofs of the town, on the yards and the streets, on the washing that was hung out in the yards. Down below, I could see, that it was our synagogue from which the black smoke rose. Children moved back from the wall and looked at me. They moved away from me as if I were Willy and had committed something foul. Our teacher came to me and took my hand. “I’m going to walk you home.” We found my brother, Karl, who by then was also attending school. He was in first grade, I in second. Our teacher took each of us by the hand and so, hand in hand, Karl on one side and I on the other, our teacher walked us home.

We waked down the cobbled streets, past Schorn’s store, past Aunt Lydia’s house, down past the blacksmith’s. There seemed to be more people than usual out on the street. There seemed to be women in aprons who had just stepped out of their houses, some with towels still in their hands, as if, in their rush outdoors, they had been overtaken by surprise, and who were chatting as if in front of their own house steps right out in the open, on the street. And as we passed they stopped their talk, and now silent, looked at us. I was excited by what seemed to be this totally extraordinary event. I did not at all mind the attention our walk was getting. A crowd stood in front of the synagogue: townspeople, men and women milling, several gray uniformed policemen, Brownshirts with red swastika armbands. White smoke billowed from the front door of the synagogue. My grandfather, my Opa appeared in the smoke. He stood in the doorway with a Torah on his

shoulder as if he had just lifted it from the Ark. I was afraid, I pulled at our teacher's hand. I wanted to run to Opa. The teacher squeezed my hand hard, looked down at me and shook his head. He threaded us along the back of the crowd. He held our hands tight and looked straight ahead. We arrived in front of our house. We stopped. Our grandmother stood on the front steps. Our teacher nodded at her, maybe bowed, then turned and left. Grandmother came down and embraced us. She was crying, we were crying.

Opa came in the door, smelling of smoke and carrying a Torah. "I have to go back, get the others." He laid the Torah on the kitchen table and hurried out again. A few minutes later he came back with another. As he started to rush out again Oma said, quietly, "the shul is burning." Opa looked at her, said nothing and hurried out again. Several of the older men, Gustav and Otto Gärtner, Harry Regensburgers' father, old Mr. Isaaks, Oma's brother, Julius, all came to the kitchen carrying Torahs, or old leather covered books. The Torahs lay on the kitchen table and all the old men sat around on chairs with their hands in front of their mouths. The policeman, Laddach appeared in the kitchen door, there were several young SA men behind him. Laddach was about to say something when one of the young men jumped in front of him and yelled, "You old men, pick up those things and get outside." They all waited, then Officer Laddach nodded. Opa first and then the others picked up the Torahs and books, and filed out the door. Outside, in front of our house the Brown Shirts made the men stand in a line and then yelled at them to start marching. As they went off with Opa at the head of the line one of them yelled, "left foot, right foot," over and over again, soon all the other brown shirts began yelling, "left foot, right foot." Somebody ran up to Opa and forced an axe into his left hand. I saw them move out and round a corner. I tried to follow them but Mamma pulled me back and pushed me into the house. Someone, later, told us that the old men were made to march through all the streets of the village with the SA men yelling, "left foot, right foot," laughing and enjoying themselves. The old men and Opa were then made to stand in front of the synagogue where a bonfire had been started and with guns pointing at them the men were made to throw the books and Torahs into the fire.

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The next few days are jumbled. My grandparents lived on the ground floor. There was a center hall and their living quarters were off to the right. A stair on the left led up to our apartment. At the end of the hall was a door that led out to the barn now empty of cows. Next to the stairs, in a small alcove was the cream separator, a shining stainless steel tube, the top quarter pinched in and then, like a large woman's hips, it flared out. I was in my grandmother's kitchen. There was a loud knocking on the front door. My grandmother and I both went to see: she opened the door. Officer Laddach, in a gray uniform stood at the door. He pulled off his cap, "I'm sorry Oma. I'm looking for Oscar."

My father in his shirt and undone collar, came down the stairs, my mother behind him. My father stood

in the middle of the room turning in a circle, looking at his mother, at my mother.

“What do you want Laddach,” said my mother. Laddach shuffles his feet, “I’m sorry Melli, but I have to take Oscar.”

“Why Oscar?”

“They’re taking everybody. The Regensburgers, the Gärtners, everybody.” Oma went out into the barn. “Oscar, you have to get dressed. Dress warm.”

“Where is he going?” Laddach pressed his lips together.

“Laddach, you two were in the band together, in the soccer club.”

“First to Cologne, Messehalle, I think, then I don’t know.”

My mother ran upstairs. I moved from the stairs over to the cream separator. I leaned on it, I put my arms around its waist, embracing, holding on tight. Laddach and my father looked at each other. Neither said anything. My father turned in circles. He didn’t see me. My grandmother returned from the barn.

My mother and grandmother ran at my father with clothes. My father just stood there. He stood helpless while they seemed to dress him; my mother with coat and tie, my Grandmother with a scarf; my mother with a sweater, then a heavy overcoat, then a hat. Laddach said, “all right.” My father moved toward the door and my grandmother screamed, “wait, I have to make some sandwiches. He has to take some sandwiches.” They all, except my grandmother, stood there saying nothing. Grandmother came with sandwiches. She embraced my father. Then my mother embraced him. My father went to the door, Laddach took him by the arm and they went out.

Somewhat later in the day, Laddach appeared at our door again.

“Melli, you have to come, you and the kids.” My mother’s knees buckled; she fell to the floor. Laddach and my grandmother helped her up, “they just want you at the synagogue. They just want some pictures.” Another man came, “Hurry, they’re waiting. They have to get back to Cologne.”

A small crowd still stood about the building, among them, several of my classmates. We were told to stand in front of the synagogue, my mother, my grandmother, my brother Karl, myself. My mother held our youngest brother, two and a half year old Peter in her arms. Although the synagogue had stopped burning, smoke still rose from the fallen roof. Now, there was merely the smell of fire and of burning. The smell was all around us. Two men were taking pictures. My classmates, my playmates, Willibald and Horst as well as some of the others picked up small clods of dirt and threw them at us. Two SS men stood in back of the crowd and as the flash bulbs popped off they began to yell at us, “just wait soon you’ll be burning too. Just wait. Just wait.” They were laughing and looking at each other, as if they were pulling off some great joke.

The following morning Opa came out of hiding. He had spent that raw November night, first outside in

the field and then, when he thought he heard some men, he ran down to a nearby brook where he spent most of the night immersed in the freezing water. What I remember about that particular morning was my Opa, outside the house, somewhere, screaming, in great pain, "I'm pissing blood. I'm pissing blood."

That night all the Jewish families in town gathered in the baker Regensburger's house. People slept in their day clothes on the floor in various rooms. We children were all in one upstairs room. We stayed up very late playing rummy and parchesi, and all that night we heard our mothers', our grandmothers' our aunts' sobbing, rising up into our room.

In the morning we were home again. The only phone in the house was the one in the downstairs hall, and that was attached to the wall. Making calls was a rare thing, but now we watched our mother make frantic telephone calls, call after call, trying to find out where our father had been taken. The following morning Mamma and several other women went off to Cologne to find out about their husbands and sons. I was taken along. I was not to open my mouth but to hold on to mother's hand. If she squeezed my hand I could cry if I wanted to. We went to the offices of Jewish community organizations, but there were rows and lines of women already there when we came, many with children holding fast to their mothers' hands. We went to police stations and to the offices of the Gestapo, and always there were long lines and nobody would tell us anything. We returned home as we got off the train, Ladach was there waiting for us. He said "Dachau. Dachau is where he is going."



There were no words, just screams. I had told Mamma that I wanted Pappa back. With Pappa home,

everything was right. Everything was in its proper place. It had to do with the house. With Pappa home, every room in the house was in its proper place; the house stood four square on its foundation, with Pappa gone, the house was askew; it seemed to lean, maybe to tip over; things were out of balance. Mamma screamed and waved her arms up and down. Oma came, stroked my hair and led me to her kitchen where there were familiar smells.

Karl and I sat on the bottom step of the stairs watching Mamma: all day she stood at the wall phone in the downstairs hall, calling; one call after the other. Opa fed us and Oma watched over Peter. Mamma was told to petition the Gestapo in Cologne. Pappa, at sixteen, during that war, had replaced a local postal worker and delivered mail for several years. Mamma learned that if someone had done service in the first world war they might be released from the concentration camp. She wrote up the petition and holding on to my hand, we returned to Cologne. The wait on a hard bench was very long. When we finally were led to an office, the black uniformed officer looked up at mother from a sheet of paper and said that, Oscar Hess, his name had been erased. Mom's face lit up with smiles; she bowed and said many thank yous, and made me say thank you. I hated her bowing. At the railroad station we ran into Ilse Isaaks, and my mother told her what had happened, that his name had been erased.

"Don't you know what that means? said Ilse, You'll never see him again." I began to sob, but mother only said, "No." She kept repeating "no" all the way back to Ruppichterath.

About six weeks later on a Friday night Mom took my brother and me down to the train station. It was dark, except for a few street lights. The wait was short. Pappa stepped down from the train. The train pulled out behind him. He stood there, between the rails, on cinders. His face was round and fat. He was bald. His wonderful black hair has been shaved off. He was a father I had never seen before. We stood across from him. His hands trembled. My brother and I looked up to him but he didn't look at us, and all he said was directed at our mother, "When do I leave? Are my papers in order?"

A week later Pappa left for Holland. The reason for his release from Dachau was that Aunt Mina in Holland had arranged it. She had contacts with Dutch government officials, and through them she arranged for his visa, for his stay with her in Amsterdam. Only because of her efforts in Holland was our father released and allowed to leave Germany. In those days the German government was more interested in getting their Jews to leave the country, rather than burning them. All that week I was full of a terrible curiosity as to what had happened to my father, where he had been, what had happened to him to make him look so strange, what made him tremble so. On the morning of his leaving we all ate in my grand-parents kitchen. At one point my grandfather left the room and then soon returned with an object wrapped in a large white linen napkin. I knew what it was; it was the Shofar, the rams' horn that was kept in the credenza, behind glass, on a glass holder, in

the dark dining room in which no one ever ate. It was the Shofar that had belonged to my grandfather's father and to his father before him and to the one before that. It had belonged to a whole series of fathers extending into what was for me an infinite past, or rather, distance, a distance like Crusoe's island, or Shatterhand's America. It was a distance extending up into the night sky. Someone had mentioned, perhaps it was our teacher that there was a constellation of stars called the Ram. I knew about rams. We kept them on the farm, for food. My grandfather would dig a little pit, struggle with the ram, his arm under its head till he was able to lift the ram's head high enough and then with a quick stroke of a sharp knife cut the ram's throat and the dark red blood gushed into the pit of dug up earth till the pit was full and the ram stopped its struggling. I associated the sky ram with Abraham. It was his ram that was up in the sky; it was the ram he slaughtered instead of slaughtering his son, his only one. It was that distance that the Shofar bridged since it came from the horn of that ram. But I wanted to know what made Pappa look so strange and why he spoke so little, and why he looked out of the window all the time.

I remember that we walked over snow to the railroad which would take my Papa to Holland. The snow crunched under my feet. There was a small crowd, maybe a dozen, maybe twenty people at the railroad station when we arrived, all Christians, all silent, the Protestant pastor among them. Except for the pastor, these were all old friends of Pappa's: friends from the town band, the soccer team. I thought it was strange that the pastor was there; the only contact with him that I knew of were the greetings that we exchanged whenever we passed each other on the street. Pappa embraced us, entered the train and emerged on the rear platform of the last car. The train pulled out and as it did the Protestant pastor called out, "I wish I were going with you."

Ecuador

We were having a festive meal, a holiday meal. It was the evening before the New Year Rosh HaShanah. My father said, "Tomorrow we are going to Quito. To synagogue "All of us?"

"No," said my father smiling, just you and me and Karl."

We stood on the black-top. We looked around. *Cotopaxi* was the high cone that often smoked and rumbled, *Chimborazo* was the sleeping warrior toward whose height the somber, brown, barefooted peons often looked when the loads on their backs became too heavy, and who still remembered tales of holy heights from which a young and golden bridal pair leaped for the glory of the Inca race; and *Pichincha*, the slim one whose warm and crystal springs bubbled along its base and whose black lakes disappeared among the mists and clouds that forever hid some part in whiteness. These rose over twenty thousand feet and were well known; lower peaks had names only the Indians knew.

Here, as always, cars were rare; riders on horseback were frequent. On both sides of the road grew a light green alkaline grass on which sheep grazed. At one point a dirt road joined the blacktop. Here, our three horses and a mule waited. There was our Papa who was as always, anxious on his blue-gray stallion, and there was Baerga who sat quietly, listening, on his placid mule. Karl and I sat on our squat old mares. This being a holiday, we had on sailor suits underneath our ponchos; both of us with our broad sailor caps with the ribbons down the back and on whose front, around the brows, were printed, in golden letters, "*Graff Luckner*." At one point Dad turned to us and said, "You've both been very good. I'm very proud of you."

Karl said, "I'm not very cold," but I heard his teeth click together and saw him shiver. I had to add, "I'm not cold either." Baerga smiled broadly, turned to Dad and began to reach under his poncho. Dad shook his head and said, "It's a tradition that we don't eat before noon on this day." Baerga nodded, then slipped off his mule to check the girth straps on our mares, giving them both a kind pat on the leg when he had finished. As he remounted he said, "You are wearing good warm ponchos, but anyone can get cold this early in the morning when the wind blows down from *Pichincha*. You two must have good thick Indian skin." We both sat up straight in our saddles and pulled on the slack reins of the placid mares but they barely moved.

Dad said, "stay here." He rode onto the black-top and looked steadily to where it disappeared into the mountains to the south. After a minute he rejoined our party. Apologetically, Baerga said, "It's only an hour late." "I know," said Dad, and started to smile, "but there are many people waiting for me." Baerga looked up and seemed to smell the air. His eyes widened in surprise as he turned to the boys, almost a boy himself. He called out, "*El Pajaro Azul!*" Karl and I jumped off our horses and raced onto the black-top. Dad followed in a rush, scooped us up, one under each arm, and released us at the side of the road. Dad had grabbed me and was about to swat me hard on the back side when Baerga held up one hand with fingers spread out, and said gently, "*Cinco minutos*. It will be here in five minutes." Dad let me go and began scolding us both in German. His anger had to do with our leaving the horses. "Do you think that you can just leave them? Do you think they'll stay there forever? If they wander into the wheat whose responsibility will it be? And who will retrieve them for you?" We both looked up at Baerga. "No. Not Baerga. They are your horses and your responsibility. And how dare you run out onto a busy highway..." He continued on till Karl began to bawl.

From the rim of the southern mountains a loud klaxon, a hoarse kazoo, which mixed itself with Karl's crying began to sound. A small black dot appeared on the highway. The black dot turned into a blue one and then into the outlines of a blue bus. The horses started to prance nervously at the increasing sound. Pappa found a handkerchief under his poncho and wiped Karl's face. He went to his horse and removed a large soft leather bag that hung by a thong over the pommel. He had to yell to Baerga over the bus' noise, "I will see you later."

He gave the Indian the reins of his horse. Baerga gathered the reins of the other two horses. "I will

meet you here at six this evening, Señor,” and turned down the path, the three horses trailing behind him.

The bus seemed to take forever to reach us. It seemed impossible for the peculiar horn to grow louder, but it did. When Karl saw that I was covering my ears he covered his also. Dad looked down the path. Baerga was a good way down the dirt track, the mule and the horses picking their way carefully over the sharp rocks.

For all the noise it made at a distance, the bus arrived almost soundlessly. Suddenly it was there, stopped. Doors opened with a rattle. The driver called out, “*Vamos, Vamos,*” but then, *vamos*, became a respectful, “*Señor,*” when he saw that we were European. We searched for seats.

The bus was filled to overflowing with Indians and Mestizos. All the seats were taken and from the rear, halfway to the front, Indians were seated on the floor. Whole families were traveling on the bus. They seemed to have come a long way, for there was a great deal of food, especially fruit, on board. On the racks above the seats, along with valises there were whole branches of bananas, baskets of pineapples, and sacks of oranges. There were cages of rodents too: guinea pigs for roasting. And just about everybody seemed to be eating the wonderful brown chunks of the meat of magnificent odors, wrapped in the usual strips of newspaper that I was absolutely forbidden to eat. Eating them meant slaps and additional bans. As we stepped inside the bus the loud and excited talk that streamed out of the door as we entered became very still. In the silence we three looked around for seats when some child in the rear pointed to the caps Karl and I were wearing and sang out, “*Marineros.*” Immediately the bus was full of talk, and laughter and pointing, and the word “*Marineros*” came from everywhere. I think that we, seeing so many smiling faces, smiled back at just everybody, while Dad reddened deeply, and slipped the caps from our heads at which the whoops in the bus just became louder.

The driver was skinny and yellow with a little Hitler mustache. He got up from his seat, faced the rear and screamed out, “*Silencio.*” The bus immediately became quiet. The driver pointed and spoke rapidly to a seat occupied by two Indian women. The one at the window seemed to be old and wrinkled and quite heavy. The other was still smooth faced but also quite heavy. The two immediately rose from their seats and Dad began to protest, “*No, no, por favor....*” But the two seated themselves on the floor despite all the Dad’s protests. The women were on the floor and the driver, with a wide grin ushered us to the vacated seats. He offered to take the leather bag from Dad and place it in the rack overhead, but Dad held on to the bag with both hands and declined with words maybe rougher than he intended. The driver shrugged and returned to his seat. The bus started off. Inside the bus we hardly heard the horn.

Dad settled into the window seat and watched the passing landscape. We two squeezed close to him. I think that it then dawned on Karl and me that the laughter and pointing had to do with us and so now we were afraid of all the brown faces that surrounded us. We looked into our laps. Sometimes we looked toward Dad but his attention was all beyond the window. For me, there was some comfort in that.

“*Cañyo?*” A brown hand shoved a stick of green sugar cane under Karl’s nose. He had the outside seat. Karl jumped and screamed out, “Papa!” Dad was startled out of his reverie. The window steamed over, became pearly white and opaque. The Indian woman sitting across from us was old but smooth-faced. She smiled, and holding out the sugar cane to Karl she kept repeating, “*Pobrecito, Pobrecito.*” Dad saw her concern and smiled back, “*No, gracias,*” over and over. He wiped the window with his sleeve and returned to the outside. Karl loved sugar cane and would gladly have taken it.

“*Dulce?*” The old woman held a small cake of an amber-brown color toward Karl. Her expression was very hopeful. On the seat next to the old woman was an extremely thin brown old man in a black suit and white shirt who nodded in emphasis to the old woman urging the boy to eat. Karl looked to Dad, who spoke gently. It took him a while before he could make the woman understand that he really meant no.

“*Platano?*” The woman had reached up to the rack above her seat where lay a large branch of small, fat, yellow, bananas. She had peeled one halfway down and pressed it into Karl’s hand. Karl was halfway to laughing as he looked at Dad and loudly whispered, “She doesn’t know who we are.” Papa, too, had a huge grin on his face as he nodded to the woman and then to Karl.

“*Bueno,*” and she pressed the sugar cake into Karl’s hand. She then gave me the length of sugar cane. I looked at Papa who nodded, and I began gnawing at it and sucking out the juice. Papa said, “Shouldn’t offend them.”

Finished with the cake Karl took a banana from the old woman. “It’s like custard,” he yipped. He just about wolfed it down when he had another in his hand. I kept ripping and sucking the sugar fibers. Very fastidiously, as I had been taught in the case of chewing gum, I would bring my hand to my mouth and spit out the used-up cane. When no one was looking I dropped it to the floor.

Dad’s attention was still out beyond the window. The bus scattered a herd of sheep that was crossing the highway. A turn in the road brought the high mountains into view. “Who would have thought it,” he sighed, “vote Papen and beat Hitler.” He looked out onto the aisle where the two women who had vacated the seats for us were sitting. The younger one sat with her back between the knees of the older one who was running a thumb and forefinger down each long and oily strand of hair. It was a scene all of us had often seen before, in the market, in the park, by the side of the road, in front of a hut; one woman’s fingers combing the hair of another, mothers doing it for the hair of their children, mostly. Quite frequently the older woman would stop and look at her fingers, pinch the fingers together and put them in her mouth. “Lice,” said Dad. I had almost become ill the first time, when Mama explained it to me, and I still had not, altogether, come to terms with it. The first time she said, “A horrible custom of these primitive people.” Since then she had come to another conclusion, and would try to explain to us that custom or not, there were several quite rational ideas behind the act. There was

simple hygiene in keeping the hair clean. She thought too, that there was a soothing and calming effect in this stroking of the hair. And finally, it was a good source of protein. These lice were rich in the blood of the people they fed on. Good and nourishing.

* * *

We are at the synagogue. It is a second story room in a white clapboard building that is reached through an outside set of wooden stairs. Several men stand on the landing. They are smiling broadly at us and they are all wearing hats and heavy dark coats. They all speak German.

“We wouldn’t start without you.”

“We couldn’t do Rosh HaShanah without you.

“So happy you could come.” We have reached the landing. One of them hugs me.

“You know, you have the only Shofar in Ecuador.”

It is not a large room but it is full of men in hats and heavy dark overcoats, of women with flowered hats and heavy dark overcoats. My father, Karl, and I sit in the front row. The cantor begins the service. He is old and has a scratchy voice. My grandfather did it better. The room grows warm. The women ask that windows be opened. The men are annoyed at the interruption but someone opens windows and the door. Through a window I can see the peak of *El Corazon*. The man sitting next to me smiles and shoves a prayer book at me but I am more interested in watching the clouds that stream and wrap themselves around the white shining peak of *El Corazon*. Every few minutes, it seems, the man smiles, pokes me in the shoulder and points down to the prayer book I am holding. My father rises from his seat. He holds the napkin- wrapped shofar in his hand. He bends over me, takes the book from my hands, leafs through it, gives it back and points. I read, *To the chief musician a psalm of the sons of Korah. All ye people clap your hands; shout unto God with a voice of triumph*. My father stands before the whole congregation. He unwraps the shofar from the napkin. He hands the napkin to me and smiles. He puts the shofar to his mouth and tentatively blows some air into it. He brings it down to his side and looks only at me. The leader of the service calls out the words that only the sound of the Ram’s horn can translate. The short blast, the long blast, the combined blast, the stuttering blast, the immensely long blast. When the last long blast has died the whole congregation, all those men and women in hats and dark coats call out, there is a great joy in their voices, “*Yishkoach*. May you be strong. Congratulations.” My father bows slightly, smiles.

But I had seen the sounds, visible shofar sounds, sounds looking like sparks, white, yellow, and red. Sparks that hob-nailed boots could make on cobble stones. And the sparks all traveled, flew out into the open, through the open window, out to the peak of *El Corazon*, out on this blue sky day to the mountain *Cayambe*, to *Pichincha*, to *Chimborazo*; out over the whole Cordillera that was the spine of the Andes.

Early US

We were desperately poor. Uncle Theo had given Papa a slip of paper that read, "I am looking for work. I have three children to support." Advice came from friends and relatives, "go here, go there," and quite soon Papa had his first job. The job was as a relief elevator operator in an apartment building, where the regular operator had become ill. Uncle Theo had gotten him the job. At first Papa was afraid of taking it,

"I don't speak any English, how can I..."

"You know one two three four, don't you?" said Uncle Theo.

"I know five too."

"Then all you need to learn is six, seven, eight. The building has eight floors. Somebody gives you a number and that's where you take them. You can do that." Papa nodded yes. Uncle Theo gave Papa a slip of paper which he was to present to the building superintendent. The super looked at it, said something about speaking English, Papa smiled and started to count,

"One, two, three, ..." He started at eight dollars a week. Then he was almost fired. A tenant had asked him to hold a package for her and deliver it to her apartment. He became confused, and didn't understand her instructions. When he attempted to make the building superintendent understand his confusion, the super, of course, saw how much English he lacked. "Don't come back after today," he was told. At the end of Papa's shift, as he was changing out of the elevator man's uniform, the Superintendent came to him. Papa divined what the Super was attempting to tell him. "He couldn't keep a man who was unable to help a tenant. Tenants come first, but he would try it one more time. Should anything like it happen again..." The super shrugged his shoulder. He slapped Papa on the shoulder and smiled and yelled at him as if he were deaf, "English, English."

Everything went well for a week or two when, one evening, Papa began to shake and shiver. It was a recurrence of the malaria he had caught in Guayaquil. We were somewhat used to it since that had happened, perhaps twice, on the hacienda. The fever and the shivering would last for two or three days and then he would be perfectly well again. This time the illness made my mother almost insane. While Papa sat in his pajamas, wrapped in all the blankets we could find, shivering in a chair, Mom combed our house, and then the neighborhood for an unemployed refugee who might perhaps substitute for the few days that Papa might be out. She combed Aunt Irma's house. She ran from the house of one relative or acquaintance to another trying to find a substitute. She found no one. The following morning she took the subway and presented herself to the building superintendent, but to no avail. Papa was fired. It was three weeks before he recovered.

Papa's next job was unloading barges on one of the East River docks. As far as I was concerned it was the best job he ever had. Each day there came a barge from the Messing Bakery up in the Bronx. Messing sold

cakes and cookies in just about every grocery store with which we were familiar: plain cakes, cakes with chocolate and vanilla icing, cookies of all kinds, plain and chocolate covered donuts and pies of all descriptions. These baked goods were only one or two days old but, to our great astonishment, in this America, they were old and could no longer be sold. So they were consigned to a dog food factory.

“Americans are very spoiled,” said my father, “One day only or even two and they can’t eat them anymore, it’s a shame. Such a waste, if only Oma could see it. In her store it would stay on the shelf,” and he silently counted on his fingers till all five were spread out, looked at us and laughed. “Maybe they know better in this country.”

After several months on the east river docks Papa began work as a dish washer at a restaurant: the Café Eclair on 72nd street on the west side of Manhattan. The Eclair then was a bit of old Europe, the kind of coffee house one might find in Vienna or perhaps Berlin or any large German city. While American-style sandwiches were, of course, on the menu, the real reason for its existence was its many varieties of cakes and pastries, all overflowing with whipped cream, chocolate, and custards. Also, there was the atmosphere of the old world café where one could linger over coffee, read a newspaper, meet with, and chat with friends. That the Café Eclair was located so very near West End Avenue and Riverside Drive, the heart of settlement for the more affluent immigrants, was certainly one of the elements for its long-lasting success. So, in a place where, on another continent he might have frequented, Papa now washed dishes and was glad of it.

It was the day before Yom Kippur, Kol Nidre eve. It was now mid-afternoon and as Papa was observant and needed to prepare for the holiday; he had arranged to leave work early. It had already been a long day. He had begun work at six that morning. Just before leaving, the boss handed Papa a box of desserts to deliver to a customer on West End Avenue at 98th Street. It was something that Pop would have understood since it was customary to have a large and elaborate meal on the evening before the long day of fasting. Pop’s subway train rolled past the station he needed to exit. He had fallen asleep on the train. He came home to 159th street. He stood in front of Mom. He held the package in his hand and did not know what to do. Mom took over. She had Papa get his needed bath, and got him something to eat. (We did not have a large and elaborate meal that year.) A problem remained. Oma Krämer, Mom’s mother, now lived with us and she was extremely observant. To have, knowingly, overstepped any of the rules and conventions of the holiday, such as, perhaps, riding on the subway, would have brought down terrible and immediate rebukes and reproaches from her mother. “Don’t say anything,” Mom tried to calm Papa, “when you and Oma are in synagogue I will take the children and go down and deliver the things.” Pop’s silence signaled his agreement.

Mom was now very pregnant and it showed. With four year old Peter at her hand we went off to make the delivery on West End Avenue. Mom cried on the subway. We children could very well have remained at

home by ourselves. We often had, often enough, but Mom probably thought that arranging for a pathetic gypsy scene might temper any anger at the late delivery. We arrived at the door of the house on 98th street and a lady in a dark dress and pearls opened the door. "Wait a minute," and she took the package. Mom smiled at us, "wait, we get a tip." The lady came back holding the opened package. She was furious. "I have twelve guests for dinner and I ordered twelve *petit fours*. One of the *petit fours* is broken. Now there are only eleven and I have twelve guests." Mom tried to explain but the lady interrupted, "Tomorrow I'll go to Eclair and tell them." The lady slammed the door. Mom pleaded through the closed door, "Please no, please no, please no, we need the job." It went on for a while before we turned around and left.

On our return home, later, Mom didn't tell Pop what happened., but when he returned to work, after the holiday, the lady had already been there, and the boss told Pop, "Don't bother changing, you're fired."

Years later when Mom would recount the story she would say, "*Nebish*, I was pregnant, I had one kid on one arm and the package in my hand. Maybe the package got bumped. The lady said, 'I invited twelve people,' and now she only had eleven and three quarters. You know, when *I* invite twelve people I have at least thirteen pieces, not twelve." She would end the story with a shake of the head, "West End Avenue Jews..."

###

Mom had one overwhelmingly wealthy set of relatives in New York. She had never before applied to them for aid either for herself or for family but now, on behalf of her in-laws she did. We took the subway downtown. Mom had the address on a slip of paper. Mom said, "If I pinch you, you can start to cry."

In the late 1890's Mom's father, Louis Krämer and a half-brother, David, came to the United States, together, to New York City. When, because of a severe economic depression his American prospects dimmed, Louis returned to Germany but David stayed. By 1940 David had died, but not before he had established a flourishing business in notions, small, lightweight items for household use, like buttons and pins. His two sons, Herbert and Monroe now ran the business.

The elevator to their offices seemed built out of a fantastic erector set. It had neither walls nor roof. It was composed of an open iron skeleton work through which one could see, far up, a sky-light. One could see as well, through the steel mesh openings as we rose, the vast ranging floors that contained row after row of immense white tables over whose every side men and women were bent doing something I knew not what. But most remarkably, no button needed to be pushed on this elevator to indicate the floor. There was an attendant who pulled on a braided metal rope that extended all the way up to the sky-light. A pull and the elevator began to rise, another pull and the elevator halted.

This floor too, contained the two vast rows of huge white tables. Large green hooded lamps extended

down from a high ceiling, and again, about each of the tables, an enormous number of men and women were bent. As we got closer we could see their fingers moving over pieces of paper as if they were practicing over silent piano keys. But there was no silence, only a crunching, rustling sound came from the tables, as if one were walking through fallen leaves.

Half way down the aisle between the tables stood two men in white shirts and ties. They seemed to be of about the same age as Mom and Pop. Mom smiled and as we got closer she leaned forward, her arms held out as if to hug them, but they retreated a bit and extended their hands for a shake.

“You look just like your grandmother. Wait a minute.” I had seen my mother in many moods but never one like this. She was nervous. “Wait a minute,” came from her over and over again as she rummaged about in her bag. A last “wait a minute,” and she pulled out a photograph on stiff paper, brown with age, of a woman with a tall head of hair and a very serious expression. The man to whom she handed the picture looked nothing like the woman in the photograph. He was short and slender and bald. He had a mustache and glasses. The other man had shiny black hair that was parted in the middle. Mom reached into her bag again and drew out a small soft blue bag. It was something that I had seen often. I was handed her large bag and Mom drew out a golden watch on a long golden chain from the soft blue bag. Mom spoke in German.

“This is your grandfather’s watch. I don’t know if you have anything to remember him by but I thought that maybe you would like to have it.” I was never more ashamed of my mother. I knew she was going to beg but I did not know that she was shamefacedly going to bribe as well. I had seen, in Germany, in Ecuador, when from time to time she had taken the watch out of the blue bag and had run a soft cloth over the gold casing; the gold watch with roman numerals. She would make a point of saying, each time that I saw her polish it, “This is the only remembrance I have of my grandfather. One of these days one of you will have it.” The bald one took the watch and smiled. Then each took turns holding it in his palm, seeming to weigh it. We stood there in the middle of this vast room and nobody spoke. There was just the rustle that came from the tables that came from the workers and their nimble fingers.

“Come, you’re pregnant. Sit down in the office. We’ll get you some coffee. We sat in an office at one end of the floor. It had a large glass wall that looked out on the workers. Mom told her story, about the terrible situation in Germany, “Everybody knows about it, I don’t have to tell you, I wrote you about Oscar’s parents, these good old people. Religious, good people, they don’t deserve to suffer, there are people here in America who could help maybe save these two old people. All we need is a thousand dollars.”

“A thousand dollars?” said the two of them, almost at once.

“I know. It’s a lot of money. You know Oscar and I would do it but Oscar works so hard for just his eight, sometimes ten dollars a week and I don’t sit on my *tochus*. I get twenty five cents an hour for scrubbing

floors. And the rent is forty eight dollars a month and we got three kids.” Mom put her arm around my neck and pinched me so the others wouldn’t see it, but I refused to cry. The begging recital made me too angry.

“Anything you can do to help us, we would pay you back when we get on our feet. And we need somebody to provide an affidavit.”

The bald headed one got up, looked down at his brother, he turned in a circle and then faced us, “How long are you in this country?”

“Why? Months, I guess.”

“How can you afford a forty-eight dollar apartment when your husband makes only eight dollars a week?”

“Did I say forty eight? I meant thirty-eight. Thirty-eight. When he gets ten, we still got two dollars left over. And I work too.”

“You’re not here even a year and already you’re pregnant.” Mom looked down at her belly and stroked a hand over it.

“I think it’s very irresponsible,” said the slick-haired brother. Mom looked up. The slick-haired brother got up and faced Mom. “Very irresponsible. How can you think of having children when you have no money, when you have no real work; nothing that gives you a real future. Now, you can still work but after a while...”

“You have a lot of responsibility; three children to take care of. A hard time at home...”

“Not so hard like you think. Money isn’t everything...”

“And then you’re hardly in the country and you have another on the way, that’s what I call irresponsible.”

“I’m sorry that you think so,” and then my mother pinched me in the neck again, but again, I refused to cry. “I’m glad I have these children and I’m glad we have another on the way.” Mom smiled. “Oscar got out of Dachau, we got out of Germany, we got out of Ecuador. Do you think all that is for nothing? Do you have children?”

They both shook their heads. Mom got up from the chair, “I don’t want charity. I’m not asking for that. I would never. This is for two old people in Germany. I didn’t really want to come and bother you, and it is really hard for me to come and beg but I thought that maybe the lives of two old Jews are really important and that blood is thicker than water, than dollars even. And people help each other when there is trouble.”

“You know,” said the slick haired one, “the blood isn’t even so thick between us as you say. Your father and our father were step-brothers, not even real brothers.” Very quickly, and more loudly, Mom replied, “Weren’t they raised in the same house, one next to the other? I can’t believe it.”

Then the egg-headed one said, “With somebody as irresponsible as you seem to be, how can we trust

that the money will be used as you say?"

Mom reached for the watch on the desk, her fingers surrounded it, "I can't believe it. My cousins! I would lie to you? I can't believe it. I should have listened to Irma and never have come to you."

The two were both standing now. Mom pulled me up from the chair, "She said you sent her a letter when she asked you to make an affidavit for our brother, for your cousin Theo. Your lawyer told you not to do it, you said. You would be responsible if he couldn't support himself: responsible for a doctor in economics!!?" Now in English, and very loud, "How many people you got working on your tables in these three floors? How much you making on each one every day?" We were almost at the elevators. People around the tables were now looking up. They had stopped working. "People like you gave money to Hitler. They bought suits for the Hitler youth." The elevator had arrived and we stepped in. In the elevator she said, very quietly, "Maybe if they had children they would think differently."

The answer that came from Canada did not differ greatly from that of Mom's cousins though here a son was involved. Here the request was for a much smaller sum and Uncle Albert wrote back, "Do you know how much five hundred dollars is?. Do you know what five hundred dollars means?"

On Sunday June 22 1941 the Germans invaded Russia. One hundred and twenty divisions struck. They struck from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Mom said "that's their end; that's Hitler's big mistake." But her face did not look happy. A few days later, Italy and Rumania too declared war on Russia.

#

Pop stopped going to work. All day he sat in the apartment, in the same chair, in his dark green pajamas with his hands clasped in front of him, never saying anything. Mom said that Doctor Joshua had been there and that it was another attack of malaria, and a very bad one. But usually when Pop had a malaria attack he lay in his couch-bed with a fever and tossed and sweated. He did not sweat now. I was afraid. I didn't know what was happening but I didn't really believe Mom

We were taken to the orphanage by subway, Karl and I. It was the last station on the "A" train. Far Rockaway. Years later if I mentioned "the orphanage" to my mother she would say, "Ach, you shouldn't say that. It wasn't an orphanage. It was like a camp. A summer camp. A camp on the beach. And you came back. We got you back, you and Karl."

"Mom, if it was a camp why did we go to school there, all of 5A?"

"So you went to school there. Was that such a bad thing? School? We couldn't do anything. Papa was sick. I was almost sick. I couldn't go to work. We had no money coming in. Franky and Peter needed me all the time. What could we do? You want to make me feel bad?"

I think I did. I know I did.

###

There was nothing to prepare us for where we were going. One morning, Mom simply took us both by the hand. Aunt Irma came along. She had the address and directions in one hand, in the other was a large paper bag that contained some clothes. It was a very long ride. We arrived at the orphanage on the day that the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, great German battleships, made a break out of the port of *Brest*, and ran the English channel past a terribly strong British attack and made it clean back to their home base on the Elbe. It was the day Singapore fell to the Japanese. *The Daily News* had it all. Someone had left a copy on a nearby seat. I read and re-read the accounts all the way out to Queens.

It was a very large house, three stories, made of stone, almost a block long, almost a castle. There were turrets at each end of the roof. Like sniffing noses, the dormer windows stuck out between the turrets. That the orphanage was on the beach was true, but it was winter, the middle of February and the cold wind blew in from the sea. We walked down a ramp from the boardwalk into the arched entrance.

Mom bent down to Karl, her hands on his shoulders, her eyes just across from his, "We'll come and visit every week. Just a little while, you'll stay here. This is a nice place. Everybody says so." I got a hug. When they turned to leave I don't think either of us cried, though we might have. Mom sometimes came, but not every week. We got postcards. Pop was getting better.

We were taken to a dormitory. It felt something like the Willard Parker hospital in that beds seemed to stretch out into the distance; they might have gone on forever if they hadn't been intercepted by a wall with two windows. There were two long rows of metal beds on each side of the vast room. Each bed was covered either by a brown or a dark gray blanket. Somebody showed us the locker next to our bed, but we had hardly anything to put into the locker. Somebody showed us how to make our beds: we learned about hospital corners.

"It's not a bad place," said the boy in the bed next to me. His name was Arthur. He had a steam iron kind of face, long, roundish, and it came to a point at his chin. He had a harelip.

"It's all right. You can look at it. I don't get into fights about it any more."

"You used to?"

"I've been here since I was three. I had a lot of fights." Arthur was eleven, a year older than me. Three times he had been up for adoption; once to a family in New Jersey.

"Three times people came, but after they looked at me, I guess, they never came back. They have nice social workers here. They talk to you. They've arranged for a doctor at Mount Sinai to operate, and fix it after the school term is over. That's July. Four months. Most people here are really nice."

There was a synagogue in the home and we went every Friday night and every Saturday morning. But it

was Saturday morning that separated me from just about everybody and everything. The service was simply not conducted in any way that was familiar to me. Familiar meant the tunes that we had sung, the same tunes that my Opa sang and that Rabbi Lieber sang; that the whole congregation in Washington Heights sang, especially the tunes that accompanied the taking out and returning the Torah to the ark. In Washington Heights these tunes came from the throats of everyone around me, they enveloped me the way Joseph's colored coat enveloped him; they were signs of favor and of inclusion, that touched me the way a gentle pat on the head from my father's friend touched me as we exited synagogue. That touch and the accompanying wordless smile said, "you are Oscar's son and I know you." Those tunes said I was a part of all that black-suited crowd that flooded out onto Amsterdam Avenue. These others were the wrong tunes. *Va'yehi bin'sauah hoaraun* and *Haudu al eretz v'shomayim*, these were totally wrong. We had been in America for almost two years, accustomed to America, accustomed to our neighborhood: Henry Rosenberg, and the grocery store on the corner; Hebrew school and Mr. Klein, accustomed to friends and streets for two years; *Ruppichteroth* and *Machachi* were memories in which the tough parts were on their way to being forgotten, or changed so that smiles were interspersed with recall; and now this. These strange songs became the leaving of every place I had ever left. They recalled not any "thing" of leaving but the whole process of leaving. They became and they returned to me the shape of all those good-byes, the black, dull, and sad feelings where something good in me was taken from me, where every separation became, after a while, a judgment I must have deserved: good-by; good-bye from Oma and Opa, good-bye from Chino, Chimborazzo and El Professor. In this synagogue boys and girls sat together.

The food was all right. There was lots of tomato soup, and sandwiches of white bread with thin smears of cream cheese or peanut butter between the slices. The bread had the crusts cut off. Friday night was chicken soup. Though it was announced as chicken soup I always doubted it. Karl brought to my attention that you could see clear to the bottom of the bowl even though the bowl was full; that our mother's chicken soup was never thin and transparent. Our mother's chicken soup was a dark yellow with swirls and eddies of fat swimming on the surface. Everybody got a piece of carrot in our mother's chicken soup and the bottom of the bowl was never visible until the bowl was empty.

The only work that was required of us was to keep the area around our beds neat and clean. In addition, we ten and eleven year olds were given a schedule for kitchen duty to dry the dishes that the older boys washed.

There was a school. I sat in a schoolroom with perhaps thirty others, both boys and girls. It was a familiar schoolroom: blackboards and shiny blond desks. Construction paper of many colors, covered with writing, decorated the walls. The teacher was a man; a man with a thin mustache: Mr. Teller. Mr. Teller read the newspaper *PM*. Every morning when we came into the classroom he was bent over the desk reading or writing something and there was the paper on the left side of the desk. Everybody in the class was smart. Should Mr.

Teller ask a question, and he asked questions all the time, just about everybody, it seemed, had a hand up, everybody except this girl who sat in a seat in front of me. Her hand never went up, though every time Mr. Teller called on her, and he often called on children who did not have their hands up, she had the right answer.

“Ina, tell me about how we operate on rational numbers.”

“By addition, subtraction, multiplication, division That’s how we operate.” Her voice was low and it had a sneer in it, as if she hated being asked and at the same time hated being asked something so very simple. She had straight blond hair that was cut like the Dutch boy in the paint adds. I liked her.

At lunch time, when Mr. Teller guided the students out the door, I kept back and sidled up to the desk to try to read something from the folded up newspaper. Maybe I could catch a headline maybe there was something happening somewhere besides thin chicken soup and hospital corners. The paper was folded and, gingerly, testing, I tried moving it with one finger to see if it would unfold. Mr. Teller stood over me, I quickly removed my hand.

“Would you like to see the newspaper?”

“Yes. No.” And I ran out to lunch.

From the time in Germany when Pop set up our short wave radio so that we could hear the reports about Spain, I knew that news was terribly important; what the radio said could bring Mom to tears and give Pop his very serious face, the silent face where one could not talk to him. I sometimes thought that the voices that came from the radio speaker were like herders of sheep and we, all of us, listening, were sheep that were shooed this way and that. I thought that there were other voices behind the voices on the radio who held knives for the sheep. People left their homes for other countries because of news. I knew that the newspapers, the radio, held information that meant life or death for somebody, somebody we might know, maybe it was about us. Maybe it was about me. “Did you hear...” was a very scary phrase. Mrs. Brill in 4B had said that I was the current events kid. I heard her tell another teacher that I was a prodigy when it came to following the news. I looked up prodigy in the dictionary. I was very pleased.

I remembered when we were still on the high seas, on the *Caribia*, when we heard about the Hitler-Stalin pact. I announced it to Mom. I thought it was something of a coup for me. “I can’t understand it. I can’t understand it.” “What’s the matter, Mama?” She looked around, then whispered, “Stalin. Stalin signed a pact with Hitler. How could he do it? Impossible. Just impossible.” Later Papa said “You and your socialists. That’s what you get.” For the first time ever I heard Mom shout at Pop, “He’s just playing for time. Just playing for time.” Then she clamped her hand over her mouth and started to cry. In Ecuador the men discussed the Finnish-Russian war with serious faces. We were still in Ecuador when the men, with joy in their voices, a joy that they communicated to all of us, talked about this great warship, the *Graff Spee*, having surrendered in the port of

Montevideo. We had just about arrived in America when, a few days after Pop's birthday, Denmark fell, then Norway. I read how German soldiers, who as starving children in the terrible years after World War 1, had been taken into Norwegian homes to be fed and nourished, now returned as strutting conquerors. The *Blitzkrieg* overwhelmed Holland. Where was Tante Mina? She lived in Amsterdam. She had saved our lives. She got Pop out of Dachau and then saved the rest of us by paying for our ship's passage and giving us money to live on in Ecuador. Pop prayed that she might be safe; his cousins, Tante Mina's children too. I thought of my cousin Eva. I wanted England and France to win but the headlines of losses and defeats were stamped in big black letters almost every day. In June Hitler danced his victory jig at *Compiègne*. But now it was 1942, Singapore had fallen and the Scharnhorst and Gneisenau were safe..

###

Evenings, the great entrance hall of the home became a place for recreation. Kids could play board games, cards, or do homework, although very little homework was ever assigned. There were several large bookcases filled, crammed tight with books. Karl would wander around the hall looking at what other kids were doing, and so did I. Some played cards, pinochle or rummy. Chinese checkers seemed to be big and so was dominoes. I wanted to do something with Karl, play a game, play cards, anything. He had on Pop's serious face, so I knew that he didn't feel happy. I wanted to, but I didn't do anything. In these early days of just looking around I would often see Arthur and Ina sitting next to each other on a bench in a dark corner next to the player piano, each of them absorbed in a book. After several days of wandering, peering at what others were doing and getting stares from the others I stared at, I wandered over to the bookcases. There were many fat books; a whole row with maroon backs and gold print, all of them written by Charles Dickens. Another smaller row, with black backs and gold print was written by William Makepeace Thackeray. A whole row of the same book: "*Bible Stories for the Jewish Young*." Then I had to smile when I came on a bunch of John R. Tunis books, and then next, these other set of my favorites, the Sam books by W. Maxwell Reed. Seeing them, I felt, for a moment, almost warm and almost at home. I had read *The Earth for Sam* and *The Sea for Sam*, I was about to pull *The Earth for Sam* from the shelf and look at the pictures when Ina, behind me said, "I wanted that."

"Sorry. I just wanted to look at the pictures."

"Why," she said in a very dull voice, "can't you read?"

"I can read. I've already read this one."

"What's it about?"

"Is this a test?"

"Yeah. What's it about?"

"Well, It's about when the earth was hot. It's about how the earth was formed: mountains, rivers,

volcanoes, glaciers and glaciation.” I was rather proud of glaciation, so I went on. “ It tells about the different periods, Silurian, Devonian, and Carboniferous, that’s when coal was formed, and it goes on with the Permian, the Jurassic and Triassic, and then it goes on with dinosaurs and human beings. There’s some nice stuff about seaweed and Jellyfish and shells.”

“What’s the picture you were looking at?”

“I wanted to see the ichthyosaurus, here,” and I leafed till I found the full page picture of the massive ichthyosaurus, sword-like bill and rows of sharp pins for teeth, swimming as if he owned the ocean.

“That looks like Mr. Kadish.” This was Arthur, now looking over my shoulder. Ina smiled for the first time. “In case you don’t know, Mr. Kadish is a trustee.” She strung out the word trustee as if it were important and foolish at the same time. “He comes once a month on a Sunday during lunch. He tells everybody, ‘ be sure to brush your teeth.’ And he pinches girls.”

“Why, are they bad?”

Both Ina and Arthur giggled. I felt foolish. I didn’t know why.

“It’s about geology,” I said. Ina took the book from me, and handed me the book she had been carrying. “Did you like it?”

“Yea. A lot. What’s this?”

“I just finished it.”

“What’s it called?”

“Oliver Twist.”

“What’s it about?”

“Orphans.” She took the book back and stuffed it between the others in the row with the maroon books with the gold writing on the back.

The lunchroom (it was the breakfast and dinner room as well) was very large. There were many rows of tables with benches attached where four or five children could sit on a side. On one of the long sides of the room was the cafeteria-style serving area and behind that was the kitchen. On one of the short sides there was a large bank of windows that looked out over the beach. Ina, it seemed, was always one of the last to enter the lunchroom and she evidently did that in order to sit at a table where the fewest other children sat. Her preference, it seemed, was to sit with her tray in front of her, all alone, on a bench by herself.

The first few days or maybe weeks I would try to sit somewhere with both Karl and Arthur, but then I copied Ina and waited almost to the end of mealtime to see where she sat and then I would sit near her at the same table. I might have tried to start a conversation with her, asking about a book or a problem in a subject from class but she never answered me, never even looked up from her meal. Arthur found my sitting at a table

with Ina peculiar. It might have been on a sunny day in late February or early March. We were allowed out on the beach if we were nicely bundled up and had a scarf around our neck. Arthur and I were looking for shells.

“Why do you always sit with Ina?”

“Huh?”

“With Ina, at her table, all alone, and she never talks.”

“I don’t know.”

“She hits.”

“What?”

“She hits. At one of the movies one of the older boys tried to kiss her and she hit him with her fist on the nose so that his nose bled.”

“That’s funny.”

“He had nose bleed all over him. When we were six, I think, one of the families that looked at me adopted Ina, but she came back after a couple of months.”

“So?”

The conversation stopped. Arthur had dug something up with his hands, held it in front of him and dusted some sand off the object, then he yelled, “a whelk. A whelk,” and ran back to our orphan home.

I continued to sit at Ina’s table. After a week or two of this, never speaking, she called across the table,

“Can’t you sit somewhere else?”

“It’s a free country.”

“Can’t you sit somewhere else in this free country?”

“What are you going to do, hit me if I don’t move?” I couldn’t tell whether the twinge in her lips was anger or the beginnings of a smile.

“Yes.” It was the start of a smile that was quickly broken off.

“You can’t hit me, I’m a bleeder. When I start to bleed I keep on bleeding, and it doesn’t stop. My grandfather was a bleeder, and my father was a bleeder.”

“Till all the blood is gone?”

“Probably.”

“You related to the British royal family, or was it the Russian?”

“You don’t have to be sarcastic.”

How come you’re still around? You must have been scratched sometimes. Or at the dentist. People bleed at the dentists.” I remembered a line from one of my favorite radio programs, *Can You Top This*, “We didn’t have a dentist, we were too poor.”

“That’s why you’re here? You were too poor?”

“Yes. Why are you here.?”

“I’m an orphan, and you’re a hemophiliac. I don’t want to talk to you anymore.” We didn’t talk any more, but a few days later in the hall, it was afternoon, I was doing homework when Ina brought over a set of Chinese checkers. I stopped homework and without a word passing between us we played Chinese checkers.

#

I was purposely slow leaving Mr. Teller’s room and when his attention was elsewhere, I fingered his folded newspaper just to get a peek at a headline. This day, at just a touch, the paper unfolded and the headline read “GREAT BATTLE OF THE JAVA SEA.” The first few paragraphs told of our Dutch, English, and American navies sinking great quantities of Japanese ships. This was heart-pumping wonderful, maybe our first victory after the scores of soul-eroding defeats my side had suffered: France and Poland, the London Blitz and all the burning churches, Pearl Harbor, emigration.

“Something in there interests you?”

Mr. Teller loomed over me. I ran toward the door.

“Come back here, you *vantz*.” The voice was loud. It made me stop. I looked back.

“Now!” I hesitated. I wanted to run.

“Would you please come here.” The voice now seemed less harsh. I held onto the door jamb with one hand.

“Please, just for a second. I’d like to talk to you.” The voice was now gentle, even kind. Very, very slowly, I returned to the room. I kept a desk between myself and Mr. Teller.

“It’s OK. It’s OK. I’m just curious. What’s with you and this newspaper? I’ve been watching you nose all around it. Is there something in the ads you want?”

“It doesn’t have ads.”

“That’s right. Not yet, *PM* doesn’t have ads yet. So what is it?”

“The news.”

“The news? What about the news?”

“I need to know the news.”

“You need to know the news. Why?”

Suddenly, I didn’t know why I needed to know. I clamped my lips together. Tears began to form in the corners of my eyes. I bit down on my lips.

“You’re one of the refugee kids?” I nodded. Mr. Teller put a hand on my shoulder.

“He’s never coming here. Hitler.” He smiled, “You don’t have to worry about that, the Russians won’t

let him.”

“I saw. *Smolensk*.”

“You saw *Smolensk*?” He almost laughed. “Where’d you see *Smolensk*?”

“Somebody left a paper here. A visitor. In the pot with the palm. Last Sunday. I saw about *Smolensk*.”

“So, what do you think?”

“Maybe...”

“Maybe what?”

“Things can get better.”

“Things can get better? We’re getting our *kishkes* kicked in all over the world, and things are getting better?” I ran around the desk to where the paper lay and flipped it open so the headline was revealed. “Look, the Java Sea. And *Smolensk*.” Mr. Teller was quiet for a long time. I just stood there. After a while he said, “You know, if you want, you can have the paper. Take it any time. By the time I get to class I’ve read it. So you can just take it. OK? Only thing, when you’re finished with it you have to throw it in the trash. You may not leave my *PM* in the pot with the palm. OK?” And he walked out the classroom door. I stood, looking in wonder, at the headline about the Java Sea.

“Take the damn paper already.” Mr. Teller stuck his head back into the room. “You have to read the whole paper every day. Cover to cover. There will be a test on it.” But Mr. Teller was just joking, there never was a test. Except that sometimes he would say, “make sure that you read this or that.” He’d often say, “read the letters.” So many letters so often were about the difficulties “Negroes” faced in America and I thought of all those friends at PS 46. But his most insistant “make sure,” was the time when he said, with a very sad face, “Tom Mooney died.” And then, in a loud voice, “make sure you read the damn obituary.” I had to look up obituary. Tom Mooney had died. Tom Mooney was a Socialist, like Mom. Tom Mooney was for working people. He organized unions in San Francisco. He was accused of setting a bomb that killed six people but it was a frame up. He never did it, and everybody knew it. They protested. That was why his death sentence was commuted to life in prison, and he was in prison for twenty-two years. Reading that obituary I learned names that stuck with me; most of them three-name people. There was Eugene Victor Debbs, William Jennings Bryan, H.L. Menken, William Allanson White, George Bernard Shaw. (But I already knew about Shaw because my mother thought he was a great playwright which my father pooh-poohed, saying, “Of course, Goethe and Schiller are better. Shaw is too advanced. Like Ibsen,” and that I shouldn’t read him till I was much older and could really understand him.) I learned that Franklin Roosevelt had refused to intervene on Mooney’s part. I was very much troubled by the idea that such an injustice took place in my new America. I read *PM*’s labor column all the time.

I looked for the headlines every day, for the war, and I read the stories, but there also was Barnaby. Barnaby was a comic strip about a little boy who had parents, Mr. and Mrs. Baxter, John and Ellen, and an imaginary godfather, Mr. O'Malley who said, "Cushlamochree." He had a magic cigar for a wand. Mr. O'Malley looked a little bit like mayor LaGuardia with wings coming out of his shoulders. There was a talking dog and a friend, Jane. I think what drew me to Barnaby was the everydayness of the magic, of making the impossible a matter of course, of the unreal real that had something of the ichthyosaurus, the Jurassic, of glaciation and of making the needed double play at the absolutely right time in John R. Tunis' books. It was playful and funny; dogs talked. There was the mushroom McSnoyd who came from the Bronx, and O'Malley who had to look up his Handy Pocket Guide before he could do a bit of magic. But maybe there was something else; there was Mr. and Mrs Baxter. To me they seemed far more magic than Mr. O'Malley. The way Mr. Baxter sat so easily in his easy chair, a pipe in his mouth, and the day's paper in front of him talking so easily to his wife, who sat across from him in another easy chair with a book in her lap, her face relaxed and her eyes large, and who answered her husband so easily, that was true magic. And Mr. Baxter always wore a jacket and tie. And they lived in a house with a yard and a front lawn. Nothing ever concerned them except, perhaps, that their child knew something, saw something that they did not. Mildly, gently, while looking at their paper or their book, they might concoct ways for their boy to forget Pixies, but they had no idea of what really went on in Barnaby's head.

Dr. Seuss was in *PM*, not that we knew him by that name. That was to come much later; then, I thought of him as "Quick Henry the Flit." "Quick Henry the Flit" was a slogan plastered on billboards everywhere but I encountered it mostly on subway advertising. Funny ugly mosquitoes were eradicated by flying Henry and a funny squirt gun. Now drawings, cartoons, very similar in style to Henry appeared in *PM*. Hitler was a leering flying dragon, costumed as from a weird Wagner opera, dropping bombs and laying waste English churches. Churchill was the knight in a Spitfire about to lance him. Mussolini was a power who could invade Egypt, but in reality he was a mere janitor trying to dust off the pyramids. McArthur was a hero wiping out Japanese sharks in a shooting gallery. No defeat was so serious that we would not ultimately triumph over it. That was the message. It drew some of the terror out of the terrorists.

Around that time there was the wonderful British raid on the French port of St. Nazaire. U Boats that were sinking our ships all along the American coastline were stationed in St. Nazaire. The report said that a destroyer had rammed a dock gate. I didn't know what a dock gate was, but I felt the magnificent courage of a tiny ship and felt the physical force of the crash in my bones. The harbor was blocked up so U-Boats had difficulty coming out. British Commandoes took part in the raid and I told Arthur and Ina that the second front was not far away. Too, we were beginning to hear about the great toll that U-Boats were taking on coastal

shipping. We had to make sure that windows were covered at night so no light might spill out. If it did, the light would make it easy for the Nazi sharks to sink our ships. Block wardens were appointed, and just about every night one could hear somebody yell, "Hey, up there, turn it off." It was also the time, but I did not tell Arthur or Ina, that the Philippines had surrendered and that all that was left was the fortress of Corregidor.

That was the time, as well, when the home showed a movie in the large entrance hall. The lady who was the head of the home stood in front of us, in front of all the kid filled chairs that had been set up in front of her, and told us that we should be very thankful to Mr. Kadish, who was a trustee and who sent us these films every month from his office where he worked on Lexington Avenue. I sat at the end of one row, near the back, next to Arthur. This was going to be a wonderful film, she said, in color, of the great American novel, by the great American novelist, Mark Twain. It was called "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer," and we should enjoy it and be grateful to Mr. Kadish. And then the lights went out and a stream of light shot out from in back of us, a stream that was thin at first and then grew larger as it met the screen. The screen showed numbers which counted down from ten, and with each number there was a loud pop of noise. Just after the number ten there was Ina, standing next to me. "Move over. I want to sit." I nudged Arthur, Arthur nudged someone else and after a series of nudges there was Ina sitting next to me. I was very aware that Ina had punched someone in the nose while watching a movie.

I don't think I had ever seen anything so wonderful, not even Maureen O'Sullivan swimming in the water. The film was in color, it took place in the country, not in the city, and that it was set a hundred years earlier didn't matter. Indian Joe was a Nazi and Muff Potter was my Opa. I had to marvel at that air of ease and easy indifference that Tom shared with the Baxters, and with which Tom got the others to paint that fence: that was American, that was beautiful. Could I ever own that air? Tom was heroic, he spoke out, he spoke the truth and saved Muff from sure death. He saved Opa. Was ever a knight battling a dragon more heroic, more honorable? And the reward? The praise of the town, the acclaim of the universe, and a little blond girl. But there was still more: a quest and submission to even greater challenges: there was the display of even more courage, there was the cave.

The second Tom and Becky entered the cave; both my hands gripped the edges of my chair. Bats were awakened from their sleep on the cave ceiling; bats swooped like solid pieces of a black cloud, and I heard Ina drawing a long breath. There were more long breaths when the cave-ins began. When Becky cried for her mother there was a loud scream from Ina. There were words in that scream which I did not understand and everybody turned around and looked at her. Ina reached for my hand on the chair and held it, and softly said, "I'm sorry. Sorry." Bravely, I whispered to her, "It's only a movie." There was a brief dark look toward me and she took her hand away.

I read that the Battle of the Java Sea had not really been a victory. The news came out bit by bit. British cruisers, Dutch battle ships, American destroyers, all were sunk. There had been immense losses of men and ships that led to Japanese victories, first in Java, and then in the whole Dutch East Indies. But then there was the glorious raid on Japan. In the middle of April, Jimmy Doolittle took off from the carrier Hornet with his medium bombers, twin-engined B-25's, the ones with the glass noses, and the bubble gun turret on top. They bombed Tokyo, and other places in Japan. Mr. Teller began the morning by reading the whole story to us. "Hess," he called out "you ought to get a scissors and cut this story out. Save it for your kids and grandkids. This is history. There are pictures."

Sundays, many of the children would wait inside near the entrance to the Home, though some would lounge out on the boardwalk, hanging over the railing along the beach, looking out into the distance, toward the subway station from which a relative might come. Sometimes Mom and even Oma would come out to visit on a Sunday. Karl and I watched for them. When the visitors came near to us Karl would run toward them, but I made a point of not running. I tried to look beyond them, trying to look for someone else, though he never came. When Karl asked why Pop never came, I would tell him, "He probably has to work on Sundays. He gets overtime on Sundays", but I didn't believe myself. Though the entrance hall and the dining room were set up to accommodate the Sunday visitors, if the weather was the least bit appropriate, Mom always insisted on walking out onto the beach. There we would sit down on the sand and Mom would begin, "Isn't this wonderful. Right on the ocean. The air so clean. The waves. The food here is good, I think," and then she would open the bag that hung at her side, place a large towel on the sand and unroll a few packages of food from the wax paper. It was mostly cake, *Rührkuchen*, a pound cake. From Oma we would each get a bar of Hershey's chocolate, accompanied by the plaint, "The chocolate in this country is not so very good. It was much better over there."

As we ate, Ina would circle our group from a good distance away. Sometimes she would hunker down and watch us. Mom noticed. "Who is that? Do you know her? Is it somebody from the home? Poor child, has she nobody to visit her today? Why don't you invite her to come and sit with us." Mom waved her arms toward Ina and called out, "Come. Sit with us." But Ina quickly jumped up and ran off down the beach.

At the end of our picnic Mom would take off her shoes and socks, hike up her skirt and walk out into the water to where the surf just hissed and colored the sand a darker tan. When she returned from her water-walk she would say, "I could tell you to come in too. The feeling is so nice, but I know you wouldn't. I'm just glad you ate the cake. You are such a thick-head. Let's go back." Walking back Karl had Mom's hand. He looked up at her and said, "That's a home over there, but none of the kids who live there have a home." We continued walking and when we were almost at the entrance to the home Mom gave a big hug first to Karl and then to me. She said, "Just wait. You are going to have a surprise."

Over the next several weeks we waited for the surprise, but no surprise came. At each visit we asked about the surprise and all Mom would say was, Maybe I shouldn't have said anything. Pop said I shouldn't have said anything, but anyway, not yet." Meanwhile Corregidor fell.

I mentioned to Ina that our mother had spoken of a surprise.

"You're going to go home soon," she said and from that time on Ina seemed to disappear. She disappeared quickly after class, and there were no more checker games. Now, for several weeks, Pop came along on Sunday visits. He had on his smiling face, not the serious one, and I was glad for the smiling face. It was I who put on the serious one. I was happy that he visited, but not totally. Where had he been all those other weeks? We all walked out onto the beach, Mom waded. I sat and watched her. Pop and Karl went looking for shells.

There had been a great sea battle in the Pacific, the battle of Midway. It was early June, not long after my birthday. For six months after Pearl Harbor the Japanese had had a string of terrible victories. All of Asia, all of the Pacific seemed to be theirs. Now, at Midway, the Japanese advance was stopped. Now, it was Sunday and the great victory spilled happy black letters over the newspapers' front. It was the Sunday that Mom came to take us home. Karl and I stood outside the office where Mom was filling out papers. I looked around the large entrance hall. There were the usual waves of murmur and silence, of kids talking, of chairs scraping, of kids looking into books and writing, studying, of kids playing board games. Arthur stood nearby and waved to us. I saw Ina near the hall entrance. I walked over and as I did she ran. When I reached the doorway she was at the ramp down toward the beach. She ran, looking backward, she stumbled and then ran out farther onto the sand.

The usual course from 162nd Street where the A train stopped would have been to walk a few blocks south on Amsterdam Avenue and then down 159th Street to our house at number 542. But this time Mom insisted we walk down 160th Street. I was puzzled. Karl said, "Mom, we're going the wrong way." She smiled, "Now comes the surprise, we have a new apartment."

Walking down 160th Street we crossed Broadway, then Fort Washington Avenue; as we approached the middle of the block we could see a slice of the Hudson River. 652 West 160th Street was on the south side in the middle of the block. Apartment 2C was one flight up, and Dad was waiting for us when we entered. There was a mirrored coat rack in the tiny foyer, but I was not able to take off my coat because Pop drew me into a living room that astounded me with its shine. There was shiny new linoleum on the floor; there was a shiny dining-room table at the other end of the room; there was a couch with a flowered covering along one wall, and across from it, a credenza of a dark shining wood with what seemed to be neatly carved little doors. There was a gold framed picture above it, a watercolor of a street in Ruppichteroth. I stared at the credenza and slowly ran a hand

over its shiny surface. Dad leaned against the credenza, looked down at me: “Well, how do you like it?” There was a small smile on his face, an intense eagerness in his face, and at the same time an intense shyness in his Spencer Tracy face. I understood from his look and from the softness in his voice that it was terribly important to him that I be pleased. I understood in some large measure that all the shine was there in order that I be pleased, that it was there to make up for the months that we had been sent away. By the look on his face I knew that he felt terrible that we had to be sent away and at the same time he wanted me to feel proud of him because there was a sense of immense accomplishment in the shine, that in the shine there were long hours of labor and pain, both his and Mom’s. There was a pleading in his face; he wanted to be forgiven, excused. What I might say seemed to matter intensely.

I was glad that we had accomplished the crossing of Broadway, even awed by all the newness, awed by all the shine, but I felt totally apart, separated, unconnected to it. Angry, I wanted to destroy it, rip it apart, because it had come at the price of being put away, sent away, feeling unprotected by my parents and especially by my father who had sat there, in his green pajamas, saying nothing, as we were taken to the orphan asylum. I felt terribly separated from my father, the distance was immense. Never before had I this very real feeling that we were two different, distinct people. And where before my “I” seemed to extend everywhere my interest, my caring led me, I now extended no farther than my skin. What he wanted so badly from me I could not give him. What he wanted me to acknowledge I could not, because just then I hated him. So I looked Dad in the face, turned away, and said nothing. I walked around the room touching things. There were framed pictures, photos of Dad’s parents on the credenza, a crocheted table cloth on the new table.

“This is a wonderful country,” said Dad smiling, “Nothing down and only a few dollars a month and you can get anything anybody would want.” Time payments. Now I had to worry whether these two people with their painter’s and housemaid’s wages would be able to make the monthly payments. Weren’t we sent away because there was an inability to manage? I walked around the apartment. There was a kitchen where we could eat, there was a small bedroom just as one came in the door. “That’s Oma’s room.” I opened the door and it smelled of the camphor, liniment, face powder and lilacs, a smell it would never relinquish in all our time at number 652. There was another bedroom to the right of the living room. A crib, in which brother Frank was sleeping, sat to the left of the door, and across from the crib twin beds that had been pushed together, then a closet, an armoire, and a chest of drawers.

”That’s all for you.”

“For me?”

“*Ja*, and for Peter and Karl. These,” pointing to the chest and armoire, “are not new. We got them second hand on Amsterdam Avenue, very good and real cheap.”

Our Sunday evening meal was of cold cuts and rye bread and tea. Cold cuts were always one of my favorite meals. The meal was delicious and tasted better than any tomato soup and sandwiches of white bread with thin smears of cream cheese or peanut butter.

“So, how is it? We got it special for you,” said my mother. I chewed, and when I had finished chewing my teeth were clenched and my lips were tight.

“Nothing? Nothing to say? We got it special for you.” I remained silent, and I remained silent through the rest of the meal. And I was silent, at home, for a long time after that.

Basic Training

Every day, either at mid-day or in the evening, when we returned to the barracks, there was a race to the one radio we were allowed. Whoever reached the radio first turned the dial to his favorite station. In this part of mountainous eastern Pennsylvania our radio drew in a lot of stations and all of them played music that I detested, and knew as hillbilly. The one other station was WQXR from New York; the station that played classical music, the music that I was used to from home; the music that announced a life of reason, regularity, and culture. I knew that the radio could play QXR because in the first week of our training I was a barrack guard. (Each day, one member of the platoon remained behind from the day’s training to guard the barracks.) I participated in the daily race for the radio dial, but I never won. I liked jazz, there was a lot of pop that was tolerable, but I hated hillbilly. As the days went on the race became nasty. There were pushes from the side, a group of boys would simply stand in front of me and not move; I was frequently tripped, but I persisted. It seemed as if all my anger and hostility at the regimentation, the constant drill, the foul base plate, the repeated warnings about death became focused upon changing that dial, just once. The last time I was pushed in the side I grabbed the ridge-runner nearest me. We wrestled on the ground. “Fight, fight,” was the scream from several dozen. We rolled on the ground, no one landed a punch. I was bitten on the shoulder, and my head butt on his brow drew blood. At the sight of blood, Zach Marantis and several others pulled us apart.

Later, I think it was when we were both on KP, scrubbing pots, John Harmon said to me, “You’re going to get yourself killed.”

“That’s what everybody around here says all the time.”

“Long before you get to Korea.”

“How? Killed.”

“You don’t know that they’ve got guns and live ammo in this place?”

“You’re serious?”

“Yes, I’m serious. You wouldn’t be the first Jew these Yahoos got.”

“There were others?”

“Don’t be funny. I’ve been dealing with these people all my life, they’re even angrier than you are.

They’re the same as blacks, except they don’t know it. They’re as angry as black folk. One thing, maybe the only thing that keeps them in place is when they’re told blacks are lower than them. They hear that so they can be screwed with the prices they get on their farms, screwed out of wages in mines and factories, shot or beat up if they want unions, same as black folk. If you explain things right, they are the salt of the earth.”

“Salt?”

“Don’t be funny. My folks were organizers with the Wobblies; you know about them?” I nodded, “majored in American History. Black and white unite and fight.”

“No,” John laughed “that came later, but you got to know when not to fight. You got to know when to relax, and you really have got to relax. Think what you want, but keep it to yourself. If it gets too much, and sometimes I know it gets too much, talk to me.” John smiled, looked around, “but don’t let them hear you say that.”

“What?”

“You know. Black and white.”

We were riding in a car. It was the end of our first month and our first weekend pass. Morty Zucker, somehow, had a car garaged in a town near the camp, and for a share of the gas money he took Zach, John and me back to New York City. Driving away from camp felt very liberating. “Ta, ta, ta, taaahhh.” I slapped my belly to the rhythm of the opening notes of Beethoven’s fifth. “Liberation. V for Victory.” I slapped victory on the seat, window, John’s head. “I’m going to every concert I can afford, I’m going to stay home and run QXR loud. I’m going to wash that corn-pone music, that corn-pone twang out of my ears. Out of my brain.”

“I once got beat up in college, in a bar, in Philadelphia, because I said, maybe a bit loud for somebody my size and considering where I was, that one of the sources of country music was in the black people’s blues,” said John.

“Am I offending you?”

“No, you’re a snob. A white snob.”

“Why white?”

“In distinction from a black snob, which is what I am and have got to get over.”

“I don’t understand that, but OK.”

“What you have to understand is that Tex Ritter and Charley Pride, all those great Kentucky fiddlers are great. Maybe not Shakespeare...”

“Beethoven.”

“Maybe not Shakespeare, but their language and even those tunes, mostly, are from that time.

Seventeenth, eighteenth century people living in those hills. You know, ‘Black, black, black, is the color of my true love’s hair?’ Mix that with what they heard from the colored churches, the shivarees, and you can get ‘Your Cheating Heart,’ or any one of a hundred others. Its poor people’s music. It’s great.”

“Oh, come on...”

“Zucker, turn on the radio.”

For the rest of the two hour trip John made us, me, listen to country music. I listened because I liked John. I still didn’t care for it then, but John started something for me. And I began to relax. John was right. To have kept the contest up was stupid. There would have come some night on a bivouac when some Sterno can would have been kicked over and I would really get hurt. I decided that John kept me from a big injury. But I had already decided to like the “ridge runners.” It took me a while but I became impressed by the very long time they took to clean their rifles, sitting on their bunks for long hours, swabbing the barrel; cleaning it. I became impressed by the long time they took cleaning and shining their boots; spit shining their shoes till they were bright cordovan mirrors. The boy next to me was from somewhere beyond Beckley; he and John had struck up a friendship. I told him that he really had a great shine on the boot. He looked away and then at me. His lips didn’t move but I knew that silently he was saying, ‘asshole.’ Then he said, and there might have been contempt in his voice, “You don’t get bored, do you?” I knew I deserved it, and from then on I began to spit shine my boots for long hours. I liked doing it.

A GI in Germany

Mom, till recently had been writing about affairs at home; Oma was fine, Pappa was fine, Peter was fine, more on Frankie and his preparations for Bar Mitzva. Eisenhower she didn’t like. She felt sad for Adlai Stevenson who was getting a divorce, so *The Daily News* said, though she didn’t like the Daily News or the Mirror. And please to get some news from Ruppichteroth would be nice just to know how things are. But now every letter was urgent – I must, had to, it was absolutely necessary for me to go Ruppichteroth. If I didn’t want to go for myself, I had to do it for the family, for Papa. I well understood that the invocation of Papa was to really make me feel guilty.

“You have to go to Rupp. and see Bendix, and see if what he does is all-right. He wants to sell one of the pastures by the highway, by the Bröl brook. See what the property in the area is going for. Compare. See if what he does is all-right. I don’t think we should sell anything, but I am discussing it with Papa. Mr. Bendix would very much like one of the new wash-and-wear shirts. You have to talk to Walter Schenk. He is a friend

and knows about such things.”

“He is a friend?” Why is he still a friend? Why is any German still your friend? Why do you want to hold on to even an inch of German soil? Sell it! Sell it! Have you no memory?” But I didn’t write any of that. Often, there was an addendum to one of these urgings: “Papa thinks you should see August Willach. He was a friend of Papa’s from olden times. He would know about land prices and things.” August Willach – he was one of the brothers who owned the factory that made machinery for Hitler’s war machine. They used slave laborers; hid their dead bodies under the floors of his factory sheds. Don’t you remember what Leo Baer told us: that when he got to Ruppichteroth, with the Army in ’45, Willach wanted to bribe him so that he wouldn’t inform on him and his past? But I didn’t write any of that any of that either. Late one afternoon I was still in the JAG office, lost in making translations of some documents. I thought that I was the only one left when I felt Colonel Rood standing in front of me, he said, “get in my office. I got.

“Why aren’t you writing home? I got a note from the AG’s office that there had been an inquiry from the Red Cross to the fact that you haven’t been answering any of your mother’s letters, and if there was something, anything, wrong. Your mother was worried and she got in touch with the Red Cross. What’s this all about? Nice kids write their parents.” I didn’t want to answer; didn’t know what to answer. “Don’t you like your parents? Are you mad at them?” I turned away. In the window I saw the billowing electric wires.

“Here. Write.” He handed me a sheet. “Write.” Now I knew why the Colonel had wanted me to carry his packages. He didn’t want to do this in the office with others nearby. I wrote.

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“Have you been writing home”?

“Yes, sir.”

“Since the Red Cross inquired, how often.”

“Not too often.”

“What’s not too often.”

“Once.”

“What the hell’s the matter with you? No, don’t tell me.” I didn’t tell him. I just stood there. “What the hell’s the matter.”

“I don’t know. It feels peculiar being here.”

“Where? On the base.? Here?”

“No. I don’t know. Germany.”

“Germany. You’d rather be in Korea? When did you leave Germany, ’39 - right?”

“1939”

“And you were what?”

“I was eight.”

“And you remember everything.”

“Yes sir.” I may have smiled slightly. He had me sit down in a chair across from his desk.

“You remember November 1938 - the ninth.”

“How....?”

“In April, April ’45, I had to brief Ike on Concentration Camps. He was going to a place called *Ohrdruf*, with journalists; lots of cameras. It was part of a place called Buchenwald. You heard of *Ohrdruf*?

I had to shake my head.

“*Buchenwald?*”

I nodded, and I felt the knot in my stomach.

He was silent for a long time; a hand over his mouth. “I, we, all of us, received an education at *Ohrdruf* and then *Buchenwald*; that’s how I know about November tenth. Did they take your father?”

I nodded.

“Where?”

“*Dachau.*”

“Jesus,” He was angry. “*Dachau*. Did you ever go there, where they sent your Dad? To see? Did he get out?”

I nodded. “After two months... he got out”

“You know, we go to Munich a lot; coming and going we pass the damn *Dachau* station, and you’ve never gone there to see? Never even been interested?”

“When I see the *Dachau* station sign I feel peculiar. I don’t want to see it, but I see it. I get scared.”

Colonel Rood’s anger left. The folds on his face were quiet. He was quiet. I was quiet.

“You get scared? It’s only a sign.”

I didn’t know the words with which to answer him, but then, “I don’t want to see it. It makes me feel helpless.” I quickly added, “it makes me angry.”

He was quiet for a while, and then, quietly, “no. It’s not only a sign.” After another quiet moment, elbows on the desk and his hands knotted under his chin, “are you depressed?”

“What?”

“Depressed, don’t know if you remember, but in that assault case in *Grafenwohr*, one of the psychiatrists talked about that woman’s depression as anger turned inward. I’m no shrink, but you mentioned anger.”

“No. I don’t think so.”

“You haven’t accumulated any leave time.” I shook my head.

“Been out on passes? Three day passes, seen anything of beautiful *Dutchland*.”

“Just *Göppingen*. A few times to *Stuttgart*. To concerts.

“We’ve been to *trial*...”

“Yes sir, and *Augsburg*, *Munich*, the various *Kasernes*....

“And *Munich*, we were just in *Munich*. That rape case. *Munich* interesting to you?

“Yes, sir...”

“Hitler’s beer hall...you went there?”

“No sir. *Haus Der Kunst*. They had an exhibition of what the Nazis called degenerate art. Kandinsky, Picasso, Braque...”

“Yes, Bullok and I went there. Good to know there’s at least one man on this base interested in culture rather than...What do you make of Klee. Never mind....”

“...and couple of weeks ago a bunch of us went to the Nürbergring for the car races.

“Nurbergring? Where is that?”

“Not far from Cologne, sir.”

“Not far from Cologne. That’s what you told me where your home town is. Not far from Cologne. Do you want to see the old place?” “No sir.” Then I blurted, “but my parents want me to go there and see it.”

“The parents you never write to?”

“I guess.”

“You guess. Well, I’ll tell you, from now on I want to see a letter to your folks once a week. You can just come here and wave the envelope at me, but I want to see the envelope. And I’ll see to it that next week...are you due for a Three Day Pass...” I shook my head. Well I’ll see you get one. You’ll use it to see your home town. You obviously have a mother that’s concerned about you. Damn, I want to see that you meet that concern.... otherwise think about living in a tent in *Grafenwohr* for the rest of your duty here.”

Grafenwohr is a muddy, mountainous, desert in Bavaria; south-east of Bayreuth, and north-east Nurnberg, not far from the Czech border, where Army units were regularly sent on maneuvers. Our Headquarters Company had been sent there several weeks earlier. There, our JAG unit lived, all of us in one tent, and where we played Hearts every day, all day, and where, all around us, tanks and artillery honed their skills.

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A few weeks later, Colonel Rood stopped by my desk and dropped a piece of paper on it. I looked up at him, and there was an evil smile on his face. He nodded and pointed at the paper: it was my three day pass. Here was my Colonel who was no psychiatrist, who briefed Ike regarding concentration camps, acting, if not a psychiatrist, then a therapist.

###

I was on a train. It was as if I had just landed in Germany; why were these towns, cities, railroads, still part of the planet. There were no ruins. I wanted ruins. I wanted to see women in aprons stacking bricks in front of bombed-out apartment buildings. I wanted to see old men in jackets pushing wheelbarrows full of rubble, wanted to see children with push brooms pushing dust from the sidewalks in front of bombed-out buildings. I wanted to see everybody coughing hard as the sweepings swirled all about covering them all as though the granite dust were a fog. Most of all I wanted to be in the uniform of the US Army, Class A's sharply pressed and bronze buttons shining, with people looking at me and stepping quickly out of the way for me as I walked past the blocks of neatly stacked bricks in the shattered bomb-excavated hollows of the bombed out houses. The only good German is a dead German. These are the things I wanted to say to Colonel Rood, but I couldn't. I wanted to say to the Colonel that I hated Germany and Germans, and at the same time I was not allowed to acknowledge to myself that I hated. Angry was as far as I could go. I needed, with him, with myself, to cover my mouth and not talk. Hate was not allowed. Most of all, helpless; helpless was not allowed. Why did I use that word? Why not allowed?

###

The ticket taker with the anonymous face, on the train to Bonn, the one with the dark-blue uniform, and the braided cords about his cap, who knocked on the door of the second class compartment, held out his hand, bowing slightly, smiling, suddenly straightened up, smile gone, and recognized my uniform, and as if it hurt him to say it in English said, "ticket please." I gave him my ticket, and answered, in German, "*wie lang nach Köln?*" How long to Cologne? His eyes grew large, and his bland face reddened. I wanted to add, "*Ich bin Jude,*" I'm a Jew, but I didn't and accounted myself a coward. He punched my ticket and shoved it back at me without answering. The train went on; the phone and telegraph wires bellied rhythmically downward; the early summer sun shone, and women were still out in their back-yards, in those many yards near train stations, tending their little vegetable gardens as though nothing had ever happened. I slept and when I woke the train was running along the Rhine. It had been my Rhine, but wasn't anymore. The castles of the robber barons, the curving blue river, the hillsides green with grapes weren't mine anymore. I had them once, but then I lost them. I began to tear. I didn't know then, that I was mourning. Heine and Oma's song threaded through my brain. *I once had a lovely fatherland. There the oaks grew tall, the violets beckoned gently. It was a dream.*

I had to change in Bonn; no more the little narrow-gauge railroad to Ruppichteroth but now a bus, yellow, that through a narrow road, wove through green valleys. Why no narrow gauge railroad on which we came, on which we left, and where I knew that with only a coin in my teeth I might know how distant the iron engine was? Instead, the route insisted on telling me that I was back in Massachusetts, in the Berkshires: Great Barrington, Stockbridge, Lennox. This green was too was beautiful, and I didn't want it to be beautiful. The bus

went on, through large *Siegburg* where I was born, and where there were cars on the street, through little *Henneff* where once we changed steaming trains, and where there were cars on the street, and through *Schönberg*, where once I met those joyous teen-agers whom Mom embraced and cheered and who were going to make *Aliyah*, to Palestine. But still, I was afraid.

The bus stopped in front of the Hotel, and I stepped out onto the *Choséé*, the macadamized highway over which my father and I had driven cattle. The bus drove off, and, astonished, I turned in a circle. I seemed to see everything in black and white. Black and white, just as in the postcard, where my great-grandfather, cane in hand stands exactly in the middle of the street on which I had just placed my foot; black and white, like the postcard, like all those pictures, those very small ones, from the album that Mom might draw from the bookshelf on 160th Street, and open a page at which she looked so very intently, put a hand to her mouth and then nod her head. Now, there, across the street, was the Opa Nathan's house, there, a little further off, was the road leading up to Wilhelm Strasse: my street. There was the post-office, there was the bank. I turned around but the gas-station in the postcard was gone. The black and white turned to color when I noticed red: a blinking traffic light strung high over the middle of the *Choséé*, where there had never been a traffic light before. Now I saw that the Nathan's house was gone, the largest Jewish owned house in Ruppichteroth was gone. It was a parking lot, and further on, long stretches of stretched out buildings, factory buildings with red canted roofs, and somewhere a sign that read, "Huwil Werke." The Willach factories. They must have expanded greatly during the war.

I began to walk up Wilhelm Strasse, from somewhere someone began to whistle a tune from *Hansel and Gretel*, and suddenly I recognized, to my great astonishment, that the street that I remembered being so very wide, was now a narrow, a very narrow gray track. I stood again on cobble stones, but my spit shined boots would raise no sparks from all these stones. I walked up the street that I remembered as steep, and tree lined, but now there was hardly an incline and the trees were gone. I remembered green hedges that flanked the street; they were gone, replaced by thin wires through which I could look down onto the highway. The Füllenbach house was gone. The marvelous garden surrounding their house, always so full of red tulips, was gone; all that I saw was a dirt brown lot: no more sweaty hugs from Mrs. Füllenbach. And then our house; it didn't loom over me. There were shutters on the windows where no shutters had ever been. The posts of brick still stood at the corners of garden, and the connected railings still captured the little garden plot fronting the house, but instead of grass and flowers, and lilac bushes there now was dirt. And across the street, the garden where Oma grew her asparagus, and which had been surrounded by wonderful gooseberry bushes, that too was dirt, and the gooseberry bushes were gone.

I walked the flagstones to the front door. The incised glass, over whose frosted wreaths and streaming

strangeness I both puzzled and dreamed was gone. The door was all wood. Before I could knock the door opened and there stood Herr Bendix. I had to retreat a step, since his stomach spoke of a great deal of good feeding, but his head was bald, his eyes hooded, and a nose like an eagle; an idealized Roman emperor.

“I saw you coming, you were looking about. Have you eaten? Come in.” It was all in German. I didn’t want to speak German, but I did; it was a melancholy, stumbling German. Where was Oma’s grocery? And across the entrance hall from the grocery the dining room where nobody ever ate? What I wanted was to look in and about MY house, not anyone else’s’. “Are you tired? How was the trip? Would you like to lie down for a while?” When I shook my head and said “Thank You,” I felt eight years old, and I knew that this would never be my house again. What I wanted right then was to pull it down, to create a ruin that no one could use. I was angry and felt helpless. Bendix led me inside, where in the hallway stood his wife and son, in the hallway where Mom and Oma screamed, where Opa screamed, where Pop was taken away, where I had to embrace the milk separator because no-one was there to embrace me and calm my fears. Bendix introduced me to his wife and son. The wife was short, had very white hair, a pink pale face and a sharp chin. The son was probably sixteen years old and wore a tie. “You’ll talk later,” said Bendix, and led me upstairs.

“This is our guest room.” It was not. It was our living room, where we lived, ate, and saw friends. No, used to live. The stove was gone, the window had curtains, and the walls were covered with friendly white and flowery wallpaper. There was a large bed with plump pillows and a feather bed; the bed was surrounded with area rugs. The more steps I took into the room the more I withdrew. I pulled a wash and wear shirt wrapped in its crinkly plastic wrap out of my bag on the bed and handed it to Bendix. I forced a smile, he smiled, and shook his head in admiration, “you Americans.” We had instant coffee in the downstairs kitchen that looked vaguely like Oma’s kitchen. I excused myself, and told them I would like to just walk around. They understood.

I tried walking out of the back door, thinking that I would enter the barn, but there was no barn, I stepped out into mud. I stepped out further, looked back, and the barn indeed was gone, there was a blank half-timbered wall that showed no connection to the place where, in the loft, sunk in hay, I did the reading that spared me the heavy sighs of those I loved best, and that introduced me to imagination and the world. I walked out further, there was the meadow in back of our house, but where the meadow had been, where the apple trees had been, the slopes for sledding, there was no meadow: just more mud.

On returning to the house, Bendix said, “yes. I should have told you what they told me: during the war there were soldiers quartered here, all around here, in tents and other temporary shelters. They tramped everything down, cut down trees for fires. It’s been like this ever since the war; ever since I first came here.” I had no answer; just more anger. I should come inside; more coffee. I begged off, it had been a long day, not much left of it, and I wanted to walk. He would walk with me. I declined and started off. He followed; I stopped

and waited for him, and swallowed more anger.

“That’s the Schumacher house.” Bendix was pleased, “you remember?” I didn’t answer. From where I stood I could see past the house that the Schumacher meadow, where we searched for Easter eggs, was not spared: mud. We came to the space in front of the synagogue; the space where, fourteen years earlier I found hatred and humiliation. I was grateful for Bendix’s silence. We came to stand in front of the synagogue. I faced a blank wall.

The synagogue had been sold. The handful of survivors that was the congregation in exile, had agreed that it be sold. Who now lived in that building with the red carpeting, with the balcony from where sweets rained down; the building I loved; the building where my Opa presided? How did these people feel living in a synagogue; my synagogue? Did they have children?

I saw that the three great rectangular windows high over the synagogue door were gone; their spaces were filled in by stone. The two marvelous round windows surrounded by the white stone wreaths, one on each side of the door, were gone; filled in by stone. Something had been taken from me; taken and turned to stone. I wanted to go on and see the rest of the village, but it was getting dark, and it had been a long day.

A black car was standing in front of our house, and someone was trying to extract a heavy object from the rear seat. With a heave he pulled out a large trunk; he swung around and dropped it down next to another trunk-like objects resting on the walk. Bendix ran forward, looked back at me, waved, “Come on, they are here.” Who was here? I walked.

Bendix and two other men were standing next to the car. The one, who had done the heavy lifting was a young man about my age, the other, was quite old. The older came toward me with a sad smile, and when we were quite close, he raised his hand and ran it through my hair, “*Ya Wolfgang, wie lang?*” And he paused, “*So traurig.*” How long has it been? So sad. I didn’t smile and looked at Bendix. “Joseph Lauf, this is Joseph Lauf, a friend of your Opa,” said Bendix, “and this is his grandson, Stephan.” Opa’s friend was taller than I, his eyes were bright, his face was long and smooth; he had a white mustache, and wore suspenders over a blue shirt.

I had no memory of Mr. Joseph Lauf. What right had he to touch my hair? “I’m not Wolfgang any more, my name is Walter.” He smiled his sad smile and nodded, “These things” and he pointed to the two trunks, “are from your Opa Moses. He left them with us when,” he stumbled over some words, “when all that,” and he waved a hand in front of him, as though trying to assemble some words, “when all that happened. Your Opa, was a very good man; a good friend. We kept them,” and again he pointed to the trunks, “in the barn, where nobody could find them. Your Opa thought that when it was all over we might get them to your family.”

I had to shut up. I hated them all, but here was somebody....who was this somebody?

Bendix wanted us to go inside, “maybe get something to drink; we can talk then.” Opa’s friend and his grand-son took the trunks, they were heavy, and brought them inside. I wanted to examine the trunks, but Mrs. Bendix gathered us in the kitchen where she had made more instant coffee for us. Mr. Lauf laughed and said that he liked instant better than regular, that’s all he drank now, and that the first he ever tasted came from packages my parents had sent after the war, and did I know about the letter?

“What letter?”

“The letter from your Opa; the letter that we smuggled out of the Work Camp in Much. That we sent to your family in New York.” I hated the packages that we sent to people I hated, but here was somebody who.....what the hell did I know?

“Yes, I know about the letter. It was very brave of you to have done that.”

“Not so brave.” His face became serious. “The letter went from hand to hand to hand; three of us. It was easy to hide. I put it in my bible. If I think I did anything brave it was to always think, to believe, that in the end, after everything, we would lose.” He got up, signaled to his grandson that it was time to go. He turned to me smiling, “You know, Wolfgang, Walter, I don’t think you remember, but once, when you were very little, your Opa and Pappa came to our farm with you. You ran after the chickens, and you were surprised to see our turkey, and I remember you saying over and over again, ‘what’s that; what’s that?’” They left, I watched them getting into their car and drive off. And I wondered. Why did they keep the trunks so very long. Why didn’t they ship them to us? Why did he deprecate what he did? It only made him more courageous? I didn’t want him to be courageous; if he was courageous then...? What the hell did I know?

I knew about trunks. These two were just like the ones Mom and Pop lugged around half of the world: dark brown leather, with two straps at the ends, scuffed all over. The locks were shiny bronze and the keys were strung about Mom’s neck. Those trunks contained everything we still owned; they were our kitchen and bedroom, and as a child I thought them miraculous. Mom pulled out dishes, flatware, wooden spoons, and spatulas; she pulled out towels, bedding, sheets, pillow cases and linen napkins: it as all our wealth and the residue of generations from Germany.

We brought the trunks into the kitchen, and onto the kitchen table. On opening the first one there was a large leather covered box that contained a silver table service. Mrs. Bendix said it was remarkable, and that it was for twelve. The rest of the trunk contained a beautifully decorated set of dishes, of which Mrs. Bendix said one set was really very old Rosenthal, and the other was Hutchenreuther. The dishes were wrapped in linen and in some very beautiful shawls. The other trunk was mainly linens, but there were also some women’s dresses. I wanted to cry, but I couldn’t. I skipped the offer of supper from Mrs. Bendix and went to sleep in their guest room that was really my living room where we always had guests.

I didn't sleep well, but I slept long. I pulled on my khakis and headed downstairs where Mrs. Bendix had breakfast for me: a bowl of farina and strawberry syrup. The last time I had that I was eight. Opa had prepared it for me and Karl, we were leaving Germany later that Morning. When Mrs. Bendix put down the bowl of farina, she said, "You know, you can't hate a whole country." I thought I could, but then there was Mr. Lauf, and the hand to hand to hand. Mr. Bendix came in and sat across from me, he smiled, "He put himself in some danger with those trunks. If somebody had found out...I will send those trunks to your family in New York. It's expensive, but some of your rentals, from your property, will cover the cost."

"Is that why....?"

"I don't know. Farmers are a strange people."

I needed to know from Bendix where the Willach family lived and I was told. In the letters from home, there was the frequently repeated injunction that I was to give Pop's old friend his greetings. I would do that in the afternoon, first I wanted to walk the streets of my old village wearing the uniform of the US Army. I wanted an overcast day but the sky was blue and the day was warm. I wanted to walk where once I wanted everybody to see my new shoes, but now I wanted them to see my uniform. What I hadn't seen yesterday now became visible: the Chestnut trees were all gone. My tree was gone. No coal briquets during the war, so they cut down my tree. There, on the corner is, was the Gaertner butcher shop. The large store window, through which one might see Gustav in his bloody apron, was gone: replaced by stone, just like the synagogue. There was no music ringing hammer from the blacksmith's shop. There was no blacksmith shop. I followed the thread that once was my grand street. There did not seem to be many people on the street, but whenever I passed one, man or woman, there was a quick look and a quicker turn away: it was the uniform. I was in front of the Hertzfeld Villa. The stone wall arced its way around the property, the lawn was green, the house still impressive. Was the Nazi Loewenich still its owner? Maybe, but the glass case on that wall was gone. That case, with its cartoons, that tried to tell me for much too long who I was; that case that told me that I was hated, that tried to tell me to hate myself. I continued on, to Tante Lydia's house, but Tante Lydia didn't live there any more. Tante Lydia was dispersed in the smoke rising from the smokestacks of Auschwitz. I went on to the Regensburger bakery, but the bakery had been transformed as had all the other places that I once loved. I went on to Willy's house, but it was no longer there. It had been torn down. The vacant space was all mud.

Later that afternoon I walked to the Willach house; the sky was still blue, and the afternoon still warm. The house was Old Victorian, pillared and balconied. It sat in the middle of much green grass. It was an intimidating house. It was the house of a family that profited from the war, from forced labor. I reached the front door, and before I could ring a young woman in a white apron stood there. She looked me up and down, "Herr August Willach, bitte. Ich bin" and I stopped; I needed to decide who I was. "Wolfgang Hess, my father

was a friend of Mr. Willach.” My words ended with a question mark. “Can I...,” She stepped out from the door and pointed toward the back of the house. There stood an immense gazebo, and a number of men in suits stood on its high deck, all seeming to have champagne glasses in their hands. I got close; there was a flight of stairs reaching up to the deck and I stood at the bottom of the stairs, and started to tremble. “Herr Willach? Herr August Willach? A number of men turned and leaned on the railing that seemed so high above me, all holding champagne glasses. “Yah, Ich bins.” He had a large round head, with gray hair on the sides. I tried to smile, he looked offended. “I’m Wolfgang Hess. My father is Oscar Hess, your old friend. He wanted me to give you his greetings.” I had an expectation of being invited up on the deck, but Herr August Willach just said, “Ya, OK,” turned around, and all those others leaning on the railing turned with him. I just stood at the bottom of the stairs, their backs all turned to me, and I was eight years old again, trembling, while the clods of mud came flying at me.

I walked along the *Chosee*, and came to a field that looked very much like the field where we cut hay. The brook, the Bról was close by, the woods on its other side was swept by wind. It felt like an invitation. I crossed the brook, stepping carefully on jutting stones, and walked into the wood. The floor was covered by chanterelles, but I heard none of Oma’s hallooing; instead I heard her telling me to “let it go; it’s not yours anymore. Let it go. Let it go.” Hard to let it go, but, I’m trying.

* * *

Prologue

In August of 1939 I was eight years old, and I and my family were on the North German Lloyd’s 30,000 ton steamship *Caribia*. We had left Germany and were now on our way to the country of Ecuador. Three weeks later our ship let down its anchor in the harbor of Guayaquil. The day was steaming, and I remember the odor of cocoa on the dock. The day was September 1st, it was the day the German army began its invasion of Poland; it was the day that World War 2 began.

In the spring of 1940 my family and I arrived in New York City from Ecuador on the Santa Rosa, a sleek Grace Liner with sparkling green and white smoke stacks. That day, then, was glorious; the million

windows of downtown Manhattan gleamed and sparkled a greeting as the great ship moved slowly up the Hudson to its mooring. Once moored I leaned over railings, and saw faces down on the dock, faces jumping up and down, excited, waving handkerchiefs, anticipating happy reunions.

Now, it was the spring of 1953, and I was on a ship again, an Army transport, the dull-gray General Buckner, along with a thousand other GI's. The day was gray, but a band played marches as the ship pulled out of its Staten Island dock. The Sousa sounds faded away as the Buckner nosed out into the harbor. The million windows of distant Manhattan were now gray, and without sparkle. I saw them disappear as we rounded Fort Wadsworth and as gray clouds dropped like a curtain over the island's sky-scrapers.

As our ship moved out into the Atlantic I began to feel fear. Not a powerful fear, just the beginning of a small knot in my stomach. Somebody said, "...those lights; that's Cape Cod." The Buckner tended north to make its way along the great circle route; tended back to swallowed anxieties and to angers long denied, tended back to Bremerhaven and Germany.

As I leaned over the ship's railing, what I had neglected or denied for so very long began to assert itself. The knot grew larger. It took me a while, staring over the railing into the foam, to realize that it was not simply a memory of fear that stimulated the knot, but that it now was the real thing; a reassertion of all those fears generated by all those many absences, threats and abandonments that threaded themselves through all those early years. These fears; fears so powerful, fear-makers so powerful, that for all too many years, a substitution had to be found; a way to translate what had been imprinted onto the nerves of a child in order that their living threat might be diminished. I found that substitute, telling myself and all about me that it had all been a wonderful adventure. But now I was on a ship again, I was returning to Germany, the place where all those fears began.



Chapter 1

In 1936, shortly after my fifth birthday I was given a new pair of shoes. They were ankle high, hobnailed, black. Instead of eyelets they had little metal hooks around which leather laces were wound. The shoes were shiny, not from polish but from a black greasy covering that I was told would make them waterproof. They were just like my father's: work-day shoes; farming shoes, shoes for the meadow and the cow stall. I walked out of our house, out through the flower garden that looked like a bright apron in front of our house, out onto the cobbled street and with sharp downward kicks with my metal-hobbled soles struck white, yellow

and red sparks from the cobble stones. I could make lightning.

I walked the streets of our village, striking the cobblestones, confirming my power. I walked to exhibit the shoes, to show off, but every once in a while, I would hack at the cobblestones, checking the power. With each step I lifted my shoes high in the air. I thought that there was a string that connected the tips of my shoes all the way up to where God lived, where someone, maybe God himself, pulled on the strings like a puppeteer, helping me to get my feet high up in the air so that everyone in the village might get to see the wonder. Mrs. Schumacher, our neighbor saw me and said, "Very nice new shoes." Mrs. Schumacher was a widow, tall, always in black with a white, rice pudding kind of face. Her son had a car. He had knobs on his cheeks, especially when he pulled his teeth together. Every Easter she hid colored eggs out in the meadow behind her house. And even though we were Jewish, my brother and I were invited to hunt, along with other village children, among them my friends, Willibald, Horst and Daniel, to search for eggs, running from one possible hiding place to next, with my friends, laughing, screaming on cold April mornings among the pale and frosty green hummocks of the Schumacher's meadow. I looked forward to it with great excitement. If there was talk of Passover in the air I knew that the hunt for eggs was close. I wanted to hunt for those eggs, I think, even more than to hunt for the *aphikomen* and the gifts that always went with it. I walked through streets lined with chestnut trees. That one was my tree. Under its enormous canopy I could stand dry and secure while the blue rain fell and from whose shiny brown nuts I could make, with the insertion of just a skinny twig, pipes. And sitting outside, leaning back on the last house step, pipe in hand, legs crossed, I could imagine being like my tall father, driving a herd of cattle to market.

I walked past our synagogue which was made out of large square cut field-stone.



I say our synagogue but it was really my synagogue where my grandfather, my Opa, led the service, and

in whose hand my hand rested when we walked Friday night and Saturday morning to his service.



We'd walk and sometimes he'd ask me questions.

"How did God create the world?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"Well, He said..."

"That's right, He said. And how did He say?"

"I don't know."

"Of course you don't know. When He spoke, when He said let there be..., it sounded just like a blast from the Shofar. With that sound of the Shofar, he made the world."

"Nice."

"That's how he did it. And when He speaks again, sounds it again, the world is going to be destroyed."

"That's not very nice."

"But that's not going to be for a very long time." He picked me up, held me and carried me. "You don't have to worry your head. Not for a very long time."

Gustav Gartner, the white-haired butcher, stood, with his bloody apron, in front of his store. He lifted me up, hugged me, and made me come into the store. From behind the counter he handed me slices of salami. "I saw your shoes all the way down by the synagogue. Very nice; here, they deserve another slice."

Then I heard the tune of the blacksmith's hammer. The iron tympani called me. The blacksmith was next to the butcher shop. The hammer rang more beautifully on the anvil than the bells from either the Catholic or Protestant churches. One strong and powerful ring, then many fast, light ringing repetitions, gentle touches in a slightly higher octave that faded to silence; and then again a hammer blow and the great ringing; were I sent

on an errand and was overdue at home someone was sure to come and get me from in front of the blacksmith's. His shop was a vast black hollow of a barn open to the street. It allowed entrance to the farmers and their plow horses, enormous Belgians and fiercely snorting Percherons. At the very rear was the high black furnace with its small round opening glowing fire red. The blacksmith was at the furnace pumping the bellows and with each heave thin blue wreaths of flame shot out of the furnace mouth and with each blast of air the coals bubbled a fiercer red. The smith reached into the furnace mouth and with his iron tongs drew out a glowing orange horseshoe. He placed it on the anvil and began beating. Red and white sparks flew from the beaten horseshoe, the same sparks that I made with my hobnailed shoes. The tongs lifted the glowing iron and immersed it in the nearby trough of water with a great hiss and boiling; smoke and bubbles rose from the water. The annealing process was repeated several times and then the smith lifted the enormous fore-foot of the great Belgian, rested it in his leather-aproned lap and fitted the hot iron onto its gray hoof; then a hiss from the iron doused in water, smoke and an odor like that of burning hair. I knew the smell. After my mother cut my hair she would gather all of it up and throw it into our coal stove. "Why do you do that, Mamma?" "So no one can make magic with your hair."

The hammer pounded, and the iron was nailed into the horse's hoof. The smith straightened up, came over to me and ran his rough hand through my hair. "He's going to be my apprentice." The farmer holding his horse's halter said, "A Jew working in a smithy? I want to see that one before I die."

The cobbled street ran upward, past my Aunt Lydia's house, a large half-timbered house with a pear tree orchard in back. Aunt Lydia's mustached husband Fred had been pruning a tree. He fell from the ladder, and, reaching out a hand to ease his fall, cut that hand on a shard of glass that was just lying there on the ground. Tetanus, whatever that meant. Two weeks later he was dead. I was sorry that he died because often, on a Saturday afternoon visit, he would let me have a taste of the Kümmel he was sipping. He would be reading a book and the glass was in front of him resting on a hassock. I would stand and wait till he looked up and nodded. The liquor was thick as oil and sweet; it scratched my throat, raising white sparks as it went down, raising sweet fumes that smelled like the seeds on rye bread, and the fumes went up my nose and out of my eyes.

Prayers were recited in Aunt Lydia's house instead of in the synagogue and for three nights the men of the congregation watched over the body and recited psalms. The women of the congregation, including my mother, laid him out, washed and dressed the body before the funeral. Why would they want to wash a dead body? Very strange. I wanted Aunt Lydia to see my shoes but I didn't have the courage to enter a house where, for three days, a dead body had lain. Mrs. Shumacher's son lent his car to drive the casket to the little hillside cemetery. He drove very slowly while all the rest of us followed slowly behind the car to the hillside cemetery

where my great-grandfather, Oma's father, Jacob, had been buried just a little while before. My great-grandfather had a white goatee, and never paid any attention to me, but he was famous. Our town had a picture postcard, Mamma said it was for tourists, that showed a long stretch of our main street, the mountains in the distance, the gas station on the right side, and right in the middle of the picture, right in the middle of the street, was a little man with a goatee.



Every time I looked at the picture, Mamma had it stuck in the mirror of her bedroom, she would say, “that’s your great-grandfather. That picture is sent all over Germany, maybe the world.” And I always thought “he is so small.” He was the first person that I ever knew who died.

I was on my way to Regensburgers but decided to stop first at Schorn’s store. This was the local market, the big grocery store in town. I clambered up the long stone stairs and breathed in the well mixed odors of flour and soap and chocolate. I stood in front of the counter for what seemed a very long time when Mrs. Schorn came looming over me, “Well, Wolfgang, what are you here for.”

“Nothing.” My face burned with embarrassment and I ran out.

“Wait. Wait. Come back here.” The voice was commanding and I came back, afraid. “Close your eyes and hold out your hand.” Now I knew what was coming. “Open your eyes.” A handful of non-pareils were in my palm. “What did you call them when you were a baby? Little pearls with sugar? Go. Regards home.” She didn’t say anything about my shoes.



Regensburger's bakery was across the street. Harry sat in one corner reading a newspaper. Harry was strange; he had white hair like my Opa, but he wasn't old. If he saw me looking at the counter, he'd say, "what? You never saw flour before? I'm a baker and that's flour." It was strange. I didn't know what to think.

I was hoping that his father might be in the store but he wasn't. It was afternoon and the store had its cold-baking smell. If you came in the mornings it had the hot-baking smell because all the baking was done early in the morning even before dawn came up. Harry put the paper down. "Here comes Mr. Wise guy." I hated him calling me that. Once, at some holiday party, I had seen him looking very peculiarly at Gertie Nathan. Gertie used lipstick and smoked cigarettes right out in the open, out on the street where everybody could see. I had piped out loudly, "He's looking at Gertie." From then on, to him, I was Mr. Wise Guy. Nevertheless, that day I walked up and down in front of his counter lifting my legs high, showing my shoes.

"Who are you today, Mr. Wise Guy, one of Hitler's soldiers?"

"No, that's not nice to say."

I knew from what I had picked up at home from overheard adult conversations, conversations they thought were guarded, that Hitler was not nice. I think what I heard was the anger in their throats. The mention of his name made me feel afraid.

"Well, what do you want?"

"Nothing," and I kept on high-stepping in front of him.

"We don't sell 'nothing' here. We sell bread and rolls."

"Cake too."

"And cake. I got enough people buying nothing these days; I don't need you as a customer. Take your shoes and get out of here." At least he noticed the shoes. I made my way to the door.

“Where are you going?”

“You said I should go.”

“Yes, but where are you going?”

“To Willy’s.”

“Here,” and he pulled out a sugar-coated jelly donut from under the counter. “You shouldn’t starve on the way.”

I thought that was very funny. Willy was only two streets over and one street up and I wouldn’t starve going there.

In the whole town, except for my younger brother Karl, Willy was the only Jewish boy near my age, he was almost two years older and my best friend. I played with Willy all the time. We were in each other’s houses, together in the synagogue, together at all the holiday celebrations. From time to time, I might play with my Christian friends. If I played with my Christian friends was I then disloyal to Willy who had no one else? My memory is that I played with a Christian friend out in the open air but I don’t remember ever being inside one of their houses. Poor Willy.

Willy and I were both going into first grade in the fall, Willy for the second time; he had been left back. Reading was difficult for him; he was awkward and somewhat slow. “You read newspapers when you were still little,” I was told. I read when I was sick, and that was often. There were mumps and measles and colds and then there were tonsils. The throat pained and things were hard to swallow. There was tenderness and fever. The ears hurt, the jaw hurt and when the doctor came to look at my tongue and to feel my neck I always knew what he was going to say, “The tongue is coated and the glands are swollen. Give him aspirin.”

“Those germs just love you,” said my mother when she anointed my throat with eucalyptus ointment and bound my neck with a red woolen scarf that scratched even more than the enlarged tonsils. And my Oma called me her “delicate child.” This happened sometimes two or three times a year, maybe more often. Reading books eased the worst of the initial hurt and made the convalescences easy. My favorites were *Robinson Crusoe*, Carl May and *Shatterhand*, and the books of travel by Sven Hedin. I can still hear, on distant Persian mountain deserts, the howl of hyenas in the night.

My friend Willy’s father was a cattle dealer just like mine, and though they both followed the same trade there was a difference in the culture of the two households. We had indoor plumbing and they had an outhouse. But our plumbing didn’t always work, so we too, sometimes, used the outhouse. My father played the flute and Willy’s father distilled, in their kitchen, a terrible smelling liquor from a copper retort. They had a meadow in back of their house and a cow stall attached to their house and they had a small pond on which ducks floated, and their goose. I was afraid of the goose which was almost as tall as I, and probably heavier, and which, one

day, fiercely waddled at me with a grim hissing of its yellow beak, and an angry waving of its tall neck. After that, visiting alone, I would stand some distance from their house and call out "Willy." He'd come then, and tell me that the goose had been penned; he'd then take my hand and lead me into their compound.

This day they saw my shoes; Willy, his mother and his somewhat older sister, Lera. They were all properly impressed. I waited; thought that some chocolate was due but praise was the only food forthcoming. We played with hoops on the street outside their house. We were Auto racers on the Neuburg Ring. He was Chepan, I was Cutzorra, two names that were famous for something; maybe auto racers, maybe soccer players. Finished with hoops Willy called me over to their outhouse. He looked through a knot-hole in the wooden structure, stepped back and invited me to look. There sat Lera. My face burned. I was awed, awed also by the fact that Lera wiped herself only in front while I knew that I wiped myself only in back. How could that be? For the rest of the afternoon we played Parcheesi.

It was almost dusk when my father picked me up. Willy's house stood on the rim of the bowl that was my village. Standing in front of Willy's house we watched as several stars appeared. Below, the familiar houses and streets began to darken. My father took my hand and we walked toward home. In day-light I had always made this walk by myself but now it was getting dark. We passed houses where, in the light, on the white-washed walls crossed by black timbers, I saw thin black lines, fine cracks that looked like snakes, complicated letters, strange birds and wild forest animals. But now my father held my hand and as we walked in the darkening light, past houses, their windows that had been reflecting silver, now, one after another, turned orange.

Chapter 2

If I approached our house from the street, I first walked up three broad brick steps, and then I passed through Oma's flower garden. There were brick towers at the corners of the garden that were connected by a surrounding black spiked fence. There were two wooden benches in the garden and tall lilac bushes at the fences. The front of our house looked like a face. My mother said it had the face of a man who needed to be tickled. Upstairs the two side windows were staring eyes and the third, the middle one was a nose; the front door was a mouth. The dark moldings over the two side windows were eye-brows. The two downstairs windows were a problem but I said to myself that they were cheeks; the cheeks of a skinny man; a skinny man wearing a dark suit and tie. The front door of our house had a large oval glass in a dark wooden frame. The glass had incised curlicues and frosted wreaths of interlocking leaves. I could stand in front of our door for long periods of time tracing the course of this white streaming strangeness. "Dreamer," said Fat Liesl the girl who



sometimes worked for us. “My dreamer,” said my Oma.

In back of the house there was mud and a barn for the cows, a manure pile from the top of which the rooster crowed, and off to one side a small chicken house. But the chickens never laid their eggs in the house as they were supposed to do, so my grandmother, my Oma, whose province the chickens were, had always to look for the eggs in the grass of the meadow that bordered the barn-yard. The barn was timbered; great areas of white plaster between black beams that looked like they wanted to make block letters but couldn't. The barn was two storied. Hay was stored in the rafters above the cow stalls and I would climb the ladder to lie in the odor filled hay and read my book.

The meadow in back of our house rose to a small hill and then stretched ever backward to meet with a pine wood in which Oma and I sometimes searched for mushrooms. There were small and contorted apple trees that dotted the meadow and at the border of the wood there were several tall pear trees. This meadow was a kind of holding place where my father and grandfather kept a cow or two or three that had recently been bought before they were sold again or later added to the herd.



Sometimes they kept a few sheep there and once, I remember, two brown coated colts.



Chapter 5

One day at supper my father told me that I would have to get to bed early that night. Why? Because in the morning he would be driving cows to market, to the market in *Waldbrol* and he thought that I should go with him. I looked to my mother and she nodded. Four-thirty in the morning; we'd have to get up in the dark. I ran to bed.

My father shook me, woke me, and held a finger to his lips. I was to be quiet, my brother Karl slept in the same room. My father held up clothes for me. He went downstairs to the kitchen and I washed and then

dressed on the darkened landing to the stairs. I was struggling to get into my shoes when I sensed, by his dark sweet sweat, my father's being there. He was squatted down, down to my size and was quietly, benignly, smiling at my labor. We went to the kitchen and where there was black coffee and large slabs of farmer bread slathered with fresh butter. We went into the barn and I saw white steam streaming from the skin of the cows. Out on the meadow coils of fog wove and dipped like dancers. We released the half-dozen cows from their stanchions and herded them down the street where their padding raised echoes over the dew-wet cobbles. We herded them onto the narrow macadamized highway whose ordinary surface, its day-to-day blackness, seemed, this early, wet morning, streaked with silver and pewter. It was still dark as we entered the highway but there was a patch of milky whiteness out beyond the hills on the right. Soon the patch turned as red as the flames from the blacksmiths' furnace, then orange. In full light the sky seemed very high and light blue. It was eight miles to *Waldbröl*, a five-hour walk.

The macadam road ran through a green valley. A green wood bordered the road on both sides and through openings I could see meadows, and beyond the meadows the sloping hills, and from their green tops, banks and braids of gray fog slid down into the valley bottom. On the left, dodging in and out of the woods ran a small brook.

We walked through the green, the cows plodding in front of us, and I watched the rhythmic rise and fall of their bony behinds. My father darted down into the woods where the stream ran and disappeared. I stopped, afraid. He came back smiling, with a long, thin willow switch in his hand. He snapped it in the air. It whistled. He handed it to me, "You can guide the cows with this. Make sure they don't go off the road, down into the brook. They like the water."

"After we sell these, when are we going to get more cows?"

"Of course, soon. That's the business. We sell cows. We get money; and with the money we get more cows. That's how it works."

It was important that we get more cows. My grandfather did the evening milking, and I made it my business, usually, to be there with him. He sat on his stool and stripped milk from the cows. I hunkered down beside him. "In the barn, right with the swallows," and he'd say, "watch it. Don't get caught." He meant the swishing of the cows' tails. He'd get angry when the swinging tails caught and stung his face, then he'd push the cow hard and yell and curse at it. I waited, sitting on my haunches till he said, "ready?" Then I opened my mouth and Opa, with a turn of his wrist, directed, from the teat he was holding, a stream of warm, sweet milk right into my mouth. We needed more cows.

Cars and trucks clattered by. Sometimes they waved. Sometimes they honked. Sometimes the loud noise startled the herd and then they veered off, down toward the brook. I looked at my father, he nodded and I ran

down after the cows. I touched their sides lightly with my willow. I waved my arms and yelled like my grandfather. The cows stopped, slowly turned their great necks, looked back at me with their shiny black eyes and then, as if their joints were badly connected, strained or heaved their bodies forward in separate successive sections till they reached the flat landing of the road, clattering down the asphalt, their bony back-sides riding up and down like the cars on a roller coaster. My father said, "Good. Well done." I looked down at my shoes, embarrassed at the praise.

Waldbröl on market day was large, busy and full of color, not gray busy like Bonn or Cologne where I had been several times. *Waldbröl* had the feel of a village very much like ours only many times larger and in its center was the cobbled market square. To get to the square our cows passed flower stands and farm stands; farmer's wives with their aprons attended. The houses ranging the square were large, three, sometimes four stories high. The shops carried awnings of red and brown, gold and blue. Little tables and spidery metal chairs clustered in front of the cafes, and in the center of the market stood curved metal cattle stanchions like so many motionless and sullen teenagers at school, hands in their pockets. Round the area of stanchions were large carts and wagons holding bleating sheep and calves. Farmers were throwing hay and straw into the wagons. My father found empty stanchions and fed the heads of our cattle into them. Now the German farmers gathered round my father. Some wore knee length boots, others long gray coats.

"Well, Oscar, how goes it? And who is this sparrow? Learning the business? Gonna get his nice shoes all covered with cow flop?"

"Your Pappa is a good guy. Not one of those cut throats. Not one of those putting our acres into his strong box." My face turned red, embarrassed. He meant, I knew, that there were other Jews who were doing this, and whatever it was, it wasn't nice.

"You tired? Later, after we do some business we'll have a Coca Cola over there. Yes?" He nodded toward the spidery tables. He dug a strong hand into my shoulder and released. "Your oldest, Oscar?"

The German farmers went round to all the cattle, felt their wattles, dug their hands into the shoulders of the cows, passed their hands under the udders and felt for knots, slapped them on their rumps. "No. Not there," my father called out. "She kicks."

Their bargaining was something I had only seen once before when a Christian farmer came to our house and bought a cow. Opa and the farmer stood across from each other, in front of the barn. They slapped, hard, into each other's palms and each time they did they called out the price that they were willing to pay and to get. They kept on slapping till they came to an agreement. Later I asked Opa how come the farmer talked in Hebrew when he was a Christian. Opa said "we've been in this town for a very long time."

"How long?"

“Well, before my great-grandfather, and before his great-grandfather and before his great-grandfather.”

“Is that long?”

“Long enough for us to learn German and long enough for them to learn a little bit of Hebrew.”

Now, at the market, a farmer and my father stood close together and looked straight into each other’s eyes. They then started to slap their hands together, hard, from the shoulders down their palms crashed into each other. And with each slap, each man would, in turn yell out a number. And their calling out was in Hebrew or German Yiddish; both of them. “Kaph Nun,” slap, “Mem Lamed,” slap. With each slap a number was called. My father started out high, the farmer low; my father came down, the farmer up. They met somewhere in the middle, where both knew they’d meet and the deal was done, a cow was sold. They both shook their hot hands from the wrist and smiled. The two then walked over to the spidery tables and celebrated the sale with a schnaps. My father came back and then, with another farmer, and the slapping began all over again.

By noon, all the cows were sold and I was looking forward to my Coca Cola. The farmer who had offered it was gone, he had forgotten but my father had not. “Come on, you deserve a drink.” We both sat on the spidery chairs in front of the spidery tables, at ease, sipping our drinks, my legs crossed just like my father’s and we watched all those others who still had animals to sell. All through the market square one could hear the slapping of palms and the Hebrew numbers called out.

Chapter 7

One day at school, in the yard during recess, someone called out, “look down there. Smoke.” We all ran to a low wall that ran the edge of the playground. From the wall we could look down on the roofs of the town, on the yards and the streets, on the washing that was hung out in the yards. Down below, I could see, that it was our synagogue from which the black smoke rose. Children moved back from the wall and looked at me. They moved away from me as if I were Willy and had committed something foul. Our teacher came to me and took my hand. “I’m going to walk you home.” We found my brother, Karl, who by then was also attending school. He was in first grade, I in second. Our teacher took each of us by the hand and so, hand in hand, Karl on one side and I on the other, our teacher walked us home.

We waked down the cobbled streets, past Schorn’s store, past Aunt Lydia’s house, down past the blacksmith’s. There seemed to be more people than usual out on the street. There seemed to be women in aprons who had just stepped out of their houses, some with towels still in their hands, as if, in their rush outdoors, they had been overtaken by surprise, and who were chatting as if in front of their own house steps right out in the open, on the street. And as we passed they stopped their talk, and now silent, looked at us. I was excited by what seemed to be this totally extraordinary event. I did not at all mind the attention our walk was

getting. A crowd stood in front of the synagogue: townspeople, men and women milling, several gray uniformed policemen, Brownshirts with red swastika armbands. White smoke billowed from the front door of the synagogue. My grandfather, my Opa appeared in the smoke. He stood in the doorway with a Torah on his shoulder as if he had just lifted it from the Ark. I was afraid, I pulled at our teacher's hand. I wanted to run to Opa. The teacher squeezed my hand hard, looked down at me and shook his head. He threaded us along the back of the crowd. He held our hands tight and looked straight ahead. We arrived in front of our house. We stopped. Our grandmother stood on the front steps. Our teacher nodded at her, maybe bowed, then turned and left. Grandmother came down and embraced us. She was crying, we were crying.

Opa came in the door, smelling of smoke and carrying a Torah. "I have to go back, get the others." He laid the Torah on the kitchen table and hurried out again. A few minutes later he came back with another. As he started to rush out again Oma said, quietly, "the shul is burning." Opa looked at her, said nothing and hurried out again. Several of the older men, Gustav and Otto Gärtner, Harry Regensburgers' father, old Mr. Isaaks, Oma's brother, Julius, all came to the kitchen carrying Torahs, or old leather covered books. The Torahs lay on the kitchen table and all the old men sat around on chairs with their hands in front of their mouths. The policeman, Laddach appeared in the kitchen door, there were several young SA men behind him. Laddach was about to say something when one of the young men jumped in front of him and yelled, "You old men, pick up those things and get outside." They all waited, then Officer Laddach nodded. Opa first and then the others picked up the Torahs and books, and filed out the door. Outside, in front of our house the Brown Shirts made the men stand in a line and then yelled at them to start marching. As they went off with Opa at the head of the line one of them yelled, "left foot, right foot," over and over again, soon all the other brown shirts began yelling, "left foot, right foot." Somebody ran up to Opa and forced an axe into his left hand. I saw them move out and round a corner. I tried to follow them but Mamma pulled me back and pushed me into the house. Someone, later, told us that the old men were made to march through all the streets of the village with the SA men yelling, "left foot, right foot," laughing and enjoying themselves. The old men and Opa were then made to stand in front of the synagogue where a bonfire had been started and with guns pointing at them the men were made to throw the books and Torahs into the fire.

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The next few days are jumbled. My grandparents lived on the ground floor. There was a center hall and their living quarters were off to the right. A stair on the left led up to our apartment. At the end of the hall was a door that led out to the barn now empty of cows. Next to the stairs, in a small alcove was the cream separator, a shining stainless steel tube, the top quarter pinched in and then, like a large woman's hips, it flared out. I was in my grandmother's kitchen. There was a loud knocking on the front door. My grandmother and I both went to

see: she opened the door. Officer Laddach, in a gray uniform stood at the door. He pulled off his cap, "I'm sorry Oma. I'm looking for Oscar."

My father in his shirt and undone collar, came down the stairs, my mother behind him. My father stood in the middle of the room turning in a circle, looking at his mother, at my mother.

"What do you want Laddach," said my mother. Laddach shuffles his feet, "I'm sorry Melli, but I have to take Oscar."

"Why Oscar?"

"They're taking everybody. The Regensburgers, the Gärtners, everybody." Oma went out into the barn. "Oscar, you have to get dressed. Dress warm."

"Where is he going?" Laddach pressed his lips together.

"Laddach, you two were in the band together, in the soccer club."

"First to Cologne, Messehalle, I think, then I don't know."

My mother ran upstairs. I moved from the stairs over to the cream separator. I leaned on it, I put my arms around its waist, embracing, holding on tight. Laddach and my father looked at each other. Neither said anything. My father turned in circles. He didn't see me. My grandmother returned from the barn.

My mother and grandmother ran at my father with clothes. My father just stood there. He stood helpless while they seemed to dress him; my mother with coat and tie, my Grandmother with a scarf; my mother with a sweater, then a heavy overcoat, then a hat. Laddach said, "all right." My father moved toward the door and my grandmother screamed, "wait, I have to make some sandwiches. He has to take some sandwiches." They all, except my grandmother, stood there saying nothing. Grandmother came with sandwiches. She embraced my father. Then my mother embraced him. My father went to the door, Laddach took him by the arm and they went out.

Somewhat later in the day, Laddach appeared at our door again.

"Melli, you have to come, you and the kids." My mother's knees buckled; she fell to the floor. Laddach and my grandmother helped her up, "they just want you at the synagogue. They just want some pictures." Another man came, "Hurry, they're waiting. They have to get back to Cologne."

A small crowd still stood about the building, among them, several of my classmates. We were told to stand in front of the synagogue, my mother, my grandmother, my brother Karl, myself. My mother held our youngest brother, two and a half year old Peter in her arms. Although the synagogue had stopped burning, smoke still rose from the fallen roof. Now, there was merely the smell of fire and of burning. The smell was all around us. Two men were taking pictures. My classmates, my playmates, Willibald and Horst as well as some of the others picked up small clods of dirt and threw them at us. Two SS men stood in back of the crowd and as

the flash bulbs popped off they began to yell at us, “just wait soon you’ll be burning too. Just wait. Just wait.” They were laughing and looking at each other, as if they were pulling off some great joke.

The following morning Opa came out of hiding. He had spent that raw November night, first outside in the field and then, when he thought he heard some men, he ran down to a nearby brook where he spent most of the night immersed in the freezing water. What I remember about that particular morning was my Opa, outside the house, somewhere, screaming, in great pain, “I’m pissing blood. I’m pissing blood.”

That night all the Jewish families in town gathered in the baker Regensburger’s house. People slept in their day clothes on the floor in various rooms. We children were all in one upstairs room. We stayed up very late playing rummy and parchesi, and all that night we heard our mothers’, our grandmothers’ our aunts’ sobbing, rising up into our room.

In the morning we were home again. The only phone in the house was the one in the downstairs hall, and that was attached to the wall. Making calls was a rare thing, but now we watched our mother make frantic telephone calls, call after call, trying to find out where our father had been taken. The following morning Mamma and several other women went off to Cologne to find out about their husbands and sons. I was taken along. I was not to open my mouth but to hold on to mother’s hand. If she squeezed my hand I could cry if I wanted to. We went to the offices of Jewish community organizations, but there were rows and lines of women already there when we came, many with children holding fast to their mothers’ hands. We went to police stations and to the offices of the Gestapo, and always there were long lines and nobody would tell us anything. We returned home as we got off the train, Ladach was there waiting for us. He said “Dachau. Dachau is where he is going.”



There were no words, just screams. I had told Mamma that I wanted Pappa back. With Pappa home, everything was right. Everything was in its proper place. It had to do with the house. With Pappa home, every room in the house was in its proper place; the house stood four square on its foundation, with Pappa gone, the house was askew; it seemed to lean, maybe to tip over; things were out of balance. Mamma screamed and waved her arms up and down. Oma came, stroked my hair and led me to her kitchen where there were familiar smells.

Karl and I sat on the bottom step of the stairs watching Mamma: all day she stood at the wall phone in the downstairs hall, calling; one call after the other. Opa fed us and Oma watched over Peter. Mamma was told to petition the Gestapo in Cologne. Pappa, at sixteen, during that war, had replaced a local postal worker and delivered mail for several years. Mamma learned that if someone had done service in the first world war they might be released from the concentration camp. She wrote up the petition and holding on to my hand, we returned to Cologne. The wait on a hard bench was very long. When we finally were led to an office, the black uniformed officer looked up at mother from a sheet of paper and said that, Oscar Hess, his name had been erased. Mom's face lit up with smiles; she bowed and said many thank yous, and made me say thank you. I hated her bowing. At the railroad station we ran into Ilse Isaaks, and my mother told her what had happened, that his name had been erased.

"Don't you know what that means? said Ilse, You'll never see him again." I began to sob, but mother only said, "No." She kept repeating "no" all the way back to Ruppichteroth.

About six weeks later on a Friday night Mom took my brother and me down to the train station. It was dark, except for a few street lights. The wait was short. Pappa stepped down from the train. The train pulled out behind him. He stood there, between the rails, on cinders. His face was round and fat. He was bald. His wonderful black hair has been shaved off. He was a father I had never seen before. We stood across from him. His hands trembled. My brother and I looked up to him but he didn't look at us, and all he said was directed at our mother, "When do I leave? Are my papers in order?"

A week later Pappa left for Holland. The reason for his release from Dachau was that Aunt Mina in Holland had arranged it. She had contacts with Dutch government officials, and through them she arranged for his visa, for his stay with her in Amsterdam. Only because of her efforts in Holland was our father released and allowed to leave Germany. In those days the German government was more interested in getting their Jews to leave the country, rather than burning them. All that week I was full of a terrible curiosity as to what had happened to my father, where he had been, what had happened to him to make him look so strange, what made

him tremble so. On the morning of his leaving we all ate in my grand-parents kitchen. At one point my grandfather left the room and then soon returned with an object wrapped in a large white linen napkin. I knew what it was; it was the Shofar, the rams' horn that was kept in the credenza, behind glass, on a glass holder, in the dark dining room in which no one ever ate. It was the Shofar that had belonged to my grandfather's father and to his father before him and to the one before that. It had belonged to a whole series of fathers extending into what was for me an infinite past, or rather, distance, a distance like Crusoe's island, or Shatterhand's America. It was a distance extending up into the night sky. Someone had mentioned, perhaps it was our teacher that there was a constellation of stars called the Ram. I knew about rams. We kept them on the farm, for food. My grandfather would dig a little pit, struggle with the ram, his arm under its head till he was able to lift the ram's head high enough and then with a quick stroke of a sharp knife cut the ram's throat and the dark red blood gushed into the pit of dug up earth till the pit was full and the ram stopped its struggling. I associated the sky ram with Abraham. It was his ram that was up in the sky; it was the ram he slaughtered instead of slaughtering his son, his only one. It was that distance that the Shofar bridged since it came from the horn of that ram. But I wanted to know what made Pappa look so strange and why he spoke so little, and why he looked out of the window all the time.

I remember that we walked over snow to the railroad which would take my Papa to Holland. The snow crunched under my feet. There was a small crowd, maybe a dozen, maybe twenty people at the railroad station when we arrived, all Christians, all silent, the Protestant pastor among them. Except for the pastor, these were all old friends of Pappa's: friends from the town band, the soccer team. I thought it was strange that the pastor was there; the only contact with him that I knew of were the greetings that we exchanged whenever we passed each other on the street. Pappa embraced us, entered the train and emerged on the rear platform of the last car. The train pulled out and as it did the Protestant pastor called out, "I wish I were going with you."

Chapter 11 – In Ecuador

We were having a festive meal, a holiday meal. It was the evening before the New Year: Rosh

HaShanah. My father said, "Tomorrow we are going to Quito. To synagogue "All of us?"

"No," said my father smiling, just you and me and Karl."

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We stood on the black-top. We looked around. *Cotopaxi* was the high cone that often smoked and rumbled, *Chimborazo* was the sleeping warrior toward whose height the somber, brown, barefooted peons often looked when the loads on their backs became too heavy, and who still remembered tales of holy heights from which a young and golden bridal pair leaped for the glory of the Inca race; and *Pichincha*, the slim one whose

warm and crystal springs bubbled along its base and whose black lakes disappeared among the mists and clouds that forever hid some part in whiteness. These rose over twenty thousand feet and were well known; lower peaks had names only the Indians knew.

Here, as always, cars were rare; riders on horseback were frequent. On both sides of the road grew a light green alkaline grass on which sheep grazed. At one point a dirt road joined the blacktop. Here, our three horses and a mule waited. There was our Papa who was as always, anxious on his blue-gray stallion, and there was Baerga who sat quietly, listening, on his placid mule. Karl and I sat on our squat old mares. This being a holiday, we had on sailor suits underneath our ponchos; both of us with our broad sailor caps with the ribbons down the back and on whose front, around the brows, were printed, in golden letters, "*Graff Luckner*." At one point Dad turned to us and said, "You've both been very good. I'm very proud of you."

Karl said, "I'm not very cold," but I heard his teeth click together and saw him shiver. I had to add, "I'm not cold either." Baerga smiled broadly, turned to Dad and began to reach under his poncho. Dad shook his head and said, "It's a tradition that we don't eat before noon on this day." Baerga nodded, then slipped off his mule to check the girth straps on our mares, giving them both a kind pat on the leg when he had finished. As he remounted he said, "You are wearing good warm ponchos, but anyone can get cold this early in the morning when the wind blows down from *Pichincha*. You two must have good thick Indian skin." We both sat up straight in our saddles and pulled on the slack reins of the placid mares but they barely moved.

Dad said, "stay here." He rode onto the black-top and looked steadily to where it disappeared into the mountains to the south. After a minute he rejoined our party. Apologetically, Baerga said, "It's only an hour late." "I know," said Dad, and started to smile, "but there are many people waiting for me." Baerga looked up and seemed to smell the air. His eyes widened in surprise as he turned to the boys, almost a boy himself. He called out, "*El Pajaro Azul!*" Karl and I jumped off our horses and raced onto the black-top. Dad followed in a rush, scooped us up, one under each arm, and released us at the side of the road. Dad had grabbed me and was about to swat me hard on the back side when Baerga held up one hand with fingers spread out, and said gently, "*Cinco minutos*. It will be here in five minutes." Dad let me go and began scolding us both in German. His anger had to do with our leaving the horses. "Do you think that you can just leave them? Do you think they'll stay there forever? If they wander into the wheat whose responsibility will it be? And who will retrieve them for you?" We both looked up at Baerga. "No. Not Baerga. They are your horses and your responsibility. And how dare you run out onto a busy highway..." He continued on till Karl began to bawl.

From the rim of the southern mountains a loud klaxon, a hoarse kazoo, which mixed itself with Karl's crying began to sound. A small black dot appeared on the highway. The black dot turned into a blue one and then into the outlines of a blue bus. The horses started to prance nervously at the increasing sound. Pappa found

a handkerchief under his poncho and wiped Karl's face. He went to his horse and removed a large soft leather bag that hung by a thong over the pommel. He had to yell to Baerga over the bus' noise, "I will see you later."

He gave the Indian the reins of his horse. Baerga gathered the reins of the other two horses. "I will meet you here at six this evening, Señor," and turned down the path, the three horses trailing behind him.

The bus seemed to take forever to reach us. It seemed impossible for the peculiar horn to grow louder, but it did. When Karl saw that I was covering my ears he covered his also. Dad looked down the path. Baerga was a good way down the dirt track, the mule and the horses picking their way carefully over the sharp rocks.

For all the noise it made at a distance, the bus arrived almost soundlessly. Suddenly it was there, stopped. Doors opened with a rattle. The driver called out, "*Vamos, Vamos,*"

but then, *vamos*, became a respectful, "*Señor,*" when he saw that we were European. We searched for seats.

The bus was filled to overflowing with Indians and Mestizos. All the seats were taken and from the rear, halfway to the front, Indians were seated on the floor. Whole families were traveling on the bus. They seemed to have come a long way, for there was a great deal of food, especially fruit, on board. On the racks above the seats, along with valises there were whole branches of bananas, baskets of pineapples, and sacks of oranges. There were cages of rodents too: guinea pigs for roasting. And just about everybody seemed to be eating the wonderful brown chunks of the meat of magnificent odors, wrapped in the usual strips of newspaper that I was absolutely forbidden to eat. Eating them meant slaps and additional bans. As we stepped inside the bus the loud and excited talk that streamed out of the door as we entered became very still. In the silence we three looked around for seats when some child in the rear pointed to the caps Karl and I were wearing and sang out, "*Marineros.*" Immediately the bus was full of talk, and laughter and pointing, and the word "*Marineros*" came from everywhere. I think that we, seeing so many smiling faces, smiled back at just everybody, while Dad reddened deeply, and slipped the caps from our heads at which the whoops in the bus just became louder.

The driver was skinny and yellow with a little Hitler mustache. He got up from his seat, faced the rear and screamed out, "*Silencio.*" The bus immediately became quiet. The driver pointed and spoke rapidly to a seat occupied by two Indian women. The one at the window seemed to be old and wrinkled and quite heavy. The other was still smooth faced but also quite heavy. The two immediately rose from their seats and Dad began to protest, "*No, no, por favor....*" But the two seated themselves on the floor despite all the Dad's protests. The women were on the floor and the driver, with a wide grin ushered us to the vacated seats. He offered to take the leather bag from Dad and place it in the rack overhead, but Dad held on to the bag with both hands and declined with words maybe rougher than he intended. The driver shrugged and returned to his seat. The bus started off. Inside the bus we hardly heard the horn.

Dad settled into the window seat and watched the passing landscape. We two squeezed close to him. I

think that it then dawned on Karl and me that the laughter and pointing had to do with us and so now we were afraid of all the brown faces that surrounded us. We looked into our laps. Sometimes we looked toward Dad but his attention was all beyond the window. For me, there was some comfort in that.

“*Cañyo?*” A brown hand shoved a stick of green sugar cane under Karl’s nose. He had the outside seat. Karl jumped and screamed out, “Papa!” Dad was startled out of his reverie. The window steamed over, became pearly white and opaque. The Indian woman sitting across from us was old but smooth-faced. She smiled, and holding out the sugar cane to Karl she kept repeating, “*Pobrecito, Pobrecito.*” Dad saw her concern and smiled back, “*No, gracias,*” over and over. He wiped the window with his sleeve and returned to the outside. Karl loved sugar cane and would gladly have taken it.

“*Dulce?*” The old woman held a small cake of an amber-brown color toward Karl. Her expression was very hopeful. On the seat next to the old woman was an extremely thin brown old man in a black suit and white shirt who nodded in emphasis to the old woman urging the boy to eat. Karl looked to Dad, who spoke gently. It took him a while before he could make the woman understand that he really meant no.

“*Platano?*” The woman had reached up to the rack above her seat where lay a large branch of small, fat, yellow, bananas. She had peeled one halfway down and pressed it into Karl’s hand. Karl was halfway to laughing as he looked at Dad and loudly whispered, “She doesn’t know who we are.” Papa, too, had a huge grin on his face as he nodded to the woman and then to Karl.

“*Bueno,*” and she pressed the sugar cake into Karl’s hand. She then gave me the length of sugar cane. I looked at Papa who nodded, and I began gnawing at it and sucking out the juice. Papa said, “Shouldn’t offend them.”

Finished with the cake Karl took a banana from the old woman. “It’s like custard,” he yipped. He just about wolfed it down when he had another in his hand. I kept ripping and sucking the sugar fibers. Very fastidiously, as I had been taught in the case of chewing gum, I would bring my hand to my mouth and spit out the used-up cane. When no one was looking I dropped it to the floor.

Dad’s attention was still out beyond the window. The bus scattered a herd of sheep that was crossing the highway. A turn in the road brought the high mountains into view. “Who would have thought it,” he sighed, “vote Popen and beat Hitler.” He looked out onto the aisle where the two women who had vacated the seats for us were sitting. The younger one sat with her back between the knees of the older one who was running a thumb and forefinger down each long and oily strand of hair. It was a scene all of us had often seen before, in the market, in the park, by the side of the road, in front of a hut; one woman’s fingers combing the hair of another, mothers doing it for the hair of their children, mostly. Quite frequently the older woman would stop and look at her fingers, pinch the fingers together and put them in her mouth. “Lice,” said Dad. I had almost become ill the

first time, when Mama explained it to me, and I still had not, altogether, come to terms with it. The first time she said, “A horrible custom of these primitive people.” Since then she had come to another conclusion, and would try to explain to us that custom or not, there were several quite rational ideas behind the act. There was simple hygiene in keeping the hair clean. She thought too, that there was a soothing and calming effect in this stroking of the hair. And finally, it was a good source of protein. These lice were rich in the blood of the people they fed on. Good and nourishing.

* * *

We are at the synagogue. It is a second story room in a white clapboard building that is reached through an outside set of wooden stairs. Several men stand on the landing. They are smiling broadly at us and they are all wearing hats and heavy dark coats. They all speak German.

“We wouldn’t start without you.”

“We couldn’t do Rosh HaShanah without you.

“So happy you could come.” We have reached the landing. One of them hugs me.

“You know, you have the only Shofar in Ecuador.”

It is not a large room but it is full of men in hats and heavy dark overcoats, of women with flowered hats and heavy dark overcoats. My father, Karl, and I sit in the front row. The cantor begins the service. He is old and has a scratchy voice. My grandfather did it better. The room grows warm. The women ask that windows be opened. The men are annoyed at the interruption but someone opens windows and the door. Through a window I can see the peak of *El Corazon*. The man sitting next to me smiles and shoves a prayer book at me but I am more interested in watching the clouds that stream and wrap themselves around the white shining peak of *El Corazon*. Every few minutes, it seems, the man smiles, pokes me in the shoulder and points down to the prayer book I am holding. My father rises from his seat. He holds the napkin- wrapped shofar in his hand. He bends over me, takes the book from my hands, leafs through it, gives it back and points. I read, *To the chief musician a psalm of the sons of Korah. All ye people clap your hands; shout unto God with a voice of triumph*. My father stands before the whole congregation. He unwraps the shofar from the napkin. He hands the napkin to me and smiles. He puts the shofar to his mouth and tentatively blows some air into it. He brings it down to his side and looks only at me. The leader of the service calls out the words that only the sound of the Ram’s horn can translate. The short blast, the long blast, the combined blast, the stuttering blast, the immensely long blast. When the last long blast has died the whole congregation, all those men and women in hats and dark coats call out, there is a great joy in their voices, “*Yishkoach*. May you be strong. Congratulations.” My father bows slightly, smiles.

But I had seen the sounds, visible shofar sounds, sounds looking like sparks, white, yellow, and red.

Sparks that hob-nailed boots could make on cobble stones. And the sparks all traveled, flew out into the open, through the open window, out to the peak of *El Corazon*, out on this blue sky day to the mountain *Cayambe*, to *Pichincha*, to *Chimborazo*; out over the whole Cordillera that was the spine of the Andes.

Chapter 14 – Early US

We were desperately poor. Uncle Theo had given Papa a slip of paper that read, “I am looking for work. I have three children to support.” Advice came from friends and relatives, “go here, go there,” and quite soon Papa had his first job. The job was as a relief elevator operator in an apartment building, where the regular operator had become ill. Uncle Theo had gotten him the job. At first Papa was afraid of taking it,

“I don’t speak any English, how can I...”

“You know one two three four, don’t you?” said Uncle Theo.

“I know five too.”

“Then all you need to learn is six, seven, eight. The building has eight floors. Somebody gives you a number and that’s where you take them. You can do that.” Papa nodded yes. Uncle Theo gave Papa a slip of paper which he was to present to the building superintendent. The super looked at it, said something about speaking English, Papa smiled and started to count,

“One, two, three, ...” He started at eight dollars a week. Then he was almost fired. A tenant had asked him to hold a package for her and deliver it to her apartment. He became confused, and didn’t understand her instructions. When he attempted to make the building superintendent understand his confusion, the super, of course, saw how much English he lacked. “Don’t come back after today,” he was told. At the end of Papa’s shift, as he was changing out of the elevator man’s uniform, the Superintendent came to him. Papa divined what the Super was attempting to tell him. “He couldn’t keep a man who was unable to help a tenant. Tenants come first, but he would try it one more time. Should anything like it happen again...” The super shrugged his shoulder. He slapped Papa on the shoulder and smiled and yelled at him as if he were deaf, “English, English.”

Everything went well for a week or two when, one evening, Papa began to shake and shiver. It was a recurrence of the malaria he had caught in Guayaquil. We were somewhat used to it since that had happened, perhaps twice, on the hacienda. The fever and the shivering would last for two or three days and then he would be perfectly well again. This time the illness made my mother almost insane. While Papa sat in his pajamas, wrapped in all the blankets we could find, shivering in a chair, Mom combed our house, and then the neighborhood for an unemployed refugee who might perhaps substitute for the few days that Papa might be out. She combed Aunt Irma’s house. She ran from the house of one relative or acquaintance to another trying to find a substitute. She found no one. The following morning she took the subway and presented herself to the

building superintendent, but to no avail. Papa was fired. It was three weeks before he recovered.

Papa's next job was unloading barges on one of the East River docks. As far as I was concerned it was the best job he ever had. Each day there came a barge from the Messing Bakery up in the Bronx. Messing sold cakes and cookies in just about every grocery store with which we were familiar: plain cakes, cakes with chocolate and vanilla icing, cookies of all kinds, plain and chocolate covered donuts and pies of all descriptions. These baked goods were only one or two days old but, to our great astonishment, in this America, they were old and could no longer be sold. So they were consigned to a dog food factory.

"Americans are very spoiled," said my father, "One day only or even two and they can't eat them anymore, it's a shame. Such a waste, if only Oma could see it. In her store it would stay on the shelf," and he silently counted on his fingers till all five were spread out, looked at us and laughed. "Maybe they know better in this country."

After several months on the east river docks Papa began work as a dish washer at a restaurant: the Café Eclair on 72nd street on the west side of Manhattan. The Eclair then was a bit of old Europe, the kind of coffee house one might find in Vienna or perhaps Berlin or any large German city. While American-style sandwiches were, of course, on the menu, the real reason for its existence was its many varieties of cakes and pastries, all overflowing with whipped cream, chocolate, and custards. Also, there was the atmosphere of the old world café where one could linger over coffee, read a newspaper, meet with, and chat with friends. That the Café Eclair was located so very near West End Avenue and Riverside Drive, the heart of settlement for the more affluent immigrants, was certainly one of the elements for its long-lasting success. So, in a place where, on another continent he might have frequented, Papa now washed dishes and was glad of it.

It was the day before Yom Kippur, Kol Nidre eve. It was now mid-afternoon and as Papa was observant and needed to prepare for the holiday; he had arranged to leave work early. It had already been a long day. He had begun work at six that morning. Just before leaving, the boss handed Papa a box of desserts to deliver to a customer on West End Avenue at 98th Street. It was something that Pop would have understood since it was customary to have a large and elaborate meal on the evening before the long day of fasting. Pop's subway train rolled past the station he needed to exit. He had fallen asleep on the train. He came home to 159th street. He stood in front of Mom. He held the package in his hand and did not know what to do. Mom took over. She had Papa get his needed bath, and got him something to eat. (We did not have a large and elaborate meal that year.) A problem remained. Oma Krämer, Mom's mother, now lived with us and she was extremely observant. To have, knowingly, overstepped any of the rules and conventions of the holiday, such as, perhaps, riding on the subway, would have brought down terrible and immediate rebukes and reproaches from her mother. "Don't say anything," Mom tried to calm Papa, "when you and Oma are in synagogue I will take the children and go down

and deliver the things.” Pop’s silence signaled his agreement.

Mom was now very pregnant and it showed. With four year old Peter at her hand we went off to make the delivery on West End Avenue. Mom cried on the subway. We children could very well have remained at home by ourselves. We often had, often enough, but Mom probably thought that arranging for a pathetic gypsy scene might temper any anger at the late delivery. We arrived at the door of the house on 98th street and a lady in a dark dress and pearls opened the door. “Wait a minute,” and she took the package. Mom smiled at us, “wait, we get a tip.” The lady came back holding the opened package. She was furious. “I have twelve guests for dinner and I ordered twelve *petit fours*. One of the *petit fours* is broken. Now there are only eleven and I have twelve guests.” Mom tried to explain but the lady interrupted, “Tomorrow I’ll go to Eclair and tell them.” The lady slammed the door. Mom pleaded through the closed door, “Please no, please no, please no, we need the job.” It went on for a while before we turned around and left.

On our return home, later, Mom didn’t tell Pop what happened., but when he returned to work, after the holiday, the lady had already been there, and the boss told Pop, “Don’t bother changing, you’re fired.”

Years later when Mom would recount the story she would say, “*Nebish*, I was pregnant, I had one kid on one arm and the package in my hand. Maybe the package got bumped. The lady said, ‘I invited twelve people,’ and now she only had eleven and three quarters. You know, when *I* invite twelve people I have at least thirteen pieces, not twelve.” She would end the story with a shake of the head, “West End Avenue Jews....”

Chapter 11 B

Mom had one overwhelmingly wealthy set of relatives in New York. She had never before applied to them for aid either for herself or for family but now, on behalf of her in-laws she did. We took the subway downtown. Mom had the address on a slip of paper. Mom said, “If I pinch you, you can start to cry.”

In the late 1890’s Mom’s father, Louis Krämer and a half-brother, David, came to the United States, together, to New York City. When, because of a severe economic depression his American prospects dimmed, Louis returned to Germany but David stayed. By 1940 David had died, but not before he had established a flourishing business in notions, small, lightweight items for household use, like buttons and pins. His two sons, Herbert and Monroe now ran the business.

The elevator to their offices seemed built out of a fantastic erector set. It had neither walls nor roof. It was composed of an open iron skeleton work through which one could see, far up, a sky-light. One could see as well, through the steel mesh openings as we rose, the vast ranging floors that contained row after row of immense white tables over whose every side men and women were bent doing something I knew not what. But most remarkably, no button needed to be pushed on this elevator to indicate the floor. There was an attendant

who pulled on a braided metal rope that extended all the way up to the sky-light. A pull and the elevator began to rise, another pull and the elevator halted.

This floor too, contained the two vast rows of huge white tables. Large green hooded lamps extended down from a high ceiling, and again, about each of the tables, an enormous number of men and women were bent. As we got closer we could see their fingers moving over pieces of paper as if they were practicing over silent piano keys. But there was no silence, only a crunching, rustling sound came from the tables, as if one were walking through fallen leaves.

Half way down the aisle between the tables stood two men in white shirts and ties. They seemed to be of about the same age as Mom and Pop. Mom smiled and as we got closer she leaned forward, her arms held out as if to hug them, but they retreated a bit and extended their hands for a shake.

“You look just like your grandmother. Wait a minute.” I had seen my mother in many moods but never one like this. She was nervous. “Wait a minute,” came from her over and over again as she rummaged about in her bag. A last “wait a minute,” and she pulled out a photograph on stiff paper, brown with age, of a woman with a tall head of hair and a very serious expression. The man to whom she handed the picture looked nothing like the woman in the photograph. He was short and slender and bald. He had a mustache and glasses. The other man had shiny black hair that was parted in the middle. Mom reached into her bag again and drew out a small soft blue bag. It was something that I had seen often. I was handed her large bag and Mom drew out a golden watch on a long golden chain from the soft blue bag. Mom spoke in German.

“This is your grandfather’s watch. I don’t know if you have anything to remember him by but I thought that maybe you would like to have it.” I was never more ashamed of my mother. I knew she was going to beg but I did not know that she was shamefacedly going to bribe as well. I had seen, in Germany, in Ecuador, when from time to time she had taken the watch out of the blue bag and had run a soft cloth over the gold casing; the gold watch with roman numerals. She would make a point of saying, each time that I saw her polish it, “This is the only remembrance I have of my grandfather. One of these days one of you will have it.” The bald one took the watch and smiled. Then each took turns holding it in his palm, seeming to weigh it. We stood there in the middle of this vast room and nobody spoke. There was just the rustle that came from the tables that came from the workers and their nimble fingers.

“Come, you’re pregnant. Sit down in the office. We’ll get you some coffee. We sat in an office at one end of the floor. It had a large glass wall that looked out on the workers. Mom told her story, about the terrible situation in Germany, “Everybody knows about it, I don’t have to tell you, I wrote you about Oscar’s parents, these good old people. Religious, good people, they don’t deserve to suffer, there are people here in America who could help maybe save these two old people. All we need is a thousand dollars.”

“A thousand dollars?” said the two of them, almost at once.

“I know. It’s a lot of money. You know Oscar and I would do it but Oscar works so hard for just his eight, sometimes ten dollars a week and I don’t sit on my *tochus*. I get twenty five cents an hour for scrubbing floors. And the rent is forty eight dollars a month and we got three kids.” Mom put her arm around my neck and pinched me so the others wouldn’t see it, but I refused to cry. The begging recital made me too angry. “Anything you can do to help us, we would pay you back when we get on our feet. And we need somebody to provide an affidavit.”

The bald headed one got up, looked down at his brother, he turned in a circle and then faced us, “How long are you in this country?”

“Why? Months, I guess.”

“How can you afford a forty-eight dollar apartment when your husband makes only eight dollars a week?”

“Did I say forty eight? I meant thirty-eight. Thirty-eight. When he gets ten, we still got two dollars left over. And I work too.”

“You’re not here even a year and already you’re pregnant.” Mom looked down at her belly and stroked a hand over it.

“I think it’s very irresponsible,” said the slick-haired brother. Mom looked up. The slick-haired brother got up and faced Mom. “Very irresponsible. How can you think of having children when you have no money, when you have no real work; nothing that gives you a real future. Now, you can still work but after a while...”

“You have a lot of responsibility; three children to take care of. A hard time at home...”

“Not so hard like you think. Money isn’t everything...”

“And then you’re hardly in the country and you have another on the way, that’s what I call irresponsible.”

“I’m sorry that you think so,” and then my mother pinched me in the neck again, but again, I refused to cry. “I’m glad I have these children and I’m glad we have another on the way.” Mom smiled. “Oscar got out of Dachau, we got out of Germany, we got out of Ecuador. Do you think all that is for nothing? Do you have children?”

They both shook their heads. Mom got up from the chair, “I don’t want charity. I’m not asking for that. I would never. This is for two old people in Germany. I didn’t really want to come and bother you, and it is really hard for me to come and beg but I thought that maybe the lives of two old Jews are really important and that blood is thicker than water, than dollars even. And people help each other when there is trouble.”

“You know,” said the slick haired one, “the blood isn’t even so thick between us as you say. Your

father and our father were step-brothers, not even real brothers.” Very quickly, and more loudly, Mom replied, “Weren’t they raised in the same house, one next to the other? I can’t believe it.”

Then the egg-headed one said, “With somebody as irresponsible as you seem to be, how can we trust that the money will be used as you say?”

Mom reached for the watch on the desk, her fingers surrounded it, “I can’t believe it. My cousins! I would lie to you? I can’t believe it. I should have listened to Irma and never have come to you.”

The two were both standing now. Mom pulled me up from the chair, “She said you sent her a letter when she asked you to make an affidavit for our brother, for your cousin Theo. Your lawyer told you not to do it, you said. You would be responsible if he couldn’t support himself: responsible for a doctor in economics!?” Now in English, and very loud, “How many people you got working on your tables in these three floors? How much you making on each one every day?” We were almost at the elevators. People around the tables were now looking up. They had stopped working. “People like you gave money to Hitler. They bought suits for the Hitler youth.” The elevator had arrived and we stepped in. In the elevator she said, very quietly, “Maybe if they had children they would think differently.”

The answer that came from Canada did not differ greatly from that of Mom’s cousins though here a son was involved. Here the request was for a much smaller sum and Uncle Albert wrote back, “Do you know how much five hundred dollars is?. Do you know what five hundred dollars means?”

On Sunday June 22 1941 the Germans invaded Russia. One hundred and twenty divisions struck. They struck from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Mom said “that’s their end; that’s Hitler’s big mistake.” But her face did not look happy. A few days later, Italy and Rumania too declared war on Russia.

Chapter 20

Pop stopped going to work. All day he sat in the apartment, in the same chair, in his dark green pajamas with his hands clasped in front of him, never saying anything. Mom said that Doctor Joshua had been there and that it was another attack of malaria, and a very bad one. But usually when Pop had a malaria attack he lay in his couch-bed with a fever and tossed and sweated. He did not sweat now. I was afraid. I didn’t know what was happening but I didn’t really believe Mom

We were taken to the orphanage by subway, Karl and I. It was the last station on the “A” train. Far Rockaway. Years later if I mentioned “the orphanage” to my mother she would say, “Ach, you shouldn’t say that. It wasn’t an orphanage. It was like a camp. A summer camp. A camp on the beach. And you came back.

We got you back, you and Karl.”

“Mom, if it was a camp why did we go to school there, all of 5A?”

“So you went to school there. Was that such a bad thing? School? We couldn’t do anything. Papa was sick. I was almost sick. I couldn’t go to work. We had no money coming in. Franky and Peter needed me all the time. What could we do? You want to make me feel bad?”

I think I did. I know I did.

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There was nothing to prepare us for where we were going. One morning, Mom simply took us both by the hand. Aunt Irma came along. She had the address and directions in one hand, in the other was a large paper bag that contained some clothes. It was a very long ride. We arrived at the orphanage on the day that the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, great German battleships, made a break out of the port of *Brest*, and ran the English channel past a terribly strong British attack and made it clean back to their home base on the Elbe. It was the day Singapore fell to the Japanese. *The Daily News* had it all. Someone had left a copy on a nearby seat. I read and re-read the accounts all the way out to Queens.

It was a very large house, three stories, made of stone, almost a block long, almost a castle. There were turrets at each end of the roof. Like sniffing noses, the dormer windows stuck out between the turrets. That the orphanage was on the beach was true, but it was winter, the middle of February and the cold wind blew in from the sea. We walked down a ramp from the boardwalk into the arched entrance.

Mom bent down to Karl, her hands on his shoulders, her eyes just across from his, “We’ll come and visit every week. Just a little while, you’ll stay here. This is a nice place. Everybody says so.” I got a hug. When they turned to leave I don’t think either of us cried, though we might have. Mom sometimes came, but not every week. We got postcards. Pop was getting better.

We were taken to a dormitory. It felt something like the Willard Parker hospital in that beds seemed to stretch out into the distance; they might have gone on forever if they hadn’t been intercepted by a wall with two windows. There were two long rows of metal beds on each side of the vast room. Each bed was covered either by a brown or a dark gray blanket. Somebody showed us the locker next to our bed, but we had hardly anything to put into the locker. Somebody showed us how to make our beds: we learned about hospital corners.

“It’s not a bad place,” said the boy in the bed next to me. His name was Arthur. He had a steam iron kind of face, long, roundish, and it came to a point at his chin. He had a harelip.

“It’s all right. You can look at it. I don’t get into fights about it any more.”

“You used to?”

“I’ve been here since I was three. I had a lot of fights.” Arthur was eleven, a year older than me. Three

times he had been up for adoption; once to a family in New Jersey.

“Three times people came, but after they looked at me, I guess, they never came back. They have nice social workers here. They talk to you. They’ve arranged for a doctor at Mount Sinai to operate, and fix it after the school term is over. That’s July. Four months. Most people here are really nice.”

There was a synagogue in the home and we went every Friday night and every Saturday morning. But it was Saturday morning that separated me from just about everybody and everything. The service was simply not conducted in any way that was familiar to me. Familiar meant the tunes that we had sung, the same tunes that my Opa sang and that Rabbi Lieber sang; that the whole congregation in Washington Heights sang, especially the tunes that accompanied the taking out and returning the Torah to the ark. In Washington Heights these tunes came from the throats of everyone around me, they enveloped me the way Joseph’s colored coat enveloped him; they were signs of favor and of inclusion, that touched me the way a gentle pat on the head from my father’s friend touched me as we exited synagogue. That touch and the accompanying wordless smile said, “you are Oscar’s son and I know you.” Those tunes said I was a part of all that black-suited crowd that flooded out onto Amsterdam Avenue. These others were the wrong tunes. *Va’yehi bin’sauah hoaraun* and *Haudu al eretz v’shomayim*, these were totally wrong. We had been in America for almost two years, accustomed to America, accustomed to our neighborhood: Henry Rosenberg, and the grocery store on the corner; Hebrew school and Mr. Klein, accustomed to friends and streets for two years; *Ruppichteroth* and *Machachi* were memories in which the tough parts were on their way to being forgotten, or changed so that smiles were interspersed with recall; and now this. These strange songs became the leaving of every place I had ever left. They recalled not any “thing” of leaving but the whole process of leaving. They became and they returned to me the shape of all those good-byes, the black, dull, and sad feelings where something good in me was taken from me, where every separation became, after a while, a judgment I must have deserved: good-by; good-bye from Oma and Opa, good-bye from Chino, Chimborazzo and El Professor. In this synagogue boys and girls sat together.

The food was all right. There was lots of tomato soup, and sandwiches of white bread with thin smears of cream cheese or peanut butter between the slices. The bread had the crusts cut off. Friday night was chicken soup. Though it was announced as chicken soup I always doubted it. Karl brought to my attention that you could see clear to the bottom of the bowl even though the bowl was full; that our mother’s chicken soup was never thin and transparent. Our mother’s chicken soup was a dark yellow with swirls and eddies of fat swimming on the surface. Everybody got a piece of carrot in our mother’s chicken soup and the bottom of the bowl was never visible until the bowl was empty.

The only work that was required of us was to keep the area around our beds neat and clean. In addition, we ten and eleven year olds were given a schedule for kitchen duty to dry the dishes that the older boys washed.

There was a school. I sat in a schoolroom with perhaps thirty others, both boys and girls. It was a familiar schoolroom: blackboards and shiny blond desks. Construction paper of many colors, covered with writing, decorated the walls. The teacher was a man; a man with a thin mustache: Mr. Teller. Mr. Teller read the newspaper *PM*. Every morning when we came into the classroom he was bent over the desk reading or writing something and there was the paper on the left side of the desk. Everybody in the class was smart. Should Mr. Teller ask a question, and he asked questions all the time, just about everybody, it seemed, had a hand up, everybody except this girl who sat in a seat in front of me. Her hand never went up, though every time Mr. Teller called on her, and he often called on children who did not have their hands up, she had the right answer.

“Ina, tell me about how we operate on rational numbers.”

“By addition, subtraction, multiplication, division That’s how we operate.” Her voice was low and it had a sneer in it, as if she hated being asked and at the same time hated being asked something so very simple. She had straight blond hair that was cut like the Dutch boy in the paint adds. I liked her.

At lunch time, when Mr. Teller guided the students out the door, I kept back and sidled up to the desk to try to read something from the folded up newspaper. Maybe I could catch a headline maybe there was something happening somewhere besides thin chicken soup and hospital corners. The paper was folded and, gingerly, testing, I tried moving it with one finger to see if it would unfold. Mr. Teller stood over me, I quickly removed my hand.

“Would you like to see the newspaper?”

“Yes. No.” And I ran out to lunch.

From the time in Germany when Pop set up our short wave radio so that we could hear the reports about Spain, I knew that news was terribly important; what the radio said could bring Mom to tears and give Pop his very serious face, the silent face where one could not talk to him. I sometimes thought that the voices that came from the radio speaker were like herders of sheep and we, all of us, listening, were sheep that were shooed this way and that. I thought that there were other voices behind the voices on the radio who held knives for the sheep. People left their homes for other countries because of news. I knew that the newspapers, the radio, held information that meant life or death for somebody, somebody we might know, maybe it was about us. Maybe it was about me. “Did you hear...” was a very scary phrase. Mrs. Brill in 4B had said that I was the current events kid. I heard her tell another teacher that I was a prodigy when it came to following the news. I looked up prodigy in the dictionary. I was very pleased.

I remembered when we were still on the high seas, on the *Caribia*, when we heard about the Hitler-Stalin pact. I announced it to Mom. I thought it was something of a coup for me. “I can’t understand it. I can’t understand it.” “What’s the matter, Mama?” She looked around, then whispered, “Stalin. Stalin signed a pact

with Hitler. How could he do it? Impossible. Just impossible.” Later Papa said “You and your socialists. That’s what you get.” For the first time ever I heard Mom shout at Pop, “He’s just playing for time. Just playing for time.” Then she clamped her hand over her mouth and started to cry. In Ecuador the men discussed the Finnish-Russian war with serious faces. We were still in Ecuador when the men, with joy in their voices, a joy that they communicated to all of us, talked about this great warship, the *Graff Spee*, having surrendered in the port of Montevideo. We had just about arrived in America when, a few days after Pop’s birthday, Denmark fell, then Norway. I read how German soldiers, who as starving children in the terrible years after World War 1, had been taken into Norwegian homes to be fed and nourished, now returned as strutting conquerors. The *Blitzkrieg* overwhelmed Holland. Where was Tante Mina? She lived in Amsterdam. She had saved our lives. She got Pop out of Dachau and then saved the rest of us by paying for our ship’s passage and giving us money to live on in Ecuador. Pop prayed that she might be safe; his cousins, Tante Mina’s children too. I thought of my cousin Eva. I wanted England and France to win but the headlines of losses and defeats were stamped in big black letters almost every day. In June Hitler danced his victory jig at *Compiègne*. But now it was 1942, Singapore had fallen and the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* were safe..

###

Evenings, the great entrance hall of the home became a place for recreation. Kids could play board games, cards, or do homework, although very little homework was ever assigned. There were several large bookcases filled, crammed tight with books. Karl would wander around the hall looking at what other kids were doing, and so did I. Some played cards, pinochle or rummy. Chinese checkers seemed to be big and so was dominoes. I wanted to do something with Karl, play a game, play cards, anything. He had on Pop’s serious face, so I knew that he didn’t feel happy. I wanted to, but I didn’t do anything. In these early days of just looking around I would often see Arthur and Ina sitting next to each other on a bench in a dark corner next to the player piano, each of them absorbed in a book. After several days of wandering, peering at what others were doing and getting stares from the others I stared at, I wandered over to the bookcases. There were many fat books; a whole row with maroon backs and gold print, all of them written by Charles Dickens. Another smaller row, with black backs and gold print was written by William Makepeace Thackeray. A whole row of the same book: “*Bible Stories for the Jewish Young.*” Then I had to smile when I came on a bunch of John R. Tunis books, and then next, these other set of my favorites, the Sam books by W. Maxwell Reed. Seeing them, I felt, for a moment, almost warm and almost at home. I had read *The Earth for Sam* and *The Sea for Sam*, I was about to pull *The Earth for Sam* from the shelf and look at the pictures when Ina, behind me said, “I wanted that.”

“Sorry. I just wanted to look at the pictures.”

“Why,” she said in a very dull voice, “can’t you read?”

“I can read. I’ve already read this one.”

“What’s it about?”

“Is this a test?”

“Yeah. What’s it about?”

“Well, It’s about when the earth was hot. It’s about how the earth was formed: mountains, rivers, volcanoes, glaciers and glaciation.” I was rather proud of glaciation, so I went on. “ It tells about the different periods, Silurian, Devonian, and Carboniferous, that’s when coal was formed, and it goes on with the Permian, the Jurassic and Triassic, and then it goes on with dinosaurs and human beings. There’s some nice stuff about seaweed and Jellyfish and shells.”

“What’s the picture you were looking at?”

“I wanted to see the ichthyosaurus, here,” and I leafed till I found the full page picture of the massive ichthyosaurus, sword-like bill and rows of sharp pins for teeth, swimming as if he owned the ocean.

“That looks like Mr. Kadish.” This was Arthur, now looking over my shoulder. Ina smiled for the first time. “In case you don’t know, Mr. Kadish is a trustee.” She strung out the word trustee as if it were important and foolish at the same time. “He comes once a month on a Sunday during lunch. He tells everybody, ‘ be sure to brush your teeth.’ And he pinches girls.”

“Why, are they bad?”

Both Ina and Arthur giggled. I felt foolish. I didn’t know why.

“It’s about geology,” I said. Ina took the book from me, and handed me the book she had been carrying.

“Did you like it?”

“Yea. A lot. What’s this?”

“I just finished it.”

“What’s it called?”

“Oliver Twist.”

“What’s it about?”

“Orphans.” She took the book back and stuffed it between the others in the row with the maroon books with the gold writing on the back.

The lunchroom (it was the breakfast and dinner room as well) was very large. There were many rows of tables with benches attached where four or five children could sit on a side. On one of the long sides of the room was the cafeteria-style serving area and behind that was the kitchen. On one of the short sides there was a large bank of windows that looked out over the beach. Ina, it seemed, was always one of the last to enter the lunchroom and she evidently did that in order to sit at a table where the fewest other children sat. Her

preference, it seemed, was to sit with her tray in front of her, all alone, on a bench by herself.

The first few days or maybe weeks I would try to sit somewhere with both Karl and Arthur, but then I copied Ina and waited almost to the end of mealtime to see where she sat and then I would sit near her at the same table. I might have tried to start a conversation with her, asking about a book or a problem in a subject from class but she never answered me, never even looked up from her meal. Arthur found my sitting at a table with Ina peculiar. It might have been on a sunny day in late February or early March. We were allowed out on the beach if we were nicely bundled up and had a scarf around our neck. Arthur and I were looking for shells.

“Why do you always sit with Ina?”

“Huh?”

“With Ina, at her table, all alone, and she never talks.”

“I don’t know.”

“She hits.”

“What?”

“She hits. At one of the movies one of the older boys tried to kiss her and she hit him with her fist on the nose so that his nose bled.”

“That’s funny.”

“He had nose bleed all over him. When we were six, I think, one of the families that looked at me adopted Ina, but she came back after a couple of months.”

“So?”

The conversation stopped. Arthur had dug something up with his hands, held it in front of him and dusted some sand off the object, then he yelled, “a whelk. A whelk,” and ran back to our orphan home.

I continued to sit at Ina’s table. After a week or two of this, never speaking, she called across the table,

“Can’t you sit somewhere else?”

“It’s a free country.”

“Can’t you sit somewhere else in this free country?”

“What are you going to do, hit me if I don’t move?” I couldn’t tell whether the twinge in her lips was anger or the beginnings of a smile.

“Yes.” It was the start of a smile that was quickly broken off.

“You can’t hit me, I’m a bleeder. When I start to bleed I keep on bleeding, and it doesn’t stop. My grandfather was a bleeder, and my father was a bleeder.”

“Till all the blood is gone?”

“Probably.”

“You related to the British royal family, or was it the Russian?”

“You don’t have to be sarcastic.”

How come you’re still around? You must have been scratched sometimes. Or at the dentist. People bleed at the dentists.” I remembered a line from one of my favorite radio programs, *Can You Top This*, “We didn’t have a dentist, we were too poor.”

“That’s why you’re here? You were too poor?”

“Yes. Why are you here.?”

“I’m an orphan, and you’re a hemophiliac. I don’t want to talk to you anymore.” We didn’t talk any more, but a few days later in the hall, it was afternoon, I was doing homework when Ina brought over a set of Chinese checkers. I stopped homework and without a word passing between us we played Chinese checkers.

#

I was purposely slow leaving Mr. Teller’s room and when his attention was elsewhere, I fingered his folded newspaper just to get a peek at a headline. This day, at just a touch, the paper unfolded and the headline read “GREAT BATTLE OF THE JAVA SEA.” The first few paragraphs told of our Dutch, English, and American navies sinking great quantities of Japanese ships. This was heart-pumping wonderful, maybe our first victory after the scores of soul-eroding defeats my side had suffered: France and Poland, the London Blitz and all the burning churches, Pearl Harbor, emigration.

“Something in there interests you?”

Mr. Teller loomed over me. I ran toward the door.

“Come back here, you *vantz*.” The voice was loud. It made me stop. I looked back.

“Now!” I hesitated. I wanted to run.

“Would you please come here.” The voice now seemed less harsh. I held onto the door jamb with one hand.

“Please, just for a second. I’d like to talk to you.” The voice was now gentle, even kind. Very, very slowly, I returned to the room. I kept a desk between myself and Mr. Teller.

“It’s OK. It’s OK. I’m just curious. What’s with you and this newspaper? I’ve been watching you nose all around it. Is there something in the ads you want?”

“It doesn’t have ads.”

“That’s right. Not yet, *PM* doesn’t have ads yet. So what is it?”

“The news.”

“The news? What about the news?”

“I need to know the news.”

“You need to know the news. Why?”

Suddenly, I didn't know why I needed to know. I clamped my lips together. Tears began to form in the corners of my eyes. I bit down on my lips.

“You're one of the refugee kids?” I nodded. Mr. Teller put a hand on my shoulder.

“He's never coming here. Hitler.” He smiled, “You don't have to worry about that, the Russians won't let him.”

“I saw. *Smolensk*.”

“You saw *Smolensk*?” He almost laughed. “Where'd you see *Smolensk*?”

“Somebody left a paper here. A visitor. In the pot with the palm. Last Sunday. I saw about *Smolensk*.”

“So, what do you think?”

“Maybe...”

“Maybe what?”

“Things can get better.”

“Things can get better? We're getting our *kishkes* kicked in all over the world, and things are getting better?” I ran around the desk to where the paper lay and flipped it open so the headline was revealed. “Look, the Java Sea. And *Smolensk*.” Mr. Teller was quiet for a long time. I just stood there. After a while he said, “You know, if you want, you can have the paper. Take it any time. By the time I get to class I've read it. So you can just take it. OK? Only thing, when you're finished with it you have to throw it in the trash. You may not leave my *PM* in the pot with the palm. OK?” And he walked out the classroom door. I stood, looking in wonder, at the headline about the Java Sea.

“Take the damn paper already.” Mr. Teller stuck his head back into the room. “You have to read the whole paper every day. Cover to cover. There will be a test on it.” But Mr. Teller was just joking, there never was a test. Except that sometimes he would say, “make sure that you read this or that.” He'd often say, “read the letters.” So many letters so often were about the difficulties “Negroes” faced in America and I thought of all those friends at PS 46. But his most insistant “make sure,” was the time when he said, with a very sad face, “Tom Mooney died.” And then, in a loud voice, “make sure you read the damn obituary.” I had to look up obituary. Tom Mooney had died. Tom Mooney was a Socialist, like Mom. Tom Mooney was for working people. He organized unions in San Francisco. He was accused of setting a bomb that killed six people but it was a frame up. He never did it, and everybody knew it. They protested. That was why his death sentence was commuted to life in prison, and he was in prison for twenty-two years. Reading that obituary I learned names that stuck with me; most of them three-name people. There was Eugene Victor Debbs, William Jennings Bryan, H.L. Menken, William Allanson White, George Bernard Shaw. (But I already knew about Shaw because my

mother thought he was a great playwright which my father pooh-poohed, saying, “Of course, Goethe and Schiller are better. Shaw is too advanced. Like Ibsen,” and that I shouldn’t read him till I was much older and could really understand him.) I learned that Franklin Roosevelt had refused to intervene on Mooney’s part. I was very much troubled by the idea that such an injustice took place in my new America. I read *PM*’s labor column all the time.

I looked for the headlines every day, for the war, and I read the stories, but there also was Barnaby. Barnaby was a comic strip about a little boy who had parents, Mr. and Mrs. Baxter, John and Ellen, and an imaginary godfather, Mr. O’Malley who said, “Cushlamochree.” He had a magic cigar for a wand. Mr. O’Malley looked a little bit like mayor LaGuardia with wings coming out of his shoulders. There was a talking dog and a friend, Jane. I think what drew me to Barnaby was the everydayness of the magic, of making the impossible a matter of course, of the unreal real that had something of the ichthyosaurus, the Jurassic, of glaciation and of making the needed double play at the absolutely right time in John R. Tunis’ books. It was playful and funny; dogs talked. There was the mushroom McSnoyd who came from the Bronx, and O’Malley who had to look up his Handy Pocket Guide before he could do a bit of magic. But maybe there was something else; there was Mr. and Mrs. Baxter. To me they seemed far more magic than Mr. O’Malley. The way Mr. Baxter sat so easily in his easy chair, a pipe in his mouth, and the day’s paper in front of him talking so easily to his wife, who sat across from him in another easy chair with a book in her lap, her face relaxed and her eyes large, and who answered her husband so easily, that was true magic. And Mr. Baxter always wore a jacket and tie. And they lived in a house with a yard and a front lawn. Nothing ever concerned them except, perhaps, that their child knew something, saw something that they did not. Mildly, gently, while looking at their paper or their book, they might concoct ways for their boy to forget Pixies, but they had no idea of what really went on in Barnaby’s head.

Dr. Seuss was in *PM*, not that we knew him by that name. That was to come much later; then, I thought of him as “Quick Henry the Flit.” “Quick Henry the Flit” was a slogan plastered on billboards everywhere but I encountered it mostly on subway advertising. Funny ugly mosquitoes were eradicated by flying Henry and a funny squirt gun. Now drawings, cartoons, very similar in style to Henry appeared in *PM*. Hitler was a leering flying dragon, costumed as from a weird Wagner opera, dropping bombs and laying waste English churches. Churchill was the knight in a Spitfire about to lance him. Mussolini was a power who could invade Egypt, but in reality he was a mere janitor trying to dust off the pyramids. McArthur was a hero wiping out Japanese sharks in a shooting gallery. No defeat was so serious that we would not ultimately triumph over it. That was the message. It drew some of the terror out of the terrorists.

Around that time there was the wonderful British raid on the French port of St. Nazaire. U Boats that

were sinking our ships all along the American coastline were stationed in St. Nazaire. The report said that a destroyer had rammed a dock gate. I didn't know what a dock gate was, but I felt the magnificent courage of a tiny ship and felt the physical force of the crash in my bones. The harbor was blocked up so U-Boats had difficulty coming out. British Commandoes took part in the raid and I told Arthur and Ina that the second front was not far away. Too, we were beginning to hear about the great toll that U-Boats were taking on coastal shipping. We had to make sure that windows were covered at night so no light might spill out. If it did, the light would make it easy for the Nazi sharks to sink our ships. Block wardens were appointed, and just about every night one could hear somebody yell, "Hey, up there, turn it off." It was also the time, but I did not tell Arthur or Ina, that the Philippines had surrendered and that all that was left was the fortress of Corregidor.

That was the time, as well, when the home showed a movie in the large entrance hall. The lady who was the head of the home stood in front of us, in front of all the kid filled chairs that had been set up in front of her, and told us that we should be very thankful to Mr. Kadish, who was a trustee and who sent us these films every month from his office where he worked on Lexington Avenue. I sat at the end of one row, near the back, next to Arthur. This was going to be a wonderful film, she said, in color, of the great American novel, by the great American novelist, Mark Twain. It was called "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer," and we should enjoy it and be grateful to Mr. Kadish. And then the lights went out and a stream of light shot out from in back of us, a stream that was thin at first and then grew larger as it met the screen. The screen showed numbers which counted down from ten, and with each number there was a loud pop of noise. Just after the number ten there was Ina, standing next to me. "Move over. I want to sit." I nudged Arthur, Arthur nudged someone else and after a series of nudges there was Ina sitting next to me. I was very aware that Ina had punched someone in the nose while watching a movie.

I don't think I had ever seen anything so wonderful, not even Maureen O'Sullivan swimming in the water. The film was in color, it took place in the country, not in the city, and that it was set a hundred years earlier didn't matter. Indian Joe was a Nazi and Muff Potter was my Opa. I had to marvel at that air of ease and easy indifference that Tom shared with the Baxters, and with which Tom got the others to paint that fence: that was American, that was beautiful. Could I ever own that air? Tom was heroic, he spoke out, he spoke the truth and saved Muff from sure death. He saved Opa. Was ever a knight battling a dragon more heroic, more honorable? And the reward? The praise of the town, the acclaim of the universe, and a little blond girl. But there was still more: a quest and submission to even greater challenges: there was the display of even more courage, there was the cave.

The second Tom and Becky entered the cave; both my hands gripped the edges of my chair. Bats were awakened from their sleep on the cave ceiling; bats swooped like solid pieces of a black cloud, and I heard Ina

drawing a long breath. There were more long breaths when the cave-ins began. When Becky cried for her mother there was a loud scream from Ina. There were words in that scream which I did not understand and everybody turned around and looked at her. Ina reached for my hand on the chair and held it, and softly said, "I'm sorry. Sorry." Bravely, I whispered to her, "It's only a movie." There was a brief dark look toward me and she took her hand away.

I read that the Battle of the Java Sea had not really been a victory. The news came out bit by bit. British cruisers, Dutch battle ships, American destroyers, all were sunk. There had been immense losses of men and ships that led to Japanese victories, first in Java, and then in the whole Dutch East Indies. But then there was the glorious raid on Japan. In the middle of April, Jimmy Doolittle took off from the carrier Hornet with his medium bombers, twin-engined B-25's, the ones with the glass noses, and the bubble gun turret on top. They bombed Tokyo, and other places in Japan. Mr. Teller began the morning by reading the whole story to us. "Hess," he called out "you ought to get a scissors and cut this story out. Save it for your kids and grandkids. This is history. There are pictures."

Sundays, many of the children would wait inside near the entrance to the Home, though some would lounge out on the boardwalk, hanging over the railing along the beach, looking out into the distance, toward the subway station from which a relative might come. Sometimes Mom and even Oma would come out to visit on a Sunday. Karl and I watched for them. When the visitors came near to us Karl would run toward them, but I made a point of not running. I tried to look beyond them, trying to look for someone else, though he never came. When Karl asked why Pop never came, I would tell him, "He probably has to work on Sundays. He gets overtime on Sundays", but I didn't believe myself. Though the entrance hall and the dining room were set up to accommodate the Sunday visitors, if the weather was the least bit appropriate, Mom always insisted on walking out onto the beach. There we would sit down on the sand and Mom would begin, "Isn't this wonderful. Right on the ocean. The air so clean. The waves. The food here is good, I think," and then she would open the bag that hung at her side, place a large towel on the sand and unroll a few packages of food from the wax paper. It was mostly cake, *Rührkuchen*, a pound cake. From Oma we would each get a bar of Hershey's chocolate, accompanied by the plaint, "The chocolate in this country is not so very good. It was much better over there."

As we ate, Ina would circle our group from a good distance away. Sometimes she would hunker down and watch us. Mom noticed. "Who is that? Do you know her? Is it somebody from the home? Poor child, has she nobody to visit her today? Why don't you invite her to come and sit with us." Mom waved her arms toward Ina and called out, "Come. Sit with us." But Ina quickly jumped up and ran off down the beach.

At the end of our picnic Mom would take off her shoes and socks, hike up her skirt and walk out into the water to where the surf just hissed and colored the sand a darker tan. When she returned from her water-walk

she would say, "I could tell you to come in too. The feeling is so nice, but I know you wouldn't. I'm just glad you ate the cake. You are such a thick-head. Let's go back." Walking back Karl had Mom's hand. He looked up at her and said, "That's a home over there, but none of the kids who live there have a home." We continued walking and when we were almost at the entrance to the home Mom gave a big hug first to Karl and then to me. She said, "Just wait. You are going to have a surprise."

Over the next several weeks we waited for the surprise, but no surprise came. At each visit we asked about the surprise and all Mom would say was, Maybe I shouldn't have said anything. Pop said I shouldn't have said anything, but anyway, not yet." Meanwhile Corregidor fell.

I mentioned to Ina that our mother had spoken of a surprise.

"You're going to go home soon," she said and from that time on Ina seemed to disappear. She disappeared quickly after class, and there were no more checker games. Now, for several weeks, Pop came along on Sunday visits. He had on his smiling face, not the serious one, and I was glad for the smiling face. It was I who put on the serious one. I was happy that he visited, but not totally. Where had he been all those other weeks? We all walked out onto the beach, Mom waded. I sat and watched her. Pop and Karl went looking for shells.

There had been a great sea battle in the Pacific, the battle of Midway. It was early June, not long after my birthday. For six months after Pearl Harbor the Japanese had had a string of terrible victories. All of Asia, all of the Pacific seemed to be theirs. Now, at Midway, the Japanese advance was stopped. Now, it was Sunday and the great victory spilled happy black letters over the newspapers' front. It was the Sunday that Mom came to take us home. Karl and I stood outside the office where Mom was filling out papers. I looked around the large entrance hall. There were the usual waves of murmur and silence, of kids talking, of chairs scraping, of kids looking into books and writing, studying, of kids playing board games. Arthur stood nearby and waved to us. I saw Ina near the hall entrance. I walked over and as I did she ran. When I reached the doorway she was at the ramp down toward the beach. She ran, looking backward, she stumbled and then ran out farther onto the sand.

The usual course from 162nd Street where the A train stopped would have been to walk a few blocks south on Amsterdam Avenue and then down 159th Street to our house at number 542. But this time Mom insisted we walk down 160th Street. I was puzzled. Karl said, "Mom, we're going the wrong way." She smiled, "Now comes the surprise, we have a new apartment."

Walking down 160th Street we crossed Broadway, then Fort Washington Avenue; as we approached the middle of the block we could see a slice of the Hudson River. 652 West 160th Street was on the south side in the middle of the block. Apartment 2C was one flight up, and Dad was waiting for us when we entered. There was

a mirrored coat rack in the tiny foyer, but I was not able to take off my coat because Pop drew me into a living room that astounded me with its shine. There was shiny new linoleum on the floor; there was a shiny dining-room table at the other end of the room; there was a couch with a flowered covering along one wall, and across from it, a credenza of a dark shining wood with what seemed to be neatly carved little doors. There was a gold framed picture above it, a watercolor of a street in Ruppichteroth. I stared at the credenza and slowly ran a hand over its shiny surface. Dad leaned against the credenza, looked down at me: "Well, how do you like it?" There was a small smile on his face, an intense eagerness in his face, and at the same time an intense shyness in his Spencer Tracy face. I understood from his look and from the softness in his voice that it was terribly important to him that I be pleased. I understood in some large measure that all the shine was there in order that I be pleased, that it was there to make up for the months that we had been sent away. By the look on his face I knew that he felt terrible that we had to be sent away and at the same time he wanted me to feel proud of him because there was a sense of immense accomplishment in the shine, that in the shine there were long hours of labor and pain, both his and Mom's. There was a pleading in his face; he wanted to be forgiven, excused. What I might say seemed to matter intensely.

I was glad that we had accomplished the crossing of Broadway, even awed by all the newness, awed by all the shine, but I felt totally apart, separated, unconnected to it. Angry, I wanted to destroy it, rip it apart, because it had come at the price of being put away, sent away, feeling unprotected by my parents and especially by my father who had sat there, in his green pajamas, saying nothing, as we were taken to the orphan asylum. I felt terribly separated from my father, the distance was immense. Never before had I this very real feeling that we were two different, distinct people. And where before my "I" seemed to extend everywhere my interest, my caring led me, I now extended no farther than my skin. What he wanted so badly from me I could not give him. What he wanted me to acknowledge I could not, because just then I hated him. So I looked Dad in the face, turned away, and said nothing. I walked around the room touching things. There were framed pictures, photos of Dad's parents on the credenza, a crocheted table cloth on the new table.

"This is a wonderful country," said Dad smiling, "Nothing down and only a few dollars a month and you can get anything anybody would want." Time payments. Now I had to worry whether these two people with their painter's and housemaid's wages would be able to make the monthly payments. Weren't we sent away because there was an inability to manage? I walked around the apartment. There was a kitchen where we could eat, there was a small bedroom just as one came in the door. "That's Oma's room." I opened the door and it smelled of the camphor, liniment, face powder and lilacs, a smell it would never relinquish in all our time at number 652. There was another bedroom to the right of the living room. A crib, in which brother Frank was sleeping, sat to the left of the door, and across from the crib twin beds that had been pushed together, then a

closet, an armoire, and a chest of drawers.

”That’s all for you.”

“For me?”

“*Ja*, and for Peter and Karl. These,” pointing to the chest and armoire, “are not new. We got them second hand on Amsterdam Avenue, very good and real cheap.”

Our Sunday evening meal was of cold cuts and rye bread and tea. Cold cuts were always one of my favorite meals. The meal was delicious and tasted better than any tomato soup and sandwiches of white bread with thin smears of cream cheese or peanut butter.

“So, how is it? We got it special for you,” said my mother. I chewed, and when I had finished chewing my teeth were clenched and my lips were tight.

“Nothing? Nothing to say? We got it special for you.” I remained silent, and I remained silent through the rest of the meal. And I was silent, at home, for a long time after that.

Chapter 41

Every day, either at mid-day or in the evening, when we returned to the barracks, there was a race to the one radio we were allowed. Whoever reached the radio first turned the dial to his favorite station. In this part of mountainous eastern Pennsylvania our radio drew in a lot of stations and all of them played music that I detested, and knew as hillbilly. The one other station was WQXR from New York; the station that played classical music, the music that I was used to from home; the music that announced a life of reason, regularity, and culture. I knew that the radio could play QXR because in the first week of our training I was a barrack guard. (Each day, one member of the platoon remained behind from the day’s training to guard the barracks.) I participated in the daily race for the radio dial, but I never won. I liked jazz, there was a lot of pop that was tolerable, but I hated hillbilly. As the days went on the race became nasty. There were pushes from the side, a group of boys would simply stand in front of me and not move; I was frequently tripped, but I persisted. It seemed as if all my anger and hostility at the regimentation, the constant drill, the foul base plate, the repeated warnings about death became focused upon changing that dial, just once. The last time I was pushed in the side I grabbed the ridge-runner nearest me. We wrestled on the ground. “Fight, fight,” was the scream from several dozen. We rolled on the ground, no one landed a punch. I was bitten on the shoulder, and my head butt on his brow drew blood. At the sight of blood, Zach Marantis and several others pulled us apart.

Later, I think it was when we were both on KP, scrubbing pots, John Harmon said to me, “You’re going to get yourself killed.”

“That’s what everybody around here says all the time.”

“Long before you get to Korea.”

“How? Killed.”

“You don’t know that they’ve got guns and live ammo in this place?”

“You’re serious?”

“Yes, I’m serious. You wouldn’t be the first Jew these Yahoos got.”

“There were others?”

“Don’t be funny. I’ve been dealing with these people all my life, they’re even angrier than you are.

They’re the same as blacks, except they don’t know it. They’re as angry as black folk. One thing, maybe the only thing that keeps them in place is when they’re told blacks are lower than them. They hear that so they can be screwed with the prices they get on their farms, screwed out of wages in mines and factories, shot or beat up if they want unions, same as black folk. If you explain things right, they are the salt of the earth.”

“Salt?”

“Don’t be funny. My folks were organizers with the Wobblies; you know about them?” I nodded, “majored in American History. Black and white unite and fight.”

“No,” John laughed “that came later, but you got to know when not to fight. You got to know when to relax, and you really have got to relax. Think what you want, but keep it to yourself. If it gets too much, and sometimes I know it gets too much, talk to me.” John smiled, looked around, “but don’t let them hear you say that.”

“What?”

“You know. Black and white.”

We were riding in a car. It was the end of our first month and our first weekend pass. Morty Zucker, somehow, had a car garaged in a town near the camp, and for a share of the gas money he took Zach, John and me back to New York City. Driving away from camp felt very liberating. “Ta, ta, ta, taaahhh.” I slapped my belly to the rhythm of the opening notes of Beethoven’s fifth. “Liberation. V for Victory.” I slapped victory on the seat, window, John’s head. “I’m going to every concert I can afford, I’m going to stay home and run QXR loud. I’m going to wash that corn-pone music, that corn-pone twang out of my ears. Out of my brain.”

“I once got beat up in college, in a bar, in Philadelphia, because I said, maybe a bit loud for somebody my size and considering where I was, that one of the sources of country music was in the black people’s blues,” said John.

“Am I offending you?”

“No, you’re a snob. A white snob.”

“Why white?”

“In distinction from a black snob, which is what I am and have got to get over.”

“I don’t understand that, but OK.”

“What you have to understand is that Tex Ritter and Charley Pride, all those great Kentucky fiddlers are great. Maybe not Shakespeare...”

“Beethoven.”

“Maybe not Shakespeare, but their language and even those tunes, mostly, are from that time.

Seventeenth, eighteenth century people living in those hills. You know, ‘Black, black, black, is the color of my true love’s hair?’ Mix that with what they heard from the colored churches, the shivarees, and you can get ‘Your Cheating Heart,’ or any one of a hundred others. Its poor people’s music. It’s great.”

“Oh, come on...”

“Zucker, turn on the radio.”

For the rest of the two hour trip John made us, me, listen to country music. I listened because I liked John. I still didn’t care for it then, but John started something for me. And I began to relax. John was right. To have kept the contest up was stupid. There would have come some night on a bivouac when some Sterno can would have been kicked over and I would really get hurt. I decided that John kept me from a big injury. But I had already decided to like the “ridge runners.” It took me a while but I became impressed by the very long time they took to clean their rifles, sitting on their bunks for long hours, swabbing the barrel; cleaning it. I became impressed by the long time they took cleaning and shining their boots; spit shining their shoes till they were bright cordovan mirrors. The boy next to me was from somewhere beyond Beckley; he and John had struck up a friendship. I told him that he really had a great shine on the boot. He looked away and then at me. His lips didn’t move but I knew that silently he was saying, ‘asshole.’ Then he said, and there might have been contempt in his voice, “You don’t get bored, do you?” I knew I deserved it, and from then on I began to spit shine my boots for long hours. I liked doing it.

Chapter 53 – A GI in Germany

Mom, till recently had been writing about affairs at home; Oma was fine, Pappa was fine, Peter was fine, more on Frankie and his preparations for Bar Mitzva. Eisenhower she didn’t like. She felt sad for Adlai Stevenson who was getting a divorce, so *The Daily News* said, though she didn’t like the Daily News or the Mirror. And please to get some news from Ruppichteroth would be nice just to know how things are. But now every letter was urgent – I must, had to, it was absolutely necessary for me to go Ruppichteroth. If I didn’t want to go for myself, I had to do it for the family, for Papa. I well understood that the invocation of Papa was to really make me feel guilty.

“You have to go to Rupp. and see Bendix, and see if what he does is all-right. He wants to sell one of the pastures by the highway, by the Bröl brook. See what the property in the area is going for. Compare. See if what he does is all-right. I don’t think we should sell anything, but I am discussing it with Papa. Mr. Bendix would very much like one of the new wash-and-wear shirts. You have to talk to Walter Schenk. He is a friend and knows about such things.”

“He is a friend?” Why is he still a friend? Why is any German still your friend? Why do you want to hold on to even an inch of German soil? Sell it! Sell it! Have you no memory?” But I didn’t write any of that. Often, there was an addendum to one of these urgings: “Papa thinks you should see August Willach. He was a friend of Papa’s from olden times. He would know about land prices and things.” August Willach – he was one of the brothers who owned the factory that made machinery for Hitler’s war machine. They used slave laborers; hid their dead bodies under the floors of his factory sheds. Don’t you remember what Leo Baer told us: that when he got to Ruppichterorth, with the Army in ’45, Willach wanted to bribe him so that he wouldn’t inform on him and his past? But I didn’t write any of that any of that either. Late one afternoon I was still in the JAG office, lost in making translations of some documents. I thought that I was the only one left when I felt Colonel Rood standing in front of me, he said, “get in my office. I got.

Chapter 53

“Why aren’t you writing home? I got a note from the AG’s office that there had been an inquiry from the Red Cross to the fact that you haven’t been answering any of your mother’s letters, and if there was something, anything, wrong. Your mother was worried and she got in touch with the Red Cross. What’s this all about? Nice kids write their parents.” I didn’t want to answer; didn’t know what to answer. “Don’t you like your parents? Are you mad at them?” I turned away. In the window I saw the billowing electric wires.

“Here. Write.” He handed me a sheet. “Write.” Now I knew why the Colonel had wanted me to carry his packages. He didn’t want to do this in the office with others nearby. I wrote.

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“Have you been writing home?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Since the Red Cross inquired, how often.”

“Not too often.”

“What’s not too often.”

“Once.”

“What the hell’s the matter with you? No, don’t tell me.” I didn’t tell him. I just stood there. “What the hell’s the matter.”

“I don’t know. It feels peculiar being here.”

“Where? On the base.? Here?”

“No. I don’t know. Germany.”

“Germany. You’d rather be in Korea? When did you leave Germany, ’39 - right?”

“1939”

“And you were what?”

“I was eight.”

“And you remember everything.”

“Yes sir.” I may have smiled slightly. He had me sit down in a chair across from his desk.

“You remember November 1938 - the ninth.”

“How....?”

“In April, April ’45, I had to brief Ike on Concentration Camps. He was going to a place called *Ohrdruf*, with journalists; lots of cameras. It was part of a place called Buchenwald. You heard of *Ohrdruf*?”

I had to shake my head.

“*Buchenwald*?”

I nodded, and I felt the knot in my stomach.

He was silent for a long time; a hand over his mouth. “I, we, all of us, received an education at *Ohrdruf* and then *Buchenwald*; that’s how I know about November tenth. Did they take your father?”

I nodded.

“Where?”

“*Dachau*.”

“Jesus,” He was angry. “*Dachau*. Did you ever go there, where they sent your Dad? To see? Did he get out?”

I nodded. “After two months... he got out”

“You know, we go to Munich a lot; coming and going we pass the damn Dachau station, and you’ve never gone there to see? Never even been interested?”

“When I see the Dachau station sign I feel peculiar. I don’t want to see it, but I see it. I get scared.”

Colonel Rood’s anger left. The folds on his face were quiet. He was quiet. I was quiet.

“You get scared? It’s only a sign.”

I didn’t know the words with which to answer him, but then, “I don’t want to see it. It makes me feel helpless.” I quickly added, “it makes me angry.”

He was quiet for a while, and then, quietly, “no. It’s not only a sign.” After another quiet moment, elbows on the desk and his hands knotted under his chin, “are you depressed?”

“What?”

“Depressed, don’t know if you remember, but in that assault case in Grafenwohr, one of the psychiatrists talked about that woman’s depression as anger turned inward. I’m no shrink, but you mentioned anger.”

“No. I don’t think so.”

“You haven’t accumulated any leave time.” I shook my head.

“Been out on passes? Three day passes, seen anything of beautiful Dutchland.”

“Just Göppingen. A few times to Stuttgart. To concerts.

“We’ve been to trial...”

“Yes sir, and Augsburg, Munich, the various *Kasernes*....

“And Munich, we were just in Munich. That rape case. Munich interesting to you?

“Yes, sir...”

“Hitler’s beer hall...you went there?

“No sir. *Haus Der Kunst*. They had an exhibition of what the Nazis called degenerate art. Kandinsky, Picasso, Braque...”

“Yes, Bullok and I went there. Good to know there’s at least one man on this base interested in culture rather than...What do you make of Klee. Never mind....

“...and couple of weeks ago a bunch of us went to the Nürbergring for the car races.

“Nurbergring? Where is that?”

“Not far from Cologne, sir.”

“Not far from Cologne. That’s what you told me where your home town is. Not far from Cologne. Do you want to see the old place?” “No sir.” Then I blurted, “but my parents want me to go there and see it.”

“The parents you never write to?”

“I guess.”

“You guess. Well, I’ll tell you, from now on I want to see a letter to your folks once a week. You can just come here and wave the envelope at me, but I want to see the envelope. And I’ll see to it that next week...are you due for a Three Day Pass...” I shook my head. Well I’ll see you get one. You’ll use it to see your home town. You obviously have a mother that’s concerned about you. Damn, I want to see that you meet that concern.... otherwise think about living in a tent in *Grafenwohr* for the rest of your duty here.”

Grafenwohr is a muddy, mountainous, desert in Bavaria; south-east of Bayreuth, and north-east Nurnberg, not far from the Czech border, where Army units were regularly sent on maneuvers. Our Headquarters Company had been sent there several weeks earlier. There, our JAG unit lived, all of us in one tent, and where we played Hearts every day, all day, and where, all around us, tanks and artillery honed their skills.

###

A few weeks later, Colonel Rood stopped by my desk and dropped a piece of paper on it. I looked up at him, and there was an evil smile on his face. He nodded and pointed at the paper: it was my three day pass. Here was my Colonel who was no psychiatrist, who briefed Ike regarding concentration camps, acting, if not a psychiatrist, then a therapist.

###

I was on a train. It was as if I had just landed in Germany; why were these towns, cities, railroads, still part of the planet. There were no ruins. I wanted ruins. I wanted to see women in aprons stacking bricks in front of bombed-out apartment buildings. I wanted to see old men in jackets pushing wheelbarrows full of rubble, wanted to see children with push brooms pushing dust from the sidewalks in front of bombed-out buildings. I wanted to see everybody coughing hard as the sweepings swirled all about covering them all as though the granite dust were a fog. Most of all I wanted to be in the uniform of the US Army, Class A's sharply pressed and bronze buttons shining, with people looking at me and stepping quickly out of the way for me as I walked past the blocks of neatly stacked bricks in the shattered bomb-excavated hollows of the bombed out houses. The only good German is a dead German. These are the things I wanted to say to Colonel Rood, but I couldn't. I wanted to say to the Colonel that I hated Germany and Germans, and at the same time I was not allowed to acknowledge to myself that I hated. Angry was as far as I could go. I needed, with him, with myself, to cover my mouth and not talk. Hate was not allowed. Most of all, helpless; helpless was not allowed. Why did I use that word? Why not allowed?

###

The ticket taker with the anonymous face, on the train to Bonn, the one with the dark-blue uniform, and the braided cords about his cap, who knocked on the door of the second class compartment, held out his hand, bowing slightly, smiling, suddenly straightened up, smile gone, and recognized my uniform, and as if it hurt him to say it in English said, "ticket please." I gave him my ticket, and answered, in German, "*wie lang nach Köln?*" How long to Cologne? His eyes grew large, and his bland face reddened. I wanted to add, "*Ich bin Jude,*" I'm a Jew, but I didn't and accounted myself a coward. He punched my ticket and shoved it back at me without answering. The train went on; the phone and telegraph wires bellied rhythmically downward; the early summer sun shone, and women were still out in their back-yards, in those many yards near train stations, tending their little vegetable gardens as though nothing had ever happened. I slept and when I woke the train was running along the Rhine. It had been my Rhine, but wasn't anymore. The castles of the robber barons, the curving blue river, the hillsides green with grapes weren't mine anymore. I had them once, but then I lost them. I began to tear. I didn't know then, that I was mourning. Heine and Oma's song threaded through my brain. *I once had a lovely fatherland. There the oaks grew tall, the violets beckoned gently. It was a dream.*

I had to change in Bonn; no more the little narrow-gauge railroad to Ruppichteroth but now a bus, yellow, that through a narrow road, wove through green valleys. Why no narrow gauge railroad on which we came, on which we left, and where I knew that with only a coin in my teeth I might know how distant the iron engine was? Instead, the route insisted on telling me that I was back in Massachusetts, in the Berkshires: Great Barrington, Stockbridge, Lennox. This green was too was beautiful, and I didn't want it to be beautiful. The bus went on, through large *Siegburg* where I was born, and where there were cars on the street, through little *Henneff* where once we changed steaming trains, and where there were cars on the street, and through Schönberg, where once I met those joyous teen-agers whom Mom embraced and cheered and who were going to make *Aliyah*, to Palestine. But still, I was afraid.

The bus stopped in front of the Hotel, and I stepped out onto the *Choséé*, the macadamized highway over which my father and I had driven cattle. The bus drove off, and, astonished, I turned in a circle. I seemed to see everything in black and white. Black and white, just as in the postcard, where my great-grandfather, cane in hand stands exactly in the middle of the street on which I had just placed my foot; black and white, like the postcard, like all those pictures, those very small ones, from the album that Mom might draw from the bookshelf on 160th Street, and open a page at which she looked so very intently, put a hand to her mouth and then nod her head. Now, there, across the street, was the Opa Nathan's house, there, a little further off, was the road leading up to Wilhelm Strasse: my street. There was the post-office, there was the bank. I turned around but the gas-station in the postcard was gone. The black and white turned to color when I noticed red: a blinking traffic light strung high over the middle of the *Choséé*, where there had never been a traffic light before. Now I saw that the Nathan's house was gone, the largest Jewish owned house in Ruppichteroth was gone. It was a parking lot, and further on, long stretches of stretched out buildings, factory buildings with red canted roofs, and somewhere a sign that read, "Huwil Werke." The Willach factories. They must have expanded greatly during the war.

I began to walk up Wilhelm Strasse, from somewhere someone began to whistle a tune from *Hansel and Gretel*, and suddenly I recognized, to my great astonishment, that the street that I remembered being so very wide, was now a narrow, a very narrow gray track. I stood again on cobble stones, but my spit shined boots would raise no sparks from all these stones. I walked up the street that I remembered as steep, and tree lined, but now there was hardly an incline and the trees were gone. I remembered green hedges that flanked the street; they were gone, replaced by thin wires through which I could look down onto the highway. The Füllenbach house was gone. The marvelous garden surrounding their house, always so full of red tulips, was gone; all that I saw was a dirt brown lot: no more sweaty hugs from Mrs. Füllenbach. And then our house; it didn't loom over me. There were shutters on the windows where no shutters had ever been. The posts of brick still stood at the

corners of garden, and the connected railings still captured the little garden plot fronting the house, but instead of grass and flowers, and lilac bushes there now was dirt. And across the street, the garden where Oma grew her asparagus, and which had been surrounded by wonderful gooseberry bushes, that too was dirt, and the gooseberry bushes were gone.

I walked the flagstones to the front door. The incised glass, over whose frosted wreaths and streaming strangeness I both puzzled and dreamed was gone. The door was all wood. Before I could knock the door opened and there stood Herr Bendix. I had to retreat a step, since his stomach spoke of a great deal of good feeding, but his head was bald, his eyes hooded, and a nose like an eagle; an idealized Roman emperor.

“I saw you coming, you were looking about. Have you eaten? Come in.” It was all in German. I didn’t want to speak German, but I did; it was a melancholy, stumbling German. Where was Oma’s grocery? And across the entrance hall from the grocery the dining room where nobody ever ate? What I wanted was to look in and about MY house, not anyone else’s’. “Are you tired? How was the trip? Would you like to lie down for a while?” When I shook my head and said “Thank You,” I felt eight years old, and I knew that this would never be my house again. What I wanted right then was to pull it down, to create a ruin that no one could use. I was angry and felt helpless. Bendix led me inside, where in the hallway stood his wife and son, in the hallway where Mom and Oma screamed, where Opa screamed, where Pop was taken away, where I had to embrace the milk separator because no-one was there to embrace me and calm my fears. Bendix introduced me to his wife and son. The wife was short, had very white hair, a pink pale face and a sharp chin. The son was probably sixteen years old and wore a tie. “You’ll talk later,” said Bendix, and led me upstairs.

“This is our guest room.” It was not. It was our living room, where we lived, ate, and saw friends. No, used to live. The stove was gone, the window had curtains, and the walls were covered with friendly white and flowery wallpaper. There was a large bed with plump pillows and a feather bed; the bed was surrounded with area rugs. The more steps I took into the room the more I withdrew. I pulled a wash and wear shirt wrapped in its crinkly plastic wrap out of my bag on the bed and handed it to Bendix. I forced a smile, he smiled, and shook his head in admiration, “you Americans.” We had instant coffee in the downstairs kitchen that looked vaguely like Oma’s kitchen. I excused myself, and told them I would like to just walk around. They understood.

I tried walking out of the back door, thinking that I would enter the barn, but there was no barn, I stepped out into mud. I stepped out further, looked back, and the barn indeed was gone, there was a blank half-timbered wall that showed no connection to the place where, in the loft, sunk in hay, I did the reading that spared me the heavy sighs of those I loved best, and that introduced me to imagination and the world. I walked out further, there was the meadow in back of our house, but where the meadow had been, where the apple trees had been, the slopes for sledding, there was no meadow: just more mud.

On returning to the house, Bendix said, “yes. I should have told you what they told me: during the war there were soldiers quartered here, all around here, in tents and other temporary shelters. They tramped everything down, cut down trees for fires. It’s been like this ever since the war; ever since I first came here.” I had no answer; just more anger. I should come inside; more coffee. I begged off, it had been a long day, not much left of it, and I wanted to walk. He would walk with me. I declined and started off. He followed; I stopped and waited for him, and swallowed more anger.

“That’s the Schumacher house.” Bendix was pleased, “you remember?” I didn’t answer. From where I stood I could see past the house that the Schumacher meadow, where we searched for Easter eggs, was not spared: mud. We came to the space in front of the synagogue; the space where, fourteen years earlier I found hatred and humiliation. I was grateful for Bendix’s silence. We came to stand in front of the synagogue. I faced a blank wall.

The synagogue had been sold. The handful of survivors that was the congregation in exile, had agreed that it be sold. Who now lived in that building with the red carpeting, with the balcony from where sweets rained down; the building I loved; the building where my Opa presided? How did these people feel living in a synagogue; my synagogue? Did they have children?

I saw that the three great rectangular windows high over the synagogue door were gone; their spaces were filled in by stone. The two marvelous round windows surrounded by the white stone wreaths, one on each side of the door, were gone; filled in by stone. Something had been taken from me; taken and turned to stone. I wanted to go on and see the rest of the village, but it was getting dark, and it had been a long day.

A black car was standing in front of our house, and someone was trying to extract a heavy object from the rear seat. With a heave he pulled out a large trunk; he swung around and dropped it down next to another trunk-like objects resting on the walk. Bendix ran forward, looked back at me, waved, “Come on, they are here.” Who was here? I walked.

Bendix and two other men were standing next to the car. The one, who had done the heavy lifting was a young man about my age, the other, was quite old. The older came toward me with a sad smile, and when we were quite close, he raised his hand and ran it through my hair, “*Ya Wolfgang, wie lang?*” And he paused, “*So traurig.*” How long has it been? So sad. I didn’t smile and looked at Bendix. “Joseph Lauf, this is Joseph Lauf, a friend of your Opa,” said Bendix, “and this is his grandson, Stephan.” Opa’s friend was taller than I, his eyes were bright, his face was long and smooth; he had a white mustache, and wore suspenders over a blue shirt.

I had no memory of Mr. Joseph Lauf. What right had he to touch my hair? “I’m not Wolfgang any more, my name is Walter.” He smiled his sad smile and nodded, “These things” and he pointed to the two

trunks, “are from your Opa Moses. He left them with us when,” he stumbled over some words, “when all that,” and he waved a hand in front of him, as though trying to assemble some words, “when all that happened. Your Opa, was a very good man; a good friend. We kept them,” and again he pointed to the trunks, “in the barn, where nobody could find them. Your Opa thought that when it was all over we might get them to your family.”

I had to shut up. I hated them all, but here was somebody....who was this somebody?

Bendix wanted us to go inside, “maybe get something to drink; we can talk then.” Opa’s friend and his grand-son took the trunks, they were heavy, and brought them inside. I wanted to examine the trunks, but Mrs. Bendix gathered us in the kitchen where she had made more instant coffee for us. Mr. Lauf laughed and said that he liked instant better than regular, that’s all he drank now, and that the first he ever tasted came from packages my parents had sent after the war, and did I know about the letter?

“What letter?”

“The letter from your Opa; the letter that we smuggled out of the Work Camp in Much. That we sent to your family in New York.” I hated the packages that we sent to people I hated, but here was somebody who.....what the hell did I know?

“Yes, I know about the letter. It was very brave of you to have done that.”

“Not so brave.” His face became serious. “The letter went from hand to hand to hand; three of us. It was easy to hide. I put it in my bible. If I think I did anything brave it was to always think, to believe, that in the end, after everything, we would lose.” He got up, signaled to his grandson that it was time to go. He turned to me smiling, “You know, Wolfgang, Walter, I don’t think you remember, but once, when you were very little, your Opa and Pappa came to our farm with you. You ran after the chickens, and you were surprised to see our turkey, and I remember you saying over and over again, ‘what’s that; what’s that?’” They left, I watched them getting into their car and drive off. And I wondered. Why did they keep the trunks so very long. Why didn’t they ship them to us? Why did he deprecate what he did? It only made him more courageous? I didn’t want him to be courageous; if he was courageous then...? What the hell did I know?

I knew about trunks. These two were just like the ones Mom and Pop lugged around half of the world: dark brown leather, with two straps at the ends, scuffed all over. The locks were shiny bronze and the keys were strung about Mom’s neck. Those trunks contained everything we still owned; they were our kitchen and bedroom, and as a child I thought them miraculous. Mom pulled out dishes, flatware, wooden spoons, and spatulas; she pulled out towels, bedding, sheets, pillow cases and linen napkins: it as all our wealth and the residue of generations from Germany.

We brought the trunks into the kitchen, and onto the kitchen table. On opening the first one there was a large leather covered box that contained a silver table service. Mrs. Bendix said it was remarkable, and that it

was for twelve. The rest of the trunk contained a beautifully decorated set of dishes, of which Mrs. Bendix said one set was really very old Rosenthal, and the other was Hutchenreuther. The dishes were wrapped in linen and in some very beautiful shawls. The other trunk was mainly linens, but there were also some women's dresses. I wanted to cry, but I couldn't. I skipped the offer of supper from Mrs. Bendix and went to sleep in their guest room that was really my living room where we always had guests.

I didn't sleep well, but I slept long. I pulled on my khakis and headed downstairs where Mrs. Bendix had breakfast for me: a bowl of farina and strawberry syrup. The last time I had that I was eight. Opa had prepared it for me and Karl, we were leaving Germany later that Morning. When Mrs. Bendix put down the bowl of farina, she said, "You know, you can't hate a whole country." I thought I could, but then there was Mr. Lauf, and the hand to hand to hand. Mr. Bendix came in and sat across from me, he smiled, "He put himself in some danger with those trunks. If somebody had found out...I will send those trunks to your family in New York. It's expensive, but some of your rentals, from your property, will cover the cost."

"Is that why....?"

"I don't know. Farmers are a strange people."

I needed to know from Bendix where the Willach family lived and I was told. In the letters from home, there was the frequently repeated injunction that I was to give Pop's old friend his greetings. I would do that in the afternoon, first I wanted to walk the streets of my old village wearing the uniform of the US Army. I wanted an overcast day but the sky was blue and the day was warm. I wanted to walk where once I wanted everybody to see my new shoes, but now I wanted them to see my uniform. What I hadn't seen yesterday now became visible: the Chestnut trees were all gone. My tree was gone. No coal briquets during the war, so they cut down my tree. There, on the corner is, was the Gaertner butcher shop. The large store window, through which one might see Gustav in his bloody apron, was gone: replaced by stone, just like the synagogue. There was no music ringing hammer from the blacksmith's shop. There was no blacksmith shop. I followed the thread that once was my grand street. There did not seem to be many people on the street, but whenever I passed one, man or woman, there was a quick look and a quicker turn away: it was the uniform. I was in front of the Hertzfeld Villa. The stone wall arced its way around the property, the lawn was green, the house still impressive. Was the Nazi Loewenich still its owner? Maybe, but the glass case on that wall was gone. That case, with its cartoons, that tried to tell me for much too long who I was; that case that told me that I was hated, that tried to tell me to hate myself. I continued on, to Tante Lydia's house, but Tante Lydia didn't live there any more. Tante Lydia was dispersed in the smoke rising from the smokestacks of Auschwitz. I went on to the Regensburger bakery, but the bakery had been transformed as had all the other places that I once loved. I went on to Willy's house, but it was no longer there. It had been torn down. The vacant space was all mud.

Later that afternoon I walked to the Willach house; the sky was still blue, and the afternoon still warm. The house was Old Victorian, pillared and balconied. It sat in the middle of much green grass. It was an intimidating house. It was the house of a family that profited from the war, from forced labor. I reached the front door, and before I could ring a young woman in a white apron stood there. She looked me up and down, "Herr August Willach, bitte. Ich bin" and I stopped; I needed to decide who I was. "Wolfgang Hess, my father was a friend of Mr. Willach." My words ended with a question mark. "Can I...," She stepped out from the door and pointed toward the back of the house. There stood an immense gazebo, and a number of men in suits stood on its high deck, all seeming to have champagne glasses in their hands. I got close; there was a flight of stairs reaching up to the deck and I stood at the bottom of the stairs, and started to tremble. "Herr Willach? Herr August Willach? A number of men turned and leaned on the railing that seemed so high above me, all holding champagne glasses. "Yah, Ich bins." He had a large round head, with gray hair on the sides. I tried to smile, he looked offended. "I'm Wolfgang Hess. My father is Oscar Hess, your old friend. He wanted me to give you his greetings." I had an expectation of being invited up on the deck, but Herr August Willach just said, "Ya, OK," turned around, and all those others leaning on the railing turned with him. I just stood at the bottom of the stairs, their backs all turned to me, and I was eight years old again, trembling, while the clods of mud came flying at me.

I walked along the *Chosee*, and came to a field that looked very much like the field where we cut hay. The brook, the Bröl was close by, the woods on its other side was swept by wind. It felt like an invitation. I crossed the brook, stepping carefully on jutting stones, and walked into the wood. The floor was covered by chanterelles, but I heard none of Oma's hallooming; instead I heard her telling me to "let it go; it's not yours anymore. Let it go. Let it go." Hard to let it go, but, I'm trying.

* * *

REFUGEE: A MEMOIR

*And what I shall never in the world return to
And look at, I am to love forever.
Only a stranger will return to my place. But I will set down
All these things once more, as Moses did,*

*After he smashed the first tablets.
Yehuda Amichai*

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Prologue

In August of 1939 I was eight years old, and I and my family were on the North German Lloyd's 30,000 ton steamship *Caribia*. We had left Germany and were now on our way to the country of Ecuador. Three weeks later our ship let down its anchor in the harbor of Guayaquil. The day was steaming, and I remember the odor of cocoa on the dock. The day was September 1st, it was the day the German army began its invasion of Poland; it was the day that World War 2 began.

In the spring of 1940 my family and I arrived in New York City from Ecuador on the Santa Rosa, a sleek Grace Liner with sparkling green and white smoke stacks. That day, then, was glorious; the million windows of downtown Manhattan gleamed and sparkled a greeting as the great ship moved slowly up the Hudson to its mooring. Once moored I leaned over railings, and saw faces down on the dock, faces jumping up and down, excited, waving handkerchiefs, anticipating happy reunions.

Now, it was the spring of 1953, and I was on a ship again, an Army transport, the dull-gray General Buckner, along with a thousand other GI's. The day was gray, but a band played marches as the ship pulled out of its Staten Island dock. The Sousa sounds faded away as the Buckner nosed out into the harbor. The million windows of distant Manhattan were now gray, and without sparkle. I saw them disappear as we rounded Fort Wadsworth and as gray clouds dropped like a curtain over the island's sky-scrapers.

As our ship moved out into the Atlantic I began to feel fear. Not a powerful fear, just the beginning of a small knot in my stomach. Somebody said, "...those lights; that's Cape Cod." The Buckner tended north to make its way along the great circle route; tended back to swallowed anxieties and to angers long denied, tended back to Bremerhaven and Germany.

As I leaned over the ship's railing, what I had neglected or denied for so very long began to assert itself. The knot grew larger. It took me a while, staring over the railing into the foam, to realize that it was not simply a memory of fear that stimulated the knot, but that it now was the real thing; a reassertion of all those fears generated by all those many absences, threats and abandonments that threaded themselves through all those early years. These fears; fears so powerful, fear-makers so powerful, that for all too many years, a substitution had to be found; a way to translate what had been imprinted onto the nerves of a child in order that their living threat might be diminished. I found that substitute, telling myself and all about me that it had all been a wonderful adventure. But now I was on a ship again, I was returning to Germany, the place where all those fears began.



Chapter 1

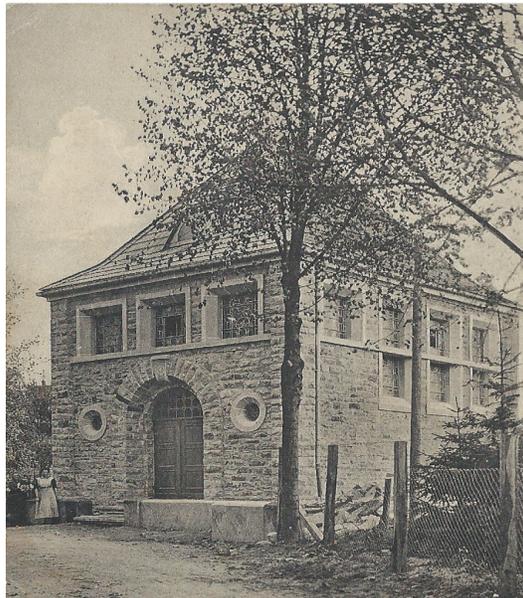
In 1936, shortly after my fifth birthday I was given a new pair of shoes. They were ankle high, hobnailed, black. Instead of eyelets they had little metal hooks around which leather laces were wound. The shoes were shiny, not from polish but from a black greasy covering that I was told would make them water-proof. They were just like my father's: work-day shoes; farming shoes, shoes for the meadow and the cow stall. I walked out of our house, out through the flower garden that looked like a bright apron in front of our house, out onto the cobbled street and with sharp downward kicks with my metal-hobbled soles struck white, yellow and red sparks from the cobble stones. I could make lightning.

I walked the streets of our village, striking the cobblestones, confirming my power. I walked to exhibit the shoes, to show off, but every once in a while, I would hack at the cobblestones, checking the power. With each step I lifted my shoes high in the air. I thought that there was a string that connected the tips of my shoes all the way up to where God lived, where someone, maybe God himself, pulled on the strings like a puppeteer, helping me to get my feet high up in the air so that everyone in the village might get to see the wonder. Mrs. Schumacher, our neighbor saw me and said, "Very nice new shoes." Mrs. Schumacher was a widow, tall, always in black with a white, rice pudding kind of face. Her son had a car. He had knobs on his cheeks, especially when he pulled his teeth together. Every Easter she hid colored eggs out in the meadow behind her house. And even though we were Jewish, my brother and I were invited to hunt, along with other village children, among them my friends, Willibald, Horst and Daniel, to search for eggs, running from one possible hiding place to next, with my friends, laughing, screaming on cold April mornings among the pale and frosty green hummocks of the

Schumacher's meadow. I looked forward to it with great excitement. If there was talk of Passover in the air I knew that the hunt for eggs was close. I wanted to hunt for those eggs, I think, even more than to hunt for the *aphikomen* and the gifts that always went with it.

I walked through streets lined with chestnut trees. That one was my tree. Under its enormous canopy I could stand dry and secure while the blue rain fell and from whose shiny brown nuts I could make, with the insertion of just a skinny twig, pipes. And sitting outside, leaning back on the last house step, pipe in hand, legs crossed, I could imagine being like my tall father, driving a herd of cattle to market.

I walked past our synagogue which was made out of large square cut field-stone.



I say our synagogue but it was really my synagogue where my grandfather, my Opa, led the service, and in whose hand my hand rested when we walked Friday night and Saturday morning to his service.



We'd walk and sometimes he'd ask me questions.

"How did God create the world?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"Well, He said..."

"That's right, He said. And how did He say?"

"I don't know."

"Of course you don't know. When He spoke, when He said let there be..., it sounded just like a blast from the Shofar. With that sound of the Shofar, he made the world."

"Nice."

“That’s how he did it. And when He speaks again, sounds it again, the world is going to be destroyed.”

“That’s not very nice.”

“But that’s not going to be for a very long time.” He picked me up, held me and carried me. “You don’t have to worry your head. Not for a very long time.”

Gustav Gartner, the white-haired butcher, stood, with his bloody apron, in front of his store. He lifted me up, hugged me, and made me come into the store. From behind the counter he handed me slices of salami. “I saw your shoes all the way down by the synagogue. Very nice; here, they deserve another slice.”

Then I heard the tune of the blacksmith’s hammer. The iron tympani called me. The blacksmith was next to the butcher shop. The hammer rang more beautifully on the anvil than the bells from either the Catholic or Protestant churches. One strong and powerful ring, then many fast, light ringing repetitions, gentle touches in a slightly higher octave that faded to silence; and then again a hammer blow and the great ringing; were I sent on an errand and was overdue at home someone was sure to come and get me from in front of the blacksmith’s. His shop was a vast black hollow of a barn open to the street. It allowed entrance to the farmers and their plow horses, enormous Belgians and fiercely snorting Percherons. At the very rear was the high black furnace with its small round opening glowing fire red. The blacksmith was at the furnace pumping the bellows and with each heave thin blue wreaths of flame shot out of the furnace mouth and with each blast of air the coals bubbled a fiercer red. The smith reached into the furnace mouth and with his iron tongs drew out a glowing orange horseshoe. He placed it on the anvil and began beating. Red and white sparks flew from the beaten horseshoe, the same

sparks that I made with my hobnailed shoes. The tongs lifted the glowing iron and immersed it in the nearby trough of water with a great hiss and boiling; smoke and bubbles rose from the water. The annealing process was repeated several times and then the smith lifted the enormous fore-foot of the great Belgian, rested it in his leather-aproned lap and fitted the hot iron onto its gray hoof; then a hiss from the iron doused in water, smoke and an odor like that of burning hair. I knew the smell. After my mother cut my hair she would gather all of it up and throw it into our coal stove. "Why do you do that, Mamma?" "So no one can make magic with your hair."

The hammer pounded, and the iron was nailed into the horse's hoof. The smith straightened up, came over to me and ran his rough hand through my hair. "He's going to be my apprentice." The farmer holding his horse's halter said, "A Jew working in a smithy? I want to see that one before I die."

The cobbled street ran upward, past my Aunt Lydia's house, a large half-timbered house with a pear tree orchard in back. Aunt Lydia's mustached husband Fred had been pruning a tree. He fell from the ladder, and, reaching out a hand to ease his fall, cut that hand on a shard of glass that was just lying there on the ground. Tetanus, whatever that meant. Two weeks later he was dead. I was sorry that he died because often, on a Saturday afternoon visit, he would let me have a taste of the Kümmel he was sipping. He would be reading a book and the glass was in front of him resting on a hassock. I would stand and wait till he looked up and nodded. The liquor was thick as oil and sweet; it scratched my throat, raising white sparks as it went down, raising sweet fumes that smelled like the seeds on rye bread, and the fumes went up my nose and out of my eyes.

Prayers were recited in Aunt Lydia's house instead of in the synagogue and for three nights the men of the congregation watched over the body and recited psalms. The women of the congregation, including my mother, laid him out, washed and dressed the body before the funeral. Why would they want to wash a dead body? Very strange. I wanted Aunt Lydia to see my shoes but I didn't have the courage to enter a house where, for three days, a dead body had lain. Mrs. Shumacher's son lent his car to drive the casket to the little hillside cemetery. He drove very slowly while all the rest of us followed slowly behind the car to the hillside cemetery where my great-grandfather, Oma's father, Jacob, had been buried just a little while before. My great-grandfather had a white goatee, and never paid any attention to me, but he was famous. Our town had a picture postcard, Mamma said it was for tourists, that showed a long stretch of our main street, the mountains in the distance, the gas station on the right side, and right in the middle of the picture, right in the middle of the street, was a little man with a goatee.



Every time I looked at the picture, Mamma had it stuck in the mirror of her bedroom, she would say, “that’s your great-grandfather. That picture is sent all over Germany, maybe the world.” And I always thought “he is so small.” He was the first person that I ever knew who died.

I was on my way to Regensburg but decided to stop first at Schorn’s store. This was the local market, the big grocery store in town. I clambered up the long stone stairs and breathed in the well mixed odors of flour and soap and chocolate. I stood in front of the counter for what seemed a very long time when Mrs. Schorn came looming over me, “Well, Wolfgang, what are you here for.”

“Nothing.” My face burned with embarrassment and I ran out.

“Wait. Wait. Come back here.” The voice was commanding and I came back, afraid. “Close your eyes and hold out your hand.” Now I knew what was coming. “Open your eyes.” A handful of non-pareils were in my palm. “What did you call them when you were a baby? Little pearls with sugar? Go. Regards home.” She didn’t say anything about my shoes.



Regensburger's bakery was across the street. Harry sat in one corner reading a newspaper. Harry was strange; he had white hair like my Opa, but he wasn't old. If he saw me looking at the counter, he'd say, "what? You never saw flour before? I'm a baker and that's flour." It was strange. I didn't know what to think.

I was hoping that his father might be in the store but he wasn't. It was afternoon and the store had its cold-baking smell. If you came in the mornings it had the hot-baking smell because all the baking was done early in the morning even before dawn came up. Harry put the paper down. "Here comes Mr. Wise guy." I hated him calling me that. Once, at some holiday party, I had seen him looking very peculiarly at Gertie Nathan. Gertie used lipstick and smoked cigarettes right out in the open, out on the street where everybody could see. I had piped out loudly, "He's looking at Gertie." From then on, to him, I was Mr. Wise Guy. Nevertheless, that day I walked up and down in front of his counter lifting my legs high, showing my shoes.

"Who are you today, Mr. Wise Guy, one of Hitler's soldiers?"

"No, that's not nice to say."

I knew from what I had picked up at home from overheard adult conversations, conversations they thought were guarded, that Hitler was not nice. I think what I heard was the anger in their throats. The mention of his name made me feel afraid.

"Well, what do you want?"

"Nothing," and I kept on high-stepping in front of him.

"We don't sell 'nothing' here. We sell bread and rolls."

"Cake too."

“And cake. I got enough people buying nothing these days; I don’t need you as a customer. Take your shoes and get out of here.” At least he noticed the shoes. I made my way to the door.

“Where are you going?”

“You said I should go.”

“Yes, but where are you going?”

“To Willy’s.”

“Here,” and he pulled out a sugar-coated jelly donut from under the counter. “You shouldn’t starve on the way.”

I thought that was very funny. Willy was only two streets over and one street up and I wouldn’t starve going there.

In the whole town, except for my younger brother Karl, Willy was the only Jewish boy near my age, he was almost two years older and my best friend. I played with Willy all the time. We were in each other’s houses, together in the synagogue, together at all the holiday celebrations. From time to time, I might play with my Christian friends. If I played with my Christian friends was I then disloyal to Willy who had no one else? My memory is that I played with a Christian friend out in the open air but I don’t remember ever being inside one of their houses. Poor Willy.

Willy and I were both going into first grade in the fall, Willy for the second time; he had been left back. Reading was difficult for him; he was awkward and somewhat slow. “You read newspapers when you were still little,” I was told. I read when I was sick, and that was often. There were mumps and measles and colds and then there were tonsils. The throat pained and

things were hard to swallow. There was tenderness and fever. The ears hurt, the jaw hurt and when the doctor came to look at my tongue and to feel my neck I always knew what he was going to say, "The tongue is coated and the glands are swollen. Give him aspirin."

"Those germs just love you," said my mother when she anointed my throat with eucalyptus ointment and bound my neck with a red woolen scarf that scratched even more than the enlarged tonsils. And my Oma called me her "delicate child." This happened sometimes two or three times a year, maybe more often. Reading books eased the worst of the initial hurt and made the convalescences easy. My favorites were *Robinson Crusoe*, Carl May and *Shatterhand*, and the books of travel by Sven Hedin. I can still hear, on distant Persian mountain deserts, the howl of hyenas in the night.

My friend Willy's father was a cattle dealer just like mine, and though they both followed the same trade there was a difference in the culture of the two households. We had indoor plumbing and they had an outhouse. But our plumbing didn't always work, so we too, sometimes, used the outhouse. My father played the flute and Willy's father distilled, in their kitchen, a terrible smelling liquor from a copper retort. They had a meadow in back of their house and a cow stall attached to their house and they had a small pond on which ducks floated, and their goose. I was afraid of the goose which was almost as tall as I, and probably heavier, and which, one day, fiercely waddled at me with a grim hissing of its yellow beak, and an angry waving of its tall neck. After that, visiting alone, I would stand some distance from their house and call out "Willy." He'd come then, and tell me that the goose had been penned; he'd then take my hand and lead me into their compound.

This day they saw my shoes; Willy, his mother and his somewhat older sister, Lera. They were all properly impressed. I waited; thought that some chocolate was due but praise was the only food forthcoming. We played with hoops on the street outside their house. We were Auto racers on the Neuburg Ring. He was Chepan, I was Cutzorra, two names that were famous for something; maybe auto racers, maybe soccer players. Finished with hoops Willy called me over to their outhouse. He looked through a knot-hole in the wooden structure, stepped back and invited me to look. There sat Lera. My face burned. I was awed, awed also by the fact that Lera wiped herself only in front while I knew that I wiped myself only in back. How could that be? For the rest of the afternoon we played Parcheesi.

It was almost dusk when my father picked me up. Willy's house stood on the rim of the bowl that was my village. Standing in front of Willy's house we watched as several stars appeared. Below, the familiar houses and streets began to darken. My father took my hand and we walked toward home. In day-light I had always made this walk by myself but now it was getting dark. We passed houses where, in the light, on the white-washed walls crossed by black timbers, I saw thin black lines, fine cracks that looked like snakes, complicated letters, strange birds and wild forest animals. But now my father held my hand and as we walked in the darkening light, past houses, their windows that had been reflecting silver, now, one after another, turned orange.

Chapter 2

If I approached our house from the street, I first walked up three broad brick steps, and

then I passed through Oma's flower garden. There were brick towers at the corners of the garden that were connected by a surrounding black spiked fence. There were two wooden benches in the garden and tall lilac bushes at the fences. The front of our house looked like a face. My mother said it had the face of a man who needed to be tickled. Upstairs the two side windows were staring eyes and the third, the middle one was a nose; the front door was a mouth. The dark moldings over the two side windows were eye-brows. The two downstairs windows were a problem but I said to myself that they were cheeks; the cheeks of a skinny man; a skinny man wearing a dark suit and tie. The front door of our house had a large oval glass in a dark wooden frame. The glass had incised curlicues and frosted wreaths of interlocking leaves. I could stand in front of our door for long periods of time tracing the course of this white streaming strangeness. "Dreamer," said Fat Liesl the girl who sometimes worked for us. "My dreamer," said my Oma.



In back of the house there was mud and a barn for the cows, a manure pile from the top of which the rooster crowed, and off to one side a small chicken house. But the chickens never laid their eggs in the house as they were supposed to do, so my grandmother, my Oma, whose province the chickens were, had always to look for the eggs in the grass of the meadow that bordered the barn-yard. The barn was timbered; great areas of white plaster between black beams that looked like they wanted to make block letters but couldn't. The barn was two storied. Hay was stored in the rafters above the cow stalls and I would climb the ladder to lie in the odor filled hay and read my book.

The meadow in back of our house rose to a small hill and then stretched ever backward to meet with a pine wood in which Oma and I sometimes searched for mushrooms. There were small and contorted apple trees that dotted the meadow and at the border of the wood there were

several tall pear trees. This meadow was a kind of holding place where my father and grandfather kept a cow or two or three that had recently been bought before they were sold again or later added to the herd.



Sometimes they kept a few sheep there and once, I remember, two brown coated colts.



Up the hill and off to one side of the meadow was my mother's garden and beyond that my father's potato field where I helped him plant potatoes in the upturned earth making sure that the piece I dropped into the furrow had its eyes turned down into the dirt. But most of our cows were not kept in this meadow. The cows were kept in fields outside of the village, up past the Catholic church and past the black surfaced pond they called the *Sperber*, the hawk, where a man was supposed to have drowned, and when my mother and I would go to retrieve the cattle from this distant field and when we passed the black surfaced pond she would make hooting noises to keep the ghosts away.

Chapter 3

Oma had three sisters, one of whom lived in the village; that was aunt Lydia. She had an older brother, Julius, who also lived in the village in one of the town's larger houses. Oma, once, had had two brothers. I knew the story. Fat Liesl sometimes liked to tell me the story.

Fat Liesl had upper arms from which lots of flesh hung down and the flesh jiggled when she moved. She had red spots on her face and arms. She sweated a lot and breathed very hard and she always told me stories. She told this one to me one time when I was standing looking at

the front door and she wanted to clean it but I wouldn't move. She said she was cleaning the front hall first and when she got to the front door I had better move.

The story was this: when Oma was a little girl, maybe five years old, her younger brother Karl did something bad. He was about three years old and old Opa Nathan, to punish him, put him down into their potato cellar. We had a potato cellar. Five stone steps led down into it. It had a very low ceiling and except for the light the door allowed in there was only the narrow window at the base of the far opposite end of the house. The potato cellar was large, dark and musty. It smelled of mice and turned up earth, and potatoes that had been stored for a long time. From the eyes of old potatoes there grew green and flesh colored tendrils. Right by the door of our potato cellar there were two tall wooden barrels; one contained sauerkraut and the other pickles and whenever I saw the door to the potato cellar open I stole down the steps. I had to get up on my toes to reach into the barrel, to lift up the heavy piece of slate that was pressing down on the pickling, and then quickly grab a few handfuls of the delicious sauerkraut. Oma's brother, her Karl, cried for a very long time after he had been shut in the dark cellar. After a while he stopped crying and maybe the family forgot about him or maybe not. When they remembered that they had a little boy down in the cellar somebody went to get him but he was already dead. He was dead lying right in front on the other side of the cellar door. The door had long scratches in it that Karl had made with his nails.

“Anyway, that's why everybody says your Oma always looks so serious.

Maybe she thinks that somebody might still put her in the potato cellar and keep her there. She's always looked serious ever since she was a little girl and that was the reason.” Fat

Lisl looked at me hard and raised her eyebrows, “get away from the door. I have to clean it now.” I got away.

Oma didn't look very serious when she worked in the vegetable garden in the large plot right across the street from the house. It was my Oma's garden. The garden had a mesh wire fence but the fence was mostly hidden by the thick green branches of Oma's gooseberry bushes that ran all around its border. I would pull the golden yellow berries from the bushes, pop them in my mouth crunch down on their tough skin and the sweet pulp would burst in my mouth and run down my throat. There was a warning associated with eating gooseberries. First of all, we were told not to eat them, but Oma knew that my brother Karl and I would anyway, but if we did eat the berries we must not under any circumstances drink cold water right after eating the berries because once, some hundreds of years ago, the Princess of Julich und Berg, whose Princely House was then the owner of the land on which we lived, had drunk cold water right after eating gooseberries and right after drinking, she died. The water warning was also extended, for us, to apricots, peaches, plums and cherries. But if we argued that the Princess' death had only come after gooseberries the answer was always, “better safe than sorry,” and “fresh fruit is fresh fruit.” The gooseberry arguments contributed mightily to the certain knowledge that all too often adults were irrational. After one long argument, in which I insisted that a berry is not a fruit but a berry, peaches were fruit; I had learned it in school, and anyway, “why is it so terrible to drink water after gooseberries and you never say anything about currants?” I received a quick slap in the face from my mother.

When the weather was right Oma was in that garden almost every day. I would see her down in the black dirt, moving forward on her knees, among the radishes, lettuce, strawberry

beds, pea plants, pulling weeds and then she'd stand up, make a face, place a hand on her side and say, "oh, my back." In the middle of the garden there was a large section, low to the ground, which was covered by panes of glass. "My hot house," Oma said. In this part of the garden she seemed to work the hardest because under the glass was the thing she loved best. Every time she finished working, even if I saw that nothing down there had really changed, she would stand and look down for a minute and the look on her face was the same as when she looked down at my brother Peter who was still a baby in his crib .

Under the glass, which could be raised like wings and which I thought were like the transparent wings of dragon flies, she raised asparagus. Every spring Oma raised these welts, long rows of dirt under the glass. Trenches were dug on each side of a row of dirt which had been prepared for the asparagus roots. A wheelbarrow brought dung from the mountainous heap outside the cow-barn. Oma would take one handle and I the other. Oma shoveled the dung carefully into the trenches she had prepared, and as she shoveled she would repeat, "It takes a lot of dung to make good asparagus." I made many trips with basins to get water for the trenches and then we made more trips with the wheelbarrow. Oma spent a lot of time tending the beds. "Asparagus should be eaten as soon as they're picked," was Oma's motto. And on the day the asparagus was picked Opa would be in the kitchen making the mayonnaise, hunched over at the table, the spoon grating in the wooden bowl where he stirred the yellow egg yolks and all the while adding oil to the mixture, drop by drop, from the crystal cruet.

When we were finished in the garden Oma took me back into the house and into her store. I waited while she went in back of the counter, bent down, and then emerged with a bar of

chocolate. "That's for helping so nicely. Share it with Karl. All right?" Though why I should have to share it with my brother Karl when I had done all the work for Oma was beyond me.

The front right room of the house was Oma's grocery store, though these days it was rare to see a customer at the door. There was a counter with a silvery scale and near the ceiling, in back of the counter hung the strips of *stockfish*, dried cod-fish. On the other side of the counter, and creating a narrow aisle, were bins for vegetables, beans, peas, asparagus, potatoes, rhubarb, gooseberries. At the other end, opposite the door were shelves filled with jars and cans. Sometimes on Fridays, and sometimes my father went with her, Oma took a bus to Bonn to buy articles for sale in her store. One time when we were tending the asparagus I asked her, "Why do you have a store when Opa has a business?" and she said, "sometimes things don't always happen the way you might like. Sometimes."

One time I saw Fat Lisl in the potato cellar and she was stuffing Opa's sauerkraut into her mouth with both hands. She saw that I saw her. Then one day I saw Lisl cleaning Oma's silver in the special dining room in which nobody ever ate, and I sat down next to her and asked her why Oma had to have a store when Opa had a business and she said, "It's not a great business and it's not a great store. Go ask your Oma."

"I did."

"And what did she say?" I told her what Oma had said and then Lisl said, "You're a real wise guy. You want to know everything." And I said that I knew that I was a wise guy. Harry Regensburger called me that. And she said, "well, since you know that, I guess I can tell you the story. Your Opa used to be rich."

"Really? How rich?"

“I don’t know, but everybody says he was rich. You want me to tell you the story?”

“Yes.”

“Well, right after the First World War he had a very large herd of cows. He had more cows than anybody.”

“Wasn’t he a soldier in the war?”



“Yes. But he was wounded almost right away, at the beginning, so they sent him home.

Didn’t you ever see the scar on his chest?”

“No. Did you?”

“You really are a wise guy.” And at that point she was going to stop telling the story but I so begged and pleaded because I wanted very much to hear this story that started out so very like a fairy tale of somebody who was rich and then poor and then because of some wonderful thing that happened became rich again. I pulled at her apron and whined and I wouldn’t let her

go back to work till she raised her eyebrows at me and then I stopped and she said all right, but no more wise guy.

“You know” she said with some surprise, “your Opa and your father are the only farmers in this town who don’t wipe their noses on their fore-arms.” She stopped, seemed to think, and then went on, “anyway, this was nineteen fourteen, maybe fifteen and your Opa came home something of a hero. That he was a Jewish hero some people didn’t much like, but anyway his business did well. So he bought land for the cattle and the more cattle he had the more land he needed. He was rich. In the war farmers did well. Not the ones who had to go to war and be soldiers but the ones who stayed home, they got rich.”

“But Opa was a soldier. He got wounded.”

“Anyway, one day in the early twenties, after the war, your Opa sold all his cattle, and he had a lot. The next day, right the very next day the inflation started. You know about the inflation”

“Pappa says that just to buy a loaf of bread you had to take a wheelbarrow full of money to the bakery; if they had any bread.”

“That’s right. So from one day to the next he was poor. All his cash became worthless. It was as if he never had any cows or any land and the land he still had he sold most of it just to keep going. But those were very hard times for just about everybody. People starved. People on the land, farmers starved because they didn’t have money for seed. Can you imagine? We would have starved if my mother hadn’t taken in this little girl with tuberculosis from Cologne. Her parents thought the air in the country would do her good and they paid us good money to keep

her. I guess they heard about Dr. Hertzfeld's Sanitarium. And then when your uncle died...Karl..."

"My uncle?" She had stopped talking and was wiping her eyes.

"The little boy Karl..."

"Your Uncle was named after the little boy."

I don't think I had ever heard of an Uncle Karl, but I didn't know, I was confused; so many Karls that died. My younger brother was named Karl; an uncle by that name, if he was ever mentioned, it was out of ear-shot. It was something that was hardly ever talked about. I knew that I had an Uncle Albert, who was Pappa's brother and two cousins. One was named Gerhardt and the other was Karl.

"He was so good, so good. Such a shame...awful shame...so smart...so good."

"My uncle?"

He was in my class. He was so smart. So funny. Everybody loved him." I waited while she cried. "His appendix ruptured. Didn't you know? In *Beul*. In the hospital. They couldn't do anything. And he was so young."

"How..."

"He was twenty-four. He was so smart. He already had a business."

"What..."

"A grocery store up near your aunt Lydia. It was doing so well. He was going to make the family fortune all over again."

"So..."

“So your Oma, after he died, took the goods in your Uncle’s store and brought them down here, I helped carry them, and she started a store too.”

“But my uncle...”

“He died. I guess that’s another reason she looks so sad...”

“It makes me sad too.”

“And it’s not the only reason. But during the war, when you people were rich, you know, then your Opa had so much land that he needed a lot of help to run it but since all the boys were soldiers there was no help, except then they sent him two French prisoners to help him run the farm.”

“Yes?”

“Yes.”

“What were their names?”

“Wise guy. Wise guy. That’s your name. That’s the end of this story.” She raised her eye-brows at me and mumbled, “Parents shouldn’t have to see their children die.”

I ran away. I climbed up to where we stored the hay, up above the cows in the barn. I lay in the hay with a book and I thought that sometimes things don’t happen the way one might like.

Then, one day, nobody knew when it happened, but it must have been some holiday evening when we were all at synagogue, Opa discovered that all the glass panes, every one that covered the asparagus beds had been smashed in, broken. After that Oma stopped working in her garden. The shovels and shears she had used turned rusty and the garden turned to seed.

Chapter 4

In summer when the days grew longer and the weather turned warm our big city relatives, those from Frankfurt or Cologne or Hanover or Amsterdam would come to visit us in our green hills.



I always liked it when our cousins from Hanover came.



The first to arrive, usually, was my other Oma, Oma Kraemer, our mother's mother who came all the way from the big city, the city of Frankfurt.

The number of suitcases she brought with her announced the length of her stay. It was one suitcase per week. Usually my father would bring up four from the railroad station. Oma Kramer had large gray eyes, gray hair and her face had soft wrinkles that bounced when she suddenly turned her head. I felt her soft hands when she stroked my face. There were gifts when she came, wind-up toys, little red and yellow cars for Karl and me. And books. For three years it was the same large size Grimm's Fairy Tales, with dark green hard covers with the title stamped on them in large gold letters. The illustrations were in color and beautiful. Mamma said, after the third time, "Just say thank you and give her a hug and a kiss and don't you dare say anything else." Sometimes, if the door to her room was ajar, I might see her wrap her legs in bandages from her knees down to her ankles. When she would leave, back to Frankfurt, the room still had an odor that was a mixture of liniment, face powder and lilac perfume.

Oma was a widow, widowed at thirty-seven. "You were named for your Opa, and she would sigh and gently rub my hair." Louis was my middle name. Louis. Middle names were useless. Ugly middle names were even more than useless. My mother would pronounce it, "Looee." Looee was foreign, useless not German. All my classmates had names like Horst, or Wilhelm or Heinz, or Klaus or August. Actually it really didn't matter what my middle name was, it was only my middle name and useless, everyone called me by my first name anyway which was Wolfgang, a name I liked. Looee certainly had little to do with the green mountains, my father's dirty work boots, cows, chickens and the steaming dung heap. And when Herbert

Gärtner would sometimes grab me and heave me up on his shoulders he'd ask, "And how do you like that, Ludwig?" I wouldn't answer but I liked the idea of having my middle name changed from Looee to Ludwig.

Oma Kramer, everyone said, complained a lot. Pappa had a hard time fixing the mattress just right and the closet was too small. When the plumbing went out which was often, the only resort was to the out-house beyond the downstairs kitchen. And very indignantly Oma would say, "I'm simply not used to that anymore." Mamma said that Oma, her mother, had too great a sense of family pride. Her maiden name was Hess and our two families were even very distantly related. But Oma's Hesses, so she said, went back to a long line of Rabbis, all the way back to the Middle Ages, as if Pappa's Hesses didn't. And Oma often repeated, "Some of them were famous and even wrote books." But her most immediate source of pride was that her husband who was dead, her Looee, had been in the United States. At the end of the last century Louis and a half-brother traveled to America. The brother stayed but Louis returned to Germany when a depression made life in America just too hard. But while he was there and while he had some money he thought to put some of that money in a new company called US Steel.

Back in Germany, he opened a store that sold fabrics.



The store did very well and he forgot all about the American stocks. After some years, it was after World War 1, and after grand-father Louis died, the half-brother wrote Oma asking what she wanted to do with all those stocks because now she was rich. I once heard Mamma say that she always acted rich even when she had no money; after all she came from a long line of Rabbis who wrote books.

Oma liked to walk. And when she walked she wore shoes with heels, a long dark print dress, and over her arm she had her black leather bag. The town streets were paved with cobble stones and two steps out of the town you encountered dirt roads. When Oma came back from one of her walks we would hear, loudly, “Oh my legs, my legs.” Fat Lisl would roll her eyes and say in a harsh but low voice, “Where do you think you are? We don’t have fancy boulevards in this shit town.” And she would stretch out the word ‘boulevards.’

The most surprising thing was that nearly everybody who came to visit us wanted to walk. They wanted to walk from our small town to even smaller towns a few kilometers away. They wanted to walk over the hills and they wanted to walk through the woods. They wanted to walk over the main streets and over the narrowest wagon-rutted paths. The first thing in the morning was to walk. After lunch and after a nap everybody walked. Uncle Theo, Mamma's brother would, first thing after he arrived, whittle himself a walking stick. He would look for some knobby branch that fell on the side of the road somewhere and attack the wood with his pocket knife till it had zig-zag designs from top to bottom. When he finished his stick he was prepared to walk. Aunt Irma, Mama's sister, would walk day and night but only walk if she had a hat that covered her face. She hated the sun but loved to walk in the woods because she loved the pine smell so much, and there was not so much sun in the woods.

Tante Ella would come; she was Papa's cousin, the daughter of Tante Mina. Ella had been coming to Ruppichteroth since she was a small child. She always brought her daughter with her, Eva, who was one or two years older than I. Ella walked, but it was to visit all her old friends. And then there were my cousins from Hannover, Karl and Gerhardt. They came with their father and mother, my Uncle Albert and Tante Anna. Karl and Gerhardt were also several years older than I. They would go walking over the dirt roads and over the fields with their mother Anna and sing loud songs while tramping through the woods.

Whenever they came I would look at my Opa real hard. Once I had heard my mother say, "It takes something out of him." I looked to see what might be taken out of him but could see nothing. It took me a while to understand what my mother meant. Tante Anna was Catholic. Uncle Albert had married out of his religion and, Mamma said, it affected Opa, though I could

never see what had been taken out of him. Maybe it was words that were taken out of him because it seemed he was more silent whenever Albert and Anna came.

Uncle Albert was a doctor, a veterinarian. He and Pappa would sometimes walk out onto the pasture behind the house; they would talk and Albert would look at cows and I would tag along behind them. Once, they walked out to the pasture and Albert had his doctor satchel with him. They came to this one red cow and Albert poked it all over, then he rolled up one sleeve of his shirt and shoved his whole arm up the rear end of the cow. I decided then that I would never become a veterinarian. Aunt Anna was also a doctor, a doctor of history. But why history needed a doctor no one was ever able to tell me. They only laughed when I asked.

People also laughed at Aunt Anna. They did this behind her back. Aunt Anna was big and pink, and round and fat and she ate a great deal of everything. I was a fussy eater, I liked anything chocolate, vanilla pudding with raspberry syrup, potato *shalet*, which was a big fat potato pancake that was baked in an iron pot in lots of fat, *hutzelsclos*, which was something like a plum pudding, stuffed spleen, and apple fritters, and I would eat anything Opa cooked for me, but Aunt Anna ate everything, meat and vegetables, bread and rolls, and everything in huge portions. Fat Lisl would say, "She's going to eat your Omas' whole store and drive your Opa to the poor house." At breakfast people would secretly watch her. There was a huge farmers' bread that was as round as I was. Anna would hold the bread to her breast and cut off a whole round slice. Once I heard my mother say to my father, "Did you see how she slathered that whole slice with all the butter in the tun.? And then the strawberry jam? No wonder." My father gave Mom a mean look.

All of us were out behind the house one day, "*Die Kinder*" the kids. Eva was there, my brother Karl, and my cousins, Gerhard and Karl. We were being entertained by Ilse Gärtner, she was our baby sitter. We were all sitting on the grass and Ilse read to us. What she read was the story of Hannah and her ten sons who refused to bow to Antiochus Epiphanes the Hellenistic dictator of Israel, it was part of the Chanukah story. Antiochus was determined to place himself above the God of the Jews. It was demanded of the ten sons that they bow to a statue of Antiochus. Each of Hannah's sons, one after the other, refused to obey the command of the Greek commander to bow down to the statue and each son in turn was skinned alive before his mother. The Greek commander, each time, begged the mother to tell her sons to obey the command, but each time she refused. When it came to about the fifth or sixth son I began to bawl. Every muscle, every bone in my body heaved, I felt the skin being flayed from my own body. Eva looked sad, my brother Karl too began to cough a bit and tears appeared on the edges of his eyes but I was inconsolable. Gerhard pointed at me and began to laugh. His brother too joined him in pointing and laughing at me. Ilse stopped reading, she stroked my hair. Gerhard and Karl ran away toward the cow barn.

Tante Mina came. We waited for her at the train station, Oma and Opa and I.



It wasn't really a station, but simply where the train stopped on the way further down the valley to *Waldbröl*. Opa yelled at me when I leaned down to put my ear on the silver railroad track. That was what the Osage chief dressed in "Eagle Feathers" did when he wanted know how far away the iron horse was. To really know how far away the iron horse was the Osage chief would take a Mexican silver coin out of his bag of puma hide, place it between his teeth and held the coin to the rail. That told him exactly how many minutes it was to be before the train arrived. There was a low hooting scream like the owl at night, but only longer. There was gray smoke. The train was coming.

Mina wore a broad brimmed hat and a dress that waved in the wind and that was violet and lilac. It was shiny and sparkled like fish scales. Oma's face was Oval and dark like the mirror frame in the front-hall , but Tante Mina's face was light and more square. Oma's face was serious and her lips were always close together but Tante Mina, who was her sister, always seemed to have a little smile on her face. Not a big smile, just the beginnings of one, and that was all. Oma's black hair was drawn back in a knot but Tante Mina's was brown and wavy and sort of short and parted on one side and she looked like one of the ladies in the advertising poster for the big department store in Cologne. Tante Mina used to live in Cologne but now she

lived in Amsterdam; in Holland or the Netherlands the way people sometimes say it. I wondered if she was ever worried about a flood because I knew that there were dikes in Holland that kept the ocean from covering all of the low lands. But if the dikes broke what would happen then? Would the water come flowing all the way up the Rhineland, up to our town? I didn't think so, because first of all God gave us the rainbow sign and second of all we were up in the mountains. But I didn't ever believe the story of the little boy who stuck his finger in the dike and saved all the people. That was a made up story.

Tante Mina stood at the little platform of the last car of the train with her hands on the railing and she looked down on us with her little smile. Opa clapped his hands together and then walked up to the steps of the car and held out his hand to help her down. Now her smile was big but she waved Opa's hand away and quickly hopped down the steps to Oma where the two embraced. Tante Mina was our savior.

There were so many stories about Tante Mina. First, that she had married Mr. Mayer from Cologne who was rich but she made him richer. Mr. Mayer had a steel importing business and Tante Mina also got him into the steel exporting business so they got even richer. They had a car with a chauffeur. But lots of time she drove the car herself. She was the first woman in Cologne to have a driver's license and she was the first woman to drive a car over one of the Swiss mountain passes to Italy, and she wore pants. What was even more strange than the pants was the fact that she liked to go about with her sister, those times when Oma went about the yard to gather the eggs that the chickens had laid. If Tante Mina found a warm egg, one that had just been laid, she would pick it up, hold it up to the sky, wipe the egg with a handkerchief she

had with her and then, taking a pin which she also had with her, put her mouth to the hole she had made and suck out the eggs' insides. She said she liked that a lot. She also liked to walk.

Sometime in the middle of summer, when Oma Kramer had had enough of country life, Mamma told me I would accompany her and Aunt Irma back to Frankfurt: a little vacation on top of summer vacation. Frankfurt was lovely, it felt generous. It had color in distinction to our little town which I saw as black and white and gray. I remember sun over wide boulevards where people didn't walk but "strolled." Tall houses, colored cream or a shiny gray edged the boulevards. They had large windows that were covered with orange when the sun was reflected in them. The fronts of these houses had bays that made them seem to wave like wheat fields in the wind. We walked the boulevards, Aunt Irma and I. On the days that we walked we would stop in at a café that had small tables with cream-colored marble tops and spidery chairs that surrounded the tables.

"What would you like," asked Aunt Irma, and my answer was always the same, "a glass of seltzer with raspberry syrup in it and....," and I would hardly dare finish the sentence, since that one request, I felt, was all that I was entitled to have. But Aunt Irma would finish the sentence for me and with a nod tell the waiter, "and some vanilla ice cream." First came the syrupy soda which I drank in time to Aunt Irma sipping her coffee. Then came the ice cream, piled high in a silvery metal coupe that sweated beads of water. I took my time with the ice cream. It was not on any menu, ever, in Ruppichteroth. There were never ever any menus in Ruppichteroth. There were hardly any restaurants in Ruppichteroth, just a bar with tables and everybody called out what they wanted because everybody knew everything that they served.

And while I dawdled, Aunt Irma looked out of the café's glass window at the passing

crowds. At times I would go shopping with Oma or Irma, frequently to Falk, the butcher. I would stand quietly in front of the counter hoping, and then, every time, the broad Mrs. Falk, in her white chef's hat and white apron would lean over the counter and ask, "Are you a good boy?" I nodded. Then she reached over the counter and handed me a large slice of salami, or head cheese, or corn beef that was almost as delicious as the ice cream. Maybe it was just the generosity of the gift, given without any reckoning of deserve or not deserve that made it so delicious. Had I shaken my head rather than nodded I still would have gotten the gift. I knew that Mrs. Falk's question was just a repetition; something that grownups always had to do.

Very many years later, in Manhattan, in Washington Heights, on the corner of Broadway and 174th street stood the butcher store of Bloch and Falk. The first time I entered the premises, probably with one of my parents I saw the broad Mrs. Falk in her white apron but minus the chef's hat tend to customers. When she turned to my parents I intervened,

"I remember you from Frankfurt."

"You, you are Irma's nephew?" I nodded. She turned away and then turned toward me again, now holding up a large piece of balony.

"And are you a good boy?" I nodded again, and was handed the delicious meat. From then on and for many years after each time I entered the store the act was repeated. And when, very much later I would enter the store with my young daughter, Mrs. Bloch would repeat our old scenario with her. People said, and the testimony was often repeated, that Bloch and Falk, had the very best cold cuts anywhere in Manhattan, but to me, just entering the store was a great joy: almost like having new shoes.

After about three weeks in Frankfurt I was returned home. Aunt Irma took me. As I entered our house a smiling Oma greeted me and took my hand. She led me upstairs to our apartment, into our kitchen-living room. The room was full of people, Herbert Gartner was there, and several of my father's cousins. They all looked at me, smiling, and then turned their heads toward the couch where my mother lay, smiling too, with a little bald baby at her breast.

"Come, see little Peter."

I looked, then cried and screamed; screamed very loud, "Get that little thing out of here. Get it out. I don't want it. We don't need it. Why do you have it?" The congregated multitude laughed at my indignation, louder than my screaming. It was the laughing at me, the raw indignity of it that angered me, made me wild, even more than Peter at my Mother's breast.

I ran out of the room, down the stairs and out of the house. I ran, wildly, crying, down the road and out of our village, up another road, hardly knowing where I was running to. I wound up in an adjoining village at the door of fat Lisel who took me in, wiped my face, and hugged me. Some hours later, or so it seemed, my Oma stood before me, Pappa behind her. Oma hugged me and between the two, Oma and Dad, holding their hands we walked back home. "You are a very fast runner," said Dad. His sympathy was no consolation for being laughed at and for feeling displaced. It was no consolation for feeling betrayed by being sent to Frankfurt and not really told why I was being sent.

Chapter 5

One day at supper my father told me that I would have to get to bed early that night.

Why? Because in the morning he would be driving cows to market, to the market in *Waldbröl* and he thought that I should go with him. I looked to my mother and she nodded. Four-thirty in the morning; we'd have to get up in the dark. I ran to bed.

My father shook me, woke me, and held a finger to his lips. I was to be quiet, my brother Karl slept in the same room. My father held up clothes for me. He went downstairs to the kitchen and I washed and then dressed on the darkened landing to the stairs. I was struggling to get into my shoes when I sensed, by his dark sweet sweat, my father's being there. He was squatted down, down to my size and was quietly, benignly, smiling at my labor. We went to the kitchen and where there was black coffee and large slabs of farmer bread slathered with fresh butter. We went into the barn and I saw white steam streaming from the skin of the cows. Out on the meadow coils of fog wove and dipped like dancers. We released the half-dozen cows from their stanchions and herded them down the street where their padding raised echoes over the dew-wet cobbles. We herded them onto the narrow macadamized highway whose ordinary surface, its day-to-day blackness, seemed, this early, wet morning, streaked with silver and pewter. It was still dark as we entered the highway but there was a patch of milky whiteness out beyond the hills on the right. Soon the patch turned as red as the flames from the blacksmiths' furnace, then orange. In full light the sky seemed very high and light blue. It was eight miles to *Waldbröl*, a five-hour walk.

The macadam road ran through a green valley. A green wood bordered the road on both sides and through openings I could see meadows, and beyond the meadows the sloping hills, and from their green tops, banks and braids of gray fog slid down into the valley bottom. On the left, dodging in and out of the woods ran a small brook.

We walked through the green, the cows plodding in front of us, and I watched the rhythmic rise and fall of their bony behinds. My father darted down into the woods where the stream ran and disappeared. I stopped, afraid. He came back smiling, with a long, thin willow switch in his hand. He snapped it in the air. It whistled. He handed it to me, "You can guide the cows with this. Make sure they don't go off the road, down into the brook. They like the water."

"After we sell these, when are we going to get more cows?"

"Of course, soon. That's the business. We sell cows. We get money; and with the money we get more cows. That's how it works."

It was important that we get more cows. My grandfather did the evening milking, and I made it my business, usually, to be there with him. He sat on his stool and stripped milk from the cows. I hunkered down beside him. "In the barn, right with the swallows," and he'd say, "watch it. Don't get caught." He meant the swishing of the cows' tails. He'd get angry when the swinging tails caught and stung his face, then he'd push the cow hard and yell and curse at it. I waited, sitting on my haunches till he said, "ready?" Then I opened my mouth and Opa, with a turn of his wrist, directed, from the teat he was holding, a stream of warm, sweet milk right into my mouth. We needed more cows.

Cars and trucks clattered by. Sometimes they waved. Sometimes they honked. Sometimes the loud noise startled the herd and then they veered off, down toward the brook. I looked at my father, he nodded and I ran down after the cows. I touched their sides lightly with my willow. I waved my arms and yelled like my grandfather. The cows stopped, slowly turned their great necks, looked back at me with their shiny black eyes and then, as if their joints were badly connected, strained or heaved their bodies forward in separate successive sections till they

reached the flat landing of the road, clattering down the asphalt, their bony back-sides riding up and down like the cars on a roller coaster. My father said, "Good. Well done." I looked down at my shoes, embarrassed at the praise.

Waldbröl on market day was large, busy and full of color, not gray busy like Bonn or Cologne where I had been several times. *Waldbröl* had the feel of a village very much like ours only many times larger and in its center was the cobbled market square. To get to the square our cows passed flower stands and farm stands; farmer's wives with their aprons attended. The houses ranging the square were large, three, sometimes four stories high. The shops carried awnings of red and brown, gold and blue. Little tables and spidery metal chairs clustered in front of the cafes, and in the center of the market stood curved metal cattle stanchions like so many motionless and sullen teenagers at school, hands in their pockets. Round the area of stanchions were large carts and wagons holding bleating sheep and calves. Farmers were throwing hay and straw into the wagons. My father found empty stanchions and fed the heads of our cattle into them. Now the German farmers gathered round my father. Some wore knee length boots, others long gray coats.

"Well, Oscar, how goes it? And who is this sparrow? Learning the business? Gonna get his nice shoes all covered with cow flop?"

"Your Pappa is a good guy. Not one of those cut throats. Not one of those putting our acres into his strong box." My face turned red, embarrassed. He meant, I knew, that there were other Jews who were doing this, and whatever it was, it wasn't nice.

“You tired? Later, after we do some business we’ll have a Coca Cola over there. Yes?”

He nodded toward the spidery tables. He dug a strong hand into my shoulder and released.

“Your oldest, Oscar?”

The German farmers went round to all the cattle, felt their wattles, dug their hands into the shoulders of the cows, passed their hands under the udders and felt for knots, slapped them on their rumps. “No. Not there,” my father called out. “She kicks.”

Their bargaining was something I had only seen once before when a Christian farmer came to our house and bought a cow. Opa and the farmer stood across from each other, in front of the barn. They slapped, hard, into each other’s palms and each time they did they called out the price that they were willing to pay and to get. They kept on slapping till they came to an agreement. Later I asked Opa how come the farmer talked in Hebrew when he was a Christian. Opa said “we’ve been in this town for a very long time.”

“How long?”

“Well, before my great-grandfather, and before his great-grandfather and before his great- grandfather.”

“Is that long?”

“Long enough for us to learn German and long enough for them to learn a little bit of Hebrew.”

Now, at the market, a farmer and my father stood close together and looked straight into each other’s eyes. They then started to slap their hands together, hard, from the shoulders down their palms crashed into each other. And with each slap, each man would, in turn yell out a number. And their calling out was in Hebrew or German Yiddish; both of them. “Kaph Nun,”

slap, “Mem Lamed,” slap. With each slap a number was called. My father started out high, the farmer low; my father came down, the farmer up. They met somewhere in the middle, where both knew they’d meet and the deal was done, a cow was sold. They both shook their hot hands from the wrist and smiled. The two then walked over to the spidery tables and celebrated the sale with a schnaps. My father came back and then, with another farmer, and the slapping began all over again.

By noon, all the cows were sold and I was looking forward to my Coca Cola. The farmer who had offered it was gone, he had forgotten but my father had not. “Come on, you deserve a drink.” We both sat on the spidery chairs in front of the spidery tables, at ease, sipping our drinks, my legs crossed just like my father’s and we watched all those others who still had animals to sell. All through the market square one could hear the slapping of palms and the Hebrew numbers called out.

Chapter 6

Some time after that, my mother, my brother and I were on a country road some distance from town. My mother held us by the hand. The sun was shining, the sky was blue with light puffy clouds. I was wearing my sailor suit so it must have been some kind of holiday, a festivity from which we were returning. The road was hard brown, it was free of dust and almost glittered like Opa’s gold watch. We were swinging our arms in rhythm to a song we were singing. Then, from a distance we heard another song. A chorus of many people that got louder as it came closer. We stopped singing and my mother began to look over her shoulder and rather

than swinging our arms she pulled us by the arms, off the road, and into the edge of a meadow. Then coming up to the rise where we were standing we saw, first, the Nazi flag, red, on a spear tipped pole and then behind the flag a whole column of young men in full voice, in brown uniforms, shouting out a marching song. I was awed by the strength of their voices and the power of their song. Then our mother pulled us, and we ran deeper into the meadow. It was hard to keep up with her. We ran far out into the green field. We finally stopped, Karl was crying and our mother put her hand over his mouth. Here, the singing was not so loud, and from this distance we three stood and watched the flags and the long singing column pass by.

#

In going to Schorn's store, doing errands, I had to pass the Hertzfeld villa. Hertzfeld was a Jewish doctor who, in the 1920's had established a hotel and a "rest home" in the hills outside our town. I had often heard my parents call it a spa without a spa and that this *Kur Ort* was responsible, in no small measure for the economic revival of our area after the disasters of the First World War. A low masonry wall abutted the street for about a block. Behind the wall was a lawn that seemed forever green and then between tall trees there rose a very large house: the villa. The Hertzfelds were gone and the villa was now owned by Herr Löwenich, a man whom I had never seen, but who was, from the way people talked, as frightening as any gnome or dark King of Fogs: this was the town's leading Nazi. On his stone wall there now hung a glass covered case and inside the case there were displayed several pages of Nazi newspapers. It was, and I remember, the huge Teutonic letters, *Der Sturmer*, The Fury, and *Der Volkischer Beobachter*, the People's Observer. Each time I passed the case I looked; it seemed as if I were compelled to look. What forced me to stand in front of the glass case were the cartoons, the

caricatures in black and white of what the text said were Jews. The text said that these were Jews, but they looked like no Jews I had ever seen before. These were heavy men in long black coats and wide brimmed black hats. They had great hooked, pocked, noses, beards and side locks. They carried suit-cases, sandwiches whose crumbs dropped from their mouths, sausages, that dropped out of side pockets. Their wives were heavy, black-coated, great-bosomed, jowled, ugly, infants trailing behind. They were like no Jews that I had ever seen before. These were, the papers repeated, the scum of the earth. The words most used to describe them were terms describing sickness: scab, infection, germs, bacteria, contagion, plague. These were supposed to be Jews like me, but I was nothing like them. I knew that. But I had to repeatedly look at my father and mother, my grandparents, at all the others, and they certainly looked like nothing I saw in these papers. Still, if these were Jews, and these were their descriptions, what was I? Every time I passed that glass case it was as if someone forced me to look at these ugly people. I was them; I was not them.

#

Every morning, in school, we lined up in the yard and in loud voice sang patriotic songs. I somehow always managed to be the last in line and edged a bit away from the others when these songs were sung: the national anthem, I forget the others. One day our teacher came to me and in a very low voice told me that I really did not have to sing these songs if I did not want to. I felt grateful, almost comforted, but I did not tell him that. What I really wanted was to be able to sing these songs along with everyone else in school. What I wanted was not to feel that peculiar heaviness, that burden that felt physical, that was extra flesh; feelings that felt like a hump on my back and more lumps in my stomach, that made me feel different and which had

me mouth the words to the songs rather than sing out in full voice with the others who had no burden like mine.



When we had our class picture taken I found myself at the end of one of the lines. The class stood on a hillside, the big fourth grade kids stood high on the hill, my grade on the bottom. I sat apart from the others, or maybe they sat apart from me. Joseph Frisch sitting next to me looked angry, his arms akimbo was he angry that he sat next to the Jew?

Till about then I still had a few German school friends, and we played together, but it seemed more and more as if it was just Willy and me. One day, in the middle of class, a girl near the front rose and said, pointing to Willy, "he let one go. He stinks." She did not say "the

Jew stinks,” but of course that’s what I heard. There was a hating sound to her voice, a sound that ground into me. At her pointing, everyone around Willy moved away. The teacher told Willy to leave the room and wait outside. Along with everyone else I watched him as he slowly walked out the door and as I watched I thought, horrendously disloyal, of the cartoons in the glass case: the cartoons - they applied to him. The teacher then asked me to take Willy home and would I afterward return to the class. I was bewildered. I was joined to the Jew but yet made to feel different from that Jew. It was about then that my German school friends stopped playing with me. And it was about then, too, that I was no longer invited to our neighbors Easter egg hunt.

#

Very many years later, I was now a film editor in New York, I received an assignment to edit a documentary film on some aspects of the holocaust. One sequence in the film was to deal with the rounding up of Jews in the various cities and towns in Germany and Poland preparatory to their being sent to Concentration camps. Since the Germans were assiduous in documenting practically all phases of what they called “Jewish resettlement” there was a great deal of material available both in film and stills, and so a great many reels of 16mm film were handed to me. There were Jews assembled on city streets, Jews herded onto freight cars and trains, onto trucks, Jews marching in columns along ruined and bombed out city streets, marching in their black coats against the cold, fathers holding onto bundles and suitcases, mothers holding on to their children. I had to look at many reels of film to make my selections from these miles of black grainy footage. The selection process took me a very long time. At one point the film’s producer called me into his office and complained that I was being slow in completing this

sequence. We had been friends and his complaint was gentle, but I was costing him money. I nodded, promised to speed it up and went back to my cutting room and Moviola to look at more film. What the reason for my slowness was, I could not tell my friend. For days now, and for many nights as well I had been poring over film for this sequence, looking at footage almost frame by frame, examining each one for a face that might be familiar, looking for a face that I might have known, Oma or Opa, Aunt Lydia, Harry Regensburger; any of our towns' Jews that were unable to make it out of Germany in time. Most of all, I think, I was looking for Willy. One time however, I did come across a long column of marchers, the people were in a close middle distance: it was the emptying out of the Warsaw ghetto. There was one young boy at the edge of the column who could have been about my age at the time, he wore knee socks and had on a short coat and a brimmed cap. With one hand he held on to a woman who might have been his mother but whose face I could not clearly see and with the other he held a small suit case. I looked long at that face. There were cases where German Jews had been shipped to the Warsaw ghetto. It might have been Willy, but I don't really know.



#

About that time we bought a new radio, a large Grundig. My brother Karl and I watched my father place the radio on a low settee beneath the kitchen window. The old radio had sat on a shelf in the living room right above the RCA Victrola, so it seemed strange to me that this new radio should sit so peculiarly in the kitchen. We watched our father set it up. He bent and bowed over it straightening wires finding connections, and my mother stood over him smiling and nodding. He attached hooks above the window, one on each side. The sound from the radio was beautiful.

“Tell them,” said our mother, “if they touch the radio they’re going to get it.” Father, on his knees, still occupied and fiddling with wires, mumbled,

“You’re going to get it. Both of you,” then he looked up at mother, shaking his head,

puzzled, "What did they do?" And we all started laughing and our Mamma held the both of us and between laughing she said, "nothing, nothing." And Karl called out, "not yet."

Then, mostly on weekends, but often enough during the week, when it got dark, my father would stretch a bed-sheet across the window, attaching the sheet to the curtain hooks. But before stretching the sheet, and making sure it was dark, he attached one end of a rolled up wire to the back of the radio and then opening the window just a bit, let the roll of wire trail from the kitchen down to the ground below. Then my father, my mother, my grandfather and sometimes one of the Gärtners would huddle around the radio. There was a bit of music, that I would later recognize as *The Internationale*, and then a voice saying strange words such as, "Bilbao, Valencia, Negrin, Catalonia, Madrid." When the adults heard these words they sometimes would sigh, or their faces, when they rose from their stooped positions, would be stony. Then my mother would say, "It's all right. You'll see. You'll see." Then my father would take down the sheet, and slowly haul the wire up from the ground. My Opa sometimes objected to listening to the station with the music, "Why do we always have to listen to them?" And always my mother would reply, with some heat, "All the others lie. They always lie."

There was a law: Jewish bulls could not cover Aryan cows so my father's business was taken away from him; farmer, cattle dealer, cattle drover no longer. None of the Jewish families in town were allowed to do their usual work. Instead, the men were forced to work in one of the local quarries. Each day my handsome father came home all covered in gray dust. There was dust in his hair, his eyebrows, his hands and face. His clothes were gray and my father now complained of aches and pains and of all the many things my mother had, that day, neglected to do. Never before had I heard my father complain.

#

My grandmother and I were in a pine wood searching for mushrooms. Going to the woods we saw German Army vehicles parked on the roads. The army was on maneuvers. We ambled slowly through the soft pine needles, hunting on the forest floor. We separated. Our loud hallooing told each other where we were. I reached the edge of the forest. There were green bushes and then a wide meadow. Through the bushes I saw this soldier sitting at what looked like a peculiar desk; a desk that had little wheels and seemed to be made of wire and little slats of shiny wood, and on a board in front of the soldier were lots of little buttons and levers. There was a horn jutting from his chest, and he smiled and talked into the horn. His hands danced, turning levers, pushing buttons, always talking. He was brown-uniformed, blond, and he was in charge of this machine that he managed so easily. I saw him talk and laugh with an ease that I envied. Here was this wonderful figure, and there was my father all covered with gray dust, and I was a bug, an insect, a scab.

Our mother wanted to leave Germany; go to Palestine, America, anywhere. But my father, of course, did not. "Are there cows in Manhattan?" he would say. "What am I going to do in America?"

Tante Irma, Mother's sister was in New York City; Uncle Theo, her brother in England. There were terrible arguments and then I would run out of the house. Once, my mother took a book, "here, dammit. Read it yourself." And she held it under my father's nose. My father moved or my mother moved the book and then my father's nose bled all over the book. The book was *Mein Kampf*. I ran out of the house.

Some days before, forced laborers were working on the street in front of our house, working on the cobblestones or street drainage, pick and shovel work. These were some of the early enemies of the Nazis whom Hitler had rounded up and jailed or put into concentration camps; Social Democrats, union people, communists, the *Moor Soldaten*; people like that. And they were doing this street work right in front of our house. And my mother, seeing them work so hard, would bring them water, coffee, bread and butter, things like that for which these men were very grateful. And she would chat with them. These workers then told her that she should leave Germany, get out as soon as she could because Hitler had it in for the Jews and if she didn't believe what they told her she should read Hitler's book for herself and see what Hitler had in mind for her. They even gave her a copy of Hitler's book. Where they got the book, I don't know, but Mamma read it and she believed what it said. She tried to get our father to read but he wouldn't.

"This kind of thing happened all the time all over Europe. Hitler's a cheap politician, it'll blow over. Do you think that the people who really count will let him go on with this? Never!"

It was very hot when we came from collecting mushrooms, Oma and I. We had crossed the railroad tracks, the highway, then our green meadow that stretched from the highway all the way down to the edge of the brook. The brook was the *Bröl*, and its name was attached to the whole area in which we lived, *The Brölthal*, the *Bröl* valley. I was sometimes a bit embarrassed that this little brook in which I could dangle my feet on a hot day when everybody else was gathering hay, had given its name to so wide an expanse of land. I knew from my books that it was a big world and that the Nile and the Mississippi, the Amazon and the Orinocco were very large rivers yet except for the Amazon they didn't get to name the country they flowed through,

not to speak of the Rhine which was a great deal closer. But it was a nice brook and when I looked at the pool where the water eddied black with silver strings running through it I thought where did this water start. Where did it begin? Oma said there was a spring up in the hills and she pointed. There were more springs where the water bubbled up out of the ground and all of the springs and bubbling added together made the brook. Where the brook edged the meadow it ran in this lovely steel blue color except where it flowed over stones and then there was a streaming of white froth; on the forest side, where branches arched over the water, it was this dappled color, dark brown where the shadows lay and silver blue where the sun shone through the branches. I sometimes stood at the water's edge for long periods just watching a leaf flow on the current. The leaf came round the bend and slowly flowed on the current through shadow and through sunlight. Would the leaf flow on past me and round another bend and disappear or would it get caught in the swirling around one of the rocks and sink in the swirling or what was worse be pushed flat against one of the rocks and made to stay there, flattened against the rock, kept there by the pressure of the water and not at all drift off further? I think I watched many leaves float down the brook.

Now the water in the brook was low and Oma and I could hop from stone to stone till we reached the other side and we walked into a green pine wood

"They're going to cut the tall grass for hay in a few days," said Oma. The floor of the wood squeaked and crunched as we walked on the dark brown pine needles. Oma knew where she was going and soon we came to the place where the forest floor was covered with thin, crooked, yellow-brown morrels. The forest floor was dappled like the shadow part of the brook: sun and shadow. The morels seemed to grow in shadow. When one patch of morrels was almost

exhausted Oma moved on, searching for the next patch, and left me to pick the last few by myself. Her loud haloo told me where she was and I hurried after her. Oma held her apron in front of her, we threw the mushrooms into the bellying apron. It was soon filled and we started home, retracing the way we had come.

We reached the highway, turned right, and there in front of the Nathan house was a huge wooden crate. It was a huge barn of a crate, it looked as big as our living room; the wood was blond wood and it was open at one end and empty. Oma said, "the lift." The Nathan house was the largest Jewish house in the whole town, really one of the largest houses in the whole town. It had a large garden in back that ran almost down to the brook. It had a summer house in which I drank cold cider and it had willow trees that gave shade. I sat under the shade of the willow trees and squished ants with my thumb. It was the house where Oma grew up. It was where her brother Julius lived with his son Wolfgang and Wolfgang's wife Ruth. And they had a new baby.

Oma looked at the crate and turning toward the house said, "I have to go in."

"Can I stay here? I want to look at the box." I was very surprised when she said "yes." Oma went into the house and I ran toward the crate. Inside the crate it was dusk and I walked very carefully. The crate smelled of saw dust and shellac. It was huge. Its height disappeared in darkness, but its sides were a smooth blond wood. It was just wood but I touched the wood very carefully, I felt the way I felt in synagogue.. Suddenly there was a boom. There was another boom and I ran out of the box. Outside there were two men laughing, carrying a chest of drawers, "can't have vermin in the crate; got to drive them out." They carried the chest into the crate.

Oma came out of the house took my hand and we resumed our way home. "Wolfgang is going to Palestine. Did you know that?" I knew that. Wolfgang was her nephew; he had the same name as mine. "The lift is going to carry everything to Eretz."

"And Aunt Ruth and the baby in there?"

"No that's silly, just their household things." I knew that. I was making a joke. Aunt Ruth and the baby were not going to Palestine, just Wolfgang. Wolfgang was something of a joke too, in our town; not me, him. When their baby, Rolfe, was born the baby was not "all right". His skin was brown and he had lots of black hair. He had large peculiar eyes and his face was all flat. And he cried all the time. Some people said that his crying was louder than the whistle of the train whose tracks ran on the other side of the highway. I could sometimes stop his crying with a stupid game. When he visited or I was at his house and he lay in his little crib I made believe that I was catching flies. "See Rolfe, see," and I would quickly whisk my hand through the air and then close my fingers into a fist. I would show him the fist then open my hand, see. All gone. It's all gone." And I would do that over and over again and all the while I was doing it he would be quiet, fascinated, I guess, by the movement of my hands. The minute I stopped, his wailing would begin again. If I were at her house, Aunt Ruth would say that I could not leave, I would have to stay all the time and entertain her boy. Then she would get me a piece of cake or a pink marzipan pig. Aunt Ruth was tall with black hair and very smooth white skin. She would say," when Wolfgang is gone you'll come and stay with me. All right? Then I won't have lost a Wolfgang, I'll just have another Wolfgang. All right?"

The reason that Aunt Ruth's Wolfgang was something of a joke in the town was that when the baby was crying so hard he would put it in the little cream colored carriage and wheel

the baby right out on the highway that ran in front of his house where all the people could see him. He wheeled it up and down the road till the baby was quiet and then he wheeled it some more till the baby was asleep. But the people all said, "what kind of a thing is that for a man to do, wheeling a carriage? That's nothing for a man. Ruth doesn't have anything else to do? Hmmm and hmmm." There was a lot of hmmm going on.

Anyway, it was because the baby was not, "all right" that they were not leaving Germany together. Because he was not "all right" the Germans would not let the baby out of the country so it was that Wolfgang was going to leave by himself, leave Aunt Ruth and the baby, and then see what he could do to get them out of Germany from outside the country, but by the time that we left the country and that was two years later Aunt Ruth and the baby were still in Ruppichteroth.

Many years later we heard that both Ruth and the baby were transported to the Concentration Camp in Riga, Latvia, where both of them were killed.

Ernst Gärtner, Otto's son left for America. Then my favorite Gärtner, Herbert, left for America, for New York City.. He was my favorite because whenever he saw me, I would get to ride on his shoulders. Herbert had sisters, Kate and Irene, who many years before had left our town for America.

The United States existed for us, as a word called America.. The word was always, always, "America." It was a name that had an almost holy feeling to it. It was a feeling that was soft like the red carpet in the synagogue from whose low depth you looked up onto the soft and shimmering red velvet curtain, decorated on its borders with gold braid, and where, behind the curtain there were the burnished oak doors behind which were the scrolls of the Torahs with

their silver crowns and silver bells. America was as real as were the stories of Indians and the wilderness. It was *Schlaraffenland*, Utopia, the land of milk and honey, the big rock candy mountain, a place of luxury, of hard work, of delicious idleness. How could a land exist where buildings were built on hard rock and because they were built on hard rock they could reach the sky and their tops scrape the clouds?

Herbert called me 'Big Ears' because he said I would always 'snuffle', put my nose in where adults were gathered and try to listen to what they were saying. So Kate and Irene had left for America even before I was born and they were both rich, in Newark, New Jersey. Kurt Gärtner, Otto's son left for America. I did not like Kurt very much because unlike any of the other Gärtners he never bothered much with me. He was small and had a narrow face. Then Werner Gärtner, Herbert's brother left.

There were parties for all of them just before they left, parties to which I was not invited. Then the Isaak's girls left, blond Selma and blond Elsie. I was at the party for them and quite a few Christians were there. Else's mother and grandmother were both midwives and I had heard that the two of them had delivered babies in our town and in the towns round about. I remember their grandmother, Sarah, who walked stooped, had white hair and a slate-gray face and always wore black, and who I avoided because I thought she was a witch. Sarah walked along the streets of the town and when a Christian man walked by he would take off his hat to her, or sometimes, if a little girl walked by, the girl would curtsy.

#

One late afternoon I watched as over the kitchen table Oma lit a candle and carried it over to a nook in the wall where there were small shelves with small frames holding small

framed photographs of great-aunts and uncles and of Opa in an army uniform. Opa was near the nook and had been praying his usual afternoon and evening prayers. He walked back and forth, facing the wall, turning away from it, walking around Oma, watching her with some surprise and all the while praying and at the same time making questioning motions to her with his arms. While he gestured and prayed, Oma looked for more candles, she found them and then put them on the table. She turned to the stove where she rattled some pots. Opa had finished praying and turned, wide eyed, to Oma...

“Who in God’s name is that candle for, we don’t have yahrzeit. Can you tell me for what? For what are you lighting candles for now?”

Oma never said much. So often, when I saw her speak, it was as if she was just discovering words, and it was hard for her to say them. The words came out smoothly but slowly so that when she said something, it really seemed more important than when most other people said something. And when she did say something it seemed as if she were answering some very deep and important question.

“For Karl. I thought I should.

“It’s not his yahrzeit yet. It’s not till October.”

“Why not light them when we feel like it?”

“If we do it when we felt like it we might never do it.”

“Or we might light them one a minute till the kitchen looked like an acre of candle lights, like in the Cologne Cathedral.”

“An acre of lights would be too expensive for us.”

Oma went to a cupboard and took some saucers and put them on the table. She took the candles and put them, after melting some wax at their bottoms, on the saucers.

“What, in God’s name, are these for now? These four - but what four?”

“Five.”

“No. We won’t mourn them. No. There’s nothing to mourn. They’re going to leave, that’s all. You are killing them before their time, aren’t you? Aren’t you?”

“I’m not killing them. Except I know that there’ll be a time when we won’t be seeing them any more. Once they’re out the door they’re gone. And I feel sad.”

“You are a nun. You with your candles.” Opa snuffed out five candles. “One candle is enough. One is enough.”

#

There was talk of war. The nights grew longer and the days were chillier. There was talk of Sudetenland and Czechoslovakia, of cutting it up. How could one cut up a country? Did one use a knife? No. Of course not. Spain was being cut up with bombs and guns. Hitler wanted to cut up Czechoslovakia, and the Germans who lived there were going to live as Germans. All Germans everywhere were one people. But we, Opa and Oma, my parents, the other Jewish families, we were Germans too, weren’t we? How could they say that Czechs were Germans and that other Germans, Germans like us, were not Germans?

Along with talk of war, of cutting up a country there was talk of names. And the names felt like arrows, all pointed at us. In the warm evenings after supper when the talk turned to names it was as if the names did things, created actions, just names alone. One name was good, another bad, others just so-so. Some names were courageous, others cowardly. Whatever the

names did, I understood, would have an effect on our lives. When the adults spoke of the names their voices were intense. Whenever the talk turned to names it would frighten me. There was Runciman and Ciano, Bonnet and Mussolini, Roosevelt, Hitler, Benes, Chamberlain. I was frightened. All the men seemed to pull hard on their cigarettes. And though I was frightened, I wanted to hear all that my cigarette smoking, chin stroking adults had to say. When I was shoed off to bed, I walked away very slowly.

I spent most of my days in the hay loft, reading. When not reading I examined the gray spider webs being spun in the darker corners of the loft. There was something terribly exact about the woven lines and circles of their webs in which the small flies struggled. Whenever Opa came to milk the several cows we had left, I would climb down from my loft and wait as I so often did, and hunker down beside him and wait for the spray of milk into my mouth. But he was distracted so often these days that he hardly ever noticed me beside him. This day, however, he did, but not in the way I wanted.

“Just wait here. Oma needs some milk.”

When he returned he had a pail with him. “Let’s go collect some pears.” He held out his hand, I took it and we walked through our hilly meadow. It was noon and the sun shone. Holding his hand we came to the meadow’s edge where stood our ancient pear tree. The tree was huge. Strips of bark were shed from its sides. A cow stood in its shadow eating pears that had fallen. Opa drove the cow away by hitting it in the rump with the pail.

“Got to leave some pears for us humans, she’s got all this grass.” He smiled. There were a great many pears on the ground and I jumped to collect them into the pail. Opa found a stick

and hit the branches so that more pears tumbled down. We soon filled the pail. Opa looked about on the ground, found one, picked it up and rubbed it hard and gave it to me.

Eat. These are the best pears in Ruppichteroth.” I ate. The pear was sweet and tart; white and yellow sparks were in it. We walked down a small rise on which the pear tree stood. There was a hum in the air. Opa stopped. “Look up there.” I saw a sliver of silver cruise far overhead. “Look up there. A plane.” I had seen planes in the air before, but they were always black and had double wings. This one was brand new to me. The plane was silver and had only one set of wings and even more, as I looked at it, it was surrounded by a black halo. The plane flew on surrounded by this black circle. Opa put down the pail and pointed.

“That’s Chamberlain on his way to Bad Godesberg. He’s on his way to Hitler. Too bad for all the Czechs. Too bad for the rest of the world.” We resumed walking. Opa looked down at me, smiled and squeezed my hand. I held on to his hand till we reached our door. I looked back up toward the meadow. I couldn’t see the tree or cow. They were gone.

Chapter 7

One day at school, in the yard during recess, someone called out, “look down there. Smoke.” We all ran to a low wall that ran the edge of the playground. From the wall we could look down on the roofs of the town, on the yards and the streets, on the washing that was hung out in the yards. Down below, I could see, that it was our synagogue from which the black smoke rose. Children moved back from the wall and looked at me. They moved away from me as if I were Willy and had committed something foul. Our teacher came to me and took my

hand. "I'm going to walk you home." We found my brother, Karl, who by then was also attending school. He was in first grade, I in second. Our teacher took each of us by the hand and so, hand in hand, Karl on one side and I on the other, our teacher walked us home.

We waked down the cobbled streets, past Schorn's store, past Aunt Lydia's house, down past the blacksmith's. There seemed to be more people than usual out on the street. There seemed to be women in aprons who had just stepped out of their houses, some with towels still in their hands, as if, in their rush outdoors, they had been overtaken by surprise, and who were chatting as if in front of their own house steps right out in the open, on the street. And as we passed they stopped their talk, and now silent, looked at us. I was excited by what seemed to be this totally extraordinary event. I did not at all mind the attention our walk was getting. A crowd stood in front of the synagogue: townspeople, men and women milling, several gray uniformed policemen, Brownshirts with red swastika armbands. White smoke billowed from the front door of the synagogue. My grandfather, my Opa appeared in the smoke. He stood in the doorway with a Torah on his shoulder as if he had just lifted it from the Ark. I was afraid, I pulled at our teacher's hand. I wanted to run to Opa. The teacher squeezed my hand hard, looked down at me and shook his head. He threaded us along the back of the crowd. He held our hands tight and looked straight ahead. We arrived in front of our house. We stopped. Our grandmother stood on the front steps. Our teacher nodded at her, maybe bowed, then turned and left. Grandmother came down and embraced us. She was crying, we were crying.

Opa came in the door, smelling of smoke and carrying a Torah. "I have to go back, get the others." He laid the Torah on the kitchen table and hurried out again. A few minutes later he came back with another. As he started to rush out again Oma said, quietly, "the shul is burning."

Opa looked at her, said nothing and hurried out again. Several of the older men, Gustav and Otto Gärtner, Harry Regensburgers' father, old Mr. Isaaks, Oma's brother, Julius, all came to the kitchen carrying Torahs, or old leather covered books. The Torahs lay on the kitchen table and all the old men sat around on chairs with their hands in front of their mouths. The policeman, Laddach appeared in the kitchen door, there were several young SA men behind him. Laddach was about to say something when one of the young men jumped in front of him and yelled, "You old men, pick up those things and get outside." They all waited, then Officer Laddach nodded. Opa first and then the others picked up the Torahs and books, and filed out the door. Outside, in front of our house the Brown Shirts made the men stand in a line and then yelled at them to start marching. As they went off with Opa at the head of the line one of them yelled, "left foot, right foot," over and over again, soon all the other brown shirts began yelling, "left foot, right foot." Somebody ran up to Opa and forced an axe into his left hand. I saw them move out and round a corner. I tried to follow them but Mamma pulled me back and pushed me into the house. Someone, later, told us that the old men were made to march through all the streets of the village with the SA men yelling, "left foot, right foot," laughing and enjoying themselves. The old men and Opa were then made to stand in front of the synagogue where a bonfire had been started and with guns pointing at them the men were made to throw the books and Torahs into the fire.

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The next few days are jumbled. My grandparents lived on the ground floor. There was a center hall and their living quarters were off to the right. A stair on the left led up to our apartment. At the end of the hall was a door that led out to the barn now empty of cows. Next to

the stairs, in a small alcove was the cream separator, a shining stainless steel tube, the top quarter pinched in and then, like a large woman's hips, it flared out. I was in my grandmother's kitchen. There was a loud knocking on the front door. My grandmother and I both went to see: she opened the door. Officer Laddach, in a gray uniform stood at the door. He pulled off his cap, "I'm sorry Oma. I'm looking for Oscar."

My father in his shirt and undone collar, came down the stairs, my mother behind him. My father stood in the middle of the room turning in a circle, looking at his mother, at my mother.

"What do you want Laddach," said my mother. Laddach shuffles his feet, "I'm sorry Melli, but I have to take Oscar."

"Why Oscar?"

"They're taking everybody. The Regensburgers, the Gärtners, everybody." Oma went out into the barn. "Oscar, you have to get dressed. Dress warm."

"Where is he going?" Laddach pressed his lips together.

"Laddach, you two were in the band together, in the soccer club."

"First to Cologne, Messehalle, I think, then I don't know."

My mother ran upstairs. I moved from the stairs over to the cream separator. I leaned on it, I put my arms around its waist, embracing, holding on tight. Laddach and my father looked at each other. Neither said anything. My father turned in circles. He didn't see me. My grandmother returned from the barn.

My mother and grandmother ran at my father with clothes. My father just stood there. He stood helpless while they seemed to dress him; my mother with coat and tie, my

Grandmother with a scarf; my mother with a sweater, then a heavy overcoat, then a hat. Laddach said, "all right." My father moved toward the door and my grandmother screamed, "wait, I have to make some sandwiches. He has to take some sandwiches." They all, except my grandmother, stood there saying nothing. Grandmother came with sandwiches. She embraced my father. Then my mother embraced him. My father went to the door, Laddach took him by the arm and they went out.

Somewhat later in the day, Laddach appeared at our door again.

"Melli, you have to come, you and the kids." My mother's knees buckled; she fell to the floor. Laddach and my grandmother helped her up, "they just want you at the synagogue. They just want some pictures." Another man came, "Hurry, they're waiting. They have to get back to Cologne."

A small crowd still stood about the building, among them, several of my classmates. We were told to stand in front of the synagogue, my mother, my grandmother, my brother Karl, myself. My mother held our youngest brother, two and a half year old Peter in her arms. Although the synagogue had stopped burning, smoke still rose from the fallen roof. Now, there was merely the smell of fire and of burning. The smell was all around us. Two men were taking pictures. My classmates, my playmates, Willibald and Horst as well as some of the others picked up small clods of dirt and threw them at us. Two SS men stood in back of the crowd and as the flash bulbs popped off they began to yell at us, "just wait soon you'll be burning too. Just wait. Just wait." They were laughing and looking at each other, as if they were pulling off some great joke.

The following morning Opa came out of hiding. He had spent that raw November night, first outside in the field and then, when he thought he heard some men, he ran down to a nearby brook where he spent most of the night immersed in the freezing water. What I remember about that particular morning was my Opa, outside the house, somewhere, screaming, in great pain, "I'm pissing blood. I'm pissing blood."

That night all the Jewish families in town gathered in the baker Regensburger's house. People slept in their day clothes on the floor in various rooms. We children were all in one upstairs room. We stayed up very late playing rummy and parchesi, and all that night we heard our mothers', our grandmothers' our aunts' sobbing, rising up into our room.

In the morning we were home again. The only phone in the house was the one in the downstairs hall, and that was attached to the wall. Making calls was a rare thing, but now we watched our mother make frantic telephone calls, call after call, trying to find out where our father had been taken. The following morning Mamma and several other women went off to Cologne to find out about their husbands and sons. I was taken along. I was not to open my mouth but to hold on to mother's hand. If she squeezed my hand I could cry if I wanted to. We went to the offices of Jewish community organizations, but there were rows and lines of women already there when we came, many with children holding fast to their mothers' hands. We went to police stations and to the offices of the Gestapo, and always there were long lines and nobody would tell us anything. We returned home and as we got off the train, Ladach was there waiting for us. He said "Dachau. Dachau is where he is going."



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There were no words, just screams. I had told Mamma that I wanted Pappa back. With Pappa home, everything was right. Everything was in its proper place. It had to do with the house. With Pappa home, every room in the house was in its proper place; the house stood four square on its foundation, with Pappa gone, the house was askew; it seemed to lean, maybe to tip over; things were out of balance. Mamma screamed and waved her arms up and down. Oma came, stroked my hair and led me to her kitchen where there were familiar smells.

Karl and I sat on the bottom step of the stairs watching Mamma: all day she stood at the wall phone in the downstairs hall, calling; one call after the other. Opa fed us and Oma watched over Peter. Mamma was told to petition the Gestapo in Cologne. Pappa, at sixteen, during that war, had replaced a local postal worker and delivered mail for several years. Mamma learned

that if someone had done service in the first world war they might be released from the concentration camp. She wrote up the petition and holding on to my hand, we returned to Cologne. The wait on a hard bench was very long. When we finally were led to an office, the black uniformed officer looked up at mother from a sheet of paper and said that, Oscar Hess, his name had been erased. Mom's face lit up with smiles; she bowed and said many thank yous, and made me say thank you. I hated her bowing. At the railroad station we ran into Ilse Isaaks, and my mother told her what had happened, that his name had been erased.

"Don't you know what that means? said Ilse, You'll never see him again." I began to sob, but mother only said, "No." She kept repeating "no" all the way back to Ruppichteroth. About six weeks later on a Friday night Mom took my brother and me down to the train station. It was dark, except for a few street lights. The wait was short. Pappa stepped down from the train. The train pulled out behind him. He stood there, between the rails, on cinders. His face was round and fat. He was bald. His wonderful black hair has been shaved off. He was a father I had never seen before. We stood across from him. His hands trembled. My brother and I looked up to him but he didn't look at us, and all he said was directed at our mother, "When do I leave? Are my papers in order?"

A week later Pappa left for Holland. The reason for his release from Dachau was that Aunt Mina in Holland had arranged it. She had contacts with Dutch government officials, and through them she arranged for his visa, for his stay with her in Amsterdam. Only because of her efforts in Holland was our father released and allowed to leave Germany. In those days the German government was more interested in getting their Jews to leave the country, rather than burning them. All that week I was full of a terrible curiosity as to what had happened to my

father, where he had been, what had happened to him to make him look so strange, what made him tremble so. On the morning of his leaving we all ate in my grand-parents kitchen. At one point my grandfather left the room and then soon returned with an object wrapped in a large white linen napkin. I knew what it was; it was the Shofar, the rams' horn that was kept in the credenza, behind glass, on a glass holder, in the dark dining room in which no one ever ate. It was the Shofar that had belonged to my grandfather's father and to his father before him and to the one before that. It had belonged to a whole series of fathers extending into what was for me an infinite past, or rather, distance, a distance like Crusoe's island, or Shatterhand's America. It was a distance extending up into the night sky. Someone had mentioned, perhaps it was our teacher that there was a constellation of stars called the Ram. I knew about rams. We kept them on the farm, for food. My grandfather would dig a little pit, struggle with the ram, his arm under its head till he was able to lift the ram's head high enough and then with a quick stroke of a sharp knife cut the ram's throat and the dark red blood gushed into the pit of dug up earth till the pit was full and the ram stopped its struggling. I associated the sky ram with Abraham. It was his ram that was up in the sky; it was the ram he slaughtered instead of slaughtering his son, his only one. It was that distance that the Shofar bridged since it came from the horn of that ram. But I wanted to know what made Pappa look so strange and why he spoke so little, and why he looked out of the window all the time.

I remember that we walked over snow to the railroad which would take my Papa to Holland. The snow crunched under my feet. There was a small crowd, maybe a dozen, maybe twenty people at the railroad station when we arrived, all Christians, all silent, the Protestant pastor among them. Except for the pastor, these were all old friends of Pappa's: friends from the

town band, the soccer team. I thought it was strange that the pastor was there; the only contact with him that I knew of were the greetings that we exchanged whenever we passed each other on the street. Pappa embraced us, entered the train and emerged on the rear platform of the last car. The train pulled out and as it did the Protestant pastor called out, "I wish I were going with you."

Chapter 8

Over the next three months Mamma traveled to almost every city in Germany in which a foreign consular office was located to try for a visa to somewhere, anywhere. She was traveling to cities where countries had consulates. When Mamma came back from one of her trips she looked terrible. When there was black in the hollows of her eyes and her hair looked like wires and when the slaps came fast for the least infraction I knew there were no visas. Mama's travels made Opa terribly angry. Once, I heard him yell at her that she was a whore. Her husband was gone and she was traveling to friends, old boy friends, playing, eating up money while her husband was gone. When Opa was angry I wanted to disappear, to run away, anywhere, but anywhere was black, anywhere was nowhere. I wanted to bury myself in the hay up in the barn, but the hay was old and rotting, it oozed a sticky wetness and smelled bad.

When Mamma was at home, nights, she would sit in a chair in the living room, silent, with her hands in her lap.

My grandfather cooked. No other grownup man that I knew cooked. Ever. Not even my father, except that he would prepare bottles for my brother Peter, but that was not really

cooking. Sometimes, when I'd get to the Gärtners, Willy's mother, her name was Meta, she was always ironing clothes, would ask me, "And what did your Opa make for you today?" She said it while she was looking down at her ironing and when the question was over, she looked up expecting an answer. But the question was always made up of such a peculiar mixture of disdain and admiration, of criticism and regard that I was left confused. The fact that he cooked was something that seemed to set him apart from the rest of the male population of our village; that and the fact that he read and in the words of one of the townspeople, "Your Opa, he knows a lot." That and the fact that he led the service in the synagogue. It wasn't that Oma didn't cook, she did most of the cooking but it was the fact that he cooked at all that seemed to make him remarkable in the eyes of the village. And he cooked for me. Even before my father was taken to Dachau he cooked, I thought, things just for me.

"What shall we have today?" I sat at the kitchen table in front of the plate he had set and I just looked at him and said nothing, knowing what would come next. Opa had a bald head, very deep set eyes, a gray mustache and a cleft in his chin. He shaved with a straight razor.

"Stones and straw. That's what I'm making today. Stones and straw."

What I liked best were his fried potatoes and the little carrots. The carrots, mostly, came out of a can from Oma's store, but when the season was right it came from her garden, and he made them sweeter than the carrots done by anyone else. While others might, possibly, get close to the taste of Opa's carrots no one could get near his potatoes. I watched him as he stood at the coal stove, hunched over, digging the butter out of a small tun, cutting the boiled potatoes into the sizzling pan, turning the potatoes in the pan.

One day I brought a thick branch into the house. I wanted to whittle and decorate it like the shiny knobby and shellacked walking stick that was Opa's. Opa screamed at me, "Get it out of the house." I took the branch and threw it out onto the midden. I had done something wrong but I had no idea what it was that I had done.

#

We were going to Ecuador. The news came from Holland; visas and all the proper exit papers had been achieved. Oma and Opa were not going with us. Opa was not going to go to a country of snakes and jungles and anyway, things, eventually, were going to be all right in Germany. Germany was a civilized country. He was a German. He had fought for his country. He was going to be all right. Opa took us to Cologne and from there it was on to Holland.

We left on the train. Sometimes the train slowed down or even stopped when it came near a station. And then I saw all those small garden plots on the edges of the railroad tracks. There were rows of green plants and women in aprons among the plants, on their knees, pulling weeds. There were wooden huts in the backs of the gardens where implements were stored; and beyond the huts were houses with ochre walls where bedding being aired, rested on window sills. I saw a young boy pull a wheelbarrow out of one of the huts. The gardens were separated by fencing, wood or metal wiring, and very often, along the fences, there were flower beds with red flowers and white.

Telephone or telegraph wires ran along the route of the train to Holland. The wires ran from pole to pole, from telephone pole to telephone pole. I watched them out of the window. They began even, and level with a pole, but then bowed, sagged in a long soft curve, then rising up, lifted, to meet the next pole. Rising and falling, rising and falling. I watched them against

changing backgrounds, against green woods, green fields. I saw them in the dark, light from compartment windows briefly striping them with flashes of orange, my face in the darkness reflected in the compartment window, and behind the window the rising and falling rhythm of the wires. We were going to meet Pappa; we were leaving Oma and Opa. The continuous repetitions, the rising and falling of the wires were soothing to me; and they were keeping measure: the distance apart from Oma and Opa.

The train stopped at Emmerich, on the Dutch border. We heard a great deal of halooing outside the train. From the windows we could see men in various uniforms, some that we recognized as railroad people in their olive uniforms, but there were others in dark blue, and they were all waving and shouting at each other. Suddenly, and it seemed as if there was a signal, passengers seemed to look at each other, then they stood up and began to pull their baggage from the overhead compartments. The doors to the car opened with a great clang, and a group of men in uniform entered and very loudly and cheerily called out "good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, Control, Control. We are from Control, any problems with languages? Please have your suitcases open when we come around." They were very cheery and smiled and said "anything to declare?" and "thank you, thank you" a lot. They rummaged through our baggage and when they were done placed a lead seal around the clasps of the suitcases.

While all that went on, one of the uniforms sat down next to my mother. He said that he was a border policeman; he had silver arrows on the tips of his lapels. He bent over the papers that she handed to him. We stared at him as he leafed through them. After a while he looked up and shook his head. He turned and called out to men behind him, "you can stop with the baggage of these people." There was something wrong. There was something wrong with our

papers and the policeman with silver lapels said that we had to leave the train. Mom began to cry, we hung on to her skirts,

“What can I do? My husband is waiting for us in Amsterdam.”

“If you call him, maybe he can fix the problem quickly. He can talk to the Panama consulate and get it settled. There are trains all the time.”

“But what if he can’t? I have three children, and it’s late, almost night”. He shrugged his shoulders and helped my mother take our baggage off the train. Our suitcases were stacked next to the track, and my brothers and I stood next to the suitcases. We looked at our mother hurrying from one person to another asking where a phone might be. She disappeared behind a kiosk. Hissing and steaming, our train for Amsterdam pulled out and left the station. Men pushed baggage trucks back and forth. Men and women with coats over their arms rushed for trains. Nobody looked at us. After a long while our mother reappeared; there was a man with a baggy pants and rumpled jacket and a tieless white shirt following behind her. “I can’t find Pappa. This nice taxi driver thinks he knows a place where we might spend the night.” It was already quite dark.

There was a Catholic cloister that had a hostel attached to it where, the taxi driver told us, we might stay overnight. Mother had the taxi driver stack our bags in front of the cloister door and holding Peter in her arms rang a bell on the side of the door. A nun in a dark habit and wearing a wimple opened the door wide. The light shone orange behind her and there was a wide staircase to the side. The nun seemed elderly. She had a pale round pancake face and looked a great deal like Oma. Mamma tried to explain our situation: “leaving Germany, husband in Amsterdam, something the matter with our papers, can’t reach my husband, it will be all right

tomorrow, just for one night.” The nun patted Peter on the head, “just for one night.” I did not hear all their conversation, but I did hear, several times, the words “not possible.” I heard “not possible” one last time, and then the door closed. There was no room. We stood there staring at the closed door. I felt as if someone had put their hand over my mouth, and it was hard to breathe. And I felt the way I remembered when the teacher told me I need not join in singing the German anthems. There were things in this world that were just not for me. Our mother had the taxi take us to a hotel but the hotel was full.

We stood on the sidewalk, under a street-lamp, in front of the hotel, when our taxi driver ran up to us. “One of my buddies told me of a Jewish family that might take you in.” They did. We were a week in Emmerich; a week of potato soup and cold meat; a week of playing rummy with my brother and an old man who lived in the house; a week of watching our mother make phone calls; there was nothing to be done. Opa came, looked at Mom with both hands over her mouth; he shook his head, and hugged her. He came to take us back to our village.

We sat in our train compartment on slippery yellow wicker seats, my mother in a corner and Opa across from her. They sat by the window and I didn’t even care that I could not look out of the window. On the way out I would have fought for the window seat, but now I just watched my mother slumped and silent in her corner, her arm around Peter, and my grandfather asking, “and this is what you got from all your running around?”

Mama was stroking Peter and she took a long while answering, which scared me. When she began to speak she talked to the window, not Opa. “Oscar was supposed to get the transit visa for Panama through the consulate in Amsterdam and send it to me.”

“He didn’t get it?”

“No. He didn’t get it because somebody wanted too much money, and somebody else told him it wasn’t necessary since we had the visa for Ecuador.”

“So?”

“Our damn ship from Amsterdam doesn’t go direct to Ecuador; it’s too big to go through the canal or something. It lets us off in Panama where we take another boat to Ecuador. We have to stay in Panama till we get the other boat.

“Mina would have helped.”

“Tante Mina has helped and helped and helped. She got Oscar out of Dachau, she paid for all our tickets and gave us seven thousand dollars more. Oscar didn’t think he could ask her one more time.” She turned away from the window and looked at Opa and yelled, “do you know how it feels to stand in the dark with three kids and you don’t know where to go? I didn’t know where to go. I didn’t know what to do. Damn it!” She cried and hit her head against the window several times. Peter, Karl, and I began to cry. Opa stood up and took Mama’s head between his hands and kissed the top of her head.

It was night, but I didn’t go to sleep. I counted all the stations on our backwards trip from Emmerich: Wesel, Oberhausen, Duisburg, Dusseldorf, Neuss, Cologne, Bonn. At Bonn we changed to the narrow gauge train that took us back to Ruppichterath.

Three months later we were again on our way to Holland and one week after that we were on an ocean liner, first class, on our way to Ecuador.

The reason we were traveling first class was that we were forced to. The German government had made it a condition of our emigration. Emigrants’ tickets had to be paid in hard

currency: British pounds or American dollars, and so we were made to go first class, since that would bring the Nazis the largest amount of hard currency. Our family was very lucky in that we had wealthy Aunt Mina, who was able to pay for first class, as well as providing for all the money we might need in our travels. I ache for those who had no such help. The Holocaust had its class aspect.

The voyage was a great geography lesson. The 35,000 ton *Caribia* of the North German Lloyd was my teacher. The ship had nosed about Ports on the North Sea scooping up passengers destined for Caribbean ports. Now the ship was docked in *Ymuiden*, the port of Amsterdam, and when it was made clear to the white uniformed officers that the gold had been paid and the cabins reserved, we boarded and then it was out into the Channel and along the coast of France. Passengers leaned over the railing, pointing to the towns and cities that we were passing, naming them. These were seasoned travelers. I leaned over too, or tried to, and I listened. *Scheveningen, Ostende, Dunquerque, Calais, Boulogne, Dieppe, Le Havre*, “were those lights *Cherbourg?*” Then out onto the ocean. “That’s *Madeira.*” Then *Port of Spain*. I loved all the new words; all the sounds of the new languages. At the Venezuelan port of *La Guaira*, brown colored boys found ways to climb up the long black sides of the ship; they stood up on top of the railings, then passengers up on the highest deck tossed silver coins down into the brown harbor waters just to see the boys jump and dive for them. There were sharks in these waters. We could see fins cutting through the water. Elders gave their children coins to toss. *Maracaibo, Baranquilla, Cartagena, Colon*. The names were music.

Then there was luxury: First Class luxury. There was bouillon on the deck and mock turtle soup in the dining room, tea, toast and butter cookies, and the string chamber group at

four. Someone with a blanket wrapped me gently in the deck chair. They must imagine we were gentiles. We, who traveled behind cow flop, now had a shipload of obsequious servants. My mother reveled in it: the white table cloth, the heavy silver, the flowers, the smile from the captain's table. There were even scones, clotted cream and strawberry jam.

"A nice English custom, we had it in Frankfurt." Mom reveled in it. Our father could not enjoy anything. He shied at everything and everybody. Anyone with black shoes, he thought, had to be in the SS. He was constantly looking for what was in back of him. "Pappa," Mamma told us, "after Dachau, has become a real coward. A *Washlappen*, a dishrag." My father? My father who had me, walk with him, stride for stride, driving cows to market? A dishrag? Then what was I?

There was much to divert a person from knots in the stomach. I had the run of the ship. A favorite place was the gymnasium. There was all this fascinating machinery: a rowboat on dry land, a track on which I could run but which stood dead still and was called a treadmill; heavy iron weights which stood against one wall, over which men grunted when they pulled them up over their shoulders by a strong rope. And they kept up the pulling and grunting for no reason I could ever see. When I was alone in the gym, which was often, I rowed and ran and made the iron weights ring like bells when I pulled on the ropes and then quickly released them to smash on the ground.

It was all fun but we, Karl and I, were severely reprimanded when we let three year old Peter walk on top of the main deck railing. He accomplished three steps when there was a scream, a rush of adult arms and a subsequent pounding of both our rear ends. Later, Pappa took us to the railing, "look down there. Look." We were on the highest deck. Far down below,

strands of white water separated the ship from the black that stretched to the horizon. Pappa lifted me up above the railing and ordered me to look. Suddenly he staggered back. He dropped me onto the deck. "I get dizzy," he mumbled, and sat down on a deck chair. Mamma, later, told us that Pappa had a lot of trouble, a lot, looking down from a great height.

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Except for one boy and Karl there was nobody near my age on the boat, on that long voyage. I was eight and he was ten, maybe eleven. He was blond, wore long pants and white short sleeved shirts that were always creased as if they had just been ironed. He walked, as I watched him, as if nothing ever impressed him. This boat, this fantasy, this multi-colored fair, seemed to be something that was part of his ordinary life. That there were stewards, servants who brought bullion to the loungers on the top deck, meant nothing to him. The gym meant nothing, the skeet shooting on the upper deck meant nothing although I think it was his father who handled the gun most of the time, lovingly wiping down the shiny brown wooden stock with a chamois cloth, exchanging the gun he had just used with another, taking it from a wooden cabinet with a black handle as if it were an ordinary suitcase: a suitcase just for guns. There was another man with whom the boy's father played his shooting game. This man wore a large hat and a brown suit. I had seen a cowboy somewhere with a large hat, but this man did not wear one of those. Where did I see it? In a Karl May book, old and dusty, in a corner of our damp web covered cellar, in a stack of books, behind the sled? I had seen my father's name, in a strong, angular script on the fly leaf in faded, rusty ink. Or maybe I had seen a cartoon somewhere associated with an ad for cigarettes: a cowboy with legs bowed like brackets and a hat that looked like some sailboat on a Persian river, the ends upswept and the crown billowing

like a sail? The hat was not like that but something like that; an echo.

I had been watching, what? Was it a game? A tiny terrace bounded by a railing extended out over the side of the ship. It was just large enough for a man to stand on. The floor of the terrace was a braided metal weave of iron slats through whose interstices one could see the black ocean sweeping by below. A man could stand out there in safety but a little boy would surely catch his shoes in the hollow openings. Might he not fall through, down to where the flying fishes jumped, down to where the porpoises raced the black iron sides of the ship? They were all of one kind of material, ship and porpoise, the material of a curve bound and gathered by the thinnest slice of water. That was its skin, black and shiny above and its belly creamy and dun like a cowboy hat. I didn't think I would fall through the holes but what if I did? The ship would race on and I would be left behind in the empty ocean; empty of all help. I could imagine myself in the water. The high walled ship would be by in a second, long before any cry of help could come from my mouth. I was caught in the wake, tossed and tumbled in the churning wash. Could I breathe? No, I dare not. If I did, water would charge into my lungs, into my whole body and I would explode; my guts would charge out of the rents in my body like the pulp of a gooseberry when cracked between my teeth. Once, I heard, when I was not supposed to be within hearing, my father telling Mamma, that when he was in Dachau that the guards had taken a hose and pumped water down his throat. Pappa had said that he almost exploded. Maybe I would be caught by the ship's propeller and sliced and chopped into ...what? I felt myself torn apart. A blade cut into my skull. Would someone see the blood?

I had been watching the men for a long while. One of the men would walk out onto the little terrace with his rifle; off to one side of the terrace stood a strange machine. The machine

was something like a man's arm. It stood on a pedestal. It was like an arm and something like a bow and arrow. It had ropes and wires that pulled in one direction and let go in another. The lower arm of the machine was pulled back, someone, not a sailor but one of the servants on the boat, someone like a waiter would pull back the lower arm and put a large slate colored disc where the hand would be. Then the man with the rifle standing on the terrace above the black sea would call out, but not in German, "pull." The wonderful machine, just like an arm, flung itself out from the elbow and the black disc sailed away from the boat as if someone were, backhanded, skimming a hat out over the lawn. Quickly the stock of the gun rose to rest in the hollow of the man's shoulder. Smoothly the man lowered his head over the gun, his head swivelled, the barrel moved just slightly. There was a "crack," a puff of smoke and the disc disintegrated into black crumbs that fell in an arc down into the black ocean. My insides bubbled with the fact that people could be so clever.

"Good shot. Good Shot." All morning they called to each other, "Good shot. Good Shot." At each miss however, the men exchanged places and the other man would get his chance to shoot. He would get up from a canvas chair, put his drink on a table out of whose center a yellow umbrella sprouted.

I had been standing and watching for a long time but to the men doing the shooting I was invisible. Then, the man with the hat ambled over to me, "Is the shooting interesting to you?" I nodded, but was unable to say anything. He went back to his game. It was I who was watching him, not his son. I knew it was his son because he would sometimes bring him into the dining room where the children ate. This too was something new for me, eating apart from my parents. My parents ate in the dining room with the fresh cut flowers on the tables and the gleaming

glasses, and we ate away from them at the children's table. And the blond boy with the crisp white shirt sat there across from me and he spooned hot soup into his mouth, each time scooping the liquid up by pushing the spoon away to the far end of the plate as my mother had been trying to teach us for many years. And the boy sat there, and small bubbles of steam collected on the blond down of his upper lip. There was nothing so much that I wanted as to have blond down on my upper lip and for little bubbles of steam to collect there.

Sometimes I would steal away from my parents to stand up very near the ship's prow. It meant going down clanging metal stairs to second class and then past the vast canvas covered hatches winches, and masts, up to the prow where anchor chains lay folded like undershirts in a bureau drawer. Then I would see the ship cut through the hissing water, raising spray and white water, and, as if playing a game, knowing he was playing a game, I would see a blue-backed dolphin skipping and leaping just inches ahead of the prow, riding on the white waves the prow threw up. I knew that the dolphin knew that he was playing a game and that it was a great joy to him and it was a great joy for me to watch, but it was as nothing like seeing that blond boy who I wished to be more than anything else in the world.

There was a tap on my shoulder. I looked. It was Pappa, "We've been looking for you everywhere."

"Look. Look. Down there, the Dolphin, he's leaping. Look down there." Pappa shook his head, "I can't. Looking down from this height, I get dizzy. Come."

To get to Ecuador we needed to go through the Panama Canal. The *Caribia* was not going that way. She let us off in the Panamanian city of Colon on the Atlantic side of the Canal. For a whole week we waited in a hotel, waiting for the boat that would take us through the canal

and on to Ecuador. We slept in rooms with mosquito netting over our beds and our mother started feeding us quinine pills to ward off malaria.

The boat to Ecuador was small and black with one stack in the rear rather than with two tall grand raked stacks high and in its middle. There was only one class. Still, the dinner tables were set with white table cloths and shiny silver. What was most remarkable, however, was the Panama Canal itself: the locks with their immense and massive doors that opened and closed to let the ship in and out, the black water that swirled in silver circles like the eddies on my *Bröl* stream, and that filled empty space on the lock so that the ship might first be lifted and then the lock emptied and the ship was lowered. There was the marvel of the rectangular donkey engines that ran on rails besides the locks and that pulled and guided the ship through the locks. Here were giants at work. I had, often, to be pulled from the ships' railing while making transit. In the grand lake between the Atlantic and Pacific locks I saw the American flag for the first time. It was flying at the rear of a sleek gray destroyer that tore through the water. I had the sense that there was something conscious about the vessel. That it had a sense of its own strength and that most of all it knew to where it was speeding.

Chapter 9

We disembarked in Guayaquil. A lighter, rocking over choppy water, took us to the dock. Two things: the wonderful odor of drying coffee, piles of coffee, seeming acres, rested all around the dock. Men with rakes walked through the piles turning the beans over to dry in the sun, letting the odor out. We were standing there, my father wondering how to get to our hotel,

when a shoeless boy in a ragged shirt and ragged pants walked past us dragging behind him, by a rope tied to its neck, a long, dead, shiny brown snake.

“Hotel. Hotel. Where is it.” Pappa kept turning around and around saying, “Hotel.”

People from the lighter streamed past.

“Hotel.” When most of the crowd from the ship had gone past, the boy with the snake pointed across the street, said, “Taxi,” and went on his way dragging his enormous snake.

Machachi near Quito was to be our final destination but we were forced to remain in Guayaquil for several weeks: Pappa came down with malaria. Our hotel was owned by a Jewish couple. He wore a skull cap all the time, and the wife brought my father chicken soup. We spent our time standing around the bottom of Pappa’s mosquito netted bed. The couple came often to stand at the bottom of the bed and to discuss the events in Europe. We had landed in Ecuador on September 1st 1939, the day the Germans invaded Poland. There were long faces and worried groans from the adults. But there were stories too about our new country: its amazing poverty and crime. The most memorable one concerned a recently arrived Jewish couple. They lived in an apartment in a decent part of the city. The two were in bed, and late one night they heard noises at the front door. Soon there were footsteps in the outer room. The two sat up, eyes open and scared. With marvelous presence the wife cried out, loudly, “*Thomas, tome el revolver, ladrones aqui.*” With a crash the footsteps were gone and the front door slammed shut. The joke was that they owned no revolver at all and that the man’s name was Itzzig.

When not around the bed we were at the movies. The best one was a Tarzan film, maybe the first of the series. There was a swimming scene, Tarzan and Jane in the water; Maureen O’Sullivan diving in the water and smiling as she swam. Somehow, in one of her underwater

motions, the top of her costume was parted from her body and I could see her breasts. I have been a lifelong fan of Maureen O'Sullivan.

As the crow flies it is less than 200 miles from the port Guayaquil, to the capital Quito. In 1939, it took two days by train to cover the distance, a distance that seemingly crosses more climate zones than miles. It ranges from the ever hot and steaming port, to the white city, ten thousand feet high, golden in the morning sun, basking in a perpetual equatorial spring. The Andes. Its sky-scraping mountain spurs force the train to make long detours, switchbacks,, where the rails run along terribly narrow shelves scratched out of the mountain sides. We see white peaks in the distance while outside the window there is a sheer drop of hundreds of feet into a green jungle. The train halts for water. Suddenly the cars are surrounded by dark people, men and women wearing black hats and ochre and maroon ponchos. They hold bananas up to the windows, oranges, pineapples, *cuyes*, guinea pigs, roasted to a shiny, crispy brown. "If you eat that you'll get a swat," says my father. "It's not kosher," says my mother.

"I want to see them closer," says my father, "maybe buy some oranges," he leaves our car and through the train window we watch him saunter up and down the side of the train where the dark people are holding out their wares. Suddenly, with a jerk, the train starts to move. Papa is not out in front of our railroad car any more, but in front of the next one behind ours and then the one after that. His head swivels back and forth looking for our car, looking at the cars that are passing him by. Our mother is screaming, "Oh, God, Oh God." My brothers' begin to scream, "Papa, Papa, Papa. Where is Papa?" The train is a very long one. Very slowly, it snakes around a curve and up a rise. I can't see my father any more. I start to run through the train, back to the rear of the train from where I might see my father once more before he disappears in

the distance as the train pulls away. Mother and brothers follow me. We run from car to car, the distance seems interminable and difficult. To open the railroad car doors seems an overwhelmingly hard task, and all of us screaming, "Papa, Papa. Oscar, Oscar." We finally reach the last car. What we see is a little gandy dancers' car, a track workers' car attached, just below where we were standing. We stand there at the open door and beyond the track workers' open car there is our father running, running trying to catch this car. Our screaming increases as we see the distance between the train and our father increase. Suddenly the upgrade grows steeper. The train rides on but slower. Father begins to gain on the train. We urge him to run, run faster. He makes it to the attached cart and clammers up and across it. There is a long tongue that attaches the cart to the train. Mother calls out "No, Oscar, no." But he manages to sit on that tongue and slowly inch himself forward, his feet almost scraping the roadbed. I look around and see a number of men standing with us at the open door at the end of the train. As father gets closer and closer to the passenger car these men, leaning over the last lip of the car, stretch out their hands toward him, and then finally when father is close enough, their hands link and the men pull him up into the passenger car.

Marching back to the car our father smiles and we children hold fast to his coat. Once in our seats father reaches into his pockets, takes out little oranges and hands them to us but mother grabs them from us and yells, "don't eat them. Damn it," and, half laughing, throws all the oranges, one after the other at my father. "Such stupidity, such stupidity."

#

We settle in *Machachi*, twenty miles from Quito, in the heart of the Andes. It is a provincial Spanish town of whitewashed buildings over three hundred years old. There is a

town square, a park surrounded by a low wall. Couples stroll through the square in the evening. Round and about the square there is a market every Wednesday and a band concert every Sunday afternoon. The houses are white but in almost every other one there is a corner where the white is washed or chipped away and where the underlying plaster shows an aging orange-yellow. There are brown skinned women in white blouses and black skirts who wear tall rounded felt hats; round their shoulders they wear black slings and the bundle in front is their baby. There are brown skinned men who wear black hats and who are draped in ochre and maroon ponchos. The women take long, hard looks at us without changing a wrinkle in their faces. The men take quick glances and move on. There are few cars on the street but a good number of horses. There are horses with riders who are perhaps less brown than the walkers in the streets. The riders too, wear black fedoras. The riders sometimes smile at us. Their horses' harness and trappings jingle as they go by. Women sit, leaning against the houses on the square, and girls, I think their daughters, sit in their laps, on their wide skirts, with their back to them. The girls lean back, they have long straight shiny black hair, and the mothers run their hands through their hair, one strand at a time it seems. They pick something off the hair, look at it and put it in their mouths.

"Lice," says my mother. "No, they don't eat it. They bite it to death. They don't have money for combs." And under her breath she says, "Maybe they do eat it. Maybe they need to. God, I hate all the bastards that keep them poor."

I went to school, began to make friends, ate *chirimoyas*. The fruit tastes like egg custard and vanilla pudding with sparks of lemon in it. If I had pesetas I bought some. I tell my mother to please try it. I tell my father; neither of them ever do. In the fact that they never did, I

sensed their judgment on all of Ecuador, on all of our surroundings. How could I like it when they don't? When I had a few more pesetas I went to the vendors in the square who sold delicious dark brown gobs of fried meat that tasted like the little friable pieces that were left over when my mother rendered the duck fat that she called '*gribenes*.' The vendors in the square sold them in paper shells for ten centavos and for which purchase, when caught, I got a beating.

"You don't know who made them, how they made them, where they made them and they could be pork."

It seemed as if I spoke Spanish almost the day we came off the ship. My mother said that I inhaled it. The teacher sat Chino in back of me, and if there was something I didn't understand I would turn to him, "*Que es eso?*" And slowly, very slowly, he would explain.

I loved my teacher. He was tall with straight shiny black hair and a thin mustache. Instead of a dark suit and tie that my teacher in Germany wore every day he often wore green pants and a shirt left open at the collar. Instead of "Herr Lehrer," we called him "Professòr." He got excited when he taught arithmetic.

"I always had problems with the seven and nine tables when I was your age," and he quickly walks, almost jumps, from the middle of the room to the blackboard and with loud bangs on the blackboard, chalks up the nines table. He talks as he writes, "the trick is to think of the nines table as the tens and then you just subtract. Everybody knows the tens, so that's no problem. If it's times three it's thirty minus three and that's twenty-seven; times four, it's forty minus four and that's thirty-six and so on. Times nine it's ninety less nine and that's eighty-one. You see?" He turns around and smiles and shakes his head, "the sevens table you just have to

memorize; just like all the others.” Then he takes his guitar from the corner, gets up on his desk, sits down cross legged, and strumming the guitar, sings us a song.

He tells stories. “Historia.” “Were we lucky? I don’t know?” He strokes his cheek and his hand rests on his chin. “I don’t know. Maybe. We had no gold or silver in the mountains like Colombia and Bolivia or Peru. So we are small. But we have gold in the water don’t we?” There were smiles and a hum of agreement from the class. “But don’t you go looking for it,” and he shakes a finger at the class. “Lots of people died or were never found again when they did. There is this great lake at the bottom of Pichincha,” he was looking right at me, talking to me.

“The lake is black and deep and cold. And the deeper it gets the colder it is. When the last Inca rulers fled the thieving Spaniards, fled Cuzco, they took all the treasure they could take, loaded gold and silver, beautiful treasures, onto the llamas and onto their own backs and fled up here, the whole court, kings, queens and all their attendants, to their second capital, Quito, and Quito is *Quetchua*, not Spanish. But before they got to Quito they were told Pizarro’s brother was already there. So when they got near Pichincha and to the lake, they took all the gold from their backs and threw it into the deepest part of the lake. It’s true. Many years ago an explorer, an American, came here and brought up a tiny gold idol from the lake. So it’s true. But nobody else ever did. Sometimes somebody tries and goes looking but he is found floating on the black surface and then the Condors come floating down and they pick at the eyes, and they pick at the rest and the Condors have meat for their children.

“But there is a nice story about the lake. In the days of the Incas the lake was a holy place. The people here, then, like now, were farmers and to insure that their crops would do well in the coming year they had a ceremony at the lake. There was a place, still is, where the cliff

juts out, far into the lake, like the prow of a great boat. Every year, they would dress a girl, a young virgin, boys, don't snicker, in beautiful robes with gold and silver thread and hand in hand with a boy, also dressed in robes like a great king, the two would jump down, a hundred meters down into the lake. There was music and people shouting and celebration. If the two sank and were never seen again the harvest would be good if they appeared again there was a terrible sadness and the harvest would be very bad. It appears that the two may have been dressed in these heavy gold and silver clothing so that they would never come to the surface again. What do you think?"

The teacher talked about the Incas, how they had this marvelous civilization. How it started when the Sun God, Inti, felt sorry for the people on earth, and Inti decided to send his two children down to earth to educate the humans so they could learn how to make things of their own. So he sent his son Manco Capac and his daughter Mama Ocllo down to Lake Titicaca, not Pichincha, where they rose from the water like gods in the bodies of humans. They married and founded the Inca city of Cuzco." Then El Professor stopped and asked, "what does that sound like? Did you hear of something like that before?" Nobody raised their hands. And then he went on, "Well it didn't really start like that: nothing like that at all; all that is a legend, a story. A very nice story but things don't happen like that. Be careful of nice stories. Nice stories are nice but they don't help you to get the truth and the truth is what you always want to have, what you always need to have if you don't always want to be poor and naked like a donkey that you always lead around by a rope around the neck. You have to be a mule that kicks and butts and bites and spits when they put too much weight on his back."

“Well, the Incas came down from the mountains in the twelfth century and made war on all the other tribes in the Andes and they conquered them all. And they started a culture that still amazes everybody in the world. Big professors can’t figure out how they did their stone work and masonry. They are all amazed at the quipu and the textiles and sculptures and the writing that nobody has figured out yet. From Quito to Valparaiso they ruled and you all are their descendants. All Indios and Mestizos are their children. You too Cèsar, if you want to be. That pig farmer Pizzaro and his brother had guns and horses and that’s why they won. That, and lies.”

In school they called me Cèsar. One day, the teacher decided that Wolfgang did not properly fit in the mouths of the other children so he stopped what he was doing and asked them, “what shall we call your new classmate?” Everybody shouted out something, mostly they shouted out what sounded to me like Herman. Herman was probably my least favorite name. I had an uncle who was big and fat who smelled and never had presents when he came for a week in the summer. The boy in back of me, Chino, who helped me with Spanish, then yelled out Cèsar, and then everybody else joined in. Cèsar! Cèsar! Cèsar! The teacher smiled “and Gaul, that’s Germany today, is divided into three parts. Stupid, disgusting and more stupid.”

I was now Cèsar but I didn’t much, ever, feel like Cèsar, the conqueror, the ruler. The ruler, the conqueror is never afraid. But we were all afraid. My father and mother were afraid, never mind that Mamma railed against the Nazis and the Germans. It was always, with me, that we had to run away from a place where I was the best in the class and where Oma brought me chocolate from the store, sometimes for no reason at all. And now we were in a new country and I had to be quiet and listen to what my parents said and what they didn’t say. There was too

much I didn't know and felt stupid about, to be a César, too much that I had to learn, too much for which I was in debt to others. Wolfgang didn't suit anymore either. That name belonged, I knew, somewhere else. Neither name belonged. I knew everybody else's name but nobody really knew my name, not my friends in school and not my parents. It felt as if I had no name. Anyway, I smiled and made believe I was a grateful guest.

The teacher told us about the marvels of the quipu. That when most of Europe couldn't read or write, when the Moors and Jews in Spain, and he repeated Spain three times, Spain, Spain, Spain, taught the rest of Europe how to think, the Incas knew how much corn was stored, or how many llamas the king had and how much the nobles of the country owed the king. Things like that. And all because of the quipu, that knotted rope that contained mathematics that Europe wouldn't know for centuries. And they had great cities, Cuzco and right near where we were was the northern capital Quito. And El Professor told us how they could make marvelous statues and decorations out of gold and silver. But then the pig farmer and his brother came and they killed and burned and pulled down the great temples, and then I thought of my grandfather standing in the burning synagogue with the Torah in his hands. And he talked about how these two pig farmers turned all the people into slaves and I thought of all those men who were working on the roads digging ditches and my father being forced to work in the stone quarries and coming home covered all over in grey dust. And he said that someday there won't be any more slaves and he climbed up on his desk with his guitar and sang a song in which all the children joined in but I didn't know any of the words.

#

Herbert Frisch and my father had become close friends in the concentration camp in

Dachau. On those very rare occasions that my father spoke of Dachau it always seemed as if Frisch was part of the conversation and when he did mention Frisch it was always in tones of great admiration. My father said that in Dachau they had helped each other out. When I asked how they had helped each other out my father shook his head, but then he said that they shared things.

“What things?”

“Aches and pains.”

“No, really, what things.”

“We shared bread. He had a crust, when we were hungry he gave me half. If I had a crust when we were hungry I gave him some. Not everybody in the KZ did that, especially the Viennese Jews. Most of them stuck together. Some of them had money and they could buy things in the canteen or they could buy off the Kapos. They didn’t get along very well with the German Jews or maybe it was the other way around. We called them Schlaviener. I don’t know what they called us. I should have asked Herbert sometime.”

“But Herbert is Viennese.”

“Let that be a lesson to you.” I didn’t want to ask what he meant. “And the reason that we are where we are is because of Herbert.” In the Concentration Camp Frisch told my father about Ecuador, a beautiful country that wanted trained Europeans. “What am I trained for,” said my father, “I’m a cattle dealer.”

“No you’re not, you have skills in farming. They need people with skills. See, I’m an economist with special skills in analyzing the international trade in pianos and other musical instruments. You see, they need people like us; agronomists and economists.”

So when my mother had exhausted all the other possibilities, my father, in Holland, tried for visas to Ecuador, and now we lived in Machachi a few doors down from the Frisch family who had a whole apartment to themselves where Mrs. Frisch had a big kitchen where she would fry delicious chicken with even more delicious dumplings she called "knödel."

We had only one room. The room had a table and some chairs and was divided by a blanket that hung on wires that my father had strung. Mamma and Dad slept on one side of the blanket; Karl and I in one bed and Peter in a cot next to us. My mother cooked on a flat portable gas stove that had two burners. The stove rested on a large steamer trunk. One time my mother was cooking scalloped potatoes on the stove. My father was at the Frisch's and possibly my mother as well. I was to mind the children. Karl and I were playing a card game on the floor when Peter, now four, toddled over to the steamer trunk and, wanting to know what produced the nice smell on top of the stove, pulled at a handle of the steamer trunk. The stove on top of the steamer trunk toppled and the hot creamy potatoes covered Peter's chest and arms. Peter screamed, within seconds Karl ran outside with a pail scooped cold water from a horse trough and poured it over Peter. He ran in and out with water several times, all the while Peter screamed and I tried to get his shirt off him. For Peter the result was nothing worse than several large red blisters on the backs of his hands. I too was blistered by my mother for not taking better care. Her unfairness burned.

And all the while my mother and father waited for the call that was to come, a job as overseer of a large hacienda not far from Machachi.

#

The Frisch's had two daughter, Sophia, eleven years old with blond hair and braids and

Gerda who was big with blond hair and braids and whom I put with the adults. Sophia and I hardly ever had any conversation. After all I was only eight, but just about all the boys in my class wanted to meet her and I was the person to make the introductions. Every day several boys would surround me and beg me to find a way. When they did, my face would grow red and I had some kind of intimation of Lera in the Gärtner outhouse. Then, substituting for an introduction, a group of boys would follow Sophia home and I would follow them, trailing, in the rear, not knowing whether I was part of the group or not; not knowing whether I was going along as a protector or a participant.

As Sophia walked home, seemingly oblivious, we would sneak after her, pasting ourselves against walls, peeking around corners, passing backward word of what she was doing now. "She's stopped and blowing her nose." "She's bending over and tying her shoes. I can see her panties, her panties." At the word "panties" the bunch threw secrecy to the winds and rushed out into the street for a better view. We clustered together in the middle of the cobblestones when suddenly from behind us we heard, "*Chicos, que pasa?*" It was loud. Like pigeons on the street hearing a backfire the group flew. No backward glance; they were gone, disappeared; all except myself, trailing in the rear and now held fast by my collar. I turned and there was Mr. Frisch, tall, skinny like a carrot and redheaded. Mr. Frisch, my father's friend, who had helped my father, maybe saved him from... got us out of Germany by suggesting Ecuador. "Wolfgang, I'm surprised at you. What are you doing? Never mind. No more, you understand? No more. No more and this stays between you and me. You understand?" I understood. And I slunk home not Wolfgang or Cèsar but Judas.

"When are we going to the hacienda?" Days passed. I thought about the hacienda.

What really was it? And I kept asking. One evening after the question, my mother grabbed my shoulders and pressing her fingers hard on my bones, she shouted and shook me. “Just stop it. Stop it. Stop it. We’ll tell you when. All right? We’ll tell you when.”

Our one room seemed to be getting smaller and smaller every day and I had run out of books to read. Mama and Papa were often snarling over stupid things and I started to go to bed earlier and earlier. The room was black, it seemed the middle of the night, there was some kind of noise and I woke up. I called out, “Mama? Papa?” I called out over and over again. There were no answers. I rose and looked behind the blanket that separated the room. There was nobody there; nobody in their beds. Where were they? Looking at their empty beds I called out, “Mamma, Pappa,” over and over again. Peter was crying, then Karl joined him. I looked toward the door. There had never been a lock in the door. There was a hole where a lock should have been. Now there was a towel looped through the hole, the towel was then tied around a slim stud that ran up toward the ceiling. I pushed at the door. The towel pretty much locked us in. Screaming out for my parents all the while, I found a serrated knife in a drawer and began to hack at the towel. Karl, through all his crying begged me to stay. I would not listen and continued to cut. The knife did its job and I could push the door open.

I was in my nightshirt, my feet were bare, I never felt the ground. I was now out on the sidewalk. There was darkness and there were no street lamps. It’s possible that my parents had told us that they were going to a restaurant, it’s more than probable that they did not. I was a sneaker, creeping, bending low along the walls of houses. The town square was a gray darkness. I held close to the low wall that surrounded the square. I bent low. No one should see me, yet I was calling out, “Mama, Papa, where are you?” Sauntering couples passed by; they

looked at me and kept walking. I don't know why I was drawn to this one particular restaurant. Maybe it was because there was music that spilled out with the light when a door opened: guitar music. I crossed the street and pushed the door open. In the center of the restaurant sat my teacher and another man, both playing guitars and singing. I stood in the door and saw my parents at a table close to the two guitarists and my father tapping out their rhythm on the table with a knife. The restaurant seemed full of people paying intense attention to the guitar players. I just stood there at the door. Suddenly my mother called out, "What are you doing here?" They both scolded, "How did you get here? Peter, Karl, where are they?" Suddenly I was scooped up by my teacher. There was an empty table near the center of the restaurant. The teacher put a chair on the table and placed me in the chair. I was at the center of the restaurant. The teacher and his friend sat in front of me and began to play songs that seemed to be just for me. "*Mama yo quiero...De la Sierra Morena...Solo tres cosas de la vida...*" They played for what seemed a very long time. My father carried me home on his shoulders.

#

I was walking home from school with my friend Chino, the Indian boy who took me in tow, who sat behind me in class, who taught me Spanish and who allowed me entry into his group of friends. The school was somewhat outside the town. We approached the great, many tiered, baroque Machachi church, built over the ancient Inca temple. A chill wind blew from the mountains. There, in the fore-court of the church stood an old woman all dressed in black. The wind ruffled her clothes and as we passed her she called out, "Judio. Judio." Chino broke the Chirimoya he had been eating and handed me half; and only half in fun, but sometimes looking back at the screaming woman, we two spit the black pits of the delicious fruit out onto the road.

#

I came home from school and there was a tall horse tied up at the bottom of the stairs to our room. A strange dark man sat in a chair between my mother and father and Peter was on his lap. Peter jumped down, and as he ran past me smiled, "I got a ride." My mother yelled out at Peter, "You can stand at the stairs and look. And you stay there." The dark man rose, when he took a step spurs on the heels of his boots jingled. He looked at my father and in a peculiarly accented German asked, "This is your oldest?" He rumbled my hair.

"Say hello to Señor DeLaBarca," said my father. "Leon," said the dark brown man.

"He went to University in Bonn," said my mother sounding greatly pleased.

"We spoke about the whole Rhine province," he said looking at me. "Bonn, Cologne, Koblenz, the Rhine, the Moselle, Trier. All those wonderful wines." He looked at my mother, "those were some of my happiest days." To me he said "I got to Siegburg but I never got to...how do you say it..Como se dice..." "Ruppichteroth, Ruppichteroth," said my father. The man laughed, "I'll never get my tongue around that one. So. How would you like a ride on a horse?" I looked at my mother. She smiled and nodded.

I sat in front of him on the saddle. "Wait," yelled my mother. She had the bellows extended on her Agfa camera. "Wait. All right, now you can go." The horse padded off. "Did you know that Marx went to the University in Bonn," said the dark brown man. I thought, "What Marx? My uncle who died of tetanus?" We rode around the town square while a late sun turned the white-washed walls to orange, and sitting on the tall horse I felt as if I owned everything I looked at.

“Señor DeLaBarca invited us out to his hacienda on Sunday,” said my father over supper at our tilting little table. “Do we walk there or is he bringing horses for us to ride. I hope.”

“No. He has a car.”

“He has a swimming pool,” said my mother.

I had, once very long ago, been in a swimming pool. I remembered I liked it, but then they put up a sign, “*Juden Unerwünscht.*” Jews not welcome. I never went again.

Leon’s house was a wide rectangle that sat on the brow of a green hill. It was a very large house made of shiny brown and gray bricks; square bricks that had designs on them like something from the age of Athauhalpa. It had large rectangular windows behind which flowed wide, white crocheted curtains. We sat on white bent-wood chairs on a broad veranda from where we could see the land flow easily down the hill and then slope and stretch smoothly out for miles and miles of wide green fields. It reminded me of being on a high deck on the ocean when the water was all smooth and calm and only the white thunder-heads budding up from behind the far horizon disturbed the feeling of being happy; happy about nothing in particular. And here too, in a distance that easily seemed just as far as that ocean’s horizon, green hills loomed up that sometimes looked a gray-blue because there was a haze and because they were so far away. Behind the hills, gray stony mountains reached half way up the sky and they were snow covered.

The swimming pool was built into the ground just below the veranda. For a foot or two shiny green and white tiles rimmed the pool. My mother was already in the pool, happy. She waved to us on the veranda.

“You have to come in. You have to.” She meant the children. Dad was not going to get into a bathing suit. Anyway, he was deep in conversation with Leon. Underpants were our bathing suits. Toe by toe by ankle, we stepped warily into the water at the low end of the pool. There was a slight feeling about my feet that was something similar to when I had to allow Karl to give my wrists a “burn” when I lost to him at something or other. My mother was impatient, “Come on, come on,” she called, “you’ve never felt anything like it.” And as I slowly lowered myself, I felt this soft tug and this benign “burn” on every inch of my water-covered skin. “*Sprudelwasser*,” called my mother, bubblewater. I had “*Sprudelwasser*,” for the first time in my life on the ship. “Soda,” said the steward who handed it to me. Sparks lit my mouth then as they now flew all over my body. My eyes were wide, Karl and Peter ran out of the pool. “Its eating me,” cried Karl. “*Quatsch*.” “Nonsense, nonsense,” Mother grabbed me under my arms and swirled me around the pool. “This is *Sprudelwasser*. All bubbles. A bubble spring feeds the pool. There’s nothing like it. Isn’t it wonderful? Come I’ll teach you the breast stroke.”

When my lips began to turn blue mother ordered me out of the pool but she remained, doing laps. An Indian woman handed me a heavy clean towel. Karl and Peter were slurping orange juice under an umbrella covered table. I went to look for my father.

I heard Leon and my father behind a heavy brown door. I knocked, Leon ushered me into a room where the walls were all covered in a dark wood and the wood was covered with lots of pictures and paintings in heavy, dark golden frames. “So? How did you like the water? Nice, eh?” I smiled and nodded. I looked toward my father who was standing, regarding the contents of a niche in the center of one wall. There, on a kind of small pillar stood a candelabra with many arms. My father turned, “Come look at this. What do you think it is?”

“Yes,” said Leon to my father, “what do you think it is.”

There was a peculiar smile on my father’s face, and all he said was, “Is it?” and Leon said “I think so. It belonged to my grandmother, and her grandmother, and her grandmother and so on.”

“Back to where?”

“Back to where somebody came not long after Pizzarro.”

“Late fifteen hundreds?”

“Fifteen-seventy-two. To New Granada. In the sixteenth century some of his relatives got burned so he moved here. To Quito first.”

I heard burned, “What do you mean burned?” Leon put his hand on my shoulder, “Look at that,” he pointed to the candelabra, “what do you think it is?” I looked hard for a moment and then it seemed quite plain, “that’s a menorah.”

“Very good. I think so too. It belonged to my grandmother. And you see those candle sticks?” They rested on a shelf above the menorah. “Those also belonged to my grandmother and she lit them every Friday night.” This puzzled me greatly. “My grandmother also lit candles every Friday night, but she was Jewish.” Leon started to laugh when my father said, “You are *Conversos*.”

“Goodness, no. My grandmother was a good Catholic, and so am I. Come, let me show you a key.” I didn’t want to know anything about boring keys so I went out again.

The sky was now a blue-black. I couldn’t see the snow-covered mountains any more. My mother was drying herself off. Earlier, the low valley had been bright in the sun and the grass tinted a light green, a green that seemed so new and fresh that my brother called it “baby green.”

Now, in the absence of the sun, in the cover of that dark blue sky, the grass showed itself the way it really was, the most intense dark green I was ever to see.

It was early afternoon but it seemed as if night was going to come very soon. As we stood there, sudden yellow streaks divided the dark blue sky and touched the peaks of the far away hills: lightning, but there was no sound of thunder. Suddenly it began to rain, the water came in the largest drops I had ever seen. The rain was pelting, yet it was very soft. It had a light blue color. My mother discarded the towel and dove back into the pool. Doing a lazy backstroke she did slow laps while the soft rain kept coming down. Later, my father was angry with her for swimming while there was lightening but she kept on saying over and over again, "there is nothing like swimming when it's raining. Nothing. Nothing like swimming when the rain comes down."

Chapter 10

The call to the hacienda came. We came in two cars. Whose they were I don't remember. A man named Corrales was driving our car. We neared the hacienda and we came past corrals, boxes and boxes with wooden fences. Cows were in some and horses in others. All about the many corrals the ground was stamped into bare brown dirt. There was a house in the distance. Not a house exactly but something far larger that stretched and extended over the top of a green hill. There was a crowd, dots of moving darkness in front of the house. As we got nearer the dots became people and what was dark resolved itself into color, sharp pieces of green and yellow, ochre and rust. The color was in the ponchos covering the men and women.

All of the moving figures, men and women both, wore men's hats, bowlers. I had seen some people in Machachi wear hats like these, but here it was everybody. As we neared the house we heard the music and the men and women in ponchos shuffling backward as we neared them. It was music, but it was a music I had never heard before. I was used to my grandfather's singing in the synagogue, Franz Lehar and Richard Tauber on the radio or gramophone, the town band and the Radetzky March, my father, in the living room, on the flute, playing operatic hits, and on the piccolo: Sousa obbligatos. But this was something never heard before, high and piercing like many piccolos, and a thumping and thrumming behind the shafts of sound that not only stabbed but floated too, floated in air, in a wind, like scarves or flags free from their poles, drifting up and out in the blue sky around the white tops of the surrounding Andes. We left the cars.

Two men without hats were playing pan pipes. Next to them a smiling man with a guitar and next to him a boy, a teenager, smiling, thumping a big stick onto the drum head. They all, slowly, retreated toward the house as we walked forward. They stopped and a smiling woman wearing a bowler hat came forward holding out a cup toward my mother, who was in the lead. Corrales said,

"It's their greeting but I'm not sure you want to drink it. Make believe you're taking a sip. Then give it to your husband. It's a tradition." Mamma looked at him as if to say don't be silly. She was overjoyed by their greeting. She moved forward, smiling and nodding her head. She held out her arms, wide, as if to embrace the music, the people, the great house on the hill. She took the cup, threw back her head and emptied whatever was in it. The music grew loud and louder and the people made muffled noises of approval. Then mother's legs gave way and she

collapsed in front of the crowd. Surprised moans from the crowd. We rushed toward her and I heard Corrales call, "It's all right. It sometimes happens. This is strong *Chicha*. They chew the raw corn, spit it out and then let it ferment in a bucket." Father held Mama's head in the crook of his arm. "Strong stuff, if you're not used to it," yelled Corrales. And I heard him say in a lower voice, "and even if you are." They carried mother to what was our apartment. She was out for several hours.

* * *

The house was enormous. Even standing at some distance from the house, it obliterated everything else, even the sky it seemed, and the mountains. There were three stories all built around an inner courtyard. A second-story veranda ran all around its outer walls. A similar veranda faced the interior courtyard. Moving in consisted of dragging our three steamer trunks into the apartment. Then there was the emptying of the trunks. There were now places to put things. There was a kitchen-living room, a room for our parents and a room for us three. There were closets for clothes and cupboards for dishes.

A woman hovered around our door as we were emptying the steamer trunks. She wore an apron and had her hair in a European manner. She was dark but wasn't dressed like an Indian. As Mama was taking out a cup from the trunk it fell and broke into two pieces. Mama picked it up and looked puzzled at the way the cup had broken. She attempted to fit the two pieces back together. Suddenly the lady at the door came in and wanted to take the pieces of the cup from my mother. The lady became apologetic, asked pardon over and over again, and as I translated for Mama it seemed that she knew how to repair the broken cup. She introduced herself. She was Olga, the wife of the foreman, they lived several doors down from us in an

apartment that opened out onto the inner veranda just like ours. The cups were white and she knew how to repair them. "*Espera un momento.*" "Wait a minute." She rushed off with the pieces of cup and quickly came back holding the cup in front of her. The two pieces were now tied together with black string.

"Look," she told my mother, "the cup is white, see? If I boil it in milk the pieces will join back together." Mamma looked at me. The lady rushed off. We were about finished with the unpacking when the foreman's wife came back. She stood at the door and said. "I thought I might help you, but it didn't work. Maybe you can do it. You come from Europe." She pushed the shards into Mama's hands, turned, and rushed back to her own apartment.

* * *

Baerga was my friend. I don't know why, but he was. He seemed to be as old as my father but where my father was tall and straight and his eyes looked forward, Baerga seemed bowed and scrunched as if he wanted to pull his body into himself. Most of the time he looked down but if he looked up he seemed to see everything. Baerga had a large head but all the skin on his dark brown face, from his forehead to below his mouth, was scrolled and folded. There were a series of tatoos on his forehead: two thin black lines straight as railroad tracks intersected at various angles like crazy railroad ties. He walked with a stoop and he was very bow-legged. And when he sweated, depending on how the light hit him, the drops on his face were either white or a yellow-gold. Baerga, it seemed, was in charge.

Baerga wasn't the foreman of the ranch, but all the other men seemed to listen to him and if he told them to do something, they did it. Baerga's main duty it seemed was to break the horses and mules on the ranch. I would hang on a rail of one of the corrals and watch as Baerga

went about his work. When he looked up and saw me, his eyes grew wide as if they were smiling. Breaking horses and mules in Ecuador was nothing like anything you might see in a cowboy movie or a rodeo. It was something much simpler.

There were wild horses that ran free on the *altiplano*, the grasslands up in the high mountains. Mules ran there as well. When horses were needed or horses were to be sold, large bunches were herded down from the mountains, and they filled most of the corrals on the ranch. Baerga would then break them. What he did, was to get one of the horses into a narrow chute where the horse would be practically immobile and then he would tie coal sacks full of dirt on the horses' back. At first there were so many sacks that the horse would often buckle under their weight. Then he would lead the horse out of the chute by a halter. The horse could hardly move but move it did. I had always thought that the expression on a horses face was always and ever the same. But I was wrong. Here, I saw what they were thinking. They were thinking the same thing and looking the same way as an Indian hauling a hundred fifty-pound bag of corn up a very long hill. There was no kicking or other wild gyrations, there was just a slow movement of a horse placing one slow foot before the other. Baerga would then lead the horse all about the ranch till he felt that the horse could go no further and by that time he would have it back in the chute. Baerga would know exactly when the horse had to be back in the chute. Then, each succeeding day, Baerga would remove one more bag from the horse's back. By the time the last bag was removed the horse was docile and amenable to control. Twelve, fifteen horses were tamed that way in one week; mules as well. Mules were more important than horses. Mules could go anywhere, their hooves could find the way on the narrowest trails whether you went uphill or down; they were the working vans and pick-up trucks of the high mountains.

In one of the herds that were brought down from the mountains there was a huge brown mule. "*Muy hermoso, muy hermoso,*" said Baerga as he stroked its back while he was sitting on a rail above the chute. The mule was quiet as it was stroked, but when Baerga tried to tie the first bag on its back it fought and shook violently; its shoulders and heels banged against the rails of the chute. The rails rattled and seemed close to breaking; the mule heaved, clawed, and shook. Yet Baerga, moving as the mule moved, got the first sack on its back and then quickly more, and finally as many as Baerga thought the mule could take. There seemed to be many more sacks on the mule's back than on any horse that I had watched Baerga tame. When it was time to walk the mule out of the chute, ranch workers were sitting up on corral rails, watching. The mule came out with Baerga leading it by a rope. It labored under its burden but unlike horses the mule held its head high. Baerga was smiling as he led it round the corral. "*El Rey de los Andes*", he kept repeating, "*El rey de los Andes.*" There were shouts of "Olé" from the rails.

Some days later I sat watching, high on a rail, the mule standing still in the chute, when last sack was removed from its back. "*El Rey*" stood quite still. Only its head moved up and down as if it were telling Baerga, "All right. Let's get me out." Someone removed the restraining rails from the chute and Baerga led "*El Rey*" as if on parade all along the many corrals. The mule stepped as if it knew it was a parade and Baerga gave the rope slack. Suddenly the mule ran. Baerga held on but he was being pulled. He tried to dig in his heels but the mule pulled and his heels made two little rills. The men working about, in front of the careening mule scattered. The mule ran at angles, Baerga, holding on at the end of the rope was swept about in swift swerving arcs. Suddenly in one fast sheering curve Baerga was thrown against a heavy corral post. I heard the crack. His hold loosened and "*El Rey*" was off, up into

the mountain meadows. Several men ran to Baerga and lifted him up. Their hands were a sling in which Baerga sat. There was no sound from him but one leg drifted back and forth as if there were no bone under the skin.

* * *

On the Hacienda Karl and I did not go to school. Mom was our sometimes teacher. This day we were in the kitchen, it was after breakfast and Mama was demonstrating to Karl and me a new way to write. In Germany we were taught to write in an angular gothic script that was particular to German schools, but from now on, especially as we were, someday, going to the United States, we had to learn our letters in another kind of script, a smoother and more rounded one. It was important if we were to get ahead in American schools. The learning was hard for me and even harder for Karl, and every once in a while the instruction was accompanied by a slap in the back of the head. It was a relief when Papa called us out of the house. We were to come down into one of the corrals. We came, and there was Baerga, his leg healed, holding two small horses, not ponies exactly, or colts either but a couple that seemed not to have grown up. They were saddled, “*...son un poco viejo, pero...*” Baerga handed the reins to Papa who looked down at us and smiled, “these are yours. Yours from now on. You can ride them. Want to ride them?” It was a joke, we had never ever ridden a horse. “No joke. Get upstairs; put on long pants, then you can try them out. Fast.” We rushed upstairs and rushed back down --- our own horses!!! Baerga lifted me up into the saddle. He adjusted the stirrups for me. I squirmed about in the saddle and the leather squeaked. Papa was helping Karl. Pappa and Baerga led us around the corral for a few turns then we were given the reins. “All right,” said Papa, “they’re yours. Go ride.” Slowly, very slowly we paraded the horses through the maze of corrals. Baerga and

Papa watched from a distance. The horses were very obedient to the reins. Just the least tendency to the left or right and that's where they went. It was a bit uncomfortable though, the horses plodding through the hoof pocked corrals, and we bouncing on the hard leather. Not quite Shatterhand or Old Winnetou. My eyes roamed. Was anyone watching me? Baerga and Papa yes, but where was Mama? This was the antidote for the open hand on the back of the neck, this was the hero on the wild mustang. The awkward bounce in the saddle took something away from my equestrian nobility, and did Shatterhand ever feel an uncomfortable chafing on the inside of his thighs? Never mind. I pressed my feet hard into the stirrups. Yes, that allowed me to sit straight and upright, high on my courser, noble and bright eyed. Baerga opened a gate for us and Papa said, "Go ahead, ride around a bit." Baerga and Papa turned and walked away. We were free.

A dirt road led up from the ranch to a paved highway that was the road to Quito. Karl and I didn't want to go that way. We wanted to ride around till Mama came out and saw us on our horses. The horses, though, didn't see it that way. In the corrals they followed the slightest inclination of the reins, but now, no matter how hard we tugged left or right, they went their own way, and the way they went was up the dirt road to the highway. I was a bit afraid but not totally alarmed by these horses that went where they wanted.

The highway was busy. There were almost constant trains of sad-eyed mules that plodded along the sides of the road. There were small herds of sheep guided along by old men with long staves. Cars were rare, and when they came they slowed down almost to a stop to allow the sheep to flow forward around them. Once on the highway the horses took the direction to Quito. Karl was now in the lead. His horse went into a trot. Karl seemed to like his

pace and began to dig his heels into the horse's flank. After more thumps into the horse's side Karl's horse went into a canter. Karl liked that even more and his legs began to fly into the horse's side. He was now in a full gallop. At Karl's every change of pace my horse followed suit. We were now flying. We cut through the herds of sheep like a ship's prow through the ocean. White flocks scattered, the mules were annoyed, their drivers too. Indians along the sides of the road stared after the white children on horses. We flew. We flew far and farther than any remembered landmarks. Karl, repeatedly, heaved back on his reins. His horse slowed and finally stopped, mine followed. Karl turned and both legs flapping dug his heels into the horse's side. Our wild, joyous course was now run backwards. The herds of sheep were scattered again and again, the mules and their drivers were again annoyed.

When we reached the road down to the ranch we turned again, back towards Quito. It was early twilight when we decided to stop flying and return down to the corrals. The horses, almost by themselves, without guidance sauntered towards one of the water troughs. Papa was waiting for us. There was a look on his face I had never seen before. His eyes stared, his lips were drawn so I could see his teeth. The second we were within his reach he pulled us off our horses. My foot stuck in a stirrup, I yelled. "Shut up. Shut up. Damn it. Just shut up. Do you see what you've done?" And he started to whale my backside with his heavy hand as I had never been hit before. He threw me to one side and started in on Karl. "Do you see what you've done?" When he was finished with Karl he pointed at our horses whose reins were in the hands of Baerga. "Look! Look! You just don't treat horses that way. I looked around and all about us, though at some distance stood, in an arc, what seemed to be the whole complement of Indian

and Mestizo workers on the ranch. Papa took my head in both his hands and with a jerk turned me to our horses. "Look, what do you see? What?" The horses were covered with white foam. "They're sweating," Karl sobbed. "Look at their mouths." We looked. Red oozed from the side of the horses' mouths. Papa removed a bit from one of them. "Look at this. Look at this." The bit was all red. Papa ran his finger along the bit then wiped the finger first on Karl's cheek then on mine. "How would you like it if this were in your mouth and I pulled so hard that I made it bleed?" Papa looked around and the workers looking on scattered. "It's probably my fault, you never had anything like this. Wipe them down." He handed large scraps of flannel to us and walked away. Baerga removed the saddles and made motions how we were to wipe the horses down. He hovered over us and kept on mumbling. "I never saw anything like that before. Not ever. Nothing like that ever." I looked up and Baerga said, "I never ever before saw white kids paddled. Nobody ever did. I never saw it before."

#

I sat on the bottom railing of a corral, my feet stretching out into the mud. Men were running cattle through the corral, yelling, waving ponchos at them to make them run. They were separating calves from their mothers. Cows were squeezing through the narrow opening of the corral, cows piled up in back of them forcing those in front through the gate-posts and making the posts shudder and squeal. Free of the opening, the men herded them into the next corral box. The cows were made to rush through the corral into the next opening but the calves running with them would stop after making the hard squeeze through that first entrance, then, as if dazed, look around, bleating, maybe trying to locate itself or its mother, when one of the men would grab it, throw it down into the mud and when it had regained its feet, herd the little

animal into a connecting corral off to one side where, already, a half-dozen calves were bleating for their disappearing mothers. If I turned my head I could see my mother leaning over the veranda railing in front of our apartment, speaking and gesturing to Baerga who was looking up at her from the ground, speaking and gesturing in reply.

I was looking at the bleating calves and beginning to feel sorry for them because I had no idea of what was going to happen to them, when Baerga suddenly grabbed me under my arms and pulled me out from my perch. Our two ponies, saddled, stood behind Baerga, Karl already up on his. We were going to the wheat fields. Our father was already there. It would make a nice afternoon.

I was on my pony, I looked up toward our apartment; Mama was still leaning over the railing. She threw us a kiss and disappeared back into our rooms. I did not like to ride much anymore. If I rode for any length of time the inside of my thighs would rub and chafe till they were red and uncomfortable. Now, with Baerga in the lead, we were climbing up out of the valley bowl toward the previously forbidden highway out on the bowls' rim. The horses heads were bobbing up and down with the uphill strain and my legs were flailing on the horses' flanks. We cut across the road onto pale green grassland and followed a trail that only Baerga knew. The sun was out, but it was still chilly. The sun on some of the nearer mountains made the ice and snow on their craggy tops shine orange.

We had taken a shortcut. We came out on a wide dirt road that led downward, then round a curve, to where the road hugged the edge of a great hill. There was a drop of maybe ten feet where at the bottom a small stream flowed over rocks. Now the road turned away from the hill and down through a little pass. Suddenly views that had been hemmed in by a long and

boring line of rocky hills opened up, and before us, and somewhat lower down there stretched an immense vista of waving yellow. Baerga stopped and smiling looked back at us, "*Vee. Oro.*" From our left there came the sound of a chugging motor and a swishing sound like wind or whips flicking through air. A harvester passed in front of us. A big wheel on its far side cut down the high stalks of standing wheat and laid the severed stalks in thick mats neatly on the ground. Yards behind the harvester came three rows of hunched-over men who gathered pads of grain in their wide curving arms and then bound their armful of wheat with twine that they pulled from bags attached to their waists. They then dropped what they had bound and moved forward to repeat their action behind the moving harvester. What was dropped was then picked up by another man who carried it back to a truck that in slow forward-inching movements trailed the gatherers. Baerga pointed across the field. Papa. We raced toward him. Papa was on his gray-blue stallion on a little ledge above the field, looking over it, very much like a general observing maneuvers. Papa smiled, "What are you doing here?" And then in a quiet voice but we heard anyway, "What am I really doing here?" Karl blurted out, in Spanish, "It's new to you; you're learning." When Baerga laughed, Papa laughed too, but he stopped abruptly. "I have to tell Señor Castillo that it would be useful to have a second truck. There's a lot of wasted time between when the full truck leaves and returns empty. It takes a while for it to return." After a while he said, "Look. Isn't it beautiful, something out of the middle ages. But they didn't have tractors then." We looked. The harvester was making wide sweeps of the field, cutting through and across the field at what seemed maybe a quarter of its length. It cleared a wide alley and then turned to make another pass so that what remained was an island of wheat in the middle of the field. We watched when suddenly all the crouching gathering men stood up. They pointed

and yelled. We looked, and there in the middle of the island of wheat was a leaping deer. The deer made for that further section of the field which had not yet been touched by the harvester, but already, there were a number of the gatherers in the open alley between the sections waving their arms up and down, yelling at the bounding animal. Papa said, "A doe. She's big." The doe turned, recoiling from the flailing arms. It turned back, in the opposite direction, but there too, and still distant, was what seemed like a wall of men who were all waving their arms and screaming. The doe ran at a right angle towards the road from where we had come, but there too were men screaming and waving. The deer stopped. We heard a faint bleat from across the field. The deer turned in circles, then leaped towards the farthest stretch of men who were still maybe a hundred yards away. She reached the men, then turned in the opposite direction. So back and forth she ran as the men closed in on her. Then suddenly all the men, who had created a kind of three sided moving corral where the fourth side was the mountain wall whose top formed the ledge on which we stood, stopped moving in on her and one or two men from each side, maybe five or six in all, started running at the deer and yelling and waving, getting close to her. If one man stopped running another or several took up the chase. The deer ran wherever she thought there might be an opening for her. She came close to our ledge and we heard the pounding of her hooves and her hard breathing. She took another direction but the runners were very close now. Again, she passed right under our ledge, her skin scraping the wall. She was cornered now, right beneath us. She reared up her front legs striking nothing but air. Someone ran at her and put his shoulder into her side but she didn't fall. Then another ran at her the same way and she went down, her legs still working. Someone grabbed the doe's head. The man fell backward still holding the head. His feet were anchored in the dirt, and with all his might he pulled the head

back. A man now stood over her with a machete and hacked at her throat. A gush of blood arched into the air and the men who were now all around her threw themselves down at her throat and took the pouring blood into their mouths. Some rolled away from the fountain, their faces smeared all red, and others then took their place. Papa had us hand him our reins, "I will take the boys back to the hacienda. See if you can get them back to work." Baerga nodded.

#

"Where's Peter?" My mother leaned out over the veranda railing, "where is he?" I could barely hear her. There was interesting stuff going on in the corrals. I was watching some of the men castrating calves in the near corral. Several men held down a thrashing and bleating bull calf. A large knife flashed and before any blood spurted a large black brush slathered tar over the cut. The tar smelled like asphalt. The cut part was thrown into a nearby pail, but before it was thrown into the pail someone held it up so I would see it and over the yelping calf called out "*Cojones*." Baerga stood over me, "very good to eat, *cojones*. Makes you strong." He held up a clenched fist, "*Muy fuerza*. Your Mama is calling."

"You were supposed to watch him."

"No I wasn't."

"Yes you were. Just wait till I come down."

"He was with Papa."

"Where is Papa?"

"Talking to the Señor."

"Where is Karl?"

"He's with Papa too."

“Just wait till I come down.”

Before Mama could come down I ran to find my father. I found him at the compound gate, looking at a piece of paper. Karl was holding on to Papa’s pants. The Señor’s car was just pulling out past the gate.

“Papa, where’s Peter?”

“I have no idea. I saw him with Cansada, upstairs, a little while ago.” Cansada was our name for the foreman’s wife. Her real name was Olga. She was thin and bustled about all the time and always had a rag in her hand. But whenever my parents engaged her in conversation, at some time or other during their talking she would blurt out, “*Soy tanto muy cansada. Tengo mucho trabajo.*” I’m always very tired. I’ve got a lot of work.”

Mama rushed at us, “Where’s Peter? Papa said that he had seen him with Cansada, upstairs, a little while ago.”

“No. He’s nowhere upstairs.”

“He was supposed to be with you.”

“How could he be with me? I had Karl with me and I had an important discussion with Castillo. How could he be with me?” Papa looked at me but I just shook my head. Mama grabbed my collar, “didn’t I say you should watch him?” I just continued to shake my head. Papa put his arm around Mama’s shoulder, “let’s look for him. He has to be somewhere.” Mama and I went into the courtyard, and Papa and Karl looked around the outside of the house. In the courtyard, several women, *Cansada* and those who worked in the Señor’s apartments, leaned out over the railings. Papa called out, “Has anybody seen Peter? Little Peter?” Nobody had.

Walter Hess 12/15/2015 2:26 PM

Comment [1]: When Mom & Pop learn to speak Spanish

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Comment [2]:

Outside we met up with Papa who had seen no sign of Peter either. Baerga came by, sensing, I think, that something was the matter.

“Baerga, stop a minute, we can’t find little Peter.” My father nodded over to the corrals, “Could you ask everybody if anybody has seen him.” Baerga said “Sure”, and quickly turned back to the men. **Mama** looked at Papa and said, “why don’t you go ask them. You’re the manager here.” Papa walked away for a minute and then came back. “They sometimes listen better to Baerga than to me. I usually try to talk to them through Mr. Cansado and Baerga. It works better that way. You know that. We’ll find Peter. Don’t worry.”

We watched as Baerga had the men stop work. An uncut calf ran about the corral. All the men looked over to us. They quickly dispersed. Baerga came back to us, “No. Nobody has seen Peter but they will go looking and ask around.”

Mama took us upstairs for lunch while Papa went to try somehow to intercept the Señor in Machachi to see if he could be of some help. All during lunch Mama kept saying, “If they’ve taken him it’s my fault. It’s my fault. It’s my fault.”

I wasn’t grateful that it wasn’t my fault that Peter couldn’t be found. I was afraid. A weight sat on my shoulders or better, in my stomach. Something like the feeling when I stood in front of the synagogue when they were pelting us and taking pictures. The scene with the deer kept appearing to me.

Baerga knocked on the door and stepped in. “Somebody said that they saw the boy.” Mama almost yelled, “When? Where?”

“Earlier this morning on the road, on the way to the village.” The village was where most of the men, the Peones, the Indians and Mestizos who worked on the hacienda lived. It was

Walter Hess 12/15/2015 2:28 PM

Comment [3]:

about a half hours walk away on a dirt track. I had never been there.

“All right, let’s go.” Mama was almost out of the door, “No. You two can’t stay here alone. You come with me.” The dishes were left on the table.

I think that it took us less than a half hour to get to the village. Baerga started on the road but Mama rushed ahead of him. She had to stop very often to wait for Karl and me to catch up. We were out of breath almost all the time, but all she could say was, “Hurry. Hurry. Can’t you go any faster?”

The village stretched over a large even plain. At the far end of the village a thin thread of brown led sharply upward toward the macadam highway. There were no houses, just several dozen huts made out of wood or adobe. The huts looked a bit like the huts that I had seen out of the window of the train leaving Germany, the huts where the garden tools were kept for the garden plots along the side of the train tracks. These huts were dark on the outside and dark on the inside. There were wooden slats for walls and they were covered by a tin roof or sometimes just covered by sod. There were others that were made out of adobe that were also dark, a gray-black dark. Sometimes from a hole in a roof I could see smoke escaping. The women who stood outside the entrances to the huts had to stoop to get out and stoop to get in. They stood there, often with a child in their arms and a child hanging on to a skirt. The children were all barefoot. The women all wore the black bowler hats and ponchos and flaring skirts of dark colors. In front of several huts there were fireplaces made of adobe. Sometimes an Indian woman would stand in front of one and wave a fan to encourage the fire. In front of some of the huts were racks on which, sometimes, a brown hide was stretched and sometimes an almost black side of

meat. Somewhere a burro hee-hawed. Soon women stood in front of every hut we passed.

Baerga had started asking about Peter at the first hut we came to.

“A little boy, a white boy, about this high. About three years old. He was wearing blue knee high stockings, black shorts and a thick blue cable stitched sweater. Have you seen him.” They all said no. At the last place we stopped a woman stood outside the opening to her hut, a baby in her arms. She looked younger than the other women we had seen. One eye of the baby was covered by a thick blue-black scab. The mother waved flies away from the eye. Baerga said, “this is my wife, Maria. The baby is Jesus.”

It was late afternoon. Peter was still missing. Horses had been brought down from the *altiplano* to be broken. I was watching as the men herded a little black and white into the restraining crib and then loaded sacks of dirt onto his back. The little pinto’s back swayed, and practically caved in under the weight. He was led around the corral for a good long while and then someone opened a gate and the pony was led out onto the road leading out of the hacienda. I followed. Once out on the road the pinto, despite all the terrible weight it was carrying began to buck. The man leading it quickly pulled it back into the corral. But I was still standing out on the road. In the far distance I had seen a rider coming on. I could not make out who it was. At first I thought it was my father, but the horse was brown rather than my father’s blue-black stallion and the rider seemed to be native. I could make out a bowler hat. I wanted to go back to watch the horse breaking but I kept looking at the rider. As he got closer I could see that he had a package in front of him. As he got closer still I could see that he had a boy riding in front of him. Some of the men called out to me and pointed toward the oncoming rider. As he came closer I could make out that the package in front of him was Peter.

I ran to get Mama. We stood there at the hacienda entrance as the rider came in. He lifted Peter down to us. "Are you all right? Is everything all right?" Mama was laughing and asking questions when Peter started to dance a little. "My feet are cold." We noticed then that he was just in his socks. He was wearing no shoes. Somewhere, someone, during Peter's hours of absence had taken his shoes. While we were talking to Peter the rider had turned around. We looked up as the rider twisted about, and waved his hand goodbye.

Chapter 11

We were having a festive meal, a holiday meal. It was the evening before the New Year: Rosh HaShanah.

My father said, "Tomorrow we are going to Quito. To synagogue."

"All of us?"

"No," said my father smiling, just you and me and Karl."

#

We stood on the black-top. We looked around. *Cotopaxi* was the high cone that often smoked and rumbled, *Chimborazo* was the sleeping warrior toward whose height the somber, brown, barefooted peons often looked when the loads on their backs became too heavy, and who still remembered tales of holy heights from which a young and golden bridal pair leaped for the glory of the Inca race; and *Pichincha*, the slim one whose warm and crystal springs bubbled along its base and whose black lakes disappeared among the mists and clouds that forever hid some part in whiteness. These rose over twenty thousand feet and were well known; lower

peaks had names only the Indians knew.

Here, as always, cars were rare; riders on horseback were frequent. On both sides of the road grew a light green alkaline grass on which sheep grazed. At one point a dirt road joined the blacktop. Here, our three horses and a mule waited. There was our Papa who was as always, anxious on his blue-gray stallion, and there was Baerga who sat quietly, listening, on his placid mule. Karl and I sat on our squat old mares. This being a holiday, we had on sailor suits underneath our ponchos; both of us with our broad sailor caps with the ribbons down the back and on whose front, around the brows, were printed, in golden letters, "*Graff Luckner*." At one point Dad turned to us and said, "You've both been very good. I'm very proud of you."

Karl said, "I'm not very cold," but I heard his teeth click together and saw him shiver. I had to add, "I'm not cold either." Baerga smiled broadly, turned to Dad and began to reach under his poncho. Dad shook his head and said, "It's a tradition that we don't eat before noon on this day." Baerga nodded, then slipped off his mule to check the girth straps on our mares, giving them both a kind pat on the leg when he had finished. As he remounted he said, "You are wearing good warm ponchos, but anyone can get cold this early in the morning when the wind blows down from *Pichincha*. You two must have good thick Indian skin." We both sat up straight in our saddles and pulled on the slack reins of the placid mares but they barely moved.

Dad said, "stay here." He rode onto the black-top and looked steadily to where it disappeared into the mountains to the south. After a minute he rejoined our party. Apologetically, Baerga said, "It's only an hour late." "I know," said Dad, and started to smile, "but there are many people waiting for me." Baerga looked up and seemed to smell the air. His eyes widened in surprise as he turned to the boys, almost a boy himself. He called out, "*El*

Pajaro Azul!” Karl and I jumped off our horses and raced onto the black-top. Dad followed in a rush, scooped us up, one under each arm, and released us at the side of the road. Dad had grabbed me and was about to swat me hard on the back side when Baerga held up one hand with fingers spread out, and said gently, “*Cinco minutos*. It will be here in five minutes.” Dad let me go and began scolding us both in German. His anger had to do with our leaving the horses. “Do you think that you can just leave them? Do you think they’ll stay there forever? If they wander into the wheat whose responsibility will it be? And who will retrieve them for you?” We both looked up at Baerga. “No. Not Baerga. They are your horses and your responsibility. And how dare you run out onto a busy highway...” He continued on till Karl began to bawl.

From the rim of the southern mountains a loud klaxon, a hoarse kazoo, which mixed itself with Karl’s crying began to sound. A small black dot appeared on the highway. The black dot turned into a blue one and then into the outlines of a blue bus. The horses started to prance nervously at the increasing sound. Pappa found a handkerchief under his poncho and wiped Karl’s face. He went to his horse and removed a large soft leather bag that hung by a thong over the pommel. He had to yell to Baerga over the bus’ noise, “I will see you later.”

He gave the Indian the reins of his horse . Baerga gathered the reins of the other two horses. “I will meet you here at six this evening, Señor,” and turned down the path, the three horses trailing behind him.

The bus seemed to take forever to reach us. It seemed impossible for the peculiar horn to grow louder, but it did. When Karl saw that I was covering my ears he covered his also. Dad looked down the path. Baerga was a good way down the dirt track, the mule and the horses picking their way carefully over the sharp rocks.

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For all the noise it made at a distance, the bus arrived almost soundlessly. Suddenly it was there, stopped. Doors opened with a rattle. The driver called out, "*Vamos, Vamos,*" but then, *vamos*, became a respectful, "*Señor,*" when he saw that we were European. We searched for seats.

The bus was filled to overflowing with Indians and Mestizos. All the seats were taken and from the rear, halfway to the front, Indians were seated on the floor. Whole families were traveling on the bus. They seemed to have come a long way, for there was a great deal of food, especially fruit, on board. On the racks above the seats, along with valises there were whole branches of bananas, baskets of pineapples, and sacks of oranges. There were cages of rodents too: guinea pigs for roasting. And just about everybody seemed to be eating the wonderful brown chunks of the meat of magnificent odors, wrapped in the usual strips of newspaper that I was absolutely forbidden to eat. Eating them meant slaps and additional bans. As we stepped inside the bus the loud and excited talk that streamed out of the door as we entered became very still. In the silence we three looked around for seats when some child in the rear pointed to the caps Karl and I were wearing and sang out, "*Marineros.*" Immediately the bus was full of talk, and laughter and pointing, and the word "*Marineros*" came from everywhere. I think that we, seeing so many smiling faces, smiled back at just everybody, while Dad reddened deeply, and slipped the caps from our heads at which the whoops in the bus just became louder.

The driver was skinny and yellow with a little Hitler mustache. He got up from his seat, faced the rear and screamed out, "*Silencio.*" The bus immediately became quiet. The driver pointed and spoke rapidly to a seat occupied by two Indian women. The one at the window

seemed to be old and wrinkled and quite heavy. The other was still smooth faced but also quite heavy. The two immediately rose from their seats and Dad began to protest, "*No, no, por favor....*" But the two seated themselves on the floor despite all the Dad's protests. The women were on the floor and the driver, with a wide grin ushered us to the vacated seats. He offered to take the leather bag from Dad and place it in the rack overhead, but Dad held on to the bag with both hands and declined with words maybe rougher than he intended. The driver shrugged and returned to his seat. The bus started off. Inside the bus we hardly heard the horn.

Dad settled into the window seat and watched the passing landscape. We two squeezed close to him. I think that it then dawned on Karl and me that the laughter and pointing had to do with us and so now we were afraid of all the brown faces that surrounded us. We looked into our laps. Sometimes we looked toward Dad but his attention was all beyond the window. For me, there was some comfort in that.

"*Cañyo?*" A brown hand shoved a stick of green sugar cane under Karl's nose. He had the outside seat. Karl jumped and screamed out, "Papa!" Dad was startled out of his reverie. The window steamed over, became pearly white and opaque. The Indian woman sitting across from us was old but smooth-faced. She smiled, and holding out the sugar cane to Karl she kept repeating, "*Pobrecito, Pobrecito.*" Dad saw her concern and smiled back, "*No, gracias,*" over and over. He wiped the window with his sleeve and returned to the outside. Karl loved sugar cane and would gladly have taken it.

"*Dulce?*" The old woman held a small cake of an amber-brown color toward Karl. Her expression was very hopeful. On the seat next to the old woman was an extremely thin brown old man in a black suit and white shirt who nodded in emphasis to the old woman urging the

boy to eat. Karl looked to Dad, who spoke gently. It took him a while before he could make the woman understand that he really meant no.

“*Platano?*” The woman had reached up to the rack above her seat where lay a large branch of small, fat, yellow, bananas. She had peeled one halfway down and pressed it into Karl’s hand. Karl was halfway to laughing as he looked at Dad and loudly whispered, “She doesn’t know who we are.” Papa, too, had a huge grin on his face as he nodded to the woman and then to Karl.

“*Bueno,*” and she pressed the sugar cake into Karl’s hand. She then gave me the length of sugar cane. I looked at Papa who nodded, and I began gnawing at it and sucking out the juice. Papa said, “Shouldn’t offend them.”

Finished with the cake Karl took a banana from the old woman. “It’s like custard,” he yipped. He just about wolfed it down when he had another in his hand. I kept ripping and sucking the sugar fibers. Very fastidiously, as I had been taught in the case of chewing gum, I would bring my hand to my mouth and spit out the used-up cane. When no one was looking I dropped it to the floor.

Dad’s attention was still out beyond the window. The bus scattered a herd of sheep that was crossing the highway. A turn in the road brought the high mountains into view. “Who would have thought it,” he sighed, “vote Papen and beat Hitler.” He looked out onto the aisle where the two women who had vacated the seats for us were sitting. The younger one sat with her back between the knees of the older one who was running a thumb and forefinger down each long and oily strand of hair. It was a scene all of us had often seen before, in the market, in the park, by the side of the road, in front of a hut; one woman’s fingers combing the hair of another,

mothers doing it for the hair of their children, mostly. Quite frequently the older woman would stop and look at her fingers, pinch the fingers together and put them in her mouth. "Lice," said Dad. I had almost become ill the first time, when Mama explained it to me, and I still had not, altogether, come to terms with it. The first time she said, "A horrible custom of these primitive people." Since then she had come to another conclusion, and would try to explain to us that custom or not, there were several quite rational ideas behind the act. There was simple hygiene in keeping the hair clean. She thought too, that there was a soothing and calming effect in this stroking of the hair. And finally, it was a good source of protein. These lice were rich in the blood of the people they fed on. Good and nourishing.

* * *

We are at the synagogue. It is a second story room in a white clapboard building that is reached through an outside set of wooden stairs. Several men stand on the landing. They are smiling broadly at us and they are all wearing hats and heavy dark coats. They all speak German.

"We wouldn't start without you."

"We couldn't do Rosh HaShanah without you.

"So happy you could come." We have reached the landing. One of them hugs me.

"You know, you have the only Shofar in Ecuador."

It is not a large room but it is full of men in hats and heavy dark overcoats, of women with flowered hats and heavy dark overcoats. My father, Karl, and I sit in the front row. The cantor begins the service. He is old and has a scratchy voice. My grandfather did it better. The room grows warm. The women ask that windows be opened. The men are annoyed at the

interruption but someone opens windows and the door. Through a window I can see the peak of *El Corazon*. The man sitting next to me smiles and shoves a prayer book at me but I am more interested in watching the clouds that stream and wrap themselves around the white shining peak of *El Corazon*. Every few minutes, it seems, the man smiles, pokes me in the shoulder and points down to the prayer book I am holding. My father rises from his seat. He holds the napkin-wrapped shofar in his hand. He bends over me, takes the book from my hands, leafs through it, gives it back and points. I read, *To the chief musician a psalm of the sons of Korah. All ye people clap your hands; shout unto God with a voice of triumph.* My father stands before the whole congregation. He unwraps the shofar from the napkin. He hands the napkin to me and smiles. He puts the shofar to his mouth and tentatively blows some air into it. He brings it down to his side and looks only at me. The leader of the service calls out the words that only the sound of the Ram's horn can translate. The short blast, the long blast, the combined blast, the stuttering blast, the immensely long blast. When the last long blast has died the whole congregation, all those men and women in hats and dark coats call out, there is a great joy in their voices, "*Yishkoach*. May you be strong. Congratulations." My father bows slightly, smiles.

But I had seen the sounds, visible shofar sounds, sounds looking like sparks, white, yellow, and red. Sparks that hob-nailed boots could make on cobble stones. And the sparks all traveled, flew out into the open, through the open window, out to the peak of *El Corazon*, out on this blue sky day to the mountain *Cayambe*, to *Pichincha*, to *Chimborazo*; out over the whole Cordillera that was the spine of the Andes.

Chapter 12

We were at the Frisches. We had eaten lunch. The *knödel* were delicious. Sitting on the floor Karl and I were building houses with a deck of cards. Sophia was reading a book on the couch and Gerda had taken Peter out for a walk. Papa and Mr. Frisch sat dividing pieces of a newspaper between them. Mama and Mrs. Frisch were washing dishes and putting them away. Mama was saying things I had heard her say a dozen times before and which always pained me because it felt to be a criticism, now public, of Papa. "...Yes, we always wanted to get to America. Maybe not South America, but anyway it's America. We would have been there years ago but Oscar never wanted to leave, but Hitler taught him to get to the America. Dachau taught him. But this is a good place and all in all we are very, very lucky. And we have you to thank. If only my heart..."

"The Russians don't seem to be getting very far in Finland," said Mr. Frisch and my father said, "*Mannerheim* is a Nazi. The Germans are helping him against the Russians."

"Jah. The pact is in the process of being torn up. Read this." and he handed Papa a piece of the newspaper. "Stalin was stupid to trust Hitler."

Mama called out, "I don't know that. Stalin is playing for time. He knows what he's doing."

"I hope so," said Frisch. "But if Hitler's *drang nach osten* succeeds, and I'm sure he will, the west is done for." I accidentally knocked over our house of cards which had reached four stories and we had to start construction over again. After a while I heard Mama say, "...and they say he sleeps with a pistol under his pillow." I called out, "who does? Hitler?"

“Never mind. It doesn’t concern you.”

“Mr. Castillo. I know that. I heard Baerga say it.”

“You are a real wise guy.”

“I know that too.”

Gerda came in. Peter had a little cup of shaved ice with a red syrup in his hand, a *Piragua*, and Gerda said, “I know, I shouldn’t have done it, but he’s so cute and he almost started to cry.”

“I wish you hadn’t.”

“You know the owner of your hacienda stopped in front of our door. He was in his car.”

“Did you talk to him?”

“He talked to me. He wanted to know if I wanted to see some of the country. Maybe go down to *Banios* some time.”

Mama said, “A few days ago he asked me too. He said that he was going to speak to you about going and if I wanted to go too. I was just telling your mother about it.” Mr. Frisch turned to my mother and said, “This is something new.”

Mama said, “I know. We have to talk about it.”

A week or so later Mama and Gerda left for *Banios* with Mr. Castillo in his car. When they came back I heard her tell Papa how beautiful the trip was, how amazing the landscape. And then she added, “But that man is a pig. A real pig.”

#

My mother now often smelled of valerian . I would sometimes see her in the bathroom with a medicine dropper squirting a tube of the medicine directly into her mouth. “It’s my heart.

The valerian keeps it quiet. I think it's the altitude that affects it. We are very high here. It has to have an effect on the heart. I had scarlet fever as a child and that often affects the heart. The altitude doesn't do it much good either."

We received letters. Aunt Irma, Mama's sister, wrote from New York City urging us to leave the jungles. The affidavits were all arranged. She and others guaranteed that we would not become a burden to the state. We received letters from Oma and Opa in Germany in which much of the content had heavy black lines struck through them. We could read, through the censored blackness, that life had become a great burden for them. Oma and Opa now entertained hopes for emigration, but Mama and Papa, with sheaves of their letters in their hand looked at each other with sad, blank faces. They shook their heads, sighed, held their hands over their faces; nothing could be done for them from Ecuador. Papa now seemed to make almost weekly trips to Quito, to the American consulate, to check on our quota number. Now, for the very slightest transgression, the slaps came quick and hard.

What was happening in Europe became the main topic of talk among the refugees in *Machachi*. At the Frisches the newspaper was handed around more often than a bowl of candies. Gerda or I were sometimes asked to translate from the papers. I thought Scapa Flow was such a funny name, I laughed and got a smack from Papa who called out very loud, "Just read." Scapa Flow, a place in England had been bombed by the Germans. Afterward Papa gave me a hug and said that he was sorry for hitting me. Finland and Russia made peace, but I was still angry. Denmark and Norway were overrun by the Germans. Faces now were long and gray. The blitzkrieg ran over France, and Holland surrendered after five days. Mama and Papa seemed buried in sadness. Over and over they talked about Tante Mina and Papa's cousins.

It was only after the war that we learned what had happened to them. The day that the Nazis entered Amsterdam Tante Mina's oldest son, killed his two children, then he and his wife committed suicide. Tante Mina's husband committed suicide. Tante Mina had come home from an errand and found her husband dead. Mina left the apartment just as it was and went out into the street. She found a bicycle leaning against her building. She mounted it and cycled out of the city into the countryside. When her strength ran out she found herself in front of a farm house. The farmer stood in front of his door. Tante Mina approached him and told him that she was a Jew and that he could either turn her in to the occupation or give her a place to hide. The farmer took her in and gave her a place to hide throughout the war. She told us later, "I always knew what Hitler had in mind for us, but I thought that we still had time; that we still had time"

#

The time had come for us in Ecuador. America held out its arms. But before entering the embrace there was the question of heads. Papa was convinced that in the United States there was a market for shrunken heads. He had heard that several of the refugee families who had moved to the States had taken shrunken heads with them and sold them at an enormous profit to collectors of such things. Mama was very much against the idea. I heard them arguing at night.

"It is illegal and I won't let you do it."

"The Sigmunds from Quito, the ones with the two girls, took four heads to New York. He got five thousand dollars for each." "You won't take one. I don't care about the Sigmunds. If you take them, we'll get caught and they'll send us back to Germany."

"I won't get caught. If Sigmund can do it, I can do it."

“We are not that kind of people. We are the kind of people who get caught. We are lucky in other ways.”

“Yes. Great luck. Dachau was great luck.”

“We got out, didn’t we? We have just about enough money left for the ship tickets. Buy those heads and we’ll have nothing when we get to America. It’s a waste of money. A pure waste. When did you become a *luftmensch*. And tell me, just how did the Sigmunds smuggle their heads into America?”

“There were these two Jews...”

“Don’t tell me; one of Frisch’s *schmutzig* stories?”

“There were these two Jews. Refugees in Quito. The one says, ‘I see your wife wearing all this very nice jewelry. Different ones to shul every shabbes.’ ‘Yes,’ says the other, ‘we were lucky. We got all our jewelry out of Germany.’ ‘That’s really remarkable. How did you get all that jewelry out of Germany, past the SS, past all those border inspections?’ ‘Well,’ says the other, ‘I’m reluctant to talk about it but we hid it in my wife’s private parts.’ ‘God,’ says the first one, ‘I should have talked to my wife. She could have gotten all of our furniture out.’”

“Not one of his best. Good night. And you really have no idea how to get it through all the customs inspections. Good night. We are not doing this.”

Señor Castillo had another hacienda near Baños and sometimes Papa had to go to the other hacienda to do something, I did not know what. Baños was the Ecuadorian town just at the edge of the Amazonian jungle. It was in the Amazonian jungle where those Indians lived, the ones with the fierce make-up and the wild hair, who practiced the shrinking of heads. They were warrior Indians and they did not just shrink any heads but only the heads of the enemies they

captured and killed. It was a religious ritual. When the Indians learned that there was a market for their shrunken heads, that museums, scientists, and collectors were willing to buy them, they ventured out of their jungle and hung around street corners and bars in Baños and other towns that bordered the jungle and surreptitiously offered their wares to buyers. At the time I assumed that these were sellers who had abandoned their religion, because all the Indians I had ever read about were honest and true to their faith; none of them dabbled in business. And there were strong Ecuadorian prohibitions against any traffic in shrunken heads; there were fines and jail terms. This was an effort to halt the traffic because there was a suspicion that since a trade had opened up, these Amazonian apostates killed not for reasons of the usual tribal warfare, but now, because it had become a business.

Mama was packing our steamer trunks when Papa walked in, "Look what I have." He sounded very proud. From a satchel he pulled out the rolled up skin of a snake. It was two or three hand widths wide and when Papa unrolled it was as long as two of me. The skin, when it was unrolled, shone and sparkled. There were dark scales that changed from black to dark-blue, and dark yellow ones and dark red ones. "They sparkle like diamonds," said my mother. "This will be a nice reminder of our time here." I saw Baerga standing outside our door.

"And look what else I have."

"You did it. You did it." Mama slammed a pot she was wrapping into the steamer trunk. "Damn you, you did it." Papa pulled out two shrunken heads from the satchel. He held the two by their dark brown hair and the heads gyrated in front of us like a pair of swings. They looked terrible; two men's heads shrunken to the size of tennis balls. The heads were all shriveled and puckered. There were white stripes on their dark hairy brows and dark red paint over their eye

sockets.

“One hundred dollars each; ten thousand in America.”

“For your ten thousand we’ll never get to America. You’ll go to jail and we’ll be stuck ten thousand feet up here forever. This is so stupid. So stupid. And we talked about it. “Oh, Oscar.” Mama began to cry. She walked over to Papa and held him and put her head on his shoulder and cried.

Baerga had been standing outside our door all this time. “*Pardoneme.*” he excused himself and crossed the threshold. “*Pardoneme, por favor,*” and he took the shrunken heads from my father’s hand. He held the heads close to his eyes, he stroked the hair by which Papa had been holding them. He pulled at hairs around the chin and looked up at Papa, “*Esos no son hombres.*” “They’re not men.”

“Not men? Women?”

“Not men, not women,” said Baerga, “monkeys.” Mama got very quiet, “How do you know, Baerga?”

“I’m not one of these mountain Indians. I’m not so long out of the jungle myself. I can tell. I came to give the children a good-bye present.”

“Baerga, you’re very sure?,” Papa asked him.

Baerga smiled, “Since there are all these missionaries walking around the jungle we don’t do this so much any more.”

“Not so much any more, but still some?”

‘Still some’ is what the men, the sellers in the bars in Baños say, that’s to keep the gringos guessing. We are primitive, but we are not stupid. Today, money buys what the little

heads can't. But I tell you that these are monkey heads." Then Baerga gave each of us a tiny crown, perfectly carved from what everybody called a stone nut.

"Be well. Good Luck." He bowed a little to my father, turned, and walked out.

Once Baerga left Mama started to laugh. Once Mama laughed Papa laughed too. They laughed and snorted and laughed till they started choking. I got water for both of them.

"I guess we'll take them to America," said Mama. "They can't do anything to us since they're not men but monkeys." Then Karl called out, "but what if America can't tell the difference between monkeys and men? You couldn't." Before we left we gave the monkeys to Mr. Frisch.

Chapter 13

The train ride was all down-hill. That's what Papa said. Mama would not let him out of her sight the whole time. No more running after trains. He did go out one time when Mama was in the toilet and the train had stopped at a station for water. He brought in a whole branch of bananas. The bananas were small and sweeter than any I had ever tasted before. I ate one right after the other. Mama said "stop, you'll get sick." I didn't stop and I got sick. When, eight hours later we arrived in Guayaquil, I was very sick. We stayed at the hotel where we stayed when we first arrived. I threw up all over the mosquito netting. The next day we were to board ship. Small boats, lighters, ferried us through the harbor and out onto the green funneled Santa Rosa of the Grace line. The lighter wobbled as it ferried us through rough waves. My stomach again emptied itself before we even tied up at the Santa Rosa. The stairs on the side of the ship, over

which we had to ascend, seemed mountainous. I hesitated to climb. Papa picked me up and deposited me on the deck. Once on deck and looking out over the waves to the city the empty stomach decided to empty itself once more. It would be many years before I would ever eat a banana again. My relatively brief misery was a terrible introduction to an even greater and longer misery.

I had not really understood all the arguments and discussions between my parents regarding the buying of the shrunken heads. What they really referred to was the fact that we were poor. I did not understand what Mama meant when she said that we would arrive in New York with just twenty dollars in our pockets. But soon after we boarded the ship, then I finally knew.

The Santa Rosa was a marvelous vessel. The Santa Rosa was fast. It could do 28 knots on a good day. The two shiny green stacks with their white stripes canted sharply backward made the ship seem to race even when standing still. It had four decks, three that shone bright and white in the sun, and the fourth that was down and dark. Here were the cargo hatches that were covered by dark heavy canvas. From here the masts, hoists, and winches rose like yellow trees to the sky. The deck, down where the cargo hatches were, was the third-class deck. No more first class, we were now in third class. Mama and Papa had one cabin, and we three boys shared another. Our cabin had a strong, sharp odor of some kind of cleaning material. There were bunk beds, one atop the other, where Peter and Karl slept. There was a cot for me. What I saw, what I knew as the awful emblem of our shrunken fortune, was the dining-room. No gold-braided captain ate here. Not one table was covered with white linen. There were no flowers, no crystal chandeliers, no menu cards on heavy cream paper with red printing that also provided

news and the announcements regarding the evening's entertainment. There was no evening entertainment. There were no great banks of windows lining the dining room that gave access to sun and stars and the broad sea outside. Here were a series of long tables that reached out from the walls. The tables were covered by slick linoleum with a Persian rug design. There were benches on which the eaters, not diners sat. The third class dining room reeked of cooking. The odor of cabbages and cauliflower mixed with the same cleaning smells that soaked our cabin. Over against one wall was something I had never seen before, a low wall that contained pots and containers behind which stood men and women all in white, many wearing a high domed chef's cap. We could pick up a tray and dishes at one end of the low wall and then pass before the white-clothed people who asked, "Would you like..." and before one could ask for a translation, they slapped down cabbage or cauliflower onto the tray. "Would you like..." and a bowl of soup was handed you. "Would you like..." and a little bowl of green Jello was handed you. At the long table you were accompanied by dark haired men who glowered and slurped their soup.

I wanted to explore the ship. I tried the stairs from our dank deck up to where the ship's sides shone shiny white. At the top of the stairs there was a silvery chain that forbade entrance to second class. From where I stood I could see people play shuffle board and I could see people, some of whom were being wrapped in blankets against the ocean breeze resting on deck chairs. I tried to remove the barrier but I found that very hard. Finally I tried ducking under the chain. When I emerged from under, there stood a white jacketed steward before me, glaring. "You are third class. You are not allowed up here. Not even in second class. Where are your

parents? Get back where you belong.” He spoke English and I didn’t know what he was talking about. I started into German, asking to be allowed..... “*Du, dritte Classe. Nicht erlaubt..*.”

I was third class. He said it loud; in front of other people. I was third class when a short year ago I was first class; only days ago I had my own horse; looked into the heart of the Andes, up on my own horse. And my Mama and Papa, they were involved in this. My father, who was a manager of a great *Estancia*, who rode the great blue-gray stallion that was saddled for him every day, he was involved in this. How did the manager manage this? In Germany it was the Nazis, here it was an ugly steward who branded me inferior. How could my father allow this? My mother?

I leaned out over the prow of the ship. The sharp leading edge parted the water with a hiss, parted the silver water into separate streams of white circling foam. “Look,” said my father, his hand was on my shoulder, “there, look, flying fish.” I wouldn’t look. I looked down at the spinning white ruffs: white waves that looked like ruffs in motion, the ruffs that I had seen on old pictures of old women at an old museum I had been taken to in Amsterdam.

“There they go again. Look.” I wouldn’t look. “Never have I seen so many. Really. This is fantastic.” At ‘fantastic’ I had to turn my head. There was nothing to be seen. Another cheat of my father’s, another disappointment, like his lack of words to me on his return from Dachau. Suddenly a squadron of fish surfaced. Soaring like birds they coasted over the waves while I held my breath. With my exhalation they dipped down under the water. “Did you ever see anything like that?” I ran back to my cabin, but I had never before seen anything like that.

My mother was in her bathing suit. She handed us bathing suits. “Put these on. There’s a swimming pool on the upper deck.”

“They won’t let us up there. I tried.”

“Ridiculous. We paid our fare.”

“They won’t let us.”

“I got us out of Germany, I can get us into this pool.”

“You’ll see.”

We arrived at the top of the stairs and there stood the same steward. “*Dritte Classe. Nicht erlaubt.*” Third class. Not allowed. My mother argued long and loud. She evoked Hitler, the Nazis. She never believed that Americans could behave this way to immigrant children; all they wanted was to cool off on a hot day. “*Dritte Classe. Nicht erlaubt.*” While Mama argued, and I knew that it was she who wanted into the pool, never mind the immigrant children, two men stood a short distance behind the steward listening to our conversation, listening to Mama practically beg. If we had been on land, I would have run away and hidden out somewhere. The two men came forward and said some words in English to the steward. The steward bowed to the two men the way Baerga sometimes did to my father. The steward removed the chain and then with another bow removed himself.

The man with red hair asked in not so good German if we would be their guests. My mother said “of course,” and I wanted to run, but I stayed. We sat on chairs, in first class, in the ship’s café while my mother recounted the tale of our miseries in Germany and of our subsequent travels. I hated my mother telling this story because it sounded so much like begging. She told it because she knew it would create sympathy for us. She told these stories because the red-haired man was Aaron Siskind, and his friend was Jacob Sharp. They were both Jews, they lived in Brooklyn Heights and had been on a vacation and cruise. They followed the

situation in Europe very closely. They knew, years ago, what was happening to the Jews in Germany. Jacob had spent a year at the University in Jena. They contributed money to HIAS, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, and to other rescue organizations. The one was a lawyer and the other in advertising, and they both worked for a film production company in New York, but they didn't know Johnny Weismueller or Maureen O'Sullivan. "Look, if you or the boys want to go swimming? Look, anytime. Please be our guests. If we can do anything else for you, please ask. OK?" We went swimming, but I didn't like it. We went swimming almost every day. Every time I went into the pool I felt as if I were betraying something, but I didn't know what.

The Santa Rosa crawled up the coast of South America, then through the Panama Canal. The first time we went through we saw just one destroyer racing like a greyhound through the lake in the middle of the canal. This time they were everywhere. They were on the lake, they were in the locks ahead of us and behind us. I heard Aaron say to my mother, "Roosevelt wants a war. When he gets it, Germany better watch out."

#

We were up early: we were going to land in New York today. Leaning over the rail, we saw a small boat rushing up to the side of our large one. "The pilot boat," said Papa. I knew pilot boats, he didn't have to tell me. The little ship came along side while we were still moving, a gangway was lowered, and about a dozen men in suits and hats clambered up.

Mama and Papa herded us into an enormous hall up in first class; the dining room had been emptied. There were little tables at one end of the room and more little tables on the side behind which sat the men in suits and hats. Lines formed in front of the tables. People presented

papers to the men at the tables. Sometimes someone was waved over to the side tables where men, evidently doctors, would put stethoscopes to people's chests. While we were all lined up together, Papa kept on saying, "If anybody asks you anything just tell them the truth." They asked Mama and Papa all kinds of questions, especially questions dealing with health. They were especially interested in tuberculosis. Did we have it or did we ever have it. They spoke very good German. Finally one of the men smiled at us and asked if there was anything else, when Karl called out "we don't have any shrunken heads. We gave them to Mr. Frisch." At that several of the men jumped up, their eyes wide. The result was that all our baggage needed to be thoroughly searched. Mama and Papa needed to attend the search and so missed seeing the Statue of Liberty.

Karl and I saw the Statue of Liberty, a giant green lady in the middle of the sea. We stood at the railing with Aaron and Jacob, but far more awesome than any green giant lady in the middle of the sea was the sun that we saw reflected in the million windows of Manhattan. The ship slowed down. Tug-boats fastened themselves ahead and behind the ship. "They will take us up river the rest of the way," said Jacob. I knew about tugs but, "what river?" Jacob's arm moved wide across the blue-gray surface of water, "the lordly Hudson. There are places where, people say, it's as beautiful as the Rhine." "Well, maybe," I thought, "but the orange sun in all those million windows...that must have it over anything in Germany. Those buildings, each with a million windows; those buildings higher than the Kölner Dom, spires higher than the Kathedral." Smiling, Jacob said, "You have to be careful about places where the buildings are higher than the churches." Everybody laughed when Karl said, "We had enough trouble in places where the houses were lower than the churches."

“Does it have castles? The river?” I wanted to change the subject. Everybody thought Karl was so cute.

“No castles, but some big houses up a ways.”

“But you said ‘lords’.”

“No, lordly, like grand, like big. It doesn’t have lords but it does have some very rich people who sometimes try and act like lords: that’s Wall Street over there.”

“Wall Street?”

“Yes. In the time of the Indians, the Dutch built a wall to protect their little town from the Indians. A wall of tree-trunks. A palisade.”

“But the Indians were friends to the white man... Shatterhand...”

“Well, maybe it was to protect the Indians from the white man. Look, there; the building with that long spire: that’s the Empire State Building, the tallest building in the world.”

Aaron started, “You know, the Hudson, it begins as a little trickle, a spring, way up north in the Adirondack mountains, you’ll see it one day, and comes all the way down here to separate New York from New Jersey. Across there, those are factories, that’s New Jersey. And in New Jersey, over there, up, about 125th street, you can’t see it from here, is Palisades Park; an amusement park. It has rides and merry-go-rounds...”

“Like kirmesse?”

“I don’t know kirmesse but maybe once you get settled here we might take you there. What do you think.”

I didn’t know what to think. Springs and bubbling made the little brook, the *Bröl*, but in this country springs in the mountains made this wide ocean of a river that separated states. I

didn't know what to think of Palisades and lords and rich people and the Rhine without castles, and walls of wood and walls of buildings where all the windows sparkled. How could anybody get in there, through there; those walls and palisades of buildings? It was very confusing, but I loved all the names. Adirondack must be right out of Shatterhand and Winnetou. Before we landed, Aaron and Jacob gave Papa their telephone number and Papa gave them Tante Irma's address.

Noise: loud steel bangs, winches squealing and motors rasping, mid-ship hatch doors opened, fat hawsers thrown and wound around stubby steel stanchions, sailors shouting and longshoremen lowering gangways. Sunlight and shadows; long slivers of light. From my point on the deck, leaning over the railing, everyone below was small, was rushing somewhere, was waving at someone also leaning over the rail. We stepped off the steeply-canted gangplank down into the immense hollow of the shadowy pier. No lighter this time, no bumpy water ride toward land. This time we stepped and stumbled down into an immense covered pier, where pigeons roosted in the high-cross beams, and where pigeons rushed to daylight with every loud clang, and where just at the bottom of the steps this little lady in a round black hat and a silvery dress was jumping up and down and waving a white handkerchief. Tante Irma. Onkel Theo walked out of the shadows and stood behind her. There were long hugs and joyous crying.

It was decided that Tante Irma would take Karl and me to her apartment; Onkel Theo would stay with my parents while they waited to collect their luggage. I always liked my aunt. She was fun, was short, had smooth skin and was a bit chubby. Already in Germany I had become aware of the family consensus that she was pretty but not very bright, though that judgment of intelligence was related to a scale that began relatively high. After all, Onkel Theo

had his PhD. in economics and Mama ran with a crowd of socialists who thought that they knew everything and Oma Kramer, after her husband's death, had become the business woman who collected every debt, to the very last penny, that was owed the firm of Louis Kramer. So Tante Irma was apprenticed to a milliner.

Peter remained with our parents, Karl and I each took a hand and Tante Irma led us out onto 12th Avenue. The sun over the cobble stones made them shine like the stones of Ruppichteroth. But this was nothing like Ruppichteroth. Over the cobbles of 12th avenue bounced automobiles and huge black trucks. The trucks were propelled by chains in their undercarriages and the chains jingled; they sounded like icicles hanging from the eaves, falling and breaking on ice below.

"We take the subway. OK?" Karl and I must have looked dumb-founded. Tante Irma laughed, and began again, this time in German. "*Schön ist New York am Morgen. Schönsten am Sonntag Morgen früh, wenn die Sirenen schlafen.*" New York is lovely in the morning, loveliest early Sunday Morning when the sirens sleep. Suddenly we heard the sirens. Red screaming wagons raced by us one after another. Karl held on to Tante Irma with both hands.

"It's a fire, these are fire trucks. Don't worry. They're going to put out a fire. New York has the best fire department in the world." I thought, 'they could have used the fire department in Guayaquil. They had bunches of fires every day.'

We walked longer than we wanted to. We were not used to sidewalks. Nevertheless every added step produced wonders, mountains. One set of wonders consisted of how the people we passed were dressed. They were clean; they walked quickly, women in their print dresses, the men with their hats and suits. After five minutes the trucks and cars were already passè, but

then at almost every corner there was a man with a cart, "*Heisse Hunde*," said Tante Irma, "Hot dogs." 'Hot dogs' were something that it took me a while to understand.

Close to the docks were the foothills of the mountainous skyscrapers: buildings of five six and seven stories. As we got farther away from the docks the foothills grew in height. As we got farther too, the sidewalk became harder and walking became more tiring,

"Oh don't slow down, don't slow down, you are my champion of the ping pong games, champions don't slow down. I want to show you something. I want to show you something. There," and she pointed, "That's Macy's, the largest department store in the world. Some of the hats I make are sold in there. Come, I want to show you something else." We walked past Macy's windows. The manikins were dressed for summer. The women were in halters and shorts. Karl whispered, "Don't tell Papa that we saw this." Tante Irma stopped us in the middle of the block and pointed again,

"There. Look up there; that's the tallest building in the world: that's the Empire State Building." Heads tilted upward, and I wanted to say that Aaron already told us. But I didn't. The gray building with its millions of tiny windows extended upward farther than my eye could reach. Peering up, I thought that the building was alive. It was rooted in the ground, yes, but if it really wanted to it would move. I had heard of a monster, a *Golem*. It must be like that. It touched the sky so easily; no Andean Condor could ever fly that high. Manhattan was a rock. Only on hard rock could one stand like that and reach so high. People rushed by. I didn't know anybody.

I had heard of New York's subway trains that ran under the ground, trains that tunneled underground right through the rock. Now Tante Irma took us there. Steps led down right in front

of windows where the manikins wore shorts and halters. We heard the roar before we were halfway down the steps. We were in a darkness eased by puddles of light from ceiling lamps. Tante Irma inserted a coin at the turnstile and walked through. She had us crawl under the turnstiles.

“It’s all right, children are allowed.” I felt uncomfortable. I wasn’t sure that children like us were allowed. We re-assembled, she kissed us, “Now we’re here, now we wait.”

I saw a Negro man carrying several bundles. The only other Negroes I had ever seen were in Guayaquil. I watched a man wearing a hat who was reading a newspaper. He held it in front of his nose and reading in that manner he walked up and down the platform in straight lines. He seemed not to see anyone who might have been in front of him, yet he avoided everyone and still walked in those straight lines. “A circus man: he must be from a circus. How could he do that and still stay away from the edge of the platform?” I wanted to look down and over into that pit at the edge of the platform but Tante Irma always pulled me back. A train blasted and roared into the platform several tracks over across from our own. It screeched to a halt. Red sparks shot out from the braking wheels.

“Would you like some chewing gum? You have been such good boys.” Karl jumped up and down for joy. “Yes, yes, yes.” I pulled at his sleeve, shook my head at him. He was loud. Mamma and Papa were in my head. I knew how to behave. I knew that if something was offered, a cookie, a piece of chocolate, from anybody, even an aunt, you refused three times even if your teeth ached, your mouth watered, your stomach screamed for the offered delicacy. The rule was, the goody was to be extended three times, and then, with averted eyes, with a fake

grin and dissembling modesty you refused three times. The heart beat fast, joining all the other organs to call for the fourth proffer; only then might your hand reach out.

In Germany, chewing gum was unknown to us. Chewing gum only entered our cosmos in Ecuador. In Ecuador, at the Frisch's, gum was used as a treat for the girls. Their screaming delight when the white pills were handed out to them infected us. We wanted that joy. We became avid for that white pill; especially avid since our parents had drummed into us that chewing gum was a disgusting habit. If we were at the Frisches when this joy was distributed they would relent, but if we were alone, they could really talk for long stretches as to how really disgusting the habit was. If we pleaded for gum, the short answer was always, "Cows chew. Are you a cow?" Clearly we were not, yet the deep yearning remained.

Tante Irma turned to a yellow machine at the rear wall of the station and I edged closer to the edge of the platform and looked down. I saw a rat scurry across the rails, but I had seen many of those poke around the corrals in Ecuador looking for grain. I looked over, toward the dark curving hole that was the train tunnel. A sound seemed to reach out from the tunnel. At first it was faint but then it began to sound like the distant drumming of a herd of horses running on the high llano. I could see nothing. Then a large swatch of light appeared on the far side of the curving tunnel. The bright swatch seemed to extend itself and to slide continuously over the far tunnel side. Then, light silvered the tracks in front of us that had been black till then. The roar grew louder. Lit by stripes of light the first car suddenly appeared and a hand grabbed my shoulder and pulled me back from my leaning over the track.

"That is so dumb, so stupid. You can get hurt. What would I tell your mother if you got hurt? You get no chewing gum. Didn't I tell you to stay where you were? Didn't I? Karl gets

gum. You don't get any gum." We entered the subway car and sat on slick, yellow, rattan covered seats. I watched as Karl gleefully chewed away. And I was supposed to be her hero, her ping-pong champion.

#

One six two. I saw the numbers on the wall of the subway station where we got off. We were in Washington Heights. Tante Irma then lived on 162nd street between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue in Washington Heights. We entered her house and then an elevator. It had no attendant, but was routed, magically, by the push of a button, up to the floor of one's choice. We entered her apartment, walked down a long hallway toward the living room. I smelled coffee, and suddenly the room danced with faces. The faces bowed toward us,

"How is Melli?"

"How are you?"

"How was your trip?"

"How was it in the jungles?" The many faces were vaguely familiar, I must have seen them in Frankfurt, maybe seen them in Mother's picture album. There were Tante Irma's in-laws, who we soon learned, lived with her. There were cousins from Frankfurt and several old friends of Mom's.

"I know you don't know me but your mother and I went to school together. We always had such fun. How is she?" When the ring of familiar and strange faces finally parted there stood my Oma, Mama's mother, the Oma of aches and pains. Her arms were wide apart and Karl and I rushed into them. The arms were soft as always and there was the familiar odor of

4711 cologne, and lilac powder. Oma took us into the kitchen where there was coffee and plum cake.

When our parents tumbled into the apartment with their luggage and Uncle Theo, there was a cheery mumbling from the assembled. Mama, just stood out in the hall; we ran to her, hugged long and hard, and then, Mama, smiling, pointed to us and announced to the waiting friends and relatives, "Here you see our fortune; that, and the forty dollars in Oscar's pocket."

I wondered where we were going to sleep, but Tante Irma had already figured it out. I was to sleep with Oma in her bed. Karl was to have a cot in Tante Irma's bed room and Mama and Papa, along with Peter, were being put up in a cousin's apartment on the same floor as Tante Irma's. Karl and I lived in this arrangement for two weeks. Our parents however, were shunted to the Rosenbergs for two weeks. The Rosenbergs lived on the second floor of 542 West 159th street, between Amsterdam Avenue and Broadway. There was Mr. Rosenberg, tall, somber, square-faced, with his white mustache. His wife was Katinka, oval and short. I don't think it was her real name, how could Katinka be anyone's real name, but for as long as we knew her, and that was for many years, she was Katinka. Katinka was a great baker. Her specialty was plum cake. There were three sons: Heinz who became Henry, and was perhaps two years older than I, Walter, a good deal older, and one other who quickly disappeared. He was said to have gone to St. Louis.

After a ten day stay at the Rosenbergs an apartment became available in the same building but up on the fourth floor. Thus we were all gathered and together in apartment 4A. The rent was 28 dollars per month for the two bedroom apartment, but we were given three

months concession, three months living for free; three months for my parents to find work and to find the ability to pay the 28 monthly dollars.

Except for us, and the baggage that made it out of Germany and across the Atlantic to *Machachi*, to the hacienda, to New York, the apartment was empty. There was a box of cutlery that Papa carried under his arm, some presents scavenged from friends and cousins who had arrived in New York before us, but the apartment was dark and empty. If someone spoke there were echoes. We wandered through the apartment, examined every room, the one small bedroom over to one side, the slightly larger one, next to the living room that looked out over the street; the kitchen with its yellow-brown wooden-sided ice box with its brass handles and fittings; the bath room with its flush toilet. Karl got the first licking in the house for repeatedly pulling the chain. The door-bell rang. In came Katinka Rosenberg, large and round, carrying a blue enamel coffee pot and a bottle of milk. Behind her came Henry with a cardboard box full of dishes, and behind him Walter Rosenberg carrying a box of matzohs; these were the last few days of Passover. The Rosenbergs left and we all sat down on the kitchen floor crumbled matzohs into our cups, poured sugar and coffee and milk over them and feasted. Many years later Mama would tell me, "It was wonderful, all of us sitting on the floor, and I said to Papa, that I knew we Jews had been freed from Egypt." Mom added, "Now we're in the promised land? I don't know that, but we are free from Egypt."

Chapter 14

We were desperately poor. Uncle Theo had given Papa a slip of paper that read, "I am

looking for work. I have three children to support.” Advice came from friends and relatives, “go here, go there,” and quite soon Papa had his first job. The job was as a relief elevator operator in an apartment building, where the regular operator had become ill. Uncle Theo had gotten him the job. At first Papa was afraid of taking it,

“I don’t speak any English, how can I...”

“You know one two three four, don’t you?” said Uncle Theo.

“I know five too.”

“Then all you need to learn is six, seven, eight. The building has eight floors. Somebody gives you a number and that’s where you take them. You can do that.” Papa nodded yes. Uncle Theo gave Papa a slip of paper which he was to present to the building superintendent. The super looked at it, said something about speaking English, Papa smiled and started to count,

“One, two, three, ...” He started at eight dollars a week. Then he was almost fired. A tenant had asked him to hold a package for her and deliver it to her apartment. He became confused, and didn’t understand her instructions. When he attempted to make the building superintendent understand his confusion, the super, of course, saw how much English he lacked. “Don’t come back after today,” he was told. At the end of Papa’s shift, as he was changing out of the elevator man’s uniform, the Superintendent came to him. Papa divined what the Super was attempting to tell him. “He couldn’t keep a man who was unable to help a tenant. Tenants come first, but he would try it one more time. Should anything like it happen again...” The super shrugged his shoulder. He slapped Papa on the shoulder and smiled and yelled at him as if he were deaf, “English, English.”

Everything went well for a week or two when, one evening, Papa began to shake and shiver. It was a recurrence of the malaria he had caught in Guayaquil. We were somewhat used to it since that had happened, perhaps twice, on the hacienda. The fever and the shivering would last for two or three days and then he would be perfectly well again. This time the illness made my mother almost insane. While Papa sat in his pajamas, wrapped in all the blankets we could find, shivering in a chair, Mom combed our house, and then the neighborhood for an unemployed refugee who might perhaps substitute for the few days that Papa might be out. She combed Aunt Irma's house. She ran from the house of one relative or acquaintance to another trying to find a substitute. She found no one. The following morning she took the subway and presented herself to the building superintendent, but to no avail. Papa was fired. It was three weeks before he recovered.

Papa's next job was unloading barges on one of the East River docks. As far as I was concerned it was the best job he ever had. Each day there came a barge from the Messing Bakery up in the Bronx. Messing sold cakes and cookies in just about every grocery store with which we were familiar: plain cakes, cakes with chocolate and vanilla icing, cookies of all kinds, plain and chocolate covered donuts and pies of all descriptions. These baked goods were only one or two days old but, to our great astonishment, in this America, they were old and could no longer be sold. So they were consigned to a dog food factory.

"Americans are very spoiled," said my father, "One day only or even two and they can't eat them anymore, it's a shame. Such a waste, if only Oma could see it. In her store it would stay on the shelf," and he silently counted on his fingers till all five were spread out, looked at us and laughed. "Maybe they know better in this country."

Rather than waste such good things Papa would somehow stash away whatever he could, retrieve them at the end of the day and bring them home. Thus began the delicious and long lasting Hess custom of finishing off breakfast with cake of any kind, with pie of just about any kind or donuts: chocolate covered donuts were best, cinnamon were good too.

Mom went to work as a cleaning woman. She washed dishes and scrubbed floors for twenty-five cents an hour. There was a lady in the Bronx who told her, "Come to work for me and you'll get thirty cents an hour." So Mom gave up a twenty-five cent job in Manhattan and journeyed to the Bronx. The first day was a long twelve-hour one. Included in her functions was to clean this woman's silver. Mom cleaned it as well as she could but she had difficulties reading the instructions on the jar that said to wet the sponge first. In the evening, when the woman came home and it was time to pay, the woman told her, "I can see that you're not an experienced cleaning woman. The silver hasn't been cleaned properly. Also, you did not fluff the pillows on the couch. All I can really give you is twenty-five cents." When Mom told this story she would end with, "What could I do? I was glad to get even that." On another occasion she was employed by a very distant relative who had arrived in New York sometime in the 20's. Mom was now pregnant with our youngest brother. She suffered terribly from heartburn and it was difficult for her to bend over. When, in the evening, Mom suggested that she was finished working, her relative came over to pay, "I don't know if you should come back. You didn't get down on your knees, you didn't do the corners."

An early job for Mom was for one of the young Gaertner men who left Ruppichteroth in the middle thirties who was now married and lived in Queens. He was well employed. Mom

was to come once a week a week and clean their apartment. Pop was very strong in objecting to Mom going to work for them.

“What will it look like? After all, they worked for us in Germany. Now you have to work for them?” Mom prevailed. We needed the money. After five weeks of work in Queens, Mom was asked not to come any more. They then received a letter from Opa in Germany. He was terribly upset. Was our situation in America so bad that Mom had to work as a cleaning woman? And if a cleaning woman, how could she work for these people who had always worked for us? Mom then realized that the only reason she had been asked to work was in order that a letter back to Germany might say that, “there are Hesses who are now working for us.”

#

We walked up and down Amsterdam Avenue to furnish our apartment. There were a number of stores on Amsterdam that sold old furniture. “And for only a few dollars down,” one could buy on time. Although the war in Europe had begun and the American economy had taken a turn for the better, remnants of the depression still existed. Those who now were doing better sold their old furniture and there were still sufficient numbers who sold furniture because they needed to. A set of twin beds was delivered. These were pushed together in the larger bed room and we three children slept in the two beds. An old, dark brown, tufted pull out couch was delivered; that was for Mama and Papa. It stood in the living room. (Not for many years, and only after all the children left home did Mama and Papa have a bed-room all to themselves. In all the apartments we ever lived in we were always shy one bedroom. (We were shy because

one bedroom always went to Oma Krämer.) As long as the children lived at home Mama and Papa slept on a pull out couch in a living room. We acquired a white enamel topped kitchen table and several rickety kitchen chairs upholstered in a dark red vinyl. Mamma was very proud of two things: a brand new linoleum cover for the living room floor, for which cash, twelve dollars, was paid, and the other was a tall but narrow china closet which she called a “vitrine”: six dollars. The top section of the “vitrine” had a window of sliding glass and the sides had an in-lay of a lighter color wood. The “good” dishes were kept in the “vitrine” as well as the pewter plate dated 1802 which came from a revered ancestor on Oma Krämer’s side. (It always amazed me, the fact that we had only these few steamer trunks and valises, but out of them came dishes, a set of silver cutlery acquired at marriage, crocheted stoles, and feather beds. There seemed to be an endless supply of things needed for daily living that came out of these rectangular leather cornucopias.) The daily china, one set for meat, the other for milk, came as presents from Tante Irma and the several cousins who had arrived months earlier and whom, Pop, once he had gotten the hang of English, called, “our Yankee relatives.”

Not long after the apartment was established we children began to itch and scratch. On each one of us, on our arms legs and chest there appeared small welts and little red pock marks. Mom carefully examined us, carefully examined our beds, and called Katinka Rosenberg for a consultation. Katinka went to our beds and pulled at the mattresses. She folded over folds, she flicked a finger at the tufts; she put her nose down onto the seams. She looked up. “Bedbugs.”

“Never in my life did I have bed bugs. Not even in Equador.”

“Don’t worry, I had roaches,” Katinka told Mom in a quiet voice. “I got this powder at the Woolworths.”

“Did it do any good?”

“It got rid of most of the big ones. On the package it said it’s also good for bed bugs too. I still have some left over. You can use it.”

Mom washed our bed clothes. She boiled them in a large tub over the stove, then, in the kitchen sink, she rubbed them over a corrugated wash board, then she hung them up in the bath room and when there was not enough room in the bathroom she hung them out on a line that was connected from behind the kitchen window to a tall pole in the back yard. When she was done she rubbed her knuckles for a long time. She then took the powder, and carefully dusted every seam, every tuft, and every fold. That night we slept on the floor, a blanket beneath us, a blanket over us.

When we returned to the bed, to the welts and pocks, our scratching and itching began again. But what was worse, Mom and Papa were scratching as well. Again, Katinka was consulted. “I can’t understand it. When we had them, the powder got rid of them.” Again Katinka put her nose to the mattress and then her nose to the couch, “I can’t understand it. I don’t see anything.” After that Mom consulted, with what I sensed was shame, additional experts: Tante Irma, and the cousins, “We never, never had anything like that in Germany,” was repeated over and over again. What they told her I don’t know, but when she was able to make herself understood to the building superintendent he told her: “Sulphur candles.”

It was a Sunday afternoon when Mom placed several large water glasses around the apartment. Inside large water glasses were large yellow candles. One went in our bedroom, another in the living room where the offending couch rested and another in the kitchen. She lit them and a smoky yellow stink rose from the candles.

“O.K. Now we have to hurry and get out of here, the smoke isn’t good to get into our lungs. We are going to the *Kino*.” There had been no *Kino* since Guayaquil. She gathered us together, Pop must have been working since he was not with us, and off we went to a movie house down on Amsterdam and 155th Street. This was the era of double features, and to my great delight the first one on the bill was the same Tarzan that I had seen in Guayaquil. Once again I was treated to the wonderful Maureen O’Sullivan swimming in the nude. In the second film somebody threw a coat out of a window and that started a lot of chasing and even more talk, hardly any of which we understood. We children then grew restless and wanted to leave but Mom insisted we stay till the end “Because the sulphur had to work.” There was a newsreel. To the extent that we understood, there was going to be an American election, and there were pictures of President Roosevelt.

The newsreel-film made me very afraid. There were pictures of Hitler; he was smiling. Then Hitler in an open car, past streets filled with cheering people. Then battle ships, their guns firing. Then, German paratroopers seemed to fall out of the open doors of airplanes. The air, the screen, was soon filled with white blossoming parachutes. I understood that they were raining down on Norway. I walked home very afraid. Through my head went the terrible idea of Germany in triumph. Clods of mud were thrown at me. Germans were cheering and fire exploded from their battleships.

On our way home we heard the far away sounds of fire engines. As we neared our street the sounds grew louder and as we turned into our street we could see the trucks and flashing lights halfway down the block. Children were running toward the fire trucks. Knots of people were standing in the street and on the sidewalk, all looking upward. As we neared our house we

could see streams of gray smoke coming from a high window. Fire men in black slickers and funny hats were running with axes, others were pulling hoses from the backs of trucks. A policeman, his arms held out wide, was saying, "Git, git, git. Back, back, back. Off the street." The axe men were running toward our house, up the stoop and inside. Mom now started running down toward our house. Katinka ran toward her, waving her arms. Now closer, and from the sidewalk I could see that the smoke was pouring out from a shattered fourth floor window.

"It's your apartment," yelled Katinka.

Mama ran across the street into the arms of a policeman. She pointed up to the window, "*Mein, bitte, mein, mein, mein, bitte,*" she repeated the words over and over again, trying to force herself past him but the policeman had his hands on her, and held her. Her voice quavered, and she began to cry. Karl ran to her, held on to her and called out, "please, please." Finally, after a long pleading, the policeman holding her, let her go.

With Mama in the lead we rushed up the stairs. The smell of freshly lit matches coated all breathable air. Firemen on the way down passed us. They carried axes, thick black hoses were slung over their shoulders. At our landing we saw our apartment door fallen inward, off its hinges; broad gashes showed the white innards of its wood. Mom looked at the door, then crossed the threshold. The smell of matches was everywhere, the wooden bones of smashed chairs lay all about. Every window showing out on the street was smashed. A draft of wind rushed in. Suddenly Mom called out, "My vitrine." Her china closet lay on the floor, its broken-back exposed, glass slivers and white china shards lay around it. She beat her fists against her head, "The Nazis couldn't do it better." A fireman stepped out of the kitchen, a crunch with

every step. He started to speak to Mom. Mom had her hands out at her side, "*Nicht verstehen. Nicht verstehen.*" Henry Rosenberg appeared. He began to translate for the fireman,

"Sorry for the mess. Somebody called us. They said there was smoke in your apartment. We couldn't get into the door, so we had to break it down. There was so much smoke and we couldn't see where it was coming from so we had to search all around and do that quickly. Sorry for the mess." Then he left.

"At least he was sorry," said Mom. The super stood in back of Mom, Henry looked at Mama, "The super said that front door is very expensive." When Pop came home he said, "That was a very expensive movie." I saw the muscles on his cheeks move in and out. For the next several weeks, while the apartment was re-established, all of us were again distributed among relatives in Washington Heights.

Chapter 15

Henry Rosenberg was my first teacher of English. Henry was older. He and his family had been in America since 1938. He was a marvelous ball player and a Yankee fan. He could make the pink rubber ball called a "Spaldeen" do tricks. He would throw the ball at one of the steps of our stoop, and every time, make it hit the very edge of one of the steps. There were six steps to the house' front door and he would call out the step to which he would throw. In time Henry would become the best curb-ball player anyone had ever seen in Washington Heights. During the war, and even before, there were very few cars on the streets so it was easy and almost safe to use the streets as our ball fields. Curb-ball was a variant of base-ball. We would

mark bases from one curb to the other. Home plate was on one curb, second-base was directly across from home on the opposite curb, and first and third were placed in the middle of the street, wide apart and again, across from each other. The aim was to bounce the ball off the edge of the curb and if, on the fly, it hit the house across the street without an intervening catch it was a home run. If the ball bounced rather than flew, the normal baseball rules were in effect. Henry could, all too often, get his home run. Adept as he was at hitting, his finest accomplishment was as a fielder. From somewhere he had acquired a fielder's glove. He had removed all the stuffing from it so that it was extremely pliable; and with that glove he could pluck almost any ball out of the air with the ease of a hawk after a field mouse. His range was phenomenal. As deft as was his work on fly balls, so was his ease grabbing grounders. Everybody wanted Henry on their side.

###

One day, it was spring, and Henry said "Let's go for a walk, down to the river." The river was the lordly Hudson and to venture from 159th Street down toward water was to meet a geography very different from 159th street and the blocks toward the east. There was Broadway to cross, its center divider green with spring and with strange yellow shrubs ranging about the borders; then the walk down the steep 158th street. Along Riverside Drive were great multi-storied buildings, some with doormen.

Here, Riverside Drive was fully as wide as Broadway, and all about it to the south rose high daunting "Elevator" buildings. These buildings looked something like my Oma's in Frankfurt, solid, and substantial, undulating gray rock. I just knew that anybody living in there would never have to scrounge for furniture in the second hand shops along Amsterdam Avenue

or light sulphur candles to eliminate bed bugs. Then there were the rust colored brown-stones that followed the downward slope of 158th street, and more yellow brush rising from their front yards. At the bottom of 158th I saw the viaduct of the West Side highway and the cars buzzing north. Most remarkable of all was the long, green, dizzying, downward cascading steel staircase to the Hudson shore. Henry raced down the step and very slowly, holding on to the railing, I followed.

From the bottom of the stairs I could see a pier stretching out into the river. Henry led me onto it. The piers' wooden beams seemed old and smelled of tar. About half a dozen men were throwing fishing lines into the river. All of them were black. One, instead of dipping a line into the river let down a rectangular wire basket into the water. We walked over to him. He had a tin bucket at his feet. Smiling, he said some words, reached down into the bucket and pulled out a large crab, its feet clawing at the air. It was blue. He said some more words which I now imagine were, "Do you want to see?" and reached out with the crab toward me. I ran, frightened.

Henry ran after me. "They fish here all the time. You can't eat crab, you know. They're not Kosher." I knew that. They served crab salad on the *Caribia* and Mom had said that she so very much wanted to eat some, and they served lobster too that she wanted to eat that too, but couldn't because they weren't kosher. So I knew that I couldn't eat crab. We walked along a black topped path, the river on our left. In the far distance I could see this immense bridge. "George Washington Bridge," said Henry. "The father of our country, George Washington." I couldn't understand how one man could father a country but by that time we were at a large playground. Still, the bridge loomed in the distance, and I couldn't help looking at it. I looked long at the bridge. The supports, the pylons were so tall and massive; the criss-cross webbing of the steel supports so powerful, the roadway so delicate and thin. I

looked long. I looked at the girders that at first looked black but as I kept looking at them I saw that their real color was a very dark blue; a blue with something of the sky in it. Clouds flew in back of the great spidery columns. These strange columns felt like lords from knighthood stories. The longer I looked the more afraid I became. I thought of lords, maybe like my Opa or Papa. No - lords like those giants in black that I saw standing on their balconies in the newsreel, arms out-stretched while below a black booted mass marched in review.

Henry yelled at me, "Come. Now I'll teach you English." There were swings, slides, a sand box, see saws, monkey bars. There were children all about the various devices. Henry named each of these new and strange objects for me and made me repeat them several times. "Now," he said, "you have to go over to that boy," and he pointed to a tall and broad-shouldered boy who was, in an aimless fashion, pushing a swing with nobody on it, "and you have to tell him, in English, 'I beat you up'." He made me repeat "I beat you up" several times, then pushed me over to this young man. Smiling, I guess, I said to him what Henry had instructed. The boy's eyebrows narrowed as he took in my words, then he punched me in the nose so that I bled. I had my first English lesson: know what you're saying and know to whom you say it.

###

Mom made me read a small, soft leather-covered English-German dictionary. It began with "aback" and ended with "zwieback." Several days later, along with Aunt Irma as translator, Mom took Karl and me to Public School 46 on 156th street between Amsterdam Avenue and St. Nicholas Avenue. As we approached the building I thought of a castle, the piled gray stones that made its walls seem so very massive. But it couldn't be a castle because its windows were so very large, and pasted in the windows were pages of multi-colored drawings. It was morning and children were streaming toward the building. The children were all black. We entered with them through massive double doors. There was a

large entrance hall. It was cool and dark and filled with children. Suddenly a huge man in a gray suit moved toward us, cutting through the mass of children like a ship's prow knifing through water. He was white. With both hands, almost carelessly, without looking, he moved children aside.

“Yes?”

“These are new children, from Germany, from Ecuador.” We were escorted to an office. There was a nice lady in a white cardigan, brown hair piled on her head, and eye-glasses that hung from a string around her neck and that swung in front of her bosom every time she moved. Mom handed her some papers; the lady took a book from her desk. It was Grimm's Fairy Tales and it was in German. She had Karl and me read. The verdict then was that I was to go to class 3B-1 and Karl to 2A-1. Mom and Aunt Irma left.

I was amazed at how bright my classroom was. The desktops reflected a shiny golden honey hue. Sun streamed in at the windows. The children smiled when I was ushered into the room. Someone changed seats when I was seated in just about the middle of the room. The teacher smiled. She wrote her name on the blackboard in large block letters. Each time she lifted the chalk from the blackboard she smiled at me, each time she returned the chalk to the blackboard it was with a crash. Lift. Smile, crash: Mrs. Rubin. Mrs. Rubin was tall, a long face and long sharp jaw, brown hair and a rust colored cardigan. I was somehow made to understand, by Mrs. Rubin's peculiar German, that the boy behind me spoke German and that he would translate for me. Through much of the week though, after every one of Mrs. Rubin's explanations of something, she would sidle up the aisle toward me and whisper, “*verstaist?*” I was soon to understand. The boy sitting behind me, Gerhardt Salmson, was a very good translator. He had been in America six months. He came from Dresden. He didn't look like Chino. I thought all the teachers in the world must be taught the same way. A new boy comes into the class, he

doesn't know the language and they bring out a Chino or a Jerry to sit behind the new child. All the teachers in the world must be taught the same way.

"She is Jewish," said Gerhardt/Jerry.

"Who?"

"Mrs. Rubin."

"No. Can't be."

"Yes, she is."

"No. Jews can't be teachers. That's not allowed."

"Yes, here they can. They can't in Germany. But here they can. She speaks Yiddish."

"What's Yiddish?"

"I don't know."

#

On Friday of that first week we were told that we had to go to an "assembly." The class hurried out of their seats, stumbled down two flights, piano music and song came from somewhere. A door opened up and a blast of full throated singing by what seemed to be hundreds of seated black children came at us. A teacher in front waved a little baton. I stood there with the rest of the class while the singing continued. Jerry, behind me, translated the words, "Go down Moses, way down in Egypt land, tell old Pharaoh, let my people go." Standing in this doorway, my class half in and half outside the auditorium, I began to cry. Wasn't my Opa named Moses, and wasn't he still in Egypt? And I was here, in a place where they had Jewish teachers. And I knew pharaoh was Hitler and then the song ended. It ended with each word carefully enunciated; each word let out slowly and loud from these several hundred throats: "Let, my, people, go." Then I knew, standing in that doorway, knew for a certainty that they were singing about me; they were singing for me.

In time, after about four months, and after I had acquired some fluency in English I received another name change. My new friends, John Harmon, Don Seralls, Josh Dickens, Jack Williams, all those with whom I was invited to play handball in the school yard. Whether they came from Edgecomb Avenue or down on Broadway, they all had a hard time, as had my friends in Machachi, of pronouncing my name. Sometimes it was Wolf, or Woolie, or Gang. Lots of times it turned out Woolgang. "Go get it, Woolgang," was uncomfortable. But having undergone a name change once, it was easy to undergo another; this time pronounced by myself.

One day, late in the term, just after lunch, I went up to Mrs. Rubin and told her that from now on my name was no longer Wolfgang, but that it was Walter.

"Even if your name on the register is still Wolfgang? And has it been officially changed.?"

"No. Yes, really. Please." Mrs. Rubin smiled; she had me stand in front of the class, pointed at me with her glasses and said, "We may not anymore call this person by his real name. From now on he has an alias and we will all call him by his new alias which from now on is Walter." From then on till just about the end of the term my friends called me Alias. It wasn't until the next term that everybody in school started calling me Walter.

Chapter 16

We knew we were poor, Karl and I. Some children we knew could buy bubble gum with flip cards in the package and others could afford the ten cents for a pink spaldeen, or ten cents for a comic book or nine cents for a Saturday matinee at the *Costello* movie house on Fort Washington Avenue, or the dime for a matinee at the very grand Loew's Rio where the films were only on their third run while the *Costello* got them on their fifth or sixth round. Karl and I, for entertainment, would often go into the

Woolworth's on Broadway and spend time at the toy counter and just look. Maybe we would just fondle a spaldeen or examine a package of crayons or pick up one of the little toy cars, and run a hand over the wheels simply to hear them spin. It was hard, after picking up a toy, to then return it to its place, but we had no money to buy any of them.

One day, Mom walked past a carpenter's shop somewhere up on Audubon Avenue who was about to throw out short pieces of wood. She came home that evening with a large, heavy bag, upended the bag and these bits and pieces of wood spilled out on the living room floor.

"Here, you can build things with them. Look! A house. Look! A bridge. It's lots of fun." She was sitting on the floor, putting the pieces together. We sat down too. Looked at the pieces, handled them, stood up and walked away.

"You two are spoiled," she yelled after us. "Since when did you get so spoiled? We don't live in a rich elevator building like some people." Mom stood up and gathered the pieces. The bag of wood stood in a corner of our bedroom for a very long time.

Karl and I were in Woolworth's. It was an afternoon, after school. Karl was fondling one of the toy cars, making the wheels spin. The salesgirl was at the other end of the counter. Suddenly Karl put the car in his pocket and walked out of the store. I was anguished by his theft and awed by his courage. Silently, I walked home by his side. The next afternoon, alone, I walked into Woolworth's. I walked up to the toy counter, picked up a red toy car and made wheels spin. A salesgirl came over and asked if I wanted to buy it. I said, "No, I'm just looking." The salesgirl walked away. I saw her talking to another girl at a far corner of the aisle. I picked up the red car, put it in my pocket and walked out of Woolworth's.

It was Saturday, after synagogue, after lunch. Karl and I were in our bedroom. The door was closed. Our shoes off, we were on our bed. We had puffed up the great feather bed quilts, and made rills in the feather bed so our toy cars could run down the long slopes we had made.

“Why is the door closed?” It was Papa. “What are you doing? Why are you on the bed? What do you have there? Let me see.” Full of a terrible shame, we each reached out an arm with the stolen toy in our hands. Papa took up the cars and examined them, turned them over, looked at the wheels, hefted their leaden weight. We were going to get a terrible whaling. It was justice.

“Where did you get these?”

“Woolworth’s.”

“Where did you get the money?”

“We didn’t....”

“Didn’t what...?”

“...buy them.”

It felt like a scream, but there was no scream, “You stole them from Woolworth’s?” Karl said “yes.”

“Here.” Papa’s face was dark. He gave the cars back into our hands. We began to cry. We were in a great and terrible pain.

“Put on your shoes. I want you to come with me.” We passed Mama in the living room and she said, “where are you going? Oscar, you said you were going to take a nap.” Papa pulled at our arms, “I’ll tell you later.”

The wind on the street dried our tears, we couldn’t cry where others might see us. Papa held us by the hand, one of us on each side; he held us hard. Women were looking out of windows. Each one looking down knew Karl and I were thieves. The people we passed on the street knew that Karl and I

were thieves. They looked at Papa, and they said to themselves, "That man has thieves for children, what kind of a person must he be?"

We were inside Woolworth's. "Show me. Where." And we led him, still holding his hands, to the toy counter. We stood at the counter. A salesgirl walked by.

"Miss. Miss. Lady." She stopped across from us and smiled.

"The boys...Show them," and he pulled at our arms. We each held up our stolen car.

"The boys took the cars and didn't pay for them." The girl looked at us with her wide, shocked eyes, "They stole them? Do you want the manager? I'll call him."

The manager was going to come and take us down to the hundred and fifty-second street police station and register us as juvenile delinquents. Papa said, "No. I want to pay for the toys. How much?" The girl held the two cars, one green, the other red. She looked sharply, angrily at us all. Yes, we should be walked down to the police station.

"These are forty-five cents each. Ninety cents."

Pappa went into his pants pocket and slowly pulled out his leather change purse.

"Ninety cents?"

"Ninety Cents."

He opened the change purse, and one at a time, nickel by nickel and dime by dime he counted out the money onto the glass surface of the counter. With her palm, the girl retrieved each coin. Each coin made a scratchy sound on the glass counter top as she pulled the coins to her to let them fall into her other palm.

"Please," he looked at the girl, "the toys please." She handed the cars to Papa. He turned to us and handed us each one of the cars. He said nothing, he just took our hands and we walked home. I felt terrible. My stomach hurt. I wanted to cry but I couldn't. He of course had bathed for the Sabbath, but I

smelled the odor of his sweat as when he came home from work and bent down to receive my hug at the end of the day. His sweat. I was a betrayer. I was a betrayer of his sweat and of Mamma's day labor. I heard the coins spinning on the glass counter top. I was a terrible person.

After several months on the east river docks Papa began work as a dish washer at a restaurant: the Café Eclair on 72nd street on the west side of Manhattan. The Eclair then was a bit of old Europe, the kind of coffee house one might find in Vienna or perhaps Berlin or any large German city. While American-style sandwiches were, of course, on the menu, the real reason for its existence was its many varieties of cakes and pastries, all overflowing with whipped cream, chocolate, and custards. Also, there was the atmosphere of the old world café where one could linger over coffee, read a newspaper, meet with, and chat with friends. That the Café Eclair was located so very near West End Avenue and Riverside Drive, the heart of settlement for the more affluent immigrants, was certainly one of the elements for its long-lasting success. So, in a place where, on another continent he might have frequented, Papa now washed dishes and was glad of it.

It was the day before Yom Kippur, Kol Nidre eve. It was now mid-afternoon and as Papa was observant and needed to prepare for the holiday; he had arranged to leave work early. It had already been a long day. He had begun work at six that morning. Just before leaving, the boss handed Papa a box of desserts to deliver to a customer on West End Avenue at 98th Street. It was something that Pop would have understood since it was customary to have a large and elaborate meal on the evening before the long day of fasting. Pop's subway train rolled past the station he needed to exit. He had fallen asleep on the train. He came home to 159th street. He stood in front of Mom. He held the package in his hand and did not know what to do. Mom took over. She had Papa get his needed bath, and got him something to eat. (We did not have a large and elaborate meal that year.) A problem remained. Oma Krämer, Mom's mother, now lived with us and she was extremely observant. To have, knowingly, overstepped

any of the rules and conventions of the holiday, such as, perhaps, riding on the subway, would have brought down terrible and immediate rebukes and reproaches from her mother. "Don't say anything," Mom tried to calm Papa, "when you and Oma are in synagogue I will take the children and go down and deliver the things." Pop's silence signaled his agreement.

Mom was now very pregnant and it showed. With four year old Peter at her hand we went off to make the delivery on West End Avenue. Mom cried on the subway. We children could very well have remained at home by ourselves. We often had, often enough, but Mom probably thought that arranging for a pathetic gypsy scene might temper any anger at the late delivery. We arrived at the door of the house on 98th street and a lady in a dark dress and pearls opened the door. "Wait a minute," and she took the package. Mom smiled at us, "wait, we get a tip." The lady came back holding the opened package. She was furious. "I have twelve guests for dinner and I ordered twelve *petit fours*. One of the *petit fours* is broken. Now there are only eleven and I have twelve guests." Mom tried to explain but the lady interrupted, "Tomorrow I'll go to Eclair and tell them." The lady slammed the door. Mom pleaded through the closed door, "Please no, please no, please no, we need the job." It went on for a while before we turned around and left.

On our return home, later, Mom didn't tell Pop what happened., but when he returned to work, after the holiday, the lady had already been there, and the boss told Pop, "Don't bother changing, you're fired."

Years later when Mom would recount the story she would say, "*Nebish*, I was pregnant, I had one kid on one arm and the package in my hand. Maybe the package got bumped. The lady said, 'I invited twelve people,' and now she only had eleven and three quarters. You know, when *I* invite twelve people I have at least thirteen pieces, not twelve." She would end the story with a shake of the head, "West End Avenue Jews...."

Chapter 17

Oma had moved in with us. Her boat arrived from England just days ahead of ours. She stayed with Aunt Irma for a few weeks, but as soon as we were settled in our apartment on 159th street she moved in with us. She had been wealthy in Germany, and had given each daughter a large dowry. She was proud of her five brothers who had achieved much as traders and exporters of grain, and she was even prouder of her Hess parentage. There was a certain air of superiority that she carried with her. She was certain, though she never said so explicitly, that her side of the family was better and far superior to the cattle dealer side which was Papa's; very superior, even though the cattle-dealer side and the wealthy merchant and rabbi side were very distantly related. Rabbi blood coursed through Pop's veins as well as my mother's. I marveled at Pop's composure when, and it was often, Oma would bring up the Rabbis from Württemberg and Bavaria and the books they wrote. If I sometimes, cautiously, brought up the subject of family proximity with her she would brush it aside with, "Ach, how can you compare the two?"

Then there was the question of why she was living with us rather than with either her son Theo, or with daughter Irma. Both of these children had been in the States longer than we and were marginally better off. "Well," Mom would say, "Irma's in-laws are living with them, so of course.... And Theo's apartment is a little small," but if Mom were pressed on the subject she would answer, "If she lived with them they would kill each other. Only Papa has the nice temper so it doesn't affect him too much." Mom had the nice temper too.

One Friday afternoon Mom was late coming home from work. Oma paced. “Soon it’s Shabbes and she’s not home yet. There’s no Shabbes dinner.” Oma’s pacing only made everyone more nervous. “When does she come home?” Mom was on a job, cleaning, in Queens. Every half hour I would run up to the 162nd street station, wait a few minutes, not see Mom, and then run home. Pop would go down to the 157th street station and do the same; an hour and a half later Oma was still pacing. After two hours Oma went downstairs and stood at the building entrance. Three hours after Mom should have shown up at home she appeared down the block. She walked slowly, she was pregnant. She smiled sadly and as she neared Oma, Oma hauled off and slapped her hard in the face.

Mom had fallen asleep on the subway and had ended up in the Bronx. From there she became confused, received many confusing directions and long hours later arrived home to the reception by her mother. Mom and Pop never wondered, at least out loud, whether the five dollars, monthly, that each of Oma’s other children contributed to her lodging and up-keep was worth it.

Oma recited poetry, much of which I could not understand since it was in a rather high-flown German.

Ich hatte einst ein schönes Vaterland

Der Eichenbaum

Wuchs dort so hoch, die Veilchen nickten sanft.

Es war ein Traum.

Or:

Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen blühen

Im dunkeln Laub die Gold-Orangen glühen,

The one she recited that I liked best began:

*Über allen Gipfeln
Ist Ruh,
In allen Wipfeln
Spürest du
Kaum ein Hauch
Die Vöglein schweigen im Walde
Warte nur! Balde
Ruhest du auch.*

I memorized it then without understanding it, simply for the sounds. And only much later did I learn that the first poem was by Heine and translated went, *I once had a lovely fatherland. There the oaks grew tall, the violets beckoned gently. It was a dream.* It was titled, *In Exile.*

Chapter 18

One Oma was here with us in New York, but there was another Oma and an Opa still in Germany. America was not yet at war so letters could still be exchanged. When a letter came from Germany, I would recognize it not only by the red stamps with Hitler's picture but also by the fact that it would lie on the kitchen table, unopened, all by itself, all day until Papa came to open it. When one of the letters with the red stamps came Pop would sit in the kitchen, there would be long silences and Mom would stand behind him, the opened letter in front of him and both her hands resting on his shoulders.

#

Every four or five weeks, I would accompany Mom to the Post Office on 165th street. With a twenty dollar bill she would buy a money order and send it to Oma and Opa in Germany. This week, the day was sunny, there was a wind, and she had the twenty dollar bill in her hand as she mounted the steps to enter the Post Office. Suddenly the bill was not in her hand any more. Mom screamed, "It flew away. The wind." There were low bushes that fronted the post office. It seemed as if Mom jumped off the steps to suddenly and frantically root among the bushes. It was a mother I did not recognize. "Oh, God. Oh God. Oh God. No. No. No. No." It was a demonic screaming. She was on her knees, shoving branches aside. I was beside her, my hands between the rooted bushes too, looking, afraid and looking. "Twenty dollars, Twenty dollars." She raced inside the post office. She rushed to what seemed to be a guard, a gray uniform and a wide leather strap across his chest and a wide leather belt with a gun hanging from it and she repeated over, and over again, "I lost it, my money, I lost my money," as if the guard could do something to help. She started in German, "My parents-in-law, my parents-in-law. It is for my parents-in law. We have no money. No money. My parents-in law in Germany." I was embarrassed at her German. The guard turned away from her, "I don't work here." Sobbing as I had never heard before, me, joining her in tears, we rushed out to dig again through the shrubbery. The time and the sobbing seemed endless. We could find nothing. We rose from our searching. Mom's arms were all scratched up. Her crying stopped. "What will I tell Papa?" She took my hand, and we walked home, repeating all the time, "How could I be that careless! How could I be that careless!"

#

I don't think that Pop ever gave up on getting his parents out of Germany despite the letters that came over which both Mom and Pop brooded. When a letter came, and that was not often, they would both sit at the kitchen table. Pop would open the letter, read it and pass it on to Mom. Then they both sat

there in silence. We three children would stand at the edges of the door, knowing that something important was happening but not knowing exactly what. We might stand there as long as Mom and Pop remained sitting, absorbing their sadness and their silence.

Almost every day Pop read newspaper reports of restrictions placed on Jews wanting to emigrate. With the same silence as when he read the letters he would hand a report over to Mom, and she would, perhaps with a fist slammed down on the table call out, "Bastards, bastards, bastards." Country after country closed its doors or fiercely limited the numbers of Jews that they might accept. The extermination of Jews then already taking place in Poland and the east were not yet common knowledge.

Then, a letter came, that made it seem possible that Oma and Opa could be gotten out of Germany. An affidavit and a thousand dollars were quickly needed: a thousand dollars for ship fare and an affidavit that would assure America that the immigrants would not become a burden to the State, that whoever provided the affidavit would be responsible for the care and feeding of the new arrivals. I wanted, very badly, to have my Oma and Opa with us and whenever the talk turned to something having to do with their possible emigration I would circle about, keeping out of my parents' way, but trying very hard to listen. Aunt Irma had provided an affidavit for us, but she was wary of providing another for another group of old people. "But well, yes, if nobody else is there to do it, OK I will do it. But you have to ask others first." There were others, but with all of them there seemed to be a constantly repeated, "Well, yes, but..." There was also the task of raising the thousand dollars. A thousand dollars was to Mom and Pop, on their eight dollar a week, twenty five cents an hour income, an immense, almost incalculable sum. One might just as well have spoken of millions. Nevertheless, they tried.

Pop's brother, the veterinarian, had immigrated to Canada in 1937. By 1940 he had, according to his own modest estimate, established a "nice" practice in Kitchener Ontario. I sometimes heard Mom,

not really complain, but saying that she felt puzzled, that she could not understand why Pop had to carry the burden of trying to get his parents out of Germany when it seemed to her that Uncle Albert, who had been established in his new country for a good long while, did not expend the same energy in the task. Mom and Pop held a conference and it was decided that they would write to Uncle Albert, let him know of the situation and ask him for five hundred dollars. They were not going to ask for the full thousand from him, even though he could probably afford it. They wrangled. Mom wanted to ask for the full thousand, Pop, held out for asking for just five hundred, but let him know that a thousand was needed. Let Albert make the judgment. Mom wrote the letter as Pop wanted.

There was one other avenue which promised hope. Mom had one overwhelmingly wealthy set of relatives in New York. She had never before applied to them for aid either for herself or for family but now, on behalf of her in-laws she did. We took the subway downtown. Mom had the address on a slip of paper. Mom said, "If I pinch you, you can start to cry."

In the late 1890's Mom's father, Louis Krämer and a half-brother, David, came to the United States, together, to New York City. When, because of a severe economic depression his American prospects dimmed, Louis returned to Germany but David stayed. By 1940 David had died, but not before he had established a flourishing business in notions, small, lightweight items for household use, like buttons and pins. His two sons, Herbert and Monroe now ran the business.

The elevator to their offices seemed built out of a fantastic erector set. It had neither walls nor roof. It was composed of an open iron skeleton work through which one could see, far up, a sky-light. One could see as well, through the steel mesh openings as we rose, the vast ranging floors that contained row after row of immense white tables over whose every side men and women were bent doing something I knew not what. But most remarkably, no button needed to be pushed on this elevator

to indicate the floor. There was an attendant who pulled on a braided metal rope that extended all the way up to the sky-light. A pull and the elevator began to rise, another pull and the elevator halted.

This floor too, contained the two vast rows of huge white tables. Large green hooded lamps extended down from a high ceiling, and again, about each of the tables, an enormous number of men and women were bent. As we got closer we could see their fingers moving over pieces of paper as if they were practicing over silent piano keys. But there was no silence, only a crunching, rustling sound came from the tables, as if one were walking through fallen leaves.

Half way down the aisle between the tables stood two men in white shirts and ties. They seemed to be of about the same age as Mom and Pop. Mom smiled and as we got closer she leaned forward, her arms held out as if to hug them, but they retreated a bit and extended their hands for a shake.

“You look just like your grandmother. Wait a minute.” I had seen my mother in many moods but never one like this. She was nervous. “Wait a minute,” came from her over and over again as she rummaged about in her bag. A last “wait a minute,” and she pulled out a photograph on stiff paper, brown with age, of a woman with a tall head of hair and a very serious expression. The man to whom she handed the picture looked nothing like the woman in the photograph. He was short and slender and bald. He had a mustache and glasses. The other man had shiny black hair that was parted in the middle. Mom reached into her bag again and drew out a small soft blue bag. It was something that I had seen often. I was handed her large bag and Mom drew out a golden watch on a long golden chain from the soft blue bag. Mom spoke in German.

“This is your grandfather’s watch. I don’t know if you have anything to remember him by but I thought that maybe you would like to have it.” I was never more ashamed of my mother. I knew she was going to beg but I did not know that she was shamefacedly going to bribe as well. I had seen, in Germany, in Ecuador, when from time to time she had taken the watch out of the blue bag and had run a

soft cloth over the gold casing; the gold watch with roman numerals. She would make a point of saying, each time that I saw her polish it, "This is the only remembrance I have of my grandfather. One of these days one of you will have it." The bald one took the watch and smiled. Then each took turns holding it in his palm, seeming to weigh it. We stood there in the middle of this vast room and nobody spoke.

There was just the rustle that came from the tables that came from the workers and their nimble fingers.

"Come, you're pregnant. Sit down in the office. We'll get you some coffee. We sat in an office at one end of the floor. It had a large glass wall that looked out on the workers. Mom told her story, about the terrible situation in Germany, "Everybody knows about it, I don't have to tell you, I wrote you about Oscar's parents, these good old people. Religious, good people, they don't deserve to suffer, there are people here in America who could help maybe save these two old people. All we need is a thousand dollars."

"A thousand dollars?" said the two of them, almost at once.

"I know. It's a lot of money. You know Oscar and I would do it but Oscar works so hard for just his eight, sometimes ten dollars a week and I don't sit on my *tochus*. I get twenty five cents an hour for scrubbing floors. And the rent is forty eight dollars a month and we got three kids." Mom put her arm around my neck and pinched me so the others wouldn't see it, but I refused to cry. The begging recital made me too angry. "Anything you can do to help us, we would pay you back when we get on our feet. And we need somebody to provide an affidavit."

The bald headed one got up, looked down at his brother, he turned in a circle and then faced us, "How long are you in this country?"

"Why? Months, I guess."

"How can you afford a forty-eight dollar apartment when your husband makes only eight dollars a week?"

“Did I say forty eight? I meant thirty-eight. Thirty-eight. When he gets ten, we still got two dollars left over. And I work too.”

“You’re not here even a year and already you’re pregnant.” Mom looked down at her belly and stroked a hand over it.

“I think it’s very irresponsible,” said the slick-haired brother. Mom looked up. The slick-haired brother got up and faced Mom. “Very irresponsible. How can you think of having children when you have no money, when you have no real work; nothing that gives you a real future. Now, you can still work but after a while...”

“You have a lot of responsibility; three children to take care of. A hard time at home...”

“Not so hard like you think. Money isn’t everything...”

“And then you’re hardly in the country and you have another on the way, that’s what I call irresponsible.”

“I’m sorry that you think so,” and then my mother pinched me in the neck again, but again, I refused to cry. “I’m glad I have these children and I’m glad we have another on the way.” Mom smiled. “Oscar got out of Dachau, we got out of Germany, we got out of Ecuador. Do you think all that is for nothing? Do you have children?”

They both shook their heads. Mom got up from the chair, “I don’t want charity. I’m not asking for that. I would never. This is for two old people in Germany. I didn’t really want to come and bother you, and it is really hard for me to come and beg but I thought that maybe the lives of two old Jews are really important and that blood is thicker than water, than dollars even. And people help each other when there is trouble.”

“You know,” said the slick haired one, “the blood isn’t even so thick between us as you say. Your father and our father were step-brothers, not even real brothers.” Very quickly, and more loudly, Mom replied, “Weren’t they raised in the same house, one next to the other? I can’t believe it.”

Then the egg-headed one said, “With somebody as irresponsible as you seem to be, how can we trust that the money will be used as you say?”

Mom reached for the watch on the desk, her fingers surrounded it, “I can’t believe it. My cousins! I would lie to you? I can’t believe it. I should have listened to Irma and never have come to you.”

The two were both standing now. Mom pulled me up from the chair, “She said you sent her a letter when she asked you to make an affidavit for our brother, for your cousin Theo. Your lawyer told you not to do it, you said. You would be responsible if he couldn’t support himself: responsible for a doctor in economics!?” Now in English, and very loud, “How many people you got working on your tables in these three floors? How much you making on each one every day?” We were almost at the elevators. People around the tables were now looking up. They had stopped working. “People like you gave money to Hitler. They bought suits for the Hitler youth.” The elevator had arrived and we stepped in. In the elevator she said, very quietly, “Maybe if they had children they would think differently.”

The answer that came from Canada did not differ greatly from that of Mom’s cousins though here a son was involved. Here the request was for a much smaller sum and Uncle Albert wrote back, “Do you know how much five hundred dollars is?. Do you know what five hundred dollars means?”

On Sunday June 22 1941 the Germans invaded Russia. One hundred and twenty divisions struck. They struck from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Mom said “that’s their end; that’s Hitler’s big mistake.” But her face did not look happy. A few days later, Italy and Rumania too declared war on Russia.

###

On June 27, 1941 my grandparents, Henrietta and Moses Hess, were rounded up, along with all the other Jews in Ruppichteroth who had not already been sent into forced labor, and transported to the recently-vacated forced labor barracks in the nearby town of *Much*. Not only the Jews of Ruppichteroth were brought to Much but, predominantly, all the older Jews of the surrounding district were incarcerated here as well. Sometime after the end of World War 2, to my parents' great surprise they received a letter from my Opa Moses. The letter had been smuggled out of the camp at Much to a farmer friend of my grandfather's. The friend sent it on to us in New York as soon after the war as he could.

Translated, the letter is as follows:

The camp in Much, June 23, 1942,

My very dear ones,

Our end is very near. A thick dark line has been drawn through our lives. Till now, things have gone fairly well - we have been living, for the past thirteen months, in the Camp in Much. Because of the kindness of the local people we have been treated well, may God bless these people for their kindness. But my dear ones, soon we will be leaving this place and our dearly loved Rhineland. We old ones and all the older ones are being sent to Terescin in Bohemia - the younger ones are being sent to forced labor - among them Aunt Lydia. Uncle Julius has met his end. He was "shot while fleeing" in Buchenwald. If, perhaps after some years, you should see this letter, think of us with kindness and respect. You can't help us but Albert did have the possibility. You know what I think about that. God bless you dear Oscar, all your children, and you dear Melli. And sometimes, on good days or bad, think of us, your parents, now hounded to death. Of my sisters, only Lina remains in Frankfurt - Uncle Willi has died in Poland. Oma is quite healthy despite the hard labor she has had to do. We have quite a business here in

camp. We make rubber leggings and uniforms for the military and Oma sits from early morning till late at night at an electric sewing machine. In January I was operated, in Cologne, for a bladder condition - it is a pain but not a critical condition. I have not yet fully recovered. And now my dear loved ones, may God bless you and your children - raise them to be honorable and useful human beings and keep us in your memory.

Our good things have been hidden with Joseph Lauf and Johann Haas, and when peace returns you can get in touch with them. I will not be alive by then but in my judgment you should see Oma again. I will be seventy when the war ends. Now, once more, my wish is only for good things for you and your children.

Your Opa and Oma.

At 8 AM on July 27th 1942 trucks arrived at the camp at Much and took the last group of its inmates, including my grandparents, to local train stations, where, via Bonn and Cologne they were transported to the concentration camp of Tereszin in Moravia. From German documents my grandfather's date of death is given as 19 October 1942 and my grandmother's as June 1944. Both in Terescin.

###

*It took some time
to look at all those pictures,
the black and white ones;
to hear those stories once again;
heads nodding toward*

her and him;

that book of shadows

when we were kids

who knew enough

to fill in that which happened;

knew to perfection that desire,

no, the need to stay apart,

away from them;

from that which happened

endlessly to those you loved

but not to you.

Chapter 19

There was a synagogue up on Amsterdam Avenue, between 161st and 162nd Streets. It occupied a long hall on the second floor above a supermarket. The Rosenbergs belonged to it, as did my Aunt Irma's family. The congregation had just recently been organized. All of its members were refugees from Germany. To see the members walk into the *Shul* on a Friday evening or Saturday morning was to see them in suits and dresses, in their best clothes. The services were conducted according to the

orthodox ritual. Hebrew, of course, was the language of the religious service but all the gossip on the benches was in German. For our chattering we children were rebuked in German.

To be up above the supermarket on Friday evening or Saturday morning was to be enveloped by a certain kind of comfort. The chants and hymns were so very familiar to me. I loved the call and response when chanting a psalm, the singing that accompanied the removal of the Torahs from the ark and then the singing when they were returned to the ark. I loved the singing that accompanied the repetition of the *Amidah*, the petitionary prayers. The whole congregation sang, full throated, sang the same tunes that my Opa sang in the synagogue with the red carpeting, the synagogue made of large fieldstones, back home, in Ruppichtheroth. When, on a Saturday morning, I heard the order of prayer and heard, after what seemed like a long absence, the same melodies my Grandfather used, it was comfort and continuity. Yet even better than the Saturday mornings were the Friday nights when we, all the congregation, sang *L'Cho Daudi*. Then I had a sense that I was back in the synagogue with the red carpets, Opa leading the singing, and at the last verse turning toward the door, welcoming the mystery, the spirit that waited there, outside.

L'Cho Daudi is a hymn that celebrates the day of rest. Its essential trope compares the approaching Sabbath to a bride, though I didn't know that as a child. For me, then, it simply was the song through which my Opa smiled, and in which his voice rung with a lilt so happy that it seemed to lift the moment to grand and delicious heights. More than any other part of the service, this was very special. Toward the end of the hymn the congregation stands and turns toward the door and bows, as if honoring an entering guest. At that point, and just before standing, Opa would smile at me and wave a little circle in the air with his hand. Opa's smile and hand signal prompted the thought that someone ought to be coming through that door. But who? And then further, the thought that someone was indeed standing on the other side of the massive oak doors of the synagogue, someone who was playing with us

all, waiting, waiting, till just the right moment should arrive. That was, I was sure, the significance of Opa's smile. Opa too was playing with us, with me. And his smile promised that sometime, someday, someone would indeed enter. But it was this temporary turning, the turning away from the front of the synagogue, from the place where Opa always stood, close to where the Torahs were stored, and then the turn again to the place of usual focus that was always, for me, the most strange, mysterious, and joyous moment of the week. There was a turning away and there was a returning.

Now, standing in this, another synagogue, on a Friday night above the supermarket, when *L'Cho Daudi* was sung, and as usual, at its end, there was the turning toward the door, I was sure that even in this faraway city and on this faraway continent it was my grandfather who stood on the doors' other side. Not my grandfather in the flesh but that somehow it was his presence, not a ghost but a presence made up of his smell, his dark holiday suit, his smile, his white bristly unshaven face and white mustache. A presence waiting, and sometime, if not now, then sometime that was not so far away, that presence would come in through that door.

Joining the Synagogue meant joining Hebrew School. My first day in Hebrew School was the first day of the Hebrew School. The first day of lessons that began with a translation of the *Akeda*, the binding of Isaak. It occurred to me that Father Abraham, like my father, must have been really nervous to have taken these kinds of measures to punish his son. Never mind that it was God's instruction to take the one he loved best up that mountain. But Abraham must really have been nervous, even more than Papa, after all that traveling he had to do, all the way from Ur to Canaan. Except that it was God who told him "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred and from thy father's house." That's what Mr. Klein, our teacher, read to us before starting in on the binding; a good thing that Papa merely doled out the much too frequent whack on the backside.

###

I discovered Audubon Terrace through Jack Williams. Jack was in my class at PS 46 and he went to the Church of the Intercession and sang in the choir. The church was on the corner of Broadway and 156th Street. We were learning about the history of New York City and Jack told some of us that he knew that Peter Minuet was buried in the church's cemetery and that we could go down there and look; except that it turned out that it wasn't Peter Minuet who was buried in the cemetery but Peter Stuyvesant, and we couldn't get into the cemetery to see him so we went to look in on Audubon Terrace. We looked, and we saw that we were in a different country. No fire-escape fronted soot splashed brick five story walk-ups all squeezed together. Here there was the immense courtyard, in the center of which was the immense statue of a man on a great rearing horse, his arm lifted high and, as an extension to his arm, this great pointed flag-wrapped spear that wanted to puncture the sky. At the base of the statue it said "El Cid Campeador."

"Who was El Cid fighting," I asked Jack. Jack thought it was the Indians because one of the great buildings held the Museum of the American Indian. "He couldn't be fighting the Spanish in the Spanish Museum." I thought, "that's right. He wouldn't be fighting the Spanish because 'Campeador' was a Spanish word. Except that sometimes Spanish fought Spanish."

"And what sense," added Jack, "would there be in fighting the coins in the Numismatic Museum," so it had to be the Indians. We walked slowly about the great rectangle that held these immense light-gray buildings with the many fluted pillars and the grand cornices on top that looked as if they came out of the books where we saw Greek and Roman temples, and though they were not very tall, they somehow seemed to me to be far taller and larger than any five-story walk-up, or even any elevator building on 161st Street. Then there were these great wide terraces that surrounded each of the buildings and the grand staircases that led up to the buildings, and the Spanish museum had large rooms with dark wooden walls and massive dark brown furniture. There were some names under some of the

pictures that when I repeated them to Mom and Pop they seemed impressed. One Saturday afternoon when they went on their “*Spaziergang*” their customary walk, they tried the Spanish Museum. I had told them of Velazques and Goya, but the museum was closed. Still, Mom was pleased. “I bet none of these other refugees ever even put a foot on that place.”

But it was the Indian Museum, the Heye Museum, that called me back time after time. There were the explorations among the glass-covered cases, long walks in echoing halls among huge glass wardrobes and glass closets that held scalps, and beadwork and belts and breastplates made out of porcupine quills. There were cases of buffalo skulls and models of Indian villages from different climate areas: bark and long-houses in the wet northeast forests, adobe and rounded hogans in the dry west. There were shields with color and geometric designs dotted high along the walls. And there were the names: Pueblo and Cayuga, Arikara and Nikoyan, Cree and Taos and Crow. Perhaps these names were nothing like the ports along the French Channel, were nothing like those points on a map where the *Caribia* made port, and if I was not transported over oceans I was, here, on 156th Street, carried over time and over cultures.

###

Then Pop got a good job. Joining the synagogue, becoming friends with friends of relatives, and with friends of friends, Mom and Pop learned about work that might be available. Aunt Irma’s husband, Herbert, had gotten a job in a “*Büro*,” an office. Aunt Irma made hats somewhere in the Garment District. Uncle Theo, the Ph.D. had gotten a job, first at Klein’s department store, and then, later, in New Jersey, across the George Washington bridge, in a factory that tanned hides. Oma Krämer crocheted table cloths and doilies and complained about the pain in her wrists.

Pop’s new job was as a house painter. He had made friends with a group of former cattle dealers none of whom ever had the experience of working in a “*Büro*.” but who knew enough of cattle

excrement never to want to deal with it up close again. They had gotten jobs with the Rubinstein Company in the Bronx, and when a place opened up they took Pop along. Pop started at fifteen dollars a week.

With the war in Europe proceeding and American factories tooling up to supply armaments to our military and to Britain, with a draft being instituted that further depleted the reservoir of able-bodied young men, some refugees found work in those factories and made what was called “very good money”. But Pop had not been in the country long enough to be allowed to work in a war factory. We were still considered aliens. A good number of men who had experience on farms in Germany did become butchers. Butchers too made “very good money,” especially if they worked in a union factory, but Pop had trouble with seeing blood. He would sometimes faint at the sight. So he became a house painter.

One day Pop came home whistling. He was a very good whistler, and if he was whistling we knew that he was in a good humor. He told us he had been given his first lesson in painting. Mr. Rubinstein was the teacher.

“Rubinstein told me that there were two ways of painting and two kinds of painters. He showed me. One was the *Volga Boat Men* and the others were the *Yankee Doodle Dandys*. *The Volga Boat Men* were the guys who dipped the paint in the pot slowly and then slowly, very slowly moved the brush up and down on the wall to the sad tune, like funeral music, of *Ya Ya Knyuch Knyeh, Ya Ya Knyuch Knyeh*.” Pop whistled a few choruses of *The Volga Boatmen*. Then there were the *Yankee Doodles*. And he whistled “Yankee Doodle went to town.” *The Yankee Doodles* were happy. They dipped their brush in the pot quickly and happily made their brushes move quickly up and down the wall, all the time singing Yankee Doodle Went to Town. He wants me to be a Yankee Doodle Dandy.” I couldn’t imagine Pop as a Yankee Doodle Dandy, but soon he was making eighteen dollars a week.

Chapter 19

Mrs. Rubin felt my forehead and sent me home. My tonsils hurt. Mom took my temperature: 104. It remained high, even with aspirin, and my tonsils still hurt. Then, two days later a rash appeared all over my body. I heard Mom and Pop talking.

“Dr. Weiss, he would come. Three dollars I think.”

“Dr. Joshua is better.”

“Joshua charges five dollars to come to a house.”

“Yes, but it’s sure he comes and he’s better. It’s only five dollars.”

“Only.”

Mom hurried down to the Rosenbergs who were one of the few in the building to have a telephone. She called Doctor Joshua. He came late that evening. He bent over me. Oma, Mom and Pop seemed to hover behind him. He put his hand on my brow. “Stick out your tongue.” I did. Mom said “It’s been white, coated like that since yesterday.”

“Open your mouth wide.” I did. He mumbled, “Forchheimer.”

“What? What? We need a specialist?” asked my mother. “What kind?”

“No. Forchheimer spots. I have to call the health department.” Mom, who was not far from giving birth, yelled out, “What is it, what is it?”

“Scarlet fever.” He took Mom by the shoulder and pushed her out of the door. In the morning an ambulance came. Two men in white coats and a stretcher entered the room. They didn’t know how they were going to get me down those steep stairs on a stretcher when suddenly, one picked me up and threw me over his shoulder. We clattered down the stairs, there were women peeking out of their apartment doors, wondering, as we went by. The back of the ambulance door was open, there was a stretcher lying

in front of it. I was plopped down on the tan canvas, and as the men in white picked the stretcher up I saw an arc of children watching me. I thought, it must be a holiday, there are so many kids outside and not in school.

The ambulance raced down the East River Drive and somehow I remember seeing the gray East River striped with black, and a tug-boat out on the water pouring white smoke from its stack.

I sat on a cold marble counter-top in an examining room while a nurse with a white mask took off my clothes. I was on another stretcher, a stretcher on wheels, it felt soft, and it was covered with a stiff starched white sheet. Then I was in a large cubicle. It was surrounded on three sides by glass. A number of white coated men stood at the foot of the stretcher. They were nothing like the two from the ambulance. They had dark pants under their white coats and all their hair was nicely combed. One of them had a hypodermic needle in his hand. There was a silver tray at the bottom of my stretcher. More hypodermic needles lay in it.

“We’re going to give you some shots. It won’t hurt, just don’t move,” said the one holding the hypodermic needle. He moved forward, lifted the gown the nurse had dressed me in and stuck the needle into my groin. I screamed. He had lied; it hurt greatly. He made a face by pressing his lips together. He repeated the injection into different parts of my groin five times. I kept screaming.

I was in the Willard Parker Hospital for Communicable Diseases. The massive red brick hospital stretched for three blocks, downtown from 15th street, along the East River. Here, children were brought from all over Manhattan, children with scarlet fever, polio, tuberculosis, anything and everything that might spread contagion within a population at a time when there were no magic bullets to cure any of them.

I was in a ward for young boys. The ward seemed infinitely long. The ceiling was very high. I lay close to the door from where I could see a great row of beds arrayed the length of the two long walls

until at the far end, where there were windows looking out over the East River. There were windows, too, in back of the row of beds across from me, large heavy panes enclosing us, where I could see, men and women all dressed in white marching up and down. Sometimes they pushed the stretchers on wheels. Sometimes the stretchers ferried people and sometimes the stretchers had what looked like people on them, but they were covered by a white sheet.

We were visited by nurses whose faces were almost always covered by masks. We hardly ever saw their faces. The nurses might come with an alcohol rub to ease a fever, or bring a tray with food, and then I would see their raw red lobster hands. However she might tend to me, one nurse, on leaving, would always say, "I've got to go and wash my hands. I've got to wash my hands a million times a day." I wondered if the nurses washed the books every time we gave them back, since every few days they would come with little carts containing books. The books were my entertainment all the five weeks at Willard Parker. Here I was introduced to some very wonderful new reading matter. The books I liked were the "Twins" books and there were a great number of them. There were Twins in Alaska, in Holland, in Japan; there were American Indian twins and Indian Indian Twins; there were twins all over the world. I found out how life was lived in an igloo and how to ice skate on a Dutch canal. And always there were names like Kit and Kat, Nip and Tup, Toro and Take and Jean and Jock. The authors of my books had wonderful names as well, mouth filling names, real American names, three names at a time names, names like Lucy Fitch Perkins who wrote all the twin books and Albert Payson Terhune who wrote the *True Dog Stories* and *Lad*, and *Bruce and Buff*. All truly great Americans had three names, like Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Three-name Americans all came over with the *Mayflower*; two-name Americans came from poor immigrant families who couldn't afford a third one, like Fiorello LaGuardia.

But the best author of them all was John R. Tunis. I understood that the R. stood for a name, but one that he didn't want everyone to know. And the fact that it was only an R with a period maybe meant

that his family had arrived on a ship a bit later than the *Mayflower*. In any case he was the very best. Because of John R. I irrevocably bonded with the United States of America. *The Iron Duke* was the book and Jim Wellington, long distance runner, was the hero. The book had Harvard College where all the *Mayflower* descendants went to school; it had courageous Jim at the 1936 Olympics, where he showed up Hitler.

I never read on Sundays. Sundays the books were underneath my pillow. Sundays I watched and waited. From waking to late in the day my eyes were on the wall of windows across from me. Grown-ups: parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters would appear behind the windows and smile and tap; other children's relatives. The tapping was needed because no words ever passed across the glass divide. People mouthed words from one side to the other and from my side the most common response was "What? What? I can't hear you. What are you saying?" And then tears. Pop did come, every Sunday, but usually quite late in the day. Until he appeared there was always the question: would he? Several times Oma came with him and once, Aunt Irma came. But why didn't Mom ever appear?

Five weeks at Willard Parker, and then on a Sunday I was released, and Pop took me home. Walking to the bus Pop said, "we have a surprise for you at home." I wanted no surprises, what I wanted I did not know but I wanted something as recompense for feeling abandoned and alone in that great brick pile surrounded by masks with lobster claws. On the long trip home Pop kept smiling and asking, "So. Are you happy you're going home?" But I was in no mood to answer. "Just wait till you see the surprise." I wanted no surprise. Pop's cheery talk simply clamped my lips tighter. If I wanted anything it was silence and maybe a coffee ice cream cone.

We walked up the block toward our house. I saw Mom in front of our house. There was a baby carriage in front of her. She waved. She came closer, pushing the carriage. I stopped, making her come toward me. She ruffled my hair. "Look. Look. Look what we have." I didn't look. Pop said, "Isn't this

a nice surprise?" I shrugged. Mom kept saying, "Just look, he's such a pretty baby." I started toward the stoop steps. "Oh, don't be mad like last time."

"What last time?"

"In Ruppichteroth, with Peter."

I ran up the steps toward our apartment. I waited in front of our door till Mom and Pop came up. They came, Mom carrying the wrapped baby. "You didn't even ask his name." I knew that I didn't.

"It's Franklin. That's the name of our president."

"Everybody knows that."

"Well, I asked the nurse in the hospital, what was the name of the president and she told me. Look what I made for you." We were inside the apartment. On the kitchen table was a bowl of vanilla pudding. "We even got some raspberry syrup for you. Special." Pop went to the ice box and put a bottle of raspberry syrup next to my bowl of vanilla pudding. Then he went downstairs to lug up the baby carriage. I sat to eat the pudding which I loved. I also loved raspberry syrup on vanilla pudding, but I refused to touch the bottle. I let it stand there. When I was finished with the vanilla pudding I licked out the bowl, something Mom hated us to do, but this time she said nothing except a low, "but we bought it especially for you."

Pop came up with the carriage. He was out of breath.

"Before the baby came Aunt Irma gave us a carriage. We kept it behind the stairs, downstairs. Somebody stole it. Then Pop went to some of the supers in the buildings where he works and he asked them if they had any old carriages for the baby. He got six carriages from them." I looked around. "There's none of them left. We sold them all. So we have some extra money."

I started to laugh at the sight of all the baby carriages filling the apartment but then stopped myself. "Money to buy raspberry syrup."

“That’s right.”

“But no money for stamps?”

“What do you mean?”

“Kids on the ward got mail all the time.”

“There was so much going on here with the baby, the hospital.”

“When was he born.”

“Two weeks ago. May..”.and she slowed down. “May twenty first.”

“Last week was my birthday. Twenty-six.” I ran down to the Rosenbergs and asked if Henry was in, but he wasn’t.

###

One day a large shiny black car with four doors stopped almost in front of our house. It was after school, and Henry was teaching Karl and me about curb ball. Home plate was right in front of our house and the car, though it had found a fine parking spot a bit above our house, nevertheless kept rolling forward ever so slowly till we were forced to move our home plate further down the block. Henry had the chalk out of his pocket ready to inscribe home on the asphalt when a man in a dark suit and tie and shiny black shoes stepped out of the car that had made us move. Henry muttered, “asshole jerk,” when Karl ran up to him and called out “Aaron, Aaron.” I would not have recognized him. Mom had given him Tante Irma’s address on the ship and through Aunt Irma he had found out where we lived. We took him upstairs to Mom. He kept looking around wide eyed as we clattered up all four stories. Mom was waiting at the door. Aaron hardly opened his mouth when Mom waved her hands in front of her as if to wave Aaron away, “*Wass will er?*” What does he want.

Aaron laughed, “*Vass vill er?* I can still speak some Yiddish. “I have to go now but after lunch on Sunday, Jacob and I will come by and we’ll have an outing with the boys.” “Outing? Outing?” Mom

had never heard the word. "What is outing?" I needed to translate. When she went shopping she would point to the article and say, "that." When the total was rung up she would look sad and say, "so much?" I was embarrassed for my mother when we went shopping, and I was embarrassed for her now, standing in front of a man in a suit, white shirt and tie.

"I thought we might take them to Palisades Park."

"*Ja*. There." Mom pointed to somewhere across the Hudson. She looked at us; saw our faces.

"*Ja, Gut*. OK."

"Good. OK. We'll be here around one. Be ready. Goodbye."

#

We sat in the back seats. There were straps on each side of us, and so Karl first, pulled himself up by it, and sat with his feet under him so he could look out of the window. I followed.

"Just be careful. All this must be new to you. That's the Hudson over there, all that water."

I was about to say, I know, when Karl looked at me, his eyes wide and his shoulders raised, and I clamped my mouth shut. "And over there, ahead of us, that's the second largest suspension bridge in the world. We're going to go over it." The car veered away from the highway and spiraled up a ramp one way and then another ramp another way and we were on Ft. Washington Avenue. A sharp turn and then very quickly the great iron pillar, a huge arch, a great open mouth in its middle appeared in front of us. We streamed through the open space the curve of the arch seemed to give up and then an even greater wonder: the great silvery wave; the tube from which metal braids, silvery strings, descended. The great pylon that I had been looking at these several months just held the roadway steady, but it was the silver tube, the inverted wave, and the strings from which the concrete hung that allowed our smooth passage high above the water.

The first thing we had to do was to eat. But the first thing I wanted to do was to just walk around and look. In Ruppichteroth we had *Kirmes*, the annual fair. That's when they set up a merry-go-round, with gold and ivory horses, giant wire boxes on metal strings that once you entered them became swings, carrousel where you sat at the end of a long red girder, in giant clam shells or white swans. And there were booths where you could get mugs of sweet cider. But after a while we Jews were not allowed to attend *Kirmes*. But now we were at a *Kirmes* that was a million, billion times bigger than the one in Ruppichteroth, and Karl and I could go onto any of the rides; stand up in front of any of the booths.

"Food," said Aaron. "This place is famous for food. I go here just for food." We were both very quiet while people streamed past us and around us. The idea of food was good but what we really wanted was to try some of the rides. Did they really bring us out here just for food? We walked through an area where people threw balls at objects and girls walked past us with giant dolls. Very hesitantly Karl asked, "Can we go on one of the rides?" "Of course, of course, that's what we came for. I've been coming here since I was your age, here and Coney Island, but this was closer to your house. And I was just saying that, because I remembered the food." Jacob was laughing.

"He was just kidding. These days we go downtown to very fancy restaurants when we want to eat, but we remember some very nice things we had here when we were your age. Maybe you'd like them too."

That's how we got cones of white paper filled with French fries with vinegar on top. I thought the fries were delicious but Karl almost threw up after the first taste. That's how Karl got this huge slice of vanilla ice cream stuck between two huge waffles. He slurped the ice cream and while most of it dripped on his shirt Karl didn't care. He was happy.

The first ride, "we just have to do this," said Jacob, was the Ferris Wheel. There was something like it at the *Kirmes* in Ruppichteroth but this was as different as a Kodiak Bear and a mouse. (We had

just learned about Alaska in Geography.) In Ruppichtheroth, a man strained to turn a crank that made the whole Ferris wheel turn and when the man got tired the whole contraption stopped and you got stuck somewhere in the air till he could begin turning again; here a motor hummed somewhere and a man took your ticket before you entered your car. The ride started. Aaron pointed, "There's the fun house, there's the Whip, there's the salt water pool. That's the roller coaster. The roller coaster was interesting. We had passed it, and heard the metallic clicking of the chains grabbing a car, and moments later the train of cars was pulled skyward, and then the people screaming as it careened down to earth. I had seen people exit and some of them wobbled as if they were drunk. Jacob thought we might give the Roller Coaster a try; it seemed interesting. I thought I would wait till I was older to try it. Our Ferris Wheel rose up and I looked out over this great American *Kirmes*. What caught my eye were reflections that seemed to flash from everywhere. Momentary bits of white from silver papers, white cups, mirrored semaphores that wove in tune with the happy murmurs from the crowds below. The Ferris Wheel came to a halt when we were at its highest point. Karl asked if the man who turned the crank had gotten tired and stopped. All I wanted to do was look, but I had to explain it wasn't a man but a motor. The view from the top was miraculous. We looked out over the Hudson toward Manhattan, and we saw practically all of Manhattan over to the East River. Ferries crossing the Hudson at 125th street left silver wakes. There was Grant's Tomb. Jacob said, "Right there. See. That's Columbia University; we both went there." But I could not decipher one set of gray buildings from another. A train snaked northward along the Manhattan shore. The cars seemed so small. The sight led me toward the George Washington Bridge. In the afternoon sun the pylons looked dark red and what was silver shone a bright white. "There, there's the Empire State Building, the one with the spire, the tallest building in the world. And down there is the RCA building, Rockefeller Center, we're going to work there." The rest of the afternoon was spent in the bumper cars. I wanted to go and try other rides but Karl didn't want to go. He wanted the bumper cars. I thought that

Aaron and Jacob too wanted to stay with the bumper cars. They were laughing and whooping all the rest of the afternoon dressed in their suits and ties and bumping into each other.

Two weeks later Aaron and Jacob came again in their shiny black car. This time they took us to a movie. The RKO Colosseum was on 181st Street. It was the largest theater we had ever been in. I must have been near stupefied. Someone hit me on the back. "Take a breath. You can walk in now." Jacob smiled down at me. "Here," and handed me a small package that rattled. There was gold scribbling on the ceiling and gold scribbling on the side walls. There was a high and far away balcony. We looked for a seat in the orchestra. An organ was playing. "The best seats are right in the middle. That way you can see everything." We made our way toward the middle of the great curving row of seats. "In the middle is where you see best because that's where the best focus is. The sides,"...and Aaron waved his hand, "eh, its sometimes a bit blurry." The organ pumped out, "Happy Days Are Here Again," over and over again.

"Try it. Try it." Jacob pointed to our packages. Karl had one also. "See what you think. It's what I always used to get." We opened our little boxes. Mine was chocolate covered raisins. "Delicious." Karl had "Good and Plenty." The organ stopped. It grew dark. A film came on. A little black girl sang "A Tisket a Tasket, a Green and Yellow Basket." Her name was Ella Fitzgerald. A slide came on. Tuesday night dishes would be given away. The film then started. It was *Fantasia*.

We always had music in our house. Whatever happened, from morning till nightfall, happened to a background of music: classical music. The radio station was, mostly, WQXR, though in the early evening it was important to hear the news and the news was brought by Gabriel Heater with his signature "Ah, yes there's good news tonight." More often than not, as far as Europe was concerned, the news was bad. Then, later in the evening, WBNX a German-speaking station all the way at the end of the dial came on. This station was much more important than WQXR. Its main theme was a waltz from

Coppelia and all its ads were for restaurants and furniture stores in the German section of Manhattan: Yorkville. When the *Copelia* theme sounded we knew it was quiet time, the evening meal was over and Oma did her crocheting, Mom did her repairs on torn clothing and Pop read *The Aufbau*. The station played, operetta music mostly, interspersed with the overtures to *Fidelio*, One, Two and Three. There was a contented silence in the living room as the familiar language and the familiar music played on. There was a far more intense silence, a silence that raised heads, closed eyes and clenched lips whenever the tenor Joseph Schmidt, or Richard Tauber came on to sing their ballads. There were faces, especially Mom's and Oma's where reflections appeared to which I was never allowed entrance. Hearing these pleasant, lulling tunes just made me angry, though I never said anything. How could they fawn over German. How could they even listen to this language of people who had thrown them out, who had jailed them, who had burned their synagogues, and who had made abject and powerless the people you loved most.

"*Fantasia*, yes that's nice I heard about it. Classical music, like on the radio. How was it?" asked Mom. Karl couldn't contain himself. It was Mickey, Mickey, Mickey, when all I wanted to talk about were the dancing the Hippos.

"Mickey puts on this costume..."

"No. It was just the pointed hat."

"And he becomes the wizard..."

"No. He pretends, just pretends..."

"And then he makes this broom move..."

"No. First he makes it stand up, then..."

"He makes the broom hop..."

"The Hippos hopped..."

“Shut up. He makes the broom have arms and feet like fish...”

“Feet like flippers, like seals. Seals aren’t fish.”

“He makes the broom get water in buckets and fill this huge tub. And then he falls asleep.”

“You’re a fish.”

“And then there’s a huge flood when he wakes up, and he tries to make the broom stop.”

“You should stop.”

“And the broom walks all over him and keeps on working. Then he gets an axe and chops up the broom and each piece of the broom becomes another broom and that broom carries two buckets of water...”

“What happens is they become a disgusting army rolling over everything just like the German army rolling over everything. Mickey can’t do anything right. It just gets worse.”

“It doesn’t get worse. The wizard comes back and the wizard just waves his arms and he makes everything nice and calm. I think the wizard is really President Roosevelt.”

“Yes. Then President Roosevelt gives Mickey a swat on the *tochus* for all the stupid ruins he made; just what he deserves.”

Without much conviction Mom said that “One of these days we’ll have to see it.”

For several weeks after that, on Sundays after lunch, Karl and I would stand downstairs waiting for the shiny black car, but the shiny black car never came again.

###

“I feel weak,” Mom would say. “The four flights of steps are hard for me, and with the baby. The steps are hard.” And then she would breathe in and out quickly and I would make fun of her by breathing in and out quickly. “Don’t make fun. One day you get old too.” The weakness turned into pain in her shoulders and knees. One of the Jewish agencies sent help: a woman came several times a

week to help with the baby. When the help didn't come it was frequently my job to change the baby's diapers.

I have been told, by Mrs. Rosenberg, that about the end of summer, I awoke late one night, and not finding my grandmother or parents at home and Frankie screaming in his crib, that I went to a window facing the street and repeatedly yelled out, "Mom and Pop, if you don't come home I'm going to jump out of this window." Mrs. Rosenberg said that she had heard my screaming and rushed upstairs and remained with us till Oma, Mom and Pop arrived back at our apartment. Evidently, there had been a birthday party for one of our relatives. To Mrs. Rosenberg's questions regarding their leaving us alone Mom allegedly replied, "What? Are we, monks or holy sisters to stay inside all the time?"

It was afternoon, I was on my way to the synagogue for something, when somebody, standing on his fire escape, yelled down, "The Japs have bombed Pearl Harbor, the Japs have bombed Pearl Harbor." Kids playing curb ball on the street stopped and listened to the calling and then went back to their ball game. Mr. Klein was the first person that I saw at synagogue, "Walter, this changes everything. This changes everything."

Chapter 20

Pop stopped going to work. All day he sat in the apartment, in the same chair, in his dark green pajamas with his hands clasped in front of him, never saying anything. Mom said that Doctor Joshua had been there and that it was another attack of malaria, and a very bad one. But usually when Pop had a malaria attack he lay in his couch-bed with a fever and tossed and sweated. He did not sweat now. I

was afraid. I didn't know what was happening but I didn't really believe Mom

We were taken to the orphanage by subway, Karl and I. It was the last station on the "A" train. Far Rockaway. Years later if I mentioned "the orphanage" to my mother she would say, "Ach, you shouldn't say that. It wasn't an orphanage. It was like a camp. A summer camp. A camp on the beach. And you came back. We got you back, you and Karl."

"Mom, if it was a camp why did we go to school there, all of 5A?"

"So you went to school there. Was that such a bad thing? School? We couldn't do anything. Papa was sick. I was almost sick. I couldn't go to work. We had no money coming in. Franky and Peter needed me all the time. What could we do? You want to make me feel bad?"

I think I did. I know I did.

###

There was nothing to prepare us for where we were going. One morning, Mom simply took us both by the hand. Aunt Irma came along. She had the address and directions in one hand, in the other was a large paper bag that contained some clothes. It was a very long ride. We arrived at the orphanage on the day that the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, great German battleships, made a break out of the port of *Brest*, and ran the English channel past a terribly strong British attack and made it clean back to their home base on the Elbe. It was the day Singapore fell to the Japanese. *The Daily News* had it all. Someone had left a copy on a nearby seat. I read and re-read the accounts all the way out to Queens.

It was a very large house, three stories, made of stone, almost a block long, almost a castle. There were turrets at each end of the roof. Like sniffing noses, the dormer windows stuck out between the turrets. That the orphanage was on the beach was true, but it was winter, the middle of February and the cold wind blew in from the sea. We walked down a ramp from the boardwalk into the arched entrance.

Mom bent down to Karl, her hands on his shoulders, her eyes just across from his, "We'll come and visit every week. Just a little while, you'll stay here. This is a nice place. Everybody says so." I got a hug. When they turned to leave I don't think either of us cried, though we might have. Mom sometimes came, but not every week. We got postcards. Pop was getting better.

We were taken to a dormitory. It felt something like the Willard Parker hospital in that beds seemed to stretch out into the distance; they might have gone on forever if they hadn't been intercepted by a wall with two windows. There were two long rows of metal beds on each side of the vast room. Each bed was covered either by a brown or a dark gray blanket. Somebody showed us the locker next to our bed, but we had hardly anything to put into the locker. Somebody showed us how to make our beds: we learned about hospital corners.

"It's not a bad place," said the boy in the bed next to me. His name was Arthur. He had a steam iron kind of face, long, roundish, and it came to a point at his chin. He had a harelip.

"It's all right. You can look at it. I don't get into fights about it any more."

"You used to?"

"I've been here since I was three. I had a lot of fights." Arthur was eleven, a year older than me. Three times he had been up for adoption; once to a family in New Jersey.

"Three times people came, but after they looked at me, I guess, they never came back. They have nice social workers here. They talk to you. They've arranged for a doctor at Mount Sinai to operate, and fix it after the school term is over. That's July. Four months. Most people here are really nice."

There was a synagogue in the home and we went every Friday night and every Saturday morning. But it was Saturday morning that separated me from just about everybody and everything. The service was simply not conducted in any way that was familiar to me. Familiar meant the tunes that we had sung, the same tunes that my Opa sang and that Rabbi Lieber sang; that the whole congregation in

Washington Heights sang, especially the tunes that accompanied the taking out and returning the Torah to the ark. In Washington Heights these tunes came from the throats of everyone around me, they enveloped me the way Joseph's colored coat enveloped him; they were signs of favor and of inclusion, that touched me the way a gentle pat on the head from my father's friend touched me as we exited synagogue. That touch and the accompanying wordless smile said, "you are Oscar's son and I know you." Those tunes said I was a part of all that black-suited crowd that flooded out onto Amsterdam Avenue. These others were the wrong tunes. *Va'yehi bin'sauah hoaraun* and *Haudu al eretz v'shomayim*, these were totally wrong. We had been in America for almost two years, accustomed to America, accustomed to our neighborhood: Henry Rosenberg, and the grocery store on the corner; Hebrew school and Mr. Klein, accustomed to friends and streets for two years; *Ruppichteroth* and *Machachi* were memories in which the tough parts were on their way to being forgotten, or changed so that smiles were interspersed with recall; and now this. These strange songs became the leaving of every place I had ever left. They recalled not any "thing" of leaving but the whole process of leaving. They became and they returned to me the shape of all those good-byes, the black, dull, and sad feelings where something good in me was taken from me, where every separation became, after a while, a judgment I must have deserved: good-by; good-bye from Oma and Opa, good-bye from Chino, Chimborazzo and El Professor. In this synagogue boys and girls sat together.

The food was all right. There was lots of tomato soup, and sandwiches of white bread with thin smears of cream cheese or peanut butter between the slices. The bread had the crusts cut off. Friday night was chicken soup. Though it was announced as chicken soup I always doubted it. Karl brought to my attention that you could see clear to the bottom of the bowl even though the bowl was full; that our mother's chicken soup was never thin and transparent. Our mother's chicken soup was a dark yellow

with swirls and eddies of fat swimming on the surface. Everybody got a piece of carrot in our mother's chicken soup and the bottom of the bowl was never visible until the bowl was empty.

The only work that was required of us was to keep the area around our beds neat and clean. In addition, we ten and eleven year olds were given a schedule for kitchen duty to dry the dishes that the older boys washed.

#

There was a school. I sat in a schoolroom with perhaps thirty others, both boys and girls. It was a familiar schoolroom: blackboards and shiny blond desks. Construction paper of many colors, covered with writing, decorated the walls. The teacher was a man; a man with a thin mustache: Mr. Teller. Mr. Teller read the newspaper *PM*. Every morning when we came into the classroom he was bent over the desk reading or writing something and there was the paper on the left side of the desk. Everybody in the class was smart. Should Mr. Teller ask a question, and he asked questions all the time, just about everybody, it seemed, had a hand up, everybody except this girl who sat in a seat in front of me. Her hand never went up, though every time Mr. Teller called on her, and he often called on children who did not have their hands up, she had the right answer.

"Ina, tell me about how we operate on rational numbers."

"By addition, subtraction, multiplication, division That's how we operate." Her voice was low and it had a sneer in it, as if she hated being asked and at the same time hated being asked something so very simple. She had straight blond hair that was cut like the Dutch boy in the paint ads. I liked her.

At lunch time, when Mr. Teller guided the students out the door, I kept back and sidled up to the desk to try to read something from the folded up newspaper. Maybe I could catch a headline maybe there was something happening somewhere besides thin chicken soup and hospital corners. The paper

was folded and, gingerly, testing, I tried moving it with one finger to see if it would unfold. Mr. Teller stood over me, I quickly removed my hand.

“Would you like to see the newspaper?”

“Yes. No.” And I ran out to lunch.

From the time in Germany when Pop set up our short wave radio so that we could hear the reports about Spain, I knew that news was terribly important; what the radio said could bring Mom to tears and give Pop his very serious face, the silent face where one could not talk to him. I sometimes thought that the voices that came from the radio speaker were like herders of sheep and we, all of us, listening, were sheep that were shooed this way and that. I thought that there were other voices behind the voices on the radio who held knives for the sheep. People left their homes for other countries because of news. I knew that the newspapers, the radio, held information that meant life or death for somebody, somebody we might know, maybe it was about us. Maybe it was about me. “Did you hear...” was a very scary phrase. Mrs. Brill in 4B had said that I was the current events kid. I heard her tell another teacher that I was a prodigy when it came to following the news. I looked up prodigy in the dictionary. I was very pleased.

I remembered when we were still on the high seas, on the *Caribia*, when we heard about the Hitler-Stalin pact. I announced it to Mom. I thought it was something of a coup for me. “I can’t understand it. I can’t understand it.” “What’s the matter, Mama?” She looked around, then whispered, “Stalin. Stalin signed a pact with Hitler. How could he do it? Impossible. Just impossible.” Later Papa said “You and your socialists. That’s what you get.” For the first time ever I heard Mom shout at Pop, “He’s just playing for time. Just playing for time.” Then she clamped her hand over her mouth and started to cry. In Ecuador the men discussed the Finnish-Russian war with serious faces. We were still in Ecuador when the men, with joy in their voices, a joy that they communicated to all of us, talked about

this great warship, the *Graff Spee*, having surrendered in the port of Montevideo. We had just about arrived in America when, a few days after Pop's birthday, Denmark fell, then Norway. I read how German soldiers, who as starving children in the terrible years after World War 1, had been taken into Norwegian homes to be fed and nourished, now returned as strutting conquerors. The *Blitzkrieg* overwhelmed Holland. Where was Tante Mina? She lived in Amsterdam. She had saved our lives. She got Pop out of Dachau and then saved the rest of us by paying for our ship's passage and giving us money to live on in Ecuador. Pop prayed that she might be safe; his cousins, Tante Mina's children too. I thought of my cousin Eva. I wanted England and France to win but the headlines of losses and defeats were stamped in big black letters almost every day. In June Hitler danced his victory jig at *Compiègne*. But now it was 1942, Singapore had fallen and the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* were safe..

###

Evenings, the great entrance hall of the home became a place for recreation. Kids could play board games, cards, or do homework, although very little homework was ever assigned. There were several large bookcases filled, crammed tight with books. Karl would wander around the hall looking at what other kids were doing, and so did I. Some played cards, pinochle or rummy. Chinese checkers seemed to be big and so was dominoes. I wanted to do something with Karl, play a game, play cards, anything. He had on Pop's serious face, so I knew that he didn't feel happy. I wanted to, but I didn't do anything. In these early days of just looking around I would often see Arthur and Ina sitting next to each other on a bench in a dark corner next to the player piano, each of them absorbed in a book. After several days of wandering, peering at what others were doing and getting stares from the others I stared at, I wandered over to the bookcases. There were many fat books; a whole row with maroon backs and gold print, all of them written by Charles Dickens. Another smaller row, with black backs and gold print was written by William Makepeace Thackeray. A whole row of the same book: "*Bible Stories for the*

Jewish Young.” Then I had to smile when I came on a bunch of John R. Tunis books, and then next, these other set of my favorites, the Sam books by W. Maxwell Reed. Seeing them, I felt, for a moment, almost warm and almost at home. I had read *The Earth for Sam* and *The Sea for Sam*, I was about to pull *The Earth for Sam* from the shelf and look at the pictures when Ina, behind me said, “I wanted that.”

“Sorry. I just wanted to look at the pictures.”

“Why,” she said in a very dull voice, “can’t you read?”

“I can read. I’ve already read this one.”

“What’s it about?”

“Is this a test?”

“Yeah. What’s it about?”

“Well, It’s about when the earth was hot. It’s about how the earth was formed: mountains, rivers, volcanoes, glaciers and glaciation.” I was rather proud of glaciation, so I went on. “ It tells about the different periods, Silurian, Devonian, and Carboniferous, that’s when coal was formed, and it goes on with the Permian, the Jurassic and Triassic, and then it goes on with dinosaurs and human beings. There’s some nice stuff about seaweed and Jellyfish and shells.”

“What’s the picture you were looking at?”

“I wanted to see the ichthyosaurus, here,” and I leafed till I found the full page picture of the massive ichthyosaurus, sword-like bill and rows of sharp pins for teeth, swimming as if he owned the ocean.

“That looks like Mr. Kadish.” This was Arthur, now looking over my shoulder. Ina smiled for the first time. “In case you don’t know, Mr. Kadish is a trustee.” She strung out the word trustee as if it were important and foolish at the same time. “He comes once a month on a Sunday during lunch. He tells everybody, ‘ be sure to brush your teeth.’ And he pinches girls.”

“Why, are they bad?”

Both Ina and Arthur giggled. I felt foolish. I didn't know why.

“It's about geology,” I said. Ina took the book from me, and handed me the book she had been carrying. “Did you like it?”

“Yea. A lot. What's this?”

“I just finished it.”

“What's it called?”

“Oliver Twist.”

“What's it about?”

“Orphans.” She took the book back and stuffed it between the others in the row with the maroon books with the gold writing on the back.

The lunchroom (it was the breakfast and dinner room as well) was very large. There were many rows of tables with benches attached where four or five children could sit on a side. On one of the long sides of the room was the cafeteria-style serving area and behind that was the kitchen. On one of the short sides there was a large bank of windows that looked out over the beach. Ina, it seemed, was always one of the last to enter the lunchroom and she evidently did that in order to sit at a table where the fewest other children sat. Her preference, it seemed, was to sit with her tray in front of her, all alone, on a bench by herself.

The first few days or maybe weeks I would try to sit somewhere with both Karl and Arthur, but then I copied Ina and waited almost to the end of mealtime to see where she sat and then I would sit near her at the same table. I might have tried to start a conversation with her, asking about a book or a problem in a subject from class but she never answered me, never even looked up from her meal. Arthur found my sitting at a table with Ina peculiar. It might have been on a sunny day in late February or early

March. We were allowed out on the beach if we were nicely bundled up and had a scarf around our neck. Arthur and I were looking for shells.

“Why do you always sit with Ina?”

“Huh?”

“With Ina, at her table, all alone, and she never talks.”

“I don’t know.”

“She hits.”

“What?”

“She hits. At one of the movies one of the older boys tried to kiss her and she hit him with her fist on the nose so that his nose bled.”

“That’s funny.”

“He had nose bleed all over him. When we were six, I think, one of the families that looked at me adopted Ina, but she came back after a couple of months.”

“So?”

The conversation stopped. Arthur had dug something up with his hands, held it in front of him and dusted some sand off the object, then he yelled, “a whelk. A whelk,” and ran back to our orphan home.

I continued to sit at Ina’s table. After a week or two of this, never speaking, she called across the table, “Can’t you sit somewhere else?”

“It’s a free country.”

“Can’t you sit somewhere else in this free country?”

“What are you going to do, hit me if I don’t move?” I couldn’t tell whether the twinge in her lips was anger or the beginnings of a smile.

“Yes.” It was the start of a smile that was quickly broken off.

“You can’t hit me, I’m a bleeder. When I start to bleed I keep on bleeding, and it doesn’t stop.

My grandfather was a bleeder, and my father was a bleeder.”

“Till all the blood is gone?”

“Probably.”

“You related to the British royal family, or was it the Russian?”

“You don’t have to be sarcastic.”

How come you’re still around? You must have been scratched sometimes. Or at the dentist.

People bleed at the dentists.” I remembered a line from one of my favorite radio programs, *Can You Top This*, “We didn’t have a dentist, we were too poor.”

“That’s why you’re here? You were too poor?”

“Yes. Why are you here.?”

“I’m an orphan, and you’re a hemophiliac. I don’t want to talk to you anymore.” We didn’t talk any more, but a few days later in the hall, it was afternoon, I was doing homework when Ina brought over a set of Chinese checkers. I stopped homework and without a word passing between us we played Chinese checkers.

#

I was purposely slow leaving Mr. Teller’s room and when his attention was elsewhere, I fingered his folded newspaper just to get a peek at a headline. This day, at just a touch, the paper unfolded and the headline read “GREAT BATTLE OF THE JAVA SEA.” The first few paragraphs told of our Dutch, English, and American navies sinking great quantities of Japanese ships. This was heart-pumping wonderful, maybe our first victory after the scores of soul-eroding defeats my side had suffered: France and Poland, the London Blitz and all the burning churches, Pearl Harbor, emigration.

“Something in there interests you?”

Mr. Teller loomed over me. I ran toward the door.

“Come back here, you *vantz*.” The voice was loud. It made me stop. I looked back.

“Now!” I hesitated. I wanted to run.

“Would you please come here.” The voice now seemed less harsh. I held onto the door jamb with one hand.

“Please, just for a second. I’d like to talk to you.” The voice was now gentle, even kind. Very, very slowly, I returned to the room. I kept a desk between myself and Mr. Teller.

“It’s OK. It’s OK. I’m just curious. What’s with you and this newspaper? I’ve been watching you nose all around it. Is there something in the ads you want?”

“It doesn’t have ads.”

“That’s right. Not yet, *PM* doesn’t have ads yet. So what is it?”

“The news.”

“The news? What about the news?”

“I need to know the news.”

“You need to know the news. Why?”

Suddenly, I didn’t know why I needed to know. I clamped my lips together. Tears began to form in the corners of my eyes. I bit down on my lips.

“You’re one of the refugee kids?” I nodded. Mr. Teller put a hand on my shoulder.

“He’s never coming here. Hitler.” He smiled, “You don’t have to worry about that, the Russians won’t let him.”

“I saw. *Smolensk*.”

“You saw Smolensk?” He almost laughed. “Where’d you see *Smolensk*?”

“Somebody left a paper here. A visitor. In the pot with the palm. Last Sunday. I saw about *Smolensk*.”

“So, what do you think?”

“Maybe...”

“Maybe what?”

“Things can get better.”

“Things can get better? We’re getting our *kishkes* kicked in all over the world, and things are getting better?” I ran around the desk to where the paper lay and flipped it open so the headline was revealed. “Look, the Java Sea. And *Smolensk*.” Mr. Teller was quiet for a long time. I just stood there. After a while he said, “You know, if you want, you can have the paper. Take it any time. By the time I get to class I’ve read it. So you can just take it. OK? Only thing, when you’re finished with it you have to throw it in the trash. You may not leave my *PM* in the pot with the palm. OK?” And he walked out the classroom door. I stood, looking in wonder, at the headline about the Java Sea.

“Take the damn paper already.” Mr. Teller stuck his head back into the room. “You have to read the whole paper every day. Cover to cover. There will be a test on it.” But Mr. Teller was just joking, there never was a test. Except that sometimes he would say, “make sure that you read this or that.” He’d often say, “read the letters.” So many letters so often were about the difficulties “Negroes” faced in America and I thought of all those friends at PS 46. But his most insistant “make sure,” was the time when he said, with a very sad face, “Tom Mooney died.” And then, in a loud voice, “make sure you read the damn obituary.” I had to look up obituary. Tom Mooney had died. Tom Mooney was a Socialist, like Mom. Tom Mooney was for working people. He organized unions in San Francisco. He was accused of setting a bomb that killed six people but it was a frame up. He never did it, and everybody knew it. They protested. That was why his death sentence was commuted to life in prison, and he was in prison for

twenty-two years. Reading that obituary I learned names that stuck with me; most of them three-name people. There was Eugene Victor Debbs, William Jennings Bryan, H.L. Menken, William Allanson White, George Bernard Shaw. (But I already knew about Shaw because my mother thought he was a great playwright which my father pooh-poohed, saying, "Of course, Goethe and Schiller are better. Shaw is too advanced. Like Ibsen," and that I shouldn't read him till I was much older and could really understand him.) I learned that Franklin Roosevelt had refused to intervene on Mooney's part. I was very much troubled by the idea that such an injustice took place in my new America. I read *PM's* labor column all the time.

I looked for the headlines every day, for the war, and I read the stories, but there also was Barnaby. Barnaby was a comic strip about a little boy who had parents, Mr. and Mrs. Baxter, John and Ellen, and an imaginary godfather, Mr. O'Malley who said, "Cushlamochree." He had a magic cigar for a wand. Mr. O'Malley looked a little bit like mayor LaGuardia with wings coming out of his shoulders. There was a talking dog and a friend, Jane. I think what drew me to Barnaby was the everydayness of the magic, of making the impossible a matter of course, of the unreal real that had something of the ichthyosaurus, the Jurassic, of glaciation and of making the needed double play at the absolutely right time in John R. Tunis' books. It was playful and funny; dogs talked. There was the mushroom McSnoyd who came from the Bronx, and O'Malley who had to look up his Handy Pocket Guide before he could do a bit of magic. But maybe there was something else; there was Mr. and Mrs Baxter. To me they seemed far more magic than Mr. O'Malley. The way Mr. Baxter sat so easily in his easy chair, a pipe in his mouth, and the day's paper in front of him talking so easily to his wife, who sat across from him in another easy chair with a book in her lap, her face relaxed and her eyes large, and who answered her husband so easily, that was true magic. And Mr. Baxter always wore a jacket and tie. And they lived in a house with a yard and a front lawn. Nothing ever concerned them except, perhaps, that their child knew

something, saw something that they did not. Mildly, gently, while looking at their paper or their book, they might concoct ways for their boy to forget Pixies, but they had no idea of what really went on in Barnaby's head.

Dr. Seuss was in *PM*, not that we knew him by that name. That was to come much later; then, I thought of him as "Quick Henry the Flit." "Quick Henry the Flit" was a slogan plastered on billboards everywhere but I encountered it mostly on subway advertising. Funny ugly mosquitoes were eradicated by flying Henry and a funny squirt gun. Now drawings, cartoons, very similar in style to Henry appeared in *PM*. Hitler was a leering flying dragon, costumed as from a weird Wagner opera, dropping bombs and laying waste English churches. Churchill was the knight in a Spitfire about to lance him. Mussolini was a power who could invade Egypt, but in reality he was a mere janitor trying to dust off the pyramids. McArthur was a hero wiping out Japanese sharks in a shooting gallery. No defeat was so serious that we would not ultimately triumph over it. That was the message. It drew some of the terror out of the terrorists.

Around that time there was the wonderful British raid on the French port of St. Nazaire. U Boats that were sinking our ships all along the American coastline were stationed in St. Nazaire. The report said that a destroyer had rammed a dock gate. I didn't know what a dock gate was, but I felt the magnificent courage of a tiny ship and felt the physical force of the crash in my bones. The harbor was blocked up so U-Boats had difficulty coming out. British Commandoes took part in the raid and I told Arthur and Ina that the second front was not far away. Too, we were beginning to hear about the great toll that U-Boats were taking on costal shipping. We had to make sure that windows were covered at night so no light might spill out. If it did, the light would make it easy for the Nazi sharks to sink our ships. Block wardens were appointed, and just about every night one could hear somebody yell, "Hey,

up there, turn it off.” It was also the time, but I did not tell Arthur or Ina, that the Philippines had surrendered and that all that was left was the fortress of Corregidor.

That was the time, as well, when the home showed a movie in the large entrance hall. The lady who was the head of the home stood in front of us, in front of all the kid filled chairs that had been set up in front of her, and told us that we should be very thankful to Mr. Kadish, who was a trustee and who sent us these films every month from his office where he worked on Lexington Avenue. I sat at the end of one row, near the back, next to Arthur. This was going to be a wonderful film, she said, in color, of the great American novel, by the great American novelist, Mark Twain. It was called “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,” and we should enjoy it and be grateful to Mr. Kadish. And then the lights went out and a stream of light shot out from in back of us, a stream that was thin at first and then grew larger as it met the screen. The screen showed numbers which counted down from ten, and with each number there was a loud pop of noise. Just after the number ten there was Ina, standing next to me. “Move over. I want to sit.” I nudged Arthur, Arthur nudged someone else and after a series of nudges there was Ina sitting next to me. I was very aware that Ina had punched someone in the nose while watching a movie.

I don’t think I had ever seen anything so wonderful, not even Maureen O’Sullivan swimming in the water. The film was in color, it took place in the country, not in the city, and that it was set a hundred years earlier didn’t matter. Indian Joe was a Nazi and Muff Potter was my Opa. I had to marvel at that air of ease and easy indifference that Tom shared with the Baxters, and with which Tom got the others to paint that fence: that was American, that was beautiful. Could I ever own that air? Tom was heroic, he spoke out, he spoke the truth and saved Muff from sure death. He saved Opa. Was ever a knight battling a dragon more heroic, more honorable? And the reward? The praise of the town, the acclaim of the universe, and a little blond girl. But there was still more: a quest and submission to even greater challenges: there was the display of even more courage, there was the cave.

The second Tom and Becky entered the cave; both my hands gripped the edges of my chair. Bats were awakened from their sleep on the cave ceiling; bats swooped like solid pieces of a black cloud, and I heard Ina drawing a long breath. There were more long breaths when the cave-ins began. When Becky cried for her mother there was a loud scream from Ina. There were words in that scream which I did not understand and everybody turned around and looked at her. Ina reached for my hand on the chair and held it, and softly said, "I'm sorry. Sorry." Bravely, I whispered to her, "It's only a movie." There was a brief dark look toward me and she took her hand away.

I read that the Battle of the Java Sea had not really been a victory. The news came out bit by bit. British cruisers, Dutch battle ships, American destroyers, all were sunk. There had been immense losses of men and ships that led to Japanese victories, first in Java, and then in the whole Dutch East Indies. But then there was the glorious raid on Japan. In the middle of April, Jimmy Doolittle took off from the carrier Hornet with his medium bombers, twin-engined B-25's, the ones with the glass noses, and the bubble gun turret on top. They bombed Tokyo, and other places in Japan. Mr. Teller began the morning by reading the whole story to us. "Hess," he called out "you ought to get a scissors and cut this story out. Save it for your kids and grandkids. This is history. There are pictures."

#

Sundays, many of the children would wait inside near the entrance to the Home, though some would lounge out on the boardwalk, hanging over the railing along the beach, looking out into the distance, toward the subway station from which a relative might come. Sometimes Mom and even Oma would come out to visit on a Sunday. Karl and I watched for them. When the visitors came near to us Karl would run toward them, but I made a point of not running. I tried to look beyond them, trying to look for someone else, though he never came. When Karl asked why Pop never came, I would tell him, "He probably has to work on Sundays. He gets overtime on Sundays", but I didn't believe myself.

Though the entrance hall and the dining room were set up to accommodate the Sunday visitors, if the weather was the least bit appropriate, Mom always insisted on walking out onto the beach. There we would sit down on the sand and Mom would begin, "Isn't this wonderful. Right on the ocean. The air so clean. The waves. The food here is good, I think," and then she would open the bag that hung at her side, place a large towel on the sand and unroll a few packages of food from the wax paper. It was mostly cake, *Rührkuchen*, a pound cake. From Oma we would each get a bar of Hershey's chocolate, accompanied by the plaint, "The chocolate in this country is not so very good. It was much better over there."

As we ate, Ina would circle our group from a good distance away. Sometimes she would hunker down and watch us. Mom noticed. "Who is that? Do you know her? Is it somebody from the home? Poor child, has she nobody to visit her today? Why don't you invite her to come and sit with us." Mom waved her arms toward Ina and called out, "Come. Sit with us." But Ina quickly jumped up and ran off down the beach.

At the end of our picnic Mom would take off her shoes and socks, hike up her skirt and walk out into the water to where the surf just hissed and colored the sand a darker tan. When she returned from her water-walk she would say, "I could tell you to come in too. The feeling is so nice, but I know you wouldn't. I'm just glad you ate the cake. You are such a thick-head. Let's go back." Walking back Karl had Mom's hand. He looked up at her and said, "That's a home over there, but none of the kids who live there have a home." We continued walking and when we were almost at the entrance to the home Mom gave a big hug first to Karl and then to me. She said, "Just wait. You are going to have a surprise."

Over the next several weeks we waited for the surprise, but no surprise came. At each visit we asked about the surprise and all Mom would say was, "Maybe I shouldn't have said anything. Pop said I shouldn't have said anything, but anyway, not yet." Meanwhile Corregidor fell.

I mentioned to Ina that our mother had spoken of a surprise.

“You’re going to go home soon,” she said and from that time on Ina seemed to disappear. She disappeared quickly after class, and there were no more checker games. Now, for several weeks, Pop came along on Sunday visits. He had on his smiling face, not the serious one, and I was glad for the smiling face. It was I who put on the serious one. I was happy that he visited, but not totally. Where had he been all those other weeks? We all walked out onto the beach, Mom waded. I sat and watched her. Pop and Karl went looking for shells.

There had been a great sea battle in the Pacific, the battle of Midway. It was early June, not long after my birthday. For six months after Pearl Harbor the Japanese had had a string of terrible victories. All of Asia, all of the Pacific seemed to be theirs. Now, at Midway, the Japanese advance was stopped. Now, it was Sunday and the great victory spilled happy black letters over the newspapers’ front. It was the Sunday that Mom came to take us home. Karl and I stood outside the office where Mom was filling out papers. I looked around the large entrance hall. There were the usual waves of murmur and silence, of kids talking, of chairs scraping, of kids looking into books and writing, studying, of kids playing board games. Arthur stood nearby and waved to us. I saw Ina near the hall entrance. I walked over and as I did she ran. When I reached the doorway she was at the ramp down toward the beach. She ran, looking backward, she stumbled and then ran out farther onto the sand.

#

The usual course from 162nd Street where the A train stopped would have been to walk a few blocks south on Amsterdam Avenue and then down 159th Street to our house at number 542. But this time Mom insisted we walk down 160th Street. I was puzzled. Karl said, “Mom, we’re going the wrong way.” She smiled, “Now comes the surprise, we have a new apartment.”

Walking down 160th Street we crossed Broadway, then Fort Washington Avenue; as we approached the middle of the block we could see a slice of the Hudson River. 652 West 160th Street was on the south side in the middle of the block. Apartment 2C was one flight up, and Dad was waiting for us when we entered. There was a mirrored coat rack in the tiny foyer, but I was not able to take off my coat because Pop drew me into a living room that astounded me with its shine. There was shiny new linoleum on the floor; there was a shiny dining-room table at the other end of the room; there was a couch with a flowered covering along one wall, and across from it, a credenza of a dark shining wood with what seemed to be neatly carved little doors. There was a gold framed picture above it, a watercolor of a street in Ruppichteroth. I stared at the credenza and slowly ran a hand over its shiny surface. Dad leaned against the credenza, looked down at me: "Well, how do you like it?" There was a small smile on his face, an intense eagerness in his face, and at the same time an intense shyness in his Spencer Tracy face. I understood from his look and from the softness in his voice that it was terribly important to him that I be pleased. I understood in some large measure that all the shine was there in order that I be pleased, that it was there to make up for the months that we had been sent away. By the look on his face I knew that he felt terrible that we had to be sent away and at the same time he wanted me to feel proud of him because there was a sense of immense accomplishment in the shine, that in the shine there were long hours of labor and pain, both his and Mom's. There was a pleading in his face; he wanted to be forgiven, excused. What I might say seemed to matter intensely.

I was glad that we had accomplished the crossing of Broadway, even awed by all the newness, awed by all the shine, but I felt totally apart, separated, unconnected to it. Angry, I wanted to destroy it, rip it apart, because it had come at the price of being put away, sent away, feeling unprotected by my parents and especially by my father who had sat there, in his green pajamas, saying nothing, as we were taken to the orphan asylum. I felt terribly separated from my father, the distance was immense. Never

before had I this very real feeling that we were two different, distinct people. And where before my “I” seemed to extend everywhere my interest, my caring led me, I now extended no farther than my skin. What he wanted so badly from me I could not give him. What he wanted me to acknowledge I could not, because just then I hated him. So I looked Dad in the face, turned away, and said nothing. I walked around the room touching things. There were framed pictures, photos of Dad’s parents on the credenza, a crocheted table cloth on the new table.

“This is a wonderful country,” said Dad smiling, “Nothing down and only a few dollars a month and you can get anything anybody would want.” Time payments. Now I had to worry whether these two people with their painter’s and housemaid’s wages would be able to make the monthly payments.

Weren’t we sent away because there was an inability to manage? I walked around the apartment. There was a kitchen where we could eat, there was a small bedroom just as one came in the door. “That’s Oma’s room.” I opened the door and it smelled of the camphor, liniment, face powder and lilacs, a smell it would never relinquish in all our time at number 652. There was another bedroom to the right of the living room. A crib, in which brother Frank was sleeping, sat to the left of the door, and across from the crib twin beds that had been pushed together, then a closet, an armoire, and a chest of drawers.

”That’s all for you.”

“For me?”

“*Ja*, and for Peter and Karl. These,” pointing to the chest and armoire, “are not new. We got them second hand on Amsterdam Avenue, very good and real cheap.”

Our Sunday evening meal was of cold cuts and rye bread and tea. Cold cuts were always one of my favorite meals. The meal was delicious and tasted better than any tomato soup and sandwiches of white bread with thin smears of cream cheese or peanut butter.

“So, how is it? We got it special for you,” said my mother. I chewed, and when I had finished chewing my teeth were clenched and my lips were tight.

“Nothing? Nothing to say? We got it special for you.” I remained silent, and I remained silent through the rest of the meal. And I was silent, at home, for a long time after that.

#

Tobruk fell. Rommel was driving the British out of North Africa. Thousands of good men were captured, hundreds of guns and tanks fell into German hands. There were pictures of long lines of men with their hands on their heads. I had long been following the British and Italians chasing each other back and forth across Libya and Egypt. But now the Germans were involved, and Rommel was driving toward Cairo. He had by-passed Tobruk. The Africa Corps had Tobruk surrounded, and for heroic weeks it held out against the Germans. Now it surrendered. Again, all the foreign names, the names of Rommel’s victories were driven into me: Homs and Misurata, Sirte and El Agheila, Bengasi and Derna, Sidi Barrani and Mersa Matruh. The war was one great geography lesson.

Chapter 21

On a Saturday, soon after Karl and I had come back from the orphanage, after morning synagogue, after quickly slurping down the soup of our *Shabbes* meal, and over our parents’ protests, we ran out of the house to meet Henry Rosenberg in front of our old house. Henry walked us down to the Polo Grounds. From our old house on 159th Street it was a relatively short walk to the great Giant’s stadium: up to Amsterdam Avenue, then St. Nicholas. We were to walk down to 156th Street, but from St. Nicholas Avenue, where stood tall gray houses with their undulating fronts, under its high elms, high up on Coogan’s Bluff we could look far down into the valley where the Polo Grounds stood. We could

even see across the blue-gray Harlem River, and then farther yet, out over the distant roofs of the Bronx. Henry pointed, “that’s Yankee Stadium, and on a good day you can even see Long Island Sound.” But then there was the Polo Grounds beneath us. Even from our distance it looked so very huge, so immense. It held me as if I were seeing, close up, a great ocean liner, the immense black flanks of the *Caribia* once again. I wanted to stay and look at the giant horseshoe building that enclosed that patch of green, but Henry pulled me along. “We’ve got to get there soon.” Now it was down to 156th Street and part way down the 156th Street Bridge that vaulted the Harlem River, then down from the immense height of the bridge, via narrow metal stairs, to the vast field far below that lay like an apron in front of the great building. At the bottom of the stairs we could see a group of black men distributed over the bare field fronting the stadium. They were all dressed in white and someone was hurling a ball with a peculiar motion at some sticks a good distance in front of him. A large man in white, holding what looked like a shovel, stood in front of the sticks. The hurler pitched and the man with the shovel hit and then ran back and forth to the sticks. There was great shouting from the men. Karl, very confused asked, “is that baseball.” “No,” Henry told us. “It’s cricket. Those are men from the Islands, the Caribbean, and he pointed toward the great stadium, “that’s baseball.”

People streamed out of the 155th Street subway station only some yards from the stadium, policemen guided them to their entrances. The stream declined to a mere trickle, then suddenly there was a huge roar from the stadium. “The game’s starting,” said Henry and motioned us to walk over to one of the heavier policemen who was bent over a car at the curb and yelling at the driver, “No, you can’t stand here, don’t you see the signs?” And he whacked the roof of the car a few times with his billy club as the car drove off. He turned around, and we saw the blue chevrons on his sleeve and the gold badge on his chest. This was a sergeant. Karl and I stood in front of him, and we both looked at our shoes.

“And what might you two be wantin’?”

“We don’t have money.”

“Ya don’t have money? Well you have those black nice suits on and ya don’t have money?”

“Well, they’re our *shabbes* suits.”

“*Shabbes* suits, eh?”

“We have to look nice for synagogue.”

“An’ you don’t carry money on *Shabbes*. Right?” We both nodded. And then I blurted out, “but we don’t have money anyway, we’re poor. We’re from Germany.” If we hadn’t been looking down at our shoes we might possibly have seen a smile on the sergeant’s face.

“Poor refugees from Germany? From Hitler?” Nods. “Some of my Irish friends wanted to play footsie with the guy. But I told them that he’s an unholy bastard. Sorry. Look, you just stay over there,” he pointed to some dark depths near the stadium entrance, “and after the first half inning we’ll see where there’ll be some empty seats for you. Just over there.” We waited, latecomers streamed past. I think Karl and I both jiggled up and down on our toes with excitement. Henry asked if we needed to pee. We just kept bouncing. The sergeant came by and to our embarrassment asked if we needed to pee. “Inside,” he said “you’ll see the signs for the toilets. Sorry you had to wait for the end of the first inning.” He then ushered us into seats in far right field. “An’ if you should come again on another *Shabbes* just ask one of my men for Sergeant Haase, I’m here mostly on *Shabbes*, an we’ll see what we can do for a couple of poor German refugees from Hitler.” He patted us on our heads and disappeared.

Our seats were way back in right field but in the first row. The richest green we had ever seen extended right and left and forward. “Look down there,” said Henry Rosenberg, “that’s Mel Ott.” Right below us, we could see Mel Ott, the great Mel Ott, doing some jiggling dance steps and pounding his glove. “Does he have to pee?” asked Karl. I started to laugh. A contemptuous look from Henry

followed. "Ott has more home runs than anybody except for Babe Ruth. And look, the pitcher. That's Harry Feldman, he's throwing to Harry Danning, they're both Jews. I think that's the first time in history that a Jewish pitcher is throwing to a Jewish catcher; and look, on second base, that's Sid Gordon, he's Jewish too. This is history. Today is history." "History?" Said Karl, "they play on *Shabbes*?" We ignored him.

It didn't mean much to me, at first, that there was a Jewish batter and a Jewish second baseman. All the players were so small from where we were sitting. If the second baseman were playing third and the pitcher were somewhere in the outfield it would have been one and the same. To us, there seemed to be no distinctions in their uniforms. In the third inning Feldman struck somebody out, and a great cheer went up from the stands. People rose and clapped. Behind us, all around us, people yelled wildly, "Way to go. Way to go!" Feldman picked up the rosin bag, and threw it down hard so that we saw white powder puff out from the bag. Feldman turned around to look at his outfielders; he nodded, he grew majestic in his approval. He then turned back toward his catcher, his gloved hand resting on his hip. Feldman nodded to Harry Danning and began his wind-up, and the cheers grew louder. Suddenly, I seemed to know Feldman. Feldman was Herbert Gärtner, the man who threw me up on his shoulders and carried me, Feldman was El Profesor, my teacher in Ecuador, the man who sat me up in a chair on top of a table and played the guitar in front of me. Now, the man on the mound in his cream-colored uniform was the only one out of all nine on the field that I saw. Feldman, with his high kick, became huge. I didn't see his face, and then his arm came forward and he released the ball and with the pop in the catcher's glove I thought I saw myself standing in front of our burning synagogue, clods of dirt being thrown at me, a brown shirt with camera, smiling, moving about, taking pictures of our fear. Harry Danning returned the ball to Feldman and Feldman again turned slowly around, his eyes panning the stands, seeming to take in all his audience with this slow turn of his body. Then, and as he turned, and

just with his turn, some of that fear that the German cameras had seen seemed to evaporate. A whole stadium had risen up and cheered the Jew Feldman. A great joy came over me. Here was a Jew who was cheered; a Jew who could throw a ball towards a man standing a good distance away, and he was cheered, he was a hero. He was Bar Kochba, he was a Maccabi. I started to cry, slowly, just moisture at the corners, then more moisture and a hiccupping, then a loud bawling that seemed to burrow throughout my body. Henry pulled at my coat sleeve, Karl looked at me, frightened, Mel Ott looked up at the stands behind him and then returned to pounding his glove. I was happy. I was angry and sad. In Harry Feldman, I suddenly felt, though it was indistinct, that all my losses of people, of my Oma and Opa, my loss of place, of the physical town and the physical landscape which was another part of myself, my loss of the approval from adults who had a perfect knowledge of who I was, that all those losses had a chance of being retrieved.

Chapter 22

Early one August evening, my parents were out, I was in charge and I was dialing the radio that stood on a small table at one end of the couch. Just about every station now had news “every hour, on the hour.” And the news in the excited announcer’s words was, “U.S. Marines land on the island of Guadalcanal.” We were on the offensive in the Pacific and I saw Harry Feldman pound his glove after the strikeout. A few weeks later, dialing the radio, I stopped and heard Colonel MacCormick announce, “And now, *The Student Prince*.” Seconds into the overture a man came on, “we interrupt this program...” British and Canadian troops had landed in force on the French coast and had struck Dieppe. Navy and Air forces, all were involved. The invasion of Europe had begun. I screamed for joy, I ran to

the door and shouted out the news. It echoed through the hall and stairway. I kept on shouting, "it's started, it's started." I wanted to run to wherever my parents were for the night, but I couldn't. I pulled my head from the door when a neighbor shouted down the stairs for me to shut up. I was devastated when I heard later that it was all a false alarm. Dieppe was just a raid to test the German defenses. Oma and Opa, their freedom, would have to wait.

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That fall I started at Public School 169. On the first day, Mom led Karl and me to school and to all the ladies in offices wearing yellow or blue sweaters and who had their eye glasses on strings around their necks and who asked us where we had gone to school before. Karl said, "in an orphan asylum." Mom said, "No, no." And the lady in the yellow sweater, smiling, her eyes large and her head tilted to the side, said, "how nice that you adopted them, and you're here just how long?" Mom simply shrugged and said nothing. But the lady in the yellow sweater, who could bellow down the hall when a child was doing the forbidden running, would always smile and rumple my hair whenever we met.

Public School 169 was on 168th Street and Broadway. And though from our house it was only two blocks east and eight blocks north, it was a new geography for me, a new terrain that I had to negotiate. I knew that Manny Kirchheimer, a friend I had met through synagogue, went to 169, but Leo Levy, Jack Williams, John Harmon, Don Serealles and all the others did not. They were still at PS 46. All those dark face and those few white faces were gone; the spirituals were gone. Here the faces were all white, all cross-Broadway faces; faces that I hardly knew.

"We have, all of us, been promoted from 5A1 to 5B1, haven't we," said Mrs. Hohenstein, smiling. "But today we have a new addition to our group. Walter, please stand up and tell us something about yourself." I mumbled "no," and shook my head. Then, in the kindest way, she said, "It's all right, you don't have to." It's then that I stood up and mumbled something about Germany and Ecuador and

PS 46 on Amsterdam Avenue and that now we lived on 160th street and Riverside drive. I had lied. I had given the impression that we lived on the corner of 160th and Riverside drive, when we actually lived several houses distant from the Drive. I frightened myself. Appalled that I had lied, lied to a whole class and to my teacher. But I had lied before. Soon after returning from the orphanage I again met Manny Kirchheimer. We had become friends. Sometimes, up at his house, we would play chess. He asked me where I had been all these months, and I told him, "in Hollywood." Manny was impressed. "Yes, while I was there I became friends with Mickey Rooney. And he took me all over the place, showed me things and introduced me to a lot of movie stars." Manny was very impressed. The next week, in Synagogue, Manny's mother, sitting next to my mother asked if it were really true that I had been in Hollywood. It was Mom's turn to be appalled.

"When were you in Hollywood?" Mom asked me later. I imagine my red face answered for me. "Shame. Shame on you for telling such lies. Shame," and she turned away. I wished that she had given me a spanking rather than this burning face, "Shame." But here, in the classroom, I had lied. Again. The next morning I came to school very early. I found Mrs. Hohenstein at her desk.

"Please, Mrs. Hohenstein..."

"Yes, Walter." The Walter came with an inflection that indicated that she was not sure of my name.

"I don't live on the corner of 160th and Riverside Drive.

"All right."

"I really live several houses from the corner and...." She looked straight at me for what seemed a long time. "You've been on a long trip haven't you?"

"What?"

“I mean Germany, you said, and South America and then here....that’s a very long trip. And you’ve been very lucky.”

“Lucky?”

“Yes. After all the things we read about Germany.”

“My Oma and Opa...that really means grandparents in English....”

“And you’re worried about them.”

I nodded. “I read all those things too.”

“Tell me about what else you read.” And I told her, starting with Karl May and Sven Heddin, then going on to all the twin books, the Sam books and on to John R. Tunis. She smiled, wide-eyed at each mention, saying, often, “Really! Oh, Really!” in a wonderful approving manner. When I got to my reading of the paper *PM*, the class was almost full. They had waited while Mrs. Hohenstein and I talked. Now, Mrs. Hohenstein raised her hand, a signal for me to stop and in the kindest voice, a voice meant just for me said, “You know Walter, in this class facts are really important. I put a great stress on facts in this class, but you know, stories are important too.”

For the rest of the morning I tried thinking about what she meant. “Yes, facts. All those facts about the ways the various twins lived, all the facts that the paper, *PM*, told, but could I also tell stories about living where I didn’t live? Lies were stories, weren’t they? I was confused. It took Rabbi Lieber to straighten me out.

Chapter 23

Rabbi Lieber was now teaching my class at Hebrew School. Rabbi Lieber had a club foot and he wasn't a Rabbi, he was our Cantor. He had a beautiful voice. But the congregation didn't have enough money to pay both a cantor and a Rabbi, or people said that the congregation was too cheap to hire a Rabbi. It depended to whom you talked. After a while Rabbi Lieber did become a Rabbi.

Well, he announced, one day, that for perfect attendance he would take the class to a play. Perfect attendance was easy, Mom saw to that. Only a fever of 102 or above could possibly interfere with our study of Hebrew. Since no such luck pursued me that year, perfect attendance it was. The play was *Life With Father*. It was my first play since coming to America. It was wonderful. We came early and sat in a high tier from which we could see the colored dots below, the audience enter, and find their seats. Our seats were a burnished rust, and the wooden arch in back of the seats that ran from wall to wall had the same patina, and even the lighting from the chandeliers bathed the whole theater with this red-copper tint. It was a shine that I have always connected with gentry, and something that mocked our unsettled refugee status. The audience laughed out loud, but we didn't, when Mr. Day came to the breakfast table and bellowed that the New Haven Railroad had had another accident. His stocks - his stocks! The play was wonderful, and how I wished that my father might have trouble with the stock of the New Haven railroad. The play was based on the book by Clarence Day Jr., it said so in the program, and so, since the play came so soon after my confusion with lies it opened a line of discussion that was carried on in the subway ride home, the walk home. It all began when somebody asked what "based on" meant.

At the subway station Rabbi Lieber rushed to ride in the very front of the subway train. He reached the front, at the window, and watched the train tunnel home. I stood next to him. The front of the train was also my favorite place.

“Yes. So what does ‘based on’ mean,” I asked. The train raced and rumbled, light made the tracks shine; light shone on the tunnel walls where paint peeled and white sometimes shone where all the rest was black and gray.

“Well, it’s like wood.” Rabbi Lieber was looking straight ahead. “It’s like wood. ‘Based on’ is like a tree. You cut up a tree and the wood from it is used to build a house. Well, that wood isn’t a tree any more because now *it is* a house. So you could say that the house is ‘based on’ a tree. So first there was a book that told the story, then there was a play with actors who spoke the lines that came from the book; but it’s really the same story, you see.”

I wasn’t happy. There was no bark on the house, no leaves or branches on the house; no birds in the branches. But it wasn’t a lie.

“It wasn’t a lie.”

“So why should it be a lie? Even lies have something ‘based on’ them, something that happened before. Lies don’t come out of nothing. There’s always something that came before, before somebody lies, some real reason in the person’s mind for his lying.”

I didn’t know what my real reason was.

“You read books? There are stories in the books. The stories are made up. Somebody makes them up. OK? Would you say those are lies? Is the Lone Ranger, the Green Hornet a lie? No they’re stories you like. Is *They Died With Their Boots On* a lie?”

“No. I don’t think so. It was...OK. It was ‘based on’. It was based on General Custer and the Indians. OK.”

As we were walking down 162nd street Rabbi Lieber came over to me. “You know, there are all kinds of lies. You maybe heard of white lies? ‘*Ja, you look wonderful today.*’ If you like a person you could say that even if the other person had pink spots and blue stripes all over their face. The lies are

terrible if you hurt somebody with them. Sometimes you can't always tell if you are hurting somebody else with a lie and sometimes, maybe, that somebody who is the liar is the only one hurting himself. So maybe the best thing....."

"But what about the Ten Commandments?"

"That is a very good question. We should discuss it the next time in class." But we never discussed it in class; not the next time or any other time.

So if my lies didn't hurt anybody, I was OK? If, if, if, if. But then, I knew very well whom they hurt; it was a wound. *But*, and not such a big but, 'based on' was not really a lie. One could do something with 'based on.' 'Based on', somehow, had possibilities for bandaging the wound.

Chapter 24

We were reading about Christopher Columbus in class. History: my favorite subject. Our teacher, Mrs. Hohenstein, had the custom of sometimes giving, really lending, a student a book on a particular subject. This time I was the recipient, and the book was on Christopher Columbus. And this is what I read: Columbus had been questioned, derided, and taken for a fool and all for his belief, his certainty that the earth was a globe. And he traveled long, a nomad almost, with his son from one European court to another so that someone, king or prince or queen, might provide the money for ships so that he might prove that his ideas; that indeed the earth was round and that he would be justified despite all opposition. It occurred to me that I could do something 'based on' Christopher Columbus. I could write a play. It would be 'based on' history. Columbus! his travels, the contempt, and scorn shown him at first, and then his final triumph over all those who had derided him. I began walking around with

a little pad of paper. On the way to school and on the way home I would talk to no one. If an idea struck me I would write it down. Mrs. Hohenstein noticed.

“What are you putting in that pad? What’s so important?”

“Nothing. Nothing.” Though it may have been nothing, I was full of wonder at myself, at what I could do, at what I could summon up with my pencil. Just thinking and putting it down. It was marvelous, a great joy, and it was not lying. When I finished, I transcribed it in ink, and the next morning in school I placed it on Mrs. Hohenstein’s desk. And I waited. For three days in her class, I sat rigid and still, my hands, folded tightly in front of me, resting on the desk.

On the third day, just before afternoon dismissal, Mrs. Hohenstein asked me, “Please stay for a minute.” It was the “please,” that made me marvel at what might come. Mrs. Hohenstein’s voice was always kind, the please, always somehow implicit in her questions or demands, but now the “please,” was voiced. I was proud. I felt selected.

“What would you think if we put on your play in an assembly before Columbus Day?”

“The assembly? The whole school?”

“I re-typed your play,” and she waved some sheets at me. Tomorrow we’ll hand them to the class and see who wants to play which part. After that we’ll arrange some time for rehearsal and you can direct all the players.” She added, “I like the way you have Columbus overcome all odds and opposition; the way he achieves his victory.”

All I could do was smile, nod and run off. The play was cast, rehearsed, and presented twice, once for the lower grade, and once for the upper grades. There was a great deal of applause, and a lovely note from the principal home to my parents.

A few weeks later, as we filed out of the classroom for lunch, Mrs. Hohenstein said “please” once more and asked me to wait. “The National Board of Review asked the school to choose three or four students to help review movies for them. We thought you might be interested in doing that.”

“Do what?”

“It means, maybe once a month, to go down to the Paramount Theater...”

“Where Frank Sinatra is singing?”

“I don’t think it would be on the Paramount stage but somewhere else in the building. You would go down there, they would screen a film and then ask you to write down your opinion, what you thought of the film. Do you have someone to go with you downtown?”

“I can go downtown by myself. My mother lets me.”

“The principal needs a note from your parents to that effect.”

“Sure.”

“I’ll tell Mrs. Maloney then that you’ll do it.”

“Sure.”

I don’t think it began that afternoon, but I am sure that Mrs. Hohenstein had something to do with it. Maybe it really was that afternoon when it first began; when I felt conscious of being washed, cleaned, relieved, maybe, of some of the fear, the almost constant tension in the belly; the feeling of strangeness in almost every vista, the feeling that everything was temporary and provisional; all those feelings that had been my intimate possession since leaving Ruppichtheroth. Perhaps I looked down at my shoes. No hob-nails now; I crossed asphalt and concrete rather than cobblestone, and the stores that I passed on the way home were now familiar and not strange. Not familiar in the way my blacksmith was familiar to me or my chestnut trees or Harry Regensburger’s bakery was familiar to me, but these storefronts were now part of that landscape, the peripheral, daily backdrop to what now was my home.

There was the *White Tower*, where some kids might buy the forbidden food: hamburgers. I passed the Audubon Theater, now a movie house, where upstairs, in the ballroom Rabbi Koppel had his synagogue. I passed Estee Chocolate store, who, before *Chanukah*, would buy the candles that Karl and I sold. I passed Lieberman the butcher, who did not buy candles from us. I passed Spector's deli. Spector had a barrel of pickles standing near the door, pickles that were almost as good as my Opa's. I passed the Daitch dairy whose butter was almost as good as my Opa's. I passed Bernie's candy store where, if I had a penny I might buy a piece of gum and for whom I later worked as a soda jerk. (Some of my parents friends would come into the store, "*Ach Wolfgang* give me please a cherry soda." They'd drink the glass halfway down, "*Ach Wolfgang*, please, a little more soda." They'd take a few gulps, "*Ach Wolfgang* just a little more *spritz* of Syrup. OK?" Of course o.k..

Bernie fired me. Bookies gathered in back of Bernie's. One of Bernie's bookie friends had given him tickets to a Giant- Dodger game he could not use. It was a night game, and as I was not working and he was, he gave the tickets to me. I went. It was the night that the Dodgers' pitcher Rex Barney pitched a no-hitter. Bernie was so jealous of my having been a witness to so rare an event that he fired me.)

Chapter 25

"Mom, I need you to write a permission slip." Mom did not hear me; she looked down at an envelope in her hand. "Mom, I need a permission slip."

"Since when are you getting mail?"

"I need the slip so I can go downtown. For school."

"No. You can't go downtown by yourself. Why is General Motors sending you mail?"

Nothing happened in my life or the life of my brothers which our mother did not make it her business to know. Privacy may have been difficult given the closeness of our living arrangements and therefore may have been all the more precious to us, but privacy, at least as it pertained to her children, was a concept with which Mom refused to deal. So it was all the more surprising that the envelope that Mom held was unopened. Mom kept staring at the envelope and then began to wave it at me. She shrugged, "Since when is General Motors writing to you? Who do you know at General Motors?"

"It's probably a ticket."

"A ticket to where? You got stamps for gas?" I tried to reach for the envelope, but Mom pulled it away.

"It's probably a ticket to a concert."

"What concert, big shot. You're going to the philharmonic?" Mom smiled.

"No. Toscanini. It's at the NBC symphony." Mom tore open the envelope. She looked at the ticket. She looked stricken. She mumbled, "Toscanini? Toscanini?" And then, with full maternal authority, "No. You can't go." I screamed, "Mom..."

"No. You can't go downtown by yourself. You're too young. No. Not by yourself. The crowds, the subway. It's hard for me even."

"Mom, you can't come along. There's only one ticket. You can't get in. The ticket is for me, not for you."

"Don't worry about me, I'll just stand outside the door and listen, but I'm going along. I only want you to be safe."

My friend Gary Thalheimer knew all about music; his uncle, after all, the one who lived a few houses down from ours, owned recordings of all the 104 Haydn symphonies. All 104 stood arrayed in

yellow sleeves on the bottom shelf of his bookcase. Gary knew a lot about a lot of things. Sometimes, on weekends or holidays, we'd walk down to the playgrounds next to the Hudson River and talk. Talk about music, Beethoven was really the best, Brahms - well, almost there, but not like Beethoven. Politics: I went with the American Labor Party, but Gary was for the Liberal Party. The Liberal Party was supported by the Garment Unions, and Gary's mother worked in the garment industry. Events in the war: Stalingrad. Oh, God. If the Germans break through at Stalingrad and get to the Caucasus oil...Anything and everything that came into our heads, such as the long discussion - it lasted for weeks - which was the better paper, the *New York Post* or the *New York Times*. I was for the Post, but Gary was for the Times even though the Post supported the garment unions and Gary's mother was a garment worker. I would keep track, to myself, of how many different topics we might touch on, on one of our walks. We decided, on one of these walks, that we wanted to get tickets to one of the Toscanini NBC concerts, and since General Motors sponsored the concerts and General Motors had a headquarters building on 57th Street, why not go down there and speak to someone about getting us tickets. How Gary knew that we had to speak to someone in 'Public Relations' I will never know. One day, after school, we went.

The young woman at the desk, just past the great glass doors, said, no, they didn't give out tickets to the concerts and that anyway, for tickets, you had to send to this address in Detroit. I thought of Sergeant Haase and began talking about the fact that we were poor refugee kids whose families had fled Hitler and that we loved Toscanini the great anti-fascist and.... The lady smiled, stopped us, ushered us toward an office where we repeated our stories to a man behind a desk. He smiled and had us give our names and addresses to the young woman and told us that in two or three weeks we would be receiving tickets.

"Mom. You cannot go. Gary's mother is not going with him."

“If Gary’s mother does not care what happens to him it’s not my business, I care what happens to you. You are not even twelve yet. “

“You don’t really care about me. All you care about is getting to see Toscanini.”

“*Quatsch. Ganz falsch.* You are completely wrong. How can you say that? I would never ever say something like that to my mother. You’ll see. I will stay behind you. A good distance away. You won’t see me. I won’t embarrass you. If I see that you do all the right things going downtown I’ll sign your paper.”

“It’s not my paper.”

“Whatever.”

The Sunday came, and I dressed in my *Shabbes* suit. Mom looked like she was going to meet the president. From somewhere had come a dark coat with large shiny gray buttons, and a gray fur collar. “I got the hat from Irma. Not too fancy, is it?” There were feathers in the front of the hat. I wanted to pull them all out. I just did not answer her.

As we were walking to the subway she said, “even in the subway I will stay away from you. Just don’t run away to the next car.” How could she have read my mind? I hurried out of the subway; Mom hurried with me. At the 6th Avenue entrance to the RCA building: “OK. You stay here. You said you’d stay outside.”

“In this cold? You’re so smart, you know this is November. I hope you don’t mind if I stand inside the door and stay a little warm? “

“OK. Inside the door. Here. But that’s all.” A crowd had gathered about one of the elevator banks. I followed. Yes. Here was a sign ‘To Studio 8E’. I jammed myself into the elevator full of people. I took my ticket out of my pocket and held it in a fierce grip. Just across from the elevators a uniformed man took tickets. I turned around just as Mom came out of the elevator. How did she ever get

into the elevator and come out in back of me? A uniformed guard stood at the one entrance door and checked tickets. Mom rushed to the guard, "We got only one ticket, but I have to be here with my son. He's just too young to be by himself."

"One ticket, one person. No ticket; no person. Make up your mind who's going in."

While people piled up behind her, Mom argued, "my child, he's so young," but to no avail. I showed my ticket and took a step toward the hall.

"Lady, you can sit on that side bench, and wait for your kid."

"It's all right, Wolfgang, you go. It's OK. I'll just sit back here and listen. Don't worry, It's OK." I didn't worry. I was now inside and Mom was not. I was on my own but not yet totally happy. Halfway down the aisle I turned back and through the open doorway I saw Mom gesturing and again arguing with the guard. I knew why I was not totally happy. Gary was already in his seat.

It was a wonderful concert. I heard the *Coriolan* overture for the first time. It was wonderful. I had a marvelous view of Toscanini; his wonderful animation, his marvelous white head each time as he turned to bow. The main program was Beethoven's Third Symphony with that marvelous tune right in the first movement that Pop always whistled. "Everybody around here knows that tune." 'Here' meant Ruppichteroth. When Pop said 'here', I had to wait, hear the whole story before I knew whether he meant Washington Heights or Ruppichteroth.

"You can hear them whistling when they just walk through the woods or when they're raking hay. Everybody knows it. That melody comes right from here. They're whistling the Eroica, but if you told the farmers that, they wouldn't know what you were talking about. You know that Beethoven came from Bonn, 20 miles away from us, don't you?." The Third is wonderful. And Humperdinck, he came right from *Siegburg*. He got his tunes from here too. *Hänsel and Gretel* is all from here. Everybody whistles his tunes too, in the woods.

The concert over, I sat for a moment longer, after all the applause, to watch the musicians stand up, take their instruments and leave, others just standing and chatting with each other. I turned to leave, and there stood Mom in the rear of the Studio auditorium, smiling.

“He let me in. He was such a nice guy. I asked if there were any empty seats and he said yes, a few, and he let me in. Please don’t be mad. We can tell Daddy about the Third and that nice tune he whistles. Wasn’t Toscanini wonderful. Please don’t be mad. Gary, wasn’t Toscanini wonderful?”

#

Mom had stopped working as a cleaning lady. She now had a job as a cook in a kindergarten just a few doors down from our house. The kindergarten had been established by one of the newer refugee organizations; by upper class West End Avenue, and even some Park Avenue ladies. Mom called them the “*Shutz-Juden*” ladies. The “*Shutz-papier*”, a letter of protection, was given, in the late middle ages and till the eighteenth century to Jews who, in one way or another had been helpful to the reigning authority. The papers could also be bought.

These letters of protection were no patents of nobility, though many with such a document seemed to have adopted the manners of nobles. These letters, which were passed from one generation to the next, gave these Jews privileges that were far and above what the rest were allowed. And in modern times, ladies with such histories might often become lady bountiful. One day, while mixing tuna salad for her charges and using a huge bowl for the job, Mom went to mixing all her ingredients in the bowl with her hands. Suddenly several of the “*Schutz-Juden*” ladies appeared behind her. In a voice shuddering with indignation one of them addressed Mom,

“Mrs. Hess, I’m appalled! Really appalled! Stirring the food with your hands?”

Mom, thinking that the best job she had had in America was lost to her, held up her tuna covered hands, “I was only thinking of the children,. Madam. I was making sure there were no fish bones

anywhere.”

“*Ach, ja*. That’s wonderful. Thinking of the children. Very nice, very nice.”

“And they went off muttering,” Mom said, “about that wonderful Mrs. Hess.”

Mom may have been wonderful to the “*Schutz-Juden*” ladies, to her sons she was often something less than that. While other kids were playing outside, we, but mostly I, were indentured to inside work. “I don’t have any girls so the boys have to do the job.” Not boys, but boy. Me! Karl already had outside work, working afternoons as a delivery boy for a drug store and giving Mom, every week, part of his salary. Therefore I had the job, first, of scrubbing kitchen and bath every Friday afternoon, laying down newspapers on their floors so it shouldn’t get dirty so quickly and on other days, after school, helping Mom with “homework.” Homework consisted of cleaning zippers, and somewhat later, sticking toothpicks into white beads for costume jewelry.

It was wartime, of course, and whatever factories had made metal zippers in peacetime were now fashioning the tools of war. So, some enterprising soul collected all the old and discarded pants he could find, tore the zippers off their fronts, and gave bundles of these zipper seconds, to women who, with a single edged razor-blade, separated the pants’ cloth from the cloth in which the zippers were bound. Sunday was the time that Mom made her trip to somewhere in the Garment District and returned groaning, for sacks of zippers were heavy. For the rest of the week, and except only for my school homework or truly unusual causes, I would sit and separate the stinking pants from the stinking zippers. Mom joined me in the evenings. Mom was paid pennies for each zipper cleaned. It was stupid, hard work. Work to which, since we were working with sharp objects, attention had to be paid. I still have the long scar on my right arm; the penalty for a wandering mind.

Later, shortly after the war, when zippers for men’s pants began to be manufactured again, a neighbor entered the fringes of the costume jewelry business. It was his job to prepare recently stamped-

out white plastic costume jewelry beads for their baths in colored paint. To prepare these beads, tooth picks had to be stuck into the hole. Mom was now paid pennies per gross of beads. Everybody in the house, from Frank, the youngest, to Oma, all participated. And while the work was just as boring, it was also less dangerous than zippers.

#

Henry Rosenberg introduced me to more than the New York Giants and the English language. On the west side of Broadway, between 159th and 160th streets, up a long flight of stairs and down a long hallway and just before one reached the local pool hall, there was a huge loft that stretched over several stores on the ground floor, and from its wide bank of windows looked out over Broadway. The loft was the center of a sports club for immigrant youth: Maccabi. Maccabi was the Jewish organization that a number of refugees who had arrived in the thirties organized. Its aim was to provide a meeting place, a place for recreation and sports for the immigrant youth. There were other organizations created and led by other and earlier arrivals, such as the New World Club, and the Prospect Unity Club on 158th street, but mine was Maccabi.

The vast room had two ping-pong tables, a scattering of tables and chairs where one could sit and perhaps, with tips from running errands, sip a soda, a 7-Up, bought at the canteen of the billiard parlor down the hall. Need I say that Henry Rosenberg was a brilliant ping-pong player? From five, six feet behind the table his vicious back-hand slams intimidated every opponent. And his cutting delivery of shots he retrieved, it seemed, from almost under the table, brought gasps from the onlookers. After a while Henry was forbidden to slam either forehand or backhand because the force of his stroke often dented a ball. It was wartime after all, and ping pong balls were extremely hard to get. After a while, to get anyone to play with him, Henry was made to play with his left hand, and depending on the opposition give anywhere from five to twelve points. Henry was also the star right wing of the Maccabi

men's soccer team. And it was soccer, really, that formed the matrix of all our belonging. Maccabi had a Junior soccer team to which I and all of my friends belonged.

The league in which we played was, and we all felt the irony, "The German-American Soccer League." It was impossible for me to understand how we could play in a league that had the word German in it. Not only was the league German-American but there was also a team in this league called the German-American Club. All the clubs in our league seemed to have been generated by some ethnic group. There were the Irish-Americans, the Italian-Americans, the Czech-Americans, the Hungarian-Americans, and the Pfälzer, who were Germans from the region of the Palatine. Though why Pfalz had no "American" appended to their name was always a mystery to us. During the fall and early winter the Maccabi juniors would play home and away games with about a half dozen of these hyphenated Americans. Interesting to us was that all of these hyphenators seemed to live in parts of the city that had large open green spaces and parks nearby where, these kids, our opposition, were able to practice their soccer morning, noon, and night. We Maccabi, except for Dicky Strauss and Frankie Spiegel, were a group of flabby, fat-bottomed kids, mostly parent-driven bookworms, whose only soccer practice was the half hour warm-up before games. Dicky was our brilliant goalie and Frank our hugely athletic center-forward. Every year we came in last in the league standings because every year we lost every game we played. But if Dickie could hold the opposition to no more than three goals or if Frank could put at least one of his bullets into the net we would count that game as a victory, and the senior Maccabians who chaperoned us would, after the game, treat the whole team to sodas.

My great dread, each year that I played soccer, was the trip into the wilds of Queens, somewhere under the Throggs Neck Bridge, to play the German-American boys. A group of the senior members of the club, those who had cars with a sticker on the windshield that allowed them to purchase gasoline in war-time, would drive us out to the field. There we would see our opposition, already on the green turf,

booming shots from mid-field it seemed, while others, in a file, raced around the field's perimeter singing, I thought, the Horst Wessel song, which, of course, it was not. The game started, and though I played on the left wing, all thoughts of attack were gone as we were instructed to play defense. I tried keeping up with their striker, this twelve-year old who could run and at the same time keep the soccer ball on the toe of his shoe as though there were magnets in both. Their whole front line, in fact their whole team, had legs like young birch trees, and while they ran with ease, never seeming out of breath, we panted and hoped for the whistle that would end the game. The game did end; it was five for them and zero for us, and we slowly dragged ourselves to the locker room. On the way we had to pass a gauntlet of parents that belonged to our opponents. They smiled at us as we passed. My brother Karl was just in front of me. One of the parents patted my brother Karl on the back and said "nice game." Karl turned and screamed at the man, "I'm practically blind and I can read better than you can."

Chapter 26

It was November, and I cried when I heard Churchill. His words, rumbling from that great belly, were broadcast, it seemed, almost every hour. *"This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning."* While I cried, the words thrilled me; they came in the wake of the great British victory at El Alamein. Montgomery beat Rommel and the Africa Corps. And still greater, Americans invaded North Africa; they landed in Casablanca and Oran. There were battles in the Pacific too, but what was happening in Europe and Africa, what happened with the Germans was, of overwhelming importance to me. For many weeks then, Churchill's words were played in the newsreels. If I put my ear to the unattended back door of the *Costello* movie house on Ft. Washington

Avenue, I would hear the sounds from inside the theater. My ear was often at the back door. That particular day I heard Churchill's words with my ear to the back door. I began to cry and I had an idea. I ran to the ticket-taker wailing, "Please, please, I have to pee, I have to pee. Let me in to the toilet. Please, or I have to do it right here! Please let me in." He let me in. I stayed. I hid, slumped in a seat all the way up front to see Churchill twice make his speech. I had no thought of a moral conflict.

#

One evening, late in the year Pop came home from work, "I heard a terrible thing today." He was washing himself, stripping himself of the paint on his hands and he called out from the bathroom, "I heard a terrible thing on the radio." Mom was setting the table, "What terrible thing?"

"From the Warsaw ghetto," Pop came out of the bathroom, drying his hands. "From the Warsaw ghetto. They are sending people to Treblinka."

"What place is that," asked Mom.

"It was on the radio. From England. A man, Murrow, was sending it from London. And he said that an Englishman in Parliament said that 2 million Jews were killed in Poland and Russia." Mom slammed dishes down. "Bastards, bastards, bastards. And we don't give a damn. Nobody gives a damn."

#

In selecting me for the Young Reviewers, Mrs. Hohenstein gave me a great gift. The films I saw then, all of them, were American war films, anti-Nazi war films. The gift spoke. It told me that my country was aligned with me in my anger, with my fear, with my hope. The films told me, that whatever happened, ours would be the victory. It told me that we were good, and so I was good. I saw these films in a special screening room in the Paramount Theater, the Paramount with its wonderful stage shows, and the prices which our family could not afford, the Paramount, where bobbysoxers went wild over Frank Sinatra. I sat in a private screening room the beam of light shooting over my shoulder to project

these wonderful dramas onto the white screen. The best of these films was *Sahara*. Bogart was the tank commander, not even an officer, simply a sergeant. In the early part of the film, in the tank rumbling across the desert, he collected a ragtag group, black and white, French, Italian, British, a melting pot of justice, a noble joining of shining knights set against evil. Bogart was fair and just and wise; he was Roosevelt and Wallace and LaGuardia. He was Moses. He joined foresight and courage in a desert world in order to find water for his people and to guard that water because it was life. Then, with a knight's bravery, to deny that water-well, that life, to the enemies of life.

There was *Five Graves to Cairo* with Franchot Tone, Anne Baxter, Erich Von Stroheim and Akim Tamiroff. Von Stroheim was a magnificent Rommel. There was fright in this film, and there was, at the same time, lightness and even humor in the struggle. Tone told me that whatever the burden was, it need not be an impossible weight. And here, again, there was the sense, as in *Sahara*, that all the people of the world, whatever their station, were united with me in the fight against the Nazis.

Two other films, though, presented more difficult problems. *Hangmen Also Die* and *This Land is Mine*. These two were full of moral dilemmas. Both films turned on choices that very ordinary people needed to make. I didn't know then that these were called 'moral dilemmas' but during these early years I knew, I had heard, listening, when they thought I was reading, of the ache in the belly and the wool in the head that some people had when they were forced to consider for whom to make out an affidavit for America. Do you choose a loved aunt or a sister? After having filled out a number of affidavits, what was the pain, knowing your own slim resources, that to fill out one more was to have it questioned by some authority, was to have the loved aunt surely stranded in Portugal or England or Germany. Did one have the courage to appeal to a well-off, far distant relative, to beg and to grovel for the twentieth time for maybe just one more affidavit?

Charles Laughton was a schoolteacher in *This Land is Mine*, who saw himself as a coward but was forced to bring himself to behave with courage. In *Hangmen Also Die*, Brian Donleavy was compelled to choose between his own life, and that of many others. To be good meant sacrifice, meant offering oneself. For me, both films pointed great green arrows at Germany, at all those good people who avoided choices, or who made the wrong choices, all those people who came to watch while we were being photographed in front of our burning synagogue. But Mrs. Hohenstein's gift, I think, had another dimension; it began to shape in me the impulse that guided me to my future career in films.

Chapter 27

In early February of 1943 we heard about one of the great victories of the war: the German 6th army was broken, the siege of Stalingrad was over. The numbers were enormous. We didn't always believe Russian announcements, that is, Papa didn't believe them.

"They exaggerate. They always exaggerate." When Mom, who was ironing, gave Papa a dirty look, he smiled and added, "but in a war everybody exaggerates."

Three hundred thousand German soldiers were killed; a hundred thousand were made prisoners. Four hundred thousand Italians, Rumanians, and Hungarians were killed, four hundred thousand were captured. "Anyway Tim O'shenko did a great job."

"No Papa, it wasn't...and his name is Timoshenko. It was General Chuikov that did it."

"Irish, Russian, what's the difference. We won."

The day I began my Bar Mitzvah studies, the Germans in North Africa surrendered to the British. It was a day in May, and May was my month. Then, in June, Pop came home with *The Post* and before

he took off his painting clothes or even washed, he laid the paper on the table and called everybody to come round and see. Mom, Karl and I peered over his shoulder. "Look at this! Look at this! Cohen captured an island, a whole island. My God, *Boruch habo*. Look at this and read." I read, and was filled with a real whooping joy that Cohen captured the island of Lampedusa. Lampedusa was a tiny island in the Mediterranean near the island of Sicily. Sergeant Cohen was an RAF flyer who crash-landed his plane on the island. When Cohen walked away from the crash the whole Italian garrison walked toward him with their hands up." Mom smiled. She looked at Pop, "Good thing that you are 4A."

"What's 4A?"

"Papa's draft number. 4A means that he's too old to be a soldier. I think he feels he wants to be like Cohen. Good thing he's 4A."

That Saturday the whole synagogue was all buzz and smiles, "*Nu*, what do you think of Cohen?"

"We need Cohen to land in Italy, to land in France."

"They hear Cohen is here and they all come out with their hands up."

"The war's over: Cohen did it."

"Thank God for Cohen. Cohen, the king of Lampedusa."

American and British forces invaded Sicily, and a brand new list of joyous names entered my vocabulary: Agrigento, Trapani, Palermo, Ragusa, Catania, and Messina; all Allied victories. In early September, the Allies invaded the Italian mainland in Calabria, and soon after, Italy surrendered to the Allies. One down.

In the American landing in Anzio one of the young men from our congregation was killed. Herman Kahn volunteered the day after Pearl Harbor. The Kahn's lived on Fort Washington Avenue, and whenever we passed his building, someone would say, or silently acknowledge, "that's Herman Kahn's house." I never passed the house without a sense of awe. Someone I hardly knew, but sometimes

passed in the street, somebody I sometimes saw being called up, first to observe the Torah reading because he was a Cohen, who was a very quiet man with large furrows in his brown face, had been killed fighting the Nazis. One Cohen was master of a whole island and another Cohen was killed fighting the Nazis. It was a Friday when we heard the news. That evening the synagogue was more crowded than on any holiday. At the end of the services, all the men passed in front of Mr. Kahn, Herman's father, and with awfully serious faces, shook his hand and nodded in understanding. The women, all of whom sat in the rear half of the synagogue, passed in front of Mrs. Kahn, nodded and shook her hand. There were no tears. A large red bordered flag with a gold star was added to the front of the synagogue. Before the war ended two more gold stars were added to the flag.

Chapter 28

That fall I began Junior High School 164: Stitt, on 164th Street. Stitt stood between Edgecombe and St. Nicholas Avenues. This was on the edge of Harlem then. Stitt was supposed to be a rough school. A 'rough school', we all understood, meant that it was primarily black. While most of my class from PS 169 was now in 7AR. (the 'R' stood for 'rapid' because at some point we all were going to skip a grade.) not everybody came. A number of parents, not many, had moved heaven and all the connections they had to have their children enrolled in a more light-complected school up in the One-Seventies on Ft. Washington Avenue. So while I missed some people, I was now reunited with some of the friends I had made earlier in PS 46: Leo Levy, Jack Williams, John Harmon, Don Serralles, Harvey Groppa. I am grateful to each one of them.

From Harvey Groppa I learned about Be-Bop; from Don Seralles, in our arguments and discussions about the British in India I learned about colonialism; from John Williams I learned about

singing and Welsh song; Leo Levy is my friend to this day; John Harmon saved my life.

At Stitt I encountered a remarkable set of teachers, as I did throughout my school career. It seemed as if at each new stage of learning I was provided with someone to give me what I needed. At Stitt there was Mr. Pressman with English and Julius Caesar. Mr. Pressman had a thin black mustache, wore a different suit every day, and every suit was a different shade of dark blue. There were stories that he told off-color jokes and that he pinched girls. So we all sat there waiting for the jokes that never came.

Before Mr. Pressman, Shakespeare was a name in quotation marks. The name existed somewhere, close to that space where also lived the names of Theodore Hertzl, Heinrich Heine, and Albert Einstein. But now Shakespeare became real and Julius Caesar became real. It was a beginning joy, but a clouded joy right from the opening. There was Shakespeare's wonderful punning, awl in all. But the deriding of the commons in Julius Caesar was something I thought shameful. Did we not live in the time of FDR and democracy on its world-wide march? Except for the Nazis and Fascists of course? What was Julius Caesar like, Mr. Pressman asked. And he guided the answers. It was like politics, like Tammany Hall, like Sicilian gangsters, and somebody called out, "like the numbers game." Who were the good guys? I needed good guys. Disturbingly, the play, and where Mr. Pressman guided me in the play was, somewhere else. Mr. Pressman did not even leave Brutus with any kind of nobility because as he demonstrated, Brutus has to lie to himself, to make himself believe that Caesar is a "serpent's egg." Mr. Pressman didn't know that I was in a war where there were good guys, and bad guys, and everybody knew who they were. I was used to movies with heroes; used to books where good and bad were crystal clear. So it may have been unfair of Mr. Pressman, then, to seed our twelve-year-old minds with doubt about the motives of many in this world when it was his real intention to have us search deeper than the surface, but perhaps he knew us better.

There was not a black child in our class who did not understand the nature of race in the United States, and every refugee child in the class, and there were many - fully understood the stakes in the war against Hitler and fascism. Mr. Pressman's Julius Caesar did become for some of us a vaccine that inoculated against facile questions and easy answers. Yet with all that, there was Shakespeare's music. For several days a number of us wanted to speak in nothing but iambs.

Stitt also had Mrs. Morton, who became our home room teacher for several terms. Circling her room, above the blackboards were oak-tag signs with the large black letters, MYOB. Mind your own business. Mrs. Morton was small, wore a yellow-brown wig and every once in a while had me take clothes of hers to a cleaner down on Broadway. One day, at dismissal, she called Leo and me over to her; she bent close to us, and in a familiar tone and intimate voice, one that an aunt might have used she said, "Listen, I see you always talking and playing with all these *schvartzes* in the class. And you have spin-the-bottle games? Do you have to do that?" We both looked at her face. How she learned about spin the bottle I didn't know, but without hearing more Leo led the way out of her room, I followed. Not then or ever afterward did we speak about the incident. Never again did I carry Mrs. Morton's clothes to the cleaners, nor was I asked to.

Often, at lunch time, a number of us would play in the school yard where the lines for a handball court had been painted against one of the school walls. They were two-man games where the winners would stay on the court and the aspirants hang around the edges, waiting, and while waiting talk about everything in the world. At one of our play-yard sessions Don Serealles broached the idea that after we all finished school, high school and college, we would again join together and start a company that would manufacture chains. Chains would somehow become terribly important after the war. So our group, black and white became "The Chain Corporation." And indeed, once or twice, at someone's house where both parents worked, we had interracial spin-the-bottle games.

Chapter 29

My long preparation for Bar Mitzvah was about to end. I labored long over a Torah passage I thought mostly boring. The passage I wanted to read would have dealt with Joseph. Joseph was my hero, the greatly loved child who made it big in his exile, in his new refugee home. The passage that was mine to read, determined by my birthday was called *Nosó*, from Numbers 7. Exciting Joseph was read in cold wintry weather, whereas my portion was read in spring. My portion was full of picky details: such as who was to carry the furniture of the Tabernacle through the desert, how to tell if a woman was unfaithful, and the contributions of the splendid utensils given by the rich princes of the people to the tabernacle. Rabbi Lieber was very displeased with me when I expressed my feelings over the portion. I thought that making a special group to carry the tabernacle furniture reduced people to slaves. If carrying the furniture, even of the Tabernacle were such a great honor it should have been distributed to all the people. I skipped over the testing of the strayed wife, though my mother thought that it was grossly unfair that a suspicious husband could initiate a test for the wife while nothing was said regarding a suspicious wife having a suspected husband tested. The rich princes making donations to the Tabernacle seemed to me like the rich ones in our congregation making contributions and so purchasing honors for themselves. When I repeated as my own, something my mother said, that not merit, but money made distinctions in the synagogue, the Rabbi, with some heat, answered that we were created to try to understand God's word not to judge it. There was one other section that made a great deal of difference to me. It was a section that dealt with the laws concerning Nazirites, the abstainers from wine, those who consecrated themselves to God. Because of this section in the Torah, the additional reading from the Writings was from Judges; it was the section concerning the birth of Samson. *Manoah* was Samson's father, the name of Samson's mother is never mentioned. An angel, announcing the birth of

Samson, appeared directly to the mother, but *Manoah*, waited in a field till the announcing angel neared.

This image of a man standing in a field, the grass ankle-high, somewhere a barn, somewhere cattle on a green hillside, the man waiting, and still waiting, while from a far distance a man, maybe an angel, approaches, has been with me ever since I began studying for this rite of passage. I was, and am grateful for this image. I try not to inquire into its meaning but simply to keep it in mind because it is full of expectation; it is an expectation without anxiety. It made, and makes the boring parts bearable. The image of the man/angel arriving has a golden aura surrounding it, perhaps because of another event I link to my Bar Mitzvah.

I had read my portion, synagogue was over, and we rushed, practically running the three blocks to our apartment, my parents, brothers, grandmother and I, to prepare for the rush of my parents' friends who would come soon after the midday meal for the obligatory congratulations, the schnaps and cookies. Soon after returning home I turned on a radio. Whatever it was that I was listening to was interrupted by a bulletin; one could hear the excitement in the announcer's voice.

"It has been reported from London that the invasion of Europe has begun. British, Canadian and American troops have landed on French soil." I was quiet for a good while, amazed that this epic event was coupled with my Bar Mitzvah. It was Saturday, June the third. Hitler was done for, Oma and Opa might be retrieved, found. I announced it to my parents, who were in the living room putting liquor bottles up on the credenza. We had to have a drink, a toast to the success of the Allies. To my amazement Pop asked me what I wanted. I asked him what he was drinking, "Slivovitz." "Me too, Slivovitz."

The afternoon was noisy. All the visitors could talk about was the invasion, and there were loud toasts to the invasion. I was glued to the radio. Later in the afternoon the visits were over, there was a special service in synagogue for the success of the invasion. I remained home, stuck to the radio. At

about seven o'clock the radio told of official denials from Washington and London, no invasion had taken place. My day had been un-coupled from an epic event. And I was un-coupled from great joy. Three days later, though, on Tuesday, June 6th, the invasion of Europe did indeed begin. The gratitude I felt, the joy in this immense effort was the same as if it had happened on the day of my Bar Mitzvah. Much later, in the films of the invasion, and always the same films, I saw the same shots repeated, the shot from inside the boat, the hatch opening and the troops pouring out, through the water, onto the beach, someone falls or stumbles into the water, and then the shot from the land, out toward soldiers running onto the beach. They run, some stumble, but one man, just as he reaches dry land, is toppled instantly. I have seen those shots over and over again in my editing documentary film life. That frame has passed through my hands often. And I mourn him as I do my friend Willi, as I do my grandparents.

Chapter 30

I was a poor soccer player, but aside from that, a terrible athlete. In any of the street games I was usually the last one to be picked. We were playing stickball, and maybe because so very few kids had shown up on the street after school this day I was, for once, chosen to be on one side. It was my first time at bat, I had one strike, when suddenly windows from buildings on both sides of the street were flung open, and children, mostly my friends, began yelling down to us, "President Roosevelt is dead. President Roosevelt is dead." The game ended. We rushed to our houses, to our own radios for confirmation. I heard funereal music interrupted by confirmation. I wanted to stay at the radio but could not. I worked as an errand boy at a local drug store and was already late. It was a three-block walk, and all the way, to the store, still, from window after window, someone cried out that the president was dead. Soon after arriving at the store my boss sent me home and closed the store.

Arriving home, I saw Mom sitting in a chair in the kitchen and crying. "They killed him. They killed him. Just like *Rathenau*, the same thing, exactly the same. Pop was standing over her, bowing over her, his hands on her shoulders, "No, that doesn't happen here. Things like that don't happen here. This is America; it's a different country, this isn't Germany." Mom just kept on crying. Pop opened some cans, and we had soup for supper and nothing else. At school the next day, Friday the thirteenth, we were called to an assembly in the auditorium. The hall was packed, and my class stood in an aisle. Our principal walked on stage. He was a very small man, *Mr. Fitchhandler*. He was bald and walked stooped. All he said was, "This is for our dead president," and went to the piano that always stood on one side of the stage and played the funeral march from the Chopin B flat minor sonata. We had the records with Rubinstein playing.

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Almost every night after supper, Pop spread a map of Germany on the dining room table. "How far are we from *Ruppichterath*?" In black ink Pop scratched the advance of the Western armies toward our Rhineland town. In early march he was in a jubilant mood. "Look. Look here. They crossed the Rhine on the *Ludendorf* Bridge. The *Remagen* Bridge. You crossed the bridge already when you were a baby. I crossed it lots of times; lots of times."

One Saturday morning in Synagogue, toward the end of the service someone posted a list of Jews near the exit door, maybe two thousand people who had somehow been transferred by the Red Cross from the concentration camp at Buchenwald to Switzerland. The service had not yet ended but there was a mad rush toward the door for a look at the list. There was a pushing and shoving, loud curses and loud cries of pain. Pop remained at the back of the crowd. He found a bench and sat and held Peter's hand. The rush went on. There were perhaps a hundred people all trying for a look at the list. Through all the sound Rabbi Lieber continued with the service, his high baritone cutting through all the sounds.

With the end of the final hymn Mom, who always had sharp elbows, emerged from the crowd, sat next to Pop, took his hand and shook her head.

Chapter 31

Not long after the end of the war, Leo Baer visited us. He was still in his uniform, a major's oak leaves on his shoulders. Leo was a distant cousin of Pop's and came from *Nimbrecht*, a village close to ours. He sat on our couch, relaxed, smiling; his outstretched arms resting on the back of the couch. All of us, Mom, Pop, my brothers sat around him in a circle while he told his story.

Leo had enlisted early in 1942. He received a battlefield commission in Africa. I wanted to know what he had done to achieve it, but he just smiled and went on with his story. Because of his fluency in German he became a translator in surrender negotiations with the German army in Africa and then later, after the invasion, for the 7th Army in France. He was attached to 7th Army headquarters. Like Pop, he was anxious and excited and went every day to check the maps at Army headquarters that would tell him how close the leading units might be to our old town. When the line nudged close he begged the Commanding General to allow him to lead the first troops and the first tank into Ruppichteroth.

As Leo told his story I went with him. I saw his head sticking out of the lead tank. I saw the tank rumble up past our house, past our synagogue, past Gustav Gärtner's butcher store, past Aunt Lydia's house, past the kiosk where I would read who I was and who I was not, to the street where the lead Nazi, *Löwenich*, lived. Leo had *Löwenich* arrested and thrown into jail by the special occupation troops that accompanied him. He went down to the *Willach* factory that had made guns and machinery for Hitler and his army. He found hundreds of dead slave laborers and a thousand other bodies on the factory

grounds. He made the villagers come out of their houses and give burial to the dead. He made the villagers bring food to the starving. He found one of the *Willach* brothers hiding in the basement of his mansion. *Willach* broke open part of the basement wall. When the rubble was cleared there was a small safe. *Willach* opened the safe and dragged out gold coins and jewelry. He offered the lot to Leo if he would just leave *Willach* alone. Leo beat *Willach* to a pulp and turned him over to the new, special occupation troops.

Chapter 32

Not long after the war, early in 1946 Mom and Pop began receiving letters from several families in Ruppichteroth with whom they had been close. In the letters were indications that food was scarce. Almost immediately Mom and Pop began sending them packages of food that included instant coffee, sugar and cans of Crisco. I would not take or accompany either of them to the post office to mail these packages.

“If it hadn’t been for some good Germans you wouldn’t be alive today,” said my mother. “If Hitler had been against bicycle riders instead of the Jews you would have put on the nice brown uniform and marched with the rest,” said my mother. Usually, on those occasions, I did not answer her because there was a softness in her assertions, a softness that told me that despite everything, leaving Germany, was an enormous loss for her. Although we were all alive, and that perhaps life in America was better than what she might have had in Germany, there were still associations, a history.

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Not long after Leo's visit, I saw Pop outside, on the street, high up, six floors up, in his painter's outfit, painting the building's fire escape. Pop had recently gone on his own, formed his own painting company. He had four or five employees, but still, every day, went out on painting jobs. I thought of our time on the *Caribia* when, from a high deck he looked down onto the ocean. Then he had grown dizzy, almost fainted. Now he was earning our living six flights up in the air. Did he dare look down? Had he overcome his fear of heights? Then the thought suddenly struck me that I had always thought my parents' whole generation was weak. My mother on her knees cleaning floors, my father in his paint-smudged clothes were now silently shaming me; their poverty and complaints about poverty shaming me. Suddenly, with my father up on those spidery slim steel stairs, me knowing of his fear of heights, I began to cry, and I understood then how truly strong these two really were.

Chapter 33

Miss Seidl taught English at the George Washington High School in upper Manhattan. Actually, it was a writing class. Miss Seidl was tall, slim, with dark hair piled up high on her head. As no teenager is capable of judging age, Miss Seidl was, at various times deemed, thirty, forty and fifty. As far as I could tell, she was not quite as old as my mother, who was then in her late-forties. Miss Seidl wore make-up and pewter earrings, and often, soft corduroy suits.. Her face was both stern and questioning, hard and soft at the same time. Before she asked a question she would look up at the ceiling for what seemed a long time and think. Her eyebrows often grew together when she was listening and she listened all the time. But when she spoke it was abrupt, soft, and energetic; it had a conviction that no Rabbi I had ever heard, could summon. She hardly ever sat at her desk, but walked back and forth in

front of the blackboard, or up and down the aisles between seats. At the same time there was nothing nervous about her movements or gestures, instead there was control. While other teachers might read the tabloid *News* or *Mirror*, many, *The World Telegram*, and some had the *New York Times* on their desks, Miss Seidl read *The Herald Tribune*.

Just as one could practically determine somebody's class and ethnicity by knowing which New York baseball team they rooted for, so a somewhat similar determination could be made by knowing which New York newspaper they read. If you read the *News* or *Mirror*, you were working class, the *Times*, intellectual, *World Telegram*, civil service, since it carried news of teacher job openings or Board of Education tests for higher job categories. Miss Seidl read *The Herald Tribune*, and *The Herald Tribune* spelled WASP. But what kind of a WASP name was Seidl, and what about the "Miss."

One beautiful spring day Miss Seidl stood at the front of the room, "Everybody out of your seats and get over to the windows, and tell me what colors you see. Puzzled, we all looked at one another. While Miss Seidl often sounded both kind and peremptory with her requests, her voice seemed a bit harsh this time. Nevertheless we all crowded to the bank of windows that flanked one long side of the room.

There was a broad lawn beyond the windows. Bordering the lawn were young sycamore trees, and at about the middle of the lawn, perhaps twenty yards away there was another stand of trees. Beyond that first stand of trees there were several ranks of others that guarded the red brick walls of an old-age home, the only other building on high St. George's Hill.

"So, what do you see?" And from twenty or so voices came the loud reply, "Green."

"Look again."

There were long loud whispers, astonished and questioning, among us at the windows. "It's green."

“It’s green.”

“Of course it’s green.”

“What else?”

“It’s green.”

“I don’t see anything else.”

“The tree trunks?”

“No. Maybe.” Then somebody turned, a girl I think, who said, “There are shades of green.” We all turned, and across the room, standing next to the wardrobes, was Miss Seidl, a great smile on her face, “wonderful. Just wonderful. You saw. And just how many shades of green do you see?” For the rest of the hour many shades of green were seen. My favorite was, “baby green grass.” But for the rest of the day and for many days after that we saw the many differing shades on our classroom walls, on the walls of houses, on lawns, on the leaves of trees, on faces, on the surface of the Harlem river, in the blue sky. We saw shades in each other’s faces; in the faces of strangers on the street. We saw shades in our reading and in our discussions. Our eyes, our minds, had suddenly become conscious.

Chapter 34

Everyone who went through one of Miss Seidl’s classes read *Queed*. *Queed* was written by Henry Sydnor Harrison; a three-name person, an author with a very strange middle name, nor had anyone ever heard of this book with an even more peculiar name than that of the author. Peculiar though these names were, *Queed* had been in the top ten of best sellers in the year 1911.

What, initially captured me, was Miss Seidl's intense interest in the book. It was a restrained interest, she did not gush, but at the same time we all knew, we all felt, that this book was of supreme importance to her. On first being initiated into its pages two things were clear, it was a comedy, a comedy shaped out of a diction that was, with the exception of some of Miss Seidl's usages, foreign to almost all of us. We, the overwhelming majority in our class, came from striving lower middle class families: German refugees, Greek and Armenian refugees, Irish; all those human shavings that were to be melted in the pot on which the America of 1947 prided itself. It was the sound and tone, the diction, that, we assumed was the one Mrs. Roosevelt used when speaking to her friends, or that the president used when speaking to his Groton and Harvard chums. It was decidedly upper-class; the fun was, that, in *Queed*, the writing seemed to have fun with its own condescension. Though we might not have been able to say so at the time, it was something we all felt. We also felt that it was the kind of language to which, once melted in the pot, all of us might aspire. We did not then understand what Miss Seidl's intention for us was, though to properly speak like Mrs. Roosevelt was the least of it.

The time of *Queed* is turn-of-the-century America. The place is Virginia and its capital Richmond. One pole of the novel is a young man, in his early twenties, the autodidact of all autodidacts, a man who has never been to school but who, convincingly, is on a quest to find the one guiding principle that would unite all the sciences. To that end he is writing a book on "evolutionary sociology." *Queed*, is a physical type that Woody Allen somewhere describes as a homunculus. In this Richmond he is on an Odyssean journey toward self-discovery and a Telemachean search for paternity. He threads through class, through work, through vast ranges of emotion in order that a ferociously one-sided intellect may be wedded both to feeling, and physicality. The book's other pole is a marvelously courageous young woman, a "new woman" in 1911 terms. Sharlee Weyland is *Queed's* Athena, guide, instructress, ultimately his partner, and all in the guise of a daughter of "the new south." Sharlee

Weyland is one of the southern elite who has come down in the world, and that descent has been of immense use to her. It has made her strong and richly human. In the novel, without belaboring the point, she incorporates the spirit of both feminism and of Teddy Roosevelt's progressivism. There is a third character, a "leading man" type; a foil for Queed and a beau for Sharlee: three-named Charles Gardiner West. Charming and handsome, well born and ambitious, acknowledged by all and sundry to be a certain success in life. While the evolution of these three characters spans the narrative, at the center of the plot is that wonderful subject: money. Queed, owning higher ideals, is indifferent to it, Sharlee understands its human uses, and Charles Gardiner West, in many respects an ideal for teenagers, is ultimately corrupted by it.

While negotiating the book's moral labyrinth we were given new words and phrases to play with: "Eleemosynary", "ruminative," and "your cosmos is all ego," were among our favorites. But beyond expanding our vocabulary, the issues with which the book wrestled weighed heavily on many of us. Then, in 1946, clearer than any biblical exposition, *Queed* outlined, for a group of fifteen-year-olds, what an honorable life might be, should be. Even today, when mentioning *Queed* to one of my old classmates, a ruminative smile covers his pronouns disagree face and then words, something to the effect, that yes, *Queed*, and Miss Seidl's labor is still something against which they judge themselves.

Chapter 35

My father said, "you're good in history. Be a history teacher. Teachers have a good life. School is out at three and you have the whole summer off." Indeed, I was good in history; in my graduating class I had one of the highest averages at George Washington High School. I was also good at

chemistry and biology, so my mother said, “a doctor maybe? My boy a doctor?” She smiled when she asserted the question. My first course of college chemistry permanently settled the doctor notion; so History it was.

At age 18 I registered for the draft. The notion of being drafted then, in 1949, seemed ridiculous, but toward the end of June, in 1950, that all changed. In that late spring and summer of 1950 I was a bus-boy in “the Mountains,” the Jewish Alps, the Catskills, at the Mountain Glen Hotel, in Stamford, owned and run by Messrs. Stern and Liebenstein, German refugees all, and the hotel catered mainly to German refugees. Frau von Halle was on my station, a widow, the hotel’s only guest for the full season. She came from one of those few Jewish families who had indeed achieved the status of nobility somewhere, Austria, or Bohemia, or Germany. She was in her mid-fifties, large and delicate at the same time. It was a pleasure just to watch how delicately she buttered a cracker at lunchtime. She was the only guest at the hotel to have, in the cool of the basement, two large cartons filled with wine: white with lunch, red with dinner, and it was part of my job to see that the proper bottle rested on her table before her entrance to the meal. Sitting at her window seat, an elbow resting on the white linen, she would spend time just looking at the green mountain landscape. Then, her face lost in thought, she poured herself a glass of wine. I did not care for red wine then, but white, especially from the Rhine or Moselle, was something I had come to appreciate at my father’s table. Bringing the white back and forth every day, from the kitchen refrigerator to Frau von Halle’s table began to arouse a certain curiosity in me as to the taste of that white wine. After a few weeks of serving the lady, I decided try the wine myself. In a nook on the way to the kitchen where no one could see me I uncorked the bottle, raised it to my mouth and took a slug. Cold, a bit thick and a bit sweet, it was the best wine I had ever tasted. On following days, greedy, I would take not one slug but two and then three, but never more than three.

One sunny day, Madam von Halle, always at the same table where she sat alone, a table next to a window from where one could see green mountains stretch into blue distances, she called me over to her.

“Walter, please come here.” Dutifully, smiling, my napkin folded over my right arm, and with a slight bow, “Yes, Madam?”

“You are a very nice boy.”

“Thank you, Madam.” She smiled.

“What do you think of my wine. The white.”

“I don’t know much about wine, Madam.”

“I do think you are a “*Geniesser*,” that’s not all bad, so you can tell me.” I wanted to sink through the floor, but I shrugged. The smile went. Her lips were pressed together, her brows almost joined and there was a hard ridge of skin between them. “Look here,” and she held the bottle in her left hand and with a knife in her right pointed to a straight scratch that had been made on the label. “You see? I made a mark.” I saw.

“How do you explain it? Every day after you take it and return it, the level in the bottle seems to be closer to my mark.”

“Madam,” Before I could confess all she said, “Well, just tell me how you like it.”

I was saved. I rushed, “It’s wonderful. The best I have ever tasted. Better than *Eiswein*.”

“Fine. Now, at least, you are honest.” The smile returned.

“You can, please, get yourself a bottle of my wine from the basement. One bottle! That’s all! That will be yours, but no more drinking from my bottle. You understand?” I nodded. I understood. It would be a short summer for me in the mountains had I not.

The next morning at breakfast Madam Von Halle stood at her table and before sitting down called to me.

“Walter, have you seen this?” She unfolded her copy of the New York Times and looked at me. The headline told of the North Koreans having invaded the south.

“What does this mean for you?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know.”

“Do you think the Chinese or the Russians also have the bomb?”

There was now a new geography to learn and a new set of anxieties to acquire. The names were easy; Pusan perimeter and Inchon landing, Seoul, Yalu River, and 38th Parallel. The fighting was hard; there was Pork Chop Hill and Heartbreak Ridge. It was Truman’s War and McArthur’s, “Home by Christmas.” Some of our older friends appeared in khaki and the question of deferments arose. Deferments were given as long as one attended college full time. At City College we took Selective Service tests and filled out forms to make sure our deferments lasted, at least till graduation. I needed to keep my grades up. Outside the dean’s office a posted notice told us that if we became fluent in the Vietnamese language the deferment could be permanently continued. Rather than study Vietnamese I concentrated on history.

Chapter 36

In 1950 doctors still made house calls. I was nineteen, at home that summer and working in the city. I needed to make money. I could not make enough setting tables and collecting tips in the Katskills. I had worked about twenty hours weekly, after school in my freshman year, giving a portion of my

earnings to my parents, and I didn't want to work that hard again as a sophomore. So I lied to the foreman, telling him that I was through with school and looking for something permanent, and got my job at the drill press. It was good money. Now, it was Saturday night, time to go out and meet people, and I got sick. The pain began in my stomach. I lay on the couch in our living room, moaning. My father came over and asked, "You don't have any place to go?"

His question made me angry. "I'm not feeling well, Pop." Everybody always said that my father looked like Spencer Tracy. He had that same white hair and that same genial craggy face. When we were younger, and if we begged, he would play Jekyll and Hyde for us. Tracy's role. He would turn away, turn his back on us and then very slowly turn to us again. He had a sweet, benign, an almost ethereal visage. He'd then turn away from us again, return with a mean, cold, blank face, then suddenly and to our delicious fear, his features would, as we looked on, slowly melt and rearrange themselves into the hideous Jekyll. One year, a movie company had a promotion for a new Tracy film. They had a Tracy look-alike walking around Manhattan and if you walked up to the look-alike and said, "You're Spencer Tracy" you would get a free ticket to his movie and one person would get a vacation to Los Angeles, to Hollywood. Everybody walked up to my father and everybody was disappointed when he had to tell them, "no. I am not Spencer Tracy." He almost got into a fight with a man on the subway who kept on insisting that he indeed was Spencer Tracy and that he wanted his ticket to the movie. My father was not entirely unhappy with these false identifications, "but couldn't they tell from the accent that I'm not Irish?"

"What's the matter?"

"It's my stomach."

"You have a fever?"

"I don't think so. It's my stomach."

“*Ach*, no fever, then it’s nothing,” and he went over to the console, the combined radio and record playing console, the shiny ebony Dumont console whose existence I hated and whose existence made me proud. I hated it because it made me terribly, incredibly anxious. I was morally certain that we could not afford the payments and it made me proud because I knew that none of the other refugees in Washington Heights, those cheap refugees with all that money they made with their overtime in the war-time factories, would never in all their lives even think of laying out good money for an object that day by day brought, what our mother called “lovely culture”, into our apartment. “It’s as good as a subscription to the Met, and it plays both thirty-three and seventy-eight.” My father opened the doors to the console to pull out his favorite long playing records: *La Traviata*, the complete opera, with Richard Tucker, Robert Merrill and Licia Albanese. Tucker and Merrill were both Jewish.

The console was the work of my mother. She had first seen another one several years earlier while working as a cleaning woman in the house of a doctor in Queens. “It’s wonderful. It’s wonderful. Such sound. And you should see, after a long day with patients, the pleasure he gets from such an object. The relaxation. And Mrs. Emanuel too. The kids too. They all stay home at night and listen to records. To the best music. It will do good for everybody. Papa can relax just like Doctor Emanuel.” My mother and father argued for most of a year over the acquisition. Mother wanted it, Dad didn’t. The next year we got our television, the first one on the block. Now, on many evenings, Rabbi Lieber would come to our house. He loved to watch wrestling.

“I think I may have fever.”

“How much fever.”

“I don’t know. I haven’t taken my temperature.”

“Why don’t you take your temperature?”

“I can’t get up. My stomach hurts.”

“No. No. You can get up. Let’s see. Try.”

There must have been something on my face, the muscles on my cheeks contracting, my clenched teeth, the lips in a curve of pain as I tried to lift myself from the couch, that worked to convince my father that, yes, I was hurting. He put his hand on my brow and nodded.

“You feel hot. Where does Mama keep the thermometer?”

“In the bathroom. The cabinet.”

“Do you know where...I’ll go look.”

My mother was not at home. Had she been home she would already have been on the phone to Doctor Mayer, but she was away, recuperating, up in the green country, Westchester County someplace, Hartsdale, from what she called “nervousness.” I always thought of Hartsdale as a camp for adults that our mutual insurance company made available to refugee women who had had enough of hard work for little pay, enough of children, enough of arguing, enough of being refugees.

My father smiled. He gave me the thermometer to read. *“Wie viel fahrenheit.”* It was an old refugee joke. A bi-lingual pun. It translated into “How many will leave today? Leave by boat, by train, by plane. How many people will you let out of the concentration camp, out of Germany?”

“Hundred and one. Hundred and one.”

“What’s that in Celsius?”

“I don’t know. 40? 41? I don’t know.” I was hurting.

“Yes. I know it’s Saturday night, Dr. Mayer...Yes...The fever is over a hundred and one.... A lot over, Oscar?”

“A little bit over.”

“No, it’s not yet a hundred and two...I should call you if it’s over a hundred and two?...But fever is an infection, maybe penicillin...I should call you if it’s over one hundred and two. OK”

“What did he say?”

“You heard. I should give you some tea if you want. You want tea?”

It was about then that I started to throw up. I threw up till all that was left in my stomach was a bitter green bile. And when that was gone I still retched. My father had gotten a basin because I could not negotiate the trip to the bathroom. He had gotten a washcloth and repeatedly wiped my face. He put his hand on my brow and shook his head. Every time he put his hand on my brow I would see his hands that, although he scraped and scrubbed them every night, were never free from traces of paint. There was paint in the creases of his fingers in the folds of his hands, in the corners of his finger nails and under his finger nails. No matter how long he washed or how hard he scrubbed, with Lava soap and with turpentine, he never seemed to be able to get rid of that paint. We sometimes begged him to take out the flute he had brought with him from Germany and carried with him all through our long trek to the United States and there were rare occasions when he did but most of the time he would look sad and pained, wiggle his fingers in front of us and say that, “no he couldn’t.”

Mom always said Pop was too nice; she repeated it often after he started his own business: OSCAR HESS, PAINTING AND DECORATING. “You are not a real business man. You are too nice, too easy-going to have your own business. You let all those damn landlords deduct, deduct, deduct, from the bills.” And then she would add, “Oh, if only I were a man.”

It was true. He was too nice. He’d go into some apartment to give an estimate, “OK, sixteen dollars a room.” And if the lady of the house made a sad face he’d start going down two dollars at a time. “OK. Ten. But I’m losing money.” Everybody loved my father;” after all, he looked like Spencer Tracy.

“Yes. I know it’s Saturday night... Yes I know its after eleven but you said to call if it’s a hundred and two. It’s over...He threw up on the tea...What time in the morning...Ya, all right, but he’s hurting very much... Thank you Dr. Mayer. Thank you.

By one o’clock that night the fever was almost one hundred and four.

“I know it’s after one but you have to come now, please. It’s almost a hundred and four.”

My father called again at six when, it seemed, Dr. Mayer’s wife answered the phone. He came at eight in the morning. He felt my stomach.

“My wife didn’t want me to come.” Wherever he touched I screamed.

“It’s the appendix.”

Pappa just stood there and then, very suddenly, he started to cry. He tried to wipe his eyes, there was no sound but the tears kept coming. The tenderness I always felt for his hands now enveloped the rest of him. In all my life I had seen my father cry only once before, and that was when he, in 1946, after the war, out of the blue, received a letter from his father, my grandfather, which had been smuggled out of the collection camp where all the Jews of our village had been taken. A friendly German farmer had first received the letter, and sent it on to us after the war. At the time, the letter was strange to me. There were red and blue stamps with Gothic script on the envelope. The stamps said Deutschland, and our address was rendered in Gothic. How did they get our address? Oh yes. My parents, right after the war, sent some packages with canned meat, with sugar and instant coffee to old friends in our old town.

I remember sitting in the living room, my father on the couch, silently reading, silently weeping as he read, and my mother standing in back of him stroking his hair, “We had to leave. You know we had to leave.”

“Oscar, I don’t think it’s perforated. I’m calling the hospital. Siegfried Steuerman is the best surgeon there is.”

“I know. But my brother died of an appendix.”

My arm was around my father’s shoulder. He held me, carried me, crying, to a taxi. In the hospital elevator I looked at my father’s wet face, he looked down at me, nodded and smiled, and I thought, “who is he crying for, me or his brother?”

Chapter 37

At the City College of New York I took every course that Hans Kohn taught. Hans Kohn was a historian. When I listened to him lecture, I had the sense that I was in one of those great gothic lecture halls of an old European university, Salamanca, Heidelberg, Cambridge. From behind his desk we were showered with not only knowledge but also wisdom. His classes were always full, and each one of us, sitting back and listening, understood that we were in the presence not only of a great teacher but of a great tradition: of Seneca and the Stoics, of Heloise and Abelard, of Parcival, both Chretien, and that of Wagner: the Enlightenment loomed large in his lectures as did Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer. It seemed as if he knew the French *philosophes* as well as he knew his Prague friends Max Brod and Kafka. And while he was attached to Enlightenment hopes he understood, and had us understand “better than the enlightenment did, the infinite complexity of human nature and history, the inherent limitations of all human knowledge, the uncertainty of the human condition ...” He understood, and that understanding gave me goose-pimples, that the role of the historian in the 20th century was akin to that of the poet in that both of them took meaning and made meaning of the present and of the past. They both “render order to man’s life.” He taught me how little I knew and how much there was to be known, and I loved it.

Kohn taught courses on Nationalism and European Intellectual History but his Nationalism was intellectual history, and his intellectual history was nationalism. His understanding of nationalism

derived from personal experience, having lived in Bohemia and seeing the shattering of the Austrian Empire to nationalistic passions, experiencing the absorption of Germans, Russians, French, in fascination with myths of race and peoplehood that resulted in the horrendous agony of a new thirty years war: 1914-1945. His ideals of governance rested in the examples of political compromise that allowed the people of Switzerland and the people of his beloved England to live in peace.

Kohn sat and just talked, not ever looking at lecture notes or rehashing the reading he had assigned some days before. There was in his speech a sort of melancholy sweetness that I found sometimes in those who remembered both the greatness and the great fall of the Hapsburg Empire. There was, as well, that accent I knew: the German speaker who, somewhat late in life made his transition into English. But Kohn had made many transitions. From journalism to teaching, from Zionism to its disappointments, from soldier to prisoner and long years in Siberian exile; and many stops among many nations, Czechoslovakia, Palestine, France, Switzerland, England, America. One more refugee from whom I learned.

* * *

By my last year at City College I had completed all my required courses and so had the pleasant choice of taking almost any offering in the CCNY catalogue. In 1952, the college had one of the very first departments in the United States that offered courses in film. My friend Manny, who was majoring in film told enthusiastic stories about his adventures in the department. So what could be bad about a course where one just sat and watched the classics of film unroll on a screen and listen to one of the great personalities of the 20th century? I thought, and I was not alone, that Hans Richter was just that. . (Immigrant Richter was the famed surrealist painter and film-maker who joined the film department in 1941.) “Many opportunities, but no jobs,” in his heavy German accent, made students laugh, and at the same time rubbed a bit of the glamour off the profession.

Chapter 38

Sidney Meyers taught a course in film editing and I took the course. Sidney changed my life. Once more I came to know what it was to stand in the shadow of a master. Many years later, I was now working in films as an Editor, I encountered some remarks by the novelist Clancy Segal, who had once been an assistant to Sidney during the making of Sidney's great film, *The Quiet One*. Segal's description felt right. Segal knew what I was to get to know.

"He had time to spend with me, a film newcomer, and we spent many afternoons discussing life, art and politics, sometimes just horsing around, and occasionally he let me watch him cut. He was... a master. I'd never before seen such playful competence. At first it was terribly confusing to me because I never knew what was supposed to be serious and what was a joke. Later I learned that this was Sidney's method of instruction, to break down the distinction. I learned practically everything I know about the cutting technique from him, as I imagine many other people did....I always felt sure of Sidney when he was talking about movies or pictures or books, sure that he had felt what he was saying...." And you know he made me laugh more than almost anyone. Not that the jokes were good; they were part of his playfulness, the artist's kind of playfulness, that was very dear to my heart. I felt I was being allowed into his own private playground when he trotted out yet another one of those surreal ...jokes of his."

My friend Manny Kirchheimer, in a moving eulogy to Sidney at his memorial service wrote of the essential Sidney so many of us knew and loved; wrote for so many of us who began our professional lives under Sidney's care and tutelage.

"I never left Sidney without immediately wanting to read a book, go to a gallery, repeat a joke, study music, work, DO THINGS! He made me ashamed to squander a moment. Many... will remember one time while he was working on the Churchill Television series and discovered the fun he could have

with a certain mimeograph machine that was being used to make up research file cards. Within a week everyone in the place was drawing, doodling, inventing new ways to print different effects, and reproducing these drawings and showing them around... A dozen people were all excited and working in this newfound medium.

"You see, that was Sidney. He didn't have to go out of his way, he didn't instruct you in the ordinary sense, he only had to be Sidney and you were affected, changed, enriched, and for good...

"Close to when I first met him, I was 21 working at my first job in film, he told me of the time when [he was asked by the distributor] to cut down the Japanese film "Rashomon" for American audiences. Sidney said: 'I told him it's the work of a master, I wouldn't touch it.' And then he impishly added, 'And I needed the money, too.' That comes back to me now for good reason. It meant you 'have dignity.'

"Another time on a very hot, not air-conditioned day, standing on a plush red carpet left over from when the cutting room belonged to a high fashion milliner, Sidney was shirtless, rewinding bare-armed in a sleeveless undershirt, but with a pinched brown hat on. 'Why the hat, Sid?' I asked. 'That's to let them know I'm not here to stay.' That was funny. It was hard for him not to be funny. What it meant to me was, 'Be your own man. Don't let them seduce you with money, praise, comfort.' On that same job he told me to come screen his rough-cut with him because he said, 'it's the best version of this film you'll ever see.' He knew what they'd do to it after that.

"One lunch hour of a particularly beautiful day on the way to Stillman's Gym or an art gallery, we were walking on the avenue when he said, 'Look at the people, don't they look great with the sun on their faces?' And realizing that the sun was not on his face he suddenly ran ahead, turned around into the sun, floated back towards me, and asked, 'Did I look great too?' I was 21 and I wanted everybody to know that I was with the great Sidney Meyers, the man who made "The Quiet One", that he

was acting as if he were my friend. I couldn't believe we were really friends, because what could I give him? I was 21, and these things were terribly important, terribly important to meet such a man.

"Years later a friend and I were working on a television science series for CBS and Sidney came to visit us in the cutting room. 'It's good,' he said, you guys are working. How do you get jobs? I'm looking for work.' I was ashamed. 'Your trouble,' I said, 'is you're over-qualified. People think you're too good for the junk they have. They're afraid to ask you.' 'I'll put an ad in Variety,' he said. SIDNEY MEYERS HAS LOST HALF HIS SKILL. Later when Walter heard the story he told me, 'I'll put an ad right under it- I HAVE FOUND HALF OF SIDNEY'S SKILL.'

That wish spoke for all of us. But there's something wrong with a country that doesn't use the best of its best. It took its toll on him. Sidney complained to me often that his capabilities weren't being put to the test. In one especially depressed moment he even dismissed "The Quiet One", as a lie. To be so vulnerable, to come to such a distortion is the effect of a miserable system that does not permit Sidney Meyers to realize his powers.

"So we were the lucky ones, we who knew him, who were privileged to share him. And maybe just because he was so vulnerable, so human, and because he didn't give to us in such a way that we felt we owed him something ,maybe that's why we loved him so and why we took him for granted. And maybe that's why it took so long for me to realize why he was so important to me I only hope he knew it.

In one of his notebooks Sydney wrote, "We all of us live our lives with certain loved figures hovering over us. Whatever we do, whatever action, or moral stance we assume, we ask those figures what they think of us, and if we behave unworthily we hope they were not looking."

Sydney was, and is, for me, one of those loved hovering figures about whom he wrote. And I have often asked, in many varied ways, what, he might think of me at that moment, and yes, if I behaved unworthily I hoped he was looking elsewhere.

Chapter 39

There was a war in Korea. During most of college there was a war being waged. I now, sometimes, noticed that when he was looking at the TV news and there was a report on Korea, Pop would quickly glance at me and then quickly return to the screen. We saw the war in the pages of *Life Magazine*, on the evening television news, all in black and white. In black and white we were given heroes without feeling much triumph. It was an uncomfortable war, like the whole of the Cold War. Uncomfortable because I could not summon up the enthusiasm, the anger, the mourning or the joy that accompanied me during the “good war.” Ten years earlier General MacArthur was a hero, now he was a villain because he differed with President Truman on war policy. Spring, summer, and fall they fought in Korea, though in some winters both sides talked, and the result of their talking was to agree to continue fighting while their talks went on. I was now almost grown and perfectly confused. I was a student of Hans Kohn’s; had I missed that class of Kohn’s, where he explained these things?

* * *

It was now 1952 and in June I would graduate from City College. What would happen then? In this post-World-War world, where, it seemed, everyone now owned a shiny car with ballooning fenders, and every apartment in Washington Heights now had its own private phone and no more party lines, Korea lay lightly on most people’s psychic map, but Pop kept looking at me. In the spring and summer of 1952, despite the talks, soldiers were being killed. The maps in the *New York Times* showed the back and forth movements, it seemed, in millimeters. I had taken all the tests the army gave to allow me, as a college boy, to receive my deferments. Then, once graduated, the letter arrived: “Greetings.”

The letter arrived in July. There was no reporting date, which would arrive later, but once that first letter arrived, after taking a long breath, Pop began asking me, evenings, where I was going,

something he had stopped doing a long while before. In the past, during vacations, before the summer jobs began, and often on occasional weekends during the year Pop would say he needed my help painting, some man hadn't, or wasn't going to show up, he was short. Then I was drafted by OSCAR HESS, PAINTING AND DECORATING. No opposition or complaints were heeded or were necessary: he was short and he had promised the landlord or Mrs. Strauss, or Mr. Goldman that he would be there in the morning and OSCAR HESS, PAINTING AND DECORATING, always kept its promises. I was dragooned into painting the interiors of closets, and to scrape the ancient varnish off the old wooden floors with steel wool. The steel wool cut my fingers, and the benzine burned in the wounds. But after my graduation in early June, to my surprise, no requests for work from Pop were forthcoming.

In late October I received my two weeks' notice to report for induction into the Army down on Whitehall Street.

* * *

In a low and serious voice Mom said, "Papa asked if you could please stay home in the evenings till you go in the Army." It was morning, at breakfast, my last day at my summer job, and Mom's voice had a tone that might have been used in synagogue, "Please get me that book of prophets in the German translation that they have in the back." It was a tone I was not used to. If I remembered, the last time I heard it was the evening after dinner, when I graduated from Junior High School in 1946. There was a vase of flowers in the center of the table, and it was the first time since our arrival in America that we ate steak. I sat on the couch while others cleared the table, Mom sat down next to me and in a low and serious voice said, "you didn't say nothing. How did you like the steak?" I had nothing to say. I think I was a little bit afraid. Usually, when we were gifted, as when a new suit was bought for us before Rosh HaShanah, the suit's purchase price received as much discussion than as how the suit looked or fitted. Now it was steak and flowers and there was no discussion of price. In answer, I hugged Mom around the

neck and I remembered the tone, the voice.

For weeks now, on odd occasions, and the occasions seemed odd merely because I was present, both Mom and Oma would talk of their experiences in the First World War: for instance, Mom would, talk of the lack of food during the war. “It was potatoes, potatoes, potatoes all the time. And when the potatoes were gone we ate the potato peels. God, I remember the first time after the war that we had chocolate. Oma’s brother, Uncle Moritz brought it from Holland.”

“What did he do in Holland?”

“He was trying to get the brothers’ grain business going again.”

“How do you remember all that? You were just a little girl.”

“I remember a lot.” And with eyes wide, “you,” and she pointed, “remember every little shit you took in Ruppichtheroth.” Mom said it with affection. Oma too talked about food; how she would walk out of the city where they then lived, Würzburg, out into the open country and stop at farmer’s houses to see if she could get fresh vegetables or maybe even some meat. “Even turnips cost a sackful of money. The farmers got rich during the war.” And Mom would then quickly add, “The arms manufacturers got even richer.” Oma would wave Mom away, and under her breath she’d mutter, “Politics. With you it’s always politics.” And Oma would continue, “My brother got killed in the war, got killed early at Verdun. Got killed for the Kaiser and Germany and where did it get us? Lots of good young boys got killed. Jewish boys. I know a lot of them.” And then Mom asked Oma, “Did you know so-and-so, he was a teacher. And so-and-so. He was so handsome. He volunteered when the war started. Jews were patriotic. And so-and-so. He came from a rich family.” Oma took my hand and squeezed. Mom said, “Don’t volunteer. Don’t never. And do what they tell you.”

They were afraid for me and I remained home in the evenings. Mostly. Pop was home every night now. There had been many nights when he was not; when he had to prepare for the next mornings’

work, seeing that paint went where it was supposed to be, talking to customers in the evenings when they were home, but now Pop was home every evening. After supper he would sit in the living room reading the *New York Post*, Mom would sit in the living room knitting, and Oma would sit in the living room crocheting doilies. I sat reading history. I read Francis Parkman's *Montcalm and Wolfe*. Then, one of the things that cruised through my mind was to continue in history; to study historiography: the history of history; especially American historiography. Those 19th century American historians were great and wonderful writers; storytellers, novelists really, as far as their techniques went. One could read Prescott, Motley, Parkman for fun. Then there were the Adamses, and then Turner and Beard. There could be an occupation in it, and all it required was reading.

We were all sitting, quiet, occupied, only the radiator hissing, the room warm. After a while Pop walked over to the console, opened the cabinet doors to where the records were stored, and asked me, "What would you like to hear?" The first time he asked I was astonished, it was a question never before heard in our apartment. The phonograph was Pop's domain, that and the telephone. At first, the question made me angry. Never before had I ever had a part in the phonograph, hardly ever been allowed to even touch it. I wanted then to kick in the ribs of the console. I was being condescended to; given a present; a present to make everything all right. What was 'everything'? I thought of being carried to the hospital by Pop and him crying and me not knowing; being suspicious of Pop, thinking he might be crying for his dead brother rather than me groaning in pain. Pop smiled, and asked again, "what would you like to hear?" I was on the verge of crying. I bit lip and tongue. "*Capriccio Italien*." Pop's smile went, his face grew serious, he nodded, pulled out the record and let it play. The *Capriccio*, even more than *La Traviata*, was Pop's favorite music, he played it so often; it had come to be mine as well. The music begins with crashing chords, scary, dominating, warning; hard chords, but then the *Capriccio* becomes a lullaby, gentle, enveloping, soothing. Did Pop need a lullaby? I saw his mother, my grandmother, so

often quiet as if in silent, dark-eyed mourning. What did I know as a kid? But I knew the silence. The youngest son was dead, the other, the oldest, gone to the University; married outside the religion. Pop was needed at home. Mom always said he should have gone to university, been a teacher. But Pop was needed on the farm helping his father with the cows. In the music I saw a dark shiny baby swinging in a hammock. I saw a dark eyed mother, happy, singing a lullaby to the baby. What did Pop see? Did Pop need a lullaby? I know I needed one.

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Pop said, "When you go, I'll drive you down there." I said "there's really no need."

"I know, you're old enough." Mom added, "the morning traffic is very bad down there. It's Wall Street."

"Near Wall Street."

Mom gave a good-bye party for me, on the evening before my leaving. Pop stayed home, "I'm going to walk you to the Subway." It was a cold day. A hard, wintry Hudson River wind blew through 160th Street. It was even cold on Fort Washington Avenue, away from the river. We walked past the new synagogue that had once been the Costello movie house. "The ladies in the congregation are going to send you a package to Fort Dix," said Pop. "We'll visit you weekends."

"I don't think..." I stopped talking and we just walked. It was cold walking down Broadway. At 158th street Pop took my hand. At the top of the stairs to the subway we stopped and Pop gave me a hug. He was crying. He remained standing at the top of the stairs and as I walked down to the trains I felt terrible. I was so very stupid. I had been stupid for years.

Chapter 40

At Fort Dix we began our transformation into soldiering, and found that being soldiers meant

waiting. We waited to get our uniforms, we waited in long lines for meals, but most of all we waited for information: where were we going to be assigned. The scuttlebutt was that if you were assigned to basic training at Fort Dix you were lucky because here basic was for 12 weeks and that meant you weren't going to Korea but somewhere else. With 16 weeks of basic training you were sure to get duty in Korea. And taking Basic at Indian Town Gap, in Pennsylvania, it was certain that you were going to be sent to Korea because its mountains, the Alleghenies so very much resembled the mountains in Korea.

After three days at Fort Dix we were loaded into trucks, now and forever more known as *deuce and a halve* and sent to Indian Town Gap, Pennsylvania. For two and a half hours while the truck curved through the eastern Pennsylvania mountains it was stomping our feet on the truck's floor and "fuck, it's cold." The phrase was sometimes adjusted to, "shit, it's cold." Here was the beginning of the change in my vocabulary. Sentences grew shorter, and in all of them, most of the time, there was an angry gnarl. As a friend later said, "if, while in the Army, you can't use either "shit" or "fuck" somewhere in the sentence, you are just not getting your meaning across."

The truck drove past long avenues of barracks; it seemed a vast cityscape of elongated huts infinitely repeated. When the truck finally halted, loud voices ordered us off, "move, move, move." I moved, running after the man in front of me, followed by men running after me; all of us herded from the caravan of trucks from Ft. Dix. Herded off the trucks, we were herded into a barrack. About half the beds in the barracks were made, the other half were empty of sheets and blankets but did have striped mattresses where the stripes were often covered by large yellow stains. At one end of the barrack there was a head-high shelf on which a radio rested. Someone fiddled with the radio, and a nasally country-and-western tune blasted through the barrack. Above the radio, near the roof there was a small loudspeaker.

A bunch of men had preceded the contingent from Ft. Dix into the barrack; some were simply wandering about the vast room examining its wooden walls, others were sitting on the beds they had made. One of them had turned on the radio. A head poked through the barracks' door, 'get your fucking asses off those beds. Just because you guys come from New York it don't mean shit,' then turtle-like, the head withdrew.

Having dumped my duffel bag in front of a bed, I too began to wander about the room when someone tapped me on the shoulder.

"Oh, shit. Zack." Zachary Marantis was a high school classmate.

"Morty Zucker is here too. I think a GW reunion might be possible."

Before I could ask how he had been, where he had gone to college, was he married, a voice called out "Walter." It was John Harmon whom I hadn't seen since Junior High. I remembered that John's family did not live on "Sugar Hill," but lived somewhere down in the valley where "the regular colored folks live." Once, at PS 46, the teacher asked the class to vote. "What would you children like to be called?" The teacher's voice was cheery. "You white children don't get to vote. So what would you colored children like to be called? Black or Colored or Negro?" John piped up, "What about Socialist or Baptist? Some people are that kind." I don't remember how the teacher replied to John, but her three categories were the only ones in play. What I do remember is that although the class voted for "Negro," John called out, after the voting, "I'm gray. Look at me, I'm gray." John held up a bare arm, "Look at me. My daddy says I'm gray." And indeed, though the arm was dark, there was a dusty gray tinge over the skin.

I felt uncomfortable in what the teacher had been doing. She was making me conscious of the separation between blacks and the rest of us. Something felt uncomfortable. There was Germany. There was Willy and myself, and then there were all of the others. There was singing, loud German songs from

all the others, and silence from myself. And though there was silence there was a loud angry rattling inside me. Now, on 156th Street in New York City something again rattled inside me though the teacher's voice was cheery.

“Goddam. Gray John Harmon.

“Here to fight the enemy.” He smiled, “Who's the enemy?”

We were interrupted by a blare of sound. “Welcome to the third platoon, Charlie Company of the muffled training battalion of the Fifth Infantry Division USA,” screamed the loudspeaker. You are at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa. Your address for the next sixteen weeks. See you soon.”

Almost immediately a sergeant came through the door and began ripping up the made beds. When he straightened up from bending over beds I could see a Combat Infantry badge on his chest, and below that a Purple Heart ribbon with two bronze bumps on it.

“I'm Sergeant Fowler, any ridge runners here?” Yeows, from some of the group that preceded us to the barracks sounded behind me.

“Won't do you a fucking bit of good. Like the tune but goddam turn it off. You all are here to learn. For you boys from New York and Boston, tell 'em what a ridge runner is.” And from behind me came the shout, “West Virginia.”

“An' that's right. But the first thing to learn is how to make a bed.”

I hated Sergeant Fowler's corn-pone voice. Fowler had a sharp face and a long nose, but his hair was turning gray and it was the gray hair that somehow shocked me. He was old. He must have been in the Second World War. He must have been in the fight against Hitler. There was that Combat Infantry Badge; there were those bumps on the Purple Heart that he wore on his chest. He knew things. I had no real notion of what he knew, but I saw great slow-motion explosions in black and white, and water on a

black-and-white beach washing over an army helmet half buried in sand; pictures from old *Life* magazines. The things he knew, the things that I attributed to him awed me.

Sergeant Fowler ripped sheets and blankets from one of the beds and began to remake it. “Hospital corners. Hospital corners, see.” When he was finished he took a quarter out of his pocket, threw it down on the khaki blanket. It bounced three or four feet up into his hand. “If you can’t make a quarter do that on inspection you will be cleaning a lot of sump pits.” Morty Zucker raised his hand, “Sir, what’s a sump pit?”

“First of all I ain’t a Sir, the queen has not yet seen fit to give me a knighthood, it’s sergeant to you, second,” and he took Morty to the barrack’s door and pointed to a barrack across the way. “See that, that’s your mess hall. Get over there and ask the first man with stripes that you see what a sump pit is. Get your ass over there.” Morty went. “OK. You are all here to learn. Your pal is beginning his lessons. You all are here to learn and you better goddam learn. Get your minds set. You are all going to Korea, ‘Frozen Chosen.’ Listen to what we tell you. Listen, listen, listen. If you don’t you are going to get killed. You are going to die. The company commander’s name is Captain Bitzer. I served with him in doubleyou, doubleyou two. He’s a good man. On your first payday he will call a meeting of the company outside his office. There he will give you a talk about the importance of charity. His special charity is the Salvation Army, and he will expect you to come up with some dough for the charity. Don’t come to me later and tell me I didn’t warn you. The Captain is going to ask somebody who can type if you want to be company clerk. Who here can type?” Just about everybody raised their hand. “Anybody who volunteers is going to get killed. Anybody who volunteers is going to die in the snow in fucking Korea. Anybody who is company clerk will miss this great training you will be getting at this fucking university. Anybody who sits and types will not know what to do if he sees millions of hordes of screaming Chinese coming at him. What do you do when you see millions of hordes of Chinese coming

at you?" Nobody raised their hand. Sergeant Walker looked around. "Nobody? All you typists don't know? Well that's what we're here for. Teach you. You are Charlie Company, third platoon. Charlie Company third platoon is the heavy weapons platoon." Walker looked around again. "Nobody asking what's a heavy weapons platoon?" Walker smiled. "You are the smartest group I've had here in a good while. You guys have learned the first rule of this goddam army. Do not volunteer. I'll tell you, anybody volunteered would now be hauling an 81 millimeter mortar base plate around these barracks. Well, you'll all be hauling it anyway in a while. Mess is at 17:30, reveille at Oh six hundred. Today will have been your easiest day at Indiantown Gap. You will be issued weapons tomorrow."

At about eleven that night Zucker came in from the mess hall. He spent most of the rest of the night throwing up in the john. Two days later Zucker became the company clerk. How he did that I never found out.

The next day was not so very hard either. We were issued equipment, "the rifle is your very best friend. Take care of it." There were hours of filling out forms, lectures on General Orders, lectures on the uniform code of military justice; the signing of loyalty oaths. It was day three when I learned about the base plate of the 81 mm. mortar. It is extremely fucking heavy. What did they know about me that I should be assigned to haul this awkwardly shaped, murderously heavy piece of steel. I was a college graduate.

A four man team was assigned to "serve" the 81 mm. mortar. One "served" to haul the base plate, one "served" to haul the cannon, one "served" to haul the tripod. The fourth man was the mortar "captain" and he also "served" to level the machine and set the elevation. The "captain" carried nothing. The "captain" who "served" twiddled with a couple of knobs so that the proper coordinates were "fed" into the thing so that when the rounds were "fed" into the pipe they would not fall short and kill people on our side of the line rather than kill people, the enemy, on the other side of the line.

“The 81 millimeter mortar is a smooth-bore, muzzle-loaded, high angle fire weapon. The 81 uses four types of ammunition, high explosive, phosphorus, illumination and practice. The ordnance weighs nine pounds, the cannon weighs 35 pounds. The tripod weighs 27 pounds. The base plate weighs 29 pounds. The maximum range of the ordnance is 300 yards - the length of three football fields. You point the barrel, set the elevation, remove the safety, drop it and get your head out of the way. The entire operation will take fifteen seconds.”

In the sixteen weeks at Indiantown Gap we did not fire the weapon once. We just carried it around all the time. To my 29 pounds was added the normal backpack that usually came to near 50 pounds. The only time the weapon was ever fired was when the instructors demonstrated. We never, in our whole 16 weeks at Indiantown Gap, “fed” a live or even a dummy round of ammunition into the pipe. John Harmon was slight and small, he got to carry the cannon. Zachary Marantis who was six-two, lifted weights in high school, became the captain of the mortar crew.

In the cold, at Indiantown Gap, when not hauling my base plate, all of us, spent many hours of the day lying prone in icy mud or crawling around in it. Lying prone refers to the times the platoon spent either at target practice, or crawling on our bellies while live rounds from 30mm. machine guns were fired over our heads. Target practice was at either fast targets or pop-up targets, and we practiced from the kneeling as well as the standing position. There was always a great deal of discussion in the evening, in the barracks, as to why we began our shooting in the prone position rather than standing or kneeling and it was the almost unanimous opinion that neither standing nor kneeling would get us into the cold mud fast enough. And of course to stand while machine guns were fired at us would have been silly.

What was not silly was the earnestness with which our training cadre took their tasks. Their constant, solemn admonition to us was “do it right or you will die.” Several weeks into basic, at the

firing range and shooting from the prone position, a young first Lieutenant, we did not know his name, hardly older than most of us draftees, walked up and down in back of us. "Get your asses down. Get your asses down. Anything sticks up, they will see it. Get down, get down in the mud. If you don't you're gonna die, you're gonna die." He stood right in back of me and kept repeating "you're gonna die," over and over again. I needed a new clip and turned around. The Lieutenant was crying. Everybody on the line stopped shooting, turned to look at the lieutenant. A non-com walked over to him and led him off, then someone behind us called out, "resume firing."

Chapter 41

Every day, either at mid-day or in the evening, when we returned to the barracks, there was a race to the one radio we were allowed. Whoever reached the radio first turned the dial to his favorite station. In this part of mountainous eastern Pennsylvania our radio drew in a lot of stations and all of them played music that I detested, and knew as hillbilly. The one other station was WQXR from New York; the station that played classical music, the music that I was used to from home; the music that announced a life of reason, regularity, and culture. I knew that the radio could play QXR because in the first week of our training I was a barrack guard. (Each day, one member of the platoon remained behind from the day's training to guard the barracks.) I participated in the daily race for the radio dial, but I never won. I liked jazz, there was a lot of pop that was tolerable, but I hated hillbilly. As the days went on the race became nasty. There were pushes from the side, a group of boys would simply stand in front of me and not move; I was frequently tripped, but I persisted. It seemed as if all my anger and hostility at the regimentation, the constant drill, the foul base plate, the repeated warnings about death became

focused upon changing that dial, just once. The last time I was pushed in the side I grabbed the ridge-runner nearest me. We wrestled on the ground. "Fight, fight," was the scream from several dozen. We rolled on the ground, no one landed a punch. I was bitten on the shoulder, and my head butt on his brow drew blood. At the sight of blood, Zach Marantis and several others pulled us apart.

Later, I think it was when we were both on KP, scrubbing pots, John Harmon said to me,

"You're going to get yourself killed."

"That's what everybody around here says all the time."

"Long before you get to Korea."

"How? Killed."

"You don't know that they've got guns and live ammo in this place?"

"You're serious?"

"Yes, I'm serious. You wouldn't be the first Jew these Yahoos got."

"There were others?"

"Don't be funny. I've been dealing with these people all my life, they're even angrier than you are. They're the same as blacks, except they don't know it. They're as angry as black folk. One thing, maybe the only thing that keeps them in place is when they're told blacks are lower than them. They hear that so they can be screwed with the prices they get on their farms, screwed out of wages in mines and factories, shot or beat up if they want unions, same as black folk. If you explain things right, they are the salt of the earth."

"Salt?"

"Don't be funny. My folks were organizers with the Wobblies; you know about them?" I nodded, "majored in American History. Black and white unite and fight."

“No,” John laughed “ that came later, but you got to know when not to fight. You got to know when to relax, and you really have got to relax. Think what you want, but keep it to yourself. If it gets too much, and sometimes I know it gets too much, talk to me.” John smiled, looked around, “but don’t let them hear you say that.”

“What?”

“You know. Black and white.”

We were riding in a car. It was the end of our first month and our first weekend pass. Morty Zucker, somehow, had a car garaged in a town near the camp, and for a share of the gas money he took Zach, John and me back to New York City. Driving away from camp felt very liberating. “Ta, ta, ta, taaahhh.” I slapped my belly to the rhythm of the opening notes of Beethoven’s fifth. “Liberation. V for Victory.” I slapped victory on the seat, window, John’s head. “I’m going to every concert I can afford, I’m going to stay home and run QXR loud. I’m going to wash that corn-pone music, that corn-pone twang out of my ears. Out of my brain.”

“I once got beat up in college, in a bar, in Philadelphia, because I said, maybe a bit loud for somebody my size and considering where I was, that one of the sources of country music was in the black people’s blues,” said John.

“Am I offending you?”

“No, you’re a snob. A white snob.”

“Why white?”

“In distinction from a black snob, which is what I am and have got to get over.”

“I don’t understand that, but OK.”

“What you have to understand is that Tex Ritter and Charley Pride, all those great Kentucky fiddlers are great. Maybe not Shakespeare...”

“Beethoven.”

“Maybe not Shakespeare, but their language and even those tunes, mostly, are from that time. Seventeenth, eighteenth century people living in those hills. You know, ‘Black, black, black, is the color of my true love’s hair?’ Mix that with what they heard from the colored churches, the shivarees, and you can get ‘Your Cheating Heart,’ or any one of a hundred others. Its poor people’s music. It’s great.”

“Oh, come on...”

“Zucker, turn on the radio.”

For the rest of the two hour trip John made us, me, listen to country music. I listened because I liked John. I still didn’t care for it then, but John started something for me. And I began to relax. John was right. To have kept the contest up was stupid. There would have come some night on a bivouac when some Sterno can would have been kicked over and I would really get hurt. I decided that John kept me from a big injury. But I had already decided to like the “ridge runners.” It took me a while but I became impressed by the very long time they took to clean their rifles, sitting on their bunks for long hours, swabbing the barrel; cleaning it. I became impressed by the long time they took cleaning and shining their boots; spit shining their shoes till they were bright cordovan mirrors. The boy next to me was from somewhere beyond Beckley; he and John had struck up a friendship. I told him that he really had a great shine on the boot. He looked away and then at me. His lips didn’t move but I knew that silently he was saying, ‘asshole.’ Then he said, and there might have been contempt in his voice, “You don’t get bored, do you?” I knew I deserved it, and from then on I began to spit shine my boots for long hours. I liked doing it.

On the trip back, somewhere, soon after crossing the Delaware, Morty asked John if those three guys in civilian clothes had ever talked to him.

“Yeah. They asked me not to talk about it,” was all he said.

Chapter 42

Every few weeks I would receive a package from home, whose contents were always the same: two cans of liver paté, a package of pumpernickel, a jar of strawberry preserves, and a can of chocolate covered almonds. The package came from Oma. There was, usually, a brief note in the package, to the effect: "I always sent my brothers this when they were soldiers in the first world war. They liked it. I hope you like it too. Your Oma."

Fowler dumped the package on my cot, and with it, always, came the same admonition: "Anybody gets a package in this platoon you share it with the guys." Morty Zucker thought that, on those occasions, "he sounds like a goddam camp counselor." I sat on my cot, the radio on, tolerating though not yet reconciled to a group's loud nasal drone threaded through by a banshee violin and a constant beat from a banjo. I undid my package. I called out, "anybody want some goose liver paté."

"Fuckin' what?"

John Harmon called out, "Fucking paté. Its French. They force feed geese. Stuff corn down their gullets. Enlarges their livers. It's great."

"No fuckin' way. French goose shit."

I thanked John. I would have hated to part with any of my paté. So we partied, John, Zachary, Morty and I. Paté on pumpernickel with the jam on pumpernickel for desert all washed down with cold 7Up. It was a feast.

* * *

We began “field exercises.” That meant lugging our mortar some five miles or so into a snow white no place, then pitching pup tents, putting ponchos on the ground so we might sleep dry. Lighting up cans of Sterno in the tent to provide some warmth was no help, but we did it anyway. We still froze in our sleeping bags. Sometime in the middle of the night John, who was my tent mate, began moaning. In the morning he was burning with fever. I found Fowler, who came to look. “Fuck, he’s the fourth one. Ain’t no doctor, but that’s pneumonia. Fowler called for a truck that got John to a camp dispensary.

“Buddy’s lucky. Ain’t crossin’ the ocean with you fellas. Four weeks in a hospital gets him to the next cycle. Oh, well, be spring by then.”

On our return from the field I asked Fowler about John.

“Like I said, pneumonia.” Soon after, I went to company HQ to ask for permission to visit John in the base hospital. Zucker said that no one could see him yet, but I should get me to the next Friday evening service.

Friday evenings was the time for cleaning the barracks. It was a wet and sloppy business; a pain; especially if one was detailed to clean the latrine. And though Jewish boys were excused from work on Friday evenings, so they could attend religious services, I had, early on, after hearing nasty remarks about Jews ‘cutting out’ when there was work to be done, decided not to go to Friday evening services. Zucker knew of my practice, so I was surprised at his request. I went and I waited. After the service, while munching on kosher cookies and drinking soda, Zucker came to me, “do you remember me mentioning the three guys that asked about John?”

“When?”

“In the car back from the city.”

“No.”

“Did John talk to you about them?”

"No. They asked him not to talk about it."

"Asshole. So you remember."

"Yes, but John never said a thing to me."

"The three guys were F.B.I. or army intelligence or something."

"I don't understand. What did they want from John and why are you telling me?"

"You're his friend."

"So?"

"John didn't sign the loyalty oath."

"So?"

"They asked me if I knew he was a communist. I said I never had any conversation with him about politics. Then they said who were his friends and I said everybody, he seemed to be a nice guy. Did anybody come to see you?"

"No." Evidently Morty saw a question on my face. He smiled.

"You helped me out in the history regents and with Brolles in Chem."

"Your Dad was in the furriers union."

"Peculiar times. Doctor Brolles called you Rudolph Hess and you walked out."

"McCarthy times.....When do you think we can visit him in the hospital?"

"I'll see if I can find out."

It was a matter of maybe a week before I received permission to see John. When I found John he was walking around the hospital hall. He had pajamas on. I gave him one of my cans of goose liver paté and walked with him.

"You seem a lot better than on bivouac."

“I’ll be here another week, but I won’t be coming back to the company. Little gray John is very blue. They want to discharge me.”

“Medical discharge? You will be the envy of everybody in the platoon.”

“ Uh, uh. Nothing medical. I think it’s legal. I’m getting a lawyer.”

“Morty said...”

“It’s not only the loyalty oath. They want me to talk to them about my parents.”

“What about them?”

“What have their activities been. Are they communists? Am I a Communist? Are they anti-American. And I said I would have nothing to say about my parents and they told me that if I didn’t talk to them I’d get a bad conduct discharge. So I called a lawyer.”

“What did he say?”

“Haven’t heard from him yet. I’m going to be a lawyer, but with a bad discharge, anything less than honorable, no law school will take me. Let’s sit down.”

We sat on a bench. John seemed resigned. I could do nothing. I was probably afraid.

Chapter 43

I think fear pervaded our training. Our cadre had all been to Korea and if they cried or screamed at us, it was out of fear. In the mess hall our quartermaster sergeant sat at an empty table, hunched over, reading the New York Times. Suddenly he crumpled the paper, kicked the table and walked out. Fowler said, “lost another buddy. Back off him. Don’t get near.”

I began basic just as the bloody fighting over “Triangle Hill” ended. Then, the winter’s cold seemed to inhibit fighting, but from what our cadre kept telling us, “what the cold don’t kill snipers

can.” Toward the end of basic, fighting erupted at ‘Little Gibraltar’ and ‘Old Baldy’. Spring offensives had begun. We all heard and read, but made no sign that we had heard or read. No one wanted to go but we all knew that we were slated to go into the Korean meat grinder.

The snows turned to mud, and we marched through the mud. Earlier, snow on the hills both near and far away often presented a sweet Christmas-card vista. Lung-ratching as these walks often were, it was almost bearable to march through Hallmark country. Now, with the snow gone from the hills, the raw work of winter’s rust stared us in the face. Everything was brown. It was all brown, a wide screen of brown, the leafless trees on the hills were brown. The green of the occasional pine only emphasized the brown. And now, each succeeding week, the marches got longer. Fowler’s “close it up, close it up,” met me in my sleep. A truck followed the marches and picked up any soldier who needed to fall out. An ambulance followed the truck. The word was that if you did fall out, it was KP for the rest of your Basic Training. Though I was now in much better shape tromping through Pennsylvania hills than when I was walking around Washington Heights, all too often the only way getting through the slog was to tell myself that if I get to that next tree, if I get to that next stand of pines, if I can make it to the next group of boulders, I’ll be all right. “Close it up, close it up.” There were others from the long line ahead of me who stood at the side of the road holding their sides, leaning against a tree or sitting on their backpack, but I was still marching. Every time we passed one of the out-fallen, the pain visible in their very posture, Fowler would point at them, not saying anything just pointing his long accusing hand at their wind-sucking mouths, at their blanched faces. How often I wanted, even needed to join them. But I never did.

The big one, the big field march had been talked about for days, the long, the very long march to a very distant bivouac area, our final test. Fowler clapped his cold hands together and screamed, “this’ll tell you if you’re fit to fire an’ fight in frozen Chosen. Joe Stalin died today. Shut up and close it

up. Nobody drops out. You all are going west with the sun.” Didn’t ‘going west’ mean death? And what did he mean, by announcing Stalin’s death and coupling it with going west? We knew that negotiations were going on to end the war and we also knew that some of the very worst fighting in all the years of the war was going on right now while we were preparing for this last ordeal. So why was he so up-beat? And didn’t he leave out the fact that while we were going west we were also going to go up-hill, most of the time?

The march began in a cold rain; it was to go twelve, maybe fifteen miles; I don’t remember; but it could have been twenty. Fowler lined us up; I stood under the eave of our barrack, and the early rain slid down from the roof and over me. I remember pulling boots out of half a foot of mud making a sucking sound. The march began, and after half an hour the sucking breath met the sound of the sucking mud. The straps of the backpack cut into my shoulders, the base plate bouncing against my shins ground away at old scabs; and it was uphill. Now I knew why they called infantrymen grunts. Fowler walked by, his voice low, “gettin’ a break soon. Thirty degree hill. But then it goes up again. You’re doin’ good. Doin’ good. Good enough to join the best we got on Pork Chop Hill.”

Some two hundred men of Charlie Company walked up hill in single file. I was somewhere near the rear. Most of the up-hill was on a narrow trail that ran through a forest of tall pines. When the pine branches arched over us the rain slackened, but then the pines parted again. About every hour there was the cry, “Fall out.” Then the column halted and we did, many of us, literally fall down to rest inside the margin of the pine forest, where the rusty ground of old needles was soft and the rain fell elsewhere. I fell down once but no more because it was so difficult to get up again. But lying down on the soft forest ground I saw mushrooms, stick-like and yellow chanterelles, gray-capped mushrooms and light brown ones capped like those I picked with my Oma in Germany, in the woods beyond our meadow. Once we resumed our trek Fowler would start, “OK boys sing out, and step out ‘There was a girl lived up on a

hill...” For minutes we all marched to Fowler’s call and our response, but then the muddy ground began to prohibit the rhythm of the march and with our broken steps the singing began to break as well.

We emerged from the narrow confines of the pine forest; as we did the rain ended and our mountain climb began to straighten out. When we came to level ground we saw that we were on a high and narrow ridge, the view into a deep valley. Now we could unbend, look about. The ground fell away on both sides, and on one side, the left, in the far distance below, we could see, as from an airplanes’ height, the checkered farmers’ fields in many shades of brown and tan. On the other side were the Allegheny Mountains, whose repeated hump-backs rose and fell, and from our height, seemed to bound like frozen sheep towards the east. Windswept, the clouds broke up quickly; there was blue in the sky. On the pine-green flanks of the mountain nearest us, wispy threads of clouds, long thin tendrils, drifted downward into the valley between us.

The ridge top broadened out, and banks of puffy cumulus sailed in the blue sky. The sun lowered. On our high ridge, in the far distance one could see a stand of pines, behind which one could see, yellow and orange scraps of the lowering sun. Our trail bent around the stand of pines and when I could finally see around the bend it seemed as if, in the far distance, our ridge suddenly ended, there must have been, or so it seemed, a sheer drop down. At that end, towards that drop toward which we seemed to be marching, hung large intertwined balls of clouds that seemed very slowly, to rise from below our height. They scrolled upward, and as they did, pink chromatics, every hue of pink and red, modulated by the white of the rising clouds, appeared on the rising face of this cloud curtain.

As I marched toward this spectacular sunset I began to be enveloped in a great joy. Now there was no weight on my back, nor was it any effort to move forward. There was a show in front of me, as if put on for me and me only. But it was not a show, it felt like a benison, a birth, a blessing, not spoken, but demonstrated.

Two days later we received our orders. Everyone in our company was detailed to the east, to Korea, except for five Chinese kids and myself, who received orders for Germany.

Chapter 44

I was given a ten day leave before having to report to Fort Dix for my shipment to Germany. Bus, subway, then walking up 160th Street in my uniform. The sidewalks, houses, stoops, manhole covers that I had known for over a decade suddenly felt strange; felt distant. I was home but not home. The gray fronts of the apartment buildings seemed to say, “you don’t live here anymore. Do you?” It said, “You are released. It said you’ve grown up.” But Mom and Oma hugged me around the neck, Karl and Peter punched my shoulder, Frankie wanted to try on my Eisenhower jacket. Pop stood back, red-faced, smiling, proud of his son in uniform. It was a Friday afternoon, Mom said, “Go with Pappa to synagogue tonight.” Then quickly added, “you don’t have to go in the morning. In the morning you can sleep late. He would like that very much.”

We walked to synagogue. “My son defending his country. Very nice.” Pop kept on smiling, “You know, when you get to Germany, maybe you can go to Ruppichteroth.”

“Sure,” I said, “If I can, I will. And I’ll wear the uniform, walk all the streets with my uniform when I get there.”

When we got home from *Shul*, there was the white table cloth and the candles; first came the chicken soup, then potato *shalet* and roast chicken, wine cream for dessert, and all through the meal I felt like a guest. All that weekend, I slept.

There were photographs to be taken. “Out, out,” said my mother, “out on the street. The light is better; one with each, one with each.”

At the end of the leave Pop insisted that he would drive me back to Fort Dix. Quietly, when she had me alone, Mom thought, “maybe, could I maybe take the bus. It’s a long ride there and then back. Right now Papa is a little bit nervous.”

“Nervous? About what?”

“I really shouldn’t say. I don’t know. But I think it’s maybe about you going. Going back. The Russians. Oh, I don’t know.”

It had never been Mom’s manner, in the past, to sound confused. I suggested to Pop that maybe Mom should drive to the base, he could drive back. “No.” There were heavy exclamation marks after the “No.” I didn’t argue. The evening before leaving there were calls from Uncle Theo and Aunt Irma, each brief and each ending with, “Be careful.” Oma loaded me up with several cans of paté, loaded me up with hugs and an embarrassed, “I know you like it.” In the morning there were punches to the shoulder from the brothers, and we were off. About half way to Fort Dix, Dad pulled into a service station. In a peculiar voice he said, “Somebody else has to drive, I have something in my eyes.” As Dad rounded the front of the car I saw him wiping his eyes with a handkerchief. Mom took the wheel. When Dad sat down beside her, Mom stroked the back of his head. Mom looked back at me, her lips pressed together. We drove off. I was reminded of how dumb I had been. How for so many years my cosmos, as regarded my father, had been all ego.

Chapter 45

On just about the last day at Indiantown Gap, John Harmon told me, “Scuttlebut. I heard that when you get on your ship, go to the Chaplain, tell him you want to be on the ship’s paper; you’ll get the run of the boat. No sweating with the grunts down below all day.”

“How do you know this.”

“Your friend, this un-American commie pinko, picked it up in the officer’s mess, where I am now employed as cook.”

Once on the ship, I did as John suggested. The chaplain said that, “Yes, we used to have a paper but not this trip, but here. Here, you seem like a nice guy.” He handed me an armband that said, something about journalism. Then the Chaplain added, “but you’ll have to help the chaplain’s assistant set up for Passover the next few days.” How he knew I was Jewish I will never know.

I was hanging over the ship’s railing. The spume from heavy, North Atlantic waves reached the high deck, salt water cooled my face. I had just finished throwing up when somebody tapped me on the shoulder. He was very tall, blond, and blue eyed. His armband read “Chaplain’s Assistant.” “You’re Hess? I’m Steve Burns.” I was feeling a bit better after my exchange with the ocean, “Funny, you don’t look Jewish.”

“Just camouflage for life in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and it used to be Bernstein. Come on, I’ll get you something for your stomach”

“Please, no gefilte fish right now.”

“What makes you think...”

“All the chaplain at the Gap ever handed out was gefilte fish and Tam-Tam crackers.”

We were now inside a huge club like room. Small tables with wire backed chairs were scattered about the room. A dark, wine colored carpet covered the floor. On either side, port and starboard, a vast array of windows gave views onto the gray ocean that churned up the waves that made me feel we were

piggy back on a reeling drunk. And even here, in this hall, the ship's rushing through the sea provided background noise. Against one wall there was a piano and someone was playing. The notes were quiet. They wrapped themselves around the sea's noise and became part of the background. Against another wall there was something that looked like a bar. I was led toward the bar.

"This is no bar," said, Steve Burns. "You may never, ever, say that this is a bar. This is a place where officers may congregate and recreate, but never refer to it as a bar. And as befits an ocean liner this place is called a salon. This is not a bar." I did not argue. At the bar Steve said to the guy behind the bar, "Give this guy some soda." The guy behind the bar shook his head, but when Steve pointed to my armband the guy reached underneath the bar and pulled out a bottle of soda and a glass. The soda settled my stomach.

In the darkest part of the Salon, with its keyboard close to the wall, sat a baby grand, next to the piano, sitting on the floor was a small dark boy who from time to time looked up from the book he was reading to the player I could not see. I went over and stood behind the boy. Playing the piano was a very beautiful African-American woman. I had seen her once before when, shortly after graduating CCNY, a bunch of us, celebrating our graduation, splurged, and went to Café Society, downtown in the village. The tune was Gershwin, *Soon*. Slow, drawn-out, shaped and reshaped, modulating from a blues to pop to a pathetic torch song and each time it returned it was a different blues, different pop, and a different torch, and throughout there were interpolations of other Gershwin but with so subtle and shimmering changes that only later, trying to replay them in my head, did I then, even vaguely, understand what she was doing. I stood there a good while before she looked up from the keyboard and saw me.

"I don't take requests. And please be careful. That's my son."

I stepped back, away from the boy. "Sorry. I saw you at Café Society last year."

She smiled, “You saw me? I am wonderfully flattered to have a fan on this ship. Then OK. I’ll take a request.”

“More blues.”

“You want blues?”

I nodded. She turned back to the piano and began to play, but it wasn’t blues, it was Chopin, it was the *Barcarolle*. I knew the piece. Pop played his Chopin record often. I heard him say to Rabbi Lieber once, after synagogue, with great relish, “I have Rubinstein in my house.” With the *Barcarolle*, Pop would say, “You see the dancer?” And if I paid attention I would see the dancer, but this time I heard it all new. I heard the waves; I heard memory and I heard loss. I heard blues. I heard a piano being played every bit as fine as Rubinstein ever played. I clapped when it ended, and when it ended she started in on *Tico Tico*. I shook my head.

“Don’t care for my bread and butter?” she laughed. “OK. I know. Some more blues.” With her hands folded over the keys she drew a long breath and began to play. Very low and slow, it was the Chopin *Berceuse*. I wanted to cry. The whole time I stood there I wanted to cry, but of course I couldn’t. I saw Ruppichteroth. The cobblestones were shiny. A late sun turned the white walls of houses to orange. A knot began to form in my stomach. And I saw train tracks; swooping electric lines that led us from Germany to Holland.

She stopped, looked up at me, “See, Chopin knew the blues.” I quickly said “Yes. Thanks,” and almost stumbling over the boy I ran out to the ship’s railing again, I didn’t want to hear any more blues.

Chapter 46

A few days later, early in the day, a brief blare over the ship’s PA “Anyone wishing to celebrate the Passover can show up on the top deck salon at 19 hours sharp.” The salon was empty except for the

grand piano and about fifteen, maybe twenty uniforms standing about a row of folding tables in the center of the room. It was *Erev Pesach*, the night for the Seder, and the North Atlantic was not happy; hard waves slapped the sides the ship, and the ship-bounced spray reached our high deck and striped the glass walls of the salon. With each bounce the strings of the piano sounded an eerie discordant whisper.

“Where’s the rabbi?” Someone called out.

“The ocean’s got something against Jews?”

“Please, no brisket tonight. With this, who can hold it down?”

Burns stumbled through a door carrying a heavy carton. Haggadahs tumbled down from the top of the carton. “Please, everyone, pick them up. Take one and lets all sit.” He put his burden down, and went over to the bar. We all sat, and he came back with a stack of little plastic thimbles and a bottle of wine. “Our wine glasses.” The thimbles were distributed. Burns screwed off the top of the wine bottle, “Let’s see if we can make it reach four glasses for everybody.” I noticed that the Haggadahs were all blue-covered and, a streamer, “Compliments of Maxwell House,” was printed along the bottom of the booklet. I began to feel at home.

Someone began to read, “And it was evening and it was morning; the sixth day.” I sat down next to an officer, surprised at the silver leaf on his shoulder. There was a cavalry patch on his shoulder. Burns ripped open a carton, pulled out jars of gefilte fish and distributed them around the table. He smiled.

“Please don’t open them till we get to eating. These you can eat,” and he set out boxes of Tam Tam crackers. “They’re going to have to do for matzohs.”

The Colonel smiled at me, “Just about eight years ago I was at Mauthausen,” he shook his head, clamped his lips together, and almost to himself, as if he was seeing something, “son of a bitch. Son of a bitch. Ironic isn’t it?”

“What? Sir.”

“ Now I’m going back to save the bastards from Uncle Joe, ironic, isn’t it? Where are you from?” I told him, New York City. I wanted to tell him that I was born in Germany, but I couldn’t. Yet as the ship steamed on and as the story of the escape from Egypt was being retold, I felt myself more and ever more as having come from Ruppichteroth, the place I had escaped from, and the country to which I was returning. We were two days out of Bremerhaven.

“Yes sir. Hell of an Irony.” The telling of the Jew’s liberation from Egypt went on.

* * *

Obviously, nowhere in the Haggadah was there any reference to a place, any place in Egypt, some chunk of ground, that some slave might have cared about, never mind loved. That’s not what the Haggadah story was about, and there wasn’t any anger in it either. There was the multiplication of the plagues visited on the Egyptians and the gusto with which they were multiplied, how the Rabbis piled it on from the bible’s 10 plagues to 50 plagues in Egypt to 250 plagues in the Red Sea. I always smiled, hearing the story told, when I would imagine some small group, in the middle ages, and later still, having, maybe, just recently escaped murder and praying in exile, praying in their pointed caps, praying with the yellow label stitched on their coats, praying in their “*Judengasse*,” how they must have relished the piling on of plagues. And I thought of how they might have told the story in *Mauthausen*.

Remembering, I thought I smiled and then couldn’t smile. I remember that I wanted to cry. I wanted to cry when I heard all those songs after the meal of Tam Tams and gefilte fish; all those songs of praise, where His mercy endures forever; the thanks for all the miracles; the miracles in the day and the miracles at midnight. That evening, they all sounded, like blues, like loss, like anger.

The *Buckner* was in the English Channel, and I was leaning over the railing. The sea was calmer now, and a sun was making sparkling splinters on the low wave tops. I remembered making Peter walk the top of the rail on the *Caribia*.

Chapter 47

“What the hell you doing up here?” Brown faced and gray headed, he was a master sergeant with more stripes on his sleeve than I had ever seen before. I quickly lifted up my arm to let him see that I was a member of the press. Brown faced, gray headed master sergeants had a way of intimidating PFC’s. But then he answered very gently, “Oh. OK. Didn’t see that. Wanna write about me?” I explained the dormant nature of the ship’s paper. He shook his head, smiled, “That’s OK. That’s OK,” and leaned out over the railing. We both leaned out; leaned out for a long while. “That’s Cherbourg out there. You can’t see it, but that’s Cherbourg out there.”

“That’s the tip of Normandy,” I said.

“You know about Normandy?” He seemed surprised.

“June 6, 1944. Everybody knows about that.” I was about to tell him my Bar Mitzvah was two days before, but I stopped myself.

“You be damned surprised about how many don’t know. Goddamn shame.”

“I followed the war on a map. I followed the whole hedgerow campaign.”

“You were just a kid.”

“I was thirteen in ‘44.”

“I was twenty-six in ‘44” He said it low, as if talking to himself. “Had a bazooka team in the hedgerows.”

“You took out tanks with bazookas.” He didn’t answer, just looked out towards where he had indicated Cherbourg. I looked at him with awe. The hedgerow campaign had been fierce. I had read of the bazookas standing up against German Tiger tanks. You had one shot, and if you missed with that shot you were dead.

“Big cemetery out there. First leave I get, gonna look up some old buddies.”

I was about to say, “Lots of cemeteries out there,” when he turned and left me alone leaning over the rail.

I was at the rail a lot that day and night looking for lights, looking for cities, looking for some of those sounds I loved so many years ago; trying for Le Havre and Dieppe, trying for Boulogne and Calais, for Dunkirk and Ostende; trying to follow the route back that I had once taken out, but the more I looked the sadder I became, thinking of all those cemeteries out there, beyond the water.

In the morning I was at the rail again. The day was glorious; the sky was washed to a light blue, and a fresh breeze washed my face, the clouds were small, very white, and happy. I was not happy. I wanted to smell cordite, and no happy breeze. Burns appeared at my side. Couldn’t they all leave me alone?

“That’s Heligoland island over there.”

“I know. The Brits blew half their island to hell last year.”

“Lots of bombers went down because of that place.”

“One time, when I was a kid, my class was invited someplace in town where they showed movies. Just as we entered the hall each of us was handed a cup of soup. We were told that the soup was a gift from our ‘Führer.’ Somebody stopped me from going in. Somebody said, “this Jew?” Somebody nodded and this Jew was handed a cup of soup. Inside the hall we saw a documentary on Heligoland. The island had been changed from whatever it had been into a resort for nice blond boys and girls to do

all kinds of calisthenics on a beach. All their nice holidays were also a gift from their 'Füerer.' The Brits should have blown the whole place up."

"You're German? One of those refugees?"

"I'm one of those. Yeah, one of those Reffs. As to German? Yes. No. What the hell do I know?"

There must have been something peculiar in my voice, some kind of resentment, some kind of anger. Burns looked at me, turned, and left me alone at the rail. He came back, leaned over the railing next to me.

"You know, we Jews have a lot of rituals to help us get over our mourning, to get over our losses."

"So?"

He shrugged.

"How do I say Kaddish for...Oh, hell." I turned away, almost ran to the other side of the ship. What the fuck did he know? He was just a Chaplain's assistant.

Chapter 48

The ship turned into the Weser estuary, and now there were coasts on both sides of the ship. As we neared Bremerhaven, the two coasts narrowed, like pliers, and I could see, on one shore, great cranes waving their giant arms, dropping loads into the bottoms of anchored freighters. Dangling at the end of these great arms were great wooden rectangles that looked from my distance, like the 'lifts', the cargo boxes in which some of those leaving Germany, then, had packed all that still belonged to them. Were there still any who, one way or another, hadn't left?

On the other shore I could see rows of houses, spanking white, their red roof tiles seeming to shine and smile under the happy blue sky and the happy clouds. There were windows in the houses that

reflected the blue of the sky. There were roads on which cars moved, there were green gardens around the houses, and green trees. And the cars kept moving on the roads, under the sky and clouds as if nothing had ever happened. How could this place still exist? How come there was still this firm earth surrounding the Weser estuary. How come there was still a Weser estuary? They blew up half of Heligoland, why not all of it, why not all of the mainland too?

The busy cranes, the shining houses, the sky and clouds were mocking me. Didn't they know what had happened? Didn't they know about the lost places, the places left behind, the loved places; the lost people, the loved people? Why did any of this damn place still exist?

Over the ship's loudspeakers came the order that the uniform of the day were fatigues, that we were to gather our duffle bags, that we were to be prepared, shortly, to debark and then to board a train for *Pirmasens*; the trip to take about eight hours.

The *Buckner* docked. We stood somewhere in the bowels of the ship. A large black panel in the middle of the *Buckner* opened, two gangways were let down to the dock, and down we tumbled. Across from the ship were huge warehouses, and between the ship and the warehouses were railroad tracks. A long train rested on the tracks; the coaches looked fancy, like Pullman cars. Far ahead smoke rose from an engine I could not see. The engine whistled, and a sharp, knife-shaped-plume rose from lazy train smoke. Several NCO's waved us into the cars, "Let's go. Let's go. Move your ass." A man in a dark uniform, papers under one arm, waved us on as well. He was smiling, waving one arm to make us go faster: "*Schnell, schnell, Kinder. Schneller, Schneller. Müssen fort.*" As I came up to the dark uniformed man, I yelled at him, "*Wo sind die verdammte Lastwagen?*" Where are the damned freight cars? As he turned away from me the smile disappeared.

###

We boarded second-class cars. The cars looked better from the outside than the inside. The seats were covered with a fuzzy green felt. Thousands, maybe many thousands, rubbing against the felt had raised a nap that would never be combed down. The cars' interior was old and neglected. The wooden trim around the ceiling and sides was dull. In places gray and green splotches spread outward onto the dingy white ceilings and walls. I was shocked at the appearance of the interiors. I thought, "They didn't clean these cars very well. How very un-German." Oh, well, they were just for the Americans to use, so who cares how they look? But these cars felt familiar. The green felt seemed familiar. Could we have ridden these same cars to Holland fifteen years ago? No, those cars were bombed to hell during the war. Must have been, should have been. But these cars were so very thirties; so very old. I had a window seat. The train took off. White smoke billowed past the window. I was making a return trip.

For the hundredth time, it seemed, somebody with stripes walked through car and with variations shouted out: "Y'all goin' to Pirmasens. Pirmasens. Germany. Dutchland!!! Dutchland!!! You are in Dutchland. Dutchland's now our ally. Don't want any you to make any illegal moves against these fine *Freuleins* they got over here, Dutchland's now our allies. You all are replacements and you all are replaceable. Two, three months now y'all won't be wearin' no class A's outside your base, goin' drinkin' that fine Loewenbrau beer. Beer's the best thing they got over here. Except maybe Jaegermeister. Don't do no shots with it, except maybe if you get a letter you're wife is leavin'. Yeah. Jaegermeister. Know that these Germans are sensitive and don't want nobody to remind them of what happened. Anybody here know what happened? Didn't think so. But you guys goin' to Pirmasens. From there you will be sent to some place else in Dutchland. Maybe Division, maybe someplace else. You all are replacements. From division you will be sent to some rifle company guarding the borders of freedom, unless you got some kind of MOS where you don't never have to clean no rifle. Don't think none of you guys got that. It might be a while that you are in Pirmasens; be a while before they decide

what to do with you. You will be bored out of your skulls waiting and there will be no going outside the base for beer or Freuleins, or Jaegermeister. You will keep Pirmasens clean. You will be asked to pick up any cigarette butts on the ground. There will be no cigarette butts on the ground because all the previous replacements will have picked up whatever there was on the ground, but you will do a lot of walking stooped over. You will pick up anything that even looks like a butt even if its bird turd. You are going to *Pirmasens*. It's an eight hour trip. Get yourselves sleep. You will not get much sleep later on 'cause you'll be defending Dutchland, their beer and their Freuleins."

Chapter 49

I was really grateful for these interruptions because they kept reminding me of where I was, rather than being so preoccupied with where, years before, I had been. But where I had been kept rushing through my head. There were all those railroad stations we had passed through in 1939; all those stations with familiar names, from Bremerhaven to Bremen. Growing up, no one ever mentioned Bremen without sarcasm. People from Bremen were snooty. They spoke *hoch Deutsch*. *Hoch Deutsch*, was "high German," was snooty and the only way to speak German. Everybody else, anywhere else in Germany, spoke it wrong. Snooty people were bad people. I knew that. I was given that from the age of three. The fact that my father, mother and grandmother could still summon a resentment toward Bremen and all of north Germany, that whenever Bremen was mentioned in the kitchen of 652 West 160th Street, it made me angry. I once yelled out, "You are not living in Germany any more. Forget Germany!!!" I ran out of the house. That was loud anger. My anger was silent most of the time.

After Bremen the train pushed through the Teutoburger Wald. Passing through Osnabrück I saw a sign, something about the Teutoburger Wald. The subject of the Teutoburger Wald did not come up often in the apartment on 160th Street in Manhattan, but when it did silent anger roiled my gut.

Sometime in Caesar Augustus' reign, Herman, or Arminius (my father called him Herman) thoroughly annihilated three Roman legions led by one Varus. My father could go on for a while, proudly detailing the precise course of the Roman defeat by the Germans, lauding the fight for German independence from Roman subjugation. Then, at the end of the lecture, with a broad grin, he would intone a little jig about "Varus, Varus, Varus, where is your Army." How, how, how could he do that, how could he go on with that grinning recitation of German victory? The Germans were barbarians then; the Germans were barbarians still. Didn't he know? It was the Germans who should have been annihilated; subjugated to Rome till the end of time?

Münster, Hamm, Dortmund, Essen, the train pulled on, the cities lost, the cities behind us. There was a story my grandmother read to me about Münster, Pop had relatives in Hamm, Dortmund, more relatives, by Essen we were in the Ruhr and the Rhineland, my home. We bombed the hell out of the Ruhr. There were the wires, telephone or electric, that rose and fell the whole route of the train, but their gentle bellying, which had been so calming to me on the way out, now only reminded me of the way out. Then there were the small green gardens behind the little red-tiled houses that we passed, where women were puttering with rakes and hoes, where they were kneeling, planting blooms, or ripping up weeds. It was all just like on the way out. How could these women do this? Didn't they know?

Düsseldorf: somebody had an aunt there who ran a store. We bombed the hell out of Düsseldorf. Now we were on the industrial Rhine, not the romantic part. From a distance I could see the spire of the great Cologne cathedral. We drew close. Was the cathedral 13th or 14th century? I had to know, and there was nobody to ask. The train stopped at an isolated siding in the Cologne station. Here we were let out of our cars for a few moments and allowed to walk about. Through a fence and across a narrow street I could see the stony grayness of the cathedral. There were cars on the street, taxis. People walked. Was anybody going to the place where I had seen my first movie? Somebody whistled for a taxi. Was

anybody going to the offices where Mom, half crazed, was trying to find out where Pop had been taken *Krystall nacht*? The cathedral was up close, blocking the sky. I could see an entrance where women, mostly older women holding net shopping bags crossed in and out. The up close cathedral was a taunt. It said, "I've been here all the time, all the time, not you, not you."

The train went on. It rushed through Bonn. Bonn, where Oma and Pop went Fridays to buy groceries for Oma's store. Bonn, where twice, the little train took us to the big train, took us to the way out. And just there, to the east, not very far away, is Siegburg, and the hospital where I was born, and just a bit further, a very short distance further, Ruppichteroth, the place where I had lived. Ruppichteroth, "Ruprecht's clearing in the road." And all along the way there were the rising and falling wires, and cars on the roads, and people walking, and in this spring, people planting their little plots and pulling out weeds.

Now came the romantic part of the Rhine, through the great gorges, past the hillsides where grapes grew, past pinnacles where sat the ruined castles of the robber barons. We stopped briefly in the *Koblenz* station. There had been a cattle market in *Koblenz* where Opa and Pop bought and sold cattle. Like Opa, the market was surely gone. I wanted to see the great fortifications that Pop had often talked about so admiringly, *Ehrenbreitstein* high on its pinnacle guarding *Koblenz* from the French. "*Die Wacht am Rhine*," blared out by the hundred kids marching in their brown uniforms and the hooked cross flags. "The Watch on the Rhine," somebody called it the "Whine on the Rhine", but I don't remember who. I didn't get to see *Ehrenbreitstein*. Now, the more romantic Rhine: *Boppard*, *Oberwesel*, *Bachrach* - Who wrote the Rabbi of *Bachrach*? Was it Heine?

Ich weiss nicht was, soll es bedeuten, Dass ich so traurig bin, Ein Märchen aus uralten Zeiten, Das kommt mir nich aus dem Sinn. 'Don't know what it means that I'm so terribly sad, an ancient tale keeps murmuring about in my head.' Yeah, it was Heine, and stuff was whirring about in my head.

Now *Bingen*, and I don't see that peak sparkling in the evening sun, nor that most beautiful virgin combing her golden tresses and luring the sailors to their deaths. There was no luring. No luring at all. Didn't know why I was so sad. Didn't know that I was so angry. Didn't know that I lost something that I wanted and didn't want. Didn't know why I wanted the whole place to disappear, to sink into the ground, to relieve me from feeling that this was a place that I ever cared about. Didn't know that I still cared about it.

"You have come to *Pirmasens*, Germany," said the sergeant. We were lined up in front of Army bunks in a huge dormitory. "You are lucky that it's not Korea, if you'd had any real luck they'd have sent you to Hawaii. You've come to *Pirmasens* by the grace your Uncle Sam and your MOS," said the sergeant. "You'll be here two, three days an' then off to some division headquarters where they'll send you somewhere else. An' if you stay lucky an' keep your noses clean, you draftees, after eighteen, twenty months, you'll go home with a good conduct medal an' just dose of the clap."

We slept for two days, and then some of us were told we were going to *Göppingen*, Cooke Barracks, the headquarters of the 28th Infantry Division. The 28th, the Pennsylvania Keystone Division. OK. Not bad; but where were their Regiments stationed, their battalions, their heavy weapons platoons. "You'll go where they tell you," we were told.

On a train again. We stopped briefly in *Stuttgart*. Can I get out? Can I get directions to the American consulate from someone, anyone, here, in Stuttgart, where Mom went half crazy in 1938, trying to get papers for America? I couldn't get out. When the train stopped again, the signs said, "*Göppingen*." I had never heard of *Göppingen*. We were loaded onto trucks. I badly wanted see the town through which we were passing, but because of where I sat and the truck's canvas cover I could see nothing.

We jumped out of the trucks, there were maybe a hundred of us. A sergeant waved, "this way." I was amazed: no lining up, no marching, no "hup two, hup, two," just a wave. The sergeant pointed, and we saw a huge sign stuck in the ground and I saw the huge red keystone. I'd seen a lot of that at the Gap, it was the emblem of the Pennsylvania national guard. Then I read, "Welcome to Cooke Barracks - Headquarters of the 28th Infantry Division." The huge red patch afforded a bit of relief. Walking to where the sergeant was leading us provided a few moments to look around. They were nothing like the wooden structures I lived in at the Gap. These were solid houses, some two stories, some with gabled roofs. I heard somebody say, "these guys really built stuff to last." There were roads that curved and were lined with barracks, lined with high-reaching trees, and there were green lawns that stretched out from the houses to the roads' edges. If it weren't for these very long repeated, whitewashed, red-tiled rectangles it might have been an expensive suburban subdivision. We passed Rogers Road, and then walked up tree-lined Terry Allen Avenue.

We were in a theater, facing a white screen. A warrant officer, holding papers, stepped out from a group on one side of the room. He smiled, "you guys are impressed at our little town here, aren't you? The Germans built good. Good for a thousand years, they did. And yeah, we show movies. Got a bowling alley too. We built that. Eight lanes. Library, that's if you read. Got a photo lab, that's because everybody gets here gets themselves a Leica. Got a very nice chapel. Got a very nice nine-hole golf course too. Anybody here play golf? No? Nobody? Good 'cause you got to be here a while before they let you play, and none of you will be staying here. These goodies are all for those assigned to Division Headquarters; that's where you all are now, in three days you'll be going down the road to *Gablingen*, that's the *Gablingen* just outside *Augsburg*, that's the *Augsburg* in Bavaria, Germany. You'll be going to Headquarters, 109th Infantry Regiment. A good outfit; they got a band and all. And from there you'll be assigned further. OK? Can't tell you where they'll assign you down there so don't ask." Then, without

any transition, he began to read from one of the papers he held, things we'd heard repeatedly in basic, but now tailored to where we were.

“You are now in the 28th Infantry Division. The primary mission of the 28th is to close with the enemy by fire and maneuver in order to capture or destroy him, or to repel his assault by fire and close combat. The specific mission of the Division is three-fold. First, to engage in a training program designed to improve its capabilities to fulfill its primary mission. Second, as a part of the North Atlantic Treaty Army, it is to help safeguard the peace and freedom of the people of Western Europe and North America, and, if necessary, to defend that freedom against any aggressor. Third, by demonstrating to the people of Germany the high standard of American moral, cultural and material life, it is to inspire them with confidence in democratic ideals. That last means we don't want to find anybody passed out drunk in the streets of whatever town you're going to be in. The beer here is potent. Do it and the consequences will be potent too. For two cartons of cigarettes you can get laid. We'll call out your names and these guys here will hand you your orders. Be here when the bus for *Gablingen* takes off.”

Orders in hand, we were led to one of the houses, now called '*kasernes*,' for our three-day stay. On entering the building we were simply awed: tiles; tiles for a thousand years; white tiles, floor to ceiling. The hallway floors were tiled, the walls were tiled, the toilets were tiled, floor to ceiling, the shower rooms were tiled floor to ceiling. The ceiling in the hallway was high. From somewhere, the sun was allowed in, but I saw no windows. The ceilings in our new dorms were high, and there was wainscoting half way up the walls. Eight to a dorm, the last one in was in charge. “Make your bunks and keep it spic. We see garbage and we got kitchen sumps need cleaning. Do what you're told. We know your names. Best thing next three days is you sleep. Not going to get much after. No going off base for the time you're here. Enjoy.”

The first day I slept. The second day I got bored sleeping and wandered about the base. There were curving roads; trees and bushes graced the small paths circling about the solid rectangular buildings. I was in suburbia. I saw the huge PX that compared with any food emporium in the US, and where they sold cigarettes for eleven cents a pack. I walked past a theater. A very small wall sign advertised "*The Bad and the Beautiful*." From one building I heard the crash of bowling pins. I went in, and all eight lanes were busy. My wandering stopped at a fence. The suburbs stopped at the fence. Guards patrolled the fence. I stopped and looked at buildings in long decline from their bright tiled origins. The shabby structures stretched into the distance. Sometimes someone, man or woman, in shabby clothes, on the other side of the fence, shuffled by and looked towards the fence; looked beyond the fence.

"What are you looking at?"

I spun and saw a grey haired master sergeant. "Get out of here. No buying or selling today."

"Please sir, who are they?"

"Not sir, the king hasn't seen fit to knight me yet. DP's. Russians, Ukrainians, Jews. Nobody wants 'em and these haven't got the energy to go. You a replacement?"

"Yes."

"Don't get involved with 'em. Man or woman. If you sell 'em a carton of cigarettes, the going rate is twelve Deutch Marks. Don't let 'em cheat you. Now get out of here. You got no business here."

I went. I found the base library. I was awed by a fan of brightly shining stacks. The stacks were ceiling high and fat with books. I had to stand a while and simply look at the wonderful faded colors of the books' spines. The only people in the library were myself, a young woman who sat behind a very library-like desk and a GI, who I could only see from the back and who was bent over, leaning both elbows on the desk.

“*Ya*, please, can I help you?” said the young woman. The GI at the desk turned around. The GI and I both smiled broadly as we came to recognize each other.

“Hess tess kiss my ess.”

“Rubel, you bastard.”

“Hess tess kiss my ess; how about a game of eightball.”

“What, they’ve got pool rooms here? All I saw was a bowling alley.”

“No. No pool rooms.” He smiled, “but we’ve all kinds of other entertainment here.”

The girl at the desk turned toward a typewriter next to her and began typing.

Bert Rubel was perhaps the best pool player in Washington Heights. He was a year ahead of me in school and had been the center half on the Maccabi soccer team for older teens. On the same floor as our Club Maccabi hang-out was a pool hall. If you wanted to find Rubel, you’d find him there. While so many of us at Maccabi had after-school jobs whose earnings had to pay for our various enjoyments, Rubel made his money at the pool tables. He was a great fan of Woody Herman and he was the first person that I knew who smoked pot.

The young woman at the typewriter turned to me and smiled, “You two know each other?”

“Bert and I live in the same neighborhood. I’m 160th, he’s on 162nd, between the drive and Ft. Washington. Goddam; we’re in the same neighborhood again. How long have you been here?”

The young woman had brown hair pulled back in a bun, big eyes, an oval face ending in sharp chin, skin with a pinkish sheen. She wore a dark sweater with a brooch over her heart. She looked like the librarian at the Jumel branch on St. Nicholas Avenue. She looked up at Bert, “does he...?” Bert looked a bit puzzled and then, “Yeah. All right. You speak German don’t you?”

“Yes. So...?”

“How good is your German?”

“I don’t know. Three years of B’s at City. And they were easy markers. Probably just like you. Like all us refugee kids.”

“You just come here? What’s your assignment? Your orders?”

“I’m being sent to some infantry regiment.” I think I sighed, “I’ll be hauling a damn base plate for another two years.”

“The young woman librarian quickly said, “eighteen months. Eighteen months. Draftees are being sent home after eighteen months.”

“I’ve been here seventeen; supposed to go home next month.” He looked at the librarian, then at me, “I’ve got two weeks of leave time coming that I want to take before I go. But they won’t let me take my leave unless they get a replacement for me. You are my replacement.”

“But my orders say...”

“Screw the orders. I’ll get new orders cut for you.”

“I’m ordered to Augsburg. Tomorrow.”

“You’re staying. I’ll have the orders cut this afternoon.”

“You’ll cut the orders? Rubel cutting orders? What?”

“A bunch of us corporals run division HQ. Corporals do all the work here; we’re all friends. I tell them, they’ll do it.”

“Hard to believe, but what will I be doing? What have you been doing?”

“I work for JAG.”

“What’s JAG?”

“Judge Advocate General. I translate for them. General courts martial’s where German witnesses are involved. And there are always German witnesses involved.”

“Hope it’s better than hauling a base plate. “

“It’s a good job. People are all nice, mostly lawyers. Just watch out for Colonel Rood, but you like classical music. You’ll probably get along.”

Chapter 50

Some hundred of us sat on our duffle bags. We had been called out of the Kaserne at seven and now it was, maybe, two hours later. We had been standing in ranks for a long time when a gray haired sergeant called out “Everybody relax.” It was no order I had ever heard before, and when somebody sat on his duffel bag there was no countermanding. Trucks rolled up and names were called out. The names clambered into the trucks and disappeared behind the rear canvas. Name after name disappeared, and I was sure that Rubel had been pulling my leg. Corporals do not run U.S. Army divisions. But as more and more men disappeared behind the canvas of trucks, and I remained sitting it began to dawn on me that indeed corporals did run the Army. What had Eisenhower ever been thinking? I was the last one sitting, and when the gray haired sergeant approached I snapped to attention.

“At ease. You Hess?”

“Yes sergeant.”

“Your MOS heavy weapons?”

Yes, sergeant.”

“Then why the hell are you assigned to division HQ?” He continued on, but it was a mumble and then he shoved the papers in his hand at me, pointed to a building some distance away, “up there. You go up there. Personnel. There’s a sign. Personnel. And take your goddam bag.”

Obviously, if you are a private in the Army, stripeless, not even a Private First Class , and are invited to see Personnel in person, an alteration of ones' destiny has surely been decreed. I trooped to Personnel where a corporal changed my destination from *Augsburg* and the 109th Inf. Regt. in the Gablingen Kaserne to HQ Co. 28th Inf. Div Cooke Bks. *Göppingen*. Another corporal then changed my MOS from Heavy Weapons Specialist to Interpreter (German). Another Corporal showed me to my quarters, a large room with four bunk beds and a row of wooden closets. On the way to my new digs I learned that my corporal guide was a graduate of Harvard, and that he was acquainted with the Agha Khan. A day later, though my collar was still tan, there was now a whitish tinge to my collar, with a desk all my own in the office of the Division Judge Advocate General.

Rubel showed me around, introduced me to the several enlisted men, clerks and administrators with whom I'd work, to the several officer-lawyers with whom I'd be spending a good deal of time, the most imposing of whom was Lt. Colonel Rood. Rood was large, his face was pale: a collection of folds under bushy eyebrows: he talked with a twang that I was to learn originated in Arizona. I also was to learn that he'd been in what he called "the war previous," and that he'd been recalled to duty at the start of the Korean War.

You a lawyer?"

"No Sir."

"Good. How do you know German."

"I was born there."

"I don't hear any accent."

"I was eight when we left, sir."

"And that must have been...."

“1939, sir.” His eyebrows rose, and he nodded. I thought that he was going to ask me something but then changed his mind. His eyebrows lowered and in the kindest way asked about my schooling.

“History major, sir.”

“History major?”

“Yes, sir. American history.”

“American history, very good. How do you feel about Abraham Lincoln. Never mind, we’ll talk about him another time. How do you feel about the Germans?” I was silent, I shrugged. I felt angry, but I didn’t know that I felt angry. In any case I liked the question. He was very smart.

“Get yourself a good dictionary. Talk to people. The language has changed a bit since the last time you were here, since the last time I was here. Get Rubel to tell you how to get your corporal stripes.”

To get my stripes, Rubel told me, I had to wait. First a period of waiting for PFC, then another period for corporal, but as soon as the periods were up I could write the orders for my promotion myself, and of course Colonel Rood, would sign it.

It seemed as if all the officers, they were all lawyers, spoke with a twang. Captain Herbert came from North Carolina. The first time we were introduced I saw Gunner Myrdal’s book on his desk. Lieutenant Bullock was from Texas, from an oil family, who, I later learned, had his new Jaguar sedan flown in from England, on a private plane, to the *Stuttgart* airport, from where he had it driven to our base in *Göppingen*. Captain Barry was black, from New York City; Manhattan. He hardly ever spoke, except in court, and while I might have extended conversations with all the officers, after all, we were all college men, my interchanges with Barry were always brief and merely business. I often wondered how John Harmon might have fared in the JAG environment.

Chapter 51

Divisional JAG had supervision over all aspects of the Uniform Code of Military Justice. I was mostly needed as a translator in General Courts Martial, where major crimes were adjudicated, and while I was sometimes called on to work where minor offenses were dealt with, at a Battalion or Company level, I really had very little to do. Sometimes they gave me documents to translate.

My barracks environment was not very different from the JAG office. My friends here, while perhaps very few could boast of an acquaintance with the Agha Kahn, were also college graduates, some with very advanced degrees. Nicholas, the Ph.D. in history had written his thesis on Motley and the origins of Motley's *Rise of the Dutch Republic*. Nicholas did not pal around with the several Jews in the company.

Richard did pal around, as did Ken who knew the Agha Kahn, as did Ross, and Scott. We became friends. My friends, they were all draftees, had been assigned to the base, some for weeks, others for months. They were all part of the Corporalship. Richard did some writing for officers on the upper level, Ken was assigned to intelligence, Ross and Scott did some sort of administrative work. Scott was Jewish and had a motorcycle that he was allowed to keep on base. They introduced me to bars and beer, to restaurants and what to order in which restaurants.

Maybe I was the only Jew in the group who thought in Jewish terms; that is, to be conscious as to who was Jewish and who was not. That consciousness was lost very quickly, and very quickly it became obvious that Harvard or CCNY, UCLA or Wash. U, our interests were pretty much the same: beer and girls.

There were girls on the base; like Rubel's friend who worked in the library, or others in the PX as sales clerks, or in the various offices of headquarters doing secretarial work. They all seemed to be of an age that interested recent college grads, and they all looked, as my friend Richard pointed out, as though they too were recent college graduates; graduates of the Seven Sisters. The girls working in the PX, he insisted, had all gone to Smith. Whoever did the hiring for the PX must have known something and liked something about Smith graduates. Richard went on to insist that that the Headquarters secretaries had all gone to Vassar, and that the several women translators on the base were definitely Radcliffe.

Sam Spitzer, however, objected to Richard's classifications. Sam was Cornell '50, and of our crowd, had been in Goeppingen the longest. "No. They are what they seem to be, in the States they'd be doing the same things that they're doing here. They all want to get married. Mary an *Ami*; marry one of the victors; victors were heroes, get to the States, the land of *unbegrenzten möglichkeiten*, the land of unlimited possibilities (Spitzer, who was also Jewish, repeatedly called it the land of impossible possibilities), and of course bring your mother along."

"Where was the father?"

"Stalingrad; the Ardennes."

Spitzer said that the girls sometimes mentioned mothers but never fathers. "But unless you promised to marry you'd never get them to bed. Make out a bit, maybe, but unless you alerted the chaplain and received permission from the General, never a bed. They are pure examples of middle class morality. No," Spitzer insisted, "these are not girls from the Seven Sisters, if they were they would not want to be going to the States, but rather they'd be taking a summer off to tour Europe. You know, Rome, Florence, Madrid, maybe the Balearics." Spitzer was going for a Ph.D. in Philosophy. He was going to teach college.

But we all went out with the girls, usually in groups, to a restaurant, where the girls often received stares from other patrons, and we went swimming. There was a marvelous large pool on the base; all that was to say, that there seemed to be, for me and my friends, a certain friendly ease with girls on the base, one that came from the recognition of membership in a similar class.

I did go out on dates, maybe just twice, just two of us; maybe dinner and a concert in Stuttgart. And on each occasion, at some point in the evening, each date would begin to tell me a similar story: how terribly they had suffered during the war and its aftermath. The bombings; but especially the Russians, “you cannot imagine how terribly they treated us; rapes and theft; they lined us up and made us hold out our hands and if they saw a wrist-watch, they ripped it from the wrist.” They were quiet after their tale, but why were they telling me this? Who told them I was Jewish? Was there some kind of equivalency; whatever they suffered, against my losses of place and people? Ruppichtheroth, Oma and Opa in Terescin; and the six million? I stopped going out one on one.

Chapter 52

As soon as I learned where my permanent home was to be, I sent my new address to 160th Street. It was the only letter that I wrote for a long time. Then I began getting letters from home, always written by Mom, and always containing the plea, the injunction that I should please visit *Ruppichtheroth*. Even the please was an injunction. I didn't want to go. I neglected her letters, but her letters continued. The injunctions were of course mixed in with news from home, Frankie's Bar Mitzvah, and so on, but also and often, “could you, and why don't you, you really should go and visit Rupp. Bendix would love to see you, and when you go could you please bring him one of those new “wash and wear” shirts.” At

first I had no idea who Bendix was, but soon I was given to understand that he lived in our old house in *Ruppichtheroth*, that he was Jewish, and that he, his wife, who was not, and one son, had all been hidden by someone, somewhere near the town during the terrible times.

The reason Bendix assumed such importance was, that my grandparents' property, the house, the surrounding pastures, all had been returned to their heirs: Dad and his brother Albert. In dividing the property Albert got the house and Dad got the pastures. So Bendix had, somehow, acquired the job of managing these properties and those of the others dispossessed from our town and nearby towns; property that, after the war had been returned by the new government to those who had been driven out.

Mom and Pop wanted to see pictures so I bought a Leica, but I sent no pictures. "And I really don't understand," wrote my Mother, "why don't you go see our old town." And in various repetitions "you really have to see Bendix. See what he's doing. Does he have any customers for our property, and what are the going prices for property in the area? It would really help us if you found out all these things." I knew that it wouldn't help a bit, because I was certain that Mom and Pop were very well informed on all these issues, from Bendix himself, and from their German friends in the area. So why wasn't I writing? Tante Mina, wrote my mother, might be in Rupp. Sometime in June.

Why, after all she had suffered at German hands, would she even want to visit Germany? Have anything to do whatever, with Germany? I had to be here, she had a choice; a choice I could not understand. After all she had suffered at German hands, would she even want to visit Germany? Have anything to do whatever, with Germany?

We were coming back from a trial in *Augsburg*, and as Colonel Rood, who had been the presiding judge at the trial was in a rush to get back to the base in Göppingen, and as the local train

seemed to be the quicker than the army supplied transportation, the train it was. I went along because the Colonel asked me to carry some packages for him. Rood found an empty compartment and as it was not seemly for a private to sit with a colonel I started for another, but he stopped me, waved me into his compartment, and told me, "Get in here." I got in there.

"I don't understand," he said, "why aren't you writing your parents?" I reddened and covered my mouth. How did he know?

Chapter 53

"Why aren't you writing home? I got a note from the AG's office that there had been an inquiry from the Red Cross to the fact that you haven't been answering any of your mother's letters, and if there was something, anything, wrong. Your mother was worried and she got in touch with the Red Cross. What's this all about? Nice kids write their parents." I didn't want to answer; didn't know what to answer. "Don't you like your parents? Are you mad at them?" I turned away. In the window I saw the billowing electric wires.

"Here. Write." He handed me a sheet. "Write." Now I knew why the Colonel had wanted me to carry his packages. He didn't want to do this in the office with others nearby. I wrote.

Mom, till recently had been writing about affairs at home; Oma was fine, Pappa was fine, Peter was fine, more on Frankie and his preparations for Bar Mitzva. Eisenhower she didn't like. She felt sad for Adlai Stevenson who was getting a divorce, so *The Daily News* said, though she didn't like the Daily News or the Mirror. And please to get some news from Ruppichteroth would be nice just to know how things are. But now every letter was urgent – I must, had to, it was absolutely necessary for me to go Ruppichteroth. If I didn't want to go for myself, I had to do it for the family, for Papa. I well understood that the invocation of Papa was to really make me feel guilty.

“You have to go to Rupp. and see Bendix, and see if what he does is all-right. He wants to sell one of the pastures by the highway, by the Bröl brook. See what the property in the area is going for. Compare. See if what he does is all-right. I don’t think we should sell anything, but I am discussing it with Papa. Mr. Bendix would very much like one of the new wash-and-wear shirts. You have to talk to Walter Schenk. He is a friend and knows about such things.”

“He is a friend?” Why is he still a friend? Why is any German still your friend? Why do you want to hold on to even an inch of German soil? Sell it! Sell it! Have you no memory?” But I didn’t write any of that. Often, there was an addendum to one of these urgings: “Papa thinks you should see August Willach. He was a friend of Papa’s from olden times. He would know about land prices and things.” August Willach – he was one of the brothers who owned the factory that made machinery for Hitler’s war machine. They used slave laborers; hid their dead bodies under the floors of his factory sheds. Don’t you remember what Leo Baer told us: that when he got to Ruppichteroth, with the Army in ’45, Willach wanted to bribe him so that he wouldn’t inform on him and his past? But I didn’t write any of that any of that either.

Late one afternoon I was still in the JAG office, lost in making translations of some documents. I thought that I was the only one left when I felt Colonel Rood standing in front of me, he said, “get in my office. I got.

“Have you been writing home”?

“Yes, sir.”

“Since the Red Cross inquired, how often.”

“Not too often.”

“What’s not too often.”

“Once.”

“What the hell’s the matter with you? No, don’t tell me.” I didn’t tell him. I just stood there.

“What the hell’s the matter.”

“I don’t know. It feels peculiar being here.”

“Where? On the base.? Here?”

“No. I don’t know. Germany.”

“Germany. You’d rather be in Korea? When did you leave Germany, ’39 - right?”

“1939”

“And you were what?”

“I was eight.”

“And you remember everything.”

“Yes sir.” I may have smiled slightly. He had me sit down in a chair across from his desk.

“You remember November 1938 - the tenth.”

“How....?”

“In April, April ’45, I had to brief Ike on Concentration Camps. He was going to a place called *Ohrdruf*, with journalists; lots of cameras. It was part of a place called Buchenwald. You heard of *Ohrdruf*?”

I had to shake my head.

“*Buchenwald*?”

I nodded, and I felt the knot in my stomach.

He was silent for a long time; a hand over his mouth. “I, we, all of us, received an education at *Ohrdruf* and then *Buchenwald*; that’s how I know about November tenth. Did they take your father?”

I nodded.

“Where?”

“Dachau.”

“Jesus,” He was angry. *“Dachau.* Did you ever go there, where they sent your Dad? To see? Did he get out?”

I nodded. “After two months... he got out”

“You know, we go to Munich a lot; coming and going we pass the damn Dachau station, and you’ve never gone there to see? Never even been interested?”

“When I see the Dachau station sign I feel peculiar. I don’t want to see it, but I see it. I get scared.”

Colonel Rood’s anger left. The folds on his face were quiet. He was quiet. I was quiet.

“You get scared? It’s only a sign.”

I didn’t know the words with which to answer him, but then, “I don’t want to see it. It makes me feel helpless.” I quickly added, “it makes me angry.”

He was quiet for a while, and then, quietly, “no. It’s not only a sign.” After another quiet moment, elbows on the desk and his hands knotted under his chin, “are you depressed?”

“What?”

“Depressed, don’t know if you remember, but in that assault case in Grafenwohr, one of the psychiatrists talked about that woman’s depression as anger turned inward. I’m no shrink, but you mentioned anger.”

“No. I don’t think so.”

“You haven’t accumulated any leave time.” I shook my head.

“Been out on passes? Three day passes, seen anything of beautiful Dutchland.”

“Just Göppingen. A few times to Stuttgart. To concerts.

“We’ve been to trial...”

“Yes sir, and Augsburg, Munich, the various *Kasernes*....

“And Munich, we were just in Munich. That rape case. Munich interesting to you?”

“Yes, sir...”

“Hitler’s beer hall...you went there?”

“No sir. *Haus Der Kunst*. They had an exhibition of what the Nazis called degenerate art.

Kandinsky, Picasso, Braque...”

“Yes, Bullok and I went there. Good to know there’s at least one man on this base interested in culture rather than...What do you make of Klee. Never mind....

“...and couple of weeks ago a bunch of us went to the Nürbergring for the car races.

“Nurbergring? Where is that?”

“Not far from Cologne, sir.”

“Not far from Cologne. That’s what you told me where your home town is. Not far from Cologne. Do you want to see the old place?” “No sir.” Then I blurted, “but my parents want me to go there and see it.”

“The parents you never write to?”

“I guess.” “You guess. Well, I’ll tell you, from now on I want to see a letter to your folks once a week. You can just come here and wave the envelope at me, but I want to see the envelope. And I’ll see to it that next week...are you due for a Three Day Pass...” I shook my head. Well I’ll see you get one. You’ll use it to see your home town. You obviously have a mother that’s concerned about you. Damn, I want to see that you meet that concern.... otherwise think about living in a tent in *Grafenwohr* for the rest of your duty here.”

Grafenwohr is a muddy, mountainous, desert in Bavaria; south-east of Bayreuth, and north-east Nurnberg, not far from the Czech border, where Army units were regularly sent on maneuvers. Our Headquarters Company had been sent there several weeks earlier. There, our JAG unit lived, all of us in one tent, and where we played Hearts every day, all day, and where, all around us, tanks and artillery honed their skills.

###

On Armed Forces Day, the base was opened to German visitors. Everything had been scrubbed and cleaned. The half-tracks shone, the tanks were cleared of mud. The visitors inspected the dependent's school, the photo lab, the bowling alley. I mingled, but wherever I went, a German was shaking his head, and whispered to a neighbor, "*Das haben wir besser getan,*" We did that better, or a version thereof. . A friend, an off duty MP who also spoke some German nudged me, and shook his head. "You should have been here last year. On the night before Armed forces Day. We got a call that some young natives had some MP's surrounded in the town square. We busted in and relieved the situation. Busted some heads. The rest of the night was spent patrolling the officer's family quarters. There were some rumors that they were going to be burned down. Next day they'd scheduled a parade in town and our vehicles were showered with bricks and bottles." He snorted a kind of laugh, "Some celebration. But it's a lot nicer now. Somebody must have gotten on the phone to somebody else, let 'em know who won the war.

What I remember most of that day was the evening when there was a concert in the auditorium where usually movies were shown. The attendance was mostly of German visitors and the program was mostly for the visitors: the division band played marches, but then an African-American Sergeant stood up and announced that he was going to sing some traditional American folk songs. The one I remember

is "Shall We Gather at the River; the beautiful, the beautiful river that flows by the throne of God." It ends with a line, "soon our pilgrimage will cease." I think I first heard it in a John Ford film.

A few weeks later, Colonel Rood stopped by my desk and dropped a piece of paper on it. I looked up at him, and there was an evil smile on his face. He nodded and pointed at the paper: it was my three day pass. Here was my Colonel who was no psychiatrist, who briefed Ike regarding concentration camps, acting, if not a psychiatrist, then a therapist.

###

I was on a train. It was as if I had just landed in Germany; why were these towns, cities, railroads, still part of the planet. There were no ruins. I wanted ruins. I wanted to see women in aprons stacking bricks in front of bombed-out apartment buildings. I wanted to see old men in jackets pushing wheelbarrows full of rubble, wanted to see children with push brooms pushing dust from the sidewalks in front of bombed-out buildings. I wanted to see everybody coughing hard as the sweepings swirled all about covering them all as though the granite dust were a fog. Most of all I wanted to be in the uniform of the US Army, Class A's sharply pressed and bronze buttons shining, with people looking at me and stepping quickly out of the way for me as I walked past the blocks of neatly stacked bricks in the shattered bomb-excavated hollows of the bombed out houses. The only good German is a dead German. These are the things I wanted to say to Colonel Rood, but I couldn't. I wanted to say to the Colonel that I hated Germany and Germans, and at the same time I was not allowed to acknowledge to myself that I hated. Angry was as far as I could go. I needed, with him, with myself, to cover my mouth and not talk. Hate was not allowed. Most of all, helpless; helpless was not allowed. Why did I use that word? Why not allowed?

###

The ticket taker with the anonymous face, on the train to Bonn, the one with the dark-blue uniform, and the braided cords about his cap, who knocked on the door of the second class compartment, held out his hand, bowing slightly, smiling, suddenly straightened up, smile gone, and recognized my uniform, and as if it hurt him to say it in English said, "ticket please." I gave him my ticket, and answered, in German, "*wie lang nach Köln?*" How long to Cologne? His eyes grew large, and his bland face reddened. I wanted to add, "*Ich bin Jude,*" I'm a Jew, but I didn't and accounted myself a coward. He punched my ticket and shoved it back at me without answering. The train went on; the phone and telegraph wires bellied rhythmically downward; the early summer sun shone, and women were still out in their back-yards, in those many yards near train stations, tending their little vegetable gardens as though nothing had ever happened. I slept and when I woke the train was running along the Rhine. It had been my Rhine, but wasn't anymore. The castles of the robber barons, the curving blue river, the hillsides green with grapes weren't mine anymore. I had them once, but then I lost them. I began to tear. I didn't know then, that I was mourning. Heine and Oma's song threaded through my brain. *I once had a lovely fatherland. There the oaks grew tall, the violets beckoned gently. It was a dream.*

I had to change in Bonn; no more the little narrow-gauge railroad to Ruppichteroth but now a bus, yellow, that through a narrow road, wove through green valleys. Why no narrow gauge railroad on which we came, on which we left, and where I knew that with only a coin in my teeth I might know how distant the iron engine was? Instead, the route insisted on telling me that I was back in Massachusetts, in the Berkshires: Great Barrington, Stockbridge, Lennox. This green was too was beautiful, and I didn't want it to be beautiful. The bus went on, through large *Siegburg* where I was born, and where there were cars on the street, through little *Henneff* where once we changed steaming trains, and where there were

cars on the street, and through Schönberg, where once I met those joyous teen-agers whom Mom embraced and cheered and who were going to make *Aliyah*, to Palestine. But still, I was afraid.

The bus stopped in front of the Hotel, and I stepped out onto the *Choseé*, the macadamized highway over which my father and I had driven cattle. The bus drove off, and, astonished, I turned in a circle. I seemed to see everything in black and white. Black and white, just as in the postcard, where my great-grandfather, cane in hand stands exactly in the middle of the street on which I had just placed my foot; black and white, like the postcard, like all those pictures, those very small ones, from the album that Mom might draw from the bookshelf on 160th Street, and open a page at which she looked so very intently, put a hand to her mouth and then nod her head. Now, there, across the street, was the Opa Nathan's house, there, a little further off, was the road leading up to Wilhelm Strasse: my street. There was the post-office, there was the bank. I turned around but the gas-station in the postcard was gone. The black and white turned to color when I noticed red: a blinking traffic light strung high over the middle of the *Choseé*, where there had never been a traffic light before. Now I saw that the Nathan's house was gone, the largest Jewish owned house in Ruppichteroth was gone. It was a parking lot, and further on, long stretches of stretched out buildings, factory buildings with red canted roofs, and somewhere a sign that read, "Huwil Werke." The Willach factories. They must have expanded greatly during the war.

I began to walk up Wilhelm Strasse, from somewhere someone began to whistle a tune from *Hansel and Gretel*, and suddenly I recognized, to my great astonishment, that the street that I remembered being so very wide, was now a narrow, a very narrow gray track. I stood again on cobble stones, but my spit shined boots would raise no sparks from all these stones. I walked up the street that I remembered as steep, and tree lined, but now there was hardly an incline and the trees were gone. I remembered green hedges that flanked the street; they were gone, replaced by thin wires through which

I could look down onto the highway. The Füllenbach house was gone. The marvelous garden surrounding their house, always so full of red tulips, was gone; all that I saw was a dirt brown lot: no more sweaty hugs from Mrs. Füllenbach. And then our house; it didn't loom over me. There were shutters on the windows where no shutters had ever been. The posts of brick still stood at the corners of garden, and the connected railings still captured the little garden plot fronting the house, but instead of grass and flowers, and lilac bushes there now was dirt. And across the street, the garden where Oma grew her asparagus, and which had been surrounded by wonderful gooseberry bushes, that too was dirt, and the gooseberry bushes were gone.

I walked the flagstones to the front door. The incised glass, over whose frosted wreaths and streaming strangeness I both puzzled and dreamed was gone. The door was all wood. Before I could knock the door opened and there stood Herr Bendix. I had to retreat a step, since his stomach spoke of a great deal of good feeding, but his head was bald, his eyes hooded, and a nose like an eagle; an idealized Roman emperor.

"I saw you coming, you were looking about. Have you eaten? Come in." It was all in German. I didn't want to speak German, but I did; it was a melancholy, stumbling German. Where was Oma's grocery? And across the entrance hall from the grocery the dining room where nobody ever ate? What I wanted was to look in and about MY house, not anyone else's'. "Are you tired? How was the trip? Would you like to lie down for a while?" When I shook my head and said "Thank You," I felt eight years old, and I knew that this would never be my house again. What I wanted right then was to pull it down, to create a ruin that no one could use. I was angry and felt helpless. Bendix led me inside, where in the hallway stood his wife and son, in the hallway where Mom and Oma screamed, where Opa screamed, where Pop was taken away, where I had to embrace the milk separator because no-one was there to embrace me and calm my fears. Bendix introduced me to his wife and son. The wife was short,

had very white hair, a pink pale face and a sharp chin. The son was probably sixteen years old and wore a tie. "You'll talk later," said Bendix, and led me upstairs.

"This is our guest room." It was not. It was our living room, where we lived, ate, and saw friends. No, used to live. The stove was gone, the window had curtains, and the walls were covered with friendly white and flowery wallpaper. There was a large bed with plump pillows and a feather bed; the bed was surrounded with area rugs. The more steps I took into the room the more I withdrew. I pulled a wash and wear shirt wrapped in its crinkly plastic wrap out of my bag on the bed and handed it to Bendix. I forced a smile, he smiled, and shook his head in admiration, "you Americans." We had instant coffee in the downstairs kitchen that looked vaguely like Oma's kitchen. I excused myself, and told them I would like to just walk around. They understood.

I tried walking out of the back door, thinking that I would enter the barn, but there was no barn, I stepped out into mud. I stepped out further, looked back, and the barn indeed was gone, there was a blank half-timbered wall that showed no connection to the place where, in the loft, sunk in hay, I did the reading that spared me the heavy sighs of those I loved best, and that introduced me to imagination and the world. I walked out further, there was the meadow in back of our house, but where the meadow had been, where the apple trees had been, the slopes for sledding, there was no meadow: just more mud.

On returning to the house, Bendix said, "yes. I should have told you what they told me: during the war there were soldiers quartered here, all around here, in tents and other temporary shelters. They tramped everything down, cut down trees for fires. It's been like this ever since the war; ever since I first came here." I had no answer; just more anger. I should come inside; more coffee. I begged off, it had been a long day, not much left of it, and I wanted to walk. He would walk with me. I declined and started off. He followed; I stopped and waited for him, and swallowed more anger.

“That’s the Schumacher house.” Bendix was pleased, “you remember?” I didn’t answer. From where I stood I could see past the house that the Schumacher meadow, where we searched for Easter eggs, was not spared: mud. We came to the space in front of the synagogue; the space where, fourteen years earlier I found hatred and humiliation. I was grateful for Bendix’s silence. We came to stand in front of the synagogue. I faced a blank wall.

The synagogue had been sold. The handful of survivors that was the congregation in exile, had agreed that it be sold. Who now lived in that building with the red carpeting, with the balcony from where sweets rained down; the building I loved; the building where my Opa presided? How did these people feel living in a synagogue; my synagogue? Did they have children?

I saw that the three great rectangular windows high over the synagogue door were gone; their spaces were filled in by stone. The two marvelous round windows surrounded by the white stone wreaths, one on each side of the door, were gone; filled in by stone. Something had been taken from me; taken and turned to stone. I wanted to go on and see the rest of the village, but it was getting dark, and it had been a long day.

A black car was standing in front of our house, and someone was trying to extract a heavy object from the rear seat. With a heave he pulled out a large trunk; he swung around and dropped it down next to another trunk-like objects resting on the walk. Bendix ran forward, looked back at me, waved, “Come on, they are here.” Who was here? I walked.

Bendix and two other men were standing next to the car. The one, who had done the heavy lifting was a young man about my age, the other, was quite old. The older came toward me with a sad smile, and when we were quite close, he raised his hand and ran it through my hair, “*Ya Wolfgang, wie lang?*” And he paused, “*So traurig.*” How long has it been? So sad. I didn’t smile and looked at Bendix. “Joseph Lauf, this is Joseph Lauf, a friend of your Opa,” said Bendix, “and this is his grandson,

Stephan.” Opa’s friend was taller than I, his eyes were bright, his face was long and smooth; he had a white mustache, and wore suspenders over a blue shirt.

I had no memory of Mr. Joseph Lauf. What right had he to touch my hair? “I’m not Wolfgang any more, my name is Walter.” He smiled his sad smile and nodded, “These things” and he pointed to the two trunks, “are from your Opa Moses. He left them with us when,” he stumbled over some words, “when all that,” and he waved a hand in front of him, as though trying to assemble some words, “when all that happened. Your Opa, was a very good man; a good friend. We kept them,” and again he pointed to the trunks, “in the barn, where nobody could find them. Your Opa thought that when it was all over we might get them to your family.”

I had to shut up. I hated them all, but here was somebody....who was this somebody?

Bendix wanted us to go inside, “maybe get something to drink; we can talk then.” Opa’s friend and his grand-son took the trunks, they were heavy, and brought them inside. I wanted to examine the trunks, but Mrs. Bendix gathered us in the kitchen where she had made more instant coffee for us. Mr. Lauf laughed and said that he liked instant better than regular, that’s all he drank now, and that the first he ever tasted came from packages my parents had sent after the war, and did I know about the letter?

“What letter? “

“The letter from your Opa; the letter that we smuggled out of the Work Camp in Much. That we sent to your family in New York.” I hated the packages that we sent to people I hated, but here was somebody who.....what the hell did I know?

“Yes, I know about the letter. It was very brave of you to have done that.”

“Not so brave.” His face became serious. “The letter went from hand to hand to hand; three of us. It was easy to hide. I put it in my bible. If I think I did anything brave it was to always think, to believe, that in the end, after everything, we would lose.” He got up, signaled to his grandson that it was

time to go. He turned to me smiling, "You know, Wolfgang, Walter, I don't think you remember, but once, when you were very little, your Opa and Pappa came to our farm with you. You ran after the chickens, and you were surprised to see our turkey, and I remember you saying over and over again, 'what's that; what's that?'" They left, I watched them getting into their car and drive off. And I wondered. Why did they keep the trunks so very long. Why didn't they ship them to us? Why did he deprecate what he did? It only made him more courageous? I didn't want him to be courageous; if he was courageous then...? What the hell did I know?

I knew about trunks. These two were just like the ones Mom and Pop lugged around half of the world: dark brown leather, with two straps at the ends, scuffed all over. The locks were shiny bronze and the keys were strung about Mom's neck. Those trunks contained everything we still owned; they were our kitchen and bedroom, and as a child I thought them miraculous. Mom pulled out dishes, flatware, wooden spoons, and spatulas; she pulled out towels, bedding, sheets, pillow cases and linen napkins: it as all our wealth and the residue of generations from Germany.

We brought the trunks into the kitchen, and onto the kitchen table. On opening the first one there was a large leather covered box that contained a silver table service. Mrs. Bendix said it was remarkable, and that it was for twelve. The rest of the trunk contained a beautifully decorated set of dishes, of which Mrs. Bendix said one set was really very old Rosenthal, and the other was Hutchenreuther. The dishes were wrapped in linen and in some very beautiful shawls. The other trunk was mainly linens, but there were also some women's dresses. I wanted to cry, but I couldn't. I skipped the offer of supper from Mrs. Bendix and went to sleep in their guest room that was really my living room where we always had guests.

I didn't sleep well, but I slept long. I pulled on my khakis and headed downstairs where Mrs. Bendix had breakfast for me: a bowl of farina and strawberry syrup. The last time I had that I was eight. Opa had prepared it for me and Karl, we were leaving Germany later that Morning. When Mrs. Bendix put down the bowl of farina, she said, "You know, you can't hate a whole country." I thought I could, but then there was Mr. Lauf, and the hand to hand to hand. Mr. Bendix came in and sat across from me, he smiled, "He put himself in some danger with those trunks. If somebody had found out...I will send those trunks to your family in New York. It's expensive, but some of your rentals, from your property, will cover the cost."

"Is that why....?"

"I don't know. Farmers are a strange people."

I needed to know from Bendix where the Willach family lived and I was told. In the letters from home, there was the frequently repeated injunction that I was to give Pop's old friend his greetings. I would do that in the afternoon, first I wanted to walk the streets of my old village wearing the uniform of the US Army. I wanted an overcast day but the sky was blue and the day was warm. I wanted to walk where once I wanted everybody to see my new shoes, but now I wanted them to see my uniform. What I hadn't seen yesterday now became visible: the Chestnut trees were all gone. My tree was gone. No coal briquets during the war, so they cut down my tree. There, on the corner is, was the Gaertner butcher shop. The large store window, through which one might see Gustav in his bloody apron, was gone: replaced by stone, just like the synagogue. There was no music ringing hammer from the blacksmith's shop. There was no blacksmith shop. I followed the thread that once was my grand street. There did not seem to be many people on the street, but whenever I passed one, man or woman, there was a quick look and a quicker turn away: it was the uniform. I was in front of the Hertzfeld Villa. The stone wall arced its way around the property, the lawn was green, the house still impressive. Was the

Nazi Loewenich still its owner? Maybe, but the glass case on that wall was gone. That case, with its cartoons, that tried to tell me for much too long who I was; that case that told me that I was hated, that tried to tell me to hate myself. I continued on, to Tante Lydia's house, but Tante Lydia didn't live there any more. Tante Lydia was dispersed in the smoke rising from the smokestacks of Auschwitz. I went on to the Regensburger bakery, but the bakery had been transformed as had all the other places that I once loved. I went on to Willy's house, but it was no longer there. It had been torn down. The vacant space was all mud.

Later that afternoon I walked to the Willach house; the sky was still blue, and the afternoon still warm. The house was Old Victorian, pillared and balconied. It sat in the middle of much green grass. It was an intimidating house. It was the house of a family that profited from the war, from forced labor. I reached the front door, and before I could ring a young woman in a white apron stood there. She looked me up and down, "Herr August Willach, bitte. Ich bin" and I stopped; I needed to decide who I was. "Wolfgang Hess, my father was a friend of Mr. Willach." My words ended with a question mark. "Can I...," She stepped out from the door and pointed toward the back of the house. There stood an immense gazebo, and a number of men in suits stood on its high deck, all seeming to have champagne glasses in their hands. I got close; there was a flight of stairs reaching up to the deck and I stood at the bottom of the stairs, and started to tremble. "Herr Willach? Herr August Willach? A number of men turned and leaned on the railing that seemed so high above me, all holding champagne glasses. "Yah, Ich bins." He had a large round head, with gray hair on the sides. I tried to smile, he looked offended. "I'm Wolfgang Hess. My father is Oscar Hess, your old friend. He wanted me to give you his greetings." I had an expectation of being invited up on the deck, but Herr August Willach just said, "Ya, OK," turned around, and all those others leaning on the railing turned with him. I just stood at the bottom of the

stairs, their backs all turned to me, and I was eight years old again, trembling, while the clods of mud came flying at me.

I walked along the *Chosee*, and came to a field that looked very much like the field where we cut hay. The brook, the Bröl was close by, the woods on its other side was swept by wind. It felt like an invitation. I crossed the brook, stepping carefully on jutting stones, and walked into the wood. The floor was covered by chanterelles, but I heard none of Oma's hallooing; instead I heard her telling me to "let it go; it's not yours anymore. Let it go. Let it go." Hard to let it go, but, I'm trying.

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