Gitele

by

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Gitele

WITH LOVE, IN MEMORY OF MY PAPA

FOREWORD

This is the story of my life—a half century of it.

I was only eight years old when Papa died in 1909, but I have never forgotten the many things he told me about the old country, about his life before his illness, and about the Word of God. His stories were often almost unbelievable, but they were never without meaning.

In my life I have had three "families." My life began with my "first" family: my mother, father, two sisters, and three brothers. We lived in a three-room flat on Allen Street in New York's East Side.

With the birth of my first daughter, when I was nineteen, I began my "second" family. While raising my second family, I often recalled the anguish I suffered from unkind words carelessly spoken to me during my own childhood. They were words which were soon forgotten by their speakers, but they have left deep scars on me. As dear Papa used to say: "*A patch fargyrt, un a vort bashteyt* [A slap is forgotten, but a word stays.]"

When I eventually reached my goal of seeing my three girls secure and happily married, with wonderful husbands and gorgeous children of their own, I found myself suddenly lonely and devoid of purpose. To fill this emptiness with contentment and to bring the feeling of usefulness to my idle hands, I gave life to my "third" family, the Singleton Chapter of the City of Hope.

In addition to the happiness I received from its forma-

tion, the chapter has a dual purpose which brings me constant joy. It helps raise funds for the City of Hope, a nonsectarian medical center dedicated to research and treatment of disease and, uniquely, to the bringing together, in a social atmosphere, of single persons.

It is my wish that the City of Hope may benefit from the publication of this book, in the name of the Singleton Chapter.

As I reminisce about all the things that have happened to me, I wonder if people who do not know me will believe that all I have written is true—or wonder how I could have survived the many years of great burden. But through a miracle, and by the grace of God, I am still here, in good health, and able to write about it all. My formal education ended with the sixth grade, and my literary abilities may be open to question. But there is no doubt about two things: I have written with my heart, if not with my schooling; and all persons, dates, places, and events I have written about are authentic.

G.K.

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INTRODUCTION

What the world needs today are a few more "Gussies"—dedicated, unselfish human beings willing to devote their energies to the alleviation of human suffering.

Gitele is the inspiring autobiography of one such person. It is a warm and compassionate book, to be savored like good wine.

This is the story of an immigrant girl who left the Old World to search for happiness and freedom in America, the America of promise and opportunity. Gitele found it—but not without a few tears.

The author has set to paper a colorful chronicle of Jewish family life, recalling in vivid detail both the old tradition and the struggle for adjustment.

Gitele made it—financially and spiritually. Family and business thrived. But with success there was a yearning—the desire to return some of the riches found. For Gitele it became total dedication to a charitable cause—The City of Hope.

That it is more gratifying to give than to receive is eloquently and graphically etched into the pages of this book. That man needs his brother and must share his piece of bread has greater meaning today than at any time in history.

Gitele is a genuine fulfillment, both for the author who has shared her life with us, and for the reader who may profit from her noble example.

Louis Tabak

Note: Mr. Tabak is now serving as president of the City of Hope.

Part I

MY FIRST FAMILY

Az der mazl iz kleyn shlog zikh kop in vant un veyn.
(If your luck is small, even banging your head against the wall and crying will not help.)

—Jewish saying

1

I, Gitele, was the helpless infant girl who nearly missed the boat when my family came to America for the second time. When my parents came to this country for the first time, our family had already been started. They brought with them a little money and a great deal of hope that things would be different.

They opened a small grocery store in New York City's East Side. They lived in the rear of the store and felt themselves fortunate to be able to work long hours and to eat well, and at the same time save a few dollars.

My parents were Orthodox Jews. Their religion was their way of life, and they thanked God often for the blessings which were now theirs. It had been wise to leave Russian Poland and come to this country of greater opportunity.

Suddenly their prosperity was threatened.

The "crisis" that hit America during President Cleveland's term hit hard at the little grocery store. Business was very bad. A radical improvement seemed indicated if the family savings were not to be wiped out entirely.

Papa didn't know what would bring that improvement about in America, and neither did anyone else he knew, but Papa did know this: In the old country, in the small town my parents had come from, their few thousand dollars of savings would be a great deal of money. It would go much further there.

So Papa came up with his own "cure" for the crisis: he and Mother sold the grocery store, and the family went back to the old country. They returned to their hometown feeling that they were "somebody" now. They had had nothing when they were there before, but now they had some money to invest. They bought a mill, a place where farmers paid to have their corn ground.

I never knew exactly what caused the next ordeal they were forced to surmount, but it had something to do with property lines and with the property next door to the mill. The matter had to be taken to court. I arrived in this world on the day when the trial took place, and, since my parents were unable to appear in court, they lost the case by default. Papa probably said:

"Der mentsh trakht, in Got lakht! [Man is thinking, and God is laughing]," and:

"Az der mazl iz kleyn khotsh shlog kikh kop in vant un veyn! [If your luck is small, even banging your head against the wall and crying will not help]."

I have always remembered these sayings, since my parents gave expression to them often when trouble struck. How well they described their "comeback" in the old country!

Luck was against them again, it seemed. Feeling that they were "just hitting their heads against the wall" there, Papa salvaged what he could and led his family back to America. There, at least for a while, his luck had been "bigger," and so it might be again.

My family returned to America with five children, less money than they had had when they left, but still with the hope that things would be different.

2

The events I have described go back too far for me to remember them if I had not heard my parents talk about them. What I do remember about my first family goes back to the time we lived in a large tenement house on Allen Street, near Hester Street, on the East Side of New York City. We had three rooms on the fourth floor, front room, kitchen, and a bedroom. But all three became bedrooms at night.

In the front room Papa slept on a folding bed. His bed was always down, because he needed it day and night. Papa was sick. Phillip, my youngest brother, slept on a couch in the same room.

Harold and Herbert, my two older brothers, slept on a folding bed in the kitchen. This bed was closed up in the daytime and covered with a cloth.

Mother and my baby sister Blanche slept at the head of the bed in the real bedroom. My older sister Leah and I slept at the opposite end of the same bed. We slept *tsufusens* (at the feet of another sleeper), as Mother used to say.

The six of us were all about three years apart in age. Mother claimed it didn't just happen this way. She said that as long as she nursed her youngest one she could not conceive. She tried her best to nurse each child as long as she could force him to take the breast, but in no case was one of her children willing to nurse beyond the age of two.

Then Mother became pregnant again. Blanche, the youngest, was five years old at this point in my story, but Mother had not had another child. "It is because Papa has been sick for three years," Mother explained.

I am Gussie, and I was eight years of age at the time. My real name is Gitl, but it became Gussie when I was brought to America as a baby. It has been Gussie for fifty years since. I had another name, too—a nickname. I detested it, but it stuck to me for years. I heard it more often than Gussie, when I was a child. It was "Rusty." I suppose that everyone who has red hair should expect a nickname, but every time I heard "Rusty" I felt my red hair was a curse.

Our three rooms, the tenement building, the sidewalk outside, and the grocery store on the block made up my entire world. I hadn't even been inside a school. I stayed home all day long, every day. Phillip and Leah went to school, Harold and Herbert went to work, and Mother had to take care of our store.

I took care of my sister Blanche, still the "baby," and waited on Papa in his sickbed. I never regarded this as a chore, however. Papa was always kind and thoughtful and when he talked to me, made me feel really important. He was the only person who, I felt, loved me.

Each morning before Mother left she filled a large pot with soup bones, vegetables, and water. Sometimes she would put in some meat. Then she would put a chalk mark on the outside of the pot. My instructions were to watch the boiling water and the chalk line. I was responsible for seeing that the water did not boil below this mark, adding water as the contents boiled down.

Papa taught me how to tell time, so I would know when to light the fire and start watching the pot. Often I would

put one finger on the chalk mark on the outside and another finger at the level of the water inside, to see if they were even. Sometimes I would add as little as half a cup of water. Watching the pot was an important duty. Whether or not there was enough soup for everyone at suppertime depended on my doing it right.

Each afternoon when Leah came home from school, her job was to cook the rest of the supper, which usually meant cooking potatoes. One time she boiled the potatoes too early: if she kept them in the water to keep warm, they would fall apart; and if she took them out, they would get cold. So she decided to ask a neighbor for advice. The neighbor told Leah that she could give our family a real treat if she would cut the potatoes into small pieces and add vinegar and oil. Then she would have potato salad.

At suppertime Leah said she had a surprise for us. None of us had ever tasted potato salad before, but when it was served, nobody seemed to like it. That didn't make any difference, however. We always had to eat whatever was put on our plates.

Spitting out his first mouthful, one of my brothers yelled, "What the hell did you put in these cold potatoes?"

"Just vinegar and oil," Leah replied.

"Oil?" Mother asked. "What neighbor did you borrow oil from?" She knew we had no oil in the house. Most people thought nothing of borrowing a little sugar or salt or vinegar from neighbors, but Mother was different. She never wanted anything borowed from a neighbor. She said most people would take advantage of us: they would borrow a great deal more from us than we would borrow from them. "So don't borrow," she would say; "then we won't have to lend."

However, Leah hadn't borrowed anything, and she made

this clear. "I wouldn't have made the potato salad if I had to borrow anything!" Then she got the bottle she had used, still partly filled, and showed it to Mother.

"You dope!" Mother yelled at Leah. "What are you trying to do—kill all of us? This is coal oil!"

Twenty-four families occupied our tenement, six families on each floor. The halls were very busy places, mostly because the toilets and running water were community services in the halls. If you went to the hall sink to fetch water, you were bound to meet a neighbor or two. Someone would have a pitcher to fill with drinking water. Someone else would have a cooking pot to fill. And usually a mother would be waiting to fill a tub for her youngsters' baths.

Getting the water was important, but just as important was the chance to talk—or to listen. Papa called the halls our "talking newspapers." Here was where the gossip was passed around about who was getting married, or expecting a baby, who was ill or dying, who was having a *bris* (circumcision), or who was being *bar mitzva* (confirmed).

If you lived on an upper floor, as we did, you learned a lot more of what was going on. You met people going up- or downstairs, or on their way from the toilets or sinks as you passed each floor. And you could tell which families were having arguments by the loud voices you heard through the walls. You could pick up a lot of news on the way to the fourth floor, especially if you walked slowly.

There were two toilets on each floor, or three families per toilet. Each family had a key for the toilet they shared. Sharing included taking turns at cleaning the toilets. Friday was toilet-cleaning day, and the family whose turn it was also supplied the toilet tissue, but they didn't buy it. They cut the *Forverts* (the *Jewish Daily Forward*) into small

pieces and fastened them to the wall with a nail, making sure that the paper was fastened low enough so that the children could reach it.

One neighbor on our floor got out of the toilet-cleaning chore by paying me to do it when her turn came, every third Friday. She paid me two cents each time. Of course, it was necessary for both of us to keep this a secret. She didn't want to be the subject of gossip as one who didn't clean her own toilet—"She's too good for doing what the rest of us do," the newsmongers would say—and I didn't dare let my mother know about my own part in it. I knew that she would punish me severely for not remembering that she was a proud woman and that her daughter "did no toilet cleaning for anyone else!"

When I got my two cents, I hid the money in my shoe until the next day, which was Saturday, the day I was permitted to go outside. I spent the money for candy, and then treated the other kids on the block. This was really a bribe, so they would like me and let me take part in their games.

Every time I spent my money, I had a moment of fear. It was against our religion to carry money on the Sabbath, and it was a sin to buy anything on the Sabbath. But Saturday was the only day I could use my secretly earned money. I could only hope that my secret would not be found out.

3

Of course, I wasn't always busy in this three-room tenement-world I lived in. There were moments, when Papa was asleep and Blanche needed no attention, when I would just sit and think about things . . . and wonder . . . and daydream a bit.

I used to dream I was riding with the people on the elevated train—going some place, any place. The Allen Street elevated ran past our front window. It was a noisy attraction that ran day and night, but I thought it was wonderful. I loved to watch the people riding by in the trains. Besides, you could see the sky from our window, and this was pretty wonderful. It was more than the people on the floors below us had in the way of a view. They had neither the trains nor the open sky: they lived below the elevated's tracks, where you couldn't tell whether it was day or night. If you looked out of the windows from their floors, you could scarcely see anyone or anything that was going on. It was too dark. It was much better in my "world."

I often dreamed of having enough money to buy some peroxide, for I wanted desperately to change the color of my hair. I had hated my red hair ever since Leah had nicknamed me Rusty. "Rusty nail, spit in a pail, listen to her wail!" Leah would sing.

The nail part was to remind me that I was on the skinny side and that Leah was nice and plump.

But the peroxide would change all this, I thought. Then I would hold my head high and say to everyone, "Well, you can't call me Rusty any more!" And after a while people might even forget I had ever had red hair!

At least I could dream about it. That is, until Leah would yell, "Rusty! The trains will get where they're going without you watching them all the time."

Being with Papa was just as good as having my dreams come true.

"Come, I'll tell you a story, Gitele," he'd say. Papa was the only one who ever called me "Gitele." It was an affectionate name I loved to hear.

I can't remember Papa when he wasn't sick. I often heard Mother refer to him as a "tall, big man" who had been strong and who held himself straight. But as I looked at him on his sickbed, he looked small, and more gentle than strong.

He read and told me stories that made me laugh, usually stories that taught a lesson.

"Yes, I understand, Papa," I'd say fascinatedly as he explained about Jewish customs in the "old country."

Papa told his stories like an actor on a stage—so dramatically that I felt a part of what I heard. And yet I remember his voice being soft and gentle, just as he himself looked in that bed.

Papa told me a great deal about the poverty in the old country and what a hard life Mother had had as a child. One of Mother's parents had died when she was a baby, and the other remarried. Before she reached her teens her other parent died.

I felt a great compassion for my mother's sisters and brothers—including the many half sisters and brothers and

stepsisters and brothers—and that they were all very poor. They never wore shoes in the summer, and they had no real floors in the house.

He told me that, in the old country, when a girl reached her teens, she was considered *kale moyd* (of marriageable age), and her parents searched for an eligible boy to be her husband.

Papa said he never did see what Mother looked like before they were married, that his parents simply told him he was engaged to marry a girl they had selected for him. The family were satisfied with the match, confident that she was in good health and could have children. He told me how Mother had said that, when her parents sent her on an errand, she would look out of the corners of her eyes at the different boys she saw along the way and wonder if he were among them. The parents set a date for the wedding. Even then, while they were being married under the *khupe* (canopy), Mother's eyes were blindfolded so that she could not see what Papa looked like.

After the wedding ceremony she was led into a room where all the hair on her head was shaved off and replaced with a *sheytl* (wig). That was the religious custom to distinguish the married women from the single women. The wig was worn as long as they were married.

Then she was led into a room where all the women were having refreshments. All the menfolks drank wine in a separate room. It was always the parents of the boy who were catered to and sought after. They were always the proud and independent ones, as they bargained for the best match for their son. After the wedding the bride was brought to her boudoir and told by her parents that she was now a married woman and must not be afraid.

Papa even made it exciting when he read the *Forverts* He would read the *Bintl Brif* (a column where letters are printed and advice is given, chiefly to the lovelorn), to me. Each item would start with: "I am looking for a mate to marry." Then the person would describe himself or herself —age, talents, job, and how much money he or she had. Then followed the qualifications expected in the marriage partner.

Papa would read these in such a manner that I could just "see" the people. I would choose one who sounded just right, but then I would change my mind and choose someone else —because *he* sounded even better. And I even made up my mind about what I would say if I were advertising for a mate: I would say he must not have red hair. I wouldn't want *all* my children to have red hair!

It was during these times when Papa read the *Forverts* to me that I would rub my face on his beard, hoping that he would kiss me. He always said, "Gitele, not so close! I'm afraid my beard will scratch your face."

"No, it wouldn't, Papa—it's soft like our *perine* [feather-bedding]" Then I would ask him, "Papa, do you like me just a little bit?"

Papa would smile, take me in his arms, squeeze me, and gently say, "*Vi di gantze velt, meyn kind* [As much as the whole world, my child]!"

I would raise my lips to Papa, hoping he would kiss me, but he always bent my head down, put his lips on my forehead, and squeezed me harder. I knew that he did this to hide his tears—and to avoid seeing mine. Soon, however, he would say, "Did I hurt you, Gitele?"

"No, Papa, not at all; squeeze me as hard as you like!" I felt that I was the most fortunate one in the family, because of Papa's nearness and the affection he shared with me.

Papa told me many Biblical stories, during those pleasant hours when I was his only audience. It was from these stories, and the way that he told them, that I gained my true understanding of God.

One story had to do with a prophetic dream about seven lean cows which became thinner after devouring seven fat cows. Papa explained this as meaning that there would be seven years of famine after seven years of plenty. He said this did happen and that it was to teach us to save when we have plenty, so that we would be prepared in time of hardship.

Another was a story about Moses. Papa said that even though Moses was raised in an Egyptian palace he never forgot he was an Israelite. And when he grew up, he left the Egyptian palace and led the Jews out of Egypt. Papa said we should do as Moses did—that it is a sin to forget we are Jewish. He said that we were God's chosen people. When I asked Papa how God would choose us before we were born, he would say, "It is written in the Bible, Gitele, and God says it is a sin to question his doings."

Talking about God almost always impelled my Papa to sing a certain Jewish song for me. I couldn't sing it as Papa did, but I have always remembered it, and I tried to sing it with as much feeling as he did. It goes:

Got in zayn mishpet iz gerekht.
Mer tor keynmol nit zogn
Az Got tut shlekht.
Vail Got veyst vos er tut
Ungerekht shtroft er keinem nit.
Got in zayn mishpet iz gerekht.

(God in heaven is right.
It's a sin to say otherwise.
God knows what he does.
Without just cause
Punished no one was.
God in heaven is right.)

Often I asked Papa to repeat the story of how our family came to America the second time, perhaps because I had played a rather exciting part in the story. He told how each member of our family had to sneak away at different times, so that anyone they could not trust would not know that the whole family was leaving; otherwise, we would have been reported to the government. There were informers all around, Papa said. This was in what Papa called "Russian Poland." It was the law that every teen-age boy had to serve in the army. Since Papa had three sons, and the oldest was already twelve years old, he knew he would never be permitted to take his family out of the country, if he waited much longer. Papa said that he, Harold, and Herbert left the country first, on the pretense of visiting relatives in another town. Two days later Mother took Phillip and Leah and went to meet Papa and the other boys. I was left with my aunt. She was to bring me to my family later, meeting them at the port from which the boat would leave for America. I was nine months old then.

Papa said that the family had to act like thieves, concealing their own valuables on their persons as if they were guilty of some crime. I could just see Mother, as Papa described her: when she left, she was wearing three suits of underwear and four dresses! All the others wore as much clothing as they could force themselves into—coats over

other coats, pants pulled on over other pants, and the like.

Then came the exciting part of the story—for me. Haye Leye (my Aunt Helen), was taking care of me while the rest of my family got away. She had no children of her own. I learned later that Aunt Helen had delivered me when I was born. Mother never had a doctor when any of her children were born—not even when Blanche was born in America. Anyway, Papa said that Aunt Helen always referred to me as "her baby." She knew my family were waiting for her to bring me to the boat dock in that town some distance away, but she also knew—so Papa claimed—that my family couldn't turn back or delay their departure in any way. They would have to get on that boat when it was ready to leave whether I was there or not.

I always became very excited when Papa said that this was what almost happened. Aunt Helen arrived with me just before the boat was ready to sail! Then Papa would tease me, saying, "One of your brothers said we should leave without you. After all, we had four other children, and besides, he said, you cried too much!" Papa said he had told my brother, "We want her—even if she does cry too much."

I am sure I would have been well taken care of by my Aunt Helen. She must really have loved me. I remember wondering about how it would have been, being Aunt Helen's baby. It might have been all right. But then I wouldn't have had my papa, and I wouldn't have wanted to live any place where I would be separated from this wonderful man.

Remembering Papa's ability to tell and read stories so that they became virtual living experiences for me as I listened has convinced me he would have been a wonderful rabbi. His stories, superbly told, influenced me beyond anything one could learn in school. In fact, as I look back on

my "first family," I believe Papa's greatest influence was manifested in his teachings and examples of the best way to live as a Jew.

It was during these times, when Papa and I were just two people finding common interests, that I learned my first prayer. This was the prayer Papa taught me:

> I give thanks to thee, O King,
> Who liveth and endureth,
> Who has mercifully restored my soul to me.
> Great is thy faithfulness.

Papa spoke this prayer in Hebrew, which I did not understand, and then he carefully translated it into Jewish for me. He would add, "Then, Gitele, you can ask for anything you want, and thank God for anything special he did for you or gave you." That was fifty years ago. I have never since ended a day without repeating this prayer.

But if I never had reason to love Papa for anything else, one little incident that happened one day when we were talking together would have made me love him for a lifetime. I had told Papa of overhearing Leah tell one of her girl friends that a certain girl they both knew was "no good." She said the girl took after her brother, who was also "no good." I guess I figured this "taking after someone" was something that could be arranged between people. So I asked Papa if he could arrange it that I took after him, like the girl who took after her brother.

Papa took my hand in his and said, "Gitele, I already did that. That is why your hair is red, *meyn kind* [my child]."

"But, Papa, your hair is black. Only your beard is red."

Gently Papa said, "Gitele, I knew you wanted to be a little girl."

"You are right, Papa. I wouldn't want to be a boy."

Then Papa said, "I thought how funny you would look with a beard. But I also thought about how fine you would look with red hair. So you have red hair. So you could take after your papa!"

I loved him for saying this. After that, when someone would taunt me with: "Hey, Rusty! Rusty nail!" I would try to remember that someone else much more important had said, "Gitele, how fine you look with your red hair."

Until I was older the grocery store was the only other spot in the outside world I knew, except for the sidewalk in front of the house where I played with the other children on Saturdays. Quite often I was sent for items Leah needed in a hurry because she had started to cook something and found she had no eggs, or salt, or the like. I would go with the correct change and strict orders about what to get and to "Hurry! I'm waiting."

These shopping trips were like little adventures, because they permitted me to do something different. And I was, in my own opinion, if in no one else's, a pretty good shopper. A few times, however, the grocery clerk got the best of me—such as the time, when Leah needed eggs in a hurry.

She was getting ready to fix noodles with cottage cheese for dinner—this was a delicacy—and she realized that she had forgotten to buy the eggs to make the noodles with. So she gave me two cents to buy two cracked eggs. "Pick out the largest ones!" she yelled as I went out the door.

In the store were two stacks of eggs, one stack consisting of cracked eggs. The grocer's son was taking care of the store, so I asked him how much these eggs cost.

"Ten cents a dozen," he told me.

The other eggs were not cracked, and they seemed to be much larger. So I asked the grocery boy, "Please crack two of those large eggs for me."

"Smart aleck, ain't you?" said the boy. "Show me how much money you got." I showed him my two cents. Quickly he took two eggs from his side of the egg stacks, put them in a paper bag, and said, "Here, wise guy!" I gave him the money and walked out, thinking how smart I was to get the large eggs.

It wasn't until I got home that I learned I'd gotten no bargain. Somehow that grocery boy had managed to put two small cracked eggs into the bag without my knowing it.

When Leah got a look at my "bargain," she asked, "Well, Rusty, what did you do—take these eggs from the chicken before she was ready to lay them?"

4

I always felt more like a spectator than a part of the family. I was expected to be around, but I wasn't noticed unless I "got in the way." All of the others, except Papa, seemed concerned only with themselves most of the time. Sometimes I envied them their busy lives, however.

Harold and Herbert left for work early each morning, usually before daylight. But they never left before they *davend* (said their daily prayers)—*laygn tfiln*. Around their arms they wound straps that seemed yards long. Then they would stand and pray out loud, for what seemed to me to be hours. Before they were finished, they were beating their breasts and swaying back and forth.

Having concluded their prayers, they would leave for the clothing factory where they worked. Each owned a manual sewing machine which they took with them from job to job.

Then Leah and Phillip would be off to school, and Mother

would go to work at our store. I would be the only one not going anywhere, except for Blanche, who was too young, and Papa, who was too ill to work.

In the afternoon they would start coming home. Leah and Phillip were first, since Leah had to finish preparing supper. Then Mother, Harold and Herbert, would come home at the end of the day. Very seldom did we all sit down to supper together, except on Fridays.

Every Friday, however, the pattern changed, because our Sabbath began at sundown that day and continued until sundown Saturday. Each Friday morning Mother filled the cooking pot with twice as much water and put chicken in the pot instead of soup bones or meat. The chalk mark was higher in such cases, and I remember that this made the boiling soup easier to watch.

This double portion of soup was necessary, because the Sabbath was strictly enforced in our home. No cooking or work of any other kind, could be done after sundown Friday or before sundown Saturday, and, of course, no money was supposed to be spent or even touched. This rule presented one problem, which was solved by my practical mother. The cooking fire had to be lighted on Saturday, and lighting it was considered work. But if the fire had not been lighted, we would have had no meals on Saturday. So Mother had an agreement with a little gentile boy, who would come on Saturday, light our fire, and take from the mantel the coin which Mother had placed there before sundown Friday.

The iceman also came around on Friday. He would stop his horse and wagon on our block and ring his cowbell to let everyone know he was there. For five cents he would cut a piece of ice twelve inches square from the big chunks in his wagon. Then he would pick up the piece with his big iron

ice tongs and carry it on his back to your rooms. You could save a penny or two if you brought a tub to his wagon, let him put the cake of ice in your tub, then carried it home yourself.

We bought ice only in the warm weather. The pots of food we were preparing for Saturday were placed in the tub with the ice.

I don't know what the iceman did for a living in the wintertime: certainly neither we nor any of the neighbors needed ice then. The New York winters provided sufficient cold for our own refrigerator, which was a box nailed to the window sill outside one window. On wintertime Fridays we put the next day's food in this box, and the next day it would be as fresh, and taste as good as when it was first cooked. In real cold weather the food would be frozen solid.

On Fridays I had the added duty of scrubbing the wood kitchen floor and then covering it with newspapers until it was dry. I would cover the kitchen table with a cloth we used only on the Sabbath and Jewish holidays; then I would put candles on the table. When Leah came home from school on Fridays, she cooked noodles for the chicken soup, and potatoes.

Mother always closed the store before sundown on Fridays. As soon as she was home, she lighted the candles, covered her head with a shawl, and said this Sabbath prayer:

Boruch ato adonay Eloheynu Melekh hoolom asher kideshonu bemitzvoysov vetzivonu lehadlik neyr shel shabos.

(Blessed art thou, our Lord, our God, Creator of the universe, who has sanctified us and commanded us to kindle the Sabbath light.)

Thus began our Sabbath.

For me each Saturday that followed meant playing in the street with the other children—and chicken soup and chicken and noodles for supper. For Mother it meant the chance to rest. She almost always slept all afternoon.

Often toward evening, after sundown and the end of the Sabbath, we had a visitor or two, mostly relatives. The youngest of us would be sent to bed, but Mother, and often my older brothers, would sit and talk with the visitors for hours. Mother would serve tea with lump sugar. Each person would put a lump of sugar in his mouth and then drink two or three cups of tea before it had melted. Everyone seemed to feel good, ready to sit back and tell stories or to listen and enjoy the stories of others.

I would pretend I was asleep, but I enjoyed listening, too. Sometimes someone would have a new story, but most of the stories had been told many times before. But everyone seemed to enjoy each story as though they had never heard it before. I knew the stories almost as well as did the storytellers themselves, having heard them so often. I didn't always understand the point to the funny stories, but I enjoyed the manner in which they were told.

Mother's favorite story was about a certain *shadkhen* (matchmaker) who made his living arranging marriages. This matchmaker was on his way to see a male client, or prospect, Mother would explain as she began the story.

"On the way he met a friend, and they discussed this possible deal. This friend, who was considered a pretty wise guy, said, 'How would you like me to come along as your moral support, to help convince your client? Say, for about thirty per cent of your commission?'

"The matchmaker thought for a moment and then said, 'No, that's too much money.'

" 'Okay,' replied the wise guy. 'I'll take twenty-five per cent—not a cent less.'

"The matchmaker said, 'It isn't worth it—not even fifteen per cent. But I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll give you ten per cent of what I get.'

"The wise guy thought for a while, and then replied, 'Okay, I'll take it. That's the way I like to do business—no chiseling around.'

" 'Let's go, then,' the matchmaker said. 'But mind you: Whatever I say, you make it sound better or bigger. If I say the girl I have for my client is pretty, you say she is beautiful. Don't forget, now!'

" 'Don't worry,' the wise guy said. 'I'll brag plenty. I know my business. Do you think I would be taking your money if I couldn't help you? I have a big reputation for being convincing.'

"So the two partners called on the young prospect, and everything started off fine. The matchmaker told the young man what a wonderful cook this certain girl was. The wise guy backed him up. 'Why, she is the very best cook in the whole world!'

"The matchmaker said, 'This girl is so kind and gentle, everybody loves her.'

"Right away the wise guy said, 'Only to know her is to love her. The only ones who don't love her are those who don't know her.'

"The matchmaker said, 'She has a nice few hundred dollars in the *kasa* [bank].'

" 'What do you mean, a "few hundred dollars?" ' said the wise guy, feigning astonishment. 'Why, I know a guy who works in the bank, and he told me, secretly, of course, that this girl has a nice few *thousand* dollars!'

"The prospect, wondering who this wonderful girl was, asked, 'Do I know this girl? What is her name?'

"The matchmaker put on a big grin and said, 'Why, sure you know her, my friend. You know the Ginsburgs, the ones that have the big drygoods store and don't owe a dime on it.'

"The young man didn't smile back. He was frowning a bit. 'Isn't she the daughter who has a hump on her back?'

" 'Hump on her back?' said the matchmaker. 'Oh, just a tiny, little one. So little you would hardly notice it!'

"This seemed like a signal to the wise guy to brag again, so he came out with: 'What do you mean, a "little" hump! It's a big one. Why, I never saw anyone with a larger hump in my whole life!' " Then everyone would laugh. I couldn't help but feel sorry for this girl.

I thought it was mean to laugh at the girl, and I was glad that she could not hear them making fun of her.

However, there was one story my mother's half brother told that had much more effect on me. Stories about matchmakers were very popular, and this story of my uncle's was also about a matchmaker. His story went like this:

"This matchmaker had a girl client who really wanted to get married, and as quickly as she could. The matchmaker also had another client who wanted to get married, a young man. This young man had no job, no money, no education, and besides, he wasn't even good-looking. He knew this was all true about himself. He couldn't even advertise in the *Bintl Brif* [Jewish column], because he couldn't tell anything about himself that would interest a girl. The matchmaker knew all this, too, but he also knew he could get him this particular girl for a bride.

"The matchmaker told the young man what a gorgeous

girl he had for him. Her parents owned a big factory, they had plenty of money, and her father would make him a partner in the business without his putting up a dime—*after* he married the girl, of course.

"Well, the young man figured that this was just about too good to be true, so he said to the matchmaker, 'Why does she want to marry me? Is she sick, or is something the matter with her?'

"The matchmaker shrugged and said, 'No, there is really nothing the matter with her. She is just *a kleyn bisele a shvanger* [a little bit slightly pregnant].'"

Everybody laughed very hard at this story. I heard it more than once, but I could see nothing funny about it. It seemed to have something to do with the "partly pregnant" part, and finally I decided to find out just what the story meant.

I had learned something of what "pregnant" meant a few months before, when Mother said that Mrs. Applebaum had gotten herself a baby. I remembered that Mrs. Applebaum's stomach was fat, and that it stuck out, before she had the baby, but now her stomach was like everyone else's, and she had "gotten a baby."

I said to Mother, "Mrs. Applebaum must have carried her money to buy the baby with around her stomach, because it isn't fat any more."

"You talk too much," Mother replied, and she seemed angry.

"Where do they buy babies?" I asked.

At that Mother became really angry. "Don't you know it's a sin to ask so many questions? You'll find out when it's time for you to know."

I was very inquisitive, so the following Saturday I asked

a girl friend in the neighborhood if she knew anything about babies. She was about ten years old. Her version of how women "got babies," and the manner in which she explained it to me, would have been shocking to my mother, who had chosen to tell me nothing.

My girl friend said that "pregnant" meant "the baby," and that it was carried in the mother's stomach, and that her stomach was cut open for the baby to be born.

I thought about this often. I had never seen Mother undressed, but I imagined how terribly cut up she must be. I hoped that she would never have any more children, so she wouldn't have to be cut up any more. Now I felt that I knew what Mother meant when she sometimes talked about how much she had suffered for us children. Sometimes, when she was angry with one of us, she would say, "You aren't worth *dos blit vos isk hob fargosn* for you [the blood that I spilled for you]!"

This definition of the word "pregnant" didn't help me to understand the story my uncle told. I tried to reason it out for myself. The girl in the story was "just slightly pregnant." Did this mean that she was going to get just part of a child when they cut her stomach open? That certainly did not seem funny; yet all the older people laughed about it. So after hearing the story several more times I couldn't forget this girl and how brokenhearted she would be with just part of a baby. I wondered what part of her baby would be missing. So I decided to ask Leah what happened if a girl was "just slightly pregnant."

Apparently I had asked the wrong question again. I was used to Leah scolding me, but she was so upset and angry now that her words seemed to descend on me like blows. She ended up by saying that I was "no good," and that I would land in the gutter!

After that, when I was outside, I would walk along the edge of the sidewalk and look at the gutter. I wondered just where I would land when I landed "in the gutter."

Would it be in the middle of the block or at the corner? Would I be sitting up or lying down? I would silently pray, "Please, God, make it sitting up. Then, if a horse and wagon comes down the street, I can see it and move over a bit." I asked him, too, to fix it so I would land in the middle of the block and not at the corner, because if I was at the corner, some bigger person crossing the street might not see me and step on me. Then I would think that maybe I was asking too much. I had been told that if a person asked for too much she got nothing. So I amended my prayer: "Please, God, just sitting up will be enough. Most people cross the street in the middle of the block, anyway."

5

My parents were not only very religious but very superstitious as well. For this reason, they believed very strongly in the casting of an evil eye.

Papa had been a big, strong man, Mother would say, until he started to build and install the counters in the store. He wanted to get them in and the store opened, and he worked all day and night. He was still working at the new store at six o'clock one morning when an acquaintance, on his way to work, saw him and stopped to remark, "Charles, are you still here? Haven't you been home to sleep all night?"

"No," Papa answered. "I want to finish so I can open the store tomorrow."

"You must be strong as a horse to be able to work like this. When I came home from work last night, you were here. Now I am going to work the next morning, and you are still here!"

This, according to the superstition, was *ayin hore* [evil eye], and it began to take effect quickly. Mother said that, from that day, Papa became weaker each day. He went to several doctors, but none seemed able to do anything for him.

Some days Papa would feel very sad, and when Mother had left, I would sit beside him on his bed and say, "You will get big and strong after a while, Papa. You will see!"

It would just about break my heart when he would pat my hand and say, "You know something, Gitele? The family would be better off without me."

"No, no, Papa! You don't eat very much, not even as much as I do. Besides, I'm afraid to stay in the house alone with Blanche." This was all I could think of to say, but I knew he meant he wished he was dead. Then one day, when he was suffering a great deal, he did something more than talk about this. I have never, until now, told anyone what happened, not even members of my own family.

"Gitele," Papa said to me, "get me all the medicine off the top shelf. I want to see which is the right one to take."

I had to stand on a chair to reach the bottles. I took them down, a few at a time, and handed them to Papa. He would open each bottle as I handed it to him, smell its contents, and then remark, "No, this is not the right one."

Soon I had all the bottles down, and Papa said, "Just leave them all here for a little while. My smeller isn't working very good just now. I'll smell them again a little later."

A while later I saw Papa pour the contents of several

bottles together and drink the mixture. When he realized I was watching him, he said, "Now, you promise not to tell anyone, Gitele." He explained how the others would say he was using up the medicine too fast, and that they would be angry with him because they would have to buy more.

I understand what he was trying to do. That night he vomited a great deal, but I did not dare tell anyone the cause of it. I had promised Papa I wouldn't, and I knew they would scold him. I wasn't sure what they would do to me, either.

I was sure Papa didn't like to be scolded any more than I did. But I often wondered, when Mother would complain and scold him, and he would say little or nothing, if he just did not care, if he cared too much to argue, or whether he was too sick to defend himself. Papa always spoke with a low, gentle voice. Often he would say to me, "Be good to Mother. She works so hard in the store, from morning till night, handling those heavy rolls of yard goods. Remember, she is doing this so we can eat, Gitele."

About six months later, Papa died—of cancer, I believe now—at the age of thirty-nine; Mother was then thirty-eight years old. Neither my sisters nor I were permitted to attend the funeral. When the rest of the family returned, they took off their shoes and started *Shive* [seven days of mourning], which lasted for seven days. We all stayed in the house, and did not wear shoes for that entire period. Harold and Herbert recited *Kadish* [prayer in memory of the departed] every day for a year after.

I honestly believe that I missed Papa more than anyone else did. No longer did anyone call me Gitele, or tell me stories, or show me how much they loved me. I took sick shortly after Papa passed away. Leah had to stay home and take

care of Blanche and me. Before leaving for the store Mother put her hand on my forehead and, with concern in her voice, said, "Gussie is burning up! Leah, mind you watch the clock and give her a powder every hour, to cool her down."

I wanted to ask Mother what would happen if I burned up —whether I would be all burned or just a part of me burned. But she looked so worried that I decided to wait until she left and ask Leah.

"What are you afraid of, you big dope?" was Leah's answer. "You're not worried that your rusty hair will burn up, are you?"

She was making fun of me, of course, but at the moment her remark satisfied me, and I fell asleep, hoping that after my hair burned it would grow back a different color—any color but red.

The next thing I heard was Mother screaming and scolding Leah and shaking me, calling me to wake up! I was not quite awake, but I heard Leah say I had slept five hours, so when I woke up that time she had given me five powders!

"Then she went right back to sleep," Leah was explaining to Mother. "But she kept making noises and talking, only I couldn't make out a single word she was saying."

I recovered from the dose of five powders and from the illness—and I still had my red hair, of course. When I got well, I was told I would be registered in school at the beginning of the next term. With Papa gone, there was no need for me to stay at home any more.

We moved from Allen Street to Orchard Street, near Canal Street, into a three-room rear apartment on the first floor. Mother said we didn't have to live so high up any more in order to get fresh air, since Papa was gone. Besides, she had developed a bad case of asthma, and it was hard for her to climb stairs.

Here I couldn't watch the trains when I was home. Looking out of the windows, I could see only a yard filled with clotheslines, which were stretched on pulleys from the windows of our tenement house to the windows of the house across the yard. People in both houses used the same lines. But in this house we did have a sink with running water in our kitchen, and this was very nice. As Papa used to tell me, "You cannot find a person who has everything, and you must be grateful for the things you do have and remember that some people do not even have what you have."

I have never forgotten some of the things Papa told me about prayer. He said we should never be afraid to pray in our own simple ways for what we wanted, so long as we were sincere. "No matter what it may be for," he said, "God will never turn us down provided he thinks it is for our own good." Papa stressed that we should never forget to be thankful for everything, because nothing truly belongs to us: what we have or are given is only loaned—money, health, our children, our very lives. "God giveth and can take away."

6

I shall never forget my first or my last day in school—or the days between. The day finally came when I was standing in line, with Mother, to be registered in Public School No. 46, on Forsythe Street. I remember how uneasy Mother was and her saying, "I'm wasting too much time away from the store to answer any silly questions."

We were in a long line with other mothers and children. The children were all smaller than I was. I was eight, and

going into the first grade with six-year-olds. Other mothers were talking to each other and bragging about how smart their children were; my mother just stood there, saying nothing.

I heard one mother say that her child knew the whole alphabet, and another said her child could count up to some certain number. I asked Mother what "alphabet" meant. Her answer was, "If I could tell you, what would I be sending you to school for?"

How beautiful many of the children looked in their nicely starched dresses and pretty hair ribbons! Some wore ribbons that matched their dresses, while others even wore sashes that matched their ribbons and new shoes. I was concerned about my red hair, and I looked up and down the line to see if there were any other children with red hair. Only one small child at the end of the line had hair that matched mine. What good would that do me? I asked myself. I couldn't play with *him,* because he was a boy, and I wasn't even permitted to talk to boys.

Then Mother pulled me back into line, asking, "What do you want—to lose your place in line? I'm wasting enough time trying to educate you."

I was hoping our turn would never come, so I wouldn't have to be in class with all those little girls in their pretty clothes. But our turn did come, right after a little girl and her mother, who stood there so proudly, had finished making their application, the mother answering the questions in excellent English.

Mother understood people when they spoke to her in English, but her replies were a mixture of English and Jewish. However, most people managed to understand her, and the school registrar was no exception. When the registrar

asked Mother my age, she replied that I was going on nine years old.

I didn't want anyone around to hear how old I was, so I said, "Please, Mother, not so loud!"

I was glad, though, that when Mother was asked my name she answered "Gussie" instead of Gitl, my Jewish name. New Americanized names had been given all our family members at the time we were admitted to this country. As I understood it, Mother told the immigration people our Jewish, "old-country" names, and they came up with the English equivalents that sounded closest to them. As a result, Hershl became Harold, Khune became Herbert, Faivl became Phillip, Laye became Leah, Roze, my mother, became Rose; and Chiya, my father, became Charles. Blanche, born in America, was given the Jewish name Beyle, which was never used.

When Mother had given the registrar all the information required, she left me standing there. The next thing I knew, I was in a classroom, where a line was formed, starting with the smallest girl and ending with me, the very tallest, towering above all the rest.

The first little girl in line seemed very proud, with her pretty dress, patent-leather shoes, and blond curls with a pink hair ribbon. I wished Papa were alive so I could tell him about this fortunate little girl who had everything. Better yet, if he were alive, I wouldn't be going to school. I wished he could have lived until I should be married, so that I wouldn't have to go to school at all. But I was glad, at that moment, to be the tallest in line, because there was no one behind to see me, and the teacher had told everyone to look directly at the front.

It seemed that everyone wore either new or polished

shoes, while I was wearing Leah's outgrown shoes, dull- and old-looking. I tried to shine these shoes by lifting one foot at a time and rubbing each shoe on the backs of my long black stockings. Some of the dust did come off, but they didn't shine, so I spat on them and did some more rubbing. They looked a little better, but I still felt lucky to be at the end of the line. What was more, I was wearing one of Leah's old dresses. She was quite plump, and her dress didn't seem to fit me anywhere. But I had some idea of how to rectify that. At home, that night, I would fix this dress; I was already planning how I would do it.

When we were marched to our seats, the shorter girls were seated in the front and the taller ones in the rear, which put me in the very last seat in the last row. This satisfied me.

Then there was roll call. The teacher talked and gave instructions, but I didn't remember much of it because I was dreaming about fixing over Leah's dresses so that I would look like the rest of the girls. Finally some papers were passed out, and I heard the teacher say, "Have your mother sign this paper and bring it back tomorrow."

That night I did give the paper to Mother to sign, and I did bring it back to school the next morning. We stood in line as we went into the classroom, and each girl laid her paper on the teacher's desk when her turn came. When the teacher had looked at a girl's paper, she was allowed to go to her seat. When it was my turn, I put my paper on the desk.

"Just what do you call this, Miss Gussie?" the teacher asked sarcastically. I was confused. It was the same paper I had been given the day before, and I was turning it in, just as the other girls had done. "Why didn't you have this filled out and signed?"

I had seen Mother sign the paper, and when I pointed to it lying on the desk, I said, "There it is." I sort of expected the teacher to apologize for her own oversight in questioning me about it.

"Do you think I'm blind? Is that your mother's name, 'X'?"

"No, Miss Waters. It's Rose."

"Well, why didn't she put that down and fill out the rest, like I told the whole class? Where were you when I said that, or are you deaf and can't hear?"

By that time the children had begun to laugh. The teacher handed the paper back to me.

"Here, take it home again, and get your mother to fill it out and sign it with her name."

I was confused and hurt, and in a low voice I said, "My mother can't spell."

The teacher came back with: "I don't care if she can't spell! Just have her fill out the paper. If she can't write, have someone who can write do it for her!"

I went to my seat, deeply ashamed. I felt as if I would be happy to drop dead right then and there. If I did, everyone in the class would feel sorry—even the ones who had laughed. I tried to figure out how long it would be before I would be out of school and married. When I had children of my own, I would always be good to them. I wouldn't care, I thought, if I suffered even more than Mother did in having my children.

That night I told Mother that the teacher had been angry because she had signed that "X." "What does she know?" Mother asked. "Nothing! I bet she isn't even Jewish! If she was, she would know that 'X' stands for a name. Even if I had signed my name in Jewish, I bet she couldn't read it!"

"Do you know how to write Jewish?" I asked.

"Who knows how to write? Even if I could, that teacher wouldn't know what I wrote!"

So Phillip wrote the proper answers on the paper and signed Mother's name to it. Phillip was a good pupil, and his teachers liked him. So did everyone else—except the members of his family.

The next morning, when I handed the paper to Miss Waters, all she said was, "Why didn't you do this in the first place?"

I wasn't one of her favorites. You had to dress well to have her like you, it seemed. She would often have the best-dressed girls stand in front of the class as examples of the manner in which one should be dressed for school.

The rest of the days during that first six months in school were hardly improvements on these first ones. If I learned anything at all, I am not aware of it. I simply could not concentrate. I understood little that was discussed, but I was afraid to ask questions as the others did when they didn't understand. I was afraid that I would be criticized if I did.

Once, when I was called upon, I did answer correctly. Out loud, one of the pupils said, "Hurrah! She knew the answer for once!" When the rest laughed, all the teacher said was, "Let's have it quiet." After that, when I knew the right answer, I would say that I didn't know. I just couldn't stand to be laughed at again.

My teacher knew I had a sister attending this same school, and one day she summoned Leah to talk with her about me.

After school, with everybody else gone, I listened while Miss Waters told Leah how poorly I was doing. She asked Leah if she could help me at home and perhaps see that I was dressed more neatly for school.

I had every reason to expect the worst, knowing Leah and how she treated me as a "nobody." So I was completely amazed when she stood there like a lady and very politely said, "I most surely will do the best I can for her. Of course, I do have household responsibilities. You see, my father is dead, and my mother has a store, so I take full charge of the house and do all the cooking."

She didn't tell the teacher I was a "dope" or that I "never did anything right," as I expected. Neither did she say that I helped with the housework and the cooking, too.

The teacher thanked Leah and then turned to me. "Gussie, you should be proud of your sister. She is a very capable girl. It's too bad you don't take after her."

That evening Leah told the family how my teacher had called her in to talk about me. Throwing her head high, she said, "Go ahead, Rusty. Tell them what your own teacher said about *me*."

When I wouldn't answer, she said, "Well, then, I'll tell them what she said about *you!*" Turning to the rest of the family, she said, "What do you know? Rusty isn't only the biggest one in her class but she's also the biggest dope and the worst-dressed!"

To my surprise, Mother came to my defense, saying, "I am sure the teacher didn't call her 'Rusty.' Besides, what do you expect? You don't just wear out your clothes—you ruin them before Gussie gets them." Speaking to me, Mother said that since I did so well with my sewing she would give me some remnant material from the store, so that I could make some new clothes for myself. I wasn't sure that I would ever do much better in school, but I would surely feel much better if I could wear some new clothes.

I ripped the old clothes apart, used them as patterns in

cutting the new materials, and then sewed them together in the same way. Soon I learned how to change the styles a little.

I was very proud of a certain dress I made, with a wide silk sash and a bow in the back. I called it my best dress. That Saturday I walked up and down the block in my new dress, wanting everyone to see it. I passed one of our neighbors, who was sitting on the stoop with her children. When I came by her the second time, I stopped to make sure that she saw my dress.

"How do you like the new dress I got?" I asked, hoping she would think it was a bought dress, not a homemade one. I turned so that she could see the bow in the back.

Her answer was, "Who are you trying to kid, Gussie? Why, I can even see your uneven stitches from where I'm sitting!"

I ran home and cried a little, but I also thought, "That will never happen again! I will be more careful." However, that neighbor's remark had hurt, and I tried to make excuses for my carelessness: "I was in a hurry; I wanted to wear it Saturday, so I rushed to finish before sundown Friday." Then I remembered Papa saying that everyone makes mistakes, and that the best way to learn is from your mistakes, and that practice makes perfect. So I felt that I would do better, the more I sewed.

I dreamed about having a sewing machine, so that my stitches would always be even. How much faster I could sew —and I wouldn't waste time threading needles so often. Maybe I could even sew for other people and get paid! Now I was *really* dreaming, I told myself. Who would pay me? Even so, I would be glad to sew for nothing for people who had no sewing machine—that is, if I had one of my own.

I was doing a lot of wishing here, I realized, but at the same time I must have been unconsciously thinking again of what Papa had said: that if you wish hard enough and long enough your wish will come true. Once again things happened to bear out the wisdom of Papa's words. Not long after I started wishing, Harold left the factory, and Mother took him into the store with her. So he brought his sewing machine home! Herbert showed me how to run the machine, and this unexpected kindness on his part made me feel that he was just about the nicest person there was. I made all my own dresses and aprons. Most girls wore aprons to protect their good dresses, but I made my aprons so nicely that I wore them to cover up my less presentable dresses.

7

It was the last day in Miss Waters' class. The next day we would be in a new classroom with a new teacher.

The girl seated in front of me had two long braids, and in each there was a ribbon, braided in from the top of the braid and knotted at the very end. Nobody could tell she wore ribbons except somebody very close to her, as I was. I thought this was real waste, because, this way, her hair ribbons didn't look any better than the strings in my braids. The more I looked at those ribbons, the more I thought of what I could do if I had just one of them.

So when we got in line to go home, I stood real close to her. Again I felt lucky to be the last in line: nobody could watch me from behind. Carefully I untied the knot on one of the braids. The rest was easy. The ribbon became un-

braided by just handling it a bit, and when it was loose, I let it fall to the floor. Or, rather, I helped it land on the floor. I had the usual long black stockings that came up above my knees, with strings holding them up. Pretending I was fixing a shoelace, I picked up the ribbon and pushed it under one of the strings. My ribbon stayed in this safe place until I got home.

At home I washed my beautiful new ribbon and dipped it in a little sugar water to make it stiff. Then, while it was still wet, I ironed it to make it shine.

The next morning came, with the new class, the new teacher, and my new hair ribbon! With that silk ribbon on top of my hair it was like being born again. I felt good, and I went to school feeling like a different person. The ribbon gave me so much confidence in myself that I really thought I might do better in school.

8

When I was in the second grade, something happened in school, which I have never forgotten. It began one day when all the children were in the schoolyard eating their lunches.

I noticed a very pretty little girl sitting by herself at the end of the yard. She wore a nice new dress and a pretty hair ribbon, but she looked so sad and lonely. I didn't know her, but I wanted very much to talk to her. As I didn't know just how to start a conversation with her, I walked a few steps closer, hoping that she would notice me and maybe speak to me first. While I felt I might be able to ease her loneliness, I realize now that it was my own loneliness which drew me to her.

I was edging closer when along came Leah. Passing by, she shouted at me, "Hey, Rusty! Don't forget! Don't stop on your way home. It's Friday—it's your turn to wash the floors!"

In our house we took turns washing the wooden floors on Fridays. It *was* my turn, but there was no need to remind me in public—especially at this moment. I knew that the little girl had heard Leah, and I was overcome with embarrassment. Now, I thought, I would never be able to talk to this nice girl. Standing there, I started to cry.

The next thing I knew, the little girl was standing in front of me, saying, "Aw, don't cry! I know how you feel. I have troubles, too. If you want, I can help you after school. My mother works, and there's no one else at home, so I don't have to go right home after school."

My mother worked because my father was dead, so, since her mother worked, her father must be dead, too, I reasoned. My tears stopped, and I put my arm around her and said, "I know what your troubles are. Your papa passed away, too."

She said that wasn't it, that her papa was not dead, but she had other troubles.

The important thing was that we were talking together, just as I had wanted. I told her how I was just dying to talk to her after I saw her sitting by herself and looking so sad, because I thought that I might be able to help her. I assured her that I didn't mind washing the floors, but that I wished my sister would stop calling me "Rusty" in front of others.

By then we were both smiling, and she told me that her name was Lillian, and that she really liked me. I told her my name was Gussie, and that I liked her very much, too. I guess she felt I was her friend, right there and then,

because she said that she would tell me the secret about her troubles, even though her mother had told her not to tell anyone.

"I know that if Mother really knew you she wouldn't mind if I told you our secret," she said. "Besides, *you* told me your troubles."

No one had ever before told me she would trust me with a personal secret because she liked me and because I was a friend. I solemnly promised that I wouldn't tell a single soul.

Her secret *did* have to do with her father, Lillian told me. He was in jail. He used to have a store, she said, and he bought some stolen merchandise. He didn't know it was stolen, but he had to go to jail anyway. She said her parents had to sell the store to get money to pay the lawyer. Then she and her mother moved from where they'd lived to our neighborhood, where nobody knew them or their secret. Now they were very poor, and that was why her mother had to work.

I wondered why she said they were poor. She was wearing such a pretty dress and such a big hair-ribbon, I didn't see how they could be poor. But, I decided, a nice girl like that wouldn't say anything but the truth, so maybe a relative gave her the nice clothes, or maybe she had them before her papa went to jail.

How lucky I felt to have found such a wonderful, understanding, nice friend. How happy she had made me by showing she trusted and believed in me, by telling me her secret! I told her I wanted her to be my friend for all my life, and that I really wished she was my sister. From that moment we were good friends.

Lillian was so pretty, and she even had a pretty name, I

thought. I was proud to call her my friend, and I referred to her as my "best friend." I didn't care that she was the *only* friend I had. We walked to and from school together every day, and we ate lunch together in the yard. My lunch was almost always a bread and butter and banana sandwich.

One day she suggested that we share our lunches, but, as it turned out, it was mostly her lunch we shared. She claimed she had brought so much, she could not eat it all, and that her mother would not like it if she brought any food home again—so would I please help her by eating some of it? This happened every day after that. Eventually she admitted that her mother purposely gave her large lunches so that she could share them with me. She had told her mother all about me, and she said that her mother liked me, too.

Hearing that two wonderful people liked me made me so happy that I felt I had to cry. I did manage to hold back the tears in her presence, but inside I was crying for joy.

When I was not with Lillian, I thought about her and her mother constantly—not only about how wonderful they were to me, but about doing something for them in return. In my prayers I asked God to show me what I could do for them, because it wasn't right for them to be the best friends anyone in the world could have while I did nothing nice for them.

For some time I didn't find any answers. There was just nothing wonderful or helpful I could do for them, nothing worthwhile I could give them. Then, one day, I suddenly knew what I could do: I could pray that God would get Lillian's father out of jail! This was what she and her mother wanted most. This was what would make them both happy. So this became my prayer, every night.

I was sure that God would answer this prayer. I was so

sure that I told Lillian one day, "Wait and see. Your father is coming home real soon!" This was at a moment when she seemed exceptionally sad, as though she thought her father would never come home. "My papa was very smart," I told her. "He knew everything, and everything he told me came true. He said if you pray hard enough, what you pray for always comes true." I assured her I was praying very hard every night. Then I told her about the sewing machine. "Didn't this come true?" I asked her.

For a few moments we both had tears in our eyes. Then Lillian said, "Thank you, Gussie, but we have been praying, too, from the very first day my father went to jail. I guess that's why we moved to the top floor. We used to live on the first floor, but people upstairs talked so loud and made so much noise that God couldn't hear us. Mother tells people we don't mind climbing the five flights of stairs, because the rents are cheaper up there. I guess she just doesn't want them to know that we moved there to get closer to God."

Then Lillian said that she was so sad because she had overheard her mother say that she wished she were dead, but that she had to keep on living because of her daughter.

It made me sad to hear about Lillian's mother. I wished we were still living on Allen Street on the fourth floor, instead of on Orchard Street on the first floor, because then God would hear my prayers better. I got to thinking that maybe God wasn't hearing my prayers, that perhaps I wasn't speaking loudly enough. However, my present volume was enough to make my praying noticeable to the others in the family, Leah, in particular, overhearing and asking, "What in the hell are you mumbling about, Rusty?"

But Papa had told me, "Where there is a will, there must be a way," and that if you think hard about it you will al-

ways find the way. Papa was right. I did think hard, and I found the right way. I remembered that there was a roof on our building, and I figured that if I went up there, especially when no one else was around, nothing could stop God from hearing me. So I started going up on the roof at night to pray. I went up there night after night, feeling that this was the solution to my problem.

Something else occurred to me as I continued to think about what had happened to Lillian's father. My mother had a store, just like Lillian's father had had, and I wanted to warn Mother about what had happened to him, so that she could see to it that nothing like that happened to her. But I couldn't forget the promise I had made to Lillian, not to tell her secret to anyone. How could I tell Mother without betraying my best friend? Well, "where there is a will there must be a way." So I thought real hard, and again I found the way. If I didn't tell Mother it was Lillian's secret, but led her to believe that it was someone else's, I wouldn't be betraying a trust!

That night I told Mother that a girl in school told me that her uncle was in jail because he had bought stolen merchandise from a man he didn't know was a thief. "Please Mother," I implored, "be very careful who you buy goods from! Be certain the people are honest!"

"God forbid it should happen to us," Mother said. "Such a thing can ruin a person's life!"

The next night I stayed on the roof much longer and prayed louder, saying to God, "This is very important. Please, God, don't let Lillian's life or her parents' lives be ruined! Don't let the guy with stolen merchandise know where Mother's store is—he might want to sell to her." Then I thanked God for finding the way to warn Mother. I was

happy, knowing that she would be careful now that she knew.

Early one morning I heard Lillian calling me from the backyard, much in advance of the time to leave for school. She seemed very excited. "Hurry, Gussie, hurry! I have a secret to tell you!"

Excited, I called back that I would be right down. Then Leah asked, "Aren't you going to eat your roll and milk?"

I hadn't eaten breakfast yet, but I answered, "I'm not hungry."

"What's the matter? Are you afraid your showoff friend with her secret won't wait for you?" Leah called Lillian a "showoff," because she was pretty and was always dressed so nicely.

When I reached Lillian, she grabbed and kissed me! For a moment I was stunned, and then the tears I had held back before came streaming. This was the first time anyone had kissed me. Not even Papa had kissed me.

She said that she was not going to school that day. Her father was coming home, and she was going to stay home until he got there! We both jumped up and down from sheer joy.

"Gee, Gussie," Lillian said, "you'd think it was *your* father!"

"Can I go home with you and wait for your father?" I asked her.

"Why, sure! Didn't you help us pray?"

It was then that I realized my prayers had been answered, and Lillian's saying that made me very happy. I really had done Lillian some good, and she knew it.

When I saw that reunion, I thought about how proud God must be, knowing that he had made this happen. What a

fine man Lillian's father was! How affectionately he hugged and kissed her and her mother! They were so absorbed in each other that they didn't even know I was there, crying just as they were.

But soon Lillian's father turned to me. He pinched my cheek and said, "So this is the Gussie I was told about. What a good-looking girl she will grow up to be, with those brown eyes and that brown hair!"

No one had ever told me my hair was brown. I loved him for saying this. "But my hair is red!" I said.

"Well," he replied, "I can tell it's turning brown!"

This man was wonderful! I loved him. Then, as though I were really a member of the family, I was invited to eat lunch with them. This was the first time I had ever eaten at any table other than the one in my family's home.

That night I didn't ask God for anything, thanking Him, instead, for answering that one big prayer. Yes, my prayer had really been answered, but at a great sacrifice—as I was to find out.

For two days after her papa came home Lillian didn't come by to call for me, nor was she at school. I thought this was just because she wanted to be home with her parents. But when the third day passed and I didn't see her, I became worried. I imagined all sorts of things as having happened. I had to find out, so that day after school I went to her house. When I got inside, it looked as though the family was getting ready to move.

My first thought was that they were moving downstairs again. I figured there was no longer need to live on the top floor, just as there was no need for me going up to our roof any more. I asked Lillian if this was true. No, this was not it, Lillian told me. They were moving out West!

My world seemed to tremble. I felt as if there were an earthquake. Or could all this be a dream? I started to cry. Lillian said, "Now, Gussie, stop your crying."

I only cried harder. I told her I couldn't stop. Lillian kept talking to me: "I begged my parents to take you with us, because I wouldn't care how far away we moved if they did. I told them how unhappy you are, but that you would be happy going to another school if we were together. They tried to make me understand this is all for the best, Gussie. We have to start a new life, where nobody knows my father was in jail. Mother said that if you cared for me you wouldn't cry, because only babies cry."

But I kept on. "I can't stop crying. You are the only best friend I ever had in my whole life!"

Then Lillian slapped my face, and I stopped crying, but I was amazed and confused. Then Lillian explained, "That is what my mother did to me, and I stopped crying."

Then Lillian walked all the way home with me. We didn't talk. Even if I could have found something to say, it wouldn't have come out, because my throat was so choked up. Finally Lillian said she wouldn't be in school any more. She didn't even say good-by, and neither did I. She left me standing at the stoop and just walked away, but she did turn around many times to wave, and I waved back.

I didn't once raise my hand to wipe away the tears rolling down my cheeks, not until I couldn't see her any more.

I guess Mother was right. Their lives were ruined there, and they just had to start a new life some place else. I felt miserable for a long time. I kept imagining that I would meet her again or that maybe she would come back for a visit.

I never saw her again.

Only in the fourth grade did things get better for me in school, and this was because Miss Harms was my teacher.

I liked to just look at Miss Harms. She had black hair, done up in a knot, and she wore curved combs on either side of her head. She wore long skirts and silk blouses with large puffed sleeves. I often thought that I could make a complete dress from just one of her sleeves.

One day we were standing in line, ready to go into class, when Miss Harms walked beside my line, and I noticed that one of her combs was about to fall off. I said, "Excuse me, Miss Harms, your pretty comb is about to fall off, and you might lose it."

"Oh, thank you, Gussie," she said to me. Something about the way she said this, and the way she looked at me, made me feel that she liked me. So I decided to try to do much better in her class, so that she would not be disappointed in me.

Miss Harms must have noticed that I was trying harder, because she appointed me monitor of the blackboards. I really tried to keep our blackboards cleaner than those in any other class. Then I was also made monitor of the school supplies. When I brought needed supplies or books back to our class, I would select one of the girls I liked to help me distribute them. How proud and useful I felt, walking up and down the aisles, distributing school supplies! Soon after this many of the children started to talk to me.

Sometimes Miss Harms would give me pencils to take home and sharpen and bring back the next day. I wanted my sisters to know how well I was doing in the important job of monitor, so one time, when I was given pencils to take home to sharpen, I gave each of my sisters a pencil, thinking this would make them like me. I told them I was in

charge of school supplies, and that I had authority to distribute them as I chose.

A few nights later my sisters and I had gone to bed; Mother had not yet come home from the store. I am sure my sisters knew I wasn't asleep, but they pretended to think I was. They knew I would overhear them plotting to get me and Miss Harms in trouble. They said that they were going to the Board of Education to tell them that I was stealing school property and giving it away. They were sure the board would put my teacher on the carpet and punish her. (I wanted to ask just what carpet they meant, but I couldn't let them know I wasn't asleep.)

"Perhaps they will even fire her," Leah stated. Then she said it would serve me right if I were sent to truant school, where they send all the bad children—or even to jail!

"Rusty thinks she is big-time, being a monitor. They couldn't pay me enough to do that dirty work. A *janitor* is what she really is. Does she think it takes brains to scrub the blackboard or to carry books and sharpen pencils? Nobody else but a dope would be a monitor!"

Even when the place was quiet and everyone else was asleep, I couldn't sleep. What had I done? I asked myself. Now, it seemed, I was really a thief. I knew I had to pray, but I didn't know for whom to pray first—myself or my teacher.

I decided to pray for my teacher. Besides, what if they *did* put me behind bars? I wouldn't have to go to school any more, and maybe I could stay in jail until I got married. Then I could go some place where they didn't know me, and make a new life—maybe even where Lillian was. That would be wonderful, because *they* wouldn't care if I had been in jail. Maybe they could help me find a husband. Maybe Lil-

lian's children and mine could be friends, and we could tell them how we used to be best friends. If I had to go to jail, it would mean everything happening for the best, I reasoned, remembering what Papa used to say. Since Papa's words were always so right, I prayed, "Please, God, don't let anything bad happen to Miss Harms. She is the innocent one. She is the only teacher who didn't holler at me or criticize me—and the only one who made me a monitor. Please, God, I promise I will never steal again in my whole life if you will only keep my teacher from getting into any trouble."

God answered my prayers, because the next day it was apparent that Leah and Blanche had forgotten all about the whole affair.

I did try hard to do better schoolwork. While I never did get good marks, there were now others in my class who got worse marks.

9

By the time I was about ten years old, my face was covered with freckles, and I was no longer just Rusty: I was now called "Freckle-Puss Rusty"!

I had been told that the sun caused freckles, so one day I asked Leah why she didn't have any freckles, since she was in the schoolyard as much as I was.

"Don't you know the sun only goes after redheads and stays away from black hair?" she answered.

I couldn't understand this. I wondered if the sun was afraid of her because she had black hair, or if maybe the sun was just afraid of *her* because of her personality. Then

I remembered that the few people I knew who had red hair had freckles, too.

I used to enjoy looking in all the store windows, and one day I saw a display advertising a vanishing cream for freckles. It was in a drugstore window, and it showed two pictures of the same girl, before and after using this freckle cream. In the "after" picture she looked like a different girl, just like I wanted to look. Besides, in the "before" picture, the girl had twice as many freckles as I did, so if this cream would remove all of hers, I felt that mine should be easy for it.

First making sure no one was around who knew me, I went into the drugstore and asked a clerk the price of the vanishing cream. I was told a small jar cost forty-five cents and a big jar seventy-five cents. I couldn't say, "I'll take one," but I did say, "That's a pretty girl in the window. Do you know her?" I guess I wanted to make sure it was a real girl in the picture.

"What?" The clerk seemed surprised at my question, but a man on the other side of the counter apparently understood, and he nodded his head at the clerk. Then the clerk said, "Oh, sure, sure! The boss knows her."

"Thank you," I said. "My mother wanted me to find out."

My mother could not have been less interested, of course, but I had to give some reason for going in to ask about the cream. Certainly I could not simply say that I did not have the money to buy a jar.

All the way home I thought hard about that forty-five cents I needed. It would take me years to save that much money. Maybe if I wished hard enough for it, it would come to me.

Then I realized that this was silly. What did I expect God

to do—throw forty-five cents down from heaven? This wasn't likely, but finding money in the streets was likely—at least, it was *possible.* I had heard of other people finding money in the street, money which other people had lost. So that day, and for many days thereafter, I carefully looked for lost money whenever I was walking any place. But there didn't seem to be any people in our neighborhood dumb enough to lose money, or I wasn't smart enough to find it. But I did get my forty-five cents. It happened because I had, for some time now, been doing an errand for Harold every Friday after school: I went to the Chinese laundry to get his shirts. The charge was fifty cents each time, and of course, Harold always gave me the money to pay the laundryman.

Not too long after I discovered the freckle cream a very special Friday came along. Harold had given me the usual fifty cents to get his laundry, but when I went to get it, the laundry was closed. It was a legal holiday. Harold was pretty upset when I told him what happened. "I already have plenty of shirts and collars, but I can't wear them if they are still at the laundry," he complained. "I guess I'll have to buy some new ones. I can't take a girl out if I'm wearing a dirty shirt and collar."

I don't know whether it was having his girl on his mind or being upset about the laundry that made him forget to ask me to return his fifty cents. At the time, I just thought I would use it at the laundry the next time. All he said was, "It better not be another *goyishe* [non-Jewish] holiday again."

So now I had a dollar. Half of it would take care of Harold's laundry. The other half must be meant to be mine, I thought. But I had to be sure of this. I'd have to pray that Harold would not remember he had given me fifty cents the

week before and gotten no laundry for it. After all, he had lots of things on his mind, and he probably couldn't remember every fifty cents. Besides, it wasn't as if I had stolen the money: Harold did give it to me.

Even though I was really afraid I was headed for trouble, I decided that the fifty cents was mine to spend. I even tried to see it as God's will, to help me get rid of my freckles. I had pretty well managed to convince myself of that by the time I found myself in the drugstore, asking for the freckle-vanishing cream in the forty-five cents size. Then I asked the clerk how to use it.

"First you clean your face with cleansing cream," he said; "then you apply the vanishing cream."

It had not occurred to me that I would need cleansing cream. I asked for five cents' worth. The clerk's brow went up.

"The smallest jar costs twenty-five cents," he told me. "But you can use soap and water, and then apply this cream. It will vanish right away."

I asked him which would vanish—the cream or the freckles? He was annoyed with me, but took the time to explain that, while the cream did disappear, it cleared the freckles with it.

So I took my precious jar of freckle cream home with me. That night I washed my face extra well. I even heated the water on the stove first. Then I went to bed before anyone else did. I put some of the cream on my face and rubbed it in real hard. My idea was that, if I rubbed hard before the cream disappeared, it would make the freckles disappear sooner. All during the night I worked with the cream. I would wake up every so often, and when I made sure no one was awake, I would rub some more cream on my face. There

wasn't any cream left in the jar by the next morning.

My freckles, however, were still there! They had not vanished, though my face was sore from rubbing it all night, and it was possible that I had rubbed off some of the skin.

I was not only brokenhearted but I was afraid all over again. I should have remembered what Papa said: that no good ever comes from doing wrong. I should have remembered, also, that he said we are always punished for our sins, and that sometimes our children are punished when we do wrong. So I began to pray: "Please, God, don't punish my children for this sin. I didn't mean to keep the money. I only wanted to get rid of my freckles. I won't do anything like this again."

10

Our store was always closed all day Saturday and open all day Sunday. On Sundays Leah cooked the heavy meal in the afternoon, and I brought Mother and Harold their meals at the store. This meal was either stew, pot roast with potatoes, or vegetable soup with meat in it. I carried the pot by its two handles, holding the lid down with my thumbs. The silverware and bread I carried in a paper bag under my arm.

Mother and Harold took turns eating from the pot so one of them could be in the front of the store.

Just two doors from Mother's store was a stand where herring was sold out of a barrel. The woman who ran the stand was called the "Herring Lady," and one Sunday, as I was on my way to the store, she stopped me and asked, "Gussie, what are you carrying in that pot that smells so good?"

Mother often referred to her as "the nosy old Herring Woman," and I didn't think she would approve of my telling her what was in the pot. All I could think of saying, by way of reply, was, "If Mother wanted people to know, she wouldn't tell me to put a lid on the pot."

"*Du royte, du* [You redhead, you]!" she said loudly. "Fresh kid! It's no wonder nobody likes you!"

"I know that," I retorted. "You don't have to tell me."

I never meant to be fresh with anybody, but I never seemed to know how to defend myself in situations like these. And if I didn't answer, I was called a dummy.

Apparently I didn't have a very happy look on my face when I walked into the store, because Mother asked, "What's the matter with you?"

I told her what happened, and that I really didn't know what was in the pot, but if I had uncovered it for the Herring Woman, the food would have gotten cold. Besides, I couldn't think of anything else to say to her.

"Why don't you get smart?" Mother demanded. "If you don't know what to say, don't say anything. If you can't say anything nice, keep quiet!"

On the way to the store or back I saw interesting things—or rather, people doing things which interested me. I sometimes saw a funeral, for example. When someone died in a tenement house, his or her body was carried out of the house in its coffin by members of the family, and when it was placed in the hearse, they would follow on foot, crying and screaming, "Bury me, also!" or "Why couldn't it have been me instead?" By then everyone on the block would be watching, like an audience at a tragic play, and they would cry and carry on also.

I remember what happened when Mr. Keminsky died. His

wife not only cried and screamed but she hit the coffin with her fists, demanding, "Open the coffin and put me in!" I heard people say later that within two months she was looking for a man, and within six months she had a new husband. Mother said this was a sin, that she should have waited for a year, since her poor first husband wasn't even cold yet. I asked Leah how long it took a dead man to get cold. Her answer was, "Everything, you want to know, Rusty! Why don't you stick to playing with your little cockroaches?" She was referring to the small children with whom I loved to play.

I didn't enjoy the girls of my own age, mostly because they called me "Rusty," but the little ones all liked me and made me feel needed.

I also knew that their mothers trusted me with them. Often they would give me a nickel to take their children to the nickelodeon (movies). Sometimes I had two or three children who were under five years of age, and there was no charge for their admission. With the money I had left I'd buy candy or popcorn from the vendors who sold during intermission and treat the children so they'd like me.

When I walked along the streets, occasionally I'd see women sitting at their windows, peeling potatoes or oranges and then throwing the peels out of the window. But mostly the women I saw just sat and looked out, with their elbows on the sill and their chins in their cupped hands. Their dismal tenement rooms forced them to seek what sunlight and excitement might be seen in the world outside.

Harold was the boss of the family after Papa died. He seemed to pick on me for the slightest reason. But mostly he was rough on Phillip, especially when Leah squealed on him for shooting craps with the boys in the street.

One hot evening Phillip was sent for bread and a couple of slices of cold watermelon. It was quite late when he got home, and he had neither the bread nor the watermelon. He said that he had lost the quarter given him to buy the food with, and he hadn't been able to find it, though he had spent all that time looking for it.

"Don't believe the big liar," Leah said. "I bet he was shooting craps with the bums on the corner."

Harold lit into Phillip hard.

"Lots of people lose money and can't find it again. How could Leah see Phillip when she was home all night?" I asked Harold.

"*Sha rop!* Whoez esking you, *du royte, du* [Shut up! Who's asking you, you redhead, you]!" Harold spoke with a decided Jewish accent.

Still trying to distract him, I asked, "How come you call me *Royte,* when you have red hair, too?" He was the only one of the three boys who had red hair.

Laughing now, Harold said, "You great big fool, you! I'm a man. Don't you know it makes no difference what color hair a man has? Even if I didn't have any hair at all, I would still be a man!" Not long after that Harold began to lose his hair; by the time he was thirty he had lost nearly all of it.

The next morning I asked Phillip to show me where he had lost his quarter. I said that I would help him find it so he could show it to Harold and Leah and then they would be ashamed of themselves.

"Aw, I'll get even with them, Gussie. Thanks for trying to help, but I didn't lose the money that way. I was shooting craps with the boys, and I lost the quarter. A new guy in the neighborhood won all the money. But I know he had crooked dice. The fellows are going to fix him, *but good!*"

"Why didn't you straighten out the dice if you knew they were crooked?" I asked.

"Gee, Gussie, you don't know anything about dice! You see, kid, I never give up. If I lose all I have, I borrow from the other fellows. They like me, and they trust me. The law of averages says your luck has to change, so they are always willing to lend me more when I need it. Then I keep the money I have left after I pay them back."

This explanation wasn't clear to me, but I told Phillip that as long as he came out a winner I was happy. Then he advised me never to give up, no matter how bad things looked, since you *can* come out ahead. "Just believe you will be a winner, and you'll be one," he said. I remember thinking that this advice would be of very little use to me—because I would never shoot craps.

The slices of watermelon that Phillip had been sent to buy were a treat almost everybody bought on hot evenings from the pushcart vendors on the street. The vendors laid slices of watermelon on a large slab of ice. You could buy the nice cold melon for two cents a slice.

Most people ate their melon alongside the pushcarts. If you walked along the street early the next morning, you could tell where each pushcart had been the evening before from the piles of seeds spat out by the vendors' customers.

When the weather was warm, almost everyone sat on the stoop in front of his house. Often the stoop was fully occupied, leaving no room for anyone to pass unless some of the sitters got up. If they were disturbed too often, they brought out stools or chairs and put them on the sidewalk.

I will always remember Mr. and Mrs. Cohn, our neighbors, on one of these stoop gatherings. Mrs. Cohn was sitting in an aisle spot on the stoop, and four or five times she had to get

up to let people go by. Each time she became more irritated. Finally she called to her husband, "Willie! Hey, Willie! Bring me a chair when you come down."

Willie stuck his head out of the window and yelled back, "I'm not coming down yet. If you want a chair, come up and get it yourself!"

To this his wife replied, "My heart trouble is acting up again. You don't have to rush, but *please,* Willie, will you make it right away?"

Even though she yelled to Willie several more times, asking him if he had "died already," Willie did not appear with the chair for about half an hour. Then he put the chair down and told his wife, "Here! Put your ass on it!"

But now Mrs. Cohn did not budge. "Put your own skinny ass on it! Everyone is outside now, and I won't be disturbed any more!"

The Cohns argued and wound up not talking to each other for the rest of the evening.

Many people brought their suppers outdoors with them, saying that it was too hot to eat inside. The adults sent the children who were standing around to buy refreshments from the candy store next door.

Often the sitters bought one or two pennies' worth of polly seeds, Indian nuts, or peanuts. Then they sat and ate them all evening, spitting the shells in their laps. When they were ready to leave, they stood up, pulled their sticky clothes loose from their seats, carelessly let the shells fall on the steps, and said, "Gee, I'm tired."

Other people stepped on the shells as they walked up or down the stairs, the shells making noises like small firecrackers exploding.

Pesach (Passover or Easter) was a religious holiday we

looked forward to with enjoyment, starting to prepare for it about ten days ahead of time. It was customary for the whole family to be fitted with new shoes, new underwear, new dresses, or new suits.

Everything in the house was cleaned, scrubbed, and polished. Windows were washed, curtains changed, and all the ordinary kitchen utensils, dishes, and silverware were packed away and replaced by those reserved for Pesach and used only for the eight days of this religious period.

Erev yom tov (the day before the holiday) no *khometz* (bread or leavened baked products) was eaten, and all bread or other food left after breakfast was burned. Then, after the cooking was done for the Seder, the lavish Passover supper, the females of the family went to the baths. The waiting room at the baths would be filled with women and girls. Each person paid for the use of a bathtub, and when your turn came, you were led down a long hall with little rooms on either side, each with a tub and a chair.

Mother would put Blanche and me in a tub together, bathing and washing our hair. Then Leah had her turn, and finally Mother.

The Seder evening was a very happy time. Dressed in our new clothes, we would gather around the table expectantly. The table was always covered with a white cloth, and on it were candles and a large plate holding the special food and drink prescribed for the Seder. On this plate were: three whole matzos (unleavened bread), which were covered; *khreyn* (bitter herbs, or horse-radish); *kharoyses* (concoction of nuts, ginger, apples, and wine, eaten with herbs at the Seder); a hard-boiled egg and a glass of Passover wine for each member of the family; and a bowl of salt water. There was also a Haggada (the story of Passover recited at

the Seder) for the celebration of the Pesach for each male participating in the services.

Kiddush (prayer before drinking wine) was recited to begin the service. Then each person drank some wine from his or her glass. Then each took a hard-boiled egg, which was dipped in the salt water before eating, following the saying of grace. More wine was drunk, and the matzos broken so that everyone received a piece to eat with the bitter and sweet herbs. Afterwards the wonderful Pesach supper was then served: gefilte fish, chicken soup with *kneydlekh* (matzo balls), and chicken and potatoes.

After supper came the most fascinating part of all. The wine glasses were filled again to the brim. A large glass goblet, also filled with wine, was placed in the center of the table for Elijah (the prophet who promised the coming of the Messiah, to bring the Jews peace and freedom).

Then a prayer was recited, and the hall door was opened, with the hope that Elijah might enter and drink from his special goblet of wine, and also drink from the glasses of those who were especially good and holy. Each one looked at his or her glass of wine and declared that there was some wine gone from that glass! We were told that Elijah was invisible to the average person, but that the holy ones did see him and that he did take a sip from their glasses.

After supper the family stayed up late and sang many of the Passover songs. The following night brought the second Seder, and a repetition of the ceremony and the supper.

Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) was the most highly religious day of all. This holiday celebration started the day before, with a lavish supper of fish, chicken soup, and chicken. After this supper Mother would tell us to drink all the water we could, because we had to fast all the next day until *Shoy-*

fer Blozn (the blowing of the ram's horn). Then Mother would light a number of *yortzeit likht* (memorial candles). She said one was for Papa, and the others for her parents and close relatives who had gone to their resting places, and that the lighted candle would make these departed ones rest more easily.

Mother then covered her head with a white shawl, extended both hands over the lighted candles, and then drew her hands to her as if she were drawing the warmth from the candles. At the same time she would *bentsh likht* (bless the candles), as she did every Friday night, substituting Yom Kippur for Sabbath, saying, "God, we thank you for our health, for food, for the roof over our heads. Please, God, protect us from having to beg food from any other table. Protect us from fire and water, sickness and temptation, and all other harm."

Mother was highly emotional during this prayer, and by its end she was crying and had all of us crying with her. Then she would gather her family to her, put a hand on each of our heads, and pray, "Dear God in Heaven, grant us another year free from want."

After this she would uncover her head and say, "*Gut yom tov* [Good day, holiday]!" We would all answer, "*Gut yor* [Good year]!" From that moment until the next day, when we heard the blowing of the *shoyfer* at the synagogue, we fasted. That evening all the adults attended services for a number of hours, and then returned the following morning.

After sitting and praying from morning until sundown, everyone was exhausted. The children were permitted to visit with the parents during some parts of the day. Mother and many others kept smelling-salt bottles with them. Others preferred the scent of limes with cloves stuck in them. After

the shopha sounded, everyone went happily back to their homes to enjoy the second special meal of the holiday. On the way home greetings were exchanged between relatives and friends: "*Sholom aleichem* [Peace be unto you]," one would say. The other would reply, "*Aleichem sholom* [Unto you be peace]." Many exchange the greetings of "*Leshono Tovo* [A happy New Year]!"

I especially enjoyed Yom Kippur and Pesach, because during these holidays my family enjoyed each other—by just being together.

11

Herbert was responsible for Harold's having a girl. A co-worker in the factory where Herbert worked had wanted him to meet his sister Fanny—with matrimony as the object. Herbert was told, by the girl's brother, of her fine qualities. Their mother was dead, and this girl did all the cooking and cleaning for her father and four brothers. She also spoke good English. Good English was considered a very important asset. Besides, said her brother, his father and his other brothers would chip in and give her a sizable *nadan* (dowry).

"Fanny—sounds good," Herbert remarked, "but it wouldn't be possible for me to marry or have a girl yet. My brother Harold is older than I am, so he has to be married before I can even think about myself." Harold was a good catch, past twenty, healthy, and in business with Mother.

So the two brothers arranged for Mother and Harold to meet Fanny, and her *mishpokhe* (family). After that Harold had a girl!

After a period of courting, the wedding date was set, and preparations started for this big event.

Mother engaged a dressmaker to make her a lovely gray satin-silk dress. We girls had new dresses and new shoes, and the boys also had new clothes.

Helping Mother to fit into her beautiful new dress when the big day arrived was a job that required the co-operation of all of us girls. Corset strings were never pulled harder or tighter than on that occasion. Mother's hair was done up in a combination of rolls and curls on top of her head. "Rats" (small rolls of false hair) were added and fastened with what seemed like hundreds of hairpins, and a hairnet; Mother had discarded her married woman's wig after Papa's death and had let her hair grow, to indicate that she no longer had a husband.

Two horse-drawn buggies were hired to drive the *mekhutonim* (relatives by marriage) to the Grand Central Palace hall uptown. There was a special horse and buggy for Harold and Fanny, with a coachman on top of the buggy.

How beautiful Mother looked that night, in her long gray satin dress that gracefully swept the floor! She was very busy greeting everybody and having everyone say *mazl tov* (congratulations) to her. The hall at Grand Central Palace had a number of full-length mirrors, and every time I looked into one of them I saw a reflection of Mother. She looked like a queen in a fairy story. I was extremely proud of her.

The marriage ceremony took place with Harold, Fanny, Mother, and Fanny's father standing under the *khupe* (canopy) with the Rabbi. Mother cried loudly as though something terrible was happening. Watching her set me to crying. Then, after the ceremony, Mother fainted. I thought this must have happened because we had pulled her corset

strings too tight and she could not breathe right. But some time later I heard her say she had really fainted because she was worrying about Harold fearing that he had made a mistake in marrying Fanny.

It was a long time before Mother got over feeling this way about Fanny. She claimed that Fanny was not very considerate of her. She thought that, since her daughter-in-law had no mother of her own, she should treat her as though she were her own mother. Mother would complain, "She doesn't come to visit me. You would think she would bring me a pot of tea; she knows I'm working in the store all day long!"

So Harold was now a married man, living in his own home, and shortly thereafter he opened a store of his own about three blocks from Mother's store. This caused Mother to take Herbert into business with her, and he became head of the family. Mother moved the business into a larger store, and Phillip was taken out of school to work in the store with them.

When Phillip explained that he wanted to go to high school, and perhaps to college, he was told, "What do you want to do—starve to death? You can't make a living from an education!"

So Phillip worked in the store—and hated it. There was one thing about being in the store that he liked, however: A very nice girl worked in her father's store across the street. He often stood in the doorway of our store while she stood in front of her father's store, and the two exchanged glances and interesting signs. When Mother found out that he was flirting with the girl, she scolded him. Then, later, when she learned from a trouble-making gossip that he had taken the girl out, she accused him of doing many wrong things.

One day, when I was alone in our house after school,

Phillip came home, gathered together some of his things, and told me he was leaving the family. I asked him where he was going, and he said that he really didn't know where, but anywhere would be better than "this jail."

"Even prisoners have more liberty," he said. "They don't even let me think for myself."

"How can they stop you from thinking?" I asked.

"You'll find out soon enough, kid," he replied. Then he put a nickel in my hand and said good-by.

"But, Phillip, when are you coming back?"

"I don't know that, either. But I promise you, Gussie, I'll see you again some day."

I held out the nickel to him. "I don't want the money, Phillip."

But he made me keep it. I wondered why he had to leave, and why everyone else in the family seemed to hate him so much.

Phillip was about fifteen at this time. As time went on I wondered about him and about what he might be doing. His name was never mentioned again in the family. It was as if he had never belonged to our family, never really existed.

With Harold married and Phillip gone, we didn't need three rooms. We moved to the rear of the store, which had a kitchen and one bedroom. It worked out with four females sleeping in one bed in the bedroom, as we had previously, and with Herbert in a hideaway bed in the kitchen.

It was always my job to buy the food for breakfast; rolls and milk. Milk was sold out of a large can and measured by using a tin ladle.

I loved milk, but if Mother ever saw us drinking milk without eating a roll with it, she would ask, "What do you

think it is—water? Eat your roll with it." I would eat my roll with half a cup of milk, and then, when no one was looking, I would add water to fill the cup, so I could have a full cup again.

We always bought just enough food for each meal, except for Passover, when we bought enough eggs and matzos for the entire week. Eggs were a luxury, and were served sparingly. One day I was alone in the house, boiling the eggs for the Seder night, and I boiled two extra ones. Then I heard someone coming. Thinking that it was a member of our family, I quickly gulped them down. When I realized it was a neighbor passing in the hall, I felt terrible. I had eaten them too quickly to enjoy them, and I didn't dare boil any more so that I could take my time eating them. Besides, I had to drink a great deal of water to clear my throat. I hated myself for being a bad child and for not remembering Papa saying that "no good comes from doing wrong."

12

Suddenly I was told not to visit Harold and Fanny!

For some reason the family was now "on the outs" with both of them! "If you meet them any place, don't talk to them!" Mother ordered. "And if you have to walk down the street past Harold's store, walk on the other side of the street!"

A few months later I heard that Fanny had a baby. After that, when I thought I wouldn't be caught, I walked by Harold's store, hoping to see Fanny and maybe her baby. On one of those "wrong-side-of-the-street" occasions I ran

right into Harold in the doorway of his store. I attempted to walk past, but Harold called to me.

"What's the matter, Royte, can't you even say hello?"

So I asked, "How are Fanny—and the baby?"

"Are you afraid to come up and see him for yourself?"

To get away I told Harold I would come see them real soon, although I knew I never could.

At home I asked Leah if she thought it would be all right if I went just to see the baby.

"Go ahead," she said, "if you want to get your neck broke!"

I wanted to see the baby so much that I decided to tell Mother about seeing Harold. I said I had forgotten to cross the street at the right place and was passing his store before I knew it. She was angry with me and started to yell. To calm her I said, "Mother, the baby is only a boy!"

To my surprise, Mother smiled, and, thinking she was pleased, I asked if I could go see the baby.

"No! You want to double-cross us?"

The "No!" I understood, but "double-cross" made no sense to me. But it was all the explanation I got.

Some time went by. Then, at the next Jewish holiday, Fanny came to visit us with her baby.

He's a beautiful baby, I thought. I would gladly have changed places with Fanny, just to have the baby as my own—even though he was just a boy.

But if I changed places with Fanny, I would have to live with Harold. I wouldn't do that, even if the baby was a girl! Some day I'll get married, I decided, and then maybe I'll have a little girl of my own.

Mother was pleased that Fanny had called on her, and after that she allowed us to be on more friendly terms with

her. Mother bought the baby a present, explaining that it wasn't his fault that she disagreed with his parents. Besides, he was carrying Papa's name.

Even though Mother was very strict and ruled us with an iron hand, deep down in her heart she was very kind. She was always willing to help anyone in her family, or anyone else in need. An example of this willingness is shown by what she did for my Uncle Yankl.

Yankl was Mother's half brother, and she was responsible for his being in this country. She had advanced him money for his transportation from the old country and had vouched for his support so that he would be allowed to come here and live. Then she got him started on his own, supplying him with a pushcart and remnants of material to sell. Mother taught him about American money, its different denominations, and how to make change. She set up a cot in the store where he could sleep. Later she got him a job as a night watchman in a large store, and he got paid for sleeping there.

After Uncle Yankl had been here for a while Mother knew he was making money from his pushcart business, so she asked him, "Where are you keeping the money you are making?" He told her that he kept it pinned to his underwear. "You don't have to do that in America, Yankl," she said.

So she helped him open a savings account. "Only carry enough money to do business with, and whenever you want to send money home to the family, have the bank take care of it for you."

Shortly after that Uncle Yankl came home all excited and almost breathless.

"Roze," he said to my mother, "I must tell you how close I came to having almost a million dollars!"

Becoming excited herself, Mother said, "Tell me what happened!"

"It hung on only one little word." He sighed.

"How? Tell me, Yankl!"

"You know something, Rose? It's hard to believe—I don't even believe it myself!" He shook his head. "I went to the *kasa* [bank] like you told me." He paused and shook his head some more.

"Yeah, yeah. Tell me already: What happened at the bank?"

"I stood in line, like you told me to do." More head-shaking. "When it came to my turn—" He stopped to take a long breath, and at the same time shook his head some more. Mother became irritated and said:

"So tell me already! Do you want I should stop speaking to you forever?"

"All right, Roze. Give me a chance. When I got to the window, there before my very own eyes were stacks and stacks of big bills. Not dollar bills, but *twenty*-dollar bills. It was so close I was almost on top of it! If only the clerk had said, 'Take!' I would have had about a million dollars."

Mother looked at him and shook her head. "Poow," she said, and spat on the floor. "You had me almost scared to death. Here in America everyone who goes to the bank sees stacks of money!"

Most of all I remember Uncle Yankl as the man who worked every day, except Saturdays, pushing his cart, and going to the bank with the profits from the remnant sales he made. I remember that the only thing he did other than work and sleep was to be with our family on Saturdays. How he enjoyed eating with us, drinking wine, and telling stories!

When he had had too much wine, he would fall asleep in

the front room on the couch and snore so loudly that he could be heard in the hallway. When people asked Mother why she put up with him, she always said, "Where else has he got to go? He works every day. Besides, he only has me in this country. After all, isn't blood thicker than water?"

13

When I was not quite twelve years old, I went to Mother, crying and scared because I thought I was going to die, and told her how I was bleeding. She immediately slapped my face and said, "Now you are a woman. That slap is so you will have rosy cheeks."

I didn't understand. I thought she was angry with me. I said, through my tears, "I haven't jumped off the stoop for a long time."

Once Mother had seen me do this and had scolded me, telling me never to do it again. She said a girl had to be careful—she could "kill her insides." Mother put her arms around me and caressed me. This felt so good. It was the first time I remembered having her arm around me.

"It is fortunate we were alone in the house," Mother said. "You mustn't be afraid. From now on every month you will menstruate."

"Then I'm not going to die?"

"No," Mother assured me, "nobody dies from that."

I was able to stop crying and listen to Mother warning me that if I didn't menstruate every month my life would be ruined forever, and that if any boy as much as wanted to talk to me I was just to walk away. She said that if I didn't do this it would be the beginning of my downfall. Here she

stopped talking, as though she had covered the subject thoroughly and had told me all there was to be said about this thing that was happening to me. I was confused; I didn't understand. I wanted her to explain, so I asked the first question that came to mind:

"Do boys menstruate?"

"No!" she shouted. "You talk like a crazy woman. Just do as I tell you, and you won't get into trouble. In time you will learn all you have to know."

That night, when I prayed, I asked God to help me. I wondered what I was in for now. Could this be happening to me because I had red hair? I was sure it hadn't happened to Leah, but I wouldn't dare ask her. Something that Herbert had said came back to me now: once I asked him why he prayed hard every single day, as he did—why couldn't he pray harder just a couple of times a week? He had said, "The Bible states a man has to pray every day, because he is grateful he was born a man and not a woman." When I asked what was wrong with being a woman, he said, "Everything, but some of them have it worse than others." I was a woman now, Mother had said. Was I one who would "have it worse" than others?

I needed someone to talk to about my troubles. If Papa were still here, he would be the one. It wasn't until the next day that I decided to speak to Sarah. Leah knew Sarah, but she didn't like her. Yet I was sure Sarah liked me. One day at school, while she and Leah were arguing about something, I asked my sister a question. Loudly Leah said, "Aw, for crying out loud! Beat it, Rusty! Can't you see I'm busy?"

Sarah had said to Leah, "Why don't you lay off your sister?" So Sarah was the one I could talk to now.

I found Sarah in the schoolyard at lunchtime. I told her

I was in trouble and asked her if she could help me.

"Is it bad?" she asked, and I thought she looked a little scared herself. I told her that it was, and then she said, "Let's find a place to talk where no one can hear us, and I'll try to help you."

When I got through telling her what had happened, she just said, "Is that all? That's nothing!"

"What else is going to happen to me, Sarah? Please don't be afraid to tell me everything," I pleaded. She convinced me that nothing really bad would happen. I told her she was the second kindest girl I ever knew. Then she said that she would tell me everything a girl should know; her mother was Americanized and had told her everything. But it would take days to tell me everything, and she could tell me only a little at a time. However, she would meet me during lunch period each day and "wise me up."

At the time it seemed that I learned more from her about "what I should know" than I had from all the years I had wasted in school in history and geography. I thought: What on earth do I have to know about history and geography? I wasn't going any place. We never went more than five or six blocks away from the school or house. I had never even been on a streetcar, and the only ride I had ever taken was in the buggy at Harold's wedding.

14

The Blumenthals, who had been our neighbors, were now our main topic of conversation.

Because business had been bad for them, they had moved to Albany. There they found business booming and were living in a beautiful home—nothing like the tenement house on Orchard Street.

Herbert and Mother discussed the Blumenthals often.

"Why should we remain in New York City?" said Herbert. "We should try to better ourselves, too. If people like the Blumenthals can do it, certainly we can!"

In a great state of excitement, we sold the store and moved to Albany.

Everything started off fine, just as Herbert had been sure it would. We rented a house with two bedrooms, a living room, a large kitchen, and, for the height of luxury, a bathroom! I was sure a millionaire couldn't have it any better.

The bathroom held the greatest attraction for all of us. It was wonderful to go in there, turn on the tap, and have the choice of hot or cold water. Each of us spent a lot of time in the bathroom when it was his or her turn to use it. The person waiting for the next turn would rap on the door and call out, "Hurry up, there! What are you doing, getting married in there?" or "Hey, did you fall asleep in there?" Even Herbert spent a lot of time in the bathroom now. He shaved every day.

Everything was fine in our home in Albany, but outside it wasn't quite the same. The first time I was out on the street I saw another girl who I knew lived on our block. I wanted to make friends with her, so I said, "Do you live on this block?"

"Yeah," she answered.

"So do I," I said invitingly, but she didn't respond. So I tried another subject. "We have a bathroom right inside our home."

"Where else would you expect to have it?" was the girl's puzzling question.

"Didn't you ever live in New York?" I thought that everyone lived in New York first, before they moved some place else.

"No, I was born in Albany." More silence.

"I guess you go to school here?" I was still trying.

"Sure! Where do you think?"

I was beginning to feel sorry we had left New York. All I could think of to say was, "Well, I must go home now. Good-by."

As though annoyed that I had ever spoken to her, the girl said, *"Good-by!"*

A few weeks after we were settled in our house Mother and Herbert found and rented a store on South Pearl Street. Herbert did a fine job of fixing it up with counters and shelves. In this new store we sold everything from pins to clothing, but no yard goods as we had in New York. But, having helped get the new store, Mother was neither needed nor wanted in its operation.

There were other reasons why Mother was unhappy. She realized that Albany was a *goyishe* [non-Jewish] town. Hardly anyone spoke Jewish, especially in business. Most of the people living in the neighborhood were Italian or Portuguese. Mother had understood how to handle her Jewish trade in New York and had done so like an expert. Here, she said, it was like being in a foreign country.

Herbert convinced her it was necessary to stay open on Saturday and close on Sunday, as all the other business places did. Mother, however, would never go near the store on our Sabbath, fearing to see the sin of doing business being committed. "Please God," she would say, "forgive us. How was I to know we were moving into another world?"

Another reason for Mother's being out of place was because yard goods were not sold in our store here. She knew how to buy and sell yard goods without understanding or using any written figures or records. Here the variety of

merchandise had to be marked with prices and the bills checked. Mother was not capable of doing any of this work, but Herbert and Leah were.

Mother knew how to run the stores in New York City, even though she was unable to read or write, for she had known the exact cost of each piece of material in the store. She bought cloth by the feel of it, and by her own judgment of what would sell best. She even used a system of her own for multiplying, and she could come up with totals even quicker than Phillip could.

For example, if the sale were for eight yards at a dollar eighty-five per yard, Mother would get the right answer by saying, "One dollar a yard is eight dollars; add eight halves, and this is twelve dollars; add eight quarters, and this is fourteen dollars; and add eight dimes, and it is fourteen dollars and eighty cents."

Mother was also a successful store-operator because she knew her customers and knew how to handle each one in the right way. Many of her customers had complete confidence in her. They saw what they wanted, she told them the price, and if they liked it, they paid. If they didn't, they would ask to see something cheaper or something better. But whatever these customers chose, they paid the price Mother quoted, without question.

However, there were other customers who would never buy unless they chiseled the price down. These presented another problem. Mother always sold to these people, too, and made her profit. She would first give them a price high enough to allow for bargaining. Even then, these people wouldn't buy until Mother finally said, "Believe me, I'm losing money. I swear it cost me more!"

Having "chiseled," they bought, but more often than not

they ended up by paying more than the other customers who didn't bargain—the ones who had confidence in her.

But in Albany the situation was different. Mother said that she was no longer the businesswoman that she had been in New York City. Even so, sometimes she came into the store and tried to help out. Herbert and Leah let her know that she was out of her place, especially because of her inadequate English. I felt very sorry for her. I knew just how she felt, not feeling useful or wanted. One day Leah, said to Mother, "Why don't you stay home? You don't think you can use your New York business tactics here, do you? These people are not such fools!"

Mother was in the store, still trying to be a part of the business, when Mr. Manischavitz, a wholesaler, came in to try to sell Herbert some merchandise. On this occasion Mother expressed her opinion about some item the wholesaler was offering for sale. Leah snapped, "Who on earth is asking you?"

All Mother did was to turn to me and say, "Come, Gussie," and then start to walk out. I followed her, the tears starting down my face. At the doorway, she turned and said, "Good-by, Mr. Sanawich."

Everybody laughed. Even I laughed through my tears, it sounded so funny. Yet when I looked at Mother, I saw tears coming down her face, too. Neither of us said a word until we got home. Then I tried to comfort her by saying, "Don't worry, it's still your store. They are only working for you. Maybe if you didn't pay them any money, they would act better."

"You don't understand, Gussie. They are handling all the money now. They are the business people, and I am nobody."

I felt very close to Mother at that moment, because I felt that she was taking me into her confidence. But she spoiled the moment by saying, "You ain't very smart, Gussie, but at least you're kindhearted."

The house we lived in was ten blocks from the store, and it seemed too far to carry two meals a day for Herbert and Leah. Most of the time the food got cold before I arrived. So we moved to a house on Herkimer Street, only two blocks from the store.

I'll never forget the time a "drummer" was in the store trying to sell Herbert some merchandise. I had just brought their meals, and I had to wait until they were through eating so I could take the dishes home. I heard Herbert say to the salesman:

"You have been here an hour talking, and you haven't even asked me once how business is."

"By the way, how is business?" the salesman asked.

"Aw, don't ask!" Herbert replied.

It seemed that the salesman was not going to leave for some time, and Herbert was getting hungry, so he finally started to eat his dinner. He treated the salesman to a piece of Mother's homemade strudel.

Mother was a wonderful cook and baked the most delicious pastries. "It's worth a dollar a bite, it's so good!" he said.

During the salesman's visit a customer Leah waited on walked out with an overcoat over his arm. After the customer left, the salesman remarked, "That guy had an overcoat I could swear looked just like mine."

"Where did you put your overcoat?" Herbert asked him.

"In the rear of the store," he answered. They both looked at each other, realizing that the man had come from the back of the store.

He rushed to investigate, but there was no overcoat. I felt sorry for the salesman, losing his coat, but Herbert and Leah laughed.

Mother figured that it was time I got a job of my own. She had not sent me to school in Albany. She said I was a big girl for thirteen years, and if I told people I was fourteen, somebody would hire me.

So I applied for jobs advertised in the paper which said, "No experience necessary." Yet at every place the routine was the same:

"What is your age?"

"Fourteen," I would say, confidently.

"All right, bring your birth certificate, so we can be sure." No one was permitted to hire anyone under the age of fourteen, so I'd say, "They didn't have birth certificates in the old country, where I was born."

"Then go to the Board of Education and get a work permit," they replied. So I applied for a work permit at the Board of Education. When that department checked with the New York City schools, they discovered my true age, so back to school I had to go. I was put in the sixth grade.

A boy named Tony lived across the street from us, and, because he was so smart and so nice to me, I was sitting on top of the world, as far as my school grades were concerned. When we had a test, Tony would finish before anyone else. Then he would hand me his paper, and I would copy it. Once this didn't work, though: each student had been given different questions. I started on mine, but I soon got stuck.

I whispered to Tony, "Where did the Indians come from?"

He whispered back, "I know: from heaven!"

Gee, I thought, I'm dumb. Where else could they have come from? So that was the answer I put on my paper. I

was still struggling with my fifth question when Tony handed me a note saying, "Put your paper on the floor. I'll pick it up and finish it."

He returned my paper with another paper which he had numbered to correspond with the questions. So all I had to do was copy them in my handwriting.

When the teacher graded those papers, she handed them back to us. Handing me my paper, she remarked, "You must have been dreaming during the first five questions. The very idea, to say the Indians came from heaven!"

Of course, only Tony and I knew what she was really talking about. Tony looked at me and winked. After school he said, "Gussie, I'm very sorry. I thought you were asking me a riddle. I didn't know you would take me literally."

He always said nice things and used big words. I tried to remember these words so I could use them in talking to someone who I felt knew less than I did.

Then, suddenly, Mother took sick. The doctor said she had a bad case of rheumatism, and she needed my help during the day, so I was permitted to stay out of school. I wasn't sorry about missing school, but I did miss seeing Tony. I just saw him occasionally at the grocery store, or on the street when I was taking meals to Herbert and Leah.

One Sunday I was standing outside the house when Tony came across the street to talk to me.

"Please come to our house, Gussie. My brother and his wife are there with their new baby."

I started to move away, telling Tony I would get in trouble if anyone in my family saw me talking to a boy.

"Listen, Gussie, this is a free country. You can talk to anyone you choose."

He kept after me to go to his house. Finally I told him

that if he would leave I would come in a little while. I didn't intend to, but finally my loneliness and curiosity got the best of me. I didn't intend to go in, but as I stood in the hallway outside Tony's place I could hear people laughing and talking happily inside. It sounded wonderful.

Before I had a chance to knock, the door opened, and I was greeted by Tony and his mother. He introduced me to his brother and sisters, who all called me by my first name.

It was dinnertime, and in the center of the table I saw a large platter of what looked like small *kreplekh* (a food similar to *ravioli,* usually filled with chopped meat). There was a large bowl of vegetable salad with lettuce. I had never seen lettuce before. Tony's mother brought in a long loaf of bread with cheese on it and bottles of wine.

I was asked to sit down with the family and eat. I looked at all that food and thought: This food is *treyfe* (not kosher). It would be truly a big sin to eat it. I am not permitted to eat even Jewish food if it is not kosher, and this is Italian food!

I thanked them but said I was not hungry. This was a lie, but I was lying to uphold my Jewish faith, I reasoned.

They said it was very good and insisted I just taste some of it. I was sure it was good, but I still said that I wasn't hungry. Finally Tony said his mother would be hurt if I didn't eat just a little of it.

That did it! It would be a sin to hurt such nice people. When I sat down, the family said grace, and I prayed. I asked God to forgive me for eating the *treyfe* food and for sitting next to a boy. I promised to fast all the next day if he would keep everyone from finding out about this.

I took only a little on my plate, but everyone else filled theirs. After the first taste my little bit wasn't enough. I had a second helping. I changed the promise I had made—I

would fast two days for this bigger sin! I was sure that if the Jewish people could just taste this food they would change their religion.

They served red wine that tasted sour, not sweet like our Passover wine. I really didn't care for it, but they praised it as they drank. I thought: What wonderful people they are, not to complain that the wine's sour!

When it was time for me to leave, I asked Tony not to go outside with me. He said he understood, that his family was also strict about girls.

"Will you come again next Sunday? Mother will make spaghetti; I'm sure you will like it."

"What is spaghetti made with?"

"With spaghetti, honey."

I could hear my heart beat. I thought I was dreaming. Tony called me "honey." I can't recall how I answered him, but I went home feeling that this had been the most wonderful day of my life.

I never had the courage to visit Tony's family again, but I continued to see Tony. We met Sunday afternoons in the park, and walked around or sat and talked. I was always afraid that someone we knew would see me and tell Mother. Going home, we always said good-by two blocks from my house and went the rest of the way separately. Each time I said that I could not see him again, but each time he would set another date, and I kept that date. Sometimes, when it was dark, he held my hand or took my hand and rubbed it over his face.

Then came that Sunday afternoon in the park when Tony said, "When are you going to let me kiss you?"

"How could I let you? I couldn't let any boy kiss me unless I was going to marry him, and I can't marry you because you are not Jewish."

"I can't do anything about that," Tony said. "I don't care what nationality you are, honey. Can't I kiss you even if you won't marry me?"

I knew then that this whole thing had to stop. I did stop going out with Tony, although I saw him on the street sometimes. Yet I couldn't stop thinking about him. Mostly I thought of him when I went to bed and couldn't sleep. I thought of him kissing me, and of us living in the same house, and about me making *ravioli* for him—almost as good as his mother made. If he was Jewish, I thought, I would marry him right away, and all my worries would be over. I thought about a verse I had read and which I heard people repeat at times: " 'Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all." I was sure that this was what I was now experiencing.

As the weather got colder that year Mother's rheumatism got worse. She was unable to lift a cooking pot from the stove. So Mother taught me to cook and bake. She was a wonderful teacher, and here again was one of those rare times when I felt close to Mother—needed and wanted by her. I had a full-time job. I did all the housework, cooking, and washing. We had two stationary tubs in the kitchen, and it seemed I was always using the washboard in them. It was extremely cold that winter in Albany. Many times when I hung clothes on the line, they froze stiff as a board almost immediately.

With the help of treatments Mother recovered after that long winter's siege. In the meantime, I had reached my fourteenth birthday. So Mother took over running the house again. I got my work permit and set out to find a job for wages. I felt that maybe now I was to get the best of this Albany situation—for myself, at least.

15

My first job was in a cigar factory. I worked from eight in the morning until six in the evening, with a half-hour off for lunch. My wages at the start were three dollars a week, and I earned this money by making up little bunches of tobacco. I was seated between two girls called "rollers," who took the bunches of tobacco from me and rolled them in tobacco leaves to shape them into cigars. Then they cut off the ends, and the cigars were ready to be boxed.

I felt I had reason to be proud of myself when I was promoted to the job of "roller" after I had been at the factory only a short while. This brought me my first raise, a dollar a week. I worked hard and steadily, but I enjoyed every hour of it. Working with the easily handled tobacco, I could daydream about such things as being married, having twin girls, and dressing them alike in the best of fashion. I would make their clothes, of course, but these wouldn't be ordinary clothes—they would be the best and prettiest in town. It doesn't cost any more to make clothes in good style if you make them yourself, I told myself in my daydreams. My daydreaming didn't distract me from my work; on the contrary, it seemed to help me work faster. I was able to keep a bunch-maker very busy because I rolled twice as many cigars as most of the other girls. For this I was rewarded with another dollar raise, which brought my pay to five dollars a week.

This money, earned regularly, helped me do things which made the world seem pretty nice. While I paid three dollars a week for my room and board at home, I had two dollars a week for myself, and with this I could do wonders. For one thing, I was able to dress myself quite well. I bought silk and wool materials for between forty and seventy-five cents a yard, then bought patterns of the latest styles and made myself a nice wardrobe.

I found friends among the girls in the factory. Often I helped them make their own clothes, and sometimes I did the sewing for them. My best girl friend was Eva. I made identical dresses and suits for the two of us. Then, to make our outfits complete, I learned how to make hats.

One day Mother noticed the aprons I wore when I was working. These not only protected my clothes but gave me something to wipe my hands on. The aprons had holes in them—holes eaten by the tobacco. So Mother issued an edict: I was to quit this job at once. As she put it, there was no telling what being around the tobacco would do to my lungs if it ate holes in cloth.

Regretfully I left the cigar factory and hunted for another job. This time, I figured, maybe I wouldn't have to limit my application to places where only inexperienced help was wanted. I read the "Female Help Wanted" column in the paper and noticed that experienced sewing-machine operators were wanted.

So, with my hair up, wearing long silk stockings, and in my best clothes, I went to a shirt factory that had advertised for seamstresses. Many others were applying for jobs there—some girls, but mostly women. When my turn came, I was asked to state my experience.

"I have been sewing for many years," I replied.

"Where did you last work?"

I told the lady I had been a roller in a cigar factory.

"What kind of a machine did you operate?"

"A Singer sewing machine," I answered.

As if annoyed, the lady said, "Yes, I know that. Did you ever operate a buttonhole or a hemming machine?"

This lady's attitude, and her method of firing questions at me, made me lose confidence in myself. I didn't know what to answer, so I said, "Look at this suit I'm wearing. I made it all by myself!"

Then the lady told me to follow her. We went into the factory where lots of sewing machines were lined up side by side. They made so much noise that I was scared and wanted to run out. But the lady led me to one of the machines and told me to sit down. She handed me a bundle of shirts and said, "Thread your machine."

I didn't know where to start. It was not at all like our manual machine at home. Confused and frightened, I told the lady I had never worked on a power machine.

Annoyed, she said, "Okay. Follow me." This time we went to another part of the factory that was less noisy and where many women and girls were clicking scissors. She untied a bundle of shirts, picked a shirt from the bunch, and quickly showed me how to cut off all the loose threads. Then she handed me a pair of scissors and said arrogantly, "When you finish this bundle, tie it and take it to the desk. They will give you another bundle to do."

Then she left me. I was relieved. Alone, I would be able to figure this out, I was sure. No mention had been made of pay, so I turned to the woman sitting on my left and asked, "When do we get paid?"

She answered me, but I had no idea what she said: she

must have spoken in Italian or Portuguese. I turned to the woman on my right and said to her, "Do you speak English?"

In reply I heard something like, "Me? No, no, notetink—me no can talk Angalish."

So I picked up my scissors and started snipping threads. I wasn't sure but what I had let myself get "roped into something." But, I figured, what can I lose? I would work a week, and if I didn't earn five dollars I would quit and look for another job.

The end of the week came and I was handed my pay envelope. Inside I found only three-fifty, so that was the end of this job for me. I would have fifty cents left after I paid the three dollars room and board at home. I checked the want ads again and this time decided on Learner's Shirtwaist Factory.

This time I was better prepared for an interview. I first spoke to a man in the office at Learner's. I told him I could sew very well but that I had never worked in a factory; that I was a good worker and that I learned rapidly when it came to sewing anything; and that I couldn't afford to work for less than five dollars a week.

"Well, young lady,' 'the man said, "it all depends on you, how much you make. We pay by the piece, and if you work hard and steady, you can make a lot more than five dollars a week."

He pressed a button, and a woman came into his office. "See what you can do for this young lady," the man told her.

"I'm Mrs. Fox," the lady greeted me.

"Pleased to meet you, Mrs. Fox," I answered in a very ladylike manner. Well, I thought, the boss calls me "young lady," and Mrs. Fox spoke to me as if I were a lady! Full of confidence, I followed Mrs. Fox into the factory, without

feeling the least bit afraid. I smiled when she assigned me to a sewing machine. Patiently Mrs. Fox showed me how to thread and operate the machine. Then I started on my first bundle of shirtwaists, packed two dozen to a bundle. I was to sew up two sides of each waist. Mrs. Fox told me I would get seven cents for each dozen I finished.

At Learner's I earned seventy cents the first day and six-fifty the first week. Each week I did better, until I earned as high as fifteen dollars a week. In 1915, when I was earning this much, the amount was considered adequate for a family man's salary.

I never told my family how much I learned. They thought I was earning eight or ten dollars a week, so my board and room was raised to five dollars a week. I didn't pay less than five dollars for shoes; sometimes they were eight dollars a pair. I bought the best materials for my clothes. I even bought good ready-made dresses, but I always told my family they cost less than they actually had. I went to shows regularly, and often treated my girl friends. Sometimes I carried as much as fifty dollars in my shoe. I was happy, sitting on top of the world.

16

When we had been in Albany for more than two years, things improved for all of us. We lived in a five-room flat above the new store on the corner of South Pearl and Herkimer.

This was the largest home in which my family had ever placed its mezuzahs. These are parchment scrolls, incased in metal containers, which are attached to the right of the front door and at the entrance to each room in the house.

Each time we moved we took our scrolls with us. By tradition we were supposed to kiss our hands and then touch the mezuzah at the entrance before entering the house. Mother and Herbert were the only ones in our family who did this, however.

About this time I joined the YWHA—the Young Women's Hebrew Association—where young people gathered to dance.

Esther Blank and her brother Eddie, whom I had met there, invited a group of boys and girls to their home on Sundays. Their mother baked cookies and served hot chocolate, and we danced and played games. After several such wonderful Sunday gatherings, others in the group invited us to their homes for the same kind of fun and refreshments.

Very carefully I told Mother about these Sunday gatherings of young people, adding that Esther Blank's family (whom she knew) had started them.

"If I can have the group to our house just once, I'll furnish the refreshments and clean the house up afterward."

"Definitely not!" Mother cried. "Do you want people to think I am running a *nafke bayes* (house of prostitution) with boys and girls going in and out of here?"

However, my friends understood why my house was not open to them, and it didn't affect our friendship. They understood my mother's viewpoint much better than she understood theirs. Many times, when we were chatting together, as boys and girls do on the sidewalk, they hid me from view if I thought someone was approaching who knew my mother and who might tell her I was chatting with boys.

In fact, once a neighbor did innocently tell Mother, "I saw Gussie yesterday in the ice-cream parlor with a very nice young man. I bet she will beat Leah getting married."

When I came home from work that day, Mother came

at me and, before I realized what was happening, started to beat me.

"What's the matter? What did I do?" I asked.

"What on earth were you doing in the ice-cream parlor with a fellow?" she yelled at me. "Are you trying to disgrace the family? First you let him buy you an ice-cream soda, then you will let him kiss you, and the next thing you'll be bringing me home a *mamzer* (illegitimate child)!"

Trying to pacify her, I said, "I was there with his sister when he walked in." This wasn't true, of course, but it did help to calm her.

"Well, don't let it happen again," she said.

However, we continued to have our little Sunday gatherings, and I did my share in providing refreshments as we visited the different homes.

It seemed that I was a particularly favored guest in the Blanks' home. Perhaps this was because Eddie Blank let it be known that he liked me a lot. His mother was a very sweet person, and I was very fond of her. I felt that I could never accept a date with Eddie alone, even though I liked and admired him a great deal. Eddie had red hair too, and I did not want a serious affair to develop, because I had been teased so much about my own red hair.

He was persistent, however. He worked in a factory just around the corner from Learner's, and since he got through at 5:00 P.M., he would wait outside for an hour for me to finish work, just to talk to me and to pay my streetcar fare home. When I told him that I couldn't let him pay my fare since I wouldn't go out with him, he asked, "Well, what's wrong with going out with me, Gussie?"

"Why, you have red hair, Eddie! If I married you, all our children would be sure to have red hair!"

He seemed surprised and said, "Pray tell me, what's wrong with that?"

I told him how miserable my life had been as a small child, mostly because of my red hair. He argued other points that I am sure made sense to him, but to me there was only one big point—we were two redheads.

I really did like Eddie, and I hoped that I might meet another boy I could like as well who had hair of any color but red.

On Saturdays we worked only until noon, and then we received our pay—in cash in an envelope. To play it safe I took out the amount over and above what I had told Mother I earned, and when I got home I gave Mother the five dollars for the week's room and board. The rest of the money was mine to do with as I pleased.

Frequently I helped in the store on Saturday afternoons. Our clientele consisted mostly of Italian and Portuguese people. They were wonderful customers, easily sold and always congenial. When they paid you and you said, "Thank you," they would reply, "You welcome!"

Yet sometimes they were hard to understand. Once a woman came in to buy a shirtwaist, insisting she wanted an "alla blacka waist." Not having a black waist, Leah did her best to sell the woman either a waist with black flowers or with black stripes, but she refused both, saying, "No canna use it. She issa dead. Somabody must weara alla blacka for a mourning."

The customers seemed pleased when Herbert waited on them. He always called them by name. He said, "It makes them feel kind of special. It's easy to remember names: just associate it with something or someone else." I tried this once, and it backfired.

AN ALBUM OF PHOTOGRAPHS



My Second Family



Officers of my third family



Gussie - Lillian - Helen





Shirley in front of Sound truck



Brothers Named As Store Bandits

Woman Clerk Accuser; Man Shot in Escape

Police, hunting one of two bandits who wounded a bystander Friday night in a Fillmore street liquor store holdup, early yesterday arrested Dwight Brown, 21, younger brother of a man they already had in custody.

The youth, who was discovered hiding in a woodshed at 1480 Geary street, admitted he was the driver of the holdup car, police said.

Both brothers were arraigned before Municipal Judge Clarence Morris and held to answer on charges of robbery and assault with intent to kill.

Mrs. Gussie [redacted] identified the brothers as the two men who forced her to lie on the floor of the liquor store at 1500 Fillmore street while they emptied the cash register. Street Car Conductor James Wiley leaped on the side of their car trying to halt their escape, but was blasted off by a pistol bullet that severed one of his fingers.

The eldest brother, Keneth, 33, who was captured when the escape car crashed near the robbery scene, was scathingly denounced from the bench by Judge Morris.

"I don't know who the 'brains' of this robbery was," the judge told him. "But you would have done your younger brother a favor by shooting him through the head instead of wounding a bystander."

Kenneth has been twice a convict, while Dwight had a previously clean police record. The younger brother told police he was married and the father of an 11-months-old baby. Both were jailed in default of $10,000 bonds.



MRS. GUSSIE
Identifies Store Robb

Grandaughters — We six females - My girls & their girls













Sandy and Carolyn at the Circus

Sandy and Carolyn

Betty Carolyn Sandra

Granddaughters Carolyn and Sandra Dressed Alike









Betty and Helen





My three wonderful possessions







My daughters Helen and Betty dressed alike

Helen



Betty and Helen



Shirley and Playmate



Al and Betty



Sandy and Shirley





Alex and Doris



Helen and Sherman



Irene and Herman



Mother



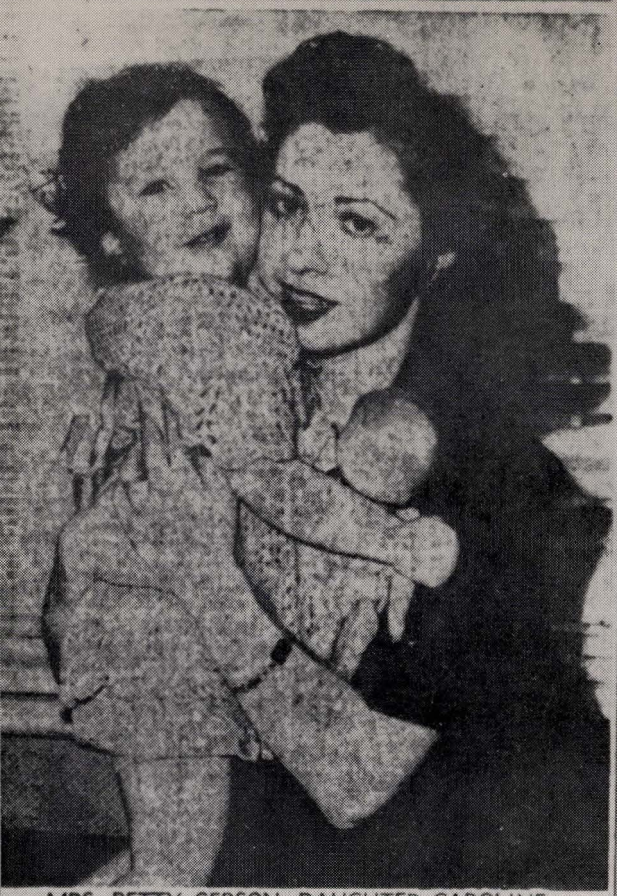
Aaron & Margo



David Lillian Max

National Smooth Dancers





MRS. BETTY GERSON, DAUGHTER CAROLINE
A 'Mr. Smith telephoned

War Widow Charges Vet With Plot

A discharged Army veteran was sentenced to 90 days in jail yesterday after testimony of a young war widow involving him in an alleged extortion plot.

The former soldier, Andrew Dosovich, 23, was found guilty of disturbing the peace on complaint of Mrs. Betty Gerson, 20, 1815 32d avenue.

Mrs. Gerson, whose husband, Private Jack Gerson, was killed in Germany November 14, told Judge Leo Cunningham, that Dosovich had attempted to mislead her with false information concerning her husband.

Mother of a 2-year-old child, the widow testified that shortly after she had received notification of her husband's death a "Mr. Smith had telephoned her, claiming that his brother had served with her husband overseas and had information concerning him.

The stranger, she said, told her that his brother was traveling from Chicago to bring her the information.

Her husband's name, she said, had appeared previously in newspaper casualty lists.

In several successive telephone calls, the complainant questioned her extensively regarding her work, position and finances.

Mrs. Gerson, suspicious of the telephone calls, phoned police.

Accompanied by a police officer, she met Dosovich in a Fillmore street bar.

Dosovich told police he did not know Mrs. Gerson's husband or have any information concerning him. In court he denied making any phone calls to Mrs. Gerson.

Judge Cunningham, in finding Dosovich guilty, said, "this sort of racket is reprehensible and it is too bad we do not have more evidence on a more serious charge."





Betty & Jack



Mayor Clifford Rishel

I was in the store while Herbert was waiting on a lady. I heard him call her Mrs. Lincoln, and then he sold her a large order. Her name was easy to remember, I thought, because she was named after a former president.

Some time later this good customer came into the store while I was there. I recognized her. "Good afternoon, Mrs. Washington," I greeted her.

She smiled and said, "Lincoln is my name."

I could have died. Apologetically I tried to make amends, succeeding only in confusing the matter further.

"I'm so sorry, but you look so much like another very fine customer we have, and her name is Lincoln."

She laughed, but I had tears in my eyes because, by this time, I wasn't sure which president she was named after. She must have realized how embarrassed I was, because she said, "My name is Lincoln, child."

I was thankful I was alone in the store at the time. Herbert and Leah were having their dinner upstairs.

17

Herbert was considered a very fine catch in the opinion of practically all the Jewish people in Albany who knew him, personally or by hearsay. He was a fine-looking man, a successful businessman, and he dressed very well. They often told him that they had, or knew, just the right girl for him. He usually replied, "I would rather see Leah get married first. She will soon be twenty years old. Do you know someone nice for her?"

I know that Herbert did investigate some of the girls described as being wonderful for him. However, he always

commented that they were either too tall, too short, too skinny or just not attractive enough.

It was the early part of 1917. When our country entered World War I, Herbert was drafted.

The property and business were sold, and Mother went back to New York. Blanche and I went with her, but Leah refused to join us. She secured a job as a clerk in the Boston Department Store in Albany, and went to live with Else Richter, one of the Blumenthal girls, who was now married.

In New York City we went back to the East Side again.

I had no trouble finding employment. I got a job at the first place I visited, a petticoat factory uptown. I operated a four-needle tucking machine.

To my surprise and satisfaction I topped twenty-five dollars a week. I paid Mother ten dollars for room and board, which left me plenty for myself. But here I found myself with no outside interests. I had nothing in common with my co-workers in the factory, as they were men and women of twice my age. I couldn't find a girl friend with whom I might go places and find some recreation.

I tried going to the dance halls in the neighborhood, but I just stood around and watched the other girls and their fellows dance. Nobody there seemed even to know I existed. I tried a number of other dance halls. The only fellows who seemed to pay attention to me were some of the fresh guys, who would say something like, "Hey, kid, anyone taking you home tonight?"

Then, if I walked away, they would say something like, "What are you afraid of, who's going to touch you?" or "Has the cat got your tongue?" Most of the time I went home early and cried myself to sleep.

Sundays I would walk down to the old neighborhood we

used to live in before we moved to Albany, hoping I would meet someone I used to know, but that didn't happen. I tried standing at the entrance of the house where we used to live, in the hope that I might get acquainted with someone. But that didn't work either.

Then came the epidemic. They called it the influenza. The disease spread through the nation, and it seemed that almost every family was hit by it. Everyone said it was a greater tragedy than the war. People took sick without warning and died almost without seeming to be sick. Doctors were at a premium. People died so rapidly that there weren't enough hearses to carry the dead to the cemeteries. Trucks and horses and wagons took the place of hearses in many cases. People were afraid to go anywhere for fear they would come in contact with someone who was carrying the dread disease. Numerous people wore masks on the street and in places where they were thrown into contact with others. Poor Mother was one of the unfortunate ones: she was stricken with it, and it lasted for months.

Never will I forget the night poor Mother was so ill. She cried out loud, "Please, good God, send me a *refue* [cure] so I won't have to leave my children so soon."

How we prayed and cried that night! I promised God that I would be good to Mother and that I would never think of the things she did which displeased me. Then I thought of how alone Mother had been without Papa. Papa had been dead nearly ten years. I hoped and prayed that God would send Mother a husband who would be good and kind to her.

I couldn't help but think how different everything would have been if Papa had lived. I am sure the members of the family would not have been such strangers to one another.

God heard our prayers, for Mother started to get well that very night.

Armistice Day came. Everybody was rejoicing, blowing horns, throwing confetti. I took a streetcar to the uptown section where all the activity was. I watched people just being happy together, right out in the street, because they knew their relatives, sweethearts, and friends would soon be home again. I was emotionally stirred and wanted to join in the fun. I kept looking around, but I couldn't find a person I knew, or anyone I thought would talk to me. When the crowds began to thin out, I felt I would soon be left standing alone in the big city, so I took the streetcar again and went home.

I felt unaccountably lonely and disheartened.

Suddenly Papa loomed up in my thoughts. For some reason I hadn't thought of him so much lately, nor had I been remembering some of the things he had said. Now I remembered what he used to say so often: "We have to pray hard for what we want." And I remembered: "Be good to Mother. Just doing what you are supposed to do is not enough. It's the little extra deed that counts, *tuen a mitzve* [to do a good deed]." How clearly I remembered Papa's saying, "The greatest happiness we get is giving happiness to others, and God does the rewarding."

I realized I had not really prayed lately for what I wanted. I realized also that all I did for Mother was to pay my board and room. I promised myself that I would change.

So I decided to tell Mother the truth about how much money I was earning. Regardless of her reaction, I felt she should derive some pleasure from the fact that I was taking her into my confidence. Her reaction surprised me.

"Good, Gussie," she said. "Now, you start saving all the

money you can. The ten dollars I get from you, and the five dollars from Blanche and the money from the mortgage of the Albany property—this is enough for me. I hope we can find a *khosn* [bridegroom] for you soon." But I didn't want her to find one for me. I didn't say this to her, but I prayed I would meet a man myself. And I "prayed hard," just as I had done when I was younger; prayed that I would find friends.

Shortly after this I was walking one evening, still not knowing just what to do but still hoping something nice would happen. I was about to pass a girl when I realized that she looked familiar. I stopped. She stopped, too, and asked, "Aren't you Gussie?"

"Yes, and you are Sophie Moskowitz! You went to Public School 46, and you used to live on Hester Street."

From that chance meeting we became close friends. I spent many evenings in her home. Her family life was wonderful. I decided that this was the way mine was going to be when I had my very own family. I met Sophie's older brother, and he asked me for a date. He was very kind and polite, but I felt that I couldn't accept his invitation because he spoke with an accent. All I could think of was that I didn't want my children's father to speak with an accent.

Sophie and I went to dances and shows together, and always had a good time. We took turns treating one another, and when one of us was short of money, the other would pay. In the meantime we were both looking for steady boy-friends.

A few months after the war ended, the garment-workers went on strike. Thousands were out of work, myself included.

I tried hard to find a job in some other field, but I

couldn't. There were thousands of other unemployed garment-workers also looking for work. Tramping around looking for work made my shoes wear out faster. Then, abruptly, the styles in women's clothing changed—from very short to very long. The strike went on for months, and the ten dollars a week I paid Mother made my savings dwindle fast. I couldn't buy the shoes I needed, and I had to wear outmoded clothes, because I couldn't lengthen the old, short ones, and I couldn't buy material for new clothes. Eventually I could no longer pay Mother anything for my board and room.

This was a bitter experience for me. From the time I started work I always had money of my own, was able to clothe myself well, and paid my own way when I was with other people. Never before had I owed money to anyone. Mother advanced me money to buy a much-needed pair of shoes, but after I had worn them once I couldn't make myself put them on again. They made my feet burn, for some reason. It seemed that my luck was "getting smaller."

Sophie, who worked in an office, seemed very fortunate to me. I began to realize the importance of an education, since anyone could work in a factory.

I felt that all the advantages I had secured for myself in the last couple of years had been lost—and I didn't see any hope of getting back up there again.

And then I met Morris.

18

I liked Morris at our first meeting, and apparently he liked me, too. At first I just thought of him as a friend. Soon, however, it became evident that Morris had more ambitious ideas for the two of us.

He lived two blocks from our place and was still working as an electrician in the shipyards, having started there during the war. Each morning on his way to work he passed our house, stopped for a moment, and whistled from across the street. I went to the window, then he waved at me, and I waved back at him. I thought this little game was fun, and I would have missed it terribly if he had stopped whistling for me.

We saw each other often, but it wasn't until Morris handed me a large package one Sunday that I realized how serious he was. Our family never observed holidays or birthdays by giving gifts. I had never been given a gift before, so I just stood looking at the box. Impatiently Morris urged me to open it.

Inside was a royal-blue cloth cape, to be used instead of a coat. It was the very latest style at that time. All I could do was stare at the beautiful gift. I didn't know what to say or do, until Morris said, "Why don't you try it on for size?"

I slipped the cape on and looked in the mirror. It was just right for me. Then I heard Morris say the one thing that made his gift absolutely perfect. He said, "You sure look good in blue, with your red hair!"

I knew that if I didn't say something pretty quick I would cry. "Gee, thanks a whole lot, Morris—I don't know how to thank you enough!"

Morris said simply, "You already have."

We used to sit and talk for hours. He told me about a girl he had gone with. He gave her a diamond ring, and then she got herself another fellow. She never did give back the ring. He also told about his family having lived in California, with an aunt and uncle who had no children. His father couldn't find enough work out there to support his family of five children, so they moved back to New York. The aunt and uncle liked him, so Morris's parents consented to let him stay in California with them. When he was sixteen, however, his parents begged him to come home. That had been five years before. Morris said that he had longed to go back to California ever since.

In March Morris showed me a diamond ring. "It's for you," he said, "if you will say that you will marry me. Marry me, Gussie, and I will take you to California."

Yes, I wanted to marry Morris; I knew that by this time. He treated me better than I had hoped any boy would. He was earning big money, too, and it seemed that he would make a good husband. Yet I didn't really want to go to California. Also, I had promised Papa that I would stick close to Mother, and she would never leave New York again.

All I could say to Morris was, "I would marry you, but I can't go with you to California," Then I told him why.

Morris's reply was, "Let's not worry about that. We'll stay in New York until you decide you want to go."

It was on the basis of this agreement that I accepted the ring. I was really happy, and I knew that Morris was, too. I thought that I had found in Morris the qualities that I

wanted in a husband. Yet I have no recollection of Morris' ever saying that he loved me. Nor did I tell him that I loved him.

If I was in love, then it wasn't like anything that I had heard or read about. With my acceptance of the ring, however, we started to make plans for our future together.

Mother consented to my marriage. She said that I was old enough and should not wait any longer. If I waited until I was twenty, the poorer my chances would be for finding a husband.

"It would be better if Leah got a husband first," Mother said, very anxiously, "but there is no telling how long you would have to wait." Then she sighed: "*Got in himl* [God in heaven], when will you send Leah a husband? I'd hate to live to see any of my girls be an old maid."

Being engaged to be married made everything else look good to me. The strike had ended, and I was back at work, earning five dollars a week more than I had before. Morris and I opened a joint savings-account and began saving our money together. His weekly earnings ranged from sixty to seventy dollars, and I averaged thirty dollars. Besides buying many things for our new home, we saved six hundred dollars in eight months.

We set December 20, 1919, as the date for our wedding. On December 1 I quit work. I wanted the time to get a lot of things ready for my new home and for myself—especially clothes and the other necessary things that I could sew. The first thing we purchased was a new sewing-machine. I don't recall whether electric machines were available at that time or not, but even if they had been, we would have bought our manually operated one. An electric machine would have been too expensive, and besides, how could we be sure that

every place we lived would have electricity?

We still had to decide on one major item, however: Where would we live after we were married?

We knew that it would be difficult to find a place to rent, but we just about covered the city, looking. We spent whole days in the Bronx and in Brooklyn. Both Morris and I wanted to make our home away from the East Side. We let it be known that we would pay thirty dollars a month, or even a little more, but this made no difference. There just were no vacant apartments for us.

Then we decided to talk to Harold. By then he had acquired a number of large apartment-houses in Brooklyn and Williamsburg. They were all up to date, with elevators, and with bathrooms in each apartment. We figured that the rent would be at least forty dollars, but we told ourselves that somehow we would make out.

We went to Harold and told him that we were getting married very soon, and that we had looked everywhere without finding any place we could rent. Would he rent us one of his apartments?

His answer was, "Do you know how much rent I get? Even if I wanted to, how could I rent you one of my apartments? If my tenants can't afford to pay the rent, I dispossess them, and if you couldn't pay your rent, I would have to dispossess *you*. Then people would *fershteynen* [stone] me, because you are my sister!"

Harold had retired even before the war, and was living in his own home in Brooklyn. We had to take the subway to get home, which took almost an hour. Neither of us spoke. Morris sensed that if he talked to me I would cry.

When we reached home, I did cry. Morris put his arms around me and said, "Don't let *him* discourage us. Please,

Gussie. We aren't going to postpone the wedding, are we?"

"No, Morris," I said although I could hardly talk. "I know that we will find a place, in spite of him—and it won't be on the East Side!"

We looked and looked, but we couldn't find any place we could afford. Finally, with the wedding date getting closer, Morris said, "We have six hundred dollars. Let's go to California. We can live with my aunt and uncle. After a while maybe things will get better here, and we can come back."

More from weariness and discouragement than because I felt he was right, I agreed to Morris's suggestion. This made him extremely happy. But when I went home that night, I couldn't sleep.

Going to California did seem to offer some attractive answers. We would be living some place other than the East Side. Maybe it was a good idea just to get away from New York. Who would care if I left? Certainly not Harold or Leah. Herbert now had a clothing store in a small town in upper New York. Then, of course, the one person who would be most affected if I left New York loomed in my thoughts—my mother. I knew then that I couldn't be three thousand miles away from her. This meant I must stay in New York.

Out of this long night of thinking came one determination on my part: We would find a place for Morris and myself, even if it had to be on the East Side!

I told Morris of my decision, and, while he was disappointed about not going to California, he agreed to our staying. We rented three rooms in a tenement house on Broome Street. The only window in the place faced the yard, with its clotheslines. We had a sink with running water, but the toilets were those same old community affairs in the hall.

Then there was that tenement-house trademark: a stoop out in front.

Having settled the problem of where to live, we found many other decisions requiring our attention. Preparations for the wedding had to be made, and furniture had to be bought.

I went to the gas-and-electric company to arrange for service for our apartment. There were many other people there who had also filled out their applications for service and who were waiting their turns to be taken care of by the clerk. I seated myself on the bench to await my turn. Then I became interested in a magazine, placed there for the patrons to read.

The clerk called out someone's name, repeating it louder each time, but no one answered. The woman next to me remarked, "What the hell is the matter with some dumb people? Why don't they listen for their names when they are called?"

I laughed and replied, "Maybe they got tired of waiting and left. The fools will only have to wait again when they return."

Then the clerk called the name louder, adding, "This is the last time!"

At that I jumped up and yelled at the clerk, "That's me!"

About fifteen people sitting in the waiting room had a good laugh.

On my way out I went past the woman I had talked to and said, "I'm sorry, but I'm getting married, and that's not my name yet!"

The woman replied, "What in the hell are you getting married for if you are sorry?" Again everyone had a good laugh.

It was just three days before my wedding day. I was at my sewing machine in the kitchen, trying to finish up a long list of things I had been sewing for my new home. I had made the curtains for the apartment, underwear for myself, and nightgowns to replace the underwear I had been sleeping in. I even made the dresses that Mother and Blanche would wear at the wedding. I couldn't make my own wedding dress, because Mother said it was unlucky for a bride to make her own wedding dress. So I had to rent a white dress and veil for myself.

Old-country customs and ages-old rituals of the Jewish religion were just about in control of my marriage arrangements. I glanced up a moment from my sewing. On the sink drainboard sat evidence of one of these customs. I say that it just sat there, but it seemed actually to be beckoning to me. This was a piece of meat in the second stage of being koshered (prepared). It had already been soaked in water for a half-hour, which was the first stage. Now, sprinkled with salt, it had lain for an hour on a slanted board which had ridges to allow the blood to run off. At that moment Mother was busy in the front room. She called to me.

"Gussie!"

"Yes, Mother."

"Gussie, *gis op dos fleysh* [rinse the meat of the salt]."

I washed the salt from the meat, placed it on a clean dish, and went back to my sewing.

When Mother came into the kitchen and looked at the meat, she became furious. "Look what you did! You put the *fleysh* into a *milkhiker teler* [put the meat into a dairy dish]! Now we cannot cook the meat, and we cannot use this plate until you see the Rabbi and *freg a shayle* [request a rabbinical interpretation]!"

Mother was talking about one of our strictest customs. This called for having two sets of utensils, dishes, silver, and dish towels. One set was used only for dairy foods, and the other set for those meats permitted by the Jewish faith. We were not permitted to mix these sets in any way, either in using them or in cleaning them. All this was based on the Bible statement: "Thou shalt not seethe [cook] a kid in its mother's milk."

"Please, Mother, couldn't we just forget it for this one time?" I pleaded.

Mother scolded, "Without the Rabbi's decision, the meat and the dish would both be *treyfe* [non-kosher]."

"Then let's not use either of them," I begged.

Mother became very angry then. "Is that the way you want to start a married life, by committing *aveyre* [sin]?"

Of course, I didn't want to sin, nor did I want to argue any more with Mother. So off I went to the nearby synagogue.

I waited about half an hour for the Rabbi. I told him what had happened, and he said, "Since the plate was clean when you put the meat on it, you can use the meat, but the plate has to be soaked in cold water for twenty-four hours before it will be kosher again."

On the eve of my wedding Mother said, "Gussie, it is now time we went to the *mikve* [ritual bath, or pool of purification]."

"What is that?" I asked her.

"A pool to cleanse yourself."

"But, Mother, I would much rather use the bathtub!"

"Do you always have to argue with me, Gussie? This is to purify you, and don't ask me any more questions, either!"

I felt that this was no time to argue with Mother, so I

went with her to the *mikve*. I undressed, and then the attendant clipped my fingernails and toenails very short. A sheet was placed over my head, and I was led to the pool and told to enter naked. My head was dunked beneath the water, a prayer was said, and the ritual was over.

On the way home I asked Mother why they had cut my fingernails off so short; I had been trying to make them grow long. She said, "That was to get rid of any dirt that might be hidden under them. Before anyone enters the *mikve* she must be clean and pure."

Well, I supposed that hundreds of other brides-to-be had entered that pool to be made "clean and pure," but I vowed that any daughters I might have would not be compelled to do this before their weddings.

Then came my wedding day.

In the morning I prepared the refreshments for the reception being held in the reception room at the synagogue on Fourth Street.

The wedding, held in the evening, was a simple affair. Herbert came to the wedding, but Leah said that she couldn't get away from her job. Harold also attended our wedding. He handed Mother fifty dollars for my wedding gift and said, "Here, give this to Gussie." Later Herbert asked Mother what Harold had given me, and she showed him the check. He said that he would have liked to give more, but since the oldest and richest member of the family gave fifty dollars, he couldn't belittle him by giving more, so he also gave me a check for fifty dollars.

During the ceremony Mother cried. Then I started to cry. I don't know whether I cried because she was crying or because I was tired and exhausted. But I was now a married woman, and my husband and I went to our home on Broome Street.

The day after my wedding Mother came to visit Morris and me. She had come to assert a right that "old-country" mothers had established generations ago.

I should have been prepared for this, as Mother had talked about marriage customs in the old country so often. Among these customs was the right of both mothers-in-law to visit a newly married couple the day after their marriage to verify that the bride had been a virgin. If the virginity of the bride could not be proved, she would be marked for life. The Rabbi would grant the *khosn* [bridegroom] a Jewish divorce immediately.

So now my mother was calling on my new husband and his bride with a demand to see our bed sheet, so that she could verify my virginity.

I was shocked and embarrassed. Yet to Morris it seemed ridiculous and quite funny. He had never heard of this custom, so he laughed and said to Mother, "Why should *you* worry? I'm satisfied."

This made her furious! She said that she was convinced that we had committed adultery before we were married and that I had brought disgrace upon her. She wondered how long after the wedding it would be before I had a baby. "To think I would live to see this from my own child!" she said bitterly.

I was completely bewildered. I didn't know what to do or say to convince her that she was wrong. The easiest thing to do was cry, and that I did.

"Your crying won't help you now, Gussie. I only hope God finds it possible to forgive you. I can't." Then Mother left.

19

In our three-room tenement-home Morris and I found peace and contentment. I felt complete for the first time in my life, with a husband of my own, an apartment with bright new curtains I had made myself, and the freedom to run my household as I wished.

Mrs. Wettenstein, our manager, was like a mother to all of her tenants. Both she and her husband were always on hand when anyone needed help, even for personal matters. All of our neighbors were considerate and nice, too. This surprised me pleasantly, since the East Side neighborhoods I had lived in before had been anything but neighborly.

Sewing was my main delight, and I enjoyed sharing my sewing machine, and the things I had learned in garment factories, with my neighbors. I believe that I derived more happiness from helping them with their sewing than they did from the assistance which I gave them.

Occasionally, on Saturdays, my in-laws visited us. They often told me how pleased they were at having me as their daughter-in-law. It didn't take much to please them or make them happy. Now and then I bought remnants from the pushcarts and made my father-in-law a silk shirt, or my mother-in-law a waist.

"*Vos meyn shnur* Gussie's *oygn zeen, kenen ihre hent tun* [What my daughter-in-law Gussie's eyes see, her hands can do]," was an expression they often used in reference to me, and I loved them for it.

I had been married only a few months when my mother anounced that she was going to get married, too. She had met a religious man, Mr. Sunshine, whom she considered to have the qualifications she now wanted in a husband.

Being Mrs. Sunshine seemed to give her the peace and contentment that I now felt. She was much easier to get along with, and the two of us shared our lives on a much more enjoyable basis. It became our habit to go shopping together each week.

Following Mother's custom, we bought live chickens. The idea was to pick the ones with the most *schmaltz* (fat) by feeling them. Whenever Mother's neighbors met her while shopping, they would say, "Mrs. Sunshine, will you take a feel of my chicken?" They called her a *guter meyvin* (good connoisseur).

We took our live chickens to the *shokhut* (ritual slaughterer), who slit the chicken's neck while reciting a prayer. The *flikerke* (chicken-plucker) was next. She performed this job for a nickel a chicken.

The chickens would have been *treyfe,* of course, if this routine had not been followed. I understood this and accepted it, because it pleased Mother.

On one of our Friday shopping-tours when I took my chicken to the counter to be wrapped, Mother noticed that one of the wings was blue. For some reason, this posed a problem we couldn't solve ourselves. We must go to the Rabbi and ask for a solution, my mother insisted.

"Not again!" I protested. "Why? What's wrong with the chicken?"

"Can't you see, Gussie? The wing is blue."

"I'll cut the wing off. There won't be much lost."

"*Di goye* [gentile woman]," mother said. "The chicken may even be *treyfe!*"

"So I won't use it at all," I said. I was willing to throw the chicken away rather than go looking for a rabbi for his opinion. When Mother said that this would be a sin, I reminded her that it was Friday, not Thursday, and that the Rabbi would not be in the synagogue until that night. But she had thought of this, too, and had her answer ready.

"We must go to the *kheder* [Hebrew school]. We will find a rabbi there." So we started off, going from one Hebrew school to another, and finding, at each one, that the rabbi had just left, wouldn't be back until evening, or just plain wasn't there. We finally found one, at noontime. Mother unwrapped my chicken, and the Rabbi looked at it. Then he pulled out his *sidder* (prayer book) and read something from it. Soon he announced, "The chicken is kosher. You can use it—just cut off the wing and throw it away."

I wasn't any more pleased with that chicken than I had been before the Rabbi had said a few words over it, but Mother said, "Now don't you feel better? We didn't commit a sin by taking it upon ourselves to decide." I didn't feel any better until I got home and put that chicken in the pot.

Mother was very righteous and modest, highly respected by everyone who knew her. I never remember hearing Mother swear or take God's name in vain. Also, she was shy and embarrassed when anyone talked about intimacies. That was the reason I was so shocked when we finished shopping for our two days' food supply for the high holidays. Before I left to go home Mother said, "I want you to remember and observe that on Yom Kippur you do not have intercourse. That is one of the greatest sins you can commit."

As soon as Mother knew that I was pregnant, she started counting the days off from the date of my marriage. She

was greatly relieved when the nine-month mark was passed. My baby was eventually born nine months and twenty-one days after Morris and I had been married.

I was about six months pregnant when Mrs. Wettenstein asked, "Did you see a doctor yet?"

"Why, no! What for?"

"Why, to deliver your baby!"

"But I haven't felt any pain yet," I told her. Then she explained the value of seeing a doctor ahead of time, so that he could help me to prepare myself for what was to come. I took her advice and went to see three different doctors in the neighborhood. Eventually I chose Dr. Herstein, because he said that he would deliver my baby at home for twenty-five dollars. So I gave him a five-dollar deposit.

Not until after I had visited the doctor did I fully realize that I was actually going to have a real live baby of my own. I had great confidence in the doctor, but I knew that I must also have faith. So I prayed that God would do the best for my child, make it normal and healthy—and, *please,* no red hair! I silently hoped that it would be a little girl.

My baby daughter arrived October 11, 1920. When the doctor handed me my beautiful little girl with long black hair, I felt that this was the most wonderful thing that could ever happen to me in all my life. I thanked God over and over again for blessing me with this lovely little girl. That night, with my baby beside me in bed, I couldn't sleep—or, rather, I didn't *want* to sleep. I just wanted to look at this wonderful being and, at times, to assure myself that she was still breathing!

The next day Morris brought home a crib for his daughter, and Mother bought a beautiful baby-carriage for her granddaughter. Mother suggested that we name our daughter

after Aunt Haye Leye, who had recently died in the old country. By tradition, a newborn child was named after someone who had passed away, never after the living. It was believed that, having a namesake, the dead would rest in peace. So we named our daughter Helen Lulu, which we considered as close as we could come to my aunt's Jewish names.

My daughter and her baby carriage were the prettiest on the block, and never was her carriage cover or hat without a ribbon or a bow. We visited Mother several times a week. My Helen was something special to her. If Mother was sitting on the stoop when I came, she often sent me to buy something that I knew she didn't need. Then, when I left Helen with her, she could show her grandchild to her neighbors. Mother often said to me, "Don't doll the baby up so much: we must be very careful of an *ayin hore* [evil eye]!" When people stopped to admire Helen, Mother never failed to say after they left, "*Keyn ayin hore* [No evil eye]," to protect the baby from harm.

Once I heard a neighbor say to Mother, "Mrs. Sunshine, what are your other children like? I have never seen them here. What do your other grandchildren look like?"

I could see Mother's sadness under her forced smile as she answered, "God bless them, they are always so busy; besides, I wouldn't think of letting my grandchildren travel all the way from Brooklyn just to see me." My heart ached, and it was all I could do to keep from putting my arms around her and kissing her.

One afternoon in January of 1921 I answered a knock at the door. Standing there was a tall, good-looking young man, too well dressed for our neighborhood, especially for a weekday afternoon. For a moment he just stood there,

looking at me, without saying a word. I couldn't see him too clearly in the doorway, because the halls were so dark, even in the daytime. "Yes?" I said.

"Hi, kid!" Phillip was the only one who ever called me "kid."

"Phillip!" I exclaimed. He took me in his arms and kissed me.

"Now stop crying, or I'll think you're not glad to see me."

"Where have you been all these years? What are you doing? Where are you living? Are you married? Do you have any children?"

"Hold your horses, kid. Not so fast!" he laughed.

I didn't give him a chance to answer one of my questions; I rushed into the bedroom and returned with Helen. Phillip asked to hold her, and Helen watched him with her big blue eyes as he talked to her, looking as though she understood every word he said.

"Why haven't we ever heard from you, Phillip?" I finally asked.

Phillip told me that he had legally changed his name, as he didn't want to see the family hurt if he ever got in trouble. He was married to a gentile girl who had a child from a previous marriage, and he owned several restaurants in Philadelphia. He went on to say that he didn't want his wife, or her folks, to know our family, because they wouldn't see eye to eye on anything. "I guess every family has a black sheep, and I am the one in this family," he said.

I laughed and said, "This family has two colored sheep—I'm the red one."

Chuckling, Phillip replied, "How about the green one?" I had often heard him refer to Harold, when he wasn't around and Phillip was peeved at him, as the "greenhorn."

Phillip stayed only about half an hour. He said that he had spent a lot of time trying to locate me and that now he had to leave. That was thirty-eight years ago. I have never seen him since.

Morris and I and our baby were getting along fine. Then came one of those times when you realize that, while you can be contented in your "own little world," you are completely dependent upon what is happening in the world outside.

With its wartime contracts terminated, the shipyard closed. It became difficult for Morris to get two straight weeks of work, and then he was paid only six dollars a day.

On top of all this, Morris developed an irritating boil on his arm. To save money he went to the free Essex Street Dispensary to have it treated. There the boil was lanced, but apparently it had become infected. Blood poisoning developed, and he had to go to a private doctor. So doctor bills were added to our expenses. I started to do dressmaking at home, to add to our income.

Again my neighbors were kind and helpful. Those I had been sewing for without charge now kept me busy and paid for my services. They also brought their friends to me as customers. Soon I had more work than I could handle, even though I made my day stretch until two and three o'clock in the morning.

Now Mother came to visit *me,* because I was unable to visit her as I had before. She said that she missed her grandchild. How glad I was to see her! Knowing that she cared gave me a sense of belonging to her.

However, Mother's visits kept me on my guard, busy keeping her from discovering that I didn't keep a kosher house. If I heard her coming, I would quickly wet the meat

I was going to cook for supper, put it on the salt board, and sprinkle salt on it. Then after she was there five minutes, I would look at the clock and, pretending that the required time has passed, wash the meat.

I divided my only set of dishes on two shelves. "The ones on the upper shelf are *milkhike* [for dairy products] dishes, and the ones on the lower are *fleyshike* [for meat products]," I would tell my mother.

I felt guilty about fooling her, but if she had known the truth, she would never have eaten my food, and she would have been so angry as to stop coming to visit me. Besides, the meat did not taste as good when it was koshered.

Mother grew closer to me now than I ever hoped possible. She seemed happier, during her two years as Mrs. Sunshine, than I had ever known her to be. I knew that she had at last found contentment, even though she had to live economically on the twenty-five dollars a week Mr. Sunshine received from his children. They lived five blocks from us, on Fourth Street, in a three-room apartment, with the community toilets in the hall, which she thought she would never have to go back to when she left New York City to live in Albany.

For the first time in my life I began to realize how lonely Mother must have felt all those years without a husband. I was now aware that none of us children had ever brought her joy or happiness. All she had ever had out of life was worry, bickering, and hard work. All she had ever prayed for was to be capable of feeding her children and providing a roof over their heads. It was now easy to be kind to Mother. She didn't have to tell me how much she appreciated the little things I did for her. Each week I put her laundry into my wet-wash bundle. Then, after I starched and ironed her clothes, I would put her bundle on the shelf underneath the

baby carriage and return it when we went to visit her.

When I delivered the laundry, we would sit on the stoop until her husband came home. Then she would tell him to carry the laundry into the house, where she would open the bundle in front of him. Pretending that she was examining the clothes, Mother would say, "You know, Gussie does pretty good work."

What gave me the most pleasure was making her clothes. She would show them to her husband and neighbors and remark in a casual manner, "It fits perfect. It's even better than the bought ones."

I was seven months pregnant with my second child when Mother became very ill. Each day I went to her place to shop and prepare their dinner. As sick as she was, Mother worried about whether or not I was keeping her dishes separate, and if I was cheating on the time allotted for koshering the meat.

On one of these daily trips a neighbor who knew I was pregnant said, "I'll bet you are carrying your Mother's name!"

"God forbid, *please,* God forbid!" I kept praying. If she had stuck a knife into my heart, I couldn't have felt worse.

After being in bed for a month, Mother got worse and was sent to the hospital. I visited her there every day, and we talked about what we were going to do when she came home.

I will always treasure the memory of the following visit as long as I live, for it was just two days before Mother died.

Mother said, "God willing, if we live the following summer, we will go to the Catskill Mountains." Neither she nor I had ever been there. "We will rent two rooms and do our own cooking." Then she insisted on bringing her own dishes. We also talked about the child I was to bear. I told her that this time I wanted a son to name after Papa and that I was

going to nickname him "Pipele," because Papa always called me Gitele. I had pretended to want my first child to be a boy, going along with the wishes of my in-laws, but secretly I had crocheted and prepared a layette in pink. Mother had smiled and said, "It's good to do things to please yourself sometimes."

We talked a great deal about moving away from the East Side and renting a large flat which we could divide, so that we would have a bathroom which we didn't have to share with the other tenants. I talked about how attractively I would fix the flat: I would make drapes to match the bedspreads and living-room drapes to match the couch. Mother shook her head and said, "*Der mentsch trakht, un Got lakht* [Man is thinking, and God is laughing]. Don't plan so much, so you won't be disappointed."

Just before I left, Mother said, with a tender smile on her face, "You know something, Gussie? You are not really a *shlekht kind* [bad child]."

I turned my head so Mother couldn't see the tears in my eyes. "Thanks, Mamma." That was her way of letting me know that she loved me, and my heart cried for joy.

The following day Fanny was waiting at the hospital. I had the only visiting pass allotted, so I went up first to see Mother. I told her that Fanny was downstairs and that she had brought her some food; I would let her use the pass, so that she could visit with her, too.

"Please, Mother," I pleaded, "don't let Fanny stay long, as I have something very important to tell you!" Had Mother's lips spoken the words, she couldn't have told me more clearly that she knew what I had to tell her than her smile and tears did.

As I was leaving, Mother called me back. "You better kiss

me good-by now." That was the first time I had ever heard Mother ask anyone to kiss her. As I kissed her, I saw that she was crying.

"Please, Mamma, don't let Fanny stay too long!" I reminded her, pleadingly.

"All right, I'll try," she answered, "but you don't know Fanny."

Mother was right. Fanny stayed with her until visiting hours were over.

At three o'clock the next morning a policeman knocked at the door of our apartment. He brought a message from the hospital. Mother had passed away. My first reaction was that the policeman must be mistaken or that the hospital had sent the wrong message.

With all my heart I prayed that they were mistaken. "I just *must* tell Mother what I wanted to the day before! Oh, dear God," I prayed, "don't take her—*not before I tell her I love her!*"

I hastily dressed and dashed blindly into the dark hallway. I neither saw nor thought of the stairway, and the next moment I fell to the bottom of the stairs.

The shock of the fall cleared my mind. I realized that I had seen Mother for the last time, and that she had really said good-by to me.

Herbert came to the funeral. It was he who was at my side as we walked, following the hearse, while I cried and whispered, "Dear God, there rides my mother in your care and in my heart. *Please* let her know how much I love her and how sorry I am that I didn't tell her when she was alive."

Herbert remained for the week of *Shive* [seven days of mourning after burial]. I was happy when I saw him talk-

ing with and paying attention to my Helen. When I asked him why he hadn't married yet, he answered, "When I was young, I was too choosy, and now there isn't much to choose from—the best girls are already married." Because this was the first time any of my sisters or brothers, except for Phillip, had talked to me like one human being to another, I now felt close to Herbert.

Fourteen days after Mother died Dr. Herstein delivered my magnificent son, weighing ten pounds at birth. After seven days we engaged a *mohel* [the person who performs the circumcision]. Harold advised me to name my son after Mother. I wanted to do what was right, but my heart longed to have my second child carry Papa's name.

Harold said, "My oldest son is named after Papa: his soul rests in peace. How could you possibly refuse to name your child after Mother, so her soul can also rest in peace?"

How could I tell him that the day my son was handed to me I silently named him Charles and nicknamed him "Pipele," because of the affectionate way Papa called me Gitele, or about the "curse" the woman had made that I was carrying my mother's name?

I pleased Harold and never stopped regretting it, especially when I recalled Mother's words: "It's good to do things to please yourself sometimes."

At first I didn't take it seriously when my baby vomited after each feeding. Mrs. Wettenstein said it was only a sign that he would be a fat baby and that he was taking more milk than his little stomach could hold. I noticed, though, that he was constantly hungry and that he didn't seem to be gaining. I weighed him, and the scale told me that he had lost half a pound since birth. I became frightened and called Mrs. Wettenstein. She immediately called a doctor and told

him that she believed my milk was unfit for the baby because of the emotional upset I had been through, or perhaps I had hurt the baby the morning I fell down the flight of stairs.

The doctor put the baby on a formula, and each week the formula was changed. My baby continued to lose weight, and my heart broke to see my little son's eyes look up at me as if he were begging to be helped. One night Morris came home and found me holding my baby tightly, praying. I was calling upon my parents to help my sick baby. I had been to the doctor that day, and the formula had been changed again, because my son was still losing weight. Morris tried to comfort me. Then he expressed the one thought that seemed to make sense.

"We're only hitting our heads against a stone wall here. Let's go to California. I'm sure that when we get the baby into the sunshine and fresh air out there he will do much better. We may even find the right doctor there. Besides, I'm barely making a living for us here. Your mother is gone; what is there to hold us here any more?"

I knew he was right. There was nothing to hold us here longer. We called a secondhand man and sold all the furniture, including the sewing machine. We kept Morris's tools and Helen's folding crib.

We purchased a trunk, in which we put our personal belongings, Morris's tools, the folding crib, and the two fifty-dollar Liberty bonds I had bought when I was working in the shirtwaist factory during the war.

With these possessions, the train tickets paid for with the money received for the furniture and sewing machine, we left New York City's East Side—my "first family"—the mezuzahs on our doors, and headed for California.

In my mind was the saying Papa had so often repeated: "Gitele, God sees that everything happens for the best. He will blow the wind according to the clothes we wear."

And my heart answered Papa, "Gitele believes you, Papa dear. California is the right place now."

Part II

MY SECOND FAMILY

20

The five days and four nights on the train were the longest I had ever lived through. I didn't think that we would ever reach California.

Morris and our daughter occupied the upper berth. The baby and I slept in the lower one, because it was necessary to prepare the baby's formula every three hours, day and night. My baby took only an ounce or two of the formula and then sometimes vomited what looked like twice as much.

My sick little son's cries were very weak, and by the third day he could hardly cry at all. I took his temperature—it was 104 degrees. The conductor wired ahead for a doctor to meet us at the next station. When the doctor examined the baby, he said, "It looks bad. You may have to get off at the next stop to bury him!" I felt like jumping off the moving train.

The other passengers on the train were very sympathetic. They didn't ask me any questions, simply saying that they were sorry, and they devoted a great deal of attention to Helen. She was so good and understanding, never fussing or demanding any attention from me.

My heart almost broke when I heard a woman say, "That woman must be crazy to travel with such a tiny baby. I'll bet he's only a week old!" My son was three months old.

I wondered if I had done the right thing in traveling with my sick baby. Nobody had told me not to. I thought that maybe if Herbert had been there when I left New York he would have told me not to leave; I believe I would have lis-

tened to him. My brothers and sisters knew that I was leaving for California, but they were all unable to see us off.

We arrived in Berkeley, California, on February 6, 1923. Mrs. Green, Morris's aunt, met us and took us to her home on Addison Street. Dr. McCleave, a baby specialist, was recommended to us. I phoned him immediately and explained my baby's condition. He advised me to give him rice water, boiled until it was very thick, and told me to bring the baby to the Children's Hospital at eight o'clock the next morning.

Surprisingly, the rice water did stay down, and I thanked God, for I believed I had found a good omen.

The following morning at the hospital I undressed my tiny son, who now weighed only seven pounds. He had lost three pounds since birth. Dr. McCleave examined the baby. The worried look on his sympathetic, kind face told me that things were very serious. He explained that the constant vomiting had caused the baby's intestines to become hard and the passage to become smaller. This prevented the food from entering the body and providing nourishment.

"If you will consent," he said, "I will operate and do the best I possibly can to save the little fellow."

After the operation Dr. McCleave put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Your baby cried. That's a good sign."

I followed the nurse as she wheeled the baby into the room. As she put my tiny son into the bed, my heart almost stopped beating: he seemed even smaller now. He opened his eyes, which seemed so large for his little body. Then he smiled! "Oh, thank God," I cried aloud. The nurse put her arm around me and said, "No need for crying. Now you wait and see: he is going to get well."

Somehow I couldn't help but feel confident that everything would be all right. As I sat there, watching the nurse

feed the baby every hour, a million things went through my mind. I thought of Papa saying, "We sometimes have trouble, because we forget and take God too much for granted." But I knew I hadn't done that. Perhaps, I thought, I wasn't appreciating the good things enough.

I thought of Mother and how she would have loved it here. I compared the weather in California with that of New York in wintertime. I thought that maybe if I hadn't changed my mind about coming to California when we first got married we might have been able to persuade Mother to come out later. Perhaps Mother would be alive now, I thought, enjoying this wonderful sunshine and fresh air.

At four o'clock the nurse told me to go home and come back at seven that evening. On my way home I stopped at a baby shop and inquired about the prices of baby carriages. The clerk gave me a peculiar look. "Lady, you mean baby buggies!" he said. I thought this was a funny thing to call a baby carriage! After I looked at some I said that I would come back later with my husband, that I didn't know exactly when we would bring the baby home. The clerk said, "You must have a newborn baby." And I answered. "Yes." I felt as if my baby had been born again.

When I entered the house, the phone was ringing. I rushed to answer it. "Your baby took a turn for the worse. Would you please come to the hospital?"

"What? What did you say?" I screamed.

Then I heard someone else say, "Her baby just passed away!"

I don't remember anything after that—not until two days later when Morris gave me the Liberty bonds to sign.

"The little fellow is gone," he said. "We need the money to pay the undertaker."

I didn't even see his burial.

21

With the great amount of building going on in California it was easy for Morris to get a job as an electrician, since he had all the necessary tools. Then, after a few weeks, Mrs. Green asked us to look for a place of our own, saying that she wasn't strong enough to stand the confusion of our being there.

We rented two furnished housekeeping rooms. I began to dream of being able to buy furniture of our own, perhaps some day a little cottage. I longed and hoped, also, to have a few more children. So, with the first money I saved, I bought a sewing machine. With permission from the manager of the rooming house, I placed a small sign out front: "Dressmaking, Remodeling, Mending. Reasonable Prices."

In six months we saved nearly four hundred dollars, and then the building trades went on strike. It seemed that things could never go smoothly for us for very long. However, I felt that I had a great deal for which I should be thankful. My daughter Helen was the most adorable child—smart, good and very pretty. How my heart longed to be able to give her the comforts and pleasures other children enjoyed!

A month went by, with still no signs of the strike being settled. The money I earned from sewing bought only the food we needed. It was impossible for Morris to find work. We were becoming very concerned about our savings.

Morris said that his uncle and aunt, during the time when they had raised him, had been in the junk business in Marin

County. His uncle had used to take him along to buy sacks and bottles from the ranches. Morris claimed that he knew the business well. His aunt and uncle were wealthy now, and it was in the junk business that they had made their money. Morris convinced me that if he took the chance of going into the junk business he would make money—at least he would make a good living for us.

We put a two hundred and fifty dollar down payment on a second hand Ford truck and rented a cottage with a yard, in San Anselmo, for twenty-five dollars a month.

I painted the secondhand bed, dresser, and table and chairs we had bought. The stove came with the house. These, with Helen's crib and the sewing machine, were all that we had in the cottage.

Each day Morris went to the different ranches and bought sacks and bottles. I washed the bottles, and Morris showed me how to sort them and bundle the sacks. Then, every three or four days, he sold what we had accumulated to the wholesale junk yards. We were able to meet our expenses and the payments on the truck.

We accumulated a number of pieces of furniture, which I painted and fixed: iron beds, old dressers, chests of drawers, and chairs that the ranchers had discarded. Soon, however, the feed season was over, and there were no more sacks to buy.

We rented a store with two rooms in the rear, and the owner installed a bathtub for us. Since there was no stove, we bought a secondhand gas-plate on which I cooked and heated the water for bathing or washing clothes. We hung a sign out front: "We Buy and Sell All Kinds of Furniture."

In order that we would have more furniture for sale in the store, we replaced our table and chairs with boxes. Helen

slept with us, for we put her crib in the store, too. We hoped that we would be able to make a living.

Here, for the first time in my life, we had a Christmas tree. Like children we enjoyed the holiday spirit, and we made up our minds to celebrate Christmas each year.

22

Blanche was the only one who corresponded with me. I didn't want to complain about our hardships, so I wrote her that we were in the furniture business, and that California was God's country. We laughed when she answered, Harold said, "Since when did God leave New York and move to the Barbary Coast?' "

I was pleased when I heard that Blanche was getting married. I was grateful that God made it possible to send her fifty dollars as a wedding gift. This was a mistake, however, as it helped give her the impression that we were doing a prosperous business.

Soon Blanche wrote that Sam's (her husband's) father had died, and that Sam had inherited five thousand dollars. When I heard that they were moving to California, I was truly happy. But when I realized how much they were planning to accomplish with the money they had, I felt that writing Blanche about our being in business had been a mistake. It was misleading, and she had assumed too much. She knew that we had had nothing when we left, and now we were in business. I was sorry, and I hoped I hadn't done the wrong thing.

When Blanche and her husband arrived, they didn't hesitate to show their disappointment with our business. Shortly

thereafter they moved to Oakland and went into the grocery business.

On July 30, 1924, our second daughter was born, in the back of our store. We named her Rose, after my mother. Two days later I got out of bed to bathe my baby, and returned to my daily chores.

Soon after this Blanche gave birth to a son. Hardly a day went by that we didn't phone each other. She told me that the doctor kept changing the baby's formula, and that she was concerned about the water in Oakland. They were using a disinfectant, she said, to purify the water, and it tasted like iodine. Blanche feared that this might be injurious to her baby.

I had often been told that Marin County, where we lived, had the best drinking-water in the country. So I boiled two gallons of our water at a time and, at night, after my family was asleep, took it to Blanche. Since there was no direct route, it meant taking a ferry to San Francisco, then another ferry to Oakland, and finally the train to her house.

One afternoon Blanche phoned me, crying that her baby was vomiting constantly. Early the next day I went to see her. I asked Blanche to let me bathe the baby. Then I laid him on the table after his bath and pressed my hand over his little stomach as Dr. McCleave had done. I saw the same contorted muscles that I had seen on my baby.

I didn't want to frighten Blanche, so I went outside and phoned the doctor. He said to bring the baby to his office the following day. I started to cry, pleading, "Please, Doctor, my sister's baby is dying!"

"How do you know?" he asked.

"My baby died of the same thing four years ago."

"Meet me at the Children's Hospital in an hour!" he exclaimed.

I told Blanche that I had made an appointment with the doctor, but I didn't tell her what I knew of the baby's condition.

When the doctor finished his examination, he said, "It is very unusual to find a mother who recognizes this danger so early." Blanche, realizing the seriousness of the condition, frantically turned to me. We both started to cry, and Dr. McCleave asked, "Which one of you is the baby's mother?"

The baby was put to bed in the hospital and kept under observation for forty-eight hours. He was fed Cream of Wheat as thick as jelly, and he kept it down. In the forty-eight hours he gained weight, and the following day he was discharged. The doctor explained that, because we had caught the problem in the early stage, no operation was necessary. Feeding the baby Cream of Wheat had forced the intestinal passage to open, allowing the food to nourish the baby's body. Benny continued to improve and gained as any normal child.

23

I was kept busy from early morning until late at night, taking care of my two daughters and the store. Morris was out most of the time, giving estimates or delivering the things that I had sold.

We argued constantly about how much he was paying for used furniture. People would tell Morris they had paid a great deal more for their furniture than they had and try to get him to pay them almost what it cost them now. Often he paid for a roomful of furniture and then, when he was loading it on the truck, the people would hold out some pieces, saying these were not included. Also, the

secondhand furniture he bought looked more like third- or fourth-hand and very much out of date.

I was getting better at sanding and removing the old finish from the furniture and applying varnish and paint. But I was convinced we could purchase new furniture at lower prices than Morris was paying for the old, abused items. Finally Morris agreed, and we changed our sign to read: "New and Used Furniture."

After that we acquired used furniture only as trade-ins on new furniture. Quite frequently people insisted on buying used furniture, thinking that they would get a better bargain. So I would show them the new merchandise and tell them that it was used but still in very good condition. They happily paid the price I asked, thinking it was a bargain. Sometimes I put a small scratch or two on new furniture and told the customers that I could remove the scratch, and the piece would look like new.

There was a considerable amount of building and remodeling of homes going on, so we decided to carry a stock of assorted electric-light fixtures. Then Morris contacted builders and tried to sell them both the fixtures and their installations. He taught me to assemble the fixtures, which I did in my spare moments.

We continually did more business, but it was difficult to collect our money: everyone wanted credit. Morris became discouraged and often complained, "What a miserable life we're leading for two young people! We don't go anywhere; and where can we have people visit us—here in the back of the store? No wonder we don't have any friends!"

"There's always so much to do, and we have two children who need attention," I said. "Besides, what could we wear? We haven't had anything new since we've been in California!"

We decided that each of us would go to the movies one night a week. That way one of us could be with the children, and we wouldn't have to close the store at night, which was the time when we did most of our business. I was pleased with the arrangement. Not having been to a show for such a long time, I enjoyed it even when others said the picture wasn't very good. I enjoyed talking about the shows, but when I tried to discuss a picture we had both seen, Morris claimed he had fallen asleep.

Then, on *his* nights to go to the show, Morris would say that he would rather try to contact more builders and become friendly with them. We would get more business this way, he claimed. Soon he was making a great many contacts, which he said were for business purposes. But he got no business. He claimed the builders were getting tougher to deal with.

Morris was out most of the time, trying to collect from customers who owed us money but didn't pay on time. Some of these people said they were unable to come in, when I phoned to ask them to make payments. So Morris went to collect from them. Then we started having disputes with many of our customers. They would say that they had paid Morris, often showing receipts to verify their payments. Morris claimed he had given the money to me and that I had forgotten to give the people credit.

Defending himself, he would say, "You are always so busy, trying to do so much. How could you remember everything? One of these days you're going to lose your mind." This happened so often that I began to worry, even beginning to distrust my memory. Then I imagined that I was getting sick. What would happen to my little children if I lost my memory? I worried. Yet I knew that I had been healthy all

my life. Why, I hadn't been sick at all, except for that short period following Papa's death, and that was eighteen years before.

Things didn't get any better. Rather, they got worse. At least once a week, when I made a deposit in the bank, I found that I had from twenty to forty dollars less to deposit than I figured I should have. If I questioned Morris he said that I must have spent the difference or paid a bill in cash. "What do I know about what you are doing with the money?" he would exclaim. "If you can't remember, maybe I should handle the money." After a while, I hesitated even to question him, because the result was always the same—he accused me of forgetting.

I began to believe there was something radically wrong with me. I knew I wasn't sick, because I felt no pain, but I was afraid to see a doctor. I felt that I had to provide for my children in the event that I lost my mind. So I applied for a life-insurance policy. I was satisfied when I passed the physical examination. Twenty-five hundred dollars was the most I could get, according to my earning capacity, and I named my two little girls as beneficiaries.

One night, after I closed the store, I put my daughters to bed and was waiting for Morris to come home. When he had left, late that afternoon, he had told me, "I may be home late. This contractor is very hard to deal with." I waited for hours, keeping the dinner warm. Finally I was so tired and hungry that I decided I might as well eat, but the food wouldn't go down my throat. Then, all of a sudden, I started to cry. I hadn't cried so hard since my son passed away. I prayed that God would help me, that he alone could get me straight, and that I shouldn't have to see a doctor. I was afraid of what the doctor would tell me.

Eventually I fell asleep in the chair. I awoke again when I heard the front door rattle. I glanced at the clock. It was 3:00 A.M. Thinking that Morris had lost his key, I turned on the lights in the store and went to the door. Standing there was the contractor Morris was supposed to be seeing. With him was a woman I didn't know. When I opened the door, I looked out onto the street, assuming that Morris was parking the truck, but there was no sign either of him or of the truck.

"Where is my husband?" I asked, immediately thinking that something had happened to him.

"That is why we are here," the man said. "May we come in?" The two of them came in uninvited.

"Has anything happened to him?" I asked, anxiously.

"Oh, nothing has happened—like getting killed or hurt."

"What has happened? Will you please tell me?" My voice was rising with fear.

"We came here because we thought you might call the cops," the contractor said. "You knew he was with me, so the cops would probably go to my wife and question her about where I was. This would just cause a lot of unnecessary trouble."

I became angry. "Just tell me where my husband is, and if you're afraid of your wife, just who is this woman—your mother?" Both looked very angry.

"Look, madam," said the woman, "we'll make it brief. Your husband was dead drunk, and we couldn't get him out. I run a respectable house—no drunks. When he first patronized my place, he was all right. But when he started to drink too much, we tried to get rid of him."

"How much did he spend tonight?" I asked.

"Oh, not much. Only about twenty dollars."

"Okay," I said. "Just give me your name and address, and I promise I won't make any trouble for you."

"I'm glad you're acting like a real smart cookie," said the woman. I didn't know what she was talking about—whether I was acting dumb or smart or whether I was acting at all.

The couple left, and I walked to the back of the store. Then, suddenly, I began to laugh out loud. "What a relief!" I cried. "There is nothing the matter with me!" Helen awoke, frightened.

"Mother, what are you laughing about?"

Then I realized that this child had never heard me laugh before. I comforted her, saying, "Oh, nothing, honey; go back to sleep—everything is going to be all right now!"

"That's good, Mommie," she said and went sleepily back to bed.

I could think of but one thing: Come what may, this marriage was finished! I decided that I would see an attorney and get a divorce.

I was thankful that I was in California where a divorce was an accepted occurrence and not a disgrace. In New York I would have found it much more difficult.

I analyzed my situation. I was working; in fact, I was really running the business. I could make a living for my children here.

By then it was daylight, and I felt that I had no time to waste. I fed my children and took a taxi to San Rafael, where I saw an attorney and told him what had happened. He tried to make me reconsider, but I told him I wanted a divorce immediately. If he had any doubt about being able to get it for me, I would get another attorney! He told me to go back home and give my husband his phone number when he came home. The lawyer said that he would do the rest.

I was giving the girls their lunch when Morris came in as if nothing unusual had happened.

"You know what happened last night? This contractor and I were talking and arguing back and forth about the price. We each had a few drinks, and I passed out!"

He seemed relieved when I didn't question him. I handed him the attorney's card and simply told him that I had been given the card to give to him and that he should contact the party immediately.

Morris phoned the attorney. When he hung up the phone, he said, "I have to leave. This attorney said that I had better see him in person."

About an hour later the attorney phoned me. He told me he had served my husband with a restraining order, prohibiting him from entering the premises, but he said that Morris was allowed to pick up his personal belongings.

Later that afternoon Morris came back with an empty suitcase. "What are you going to do now?" he asked.

"See my attorney," I answered. "I have changed the lock, so it won't do you any good to try to come back."

"What the hell kind of life did I have with you, anyhow? A fine wife you were—always too tired and too busy for me —but you had time to do everything else you wanted to!" I didn't answer him. He put his clothes in a suitcase, then took the baby's coat and put it on her.

"You're not going to have *both* children!" he cried. Then, before I knew what was happening, he left with the baby. Frantic, I phoned the attorney. "Don't worry," he said, "he'll bring her back in a day or two."

"But I can't wait that long! I'm scared!" I cried.

"Let's just wait," the attorney counseled. "Don't get so excited, and don't do anything irrational."

Before dinner Morris came back with Rose. "My aunt advised me to bring her back," he said. "She couldn't take care of her. But I'll fix you! Just you wait and see!"

When he left, I sat in the store, just thinking. Half the time it seemed as though my mind was blank. What was there to think about? I felt relieved; I was sure of that. I could only hope and pray that God was on my side. For the first time in my life I felt that I was doing what I wanted to do, without thinking of having to please anyone else.

Without warning, the sheriff came into the store two days later. He put a padlock on the store door and bolted the rear door that separated the store from the two rooms where we lived.

Fortunately I hadn't made a bank deposit of one hundred fifty dollars. It was all the money I had for food and for the rent which was now due. Morris had had the bank account attached also. I felt I had to talk with someone. I phoned Mr. Kingstone, who was the owner of the mattress factory where I had been buying merchandise for the store. Mr. Kingstone advised me to see Peter Mullens, the assistant district attorney in San Francisco.

With my two little daughters I took the ferryboat to San Francisco and went to see Peter Mullens. I stated my case as briefly as possible. However, little Rose kept making noises, and, between her and Helen trying to keep her quiet, it was impossible for Mr. Mullens to get my story accurately. He told me to come back the following day, to his law office. As I left, he said, "Please leave the children at home."

The next day I left the children with a neighbor and returned to San Francisco. Mr. Mullens was standing when I entered his office. He was a very tall, slim gentleman, and impressed me as appearing more like a farmer than a lawyer.

He listened to me attentively and gave me a feeling of confidence and warmth.

Through his kindness and consideration, and his skill as an attorney, everything was arranged. The merchandise from the store was sold, and I salvaged eight hundred dollars. It was more money than I had ever had or expected to get.

After everything was settled I went to see Mr. Mullens to pay him for his services. On my way I wondered how much he would charge me. I thought it would be wonderful if he charged me only one hundred dollars. But, I thought, whatever he charges, it was worth it. I had visited him at his office four or five times, and each time I had been there at least an hour. Besides, I was sure that, without him, I wouldn't have gotten anything.

This time when I walked into his office, he greeted me with: "My, Gussie, you're looking well. Not so worried now? How are your little ones?" I could never forget the good feeling this gentleman gave me by calling me by my first name and inquiring about my girls.

"Fine, thank you," I answered. He answered a phone call, and while he was talking I kept thinking about paying him. I wished that I knew what he was going to charge me. I had two hundred dollars in my purse. The rest was pinned inside my blouse. If I needed more than the two hundred, I would have to ask him if he had a ladies' room so I could get the rest of the money. I wished I had put more in my purse.

When he finished his phone conversation, I said, "Mr. Mullens, I want to thank you for your kindness and for all you have done for me. I am moving to Oakland. I am confident I will find work there. So if you will please let me know how much I owe you, I am prepared to pay you."

He walked over to me and put his hand on my shoulder. "Why, nothing, Gussie! You just take care of your children. I'm sure you are capable of making a living for them. Good luck to you! Let me hear from you, and if you ever need me again, feel free to call on me."

I stood there, afraid to talk because I was sure my voice would crack. But I managed to say, "Thank you very, very much!" He must have known I was about to cry, because he smiled and said, "God bless you!"

I was granted a divorce, and Morris was ordered to pay fifty dollars a month support for the children. Later he claimed that he was unable to pay this—and I received no further payments from him.

I was satisfied just to be left alone.

24

When Blanche and her husband, Sam, realized that they couldn't compete with the large chain-store nearby, they sold their grocery store. This bothered me, mostly because they made me feel that I was responsible for their having come to California. Sam went to work as a clerk in one of the large Piggly Wiggly stores. We decided to rent a cottage together and share expenses.

Blanche offered to take care of my daughters in the daytime while I worked. The luxury of living in a home with a yard for the children and of having her look after them pleased me beyond words. We agreed that she would do the washing and cooking and that I would do the ironing and sewing. These were truly the best living-conditions my children had ever known.

I sewed constantly for Blanche and her son. I made him the nicest silk suits, and all of Blanche's dresses. But Blanche soon complained about the work, with three children on her hands. I realized that this was hard on her, especially since she had never done any hard work. When I suggested that we send the clothes to the laundry and share the expense, she claimed that she couldn't afford it. Actually, I was earning more money than her husband. But as far as the children were concerned, my mind was very much at ease. I knew they were well fed, and this more than made up for other things that weren't as I wished them to be.

Helen was very grown-up for her six years. She did what she could in helping Rose and Benny, and with chores around the house. Benny was getting along wonderfully, growing like a weed. He was several months younger than Rose. Often, when he went after a toy, Rose got it before he did, for she was the aggressive one. Benny would then cry, and Rose would have to give him the toy. Then *she* would cry. This always annoyed Blanche's husband no end.

I soon learned that living alone in one room was better than sharing a large house with another family.

With my daughters I spent Sundays downtown, going to a show and dinner. I was proud of my little children, dressed exactly alike with big hair-ribbons that matched their clothes. Often I let them walk ahead, holding hands, and watched the people passing by stare at them.

Even when going to school, Helen never left without her hair ribbon nicely ironed, until the day I found her ribbon wrinkled in her coat pocket. When I asked her how it got there, she answered, "The children in school make fun of the ribbons. I took it off before going to school." Then Rose added, "But me too hate ribbons!" That was the end of hair

ribbons for my girls, and the beginning of their wearing their hair with bangs.

Blanche's husband became very restless and changed jobs often. He was melancholy about the money he had lost in disposing of their grocery business and didn't let me forget that it was my fault. Finally they decided to move back to New York City.

I felt that I had no reason to go back to New York. We belonged to nobody there, especially now that I was divorced. Blanche had told me how the family felt: divorce was against our religion, and mine would not be recognized by any of them. In the history of our family I was the only one ever to have gotten a divorce.

With Blanche and her family gone, I knew we couldn't afford a house by ourselves. I put an ad in the Oakland *Tribune:* "Good home wanted for two little daughters, three and seven years of age. Working mother to live in. Have bedroom furniture." I received many responses and selected the home of a lovely French widow, Mrs. Crandell. She had three daughters of her own, the youngest being eight years old.

Mrs. Crandell was very kind and considerate. Both she and her daughters loved Helen and Rose, and my girls loved them.

I loved to watch them in the mornings when I had some time before leaving for work. The five girls would be seated at the breakfast table, saying grace. Rose would be slow, so she would have to repeat the grace after Mrs. Crandell, whom she called "Auntie." How we all laughed one morning when she said, "Pleas, Dod, div us dis day hower daily bed"! Then, looking up at me, she finished with: "Mit out nutting on hit, Mommie?"

This was a new life for Rose. Everyone loved her and fussed over her, but here she was never in anyone's way. We were really like one happy family. Mrs. Crandell did everything possible for the children, even to trying to teach them to speak French and to dance in her native style.

On Sundays I devoted the entire day to the children. Most of the time I would have Alice, the youngest of the Crandell girls, with us, and we would see a movie or go to the playground. Occasionally we took a ride on the ferryboat to San Francisco.

I was earning one hundred and twenty-five dollars a month, which did not allow us many luxuries, even though I made all our own clothes. Still, I couldn't help but hope and plan for a better future. Some day I wanted to be in a position to open a small dress-shop of my own. I was willing and anxious to work hard, and I longed for the chance to earn more money. I investigated the different stores, and I learned that in the ready-to-wear department at Weinstein's, in San Francisco, they paid eighty dollars a month plus two per cent commission on all sales. This store had no opening, but they did put me on their list.

In 1928, when Weinstein purchased the entire stock of Friedman's, they called in extra help. Luckily, I was one of those called. Mrs. Richardson, who was the floor lady and buyer for this department, told me that if I did well during the week of this sale the chances were good for me being hired on a regular position. How I thanked God for every sale I made, and how I prayed for another one!

We were told that the new help could sell only dresses; the regular help were to sell the suits and coats. However, if all the regular help were busy, the new help could wait on customers wanting to see suits or coats. Dresses were harder

to sell, and each sale took longer. Besides, the prices ranged only from five dollars and ninety-five cents to twelve dollars and ninety-five cents, while the least expensive suit or coat was fifteen dollars, with others priced up to hundreds of dollars. I never left the floor. I even skipped my lunch hour. I didn't want to miss a sale, and I kept hoping to make a coat sale. Eventually I did sell a fifty-five dollar coat, and I was about to write it up when another clerk walked up to me and said, "You're a new girl." She took the coat from me and wrote the sale up in her book. "Weren't you a new girl once?" I asked. I wanted so much to make good so I could become one of their regulars, but the woman ignored me.

My total sales for the first day were $300. God was good to me: he had answered my prayers. I was given steady work at Weinstein's. My check for the first two weeks amounted to $74.00. I learned that the clerk who had taken my first coat sale away from me was one day newer than I, and that she was laid off after the sale was over.

I could see my hopes and plans materializing now. Soon I became top salesgirl in the department. Mrs. Richardson favored me, and we became close friends—and still are to this day. I never dreamed that I could enjoy work so much. I was very sincere with my customers and took a special interest in them. Many times, when I was busy, my customers would sit and wait until I was free, refusing to be waited on by anyone else. This made me feel proud and happy. Often, when I was out to lunch, customers would ask for "the girl with the auburn hair" if they forgot my name. When they found I was out, they would either wait or come back later.

I always had a little notebook handy, and in it I entered the names and addresses of my customers. In a few years, when I had enough money saved to have my own business,

my notebook would provide a nice clientele for my own store. Just thinking about this made me very happy. Now I had many wonderful plans for my daughters and myself. I wanted them to be proud of me, and I wanted to be respected, in business for myself. How my outlook on life had changed!

25

Working in San Francisco and living in Oakland, I saw less and less of my children. Sometimes I left for work before they got up in the mornings and was unable to get home in time to have dinner with them in the evenings. By the time I got home the children were either in bed or coming home from church.

The Crandells were very strict Catholics. They never missed a chance to attend Mass. They knew we were of the Jewish faith and that we were permitted to attend only synagogue services. But, since it was impossible for me to get home before the Crandells left for church, my children would be left alone if they didn't take them along.

This arrangement was breaking my heart. I couldn't let my children drift away from their faith and their heritage. I realized that I didn't observe the customs of our religion very conscientiously; yet my views had changed a great deal. For example, we were eating ham and bacon, which is considered a sin in our religion. But I felt that what came out of one's mouth was more important than what went into it. Besides, my children enjoyed this food. Nevertheless, my heart and my children belonged to the Jewish faith. I knew I had to make a change. Besides, under the present situation I seldom had the pleasure of seeing my children awake before

I left for work. But how could I explain all this to my children, when they were so happy here and were loved so much?

I visited the Jewish community services in San Francisco and asked for advice. I was advised to make application for the admittance of my children into the Jewish Homewood Terrace, on Ocean Avenue in San Francisco. Homewood Terrace consisted of thirty-five cottages, each with a house mother, who supervised and mothered the children in her charge. The grounds were beautifully kept, and there were a playground and a temple on the premises.

Dr. Langer, who was the director and who was loved and respected by everyone, was very kind to me. He approved my application, and after one week of waiting I was notified that my children would be admitted to Cottage 32. Mrs. Kurple was the house mother. My mind was at ease again, and for only sixty dollars a month my children would receive love and the best of care possible. Then, of course, I had to tell my children that they were moving. They cried and begged to be allowed to stay with the Crandells and the Crandell children also cried. I promised my children that they wouldn't be in Homewood Terrace long, that I would have a home for them as soon as possible; that the Crandells would visit us often, and that I would be with them always.

At the time of their admittance to Homewood Terrace Rose was almost four, and Helen was eight. My only regret was that they hadn't lived there sooner. This would not have been possible, however, since children under school age were not admitted. An exception had been made in my case, for which I was grateful.

Rose was in her glory here. She said, "Mommie, they thus tear me to pieces here," which was her interpretation of

hearing Mrs. Kurple say to the other chidren, "Stop tearing her to pieces!" She was the youngest child in any of the cottages, and she was cuddled by all the children and all the house mothers. She always got her own way. She still used her baby vocabulary, and the other children seemed to enjoy fussing over her. She was such a cute, chubby youngster that Mrs. Kurple called her Betty Rose. She said that this was a more becoming name for my daughter.

Each Sunday was open-house day at Homewood Terrace for everyone who wished to visit with the children. On every other Sunday we were permitted to take our children out for the day, as long as we brought them back by 9:00 P.M. Mrs. Kurple always took Betty Rose with her on her day off, while the older children attended school. She would dress my daughter in her best clothes and bring her into Weinstein's to visit me.

On these occasions we always had lunch together, and then I sent them to the show. To show my appreciation for the special interest Mrs. Kurple took in my children I had her pick out any dress she liked, whenever she wished, and charge it to my account at the store.

One day, when we were having lunch together, Mrs. Kurple mentioned that she had punished Helen for throwing bread and jam away. The next Sunday I questioned Helen about the incident.

"Other children ditched theirs, too, because they don't like pumpernickel bread. But I was the only one who got caught. Mrs. Kurple scolded me and told me to sit on the little chair in her room until she came up. I called down and asked her if she was sure she meant the little black chair. She got angry and screamed, 'Yes! And don't let me hear another word out of you, young lady!' I did exactly

what she told me, Mommie. But when she came upstairs, she looked real mad when she saw her new hat all squashed. I told her she wouldn't let me tell her that her hat was on the chair."

"Honey, you know you did wrong."

"Yes, Mother."

"You could have taken her hat off the chair before you sat down—and you know it is a sin to throw food away."

"Yes, Mother."

"You may fool some people, but you can't fool God. You wouldn't want him to punish us, would you?"

"No, Mother." She started to cry, saying that she was sorry. Then, with no prompting on my part, she promised that when she said her prayers she would ask God to forgive her, promise him that she would always be good, and ask him not to punish us.

A few days later, at work, I got an emergency call from Dr. Langer. Helen had fallen over the banister to the ground floor. From the moment I entered the cab I prayed that my child wasn't hurt badly and that she hadn't landed on her head. The ride out to Homewood Terrace seemed to take years. A million things ran through my mind, and I wondered what I had done to deserve having this happen to my child.

When I saw Helen there, safe and sound, I grabbed her and cried aloud, "Thank you, God!" And I whispered humble and earnest prayers of thanks.

My child didn't have as much as a scratch.

When Helen whispered, "I'm glad I didn't forget to say my prayers, Mother; otherwise, God might have really punished us, instead of just scaring us." I knew my child would never be inconsiderate again, and that she had the true feeling of God in her life.

The Levy boy, the oldest child in the cottage, came over to tell me someone was waiting to see me. I was sure that it was Dr. Langer, but the man, who was a stranger, said, "Is everything all right, madam?"

"Yes, thank God! But who are you?"

"I'm your cab-driver," he replied, which surprised me, because I didn't remember telling him to wait. Nor did I remember what he looked like. When I told him I wasn't going back yet, he asked, "Well, how long do you want me to wait, lady?"

"Don't wait," I answered. "I'll call another cab when I'm ready."

"How about some money, lady?"

"Oh, my goodness," I said, very embarrassed. By this time all the children in the cottage had gathered around us. "I didn't pay you!" At that everyone laughed.

Only from Helen did I get the story of what actually happened. Helen and Tillie, another girl in the cottage, had been given the job of polishing the hardwood banister on the stairway that led to the second story, where the children's dormitories and Mrs. Kurple's private quarters were located. They had their own ingenious way of doing this job: by riding down the banister on the polishing rag. Before taking their last ride down, Helen leaned over to see if Mrs. Kurple was around, but she leaned too far and lost her balance. She missed the stairway by inches as she fell, landing on the carpet on the floor below.

Of course, each of the twenty-two girls and boys in the cottage had special jobs to do. Even though Betty Rose was the youngest, she had to have a job, too. Mrs. Kurple, realizing she would only be in the way otherwise, had given her the job of sitting on the toilet to do her duty. This was con-

sidered quite a joke by the other children, especially on the day when they forgot to tell her to come out when they had finished their jobs. When suppertime came, everyone was looking for her. They found her still sitting there, and it took days of massaging by the girls to make the imprint that had been made on her little behind disappear.

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The future was looking brighter. Every single day I thanked God for the new hope that he had given me. My earnings exceeded my expectations. I rarely earned less than two hundred dollars a month now, and on sale days my total receipts would be as high as nine hundred dollars for a single day, which meant eighteen dollars in commissions.

I lived in a room I rented in Mrs. Hypsher's house on Lyon Street. I spent most of my free evenings with Lucille Richardson. She also was a divorcée, and she and her ten-year-old son Bob lived with her parents. We often talked over plans for going into business together. We agreed that she would do the buying, I would do the alterations, and we would both do the selling. I laughed when she said that she had always hoped to go into business with a Jewish person—they had such good business heads. Then she added, laughing, "I've got a little Jewish in me, too."

Occasionally we went to night clubs together. Lucille had no difficulty in attracting the attention of the opposite sex. She had beautiful blond hair and always wore striking clothes in the latest fashions. I could never learn her method, but she always managed to have someone else pick up our checks.

We were always careful not to be seen together by any of the others in our department. Lucille said the others would feel that she favored me—which she did. Whenever she saw a sure sale, she would call me to take over, or if she made a sale, she would write it up in my book so I would get the commission.

Later Lucille met and married Bob Armstrong. He was a wonderful man, always smiling, with a kind word and a compliment for everyone. "Big Bob" and "Little Bob," as we affectionately called them, got on well together. I was glad for Lucille and for the happiness she had found. I hoped that some day I would find as fine a husband and father for my children.

Lucille and I grew closer together, despite the fact that we seldom went out together—only on special occasions or when Big Bob was out of town. There wasn't a thing I did or planned that Lucille did not know about. She was always right there to encourage and advise me. I grew to love and depend on her a great deal.

But the nights seemed very long, sitting alone in my room with nothing to do. So I got acquainted with some of the other unmarried girls of our own age in the store. On Saturday evenings I would go out with them. Mostly we went to public or benefit dances.

It was strange how the men we met would invariably think that the other girls were the ones who had been married before. I soon learned it wasn't advisable to let them know I had been married, because after they treated me to a sandwich or coffee they would want to park and get intimate by first trying to squeeze the sandwich back out. They would say, "What have you got to lose? You've been married before." On the other hand, when I claimed to be single,

they would say, "What are you saving it for—the worms?" or "No wonder you're not married!"

Sometimes when I did meet one I thought was nice, he turned out to be married. Usually I went home alone, on the streetcar or by cab. It appeared that history was repeating itself. Only one decade earlier I had been in my teens, going to dances on the East Side of New York City in hopes that I might find friends.

I found that I was content to sit at home counting my blessings, dreaming, planning the dress shop that I hoped to open. I wanted so much to make my children proud of me. I thought that if I could only get started I would do well. We could live in the rear of the store, and I could have my children with me. I would work hard and do my alterations at night after I closed the store and the children were asleep. I thought that if I were in business for myself I wouldn't feel like such a nobody. Perhaps I would even have a better chance of meeting a nice man who would be a good father to my children.

Alone, I found comfort in reminiscing about the things Papa had taught me, such as: "God can hear you no matter where you are or how low you whisper. Just as long as you are truly sincere in your prayers, he will receive your message." Most of all I prayed that God would find a way so that I could be with my children soon.

I can't help but wonder how different my life would have been if I hadn't waited on Lou's aunt, Mrs. Goldman, whose name I *didn't* write down in my little notebook.

I waited on her for two solid hours, showing her almost every size-forty-four coat in the store. When she finally selected a seventy-five-dollar one, she asked me to put it aside, saying that she would return the following day with her

nephew. If he liked the coat, she would buy it.

She wore me out, mentally and physically. She told me all about the affair she was going to attend—all the relatives would be there.

"Everyone will be dolled up fit to kill," she declared. "I must have something special—something that looks expensive and will make their eyes pop out. But I can't afford to pay too much."

The next day, when I saw Mrs. Goldman step out of the elevator, I started to sneak out by the rear entrance. It just wasn't worth the one-fifty commission to wait on her again. Then I noticed the tall, good-looking young man who was with her. I presumed he was her nephew—and decided to stay.

Mrs. Goldman tried on a half-dozen more coats before she asked for the one I had set aside. She claimed she could afford to pay only fifty dollars. Her nephew, embarrassed at the bad time his aunt was giving me, gave her the twenty-five-dollar balance needed.

That night, after closing hours, Lou was waiting for me outside the store. He apologized for his aunt's manner and offered to drive me home.

Lou lived in Oakland. He had a fruit and vegetable market which was open for business seven days a week. But he took every Sunday off to drive me out to Homewood Terrace and spend the day with the children. On our Sundays out he took the girls and me to dinner and a show, sometimes to the beach. When we returned the children to the home, we would visit his aunt and uncle, Mr. and Mrs. Goldman. They were also in the fruit and vegetable business in San Francisco and lived in an apartment above their market.

Each visit was the same. They played poker for what they

considered small stakes—twenty to thirty dollars an evening. I participated in the games a few times, but I disliked the general atmosphere and their European habits. Their decidedly Jewish accents brought back memories of New York and the East Side, and this was the one thing that I could not digest about Lou. I didn't want to visit the Goldmans any more, so I would ask Lou to take me home after we left the children, pretending that I was tired and didn't feel well. I was always glad and relieved to be home and away from Lou.

Lou continued to make himself and his car available. He catered to my children, and they always looked forward to seeing him, with the gifts he brought, the entertainment he provided, and the rides in his new car. On the Sundays when I went alone to see them they were disappointed, and I had to promise that Lou would come the following Sunday. This made me more determined than ever to make a better life for my children and myself.

I had twenty-eight hundred dollars in my savings account, and I decided it was time to go ahead with my plans for opening a dress shop. About nine hundred dollars of this amount came from the mortgage that was finally paid off on Mother's property in Albany. Mother left no will. Harold, the oldest, was appointed administrator. After he had deducted the money for Mother's burial expenses, including the interest on the money he had advanced—a total sum of eight hundred dollars—the balance was divided by six. I often wondered what became of Phillip's share of the inheritance. Herbert suggested that the inheritance be divided among the three sisters, but Harold would not consent. Therefore, it was divided equally.

I chose a location in the heart of the Mission district, next

to the El Capitan Theater. The rent was two hundred and fifty dollars a month, and the lease called for the first month's rent, plus an advance payment of two months' rent as security. I shopped around, getting estimates for fixtures, mirrors, fitting rooms, and signs. I realized that my savings would not go far. There were still other things I would need, such as a telephone, stationery, and merchandise! Unless I had a stock worth five to eight thousand dollars I would not be able to make a success, even though I had my sewing machine and my address book, which listed over three hundred potential customers.

Everyone advised me not to give up my job and good income for a venture where I might lose all that I had worked so hard to accumulate. Even Lucille was against it. She advised me to wait until I had at least a few more thousand dollars.

"If I wasn't married, I would be happy to be your partner," she said. "I have a lot of faith in you, Gussie."

I knew that a job comparable to the one I had would be hard to find again if my business failed. I remembered that Mother used to say, "Never throw away dirty water until you are sure you have clean water to take its place." I continued working and saving and had confidence that everything would work out well in time.

My greatest problem was how to get rid of Lou. He insisted that I marry him. I told him that I didn't love him, but he wouldn't listen. He claimed that it didn't matter, that he loved me and the children enough for all of us. He promised he would be so good to us that I couldn't help but learn to love him. When I avoided having him take me to see the children, he managed to be there before me. He tried in every possible way to win their affection, too.

Soon Lou started taking time off during the week from his work. He would come to Weinstein's and stand around while I was working, trying to talk to me. He was there so consistently that I begged Lucille to tell him that it was against the rules of the store and that the house detective would take him in for questioning. He liked and respected Lucille, so he took her warning seriously.

Because he waited for me to go to lunch, I skipped lunch to avoid seeing him. When he waited out front at closing time, I sneaked out through the back exit. Often I wouldn't go home until late in the evening, but I would find him parked in front of the house when I returned. I was beginning to be afraid of what he might do. He said that I was ruining his business, that he couldn't work for worrying about me. I was tired of hearing about how proud he would be as the father of my children and how I could quit my job and work beside him. "We could open a chain of markets," he would say. When I told him that I didn't care for the food business, he replied, "Do you think you can do better in the *shmate* [rag] business?" I hated him for trying to spoil my dreams and plans by referring to the ready-to-wear business as a rag business.

When I told Mrs. Hypsher I would have to move so Lou couldn't find me at night, she warned him that the neighbors were complaining because he parked outside so much. She told him that they intended to call the police if they saw him parked there again. Yet this didn't stop him from coming around: he started parking near the streetcar stop where I got off to go home.

At work one afternoon I was feeling ill and confused from Lou's persistence that I marry him and my own constant protests, so I took the rest of the day off. I went to a movie,

had a light supper, and took the streetcar home. As I was walking toward the house, I met Lou. The look on his face petrified me with fear. He became antagonistic, and I tried to get away from him. He said he was going to kill himself, right there in front of me. He put something in his mouth and threw himself down on the sidewalk. His six-foot, two-hundred-pound body hit with such a thump that I thought he had broken every bone.

I ran across the street to a drugstore and phoned for an ambulance. By then a large crowd had gathered around Lou. I raced to my house and locked the door. When I got to my room, I became sick. I felt that I lost all the food I had eaten for a week.

I couldn't sleep. I prayed and considered moving to another city. I tried to figure how and when and where I should start. I prayed that God would send me a solution to my troubled circumstances.

The following morning I received a phone call from the emergency hospital. Lou was in the psychopathic ward and had requested that I sign for his release. I advised them to contact his aunt and uncle.

Then Lou got on the phone and pleaded. He said that it was impossible to call his aunt and uncle. I told him I couldn't come and that I would be late for work.

"Even if I was a dog, you couldn't refuse to get me out of here! I promise I'll leave you alone," he cried.

Reluctantly I went to the hospital and signed for his release. He said that he was sorry for the trouble he had caused. He declared that neither his aunt nor uncle would have come in for him, as they had already told him that they thought he was crazy.

"Why do you want to marry a woman who doesn't appre-

ciate you?" they asked him. "What does such a big good-looker want with a woman who has two children from another man? Who does she think she is, anyway? Imagine! She is only a *royte* [redhead], and she thinks she is too good for us!"

Each time I went to see the children they said the same thing: "Mommie dear, you promised it wouldn't be very long before we would live in one house together and be with you all the time."

After show and dinner one Sunday it was still too early to take them back, so I took them to my room. We played, and I talked to the girls as though they were grownups. I thought I had them convinced that they would understand everything better when they were a little older, and that if we all prayed hard enough God would help us to be together. "We'll have a nice dress-shop," I told them, "and you'll be proud of me. It won't be long now. Please, trust me and have faith. You'll see—some day we'll have a nice home and a car of our own. And when you're grown-up, I'll buy you each a car of your own." We also talked about how everyone at Homewood Terrace loved them.

They listened attentively, their faces solemn. Finally they said, "Yes, Mommie, we understand." I kissed them and held them tight, afraid to let them go. I don't know why I felt that way, but it seemed that they were more than I deserved. I thanked God for these two little lives that he had given me.

Because they missed riding in Lou's car, I called a cab when it was time to go. I started to put Betty Rose's coat on, but she wiggled away and climbed up on my bed.

"Mommie darling! Mommie dear!" she cried. "I want to teep here with you. The bed is big enough. I could even teep

on the floor. I don't want a car—I don't even know how to drive. You plomished we would be together, but you haven't kept your plomish. You don't even lob me." She began to scream and cry louder. "I won't tay my plairs for you any more! They don't come too anyway!"

I could see the tears in Helen's eyes as she whispered to Betty Rose, "Stop, honey. You are making Mommie cry!"

Then, in the midst of her hysterics, Betty Rose grabbed me and said, "Please, Mommie, don't cry!"

I cuddled them both all the way to the home.

When I returned home, I felt that I was going to explode. I burst into hysterical sobs, pulling my hair so hard my head hurt. I felt that I was paying for all the sins I had ever committed. I asked for forgiveness, but I couldn't think of what I had done that was so wrong.

Exhausted, I fell asleep and awoke again later that night. I sat up, determined to analyze the situation.

Everyone had advised me to marry Lou. "Why don't you leave it up to your children?" they would say. "Can't you see they love him? So you don't love him. What is love, anyway? Isn't it more important to make your children happy?"

Others would reason, "Why beat your brains out wanting to go into business when you can marry a man who has no obligations and wants to support you and your children?" I thought that if I waited and ventured into business, and didn't make a success, I would be miserable. I might never be able to accumulate so much money again. What was more important, it meant waiting longer to be with my children. I yearned to have the pleasure of putting them to bed and of kissing them good night. Then I thought of how many times I had prayed that God would show me a way to be with my children. Was he giving me the opportunity now? I wondered.

Before the night was over I convinced myself that I should marry Lou. The following day I told Lucille I had about made up my mind to marry Lou. She said, "I hope everything works out for the best." I was disappointed by her attitude. I had hoped that she would say, "Don't do it!"

At lunchtime I phoned Mrs. Kurple, and she obligingly consented to let me see the children that night. I just had to see them again before I made my final decision.

When I told Mrs. Kurple I was contemplating marrying Lou her only comment was, "We will sure miss the girls." Then she called my daughters and left us alone.

They greeted me with, "Did you come to take us home, Mommie?" I asked them if they would be happy to have Lou for their father. They seemed very happy at the prospect. The first thing Betty Rose said was, "Oh, boy, now we could hab all the kits in the tottage tome to tee us."

Still confused, I went home to make up my mind; I was going to decide definitely one way or the other that night.

I stopped at Mrs. Hypsher's to pay my rent. As she handed me the receipt, she said, "How are your children?"

"They are fine, thank God," I replied, and then I started to cry. She laid her hand on my shoulder and asked, "Would you like a cup of tea, Gussie?" I nodded my head.

Mrs. Hypsher was a European, motherly sort of woman. When she put a cube of sugar in her mouth to drink with her tea, I began crying again. It was as if Mother were sitting there.

"I know that you are worried about Lou," she said.

"He wants to marry me, but I don't love him," I cried.

"Love, smove—who knows what that is? It's only in the moving pictures. Believe me, Lou is a strong man and a hard worker. The foreigners make the best husbands. They

never cheat on their wives. So what is it if he *does* talk with an accent? Your children don't care, and, after all, what don't we do for our children?" Looking at it in this light, I couldn't think of one member in my family who had married for love. I was now convinced, because I was sure that this was the very advice Mother would have given me.

That night I prayed that God would help me make a success of this marriage, that no one would get hurt, and that, if anyone had to be, it should be me. I must have been crazy to pray for the latter, because that prayer was eventually answered.

When I told Lou I would marry him, he seemed happy. "I knew you'd come to your senses and realize what was best for you!" For a moment I wanted to run away. I felt as if I was Rusty again. Then he handed me a diamond ring. "See? I was so sure, I bought this months ago."

I gave Weinstein's notice that I was leaving in three weeks. Two days later Mr. Weinstein phoned our department and requested to see me in his office. I couldn't imagine why he wanted to see me. I wondered if some customer had complained about my service. I wasn't too concerned, since I was leaving soon anyway, but I preferred to leave on friendly terms. I wasn't sure if I might not need a good recommendation sometime.

When I entered Mr. Weinstein's office, he asked me to sit down, and then asked why I was leaving. I told him I was getting married, so I could have my children home with me. He was surprised, since he didn't know I had children or had ever been married. "Is it because you are not making an adequate income to take care of your obligations?" he asked. I told him that I was very pleased with the working conditions and the salary, that I was earning more money than I

had ever expected to make. "But," I explained, "nothing can take the place of having my children home with me."

"You're a good worker, Gussie. I hate to lose you. I still have that letter about you, you know." He was referring to a note one of my customers had sent him, stating how pleased she had been with the patience and courtesy I had shown her when she purchased her fur coat. She also wrote that I had graciously enclosed an artificial corsage. (This was a fashionable item at the time, and I had had a good reason for sending it to her, since I regarded her as a potential customer for the store I planned to open.)

As I left his office, he said, "Now, don't forget: Our doors are open to you if you ever wish to come back. Or if we can be of any service to you, feel free to call on us."

I was sorry to be leaving. This was the first time anyone had expressed so much appreciation of what I had done. When I got back to our department, everyone gathered around, curious to know what had happened. Lucille said, "What happened? I thought you were never coming back." I couldn't imagine what they expected to hear, but when I told them what had happened, they all said, "Oh, is that all?"

I had taken such an exceptionally long time returning to my department because I had had to stop at the restroom and have a good cry. Mr. Weinstein had been so soft-spoken and so kind that he brought back memories of Papa.

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My second marriage took place in Reno, Nevada, one Thursday afternoon in late September, 1929. We were scheduled to leave Reno the next day on a train leaving at 8:30 P.M., so Lou could be back to make the early morning wholesale market on Saturday.

We spent Friday in the movies and walking around town. It seemed that no matter what street we walked on we found ourselves back at the same spot we had started from. Lou was out of cigars, so he told me to wait in the lobby of the Riverside Hotel while he went out to buy some.

I waited for two hours. Then, not knowing what to do or even what to think, I took my suitcase and went to the train depot, three blocks away. I decided to take the train back, even if I had to go without Lou. Whatever else was to happen, San Francisco was where I wanted to be.

About ten minutes before the train arrived Lou showed up. I don't remember being either pleased or angry when I saw him. "Don't be mad," he said. "I knew I'd find you here." Then he placed a large paper-bag in my lap. In it were over one hundred silver dollars!

"If I had thought you wouldn't be angry, I would have played longer," Lou went on. "My luck was so good, I would have cleaned up. I didn't intend to get in the crap game, but you know how it is. I got silver dollars as change when I bought my cigars, and I just couldn't stand that heavy

money in my pocket. So, just for fun, I put the silver dollars on a player. I knew you were going to bring me luck, because I just couldn't lose. I even made seven straight passes myself!"

I didn't say a word, and Lou kept talking. When they called, "All aboard!" I handed him back the bag of dollars. All the way to our seats he kept talking, and when we were seated, he placed the bag on my lap again. Finally he said, "What's the matter? Aren't you glad I won? Go ahead, keep it, buy yourself and the kids something."

I felt like throwing the bag on the floor or out of the window. Then I thought: What's the use? I had promised myself I would make a success of this marriage. I said, "I wasn't aware you liked to gamble so much."

"Not much, Gussie. Just once in a while; I get a kick out of it."

Lou opened a market on Mission Street in San Francisco, and we rented a flat across the street. The next week I spent decorating our flat. It looked like a doll house when I finished. I knew how much the children would enjoy being able to bring children home to visit.

Even though I made all the drapes and bedspreads and other items, I spent over fifteen hundred dollars. Lou claimed that he couldn't contribute toward the furnishings: it had taken all his money to open the new market. He also informed me that the diamond ring he had given me cost him three hundred dollars, and he had had to buy a new truck.

Afraid of spending all my money, I purchased one hundred shares of Transamerica at eleven dollars a share.

I knew absolutely nothing about stocks, except that every-

one I knew said that it was impossible for this stock to go any lower, and it could possibly go as high as $140 a share, as it previously had.

With the children home, Lou acted like a little boy with two new toys. He would walk along the street holding each one by the hand, while I walked at the side. Our landlady, who knew we were recently married, surprised me. "It's amazing how your husband's children took to you," she said. "I hope they will always like you as much as they do now."

Lou always insisted that they be dressed alike when they were with us, because this attracted people's attention and made him feel proud.

On October 11th we celebrated Helen's birthday with a party. Mrs. Kurple and all the children from her cottage came, and, of course, Lucille's little Bobby. Everyone had a good time, even Lou. I realized that my children had settled for a father in order to be with me in a home of their own.

I enjoyed being a mother to my children, even when I received a note from Betty Rose's teacher, requesting that I come to see her.

The teacher complained that Betty Rose showed a lack of interest in school. "During reading time I saw her moving her lips as if she were studying, but when I passed her, I noticed that her book was upside down. When I asked her how she expected to read like that, she said it was too dark where she was seated. I moved her next to the window; then she spent all her time looking outside. When I asked her to read a simple sentence from the book—'The children were walking home from school'—she read: 'The kids were coming home from school,' and insisted that it means the same thing! If I call her to the blackboard and give her two num-

bers to subtract, she invariably asks, 'Which number belongs on top?' "

I promised the teacher I would help Betty Rose with her studies and impress upon her the importance of an education. At home I pleaded with her, studied with her, and tried to make her understand how important it was to both of us that she learn and get good marks. My pleading was to no avail.

I then determined to help her with her speech. She absolutely refused to pronounce the letter *s*. One day I refused to give her her lunch until she pronounced *sandwich* correctly.

"Sound the letter *s* first," I said.

"Sa-tanwich," she answered.

"Try it again." I made her try it over and over. Finally she said, "I don't want one, anyway," and walked away.

On Christmas Eve I prepared an exceptionally good dinner and decorated a Christmas tree with gifts for everyone. I had the shades drawn, so that the surprise I had planned would not be spoiled before Lou came home. When Lou entered the house, he flew into a rage. For a moment I thought he had gone mad. I had never heard him yell so loud.

"Are you crazy? Isn't it enough I let you get by without keeping a kosher house? Now you have the nerve to bring *Yoyzl* [Jesus] into my house! How do you think your parents would feel if they knew you were bringing up their grandchildren in sin? Those kids are going to know they are Jews, and don't you forget it!" Then, cursing, he destroyed the tree and threw it out, along with the gifts.

I spent the rest of the night sitting in the living room, crying and wondering what I had gotten into. I never had de-

nied that we were Jewish. At the Crandells' and from the time we had arrived in California we had had Christmas trees. All I had meant was for it to be a joyous and festive occasion.

I fell asleep in the chair in the living room. Lou figured I was repenting, and the following morning he said that he forgave me, but I was never to dare bring a Christmas tree into his house again. Nor did I, but it didn't stop us from celebrating Christmas when he wasn't around.

One Christmas I rented a Santa Claus outfit, and when my children and their friends from the neighborhood were gathered together, I appeared in the outfit, carrying a sack filled with toys and candy. Betty Rose recognized me and became hysterical. "*Please,* Mother dear, don't be a Santa Claus!" She pulled at me, crying loudly. She was frightening the other children, so I took her into another room and closed the door. As I was taking off my costume, she made me promise that I would never turn into a Santa Claus again. "I thus want you to be only my mother," she pleaded.

I had made a promise that I would make a success of this marriage. God alone knows how determined I was to make it successful. Had I been madly in love with Lou, I couldn't have tried harder to be a better wife. With all my heart and body I pretended to be in love with him. At least twice weekly we entertained Lou's friends by cooking dinner for them. Then, as soon as I had cleared the dinner table, out came a deck of cards. They played for high stakes and never stopped before 2:00 A.M., and often not until 5:00 A.M. Lou would barely have time to wash up and get to the wholesale market to buy the produce for that day. I got very little sleep on those nights, because Lou expected me to be on hand whenever his guests wanted coffee.

When Lou returned to the store from the market, I would help him display the fruits and vegetables. Then he would go home to catch up on his sleep and wouldn't return until it was time for me to prepare dinner.

When the children weren't in school, I kept them in the store with me until I was free to go home. Helen attended school all day, Betty Rose just half a day. If Lou was in the store when she came from school, I would take her home for a nap and then return to the store. Frequently I went back to the house to see that she wasn't getting into mischief.

If she heard me coming, she would pretend that she was asleep. Once I found her lying perfectly still with her head hanging over the edge of the bed so far it almost touched the floor, but she was pretending she was fast asleep. I didn't let her know I was laughing as I lifted her head and laid it on the pillow. Softly I said, "My poor baby. She would have hurt her head. It's lucky I came up just in the nick of time." She kept her eyes shut tight, but she had to bite her lips to keep from laughing aloud. I reached down and picked up the toy on the floor and placed it beside her.

When Helen came home from school, she took care of Betty Rose. She was wonderful with her and never let her out of her sight. Nothing was too difficult for her to do, nor too much for her to give up, when it came to caring for her sister.

Lou opened a larger market on the corner of Fillmore and Post streets. And, as business became better, he found more opportunities for gambling. Lou would bring the truckload of fresh produce to the store and leave even before the truck was unloaded. It seemed unbelievable that my decision to marry Lou had been at least partially based on the fact that he was a hard worker and a good provider. But I had the

children with me, and this compensated for many disappointments.

Every bookie in town knew Lou well. They would come by the market and look in; if they saw me there, they would walk on. When Lou lost heavily, he would drink to drown his disappointment—he knew all the speakeasies in town. When he won, he was encouraged to celebrate by the losers, who had no money for liquor.

I had seen the movie *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and thought they would have a better story if they based it on Lou's life and called it *Mr. Winner and Mr. Loser.*

As a winner Lou was happy and very gay. Everyone was his friend, and he was as everyone's friend. At such times you could get anything and everything from him just for the asking. "I'm sitting on top of the world," he would sing.

On one occasion when he was "the winner" Lou handed me three hundred dollars and said, "This is for you and the kids. Oh, boy, what luck I had tonight. I could have broke the house if I'd wanted to. I won over fifteen hundred!"

I asked him about the balance of the money, suggesting that he put it away for a rainy day. He said, "On a rainy day we'll use an umbrella. What do you want a lot of money for, anyway? So you can leave me?"

"Lou, you promised we would have a home of our own. Isn't it time we started thinking about the future?"

His answer was the same as always: "Don't worry, Gussie. One of these days I'll make a killing that will take care of us for all time."

It was just as easy to tell when Lou had lost at gambling: he'd storm into the market, finding fault with everything. He would look at the day's receipts and curse at the amount of business we had done. Once he became so violent that he

started throwing the stacks of fruit down on the floor, yelling, "No wonder business is so rotten! Look at the lousy displays!"

I didn't know how things would end, but I was sure that I didn't want to be there to see it. I took the girls to dinner and to a show. We didn't get home until quite late. Lou was asleep. The following morning he apologized for his actions and, of course, promised he would never act that way again. His words meant nothing to me. He was always sorry and always asked to be forgiven, but there was certain to be a "next time," and it always came too soon.

Later that day a policeman came into the store with a summons, asking to see Lou. I told him I didn't know where he was and asked why he was looking for him.

"Don't act dumb, sister!" said the officer.

It had been a long time since I had been referred to as "dumb," and I resented it, policeman or no policeman. I told him, "I'm not acting I'm not dumb, and I'm not your sister!" and I walked away. The embarrassed officer turned to the clerks and said, "Did any of you guys see the fight last night?"

Almost simultaneously they answered, "No." The officer left, saying he'd be back. I questioned the men, and they told me what had happened the night before.

A young man had been waiting on himself, selecting tomatoes. Evidently he hadn't noticed the sign: "Do not handle." Lou saw the customer and pulled the bag out of his hand, handing it to a clerk so that the latter could finish waiting on him. The customer became angry and said, "Shove them up your ass, you kike!" At that Lou grabbed him by the vest and hit him hard, knocking his front teeth out. One of the boys then told me that Lou had warned all

of them to "keep their traps shut" if they wanted to keep their jobs.

I received a phone call from Lou. He was in trouble and had to see me. "Drop everything and come home alone," he said.

When I got home, he showed me the summons he had been served. He was terrified. He had inquired about the chances of being prosecuted and had been informed that he stood a good chance of going to jail. I told him that I was in no position to help him. I wasn't present when it happened, and I had no intention of perjuring myself as he had asked me to do. Nothing he could say or promise would make me change my mind. I advised him to hire an attorney and warned him not to implicate me in any manner; I wanted no part of it.

Lou pleaded with me to ask Mr. Mullens to take his case. I told him it was out of the question. I would be too embarrassed to let Mr. Mullens know that my husband was mixed up in such a disgraceful affair. Then—I couldn't believe my eyes—Lou started to cry. He said he was sure he would be sent to jail if Peter Mullens didn't represent him. He begged me to at least phone Mr. Mullens and make an appointment for an interview.

"I'll be a changed man," he pleaded.

"Mr. Mullens would never remember me," I said.

"At least try!"

I began to think that perhaps this affair had happened for the best and that maybe Lou would change. All I had ever hoped for in this marriage was to have my children with me. I couldn't deny the fact that Lou was good to them in his own way.

Against my better judgment I decided to phone Mr. Mul-

lens. His secretary asked who was calling, and I replied, "I'm sure he wouldn't remember me, but I would appreciate an appointment with him."

"What is your name?"

"It's Gussie," I answered, wondering who would ever remember such a name. I waited a moment, then heard a man's voice.

"Why, how are you, Gussie?" I tried to speak but couldn't.

"Oh, come now, Gussie," Mr. Mullens said. "Nothing can be as bad as all that. Now, you just stop crying and phone me again at two thirty this afternoon."

I managed to say, "Thank you very much."

I didn't want Lou around when I called back, so I told him I was to phone again at three thirty. I said I didn't feel well and had things to do in the house. "You go down to the store. I'll call later and let you know what happened." I asked Lou to send the girls home when they came to the store after school.

"Anything you say, Gussie." I wondered how long *that* would last! "You're a pretty good kid, after all. May I kiss you?"

"If you wish, Lou." He kissed me and left.

It was the first time in a long while that I had had the opportunity to be alone, to think and pray. Lou, calling me "kid" brought Phillip to mind. I wondered what he was doing. I wondered why there had never been any closeness between any two members of my family.

I remembered a time when I was sixteen years old and had attended a wedding. Elye, one of the boys I knew from the YMHA, was also there. I had wanted to make him jealous, so I asked Herbert to dance with me. Elye didn't know Herbert was my brother. After much coaxing, Herbert

agreed to dance with me. We danced halfway around the floor until we were directly in front of Elye. I was smiling proudly when suddenly, without a word, Herbert left me standing in the middle of the floor and walked over to talk to someone else.

Embarrassed, I hurried to the restroom and cried. I stayed there for almost an hour, waiting for the music to play again so I could sneak out of the place without being seen. As I was slipping on my coat, Elye appeared. He removed my coat, saying, "Please, Gussie, don't go yet. Let's dance." Neither of us spoke as we danced, but during the intermission Elye said, "Who was that old buck you were dancing with?"

"I beg your pardon, Elye. He happens to be my brother Herbert." Elye blushed and started to apologize, but I interrupted. "Just forget it. It really doesn't matter. I'll pretend I didn't hear a word you said. . . ."

I looked up at the clock and came back to the present. How foolish I was being, I thought. Here I am almost thirty years old, and I spend an hour foolishly reminiscing. I wished I had a living parent or close relative to talk to, one who might advise me. But even though I was alone, I didn't feel lonely. God was with me. I felt his presence. I prayed aloud, "Please God, continue to give my children that treasure which no one can take from them—the companionship and love they have in each other." I promised that if I could only live long enough to see my girls happily in love, and married, I would never ask anything else of him for myself.

As it neared two thirty, I wondered what I should say to Mr. Mullens. I began to regret that I had phoned him in the first place. But when the time came, I made the call.

"I really don't know how to start, I feel so badly. I know your time is very valuable."

"Why don't you start at the beginning?"

I managed to tell him that I had remarried and that my husband had been in a fight with a young man and had injured him.

"Please, Mr. Mullens, will you help us? You are the only one who can save him from jail!"

"Tell your husband to be in my office at eleven tomorrow morning. And don't worry, Gussie. We will see what can be done."

I phoned the store at four thirty. The girls hadn't come home, and I was worried. I was told that Lou had left with them about half an hour before. At five o'clock they all came home. The girls were wearing new slack suits. They paraded around the room in their new outfits, their hands in their pockets, pretending to be boys.

I told Lou of his appointment with the attorney the next morning. He seemed very pleased. That night he took us all to dinner and to a show. I knew he was trying to make amends.

It wasn't long before Lou's troubles were over. He quickly forgot how scared and worried he had been and began bragging how he had "knocked the guy's teeth out," and that all it had cost him was a dentist's bill for two front teeth.

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Our future was uncertain, but of one thing I was sure: I would never have another child. Or so I thought. Lou had other ideas, however. I argued that I was almost thirty and he was thirty-two, and that we were too old to start raising another child. "If God will help us provide for the children we have, we should be content."

But Lou was determined that I have his child.

Eventually I gave birth to a third daughter. But the baby was a great disappointment to Lou. He hadn't wanted another girl. "Besides," he claimed, "I lost a lot of money betting it would be a son." He saw his child immediately after she was born and ordered me to make arrangements not to bring her home. "She is as red as a beet," he declared. He didn't like the shape of her head, and she was homely.

His disappointment didn't bother me, but I was concerned for the child. "God Almighty," I prayed, "please don't punish this innocent little being for my sins. Just punish me." I was sure things had turned out this way because I had tried to prevent myself from having the child. "It is enough that she is not good-looking, so please, God," I prayed, "let her be healthy and normal." For three days I prayed constantly. On the third day God answered my prayers. My baby's face was now as white as an angel's, and her head as round and pretty as that of a perfect doll.

With the baby home, Lou took to gambling more than ever. Now it was seldom that he sang "I'm Sitting on Top of the World." He said that the baby, being a girl, had put the jinx on his luck. He lost his patience with the business and with the help, and they refused to work for him.

Lou demanded that I hire a woman to take care of the baby and the house so I could take care of the business. He'd deliver the produce and be gone the rest of the day. The housekeeper would prepare dinner, but Lou was seldom home to eat it.

I was determined to keep in mind that I had much for which to be grateful: my three lovely daughters. I would leave the rest to God. Whatever was his wish, I would accept.

The bliss Shirley Joy brought into our lives was unbelievable. There was no toy or doll that Helen and Betty Rose enjoyed more than their baby sister. If I raised my voice to the baby, both girls would cry and run to protect and cuddle her.

Even Lou played with her and showed signs of affection —when he had won at gambling.

Nat Schoen, who was with the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, was one of Lou's companions. I was pleased when I learned that he had persuaded Lou to buy insurance. Lou named me as his beneficiary and insisted that I name him as mine. I consented—with the condition that I have a similar policy naming the children as beneficiaries.

I had not felt well from the time Shirley was born. I kept thinking it was just a matter of time until I would feel better. After eight months I decided to see our family doctor. Dr. Norman gave me a thorough examination, then told me that he preferred calling in another doctor before making

his final diagnosis. Both doctors came to the same decision: an operation was imperative.

I had a blood clot the size of a walnut in my intestinal tract. This clot, I was told, would grow larger each month until it became about the size of an egg, when it would burst the intestinal tube. The poison that would be released into my system would result in immediate death. I was told that I could expect to live no longer than six months without surgery, but that the operation was dangerous and there could be no guaranty that I would survive.

I had been so healthy all my life, it was difficult for me to believe that this wasn't all a bad dream. Six months was such a short time. My first and most important task, I felt, was to prepare for the worst.

Helen was twelve, Betty Rose eight, and Shirley was not yet a year old. Nothing else mattered except knowing they would be cared for. There were three things that I had to make certain of, while I was still alive: first, they would not live with Lou; second, that the girls were not to be separated. This made it impossible to consider sending them to Homewood Terrace. Third, it must be assured that the insurance money would be best used for their financial support.

I went to see Mr. Schoen and asked his advice. I told him about the twenty-year endowment policy I had carried since 1924. Acting on his advice, I had this policy converted to the type of policy he had sold us—whole life, paid up at age eighty-five. This provided my children with almost three times the amount of protection for the same premium. He also recommended that I visit the legal-trust department of the Wells Fargo Bank, on Market Street. I took my policies and Transamerica stock to the people in the trust department. They told me that, no matter who paid the premiums

on my policy, I had the power to change the beneficiary. I had my policy changed immediately, naming the children as beneficiaries. It was figured that my insurance would provide fifty dollars a month for each child until each reached her eighteenth birthday.

They asked me who would take care of the children. I had to tell them that I had no idea. They questioned me about my family. I said that they all lived in New York, that it had been ten years since I had seen them, and that we were not on friendly terms. Still, they advised me to see my family, that perhaps things would be different now. If things didn't work out with my family, and I didn't survive the operation, they assured me that they would place the children in a foster home together, and that their department would take a personal interest in them.

Lou didn't know I had sought advice. He consented when I told him I wanted to make a trip back East with Helen and Betty Rose before the operation. He said, "This may be the last chance to see your family. I can't deny it to you." I had never told him about my family life. He was under the impression that I wanted to see them because I missed them. Yet my only reason was to find out if things had changed and if there would be a place with them for my children. I hoped that they would like my children in spite of their dislike for me. But only if the family showed interest and a liking for my children would I divulge the problem I was facing.

I decided to make the trip by boat, through the Panama Canal. I knew this might be the last time I would be alone with my girls, and I wanted the trip to be as pleasant as possible. I arranged to leave Shirley with a practical nurse, Ida Epstein. Ida loved Shirley and promised that she would

not leave until I returned. The sixteen days on the *Virginia* were like a lifetime to me, yet they passed so quickly. Only once was it necessary for me to see the doctor on board.

At night I couldn't sleep, wondering if it was fate that was returning me to New York. The other members of my family were wealthy now, with flourishing businesses. Harold had been retired since the end of World War I. I considered turning over my insurance policies—with the exception of three thousand dollars—to whoever would take care of my girls. I wanted each girl to have a wedding gift of one thousand dollars when she married—a gift from their mother, who loved them so much.

In the mornings I dressed before the girls awoke. I needed time to bathe my eyes and put on layers of makeup to hide the redness from tears and lack of sleep. The children enjoyed the trip immensely, and I enjoyed watching them. Betty Rose won forty dollars on the trip playing the fifty-cent wooden-horse races. She never played any numbers other than six and seven. The other passengers nicknamed her "Number Tix and Teven." She still hadn't learned to pronounce her *s*'s.

Betty Rose entered a swimming contest. She came nowhere near winning, but she had made such a big issue of the results, saying, "Ain't no fair! I'm the littleth one," that they finally gave her a prize for being "the littlest one."

Helen volunteered her talent as a tap dancer for the kiddie show. I was disappointed when she continually executed the same two steps over and over. I asked her what happened to the handsprings and turns she usually did. "Why should I do more when they didn't applaud for what I did do?" she said, shrugging.

As we went through the Panama Canal, the ship's loud-

speaker announced that we were passing Leper Island, where a Catholic priest and his nuns were dedicating their lives to those unfortunate incurable ones who were never permitted to leave the island. I had to convince Helen that unfortunate people were on the island, that it was not animals who had the incurable disease.

When we had passed through the canal, I realized we were on the last lap of our voyage. I tried desperately to make every moment of the trip count. As we entered New York Harbor, I stared at the Statue of Liberty. Seeing this magnificent figure stretching out of the water gave me the feeling of awe I felt my parents must have had when *they* first sailed into the harbor. For the first time I felt that I knew the real reason my parents had returned to America. I was caught up in the excitement of leaving the ship. We had no difficulty passing through customs, and then, suddenly, I realized I was in New York City again!

I had written only to Leah about our trip. She was married now and had a seven-year-old daughter. She lived in upper New York, 175 miles from New York City. I didn't expect her to meet us, but I thought she might have informed other members of the family in New York City that we were coming. At first I had hoped they would be there to meet us at the boat. But then, when I saw other people around us kissing and greeting each other joyously, I was satisfied that they hadn't: we would have met like strangers, and this would have seemed odd to the girls.

We took a train to upper New York. When I saw Leah, all the animosity I had felt left me. I was pleased when I met my brother-in-law Joe. He seemed a quiet, congenial sort of person. I was surprised that Leah had gained so much weight, though. She was about five feet tall and weighed

196 pounds. She explained that it took too much effort to stay on a diet; besides, she wasn't looking for a husband—she had one!

But apparently she was very conscious of age. When the question of age came up in a conversation, I said I was thirty-two years old. She became indignant. "Why, what's the matter with you? I am not thirty-two yet, and you are three years younger than I am!" When she had gotten married, she had apparently stated her age as twenty-five instead of twenty-eight. I said no more about it.

It took me only a short time to realize that Leah's home wasn't the place for my children. Everything that happened here reminded me of my childhood—even to her two sets of dishes and the koshering of her meat.

We sat and talked for an hour. I cried a number of times as we talked of times that had passed. Leah, of course, thought that my tears were caused by the subjects of our conversation, but my mind was a million miles away from the past. My heart was full of the troubles I faced now, in the present—and time was closing in.

I saw there was no reason for staying longer and asked about visiting Herbert, who lived in a nearby town. I was delighted when Joe offered to drive us there. After about an hour's ride we arrived at Herbert's store. Herbert didn't recognize us, so Joe said, "This is your sister Gussie and her children."

We talked for about half an hour. I answered questions about my financial and personal circumstances, although I concealed most of the facts. He told me a great deal about his business. He had a tremendous store of men's suits and furnishings. He said that his basement held more in reserve stock than his store, and that his stock was larger than that of many wholesalers.

Then a car drove up and stopped in front of the store. A little girl about Betty Rose's age and a tall and stately, good-looking woman got out. Betty Rose started to play with the little girl, chasing her around the pole. I noticed Herbert watching them and smiling. I was sure the woman and girl were his wife and daughter, and my heart started to pound. Here might be the first sign of encouragement by a member of my family.

When the woman entered the store, Herbert said, "This is my wife, and that's my oldest daughter outside." We greeted each other warmly. Then, realizing that I had seen her drive up in a car which had seen better days, she remarked, "We are contemplating getting a new car this year."

"Who is asking you?" Herbert said abruptly. His wife changed the subject by telling me she had a baby at home, asleep.

We stood in the store talking for an hour. Finally I turned to Joe and said, "I guess it's time we were leaving."

We all said good-by.

What a fool I had been to think I could find a home for my children with my family! I had thought that in Herbert I would find at least some sign of affection or hospitality.

Joe was very kind. He took time to drive us around and show us some of the country. I could see how disappointed he felt about the way things had turned out. I wanted to put my arms around him and say, "Please don't feel bad. I don't mind."

Finally Joe said, "I wish Herbert had offered to show you his home and the adorable baby they have."

"Isn't Uncle Herbert too old to have a baby?" Helen asked.

"He just looks older because he lost most of his hair," Joe replied. "I'm almost as old as he is, and I sure would welcome a little baby."

When we got back to their home, I told Leah I was cutting our stay in New York short. I wanted to take the girls to the Chicago Fair on our way home. Leah said that she had been planning to visit New York City and that she would love to join us for our short stay there. I told Leah that I would like that very much.

On the way to New York we talked mostly about Harold and his family. He had two girls and two boys now. Leah said they were all scared stiff of their father, whose word was law, whether right or wrong. She told me that good-natured Fanny still spent her entire days cooking and serving, since their family seldom sat down at the same time.

I kept thinking of Charles, my parents' first grandchild and Papa's namesake. I wondered if he looked anything like Papa, now that he was a grown man. I could still close my eyes and see Papa's sad eyes smiling, even when I knew he had been in pain.

When we arrived in New York City, I reserved two adjoining rooms at the Ambassador Hotel. Leah and her daughter Ruby shared one room, the girls and I the other.

The next day we went into a large department-store to buy the girls fall hats and coats. Betty Rose liked a certain hat, and, although it was too small for her, she would settle for no other. "Just give it to me," Leah said. "I'll show you how we stretch hats in our store so they fit." She put both hands inside the hat and pulled—but she pulled so hard she tore the hat in half. Everyone, even the clerk, laughed.

"Well," declared Betty Rose, "I'll thus have to take another one now." She looked intently at Leah and said, "I liked the other one, but!"

Trying to hide her humiliation, Leah said, "What's the matter, Betty, can't you finish one sentence without saying

'but'?" This was another of my daughter's speech habits. I had encouraged her to practice speaking without adding "but" to the ends of her sentences. She tried, but I discovered she was still saying it under her breath, so I gave up.

I was embarrassed when Leah tore the hat, but I was even more embarrassed when she remarked, "The hats we have in our store never tear so easily. They are made of much stronger material." I offered to pay for the ruined hat, but the clerk said it wasn't necessary, since I had already purchased the girls' coats.

Leah was still determined to vindicate herself and to have the last word. When we had left the store, she said, "I bet they knew the material was faulty. Otherwise, they would have made you pay for it!"

"I guess so, Leah," I said. I noticed the girls, including Ruby, holding their hands over their mouths to keep from laughing out loud.

Back at the hotel we made plans for the next day. Leah promised that she would contact Charles, and perhaps he would come to the hotel. "That would be wonderful," I told her.

When Betty Rose kissed Leah good night, she asked her, "When are you going to get your little baby?"

Leah laughed and replied, "Where on earth did you get that idea from?" I told Leah what Joe had said to Helen in the car. Obviously Betty Rose had remembered.

After the children had gone to bed I said, "Frankly, Leah, it would be nice for Ruby if you had another child."

"That's what Joe's mother told me, too. You know what answer I gave her. I said, 'If you want your son to have another child, you go and have it for him.'"

Charles did come to see us. He didn't resemble Papa, but

he was smiling, and this was enough to remind me of Papa. I put my arms around Charles, closed my eyes and saw Papa's face. I kissed Charles, pretending he was Papa. Charles pulled away, embarrassed, and turned to Leah. "Who is she?"

"She is your Aunt Gussie, and these are her children."

"Oh, yeah. I've heard my mother talk about you."

Hearing that Fanny had talked of me, I decided I must visit her. I would never fogive myself if I didn't. Later that day Leah, the girls, and I went to her home—or, rather, Harold's home. I felt so peculiar walking up the same rickety steps that I had climbed the day I begged Harold to rent us an apartment in one of his huge buildings.

"For fifteen years these steps have been squeaking," said Leah. "You'd think Harold would get tired of listening to them and get them fixed."

Fanny was wide-eyed when she opened the door and saw me. She embraced me fondly and cried, "It's Gussie!" I wanted to hug her, but her arms were so tight around me, I couldn't move.

Then Leah hollered, "For crying out loud, let's go inside! People will think someone died here."

Had she punched me in the stomach with all her strength, it would have hurt me less than the sharp pain caused by that remark.

I found myself whispering, "Please, dear God, not here—not now." I felt I would never make it into the dining room without help. But, as though some unseen power came to my aid, I managed to get there.

I looked around. It amazed me to see that not a single thing had been changed or replaced in all these years. Fanny's girls were just finishing dinner when Harold

stormed into the house. He seemed like an oversized, short, bald, overweight demon as he approached. The sight of him frightened my girls. He sat down at the table, and his daughters left.

Leah was the only one who didn't seem to be afraid of him. "Harold," she said, "this is Gussie."

"Who?" he yelled. Then, with his mouth full of food and waving a knife in his hand, he shouted, "Vaught arr you doving in mine hos, you trablemacher, you? Vassent it you who rite sucha tarrable thinks to Blanche 'bout me ven she vus living by me [What are you doing in my house, you troublemaker, you? Wasn't it you who wrote such terrible things to Blanche, when she was living by me]!"

The only possible thing he could interpret, as trouble, was when I answered Blanche's constant complaint about the amount of housework, that was expected of her. I wrote her to suggest they hire some domestic help, now that their family was grown.

I had almost forgotten how violently Harold could express himself. I answered, with the same forcefulness, "Did you read the letters? Oh, I'd forgotten—since when did you learn to read?"

By then my girls were really frightened, so I led them from the dining room into the kitchen and to Fanny.

"Don't let him bother you," she said meekly. "You know how he is."

"Yes, Fanny, I do," I said. We kissed Fanny good-by and left the house without seeing or speaking to anyone else.

I truly pitied Harold and his family. I knew now we were the wealthy ones, because our lives were rich in love and companionship.

So now I had seen my family, except for Blanche. That

would be just wasting more time, and I had little of that as it was.

They had not looked fondly and affectionately at their nieces. They saw them only as my children and my responsibility.

I suppose they wondered why I took the trouble to visit them. I wondered myself. I had accomplished nothing in making this trip to New York. I prepared to head back to California. I wasn't happy as we left, and I wasn't happy thinking about what I had to face when we got home.

29

Once we were on the train headed for Chicago, I felt relaxed and calm. We checked in at the hotel and went immediately to the fair grounds. In two days we covered more territory than most people did in a week. I knew time was running out, and I was anxious to get home.

Back on the train again, headed West, I was glad the trip was about over. During the daytime I seated myself by the window, pretending to watch the scenery. I wore the dark glasses I had purchased at the fair to hide my eyes, which were again red and swollen. The only times I moved were when my girls said it was time to eat.

The girls kept themselves entertained by talking to the other passengers. Betty Rose still used much of her baby talk, and people seemed to find it amusing to hear her talk.

"Tell me more," they'd say. To which she'd answer, " 'Tain't got no more—but."

At night my thoughts and prayers touched on many sub-

jects. I prayed for a good foster-home for my three children. "Please, dear God, hear my prayer. You gave me my children. If you want me, take me. But let my children know the meaning of love and kindness, both in the giving and receiving of them. Please don't ever separate them. Even after they are married, keep them close."

I wondered if there was such a place as "hereafter," and if it would be possible for me to know if my children were happy. I wondered if my parents knew about us and if they were together. Perhaps they were saying, "Gitl will soon be here." I wondered if I would be permitted to join them.

The last day on the train I studied Helen carefully. She was a bright girl—really too smart for her years. I was certain she knew a great deal more than I imagined. I realized I hadn't given her enough credit for the comfort she had given me and the way she helped me with the other children. She had always been their second mother. . . .

Betty Rose interrupted my thoughts. "Helen," she said, "I don't think Mamma's relatives are so rich. I never saw any money laying around!"

I was glad to be back home holding Shirley in my arms. She was more beautiful than ever. She seemed to have gained a ton, but it was only because it was such an effort for me to hold her. By now it was impossible for me to stand erect. I was continually stooped over.

Dear Ida! She helped me to make arrangements for all I had to do the following day. She was only ten years older than I, but when she called me "child," I started to cry. I cried easily, usually when someone was kind to me. Maybe it was because their concern reminded me of the tender affection Papa had used to show me.

"Now don't cry, you poor child. Everything is going to be

all right. You'll be laughing at that no-good husband of yours yet!" Somehow, I thought she was implying that Lou had made advances to her.

"I'm really surprised," I said, "but I know you can take care of yourself."

"Don't be silly, child. If that was the case, I would have knocked his teeth down his throat, as big as he is." Then, speaking sincerely, she said, "I shouldn't really tell you this, but I will. It's something I heard Lou tell his roughneck companions while they were here gambling. He said he felt sorry for you and would spend every dollar of the insurance money on the best funeral a wife ever had."

I laughed—for the first time since Dr. Norman had told me the bad news. I laughed so much and so hard that the tears streamed down my face. I kept seeing Lou's disappointed, angry face when he was told he couldn't collect on the insurance policies. I laughed so hysterically that the sound echoed and reverberated in the room. Then I remembered that Ida was with me. I looked up at her and saw a pair of perplexed eyes staring at me. She seemed shocked and was backing away from me. Confused by her reaction, I said, "Ida, honey, are you all right?" I was no longer laughing; I was trembling for fear I might do something to frighten her more.

Moving toward me, she said, "Child, do you feel well? What is making you so hysterical?"

When I told her what I had done about the insurance, she put both hands on my face and kissed me as if I were a child being rewarded for doing a good deed. Then, simultaneously, we started to laugh—until we looked at each other. Then we started to cry.

"What a couple of grown-up dopes we are," said Ida,

"scaring the hell out of one another. Let's have something to eat. I'm hungry!" With that Ida set about making some fresh coffee.

The only thing I told Lou about my family in New York was that they weren't as wealthy as I had imagined and that they lived in small quarters.

I debated whether I should first visit Dr. Norman or go to the Wells Fargo trust department and complete my arrangements. The latter project seemed the more important.

At the trust office I signed the necessary papers naming the organization trustee and guardian of my three daughters.

"I would like to know what foster homes you recommend," I said.

Miss Bernard, the young lady helping me, answered, "We have many we would vouch for; however, it is solely up to you to choose. I took the liberty of investigating the ones I felt would be most desirable in your case, and I have selected three. Personally, I recommend you visit them. If you have any difficulty, or if you do not find any of these suitable, let me know. We have others you can consider."

Looking at her pretty, kind face, I wondered if any of my girls would resemble her when they grew up. She handed me the list of names of the foster homes and, with a sweet smile, said, "Good luck, Gussie."

One of the foster homes recommended was in Palo Alto, some thirty miles from San Francisco, and I had the problem of getting there. Mrs. Steinberg solved this problem for me. Mrs. Steinberg and her husband owned the shoe store across the street from Lou's market. For her I used to select the largest oranges, the firmest tomatoes, and the freshest vegetables, because she showed such fond interest in my children. Because of my admiration and respect for her, I had

called her Mrs. Steinberg for over a year until one day she said, "Gussie, why don't you call me Lillian?"

Lillian? For some reason, hearing that name brought a lump to my throat. I asked, "Did you ever live in New York City?"

"No," she smiled, "but I have relatives there, and I have visited them a number of times." But she could just as well have been my childhood Lillian grown up. I could not have treasured her friendship more if she had been.

Lillian drove me to Palo Alto, to Mrs. Howard's foster home. Little did Lillian or I know that she would be driving me here many times a year for years to come. And little did I realize that this was the beginning of her playing an important role in our lives. When I met Mrs. Howard and saw her home, I was convinced that my prayers had been answered. She showed me the children's dormitory upstairs, and the large dining room, kitchen, and library downstairs. There were spacious grounds that looked like a playground at a vacation resort, and a community swimming pool a block away.

I felt like getting down on my knees and kissing the ground of this haven. Instead, I lifted my eyes upward and whispered, "Dear God, I thank you with all my heart and soul. I only wish I could prove how grateful I am to you in some other way than just with words and thoughts."

Later I had a heart-to-heart talk with Helen about how things would be in the event something happened to me. I took her with me to the Wells Fargo trust department, where she learned the true picture. I was sorry to burden so young a child with all this, but she was ready to stand up under the heavy load of responsibilities assigned to her.

In the cab on our way home Helen said, "Mother, do you

believe I'll be capable of taking care of my sisters?"

"Sure, sweetheart," I told her. "You are an angel sent to me from heaven. God bless you! I don't know how I could ever have done without you."

"But nothing is going to happen to you, Mother. We need you so much." I kissed her on the forehead and held her head down to hide my misery. I didn't feel there was a human being deserving of such a precious child—and God had given her to me. Everything happens for a reason. I wondered if what seemed about to happen to me was because my children deserved more than I could give them.

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The following day I kept my appointment with Dr. Norman. After the examination he advised me to let him operate as soon as possible. He explained that the growth had become so large that it completely blocked the passage.

I told him I first had to engage a housekeeper to take care of my children, since Ida was now working on a nursing job. Dr. Norman said that he had someone in mind and promised to contact her. The next day was Tuesday, and in the morning Dr. Norman's nurse phoned to inform me that Mrs. Brown would be at my house on Thursday morning to take over, and that I would be admitted to Mount Zion Hospital at noon on Friday.

In the few days that followed I couldn't keep my eyes off my children. I was going away, and I didn't want to forget how my children looked. On Thursday I waited until 2:00 P.M., and Mrs. Brown hadn't appeared. I decided that I

wasn't going to leave until I met the person who was going to be in charge of my household and family.

Friday morning at nine Dr. Norman's nurse phoned to say that Mrs. Brown's son had been in an accident and that she refused to leave him. She said the doctor had changed the date of entry into the hospital to the following Tuesday, and that I could expect a Mrs. Kahn on Monday afternoon.

I wondered if this delay had come about in order to give me time to attend to something I had forgotten. Perhaps I was just being given a bit more time to be with my children. But then, I thought, perhaps I will survive: lots of people have delicate operations and live. I could still hear Papa saying that sometimes we have troubles to remind us there is a God and to pray. But it was impossible for me to forget God. He was a part of me. All I had to do was be silent and listen, and I could hear him inside me.

All day Saturday I sat or lay on the bed. I now regretted the delay, because I was so miserable and uncomfortable. I was so badly bent over that, when I stood, I was only about half my normal height.

On Sunday afternoon, after Helen had fed her sisters lunch and put Shirley to bed for her nap, I had her take Betty Rose to the show. I was glad the children were not at home to witness the agony I was experiencing. I had consumed twice the amount of pills that the doctor had prescribed, but I received no relief.

I had not had a bowel movement in over two weeks. I could hardly breathe and was soaking wet from the perspiration that covered every inch of my body. I knew that if I didn't get relief I would jump out of our third-story window.

Then I thought of trying an enema. Yes, that's what I'll do, I told myself. Dr. Herstein used to prescribe enemas

when I was pregnant, saying, "They never can hurt anyone."

I'll never know how much of the hot water entered my body. The next few minutes were like a nightmare. I remember having unbearable pains and sliding down to the floor, my hands grasping the toilet seat, trying to pull myself up again. The pain jabbed at me severely, just as it had when I delivered my children without an anesthetic. Then I passed out.

When I came to, I saw something lying near my leg that resembled a chunk of calf's liver. I picked it up with both hands. It seemed alive, it quivered so in my hands—or perhaps it was my hands that trembled so. I became frightened. I threw the "thing" into the toilet bowl and flushed it down, for fear that it might enter my body again.

The next thing I was conscious of was the realization that I was standing erect, and that I was relieved of pain.

I ran to the front-room window, pulled back the drapes, and with every bit of power I had I hollered, "God, I thank you that it was only a dream!" I kept kissing my hands and throwing them up to God, like a child throwing kisses to someone. Repeatedly I hollered, "God, dear God, I thank you." I stopped only when I heard a knock on our front door.

I opened the door and saw Viola Hayden. She had never before knocked on my door, nor had she knocked on the door of anyone else in the apartment house. I doubt if anyone would have let her come in if she had knocked. She was marked by the Jewish neighbors as *"Tsedreyte* Viola [unbalanced Viola]." The others called her "Nutty Viola." As we faced each other in the doorway, I wondered which of us looked the more peculiar to the other.

"Would you like to come in?" I asked.

"Oh, could I really?" She seemed surprised at my invitation.

I took her by the arm and led her into the living room. We sat opposite each other, Viola seeming as puzzled at being there as I was as to why she had knocked at my door. "Did you want something, Viola?" I asked her.

Hardly above a whisper, she asked, "Are you all right? I heard you screaming. But I don't see your husband here." Looking around, she said hesitantly, "You are alone. Who were you screaming at?"

I had the impression that she expected me to scream at her. I just couldn't find words to answer her, so I just sat looking at her. She shrugged her shoulders and remarked, "Gee, I guess they'll call you 'Nutty Gussie'!"

At that I got up and walked over to her. I sensed that she wanted to back away from me. In a convincing tone I said, "I'm all right, and so are you, Viola. Look at me. I feel fine now. Look, Viola, I can stand up straight. Can't you see?"

Then I realized she didn't know what I was talking about. No one in the apartment house knew anything about my illness. I had been careful not to be seen the few times I had gone out of the house recently.

"Yeah," was all Viola mumbled in reply.

Then I made some tea, which we both needed and enjoyed. I told her I had been sick, but that I was well now. Apparently she didn't believe me, because she said, "If you won't be afraid of me, I promise not to be afraid of you. Can I visit you again?"

"Sure, Viola. Any time you wish." I tried to sound as convincing as possible.

Then she said, "If I hear you screaming, I'll come down and quiet you." She smiled at me.

When the girls came home, Viola immediately got up to leave. As she left, she said, "Are you sure you want me to come again?"

I reassured her. "Why sure, Viola. Come again any time."

When she had left, Betty Rose asked, "What's 'Nutty Viola' doing here, but?"

Before I could ask her just what she meant by such a remark Helen said, "You feel better, Mother, don't you?" She made it sound as if I had just gotten over a cold.

"I sure do, Honey," I answered.

That night was one time I tried to stay awake. I was afraid to fall asleep for fear of waking up and finding that none of my good fortune was real. The past was like a bad dream. I could hardly remember the suffering and pain that I had known only a few hours before. We were all in bed when Lou came home that night. Recently he had been saying that he had nothing to come home to but a doubled-up wife. His interest in gambling had increased. But pretending to be asleep was my specialty, so Lou didn't bother me.

The next morning I wasn't the least bit tired. Lou left early for the market as usual, and as soon as I heard him leave, I jumped out of bed—and I mean I literally jumped out! I fed my children and sent them off to school. For the first time in my life I found myself singing, "I'm Sitting on Top of the World."

I heard a knock at the front door and figured it was Mrs. Kahn. But when I opened the door, there stood Viola, with her typically confused look. "May I come in, please?" she asked.

"Sure, honey, come in," I said. "I'm getting ready to go out."

When I saw the expression on her face, I realized that

what I said must have sounded sort of crazy. She said, "Are you sure you feel all right, Gussie?"

"Why, sure! Don't be afraid. You said you wouldn't be—remember?"

"Didn't I hear you singing your husband's song?" she asked.

I laughed and, without thinking, answered, "Yeah. I must be crazy!"

"Poor kid," she said. Then, when she saw tears appear in my eyes, she said, "I wouldn't let them hurt you, Gussie." She had no way of knowing that the tears were induced by her calling me "kid," because it brought back memories of my brother Phillip. I wondered what could have happened to Viola to cause her to be branded "nutty." At the same time, I realized I was, unwittingly, convincing her that *I* was "nutty."

I wanted to be the first patient in Dr. Norman's office, so I said, "Listen, Viola, I'll be back before noon. Promise you will come down and have lunch with me. I'm going to see the doctor now."

"You are? What doctor? You told me you weren't sick any more."

There were times when it seemed impossible to give her an answer, and this was one of them. But apparently she didn't need an answer. She said, "I'll be down. You need me!"

Viola's puzzled and confused expression was nothing compared to Dr. Norman's when I walked into his office holding my baby in my arms. He calmed down when he decided in his mind that I was one of my sisters. He continued talking, assuming that I was home preparing to be admitted to the hospital.

When I told the doctor I was his patient and not a sister, he turned as white as a sheet. He opened his mouth as though to speak, but said nothing. I sat there, finally realizing how really tired I was and wondering how long it would take for him to recover from his shock. When I gave him all the details, he said, "Never in history has such an incredible thing happened. I doubt that it could ever happen again. No doctor would ever recommend the use of a syringe in such a case because of the extreme danger of fatal results. If you only hadn't disposed of the specimen! It would have been worth a fortune to society. If you have never believed in a Higher-up before, you better do so now. Only his power could have performed such a miracle."

31

I was wheeling my baby down Golden Gate Avenue and across to McAllister Street on my way home when I stopped to adjust Shirley's covers. Kicking her covers off was one of her ways of getting attention. Looking up, I noticed that I had stopped at the entrance to Keneseth Israel Congregation. Was it a coincidence, I wondered, or was there some definite reason that had caused me to pause here? The entrance to this synagogue was level with the sidewalk, and I found myself wheeling the buggy inside.

Inside I came upon a group of men, all talking at the same time, and each apparently trying to talk louder than the others. Even though I understand and speak Yiddish fluently, I couldn't understand a word these men were saying. Nearby, a janitor was busily cleaning up. My stopping

here was just a coincidence, I told myself; coming in here had no significance for me, I was sure. As I turned to wheel the buggy out again, two *pushkes* [contribution boxes] on the wall stared at me like two big eyes. I was unable to decipher the Jewish writing on the *pushkes,* but I had seventy cents in change in my purse, and I deposited it in the two boxes.

Walking out, I was aware that the two *pushkes* were still staring at me. "Why, sure!" I said aloud. I had been looking for a way to thank God with more than words: here, in the synagogue, I had found the opportunity to do it.

What was it that had prompted me to go into the synagogue? I couldn't remember ever doing a charitable thing. Who had I ever helped? I had never contributed to any charities. I wasn't even religious; yet God was so good to me. "Please, God," I prayed, "try me out. Give me the opportunity to do good. I will never fail you, for you have never failed me, even at times when I haven't earned your blessings."

I went automatically about my shopping for meats and groceries on McAllister Street, methodically paying for each purchase with a bill and getting change each time. My shopping completed, I had about two-fifty in change. I returned to the synagogue and those two "eyes," the *pushkes* and deposited the change that I had accumulated. Then I went home.

In the hallway of our building I passed two of Betty Rose's playmates, giggling. As they walked away, I heard one of the girls say, "Nutty Viola, making believe she was talking to Betty's mamma." As I neared my apartment, I saw Viola standing there, facing my door. I heard her say, "It's okay. I'll wait. I have plenty of time." I realized how long

she must have been waiting, since it was now almost one o'clock. I went up to her, put my arm around her waist, and said, "Hi, there!"

She jumped as if she'd been shot. Trembling, she turned around and said, "Gee, Gussie, I thought you were someone else."

"I'm sorry I was late coming home. I did a strange thing today," I told her. "I stopped at our church."

The expression on her face told me that I had said the wrong thing again.

"Believe me, Gussie, that won't do any good. I tried that, also."

I unlocked the door and entered the apartment. "I'll be with you in a few minutes. Just let me feed the baby, and we'll have some lunch." I asked her to sit on the living-room sofa and absently handed her some magazines. Only they weren't the kind of magazines I thought they were. They were some of the children's comic books. She looked pityingly at me. I noticed that she put the comic books aside and began to bite her nails.

Quickly I opened a can of baby food, got a cup of pudding, and fed Shirley. Then, giving her a bottle of milk, I put her in her crib and shut the door. Today I was not going to be concerned about her habit of throwing the bottle on the floor when she was through. Usually I would hand the bottle to her, and she would toddle into the living room and lie down on the rug with it. Then, when she was finished, she would bring the empty bottle, knowing that she would be kissed and complimented.

Cottage-cheese salad, sandwiches, cream puffs, and hot chocolate—that was the menu I prepared for Viola and myself. Neither of us was concerned about diets! Trying to act

gay and witty, I entered the living room with a towel on my arm and announced, "Lunch is now being served!" The look on Viola's face told me I had done it again! But apparently we were both hungry. We ate with relish, saying little. Then I smiled and winked at Viola. Again I saw that puzzled look as she said, "How old are you, Gussie?"

"Not so young any more," I answered. "I'm going on thirty-three."

"That's how old I was," she said sympathetically. Dear God, I thought, I am trying to be kind to this creature, while she is branding me as being like her.

I was searching for a way to get rid of her when she looked at me and smiled. As though she had read my mind, she said, "Do you want me to leave now, Gussie?"

When I looked back at her, I didn't see her eyes. Instead I saw the two *pushkes*. "Oh, no, Viola, I need you!" These were the words I had least intended to say.

Viola stood and moved toward me, bent down, and kissed me on the forehead. She said, "Thank God somebody needs me!"

Then, just as the curtain in a theater is dropped and lifted again to bring about a change of scene, so did things change for us. We went into the living room and sat side by side, like two sane and serious-minded people.

Crying most of the time, Viola told me her story. She had been thirty-one when her widowed father died. Having to keep house for him until then was the reason she gave for being unwanted and undesirable, never having married. By the time she was twenty-nine, her sister, brothers, and their families, all younger than she, were calling her an old maid.

Then she met the man to whom she was now married. While she was too tall for the average man, and he was too

short for the average girl, they thought they would find contentment in being husband and wife. When she was thirty-three, her only son was born. If she never had anything else in the world, he would have fulfilled her life—if her sister and sisters-in-law had let her alone. "What does an old maid know about a baby, even though she is married?" was what they told her husband. "All Viola is good for is to scrub floors, wash, iron, and cook," they said, and her husband had agreed with them.

"Even my six-year-old son calls me 'Nutty,' instead of 'Mother.' When I speak to my husband, I have to look down, but he refuses to lift his eyes to look at me."

Not once did I interrupt her to ask questions. I felt that it did her more good to talk about it. My heart was breaking, as I knew how much she was suffering in talking about it. I was pleased when my girls came home from school. They always came home together. Betty Rose always looked to Helen for protection, and, like a mother hen, Helen kept her under her wing. The moment the girls entered the house Viola started to leave, avoiding looking at them.

I said, "Viola, please wait a moment, I wish to ask a favor of you." Had I presented her with a precious gift, I doubt if she would have displayed more satisfaction. Then, turning to my girls, I said, "Where are your manners, girls? Can't you say hello to Viola?"

In a duet they said, "Hello, Viola." Then Betty Rose added, "Tinky kicked me yesterday, but."

"Who is Stinky?" I asked her.

"It's her boy," she answered.

"You mean he is Viola's son?"

"Yeah, it's her boy," she retorted.

"Is Stinky his real name, Viola?"

"Oh, no," she answered. "His name is Walter, the same as his father's."

With eyes glued to the floor, and barely more than whispering, Betty Rose said, "Ebeybody talls him what she taid, but."

"What *Viola said,*" I emphasized, showing her that I was displeased.

"Yeah," she agreed with me.

"From now on you call him Walter. That's his real name."

She replied, "I'll do it, Mother dear." She was relieved that I did not pursue the subject further.

About to leave, Viola asked, "What favor did you want, Gussie?"

I really had nothing in mind, but, thinking fast, I said, "That woman who does your cleaning—is she any good?"

"Oh, yes. I have her come twice a month. Would you want me to tell Bertha you wish to see her?"

"That would be wonderful," I answered.

At noon the following day Viola phoned. Her voice sounded uncertain, as though she was afraid to talk. "Would you please have lunch with me, Gussie? No one is here."

"I'm feeding the baby, and then I have to put her down for a nap. Why don't you come down and have lunch with me?"

"Please let me bring the lunch I prepared," she pleaded.

"Sure, Viola. I have hardly a thing in the house," I fibbed.

If she'd been phoning from the hallway just outside my door, she couldn't have arrived at my apartment sooner. She brought a tray with the most delicious lunch. We continued this pattern of alternately preparing lunches. I seemed to benefit even more from all this than Viola did.

Later I hired Bertha Williams, who also did cleaning for

Viola's sisters-in-law. From Bertha I learned that they were plotting to have Viola committed to an institution for the feeble-minded. Then they planned to take over the lives of her son and husband, who was earning big money. This brought back the memory of my relationship with Morris and how I had had almost let myself be trapped by a similar circumstance. The desire to have Viola as my friend increased as I came to know her better. It almost seemed that I had only to think of something I wanted done to have Viola do it for me. The respect and consideration my children came to show her, and which she showed them in return, caused her impudent son to become envious. Betty Rose was only two years older than the boy, but she took on the self-appointed job of transforming "Stinky" into an average "polite boy." I think she accomplished more than any reform school could have done.

One day I overheard Walter say to her, "Aw, go on. Only a girl or a sissy kisses his mother."

Indignantly Betty Rose answered, "Even if I was a boy, I would kiss my mother. I even sawed the President in the movies kiss his mother. I guess you can't be President anyway, 'cause you ain't polite!"

Miraculously, within a few weeks, he was saying, "Please" and "Thank you, Mother."

I enjoyed this luxurious life of being home and taking care of my children. It continued only because my pretense of still being ill was so convincing to Lou. I had told him that I would recover without an operation, but that it meant time and medication. Both Viola and I enjoyed our new routine. As early as ten thirty in the morning Viola would come down, more often than not with a tray of lunch. She must have done her chores the night before. She took pleasure in

helping me straighten my house and prepare dinner. Then we shopped leisurely without worrying about getting back early. We would have our lunch and then put Shirley in the buggy, taking a bottle of milk for her. Sometimes we ate our lunch out, often meeting the children—her son Walter included—at school.

On one of our outings Viola became quite disturbed when she thought I was going to spank Shirley for something she had done. Being asleep and throwing her empty bottle out of the buggy was one thing, but laughing aloud, with eyes closed, when she heard the crash was quite something else. "This I refuse to take," I told Viola. "Once they know you are a pushover or an easy mark, you are sunk. And that goes for everyone else, even a husband!"

This little incident had its rewards. For it gave me an idea I could hardly wait to put to use.

Later, over a cup of hot chocolate, I told Viola that in my whole family only Papa had cared for me. I told her how it helped to remember Papa's wisdom—how he taught me that praying hard enough would bring me anything I wanted providing God knew that it was for my good; how we could have anything we want if we worked hard enough for it; that we should never look down but only up, where God is; and that before we can have others think well of us we must first think well of ourselves.

"God made us all alike. Don't let anyone hurt you: no one's better than you are."

As I spoke to Viola, I listened to my own words as if they were coming from someone else. Then I thought, what a dope I've been, being so concerned and hurt, as I was, because my family rejected me!

"I don't know your family, Gussie, but I know you. No-

body could be any kinder than you are. It's remarkable how much we have in common." Then she told me that it had been her husband's family who first started to criticize her, and, because he had never defended her, she had never had the guts to fight back.

I had a definite purpose for what I was doing, and I was ready to back it up. I knew that buying something for one's self gives a person a lift, so I convinced Viola that both of us should do just this—and we did! We bought ourselves some new clothes, and I made some. I used the money I was receiving from Lou for medicines to make the purchases.

Everyone praised us when they saw our transformed appearances. "How nice you girls look!" people would say, and Viola's eyes would gleam. Then, at the same time, the gray in Viola's hair and the "rusty-red" color in mine disappeared —with the help of the same beautician. No one had called me "Rusty" or "Red" for many years, but it gave me a feeling of accomplishment to do this, even though it was a bit late.

Viola was bashful and hesitant before others at first, but she soon mastered her shyness. The very same neighbors she had shied away from now called her by name, greeted her and conversed with her.

It did my heart good when she told me that her two sisters-in-law had visited her to find out why her husband hadn't been to see them lately. "I know they missed hearing his complaints about me," she said. "But when they saw Mrs. Carson and her sister in my apartment, I thought they would drop dead. Many times before I had wished this *would* happen, but now I want them to live and to notice me!"

On the day when she told me that her husband had said, "Please," and looked up at her when he spoke, she broke down and cried.

I dearly valued Viola's friendship. Through her I learned that, to gain friends, you have to be one first, and that by lighting another's torch you brighten the light in your own life. We became inseparable. Wherever Viola was seen, I was with her.

Then came the day when her husband's arm was caught in the machine in the shop where he was employed. There were rumors that his co-worker could have saved him from this fatal accident if he had been more conscientious at his job. Viola and her son went back to Denver to live with relatives.

We corresponded, but our exchange of letters dwindled to nothing after she sent me a picture of herself and her new husband. She didn't have to look down when she talked to this man: she could look right at him.

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My new life as an average wife, which I had come to enjoy so much, didn't last long. I couldn't keep up the pretense of still being ill. When the repeal of Prohibition became law, Lou decided to sell liquor in the store, and, since he wasn't a citizen of the United States, the license had to be granted in my name. This meant I had to be on the premises at least part of the time.

We had a much smaller crew of employees. Lou was constantly accusing them of stealing from the register, but this was only to cover up the cash he drained from the business and to induce me to spend more time at the store. Lou's luck in gambling was consistently bad. It became more and more difficult to meet our obligations, and there were times

when the rent was two months past due. Lou became more irritable. He insinuated that he wouldn't be so hard pressed financially if he didn't have such a large family.

I didn't make an issue out of Lou's behavior. I knew this would only cause arguments and fights, and such demonstrations were the last things to which I wanted to subject the children. Besides, I had too much to be grateful for. We had our health, enough to eat, a place to live, and an occasional pair of new shoes and piece of wearing apparel. I was thankful.

It was necessary for me to keep Shirley at the store with me. She seemed to know that I was unable to give her the attention which other children of her age received. She stayed in her buggy most of the day. I would prepare her lunch on a little electric hot plate in the rear of the store; then back into the buggy she would go, with the safety belt fastened and a bottle of warm milk in her hands. After she had consumed the milk she slept for hours. Awake, she entertained herself with a cookie and a ten-cent toy. She talked and laughed with everyone who would pay attention to her. From her constant kicking, she made a hole in the front of the buggy, which allowed her feet to stick out. It amused her to have someone stop and tickle her feet. At four o'clock her sisters came home from school, and Lou came back to the store to take over. Then I did my shopping and went home to prepare dinner. I did the washing, ironing, sewing, and cleaning at night after the children were asleep.

I'd never have stopped thanking God for all this if only it had lasted!

The money we took in at the store was inadequate to cover Lou's gambling losses. He started to write checks that bounced. The amounts totaled in the thousands. Strange

men—men to whom he had given these checks—were constantly looking for him. He would replace these checks with others equally invalid.

Even after the climax came, and there was no Lou to be found, I was hounded by these men and accused of knowing where he was. Some of his friends told me that they had seen him in Los Angeles, in Sacramento, and even as far away as Tennessee. Others said they had talked to him and that he had refused to recognize them by pretending he was someone else.

Because I didn't sensibly analyze the situation, I paid the $300 rent of the store, which was two weeks in arrears. This left me exactly one hundred and seventy-five dollars, which I had secretly saved from the household money and from the money I was supposedly paying for medicine.

I was constantly besieged, not only by the gamblers, but by demands from wholesale liquor and produce firms for non-payment of merchandise. I had had no idea they had never been paid. One of the kindlier creditors recommended that I see the Board of Trade attorneys. They ordered an inventory of the stock on hand. Then they called a meeting of the creditors, where a statement was read declaring the store's indebtedness to be twenty-seven hundred dollars, with merchandise on hand valued at thirteen hundred dollars. The three largest creditors made claims for eleven hundred dollars, four hundred and twenty dollars, and two hundred and sixty dollars, while all the others were under one hundred dollars. The consensus was to declare me bankrupt.

"No, *please* don't do that," I pleaded. "I promise I will pay back every cent. I swear I didn't know we owed that money. I wouldn't have paid the rent if I had."

"Yeah? Just how do you expect to do that?" called out a heavy-set man of about fifty. Standing, he didn't appear much taller than the other men who were sitting down. He was the creditor to whom I owed the most.

I took a deep breath and tried to give the appearance of an experienced businesswoman.

"Well, I've discharged all the help. I've sold what was left of the produce, since it is impossible for me to leave my children to do the wholesale marketing at five o'clock each morning."

I looked at my creditors. They were staring at me as if I were some kind of freak fish drowning in an absurd situation.

"*Please,*" I begged, "I want only to make a living for my children and myself."

"Do you have any idea what it entails to merely make a living in the liquor business?" questioned one of the attorneys.

"It means staying open from eight in the morning until two, seven days a week, dealing with all types of individuals," another said.

"I know, and I don't care. I don't mind working hard!" By their expressions I knew they were not agreeing with me, so I asked if I could have my own three hundred and fifty dollars back if they insisted on closing the store. In addition to the three hundred dollars I had paid for rent, I had also paid another fifty dollars for service, bills, and incidentals.

"How much will you settle for *now*?" demanded my largest creditor. He spoke loudly and sounded angry.

"I have only eighty-five dollars," I answered. "It's been raining for the last few days, and business was bad." I started to cry as I watched the glances he gave the other men. He didn't believe me. The other men appeared bored.

Then a tall, distinguished-looking man in his thirties got up to leave and said, "Let the poor woman have the store." I heard another man say, "Let's go. We're just wasting our valuable time."

But the same impatient creditor scoffed, "It's okay for you guys, because she don't owe you much." As most of the others left, he turned to me again. "How much do you intend to pay me? Can you give me one fourth down now?"

One fourth was two hundred and seventy-five dollars. Using my fingers under the table to help me figure, I thought: Tomorrow is Wednesday, and I should take in forty dollars each day for the rest of the week. Then Saturday and Sunday should be good for sixty or seventy dollars each. I had enough groceries at home, I figured, to last until next Monday. But here that insistent man interrupted my figuring.

"Well, what are you dreaming about?"

I said, "If you will take a postdated check and promise not to deposit it until Monday——" He didn't let me finish.

"Okay," he declared, "what have I got to lose but money? But it better be in the bank on Monday!"

I agreed to pay him fifty dollars a week until he was paid in full. He said that if I wanted other merchandise from him I would have to pay cash for it.

The few others who had remained and witnessed this agreement told me they would wait for their money until I had paid him.

In the hall, waiting for the elevator, the men talked about me, not caring the slightest that I overheard.

"What gall!" said one.

"Give her back her three hundred and fifty!" said another. "All she wants to do is make a living for her children—in

the liquor business, no less! That's about all the money that old geezer will get—that is, if the check is honored."

The men were still making remarks when we walked out of the building. Each of them got into his own big car and drove off. I stood and waited for the bus. I wondered what their answers would have been if I had asked for a ride back to the store, since several took off in that direction. . . .

From that time I was referred to as the "woman with the three children."

I was grateful for each day's business during the week, but by Sunday night I still lacked thirty-dollars of being able to cover that check.

When I phoned my creditor Monday morning, he shouted, "Goddamn it! I knew this would happen! Why don't you give up? I already deposited the check for collection." I didn't know how serious the consequences could be for me, but I begged him to give me another day.

"I'll give you *two* days," he answered, "and you better see that it's covered!" I was still thanking him before I realized that he had hung up. Happy over my reprieve, I thought, He isn't such a bad fellow. He just hollers loud.

Two months passed, and I heard nothing from Lou. I hoped that he would never return. However, Lou's old associates and gambling creditors still plagued me, refusing to believe that I didn't know where he was. They told me that if I knew what was good for me I would not lie to them. I became fearful for the children. I decided that the only solution was to secure a divorce from Lou. When I was granted my interlocutory decree, I experienced again that feeling of freedom I had had before I met Lou. But my blessing had been multiplied, for now I had another gorgeous child.

All that night my thoughts wandered. I thought of how I

had promised myself to be a better wife to Lou. I had often felt that I was to blame for the failure of my first marriage. If I had been a more satisfactory wife, not always so tired from working in the store and keeping the living quarters clean and giving so much attention to my children, things might have been different. That particular burden had been lifted from me when I married Lou, only to be replaced by the burden of his gambling.

Just before daylight I got up and decided to dress, prompted by some inner force which seemed to be telling me to search for something. Only half-conscious of what I was doing, I walked to the window. As if the window sill was the altar and God the window pane, I got down on bended knee, humbly lowered my head, and prayed: "Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, king of the universe. I sincerely promise that as long as I live and there is a soul within me I will never forget to give thanks unto thee for thy goodness, kindness, and tender mercy. Dear God, who art in heaven, please spread your wings over us and give us refuge. Keep my head lifted so that my children will never be ashamed of me."

Then I heard my mother's voice saying, "If your luck is small, hit your head against the wall; it won't help at all." It was as if she were telling me that I wasn't destined to have luck in my marital life. I started to pray louder: "Dear gracious God in heaven, *you* be my soulmate. I promise, by all that is holy and dear to me, that I will seek no other. Just give me strength to make my own way, and make it possible for me to be a good provider for my children. Please, dear God in heaven, God of my papa and my mother, help me to be a good mother and a good father to my children."

Not until Shirley shoved the empty milk bottle in front of

my face, saying, "Please fill her up," was I conscious of her presence. I grabbed her and held her and continued with: "I shall always love thee, my Lord, my God, with all my heart and soul and might. Blessed be thy name, whose glorious kingdom is for ever and ever. Amen."

I hugged and kissed my baby.

33

Every day I put Shirley in the buggy and wheeled her to the front of the store, where she stayed until the girls wheeled her back again on their way home from school. I would whisper a prayer of thanks for my three wonderful possessions as I stood outside and watched them proceed on their way. My heart ached at the thought of the burden of work and responsibility that my first-born had inherited at the tender age of fourteen. On her way home Helen would buy the food necessary to complete the dinner I had partially prepared for them. She often referred to her cookbook, always trying to make something extra-special for her sisters.

She made a lemon pie and proudly brought it to me at the store to sample. Lillian Steinberg was there when she uncovered her masterpiece. Helen's pie was delicious, and Lillian and I agreed that we had never seen a lemon pie so smooth and shiny. A few days later, when I was about to starch some dresses for the girls, I asked Helen why there was so little starch left.

"Why, Mother, I used it for the lemon pie. The recipe called for cornstarch." I laughed and couldn't help thinking of Leah's first potato salad.

Eventually it became impossible for me to bring Shirley

to the store each morning. Winter was approaching, and the weather was unpredictable. Shirley, now past the age of two, refused to stay in the buggy, and I realized that the business needed the time and attention I had been giving her. I was grateful when Mrs. Fineberg, a neighbor with two healthy, chubby children of her own, offered to take care of Shirley during the day and provide suppers for the children as well.

This arrangement, which cost me eighteen dollars a week, seemed like something sent from heaven. After breakfast I took Shirley to Mrs. Fineberg's apartment, with her supply of milk for the day. What a relief it was for Helen and me to be relieved of the chore of preparing dinner. But, eventually, the children complained about having rice, potatoes, and hot dogs for almost every evening meal.

By answering a want ad I found Dolores, an eighteen-year-old girl who needed a home and who seemed able to earn money only by doing housework and taking care of children. Everyone seemed contented and happy. Dolores was a good companion for the girls and appeared to have found what she was seeking in living with us.

With my children and household being well taken care of by Dolores, I was able to devote more time to the business.

I began to realize that I had to do more than pray to be able to continue in business. My merchandise was dwindling, and having to pay cash for new merchandise didn't help any. So I sold my depleted stock, which was worth eleven hundred dollars, for six hundred, and used the money to buy liquor.

It was a lucky day for me when Rudy Eichenbaum walked into my store. He was a fine-looking young man, full of vitality. He introduced himself as a salesman for Glaser Broth-

ers Company and began to show me his full line of Yacht Club whiskey, gin, brandy, and rum. As he talked I continued pasting labels on wine bottles. These were bottles I had filled myself, to make a few extra cents. I did my own janitorial work, washed windows, and kept the store orderly, so I didn't have much time for just visiting. I told Mr. Eichenbaum I could only buy for cash and that I didn't have any money to spare.

"Look," he said, "you have a beautiful, clean-looking corner store. With the holiday business coming, it means a chance for you to make some real money. But without merchandise you are sunk. You can't sell what you don't have."

Presuming he hadn't heard me say that I had no money, I said, "Mr. Eichenbaum, I know all that," and went on pasting labels.

"You don't know nothing!" he said in a superior tone. "Why don't you leave those lousy labels alone and listen to me for a moment? Then you can kick me out if you want!"

His attitude amazed me. I figured that I had better let him finish. He'll feel like a fool, knocking himself out trying to sell me something, when I prove I haven't any money, I thought.

"I know your credit stinks," he went on. "But we are willing to take a chance on you. If you will let me fill up a good portion of your front window with our merchandise, I'll fill up your store with all it can hold of Yacht Club liquor. Then it'll look like you're really in business. It will be billed to you on consignment. Each week we will take inventory. You pay us for what you sell, and keep the profit. It's as simple as that! We are introducing this brand. It's ours exclusively. It's worth plenty to us to have a display in a store such as yours, and on Fillmore Street."

I stood there in a daze, listening to him, unable to say a word. "Well, now do you want to throw me out?" he asked.

"Oh, no, I'd never do that!"

"Well, what do you say?" he asked.

"What have I got to lose?"

"Congratulations! It's a deal."

With the shelves and windows full of merchandise my business doubled. I was told that I sold more of the Yacht Club brand than any other store—largely due to the attractive displays. Each week Rudy called to take inventory. I paid him for what I had sold, and he replenished the stock, often adding something new. It wasn't hard to figure how much *more* business I could do if I had a better quality and even larger selection of liquor. I was constantly getting calls for other popular brands. Rudy advised me to see Max Sobel, who was then manager of Goldie Liquor Company.

"Max Sobel is a prince of a guy," Rudy said. "I'm sure he will go for the same deal I gave you. He carries all the national brands, and with his merchandise in your store you'll be sitting pretty. Why, you may even get to be a real liquor merchant!"

I hired Jack Lamb, a presentable boy about eighteen, who was content with a salary of twenty dollars a week. Deliverymen had often refused to put the wine kegs on the racks, and, until I hired Jack, I had to wait until a customer came along who could do it for me. Jack also kept the store clean and was a good clerk. With him in the store I was able to visit Max Sobel's office.

The night before, I had rehearsed everything I planned to say, but, standing before Mr. Sobel, I could remember nothing. I told him the amount of business I was doing and how much it could be increased if I had a better and larger

selection of liquor. I intended to act like a businesswoman, but I found myself telling him that I had no credit, and all about the break Glaser Brothers had given me in putting in their merchandise on consignment. I found myself telling Mr. Sobel about the money I owed for my ex-husband's bills, that I had three children to support, and that if only business would keep up I would be able to pay all those bills in less than a year.

He listened without comment. When I finished, he said, "What do you think you can use, and how much of it?"

I felt like kissing him. He started to make a list of the brands for which I had had so many calls and added some I had never heard of. My only hope, as I watched him, was that I wasn't dreaming.

"This will be delivered first thing in the morning, Gussie. What you can't sell I will take back." I wondered how he knew my name was Gussie; I hadn't told him. Then I remembered! He was the one who had said, "Let the poor woman have the store," in the office of the Board of Trade. I asked him what day his man would come to take inventory, since I didn't want it to conflict with Glaser Brothers' day.

"Don't worry about that. You can take thirty days for half the amount and sixty days for the balance."

"Do you really mean it?" I asked. I'm sure he noticed the tears in my eyes, because he avoided looking at me as he said, "You are going to do well, young lady."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Sobel. With God's help, you won't regret this."

I took a window seat in the streetcar on the way home. I whispered my prayer of thanks for this wonderful break. I realized that Thanksgiving Day was the following week. I would be able to say, "Yes, how many?" to my customers, in-

stead of "I'm sorry, I'm all out of that." There had been times when I almost hated to sell what I did have, because it meant leaving a hole on the shelf, with no stock in reserve to replace it. I felt like kicking myself for acting like such a dope in front of Mr. Sobel. Why did I have to tell him all my troubles? Wasn't it enough that I was already marked as the "woman with the three children?" I wanted so much to be considered an intelligent businesswoman.

Business increased from forty dollars a day to one hundred and forty. Instead of sixty or seventy dollar week ends, I topped two hundred dollars. Now all the suppliers wanted to extend me credit. How strange most people are! When you don't need them, they want to help you. But when you really need help, you have difficulty getting it.

Only what Max Sobel and Glaser Brothers didn't carry did I buy from other concerns. When Mr. Sobel was made manager of Haas Brothers, I did my buying there. Each time he went with a larger concern, I bought my liquor from his firm. Then, when he organized his own Max Sobel Wholesale Liquor Company, I was his steady customer.

Manuel, who worked for a wholesale liquor concern, tried constantly to sell me the same brands that Max handled. Repeatedly I turned him down, regardless of the attractive inducements he offered. Then one day Manuel announced that he was working for Max. From that day on I became his best customer.

Manuel, who was a bachelor, claimed to have elderly parents dependent upon his support. He asked me if I could give him a job on Saturdays. I paid him eight dollars each Saturday, and he had the opportunity of pushing the brands on which he received the highest commission.

The business was doing well, and Manuel knew it. He

said that he preferred working in the store to calling on the trade, claiming that work as an outside salesman made him feel like a beggar. Manuel was about five years younger than I. He said that he would consider marrying me, even though I had three children, for the sake of becoming a proprietor of my prospering liquor store. I had no dates, nor did I have the desire to date him or any other man. I tried to make him understand that, even though I had a good business, I was no bargain for him. I was older, I had my three little girls, and no other person could mean anything to me until my girls were happily married.

More than once he told me that the other salesmen kidded him about not being able to "land me." At first I paid little attention to his remarks, but when he kept repeating them, it irritated me. So I informed him that I had no further need for his services in the store.

One day a salesman who did not work for Max repeated a remark of Manuel's which distressed me. He hadn't told the other salesmen that he was getting paid to work in the store. When they kidded Manuel, saying that they thought by this time he would be married to Gussie, and asked if I had given him the gate, he replied, "Why should I buy a cow when milk is cheap? If I hang around, I have to satisfy her too much!"

I had heard similar talk about other women. Maybe they didn't care—but I did! I had too much at stake to allow anyone to speak in such a way about the mother of my girls, even in jest. God had provided me with everything I prayed for, but there was one thing I had to provide for myself: a good moral reputation. To do this for myself I needed neither an education nor great intelligence. I felt that I had to take some action about this story that was going around before it hurt and embarrassed me more.

I said to my salesman-friend, "If I phone Max Sobel, would you be willing to tell him what you told me?"

"If I didn't think so much of you, Gussie, I wouldn't have told it to you at all. I'm willing to verify it in case Manuel denies it."

I phoned Max and asked him if he would have Manuel in his office at a time when I could be there, too. I told him I would explain everything to him first. Max had never refused me before, nor did he this time.

The salesman and I went to Max's office. When Max heard the story, he told the salesman to stay in an adjoining office, that he would be called in the event that he was needed. Then Max summoned Manuel into his office. Manuel, having no idea anything was wrong, addressed me cordially. Max told me to tell my story. I did, without mentioning anyone else's name. Manuel became white as a sheet. "I swear on the life of my parents it isn't true!" he said. "Whoever told you that story is jealous because I get most of your business." Max walked over and opened the door to the adjoining office. When Manuel saw the other salesman, he started to run out.

But, calling upon all the strength God had given me, I grabbed him. If he hadn't sworn on the life of his parents, I would have been satisfied to use my hands alone as weapons. The fact that he had done so enraged me even more. With one hand on his tie and the other on his vest, I brought my knee up—hard. The blow doubled him up, and then the buttons from his vest scattered on the floor. He stumbled to the outside office where several other salesmen were standing. I never knew if they were aware of the reason for Manuel's hasty and embarrassing departure, but that night, when Manuel came back to the office, he was fired.

Not only was I labeled the "woman with the three children," but often the word "dense" was used in references to me. I'm told that people still laugh at the stories recounted about me.

A wine salesman told me that I was losing money by not stocking his fine grade of dry wines. I said, "That's funny, I thought all wine came in liquid form!" Then there was the time when I ordered gin and was told that I would be wise to stock some of the sloe gin. "What's the difference—is it in the pouring?" I asked. In a mocking answer, the salesman answered, "Yes—and the fast gin you pour fast!"

Then there was the time when I changed the window display, putting up newly painted signs and price tickets. When I went outside to inspect my work, I noticed that I had placed a sign upside down. I was about to change it when I thought: What's the difference? Who is going to notice it? Some time later a couple whom I had not seen since I had given up selling produce came into the store. They told me that my sign was upside down. I pretended I hadn't known and thanked them for telling me. We had a short conversation, and before they left they made a fair-sized purchase and apologized for not trading with me sooner.

Other people came in to tell me about the sign—and became customers. About a week later the first couple returned to make another purchase. I still hadn't changed that sign. Feigning innocence, I told them that I had forgotten about it. When they were leaving, I heard the woman say, "She isn't very smart. I feel sorry for her, trying to run a business with three children."

Nevertheless, my first holiday business surpassed my highest expectations. I now employed two clerks. The second one, Joe Morris, besides being a terrific salesman, also painted

all my signs and window banners. I paid him twenty-five dollars a week. He acquired his liquor education from the labels on the bottles. When a label stated that 5 per cent of a certain brand was eight-year-old whiskey and the balance spirits, he would tell a customer, "This bottle contains eight-year-old whiskey!"

The day before Christmas we took in $475, and on Christmas Day our receipts exceeded five hundred dollars, partly because of the other stores' being closed. The first week in January I figured the total amount of money I owed for past-due bills and compared it to my bank balance. Deciding on the total amount which I could pay, I paid each creditor the same percentage on his bill. Of course, if I had known better, I would have paid the small bills in full first, instead of having them around for many months reading "payment on account."

My first financial statement read as follows:

JANUARY 1936

Merchandise on hand	$3200
Cash in bank	150
Cash in register	50
Accounts payable	$2500

The salesmen who had passed me by before were now trying persistently to sell me their liquor. I was gaining confidence in my ability, winning both the respect of my creditors and the good will of my customers. I was losing my fear of speaking up when I felt that I was right.

A salesman with a big cigar in his mouth waited one day for me to finish with a customer, a young Negro fellow who

bought from me regularly. I had recommended that he buy a better liquor at a lower price. When he was convinced that I was sincere, he patted my hand to show his appreciation. Most of my customers enjoyed a bit of kidding, and I said, "Well, Mr. Jones, that will teach you to listen to me." He laughed, took his purchase, and left.

The salesman, chewing on his cigar and with the spittle running out of the side of his mouth, said, in a sympathetic tone, "Go wash your hands."

I couldn't understand what he was trying to say. I said, "I didn't hear you. Would you mind taking the cigar out of your mouth while you talk?"

"Go wash your hands. I'll wait," he said. The cigar was out of his mouth, and I heard him clearly, but I came no nearer to understanding his remark.

"What do you mean, you'll wait until I wash my hands?" I looked at my hands, which were certainly not immaculate after many hours of work. "Don't you think you can talk to me even if my hands are not so clean?"

"I didn't mean that," he replied apologetically. "But how can you stand to have that black nigger touch your hands?"

"I didn't see anything wrong with Mr. Jones's hands—any more than with *your* hands! His mother suffered just as much in giving birth to him as your mother did for you. He didn't ask to have dark skin any more than you asked to be so short. Does anyone know what color God is? Besides, I make a living from him and not from you, and he wasn't chewing on a cigar, with the spit running down his face!"

The salesman pulled himself up to his full height, shoved the cigar back into his mouth, muttered something I couldn't understand, and hurried out of the store.

Eighty per cent of my trade was with the Negroes, for

which I was very grateful. They seldom complained about the prices, and they never told me that they could buy the same liquor cheaper somewhere else, as many of my white customers did. Neither did they try to chisel me down on prices. Frequently, however, they were short of cash and would ask for credit. I never extended credit to anyone, because I realized that I would lose a great deal of trade from such a policy.

When a steady customer insisted on credit, I would give him a bottle, saying it was "on the house." If he came back later to pay for it, I would give him another bottle for the amount he owed. I felt that if I gave them credit they would, later when they had money, buy their next bottle from another store rather than use the money to pay me. I reasoned that they would be embarrassed to return because they couldn't pay for what they already owed. On the other hand, if they were steady customers, I felt they were entitled to a free bottle once in a while. I built up the kind of good will that couldn't be bought for any amount of money. No one, not even I, could have imagined the dividends this policy paid me.

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For the next year things went smoothly. My troubles were minimal, the business was doing well, and I was paying my bills on time.

The following January my financial statement read:

Merchandise on hand	$6800
Cash in bank	250
Cash on hand	100
Accounts payable	$3150

My household and my children were well taken care of. Helen and Betty Rose were kept active and interested by taking horseback-riding and ice-skating lessons. They were always seen together, wearing identical clothes. I kept a portable sewing-machine in the rear of the store and made clothes for them in my spare moments. I made skating costumes for each of them and for a few of their close friends in the skating class. I hoped that these things would make up for some of the loneliness they experienced in not having their mother home.

I realized that a liquor store was not the place for my children to visit me. However, I insisted they always stop by for a few minutes each day on their way home from school. On Dolores' day off I would take my girls out to dinner. Once, on the way to the restaurant, we passed a toyshop displaying big Shirley Temple dolls and buggies. All three girls stopped to admire the display. Betty Rose went into the store and brought out a large Shirley Temple doll sitting in a doll buggy. She showed it to Shirley, saying, "You like that?" and nodded her head so that Shirley would imitate her. Shirley was about to wheel the buggy down the street when I stopped her and took the doll and buggy back into the store. Betty Rose and Helen begged me to buy the toys for their younger sister. I said to Shirley, "Mother doesn't have that much money, honey. You don't care to have it, do you?" She pointed to her sisters and said, "Them want me to have it." Apparently they did, because they continued to plead with me, saying that they would give up shows and other things.

I had no intention of spending thirty dollars for something we could do without. Foolishly I said, "Let's eat first, and if I have enough money left, I may buy it." I thought

that if we took a different route home they would forget the whole thing.

In the restaurant they refused to order food, only a glass of milk. Finally I had to promise to buy the doll and buggy before they would order dinner, and even then Helen insisted on ordering the lowest-priced item on the menu. Shirley got the Shirley Temple doll and buggy; I didn't want them to remember their mother ever breaking a promise.

Every Sunday Helen and Betty Rose attended Sunday school, and on one such occasion Helen said, "Hurry, Betty, we'll be late for temple."

At that Shirley handed Helen her new doll, saying, "You don't have to go any more, Helen. Here, you can use *my* temple!"

I thought my world was tumbling down when I learned that Martell's, the largest chain retail liquor company in San Francisco, was opening a large modern store across the street from me. I saw my business threatened and all my hopes and secret dreams doomed to failure. My heart ached when I saw my customers, packages in hand, coming out of my competitor's store. But how could I blame them? Martell's ran full-page advertisements. They bought in large quantities and sold at prices lower than I could afford to meet.

No alterations had been made when my store was converted from a produce market into a liquor store. The original iron gate, which we unlocked and carried to the rear when we opened for business each day, was still on the front door. The floor was of wood, bare, oiled to look clean. Martell's modern store had beautiful show windows. The exterior was painted orange and black, and a large neon sign added to its attractiveness. The modern interior had fluorescent lighting, and battleship linoleum covering the floor.

By comparison, my store looked old and dilapidated.

I knew something had to be done. Most of my decisions were made when I went to bed, regardless of the hour. So, late one night (or early one morning) I sought the answer for this problem. No obvious solution presented itself. Of course, if I sold the store, I could open another one at some location where Martell's wouldn't be likely to do the same. In fact, I could open a dress shop or baby shop.

Then I wouldn't have to keep the store open from 8:00 A.M. to 2:00 A.M. seven days a week. Yet, if I sold the store, I would have to pay all the bills in full, which posed the question: What would I have left with which to open a new business?

Then, as real as if God were talking to me, a voice inside me said, "Where are you going? What are you running away from?" I was actually receiving a message! "If you like Martell's store, remodel yours the same way!" continued the voice.

"That's right!" I said aloud. This disturbed Helen, and, half-awake, she said, "What's right, Mother? Why don't you go to sleep?" Now, contented with my decision, I did sleep.

Mr. Henry Cohn, a dealer on McAllister Street, remodeled the front of my store and installed new counters and shelves —all nearly identical to Martell's. He allowed me ten months to pay, at the rate of sixty dollars a month. Mr. Alexander McCabe, owner of the Apex Electric Company, installed fluorescent lighting, a neon sign, and neon tubing, all copied from Martell's style. He, too, gave me an extended period in which to pay for his work. I decided to give the store a new name. Across the front in big orange and black letters was: "Post & Fillmore Cut-Rate Wines & Liquors."

Martell's, in order to make their establishments easily

identifiable to their customers, used the same style and colors for all the stores in their chain. So when Martell's advertised their new location of Fillmore Street near Post, people mistook my store for Martell's. Friday papers carried full-page Martell's specials and closeouts. My windows also boasted of the same sales and closeouts, thanks to the help of my faithful benefactor, Max Sobel.

Even though I was regarded as "small fry," my competition posing no threat to their business, all this enraged Martell's. In protest they carried a full-page advertisement:

MARTELL'S GOES MAD

. . . our unscrupulous competitors copied the style of our stores. Prices slashed, etc.

Martell's always pasted their advertisements on their store windows, aware now that people were mistaking my store for theirs. But on that particular Saturday our windows carried a streamer picturing a cross-eyed man pulling his hair and saying:

OUR COMPETITOR GOES MAD!

No wonder! Look at our low prices!

I had no idea there would be so much publicity from this little episode. For many months thereafter out-of-town liquor-dealers and salesmen who visited San Francisco were eager to offer me their best deals.

In the eyes of the industry I was now considered a sharp businesswoman. My business increased greatly, and I acquired prestige as a quantity buyer. I had to work with a

very low margin of profit, as every merchant tried cutting prices lower than the next one. However, in a short time the fair-trade law went into effect, compelling everyone to operate on a more equal basis.

When the National Distillers Company came out with their popular brand of one-year-old Brigadier Whiskey, it was packaged exactly like their five-month-old brand. They still had seven hundred cases of the latter on hand, and the main office instructed the San Francisco office to unload it in one spot, with a merchant able to pay cash and dispose of the lot before the one-year-old whiskey was put on the market. The only way to tell the difference between the two was by closely examining the label on the back of the bottle. The amazing feature of the deal was the price—nine dollars for a twenty-four-pint case on this closeout deal. Because he was in the habit of letting me be first to know what was going on, the National Distillers' representative called on me and told me the story.

"What a break it would be for me if I could get only twenty-five cases," I said. "I can pay cash for that much."

"I sure wish I could let you have a portion of it," the salesman said. "But orders are to dump the entire amount in one place."

"Did you offer it to anyone else yet?" I asked.

"No, Gussie," the man replied. "What do you have in mind?"

"If you make this offer to Weinstein, I believe he will take it and then let me have twenty-five cases," I said. "I'll tell you why, but it isn't for publication."

I told the salesman that about six months ago two men had tried to sell me some fifteen-year-old whiskey at a ridiculously low price. They said I could have any amount up to

twenty cases, but that I had to pay cash—no checks. They didn't have to say any more: I knew the merchandise wasn't "kosher." I told them that I was sorry but I had only a couple of dollars in the cash drawer. When they walked out, I went to the window, pretending to fix the display, and copied the license number of their car. Immediately I phoned Sante Quatrin, the attorney for the liquor industry, and gave him all the details. I asked him not to mention my name or where he got the information, for fear of the consequences if the men learned who had turned them in. A month later Isador Weinstein came into my store.

"I'm indebted to you, Gussie," he said. "The two men you phoned Mr. Quatrin about worked in my warehouse."

It did my heart good to know I had been of service to him. I had never forgotten how kind he was to me that day in his office, just before I left his store. He told me he had only recently learned I was in the liquor business and that he was glad I was doing well. He said he couldn't see how I could take it, though. "It's a difficult enough business for a man, let alone a woman.

"By the way," he said, "how are you being treated merchandise-wise? Can I help you in any way?" When I told him of some of the deals I was getting, he said, "You don't need anyone. You're doing wonderfully. I always knew you had a *Yidisher kop* [Jewish brains]." I was flattered to hear this from a self-made man like Mr. Weinstein. It made me think that maybe I wouldn't always be a nobody. Before he left he said, "If I can ever help you, whether in a business or personal way, please let me know. It will be my pleasure."

The National Distillers' man listened carefully and then said, "Gussie, I do believe you have something there. I know Mr. Weinstein. He's a pretty good egg."

While he continued to talk I was thinking and figuring. How much would I make on twenty-five cases? I could use this bargain to my advantage in two ways: I could sell at the regular price and make a tremendous profit; or I could sell it at a more reasonable markup and build up my reputation for selling more cheaply than others. If I could only afford a hundred cases! I wondered if I would ever be able to buy in such a large quanity. I wondered how much seven hundred cases would come to. A person would have to be a millionaire to make such a purchase for cash. But Mr. Weinstein was able, and I was certain he would let me have twenty-five cases. Maybe he would even let me have more when I had sold my twenty-five cases. Then I realized that, once he advertised a bargain such as this, there would be no more to let me have. I desperately wanted a share in this bargain deal, so before the salesman left I made him promise that he would not tell anyone else about the deal until I phoned him the next morning.

"What do you mean?" he said, laughing. "Are you trying to reach for the moon, Gussie? By God, you may even do that! Nobody knows any more *what* you're liable to come up with."

I could hardly wait until 2:00 A.M., when I could close the store and be able to think undisturbed. Then I thought: Will I ever stop making a food of myself? It was ridiculous of me to impose that promise on this salesman. When I finally got home, the only thing I could think of was Papa's advice: "If you want a thing bad enough, pray hard enough, and, if it's for your good, God will grant it you." How could this be anything but for my good, I reasoned, but how should I start praying? I felt that twenty-five cases were in the bag. But a hundred cases—what a break that would be! I imagined all the money that Weinstein would make from seven hun-

dred cases. But, I had to admit, he had the money—and money made money. Besides, I realized, he had a warehouse, while I didn't have room for seven hundred cases in the back of my store.

Then, like a ton of bricks, the idea hit me: *That's* what I will say! I will say I can handle the whole deal, but I don't have room for the seven hundred cases at one time. I will say I can use twenty-five cases a week and that I will pay cash on delivery. I fell asleep praying, "Please, dear God, let them give me this deal."

The moment I opened the store the next morning I called the sales representative and made my request for the deal on my terms.

"Well, Gussie," he said, "this sounds great, but Bert Granlee, our sales manager, is the one who has the final say."

"How early does he get to the office?" I asked.

"You mean you want to see him?" he asked skeptically. This didn't help my self-confidence, but I answered, "Yes, I would like to."

From the time I left the house until I was in Mr. Granlee's office I rehearsed my plea, changing my approach many times. When I walked into his office, Mr. Granlee said, "Have a seat, Gussie." I was grateful when he then said, "You heard about the Brigadier closeout," because I had already forgotten what approach I had decided to use.

"Yes, Mr. Granlee, that's why I am here. If it is at all possible for you to let me have it, it would be the biggest break I've ever gotten."

He showed me the telegram from the Illinois headquarters, which read: "Offer balance of Brigadier immediately to avoid conflict with new one-year-old being shipped. Cash transaction to one outlet, $9 per case."

"You see, Gussie," he explained, "the object is to find one

big outlet who would advertise in the papers and get rid of it before our company's advertisements break—to the effect that Brigadier is now one year old."

"I will advertise it in the newspapers. I will handle it any way you tell me to," I pleaded. "I can pay for one hundred cases a month. If you deliver twenty-five cases each week, I will pay for each delivery."

"I've got to hand it to you, Gussie. You are doing a wonderful job there. You keep a nice clean store, and you are always on the job, working hard."

"I have to, Mr. Granlee. I have three children to support." I bit my tongue. Here I go again, acting like a dope, after promising myself that I wouldn't bring my children into the picture after what happened one day at the store. On this particular occasion I had refused to give a certain salesman an order because his prices were too high.

Betty Rose was there at the time, taking it all in, and she said, "Mother, why don't you tell him about how you have three children?" The salesman laughed, and I felt like a fool.

"If anyone deserves it, it's you, Gussie. But I must show a bona fide order to prove it is sold."

"If I pay you for twenty-five cases and put a small amount on the balance, could I have it?" I pleaded.

"Now, that's an idea," he said. "How much can you put down on each case?"

"On each case?" He might as well have suggested I jump off the bridge. "I thought one or two hundred dollars on the whole thing."

"Well, let's see," said Mr. Granlee, picking up a pencil and doing some figuring. "A hundred and seventy-five dollars would be twenty-five cents a case."

I didn't want him to figure any further, so I said, "Oh,

wonderful, Mr. Granlee. Thank you a hundred million times!"

As I was leaving, he said, "Good luck, Gussie. Remember, this is all between you and me, and it's a cash transaction."

It was like being baptized as a real businesswoman when I received my first twenty-five cases of the Brigadier whiskey. As I had promised Mr. Granlee, I placed my first newspaper advertisement. This marked the beginning of my business career. In the *Daily News* I ran this ad:

CLOSEOUT SALE, BRIGADIER WHISKEY
69¢ a full pint
National Distillers
(Makers of Old Granddad & Old Taylor whiskeys)
Limit: 2 to a customer
We carry all popular brands
WE ARE NEVER *KNOWINGLY* UNDERSOLD

Of course, all my special customers could buy as much as they wanted—and *all* my customers were special. Three of the wholesale salesmen offered their services in the store for that first big Saturday sale. We took in nine hundred and fifty dollars.

A rumor was spread that a rich relative back East had left me a large sum of money, enabling me to make this "huge cash purchase."

Regardless of how good the deals I was now offered seemed, I never came to a decision at the times when they were presented to me. Somehow I never had confidence in myself until I had had the opportunity to consult God and pray for assurance that I was doing the right thing. So I would always say, "I'll have to sleep on it first." I never got

excited when a salesman declared that another merchant was interested in his offer and that I might lose a good deal: I felt that God was telling me not to buy it. When I was the least bit skeptical, I phoned my permanent benefactor, Max Sobel. God bless him, never once was he wrong in his advice.

Mr. Harry Chemnick was responsible for my next big break. Calvert's Distillers decided to bottle full quarts in place of fifths. Harry came to me first with 250 cases of Calvert's Special in fifths, at $12.00 a case. Any retailer would have been more than delighted to have the opportunity to make this purchase. Only when I was able to make special purchases like this did I advertise in the daily papers. My advertisement on this offer read:

Calvert's Special Whiskey
$1.59 large bottle

Calvert's Special in quarts, in the identical style of package and selling for two dollars and fifty cents, was being extensively advertised by the company. My fifths were easily mistaken for quarts. My reputation for having the lowest prices in town increased.

I soon realized that, no matter how good business was, you had to keep trying new inducements to maintain your trade and to acquire new customers. One of my customers, who was having a party, was making his third trip to the store for purchases when he remarked, "I wish I could replace our ice cubes as easily as we replace the liquor." Within a week I installed an ice-maker which supplied twenty-eight trays of ice cubes each half-hour and put a large sign advertising "Free Ice."

My competitors complained to the state Board of Equalization. A hearing was held, and I was found guilty of inducing the public to buy liquor by offering something free and ordered to remove all signs stating that we gave free ice cubes. I was further warned that I would be fined if I ever displayed them again. However, I didn't need the signs any more: by that time steady customers all knew they could get all the ice cubes they wanted just for the asking, the new customers I told. Few people in the neighborhood owned refrigerators, and others from different parts of the city found it convenient to come into my store to pick up a bag of ice cubes.

That was not the last time my competitors complained about me. One Friday I posted a large banner on each of the windows, reading:

Buy Now at Bargain Prices
GOING OUT [in very large letters]
after business [in very fine print]

On Tuesday morning two official-looking, well-dressed men came into the store and said, "That's a subterfuge you have outside." I hurried outside and looked up and down the street. I didn't know what they meant, but I thought I might find an escaped convict. I didn't see anyone outside, so I turned to the men and asked, "Where is he?"

"We are from the Better Business Bureau," one said, handing me a card. "We have had a number of complaints about your sign. If you don't want any legal trouble, just rip it off now."

I didn't argue. I took the sign down while they watched.

The same two men came back on a Monday about six

months later. This time it was a complaint about a sign reading:

Save Money While They Last
SELLING OUT [very large letters]
all off-brands [very small letters]

I said, "I'll take my 'subterfuge' down, but I wish I knew a better way to get new customers coming in without me telling them I'm going out."

One day Herschel Easley, a young man of about twenty-five, drove up to the store in a little secondhand truck. He said, "I just bought the exclusive franchise for this mixture. Would you please buy at least half a case?" Eager for me to stock his product, he told me that he had a family to support and hoped that this venture would make him a good living. He insisted that I sample his mixture. Not being a connoisseur, I said, "It tastes like ginger ale."

"Oh, no! This tastes much better."

"Okay," I said, "give me a case of your 'Seven-up.' "

"Thank you very much! I sure appreciate this. Nobody on Fillmore Street would give me an order because it's new."

I figured I was only spending a couple of dollars, and anyway, I was helping someone else who had a family to support. Besides, I wouldn't be losing anything—I could always drink it myself.

"Just for being so nice," the young man said, "I will give you two free bottles. Let your customers sample it, and that way we will both sell more. I'll call on you next week and see if you need more." When he was about to leave, he pleaded, "Please try to push Seven-up."

That really did it. I set up a wooden case, covered with a paper tablecloth, and placed a few paper cups, a bucket of

7-Up ice cubes, and the two bottles of 7-Up on it, with a sign: "Try Before You Buy."

The following day I phoned in for two more cases. You would have thought I'd given him a thousand-dollar order, from the joy he displayed when he delivered them. I paid him and told him I would take five additional cases.

"Thanks very much," he said. "I'll be back in a couple of hours. I have to pick up some empty bottles and go home and bottle your order." He was back in less than an hour. I think that he wanted to deliver the rest of the order before I had a chance to change my mind.

I was just starting to do my advertising by means of a loud speaker mounted on an old truck I had purchased, on which I had built the form of a wine barrel over its body. The truck was driven up and down Fillmore Street, advertising my different specials. When I paid young Easley for the five cases, I said, "I'd like to help you. I'll announce from my truck: 'Something new. A bottle of 7-Up with each purchase!' " He reacted as if he had hit the jackpot.

"I'll give you five cases free," he stated. "I'll be back. I have to buy more empty bottles." This made my idea even better. I had figured it was worth my while to gain a customer at the cost of a dime—now it wasn't going to cost me anything!

It was some time before my competitors had me served with a restraining order, stopping the 7-Up promotion. They complained that the truck with its loud speaker was a "nuisance." The truck-driver, driving slowly down the street, would announce, "Follow me to the Post and Fillmore Liquor Store and get your bottle of Seven-up with every purchase." Some people, not knowing what 7-Up was, assumed that it was a brand of liquor.

The official told me that this was the last time I could get by without a penalty for advertising something free. I explained that I had instructed the announcer on my truck not to use the word "free."

"What do you call it when you say a customer gets a bottle with a purchase? Isn't that the same as saying 'free'?" I didn't answer, but, with my eyes cast down, I could still see the smile he was attempting to hold back.

"Aw, go ahead home," he said. "Mind you! I don't want to see you here again."

It wasn't long before all the liquor stores on Fillmore carried Easely's new mixture, 7-Up.

In 1938, when my lease expired, I was notified that my rent would be increased to four hundred and fifty dollars a month. I took advantage of the opportunity to lease an available corner store one block away. It was less than half the size, and so was the rent, but it had a balcony which more than made up for the space I was losing.

For the four months before my lease expired I kept both stores open, directing all my customers to my new location. Since all other stores had signs reading: "Cut Rate," I named my smaller store:

Below-Cut-Rate Liquor
"The biggest little store in town"

San Francisco news-columnist Herb Caen wrote an article to the effect that on the corner of Fillmore and O'Farrell Streets there was now a "Below-Cut-Rate Liquor" store to top the cut-rate ones."

Now that I was being referred to as a "shrewd" business-

woman, I was told many salesmen took advantage of this reputation by showing my order to smaller merchants, who would then buy the merchandise more readily because I had bought some. This was even practiced on some of the larger merchants, too, to increase their order. They would be shown my order with an additional figure added to the amount of cases I had actually ordered. Of course, the salesmen would erase this alteration before they turned in my order.

It was the dealers and salesmen who were largely responsible for this reputation, plus the increase in business. I was convinced that some of the kindest and most considerate business people were in the liquor industry. I took every available opportunity to show my appreciation. I never refused, when asked, to stock a new brand being introduced on the market. By putting their new item in my window display, I was the one who benefited the most. I had coined a slogan: "You can get it at 'Below,' when the other merchants say, 'No.'"

The Schenley Distributors, for whom "Major" Bowes worked, gave each of their men two cases of rabbit's-foot key rings, with instructions to leave twenty-five key rings at each liquor store. Mr. Bowes left me a full case. This was because of something that had happened on one of his calls, when he asked me to give him an order for the following week. He said that his car was being attached for an unpaid repair bill of thirty-five dollars, which he couldn't meet until the next week. This would make it difficult for him to call on the trade.

I handed him this amount. "Honest, Gussie, I didn't mean to suggest that you lend it to me. I would never have the nerve to ask anyone!" he cried.

"But you didn't ask, and I'm not just anyone," I replied.

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Working seven days and seven nights a week on Fillmore Street, until 2:00 A.M., not only brought me success in business and personal security, but it provided me with an education about people in many walks of life.

One day a young lady, who was a fairly good customer, seemed very discouraged. She said, "I don't know what's wrong with me. I can't make any headway. The harder I work, the less I have to show for it."

I said, "Don't get discouraged. You just have to stick to it. You always have to work harder to get started, but when things start to take hold, it comes easier. Sometimes you have to work and get hardly any returns at all. I know *I* did, that first year."

"The first year!" she exclaimed, "Hell, I've been at it for five years. Why, the first two years I worked for practically nothing, until I got wise to how much the other girls were charging."

I was rolling down the awning one evening when two men got under it to get out of the rain. Taking turns, they drank liquor from the bottle I had just sold them. One said, "Let's go round the corner to the whorehouse."

"No, I don't want to go," the other man replied.

"Why not? What else is there to do? It's starting to rain—nobody's on the street. I had a swell time there last week."

The first man said, "What in blazes do I want to go there

for? I got plenty of it at home!"

Agreeably his buddy answered, "Well, what are we waiting for? Let's go to your house!"

Josephine, the name by which she was known to everyone, was a customer who always bought large orders of liquor. One day she came in and said, "You may not know it, but I'm a pretty good customer of yours. I'm always sending in my girls for liquor. You know how it is: I can't leave the house."

Automatically I answered, "Oh, yes. Thanks a million. I sure appreciate it." Then a thought struck me, and I became frightened. I was breaking the law! I realized that this woman couldn't possibly have girls over twenty-one years of age: she didn't look more than thirty-five herself. Yet she had said that I was selling her girls liquor.

Then she asked, "Do you know some good girls who want to work?" Her question wasn't out of line, because I had found jobs for a number of my customers simply because other customers had told me that they were looking for help of various kinds.

"I know quite a few good workers," I replied, "but most of them don't like to cook."

Josephine let out an angry yell and said, "I didn't think they came that dumb any more!"

Believing that it is better to give than receive has always paid off in the satisfaction that I have received. But with "Sugar Pie" it paid off in cash—and with plenty of interest!

"Sugar Pie" was the Negro shoeshine man on the corner of Geary and Fillmore streets. I knew his wife and children from the days when we had the produce market. They were poor, but good, happy folks. They always shopped late followed by a number of their children and wanted me to

wait on them. Because I liked them, and knew Sugar Pie didn't earn enough for their eight children, I would see that they got an extra bag of fruit and vegetables, and each child would receive some fruit, and would say, "Thank you, kind lady."

Every week I brought a bag of my daughters' shoes to the store for Sugar Pie to shine. He always called for them and brought them back when he had finished. Sometimes there would be fewer shoes to be shined than other times, but I would always add a quarter for a tip. One day I had only two pairs shined, and he told me the charge was twenty cents. I knew his sign read: "Shine, 15¢," so I told him he had made a mistake in figuring.

"Oh, no, I didn't make a mistake, Mrs. Below. [Some people took it for granted that this was my name, because of the store—'Below-Cut-Rate.'] You always tip well, so I give you a special price."

One day Sugar Pie handed me a sheet of paper. It read: "Please contribute what you wish toward my wife's burial. Thank you in advance. Sugar Pie and family."

He was calling on every store up and down Fillmore Street. I saw the list of names and their contributions, usually, fifty cents or a dollar. I handed him a five-dollar bill.

"How much change do you want?" he asked.

I replied, "Keep it, Sugar Pie, and God bless your family."

My two-hundred-dollar advertisements in the papers never brought me greater returns than those for which Sugar Pie was responsible. Many people came into the store and told me that he had sent them to me. Others he brought in personally, for fear they would go somewhere else. He proved to me that the best results don't always come from money spent for advertising.

The strangest incident happened one day between two young schoolgirls who met each other in front of the store. It was vacation time, and, after discussing school interests, one girl said, "I'm going steady now. How about you? Anything new in your love life?"

Putting her hands over her enlarged stomach, the other girl answered, "Who do you think I'm carrying this for—my mother?"

My girls and I were having breakfast one Sunday morning in the restaurant across the street from my store. At the far end of the counter a man and a woman were arguing. The man said, "Why don't you shut up and act like a lady, so people will like you?" Pointing to me, he said, "You see that woman over there? She's been on the street three years that I know of, and everyone patronizes her, 'cause she acts like a lady! Why can't you be like her?"

"Well," replied the woman, her nose up in the air, "you wait and see if they don't like me after I've been on the street three years!"

Then came the time when the good Lord was truly watching over me. A man whom everyone called Holyman was a steady customer of mine. One day he came in and handed me a paper bag that looked as if it contained groceries. "Can I leave this here until this evening?" he asked. "I'll pick it up on my way home."

It was after 2:00 A.M., and I had closed the store and was getting ready to mop the floor when Holyman rapped on the door. I never sold liquor after hours, not even to my friends or best customers. I had forgotten about his package, which was under the counter, and, without opening the door, I shouted, "You're too late, Holyman. It's after two. Can't sell you anything now."

"Open—bag!" he hollered back. I turned away from him, and went back to my work. I figured that he would get tired of calling and leave. But he seemed determined to stay. I wanted him to leave before I had to open the door to go home.

I shouted, "Please go away. I'd get arrested if I sold you anything. It's after hours."

"I don't want any liquor," Holyman shouted. "I want the package I left with you." Of course, I remembered then, got the paper bag, and gave it to him.

The following day the newspaper carried the story of how Holyman had been picked up carrying a paper bag containing thousands of dollars' worth of dope. I thanked God fervently for watching over me and seeing to it that Holyman hadn't been arrested while I was handing him the bag of dope.

It didn't concern me too much to hear about all the holdups around town, nor that most of them were staged in our neighborhood. Somehow I thought that such things only happened to other people. But I found that I was no exception: within two months I was held up three times.

The first time didn't seem real. I was standing near the register when a young boy pointed what looked like a small pistol at me and said, "This is a stickup!" Mechanically I opened the register and handed him the cash that was in it. As soon as he left, I walked outside. Standing in the doorway was another man, well-dressed and wearing white shoes.

In an excited voice I shouted, "That guy just held me up!" I pointed to the car in which the holdup man was speeding away. A passer-by heard me and wrote down the license number of the car, which I later turned over to the police.

The next day I was taken to the city jail to identify the

man they had picked up through the license number. I was asked if the man they held was the one who had robbed me. When I faced him, I was surprised to learn that they had picked up his accomplice, the man with the white shoes who had answered to my shouting, "I'll catch him for you."

Two days later a little old man who came in from time to time to buy an occasional pint of wine stuck a gun in my back as I was filling the shelves. "Turn around," he commanded, and when I did, the gun was pointing at my face. It looked as big as a cannon. The perspiration broke out over my whole body. I opened the cash drawer and handed him thirty-five dollars, mostly in silver.

"Don't move for half an hour," said the old man and ran out. I hesitated, then ran outside to see him running down the street. As frightened as I was, I hollered, "That man held me up!" A few other people saw the man running, but somehow he seemed to vanish into thin air. He was never captured.

After that I went around as if I were in a trance. I was scared stiff. I was afraid of almost everyone who came into the store, especially if they had their hands in their pockets. It even became difficult for me to talk to people. I finally regained confidence after I had a burglar-alarm system installed, with signal buttons placed at various spots in the store.

My third assailants were Kenneth Brown, thirty-three, and his brother, Dwight, twenty-one. They came in long past midnight and ordered me to empty the cash register and put the money on the counter. While the younger brother scooped the money into a bag, the older one leaned over the counter and held a pistol close to my chest.

"Now lay down," he ordered. "And keep that stinking face

of yours down, or I'll blow your brains out."

I managed to push the alarm button and heard them running out. I got up, ran outside, and, pointing at the fleeing men yelled, "Those guys held me up!" Almost immediately Officers Jack Sweeney and Frank Fitzpatrick captured Kenneth Brown and brought him back to the store for me to identify. I had been sure I would never forget their faces, but when the captured man said to me, "Lady, please tell them they are making a mistake. They got the wrong man," I was doubtful.

He looked like the right man, but he didn't talk like him, and somehow his face looked thinner and much older. I told the officers that there had been more than a hundred dimes in the money taken, plus a bottle of whiskey which had been grabbed on their way out. The officers searched the man, found the dimes, the whiskey, and the man's false teeth. Officer Sweeney said, "Put your teeth back in your mouth." When the man did, there was no longer any doubt in my mind that he was one of the holdup men, and my failure to make a positive identification was explained. His brother was caught later.

The ill wind that blew in this holdup also blew in some good. Because of Officer Jack Sweeney's concern for me, every policeman on the beat looked in on me every chance he got. At closing time each night one of them came around and stayed with me until I was ready to go home. A close friendship developed between Jack Sweeney's family and mine.

It was surprising to everyone when they realized that each of these holdups was carried out by white men, while 70 per cent of the people living in the district were either Negroes, Filipinos, or Mexicans.

Another frightening condition which I mastered was caused by intoxicated people who came into the store. I refused to sell to them, not only because it was against the law, but because I was afraid of them. These drunks would become very antagonistic and noisy. The more I tried to reason with them, begging them to leave, the louder and bolder they became, increasing my fear. One day I realized that what scared me most was their shouting so loudly at me. I figured that two could play at that game. After all, there was nothing wrong with my lungs!

After that the minute I saw an intoxicated person about to come in I walked up to the door and yelled, as loudly as I could, "Don't you dare come in here! I'll have you arrested. You're drunk!" Other people passing by would hear me and stop. The drunk would look around, see the others staring at him, and promptly leave. It worked like magic. Sometimes, as they passed my store, one drunk would say to another, "Don't ever go in there. She's mean. She hollers!"

My trade did not consist solely of people from the neighborhood. I also had a discriminating clientele of attorneys, doctors, and other professional people, who purchased in case lots.

One of these customers was attorney David Rubenstein. There never was a man I admired more than Dave for the respect and consideration he showed toward his family and mine. I thought my mother had had the hardest life of any woman until I met Dave's mother, Fruma Rubenstein. She had nine children, and her husband had died when Dave was a little boy. Running a little secondhand-clothing store, she supported and educated her children in Hebrew, in English, in singing, and in playing the piano. When he became old enough, Dave took over, becoming father, provider,

guiding hand, and educator of the remainder of the family.

When Helen turned eighteen, I wanted to give her a very special birthday party. It was Dave who was responsible for its success; I wouldn't have known how to arrange it all even if I had had the time. But Dave said, "There is nothing too good for your children, Gussie," and took over planning the affair for 130 people. He was responsible for an item that appeared in the daily newspaper describing the affair; he knew that it would make Helen happy.

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The only day in the year when the store was closed was Election Day, and that entire day belonged to the children. Each Election Day, our program was the same. After breakfast we packed a lunch and spent the day in Golden Gate Park. We took snapshots and later compared them with the ones taken the year before. Helen and Betty Rose invited girl friends and brought games to entertain themselves with. I would lie on a blanket in the sun, just resting and enjoying watching them play. We would get home early, clean up, and have dinner out. Then I would cast my vote and open the store after the polls had closed.

Our routine never changed, except for the one time when Betty Rose fell into a puddle of water and got soaking wet. She had to take off every stitch of her clothing and put on a long coat which I had worn. She looked so funny when we got on the streetcar, with my coat dragging on the floor. When a woman laughingly remarked, "What do you call this?" Betty Rose answered, "Can't you see I fell into the

water and I ain't got nothing on?" She shouted so that everyone on the streetcar heard. Embarrassed, I said, "You don't have to yell!"

"Well, how will them all know, then?" she replied.

During the summer months Helen and Betty Rose vacationed at Hoberg's resort and Shirley at Mrs. Howard's in Palo Alto, which, but for the goodness of God, could have been my children's permanent home.

It was impossible for me to visit little Shirley more than a couple of times each summer. Even then, those trips were made possible by Lillian Steinberg. Lillian visited Shirley every week, and never without bringing a gift and leaving my love.

Helen had stopped wearing the same style clothes as Betty Rose when she was fourteen. When she graduated from high school, I bought her a fur coat. Doing this made me realize that my first-born was no longer a child but a young lady. A fur coat had been something so special to me when I was younger. I remembered that, when I had traveled on the ferryboat between San Francisco and Oakland, I would try to get close to someone wearing a fur coat, just so I could feel it. I had wondered at the time what bracket a person had to be in to be able to afford a fur coat. My desire to own one was more than satisfied now that my Helen had hers.

Even though Helen was eighteen and Betty Rose only fourteen, they continued to go out together. They joined the Rainbow Girls and the Jewish Center, and attended all the affairs, conventions, dances, and parties. It was always Betty Rose who took up with Helen's friends, and, in so doing, she grew to act older than her years.

But Shirley was just six, and keeping her happy and occupied became my problem whenever the other girls went

out. Between customers I played "school" and "theater" with her. She would sing and dance, with me as her only audience. It broke my heart to have little Shirley just standing around, receiving very little attention from me. It was a problem keeping a little girl around a liquor store on Fillmore Street at night, or, for that matter, even during the day. My little Shirley knew this. A number of times during the evening she would say, "Time for sedert [dessert], Mother dear." Then she would go next door to the delicatessen where they sold ice cream. She spent more time making her purchase than was really necessary, knowing that it was better if she could be doing something else for a while while I was so busy.

Between eight thirty and nine o'clock I put her to sleep on a couch in the balcony. The girls always stopped at the store before going home, and if Shirley was awake, she went home with them. Otherwise, I carried her home, asleep in my arms, after the closing time of 2:00 A.M.

I fixed up a combination sitting-room and kitchen in the rear of the balcony of the store. The girls used this more than they did our four-room apartment for entertaining their friends.

On one special occasion, when Helen was giving a turkey dinner for her friends, she inquired as to the brand of champagne I was going to let her serve. She was very disappointed that it wasn't French Cordon Rouge.

"Honey," I said, "they won't know the difference."

"But, Mother, I'm sure they will. Besides, they will read the labels."

She was finally convinced that I was right when I served the Cordon Rouge and her friends asked if they couldn't have beer instead.

Whenever Helen or Betty Rose dated a young man about whom they were inclined to become serious, I secretly asked David Rubenstein to express an opinion about the young man. His opinion was always right—and the same as Lillian's. She would invite the young people to dinner so that she could get to know the boy in question better before giving her judgment. When David and Lillian agreed, I was satisfied. I had never stopped praying that God would send each of my children the right mate the first time—and how could I trust myself to know when I couldn't even pick the right man for my *second* marriage?

Jack Gerson was six feet two inches tall, and, even though he looked older, I knew he hadn't reached his sixteenth birthday. Every Saturday he worked for his father in the shoe store across the street. Jack came into my store three or four times every Saturday and bought a candy bar for five cents. The sign on the counter read: "3 for 10¢ or 5¢ each." After a few times I said, "Say, Jack, why don't you buy three bars for a dime? You will save five cents, and you won't have to cross the street so often."

He answered, "Oh, I don't mind. I like to get out."

When I got to know him better, I remarked, "You know, Jack, it would be better for your skin if you didn't eat so much candy."

He answered, "I really don't eat all of it. I give most of it to the other guys."

He was such a nice, polite boy, I offered to sell him three bars for a dime and let him pick up one at a time. "Don't worry," he told me. "I can afford it. I get paid when I'm working."

Then I noticed that each time he came in he would look to the rear of the store. He'd say, "Hello, Helen," and she

would answer, "Hello," as she would to any customer. I figured that maybe this kid wasn't as young as I thought he was, so I decided to find out. The next time he came in I said, "How old are you, Jack?" My suspicion was borne out when he answered, "I'll be sixteen very soon."

"Jack," I said, "my Helen is eighteen."

"Yes, I know," he answered. "But how old is Betty?" He blushed.

"You mean my Betty Rose?" I asked.

"I just call her Betty; she likes that better. We go to the same school."

From then on we all called her just "Betty."

Then I realized why Betty was buying shoe polish so often from the store where Jack was working. Shoes were shined every day, including the old ones that Shirley didn't wear.

Soon Betty and Jack were going steady. Jack earned two dollars and fifty cents each Saturday he worked. Betty was getting an allowance of two dollars and fifty cents, which she spent to buy lunches at the school cafeteria. But now it was different: each night she made two lunches at home. With the five dollars they had between them they bought trinkets for one another.

Helen's evenings were usually occupied with her own social life, so after Shirley was put to bed I would start phoning the house, informing them that it was time for Jack to leave and for Betty to go to sleep. But there were always studies and homework that had not quite been finished. Judging from the report cards they received, there were no beneficial results from their studying together. It would be a fallacy to say that I wasn't worried about them. Jack never left after my first phone call. At ten o'clock, and sometimes as late as eleven, he would stop by the store, out of breath

from running, to say good night and assure me that he had left.

The fact that they were content with just their own company, with no desire for any other, caused me additional concern. I realized they were missing the values of wider association with other teen-agers. I decided to talk to them separately. I told Jack that cutting off their association with others of their own age was unfair both to himself and to Betty.

"You should go out with other girls, Jack. And Betty should date other boys." The picture of the way he answered will never fade from my memory:

With his right hand on his chest, his face pale, his eyes moist and focused on the sky, he said, "I don't want any other girl. I would rather die than have her go out with some other fellow. If she ever did, I would jump off the bridge." Those are Jack's exact words, spoken when he was sixteen.

When I told Betty the same things I had told Jack, she answered, "Mother, you don't understand. We don't want anyone else. We are in love."

I will never, so long as I have a speck of memory left, forget that one evening when Betty and Jack were in the store. They were doing the usual whispering, except that they seemed more excited than usual. Then I overheard her say to him, "Go ahead. You tell Mother."

"No," Jack said, "you tell her. She may get mad at me." I figured they might have broken something in the house—perhaps the record-player again, or the radio. But when Jack added, "It was just as much your idea as mine," my heart began to beat faster. Dear God, I thought, I hope they didn't get married. Or perhaps . . . ! I was almost afraid to think.

Agitated, I said in an exceptionally loud voice, "What's *whose* idea—and what did you both do?"

"Please don't get angry with us," Betty answered. "We just thought——"

When she hesitated, I said, "Never mind what you thought! What did you do?"

"Gee," spoke Jack. "If you're angry we better not tell you." Betty, barely five feet tall and weighing under one hundred pounds, was trying to hide behind Jack so that I couldn't see her pulling him toward the outside door.

Raising my voice, I said, "You better tell me before I drop dead." This stopped them, and they came closer to me, looking even more frightened.

Then Betty suddenly became brave. "Mother, you know the bathrobe we gave you for Christmas that you gave to Helen to put in her hope chest?" Oh, I sighed inwardly. I felt relieved. I assumed they had needed a gift, perhaps for Jack's mother or sister, and had used the robe.

"So what?" I said. "You gave it to someone?"

As if that would have been a sin, she answered, "Oh, no, Mother. We would never do that, not even with the slips or nightgowns that didn't cost near so much."

By then I was raising a sweat, and I showed my anger. "Nightgowns, schmightgowns! What in the devil did you kids do? Tell me!"

When they both started to cry, I prepared myself for the worst. I put a hand on each of them and led them to the rear of the store.

"What happened? I promise I won't be angry." I was trying to be as calm as possible, but I was ready to explode inside. They looked at each other and smiled, and Jack squeezed her hand. That was the first time in my life I had

the desire to beat someone, only this time I would have made it a twosome.

"Well, tell me," I demanded. After a moment of silence Betty took over.

"Of all the presents you received," she began, and stopped.

Trying hard to speak low, I prompted with, "Again with the presents. What did you do?" I closed my eyes, thinking it would give them courage if I were not staring at them. This time Jack spoke:

"You see, tomorrow is your birthday, and instead of giving you a gift to go into Helen's hope chest, we thought we would rather treat you to the Bal Tabarin for dinner. We asked Joe Morris if he would work in the store for you, and he said he would do it for nothing. The dinners are three dollars each, and we have fifteen dollars saved up. I know we should have asked you first."

All the time he was talking I kept my eyes closed. I couldn't believe he was saying all that. I thought I was imagining it, that it just sounded like something I wanted to hear but didn't expect. When I was aware that I wasn't dreaming, I opened my eyes to look at two youngsters with their mouths open, waiting for my answer.

"Oh, thanks a million! How wonderful!" It was truly wonderful, and in my heart I first thanked God before I spoke.

"Then you're not mad at us?" they both said at the same time. I could imagine their feeling of relief, but it was nothing compared to mine.

"How could I be?" I answered and kissed them both. "Why, this is the biggest surprise I ever had in my whole life. As long as I live I will never forget it." I wanted to make amends for the severity my imagination had called into play. So I told them that the thought they had expressed and the

plans they had made were wonderful enough without them spending all the money they had worked so hard to save. I said that we would keep the dinner date, but that the cost of it would be on me.

"Oh, no," they answered. "We have nothing else to do with that money. We saved it just for you."

"How about opening a joint savings account?" I suggested, to which Betty said, "No, that's no fun."

"I'll tell you what I'll do. Whatever you put in the bank, I'll match!" They surprised me by both saying, "That sounds good!" Betty added, "Even if we both put in our two-fifty each week?"

"Yes, even if you put in ten dollars," I assured her.

"How much must we have in order to get married?" Jack asked.

Without thinking, I answered, "At least a thousand dollars." When Betty asked how long it would take to save that much, I said, "Oh, three or four years." Hearing this seemed to make them feel content, but I didn't feel that way when I heard Jack say, as they walked out, "Why, we only have to save five hundred!"

That night was the beginning of their adulthood, and I saw my second child growing up all too quickly. I still felt guilty because of my momentary desire to beat them. I had always managed to find ways of disciplining my children without resorting to spankings. Sometimes they were even more effective than I imagined they would be.

I recalled the times Betty repeatedly came home late from playing in the park. Each time I scolded her, telling her how much it made me worry. I felt that I died many times in those hours of anxious waiting.

"I should beat you," I scolded. "But instead, you are go-

ing to beat me." Her eyes, which usually looked as big as saucers, widened even more.

"How could I?" she asked.

"I'll show you how you can." And I bent down to her level. "Go ahead. Slap me as hard as you can!"

Frightened at the tone of my voice, she got down on her knees, crying, "Please, Mother dear. I can't."

"The worry you cause me by not coming home on time hurts more than any slap. Now, nobody is going to eat until you slap me real hard!" Still on her knees, her head tilted toward the ceiling as if in prayer, she sobbed, "Mother dear, Mother darling. How could I slap my very own mother? Please, oh, please, don't make me do it!"

Watching her was like seeing an actress perform. I could hardly keep from laughing. I took her hand in mine, and slapped my own face with all my might. Then I let out a shriek, no longer feeling like laughing. She had had a pencil in her hand, and it had scratched my face deeply. When she saw blood coming from the scratch, she screamed, "Oh, God, I killed my very own mother!"

Then there was the time when I first brought her home from Homewood Terrace. She insisted on drinking her milk in the bathroom. Each time she brought back the empty glass, I kissed her for finishing all her milk. Then one day, by accident, I found the water in the toilet bowl milky-white! Another time she told me that she had fixed her breakfast eggs, and I had looked in the garbage bucket and seen no eggshells. She confessed that she had thrown the eggs down the garbage chute in the hall.

I knew I wasn't always the sweet mother I could have been. I was often irritable, and I scolded them over the smallest things, especially if things didn't go well at the

store. Then I would hate myself and try to make amends by buying them special gifts, promising myself that I would be different. But when things became troublesome again, I seemed to forget that promise.

I lost my temper most often at mealtimes in the restaurants. I let the girls order, against my better judgment, and then they refused to eat what they had selected. Little Shirley gave me the most trouble. She was old enough to eat by herself, but I fed her to save time. Half the time she wouldn't chew her food or swallow it. I scolded her and told her that a girl her age should be able to feed herself and eat nicely. Always I got the same answer: "I'll eat my sedert [dessert] by myself!"

One time she refused to open her mouth to eat her spinach. I stuck the spoon between her closed lips and forced it into her mouth, and she spat it out. Seeing how angry I was, she pointed to Betty and said, "Her told me not to eat spinach!"

Betty answered in a frightened tone, "But, Mother, you used to tell me I would have color in my cheeks when I grew up if I ate spinach, and I don't want Shirley to look funny with green cheeks."

One day Shirley cured me of the habit of using a certain phrase of mine. I was scolding her when a stranger walked into the store. She put her hand over her face and backed away from me, pleading, "Please don't murder me! Oh, please don't murder me!" I was terribly embarrassed. I've never forgotten the look on that stranger's face. Nor did I ever again use the phrase, "I could murder you!"

"Let's stop in and see Gussie."

I looked up to see George Altman, who owned a men's clothing store down the block. He was with a tall, blond,

good-looking young man, whom he introduced as his nephew from Chicago. We talked for a while, and George told several jokes, one of his "new" ones being one that he had recently heard from me.

They were about to walk out when the girls came home from having their dinner. "Hello, George," they said, walking on toward the rear of the store, Helen practically walking backward.

"Hello, girls," George answered, and then to his nephew: "Come on, Seymour. Let's go eat."

"Wait a minute, Uncle." Seymour nudged him.

I pretended that I didn't hear their whispered conversation, but the young man knew I had. A bit embarrassed, he came over to me and said, "I'd like to meet your daughter."

After I introduced them George said, "Well, come on. We're going to have dinner."

"Honest, Uncle, I'm not a bit hungry," his nephew said. "I ate a big lunch. Why don't you go ahead and eat?"

"What gives with you, besides your suspenders? First you're in a hurry to eat—you're starving. Next minute you're full!" But he left, with his usual joke: "Am I going to see you sometime?"

Well, he didn't see his nephew that night. Helen invited him to the house and saw to it that he didn't starve. When I closed the store at 2:00 A.M., he was still with her.

I had often heard about love at first sight, but I had never dreamed that I would see it happen. Seymour stayed in San Francisco for one week, seeing Helen day and evening. Before he left he spent an hour in the store, waiting to talk to me, but I was busy every moment with customers. We finally managed to shake hands, and he left, saying, "I'll write to you."

When Helen returned from seeing him off, she said, "Mother, he asked me to marry him."

"What did you answer, honey?" I asked, remembering that she had known him for only a week.

"I told him I would," she answered and started to cry. Betty, who was in the store with Jack, started to cry with her sister.

"Don't you want to marry him?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, very much," she assured me. Yet she cried even harder, Betty joining in again.

"Then what are you crying for?" I asked.

"I can't help it. I'm so happy!"

Seymour had written to both Helen and me while on the plane, so we received his letters immediately. To me he expressed regret at not having had the opportunity to ask me in person for Helen's hand. He explained that he worked for the Walgreen Drug Company, and that if it was Helen's desire to remain in California he would apply for a transfer; or, if she wished to make her home in Chicago, where he then worked, he would be happy to abide by her decision. He said it made no difference where he worked or lived so long as he was with Helen.

After talking to Helen I answered his letter.

I wrote to him that I had prayed all my life that God would send my children the proper mates. If he would only consider coming into the business, I would do all in my power to arrange things to his satisfaction. It would break our hearts, I told him, if they decided to live any place other than San Francisco. Seymour made my happiness complete when he replied, accepting my offer.

Every day Helen wrote to him, and every day she received a letter from him. Seymour planned to join Helen in November, at which time they would arrange to be married as soon as possible.

The year 1940 was a lucky one for me. Helen was engaged, Betty was going steady with Jack, both girls were very happy, and my business was flourishing. How wonderful God was to me! Less than five years before, I had gone to sleep each night praying that I would take in a little more money so that I could pay the bills that were past due. Now I could buy all the merchandise I could sell, and, at the same time, I saved money because I paid cash.

I had saved seven thousand dollars and was interested in finding a small piece of property to buy. One real-estate agent told me about property on the corner of Turk and Fillmore which could be purchased for a down payment of ten thousand dollars. It grossed an income of six hundred and eighty-five dollars a month. He said the owners were open to an offer, and he advised me to bid sixty thousand dollars.

"It's out of the question," I told him. He insisted on quoting facts and figures. "Listen to me," I said. "This is ridiculous. It's out of my reach and out of my class. I would never obligate myself with a mortgage of fifty thousand dollars. Do you think I'm crazy? You must think I'm coining money. I'm not a millionaire, you know."

The realtor was still persistent. He kept saying, "If you have the down payment, you have nothing to worry about."

I figured that he took me for a fool and that he was only thinking of the commission he would make. "Don't you realize it would take me more than a lifetime to pay out fifty thousand dollars?"

He showed me that the property could be paid for in about ten years with its own earnings.

"Do you intend to work ten more years?" he asked.

"If God provides me with the health and strength, I will."

"Then what are you afraid of?" he asked. "Anyone who

can handle forty-pound cases every day the way you do will surely be able to work another ten years. Why, I've seen many a man who wasn't able to work the way you do and put in as many hours."

The man was very convincing, but I told him that I would have to think it over. I slept little for the next two nights. Every night I took a pencil and paper to bed with me. Just for the fun of it, I wanted to prove with my own figures that the agent was wrong. But no matter how I figured, I couldn't prove it. Even if the property was one-third vacant, I could still meet the three hundred and fifty dollar monthly payments from the income, after expenses were deducted. Nevertheless, I tried hard to convince myself that I shouldn't take on such an obligation. I thought about what other people had advised.

"Don't be a fool," one said. "Ten thousand dollars is a lot of money. Don't gamble with it."

Others said, "Money is too hard to get nowadays. You better hang onto it. You may not be able to get another ten thousand so easy." I wondered what they meant by "getting it easy."

Then I thought of Mr. Voden, president of the San Francisco Bank. Who would know better than he if this was a good risk?

"Gussie," said Mr. Voden, "we can't carry that large a mortgage on that property. But since they will do this, I am certain you will make it. If you haven't paid off the mortgage at the end of ten years, we will be glad to carry the balance. I have a lot of faith in you, Gussie." Then, as though he were making the decision, he said, "Good luck, Gussie. I'm very happy for you. This is really a good break for you."

So I figured that the idea must be all right. Even so, I

decided I wouldn't contact the real-estate agent. I thought that, if I was destined to have the property, he would come to me. He did, and I gave him a check for one thousand dollars as a deposit on the offer of sixty thousand dollars, as he had suggested.

The following day the agent phoned to tell me the owners would take sixty-two thousand five hundred dollars and no less. He claimed he had two other deposits on the same offer, but he was giving me the opportunity of accepting or refusing before he talked to them.

He told me that if I didn't decide before three o'clock he would return my check.

I felt I might be getting the rush act and that this was a warning not to take the risk. I went to see Mr. Voden again. He simply said, "Gussie, if it's worth sixty thousand, it's worth an extra twenty-five hundred. It is still a good buy. Good luck!" I have never stopped thanking God for this man's determination to see me make that investment. I knew then that he was talking to me through Mr. Voden.

So I committed myself to buy the property. To my seven thousand dollars in savings I added three thousand dollars from the business. This meant that I would be paying my bills a couple of weeks later than usual. I admit that this concerned me. My habit of paying bills even before they were due had given me great satisfaction. But I still had the holiday business to look forward to.

November came, and Seymour Sherman came back to us. He was even better-looking than I had remembered. Perhaps it was being in love that made him seem more handsome, just as it had made my Helen blossom into a more beautiful woman.

Seymour adapted himself to every phase of the business. A week after he had been there a man came into the store and asked to see Mr. Seymour Sherman.

"I have a package for you," he said. "Would you mind stepping outside?"

"Why don't you bring it in?" Seymour asked.

"I would if I could," laughed the man.

The man walked outside, and we all followed him. He stopped in front of a new 1941 Pontiac and handed Seymour an envelope. Inside were the keys to the car and my note: "From your future mother-in-law."

He just looked at me. His light skin turned white. It was some while before he was able to speak and to thank me.

With a happy heart I thanked God for making it possible for me to make good one of my first promises to my daughter. The second promise was fulfilled when I made a down payment on a new, modern home for them. I prayed that God would help me do no less for the others. Even though I cannot imagine how I could have raised the two younger ones without Helen's help, all three were equally dear to me. They were, I thought, like my fingers: one might be more useful than another. But it would hurt me just as much no matter which one I cut.

Nobody in the whole world could have been prouder than I was when I looked at my two daughters with their six-foot-two men—Helen with her light-complexioned man, and Betty, very fair herself, with her olive-skinned man.

For me the holidays passed quickly enough, but for Helen and Sherman the month of December seemed a year long. (Seymour preferred to be called by his last name.)

Then the big day came. On January 5, 1941, in Beth Sholom Temple, they were married with all the glory and

splendor of bridesmaids, usher, maid and matron of honor, and little Shirley as the flower girl.

My every tear was a kiss and a prayer for beloved God who had made all this possible. I was so sure nobody knew I was crying, I never raised my hand to my face. But David, standing next to me after giving my Helen in marriage, handed me his handkerchief and squeezed my hand. I knew he was as happy as I was.

I felt the nearness of my parents at this wedding of their grandchild. In my heart I could hear them say, "*Mazl tov.* What *fargenign* [Congratulations. What a joy]!"

37

When Betty graduated from junior high school, she received her fur coat. Betty had no intention of entering high school. I tried insisting, but I knew well the feeling of being poor scholastically. Only in music and art did she excel at all. Her paintings were displayed in several junior exhibits, and her singing teacher took her to perform at Eastern Star affairs and at hospitals. However, I refused to consent to his suggestion that she appear at night clubs. She got herself a job as an usherette in a neighborhood theater.

It was seeing the happiness of Helen and Sherman that induced Jack to quit school and find a job. He worked as a soda-fountain clerk and messenger boy in a drugstore near the theater where Betty worked.

When Jack's father was convinced that his son had no intention of returning to school, he offered him a steady job in his shoe store, promising to pay him as much as he was

then earning. Jack showed his father his paycheck for twenty-five dollars. The sum amazed his father, but he matched it. Jack never told his father that the check he showed him was for *two* weeks' salary at the drugstore.

I was very depressed at having Betty working as an usherette. But Jack took care of this after I mentioned that I hoped the fellows Betty met in the show didn't get fresh with her or try to date her. She quit the next day.

When I had set their goal at one thousand dollars, I never dreamed they would save so quickly. Jack deposited twenty dollars each week, and, as I had promised, I matched it. I knew things were moving too fast, but I was afraid to interfere for fear I might spoil something for them. So I put them in God's hands and prayed for their happiness and good guidance.

One day in the store I heard the two of them discussing their bank account. Jack said, "Honey, we haven't enough money yet." Betty said, "It doesn't have to be so big. I'm not as big as Helen."

I knew that they had over three hundred in the bank, but I had no idea on what they were trying to compromise. The conversation continued, with Jack saying, "Yes, it does. I want it to be."

"No, it doesn't!" insisted Betty.

Shirley, who was with them, popped up with: "*I* wouldn't fight with you, Jack, no matter what size it is—if you'd marry me!"

Thinking I could help them solve their disagreement, I said, "You know, if you ever decide to, you can split the money in half, and each of you can buy what you wish."

"Oh, no," Jack said. "We only want to buy one diamond ring, like Helen's. Sherman told me it cost over six hundred

dollars. We have only three hundred and twenty. Betty saw one for three hundred, but I don't want her to have a smaller diamond than Helen."

"You don't really need a diamond yet. In fact, a diamond isn't at all necessary," I assured them.

Jack, looking stunned, said, "How could we ever plan on getting married if we haven't got a diamond?"

The next day, when the three of us were alone, I made them a proposition. I hadn't worn my ring for eight years. I considered the mounting old-fashioned, so I told them I thought that it could be reset for about one hundred dollars and that I would give them the diamond providing they agreed to save thirteen hundred dollars before making plans to get married.

"Oh, Mother dear," said Betty. "I love that mounting! I would never want to change it, because you wore it—even if we still have to save three hundred more than we were supposed to."

The following day I gave Jack the ring so he could give it to Betty. "Remember, Jack," I said, "this is our secret—Betty's, yours, and mine."

He couldn't thank me enough. "Thanks a billion times. This will sure help us a lot in reaching our goal. You're an honest-to-goodness mother." He left as if he were floating on the clouds.

Betty, once she started wearing the diamond ring, became officially engaged. Jack's thirty-five-dollar car, purchased just three months earlier with money he had earned delivering phone directories, now refused to run. So I decided that this was the time to let them enjoy their car.

I arranged to have a new Pontiac parked in front of the store. Several times during the day Jack and Betty looked

at the car admiringly. When they returned from a show later that evening, they noticed that the car was still there. Jack said, "I wonder who the damn fool is who owns that car, leaving it parked outside all day long."

"Maybe it doesn't run," I suggested.

Jack said, "The only thing that could keep that car from running would be if it had no gas."

"Well, why don't you try it and find out, Jack? Here are the keys."

Jack backed away from me as if fearing that the keys would burn his fingers. If Betty hadn't been there to support him, I believe he would have fallen to the floor. They looked at each other in bewilderment; then, simultaneously, both ran over and embraced me.

The tragedy of war came eleven months after my first children were married. Like everyone else, we prayed that it wouldn't touch us and that, with the help of God, it would end soon. It was a time when there seemed no place for plans in my life, only for prayers for peace. But Betty and Jack lived in a dream world of their own. They showed me their bankbook, with a balance of nine hundred and thirty dollars. "It won't be too long before we have thirteen hundred," they declared.

"But things are different now," I said. "We are at war."

"But things aren't different with *us*," they answered. "We're in love. We wouldn't want to live without one another. Besides, you promised." Both, trying to act grown-up, held back their tears. Only God knew what their remark did to me: just two weeks before the papers had featured a story about two youngsters who had carried out a suicide pact. Their parents had refused to consent to their marriage.

Like a drowning person grasping at a straw, I said, "By law you must be of legal age—twenty-one—to get married."

Jack was ahead of me. "We know," he answered, "but with the consent of your parents you can marry at eighteen. Four months more and I will be eighteen—the fourth of April—and the nineteeenth falls on a Sunday. I'm sure my folks will give their consent if you do."

A lump came into my throat. I had thanked God for sending my children that which I prayed they would have above all else, but I wondered why he was rushing it like this.

On Sunday, April 19, 1942, Betty and Jack were married with all the splendor and glory of Helen's wedding. The Honorable Peter Mullens again honored us with his presence. At the ceremony it was David who sang. I felt that no greater honors could have been bestowed upon us than those bestowed by these two wonderful people. David's magnificent voice made the huge Beth Israel Temple ring with inspiring music. When he paused, you could have heard a pin drop, such was the rapture of his audience. Not even when he sang for the people in the temple on Twenty-fourth Avenue, on the high holidays, could he have imparted the solemn, heartfelt feeling that came over everyone when he sang "Because" before the ceremony, and "Oh, Promise Me" before the Rabbi married my second daughter.

David also acted as master of ceremonies at the reception dinner. I have never understood why he called on me to speak: he hadn't at Helen's wedding. The only thing I could think of to say was what I would later say to God:

"My heart is full of happiness. I thank God for providing such good husbands for my first two daughters. I hope he won't forget my baby girl. My girls have been wonderful children. I hope and pray their children will be just as good."

When I sat down, everyone laughed. But I didn't care. I really meant it for God to hear. But when David applauded, everyone else did, too. I loved him for coming to my rescue, like the beloved brother he was and is. Then, to further show his pleasure, when he called on the next speakers he told them to make it nice and short, as I had done.

I was pleased that Betty and Jack selected a home just six blocks from Helen: it made me happy to know that my girls wanted to be close together. I couldn't help but wonder if Betty remembered that time when she had refused to leave my room at Mrs. Hypsher's home, and if she had really believed that I would ever be able to make my promise come true.

On their honeymoon Jack and Betty wrote me the following letter. It indicates the effect of insufficient schooling, but it was written with their young hearts, and is more precious to me than the most precious gem:

To Our Dearest Mother:

In all the words there are to be said, we can't find enough words to express our appreciation to you for the wonderful things you have done for us. There could never be a list written for all the things you have given us. We hope some day to be able to repay you, although we know money would never be enough to repay you. Mother, you have given us every wish we could have dreamed of. We have been children a long time and always will be your children, but now we have grown up and realized all the things you have done for us. We will try to do our best to show you that we appreciate it.

Mother, there's a poem we would have liked to write because it's a poem made for you. I know that you have

heard it before, but there could never be enough times to say it again. It can express our feeling in our hearts better than we could ever say it.

God made a wonderful mother.
A mother who never grows old.
He made her smile of the sunshine,
and he moulded her heart of pure gold,
In her eyes He placed bright shining stars,
In her cheeks fair roses.
You see, God made a wonderful mother,
and He gave that dear mother to us.

Your loving Daughter and Son,
BETTY and JACK

I've never stopped wishing and hoping that my parents could read this letter from their grandchild and her husband.

38

In the summer of 1942 Judge Peter Mullens campaigned for the office of superior court judge. Determined to help, I placed signs on both sides of the liquor store and on my own property on Turk Street. During the entire campaign every customer who walked out of my store carried a picture and a card describing the career and qualifications of Judge Mullens wrapped with the purchase.

One elderly man had been coming in every Friday for many years to pick up a bottle of whiskey. The first time he entered the store he asked for a bottle of Golden Wedding whiskey. Thereafter, knowing he wanted the same brand, I

always put the bottle on the counter when I saw him coming in. Other than my closing "Thank you," we never exchanged a word. He often put the bottle in his pocket before I had a chance to wrap it.

On one particular Friday, during the campaign, I quickly wrapped his bottle when I saw him, inclosing the campaign material. Seeing what I had done, he spoke to me for the first time in years.

"You think this Pete Mullens is such a good man! Are you going to vote for him?"

"Mister," I answered, "Judge Mullens is everybody's friend. He has a heart of gold." I told him the whole story of how Judge Mullens had helped me. "He didn't know me, and at the time I wasn't even a resident of San Francisco. Furthermore, he didn't charge me a cent! Mister, when you vote for him, it will be just like voting for your own son."

"I know," he said. "Pete *is* one of my sons!"

I reached out and grabbed his arm to keep him from walking out.

"Why didn't you tell me? All these years you've been coming here! I would have given you a discount."

He laughed and said, "I know. That's why I didn't tell you."

"How did you know I knew your son?"

"Well," he replied, "Pete told me, 'Pop, do me a favor. Buy your liquor from my friend Gussie on Fillmore Street.' "

Now I not only told my story when I solicited for votes but I added this episode about the Judge sending me his father as a customer.

I know that Peter Mullens' family were honored by his re-election as Judge, but they couldn't possibly have felt more honored than I in knowing that he called me his "friend Gussie."

Jack came to work in the store with us. I never knew anyone could actually enjoy working as much as he did. He never permitted me to lift a case or do any of the heavy work. His good nature and even temper made it a pleasure to be in the store. Instead of hollering at the intoxicated men, as I did, he just took them by the arm and led them out, saying, "Well, buddy, you better go home." He never had any trouble.

Not until that time did I understand why God had taken back the son I bore. If he hadn't, I would not have had Betty, and now I had two precious children for one. Had I given birth to Jack, I couldn't have loved him more, and he couldn't have been a better son. Then the war touched us directly: both boys were drafted.

At the time both girls were expecting, and, through the help of David, the boys were granted an extension until after their children were born.

On my forty-first birthday Betty and Jack presented me with my first grandchild, Carolyn. My first grandchild—born on my birthday, and named after my beloved papa. It seemed a favorable omen.

On Mother's Day, two months later, my second granddaughter, Sandra, was born to Helen and Sherman.

I watched each of my sons-in-law hold his wife and baby until the last possible moment before departing for camp. I told myself that this was a temporary separation, to make them more thankful and appreciative of the riches they were leaving behind.

I didn't think it possible, but my daughters were drawn even closer together, keeping themselves busy with their children, consoling one another, and sharing the letters they received from their husbands.

It was difficult getting used to being alone in the store again after that welcomed relief of having the boys with me. Often I forgot to eat, and other times, when I felt like eating, there was no one to send for food. My accountant advised me not to employ help in the store. My books showed taxes, drawings, and dividends in the names of my sons-in-law, which I was turning over to their wives.

After closing time one evening I was walking toward a restaurant and thinking about Shirley. She had contracted scarlet fever and was in the hospital. I was again blessing Lillian for her interest in visting Shirley, when I suddenly felt faint. It had been one of those days when I hadn't eaten since breakfast.

My foot slipped off the curb.

It hurt some, and I imagined that I had sprained it, so I decided to go straight home.

During the night my foot became more painful. The aspirin I took and the hot water I applied gave little relief. The night was long, and when I looked at the clock, it appeared to be after six in the morning. It was impossible to get cab service during the war, so I phoned the closest hospital and asked that an ambulance be sent for me.

"You better wait until morning and phone again," I was told.

"It's already six twenty. How long will I have to wait?"

"Say, lady, you're drunk. It isn't even four o'clock yet."

"Please," I pleaded, "I'm in pain. I must have read the time wrong."

I started to cry, and the voice on the phone said, "Aw, go to bed and sleep it off," and hung up.

I got dressed, and, by holding on to the walls and dragging my foot, I finally reached the dark street. Outside I saw

a few servicemen, and others, mostly drunk. I managed to get to the corner and stood there holding on to a signpost. I waved at every car that went by, but the people only waved back.

I hollered, "Please stop!" but they just drove on. I had about decided to lie down on the street, hoping that then some car might stop, when an old drunk came over to molest me.

I screamed, "Help! Help!" as if I were about to be murdered. A truck swerved up to the curb, scaring the drunk away. The driver lifted me into the truck and drove me to the Mt. Zion on Post street.

My foot was X-rayed, and I was told that it was broken. At 9:00 A.M. my foot was in a cast, and I was given a crutch. The doctor, hesitant but obliging, drove me to the store so I could resume running my business.

Mr. and Mrs. Harris, tenants of mine, were also in the liquor business. As my girls consoled one another, so did Mrs. Harris and I. Her only children, two sons, were overseas also. One day, when there was no answer to my telephone call to the Harrises' store, I apprehensively phoned their home. She had received word that the submarine on which her oldest son had been serving had been sunk.

I closed the store and went to Mrs. Harris. It is difficult to describe the grief I found in the Harris home. I couldn't tell whether Minnie Harris was a good actress or whether she was as brave as she apparently wanted me to believe. She kept saying, "My son is not dead. He is some place."

I stopped by to see her on the morning she reopened her store. When I looked around at her empty shelves, I wondered how she was able to sell enough to pay me the monthly rent.

The liquor business was different now. No longer did salesmen bargain with you to take their merchandise. Liquor was at a premium and hard to buy at any price. However, my faithful friend, Max Sobel, took care of me and sent me twenty-five cases of whiskey each month. Because I had been a good customer, National Distillers sent me ten cases a month.

As soon as I got to my store, I phoned Max. I told him I had just come from the Harrises' liquor store and that all they had in stock was rum and brandy. "Please, Max, you will have done a *mitzve* [good deed], if you would send her a few cases of whiskey."

"What's the matter with you, Gussie? With whiskey so scarce, here you are begging for someone else!"

"But, Max, she just lost one of her sons in the war, and besides, she is my friend."

Max laughed. "You're sure a funny bird. That's why I like you so much."

The next morning Minnie phoned. "They just delivered ten cases of whiskey from your friend Max to my place by mistake. It must be for you, Gussie."

"It's not a mistake, Minnie," I assured her. "I told Max you didn't have a single bottle of whiskey in your store."

"Gussie, you didn't—you didn't!" she said. "How did you do it? A lot of merchants have tried to deal with Max, but they say he wouldn't play ball. Tell me, Gussie, how much do I have to pay under the counter?"

"Minnie," I said, "this is Max Sobel we are talking about. I've never paid one penny under or over any counter. The only merchants Max doesn't deal with now are the ones who refused to buy from him before the war. He is simply taking care of his old, steady customers."

"I really don't know Max," Minnie said. "He sure must be a prince of a man!" When she continued to receive her monthly allotments of whiskey from him, she said that she realized why he was so loved and respected by all the good and upright people.

It was a blessing for me that the law required all liquor stores to remain closed on Sundays for the duration of the war. With the boys away, we were now a family of six females. We spent every Sunday together exploring new restaurants and making plans for the boys' return.

My heart overflowed with pleasure as I watched my two little grandchildren walking, or more often running, hand in hand—the dark-complexioned Carolyn and the fair Sandra, both images of their daddies. I could see that other people admired them, thinking they were twins because they were always dressed alike. Their mothers dressed alike, too, and, when it was feasible, Shirley and I joined them in matching outfits. It was hard to realize that those little girls were my children's children. I was so proud of my family that I felt the whole world had reason to envy me.

I was grateful that my girls were so close and such a comfort to one another. They were together day and night, alternating each week in staying at one another's homes. Each day, however, they would see if mail had come to the home not occupied for that week. We talked and planned about going out of the liquor business and into something more dignified and easier, with no Sunday or night work—maybe a men's and boys' clothing shop. We could call it the Father and Son Shop.

We would, we decided, drive down to the beautiful Peninsula towns. We would open our new business in one of them. Then we envisioned the social life we could all have

in such a fine community. We would all have homes near each other, and the girls said that they wanted swimming pools.

Under the cirmumstances I felt that we had reason to be grateful for the happiness we found in each other. Then the spell was broken.

"The person plans, and God smiles."

On the Saturday afternoon of Thanksgiving week I received a call from Helen.

"Mother, come quick!" she cried. She dropped the receiver, and, over the open phone, I could hear Helen and the children screaming. In a panic, I closed the store and drove like mad, trying to anticipate what I would find. Which one was hurt, and how serious was it? Maybe one of the grandchildren had been burned or cut, or had a fall. Frightened as I was, I tried to reason that it couldn't be too bad since I had heard them all screaming.

Reaching the door, I heard Helen screaming, "Betty, Betty, please speak to me!" I opened the door and saw Helen carrying the apparently lifeless body of my Betty to the bed. I looked down at her still form, her face so white, the picture of death. In her cold hand she clutched the telegram—the message in which the government regretted to notify her that her husband had been killed.

"Mother, what shall we do?" cried Helen. Betty had swallowed the contents of a full bottle of sleeping pills.

I listened for signs of life in the cold, pale body of my Betty. I heard her barely breathing. I started calling doctors, pleading, "Hurry! My child is dying. She swallowed a whole bottle of sleeping pills." Each one gave me the same answer: "Bring your daughter to the hospital."

Someone I phoned for help found time, however, to notify

the newspapers, and we were besieged with reporters and photographers who wanted to get into our house.

I was still going down the list of doctors in the phone-book when Minnie Harris arrived with her doctor. Shirley had hysterically phoned Minnie after Helen dropped the receiver.

I followed the doctor into the bedroom, saw him administer something in Betty's mouth and an injection in her side, and then saw her start to breathe regularly again. Then I knew that God was there beside the doctor, giving my child life again. The doctor sat by her side for I don't know how many hours. He claimed it was imperative that she be wakened every half-hour, which he did by administering more injections. I stayed at his side, until finally he said, "She will be all right. We are bringing her back." I loved him for saying "we." He was giving God credit for help in his accomplishment.

For two days Betty lay perfectly still, never uttering a word. She opened her eyes for only a few moments at a time, only long enough to consume a little liquid. She made no effort to speak. She lay perfectly still, her body changing position only when I gave her sponge baths or changed the linen. I cried each time I replaced Jack's picture under her pillow, where she had kept it from the moment he had entered the service. Finally she cried, "Oh, Mother, how could it have happened?" I felt that she was born again to me, but with more pain and suffering than either of us had experienceed the first time. It was then that I learned that she had promised herself that if Jack were killed she would join him.

We lived from day to day, eating, sleeping, but talking very little—because talking meant tears. For months after Jack's death undelivered packages and letters were returned

marked "deceased." Each delivery reopened the painful wound. Betty was sick, both mentally and physically, as the result of her effort to join Jack.

In every letter Jack had written to me he had inquired about the business. He expressed great concern about whether I was getting enough liquor to sell. Somehow, unintentionally, I failed to answer this question pertaining to business. In his last letter to me he seemed exceptionally worried. Why was I ignoring his repeated inquiries about the business? So, in the last letter I wrote him, I tried to convince him that business was good. That letter was returned, marked "deceased."

"This is God's will, and it is a sin to question it." This belief my parents had instilled in me, and in turn I tried to instil it in my Betty!

"Mother, wasn't Jack a good boy? Didn't he deserve to live? What did we do that he should be taken away from us? God could have spared his life! He wasn't even twenty-one, and he had so much to live for and so much good to give. Didn't God love Jack? Everybody else did!" These were the questions she continually asked, and, with a breaking heart, I tried to answer her.

"Sure God loved Jack. Didn't I love *my* children, when they were small and I couldn't give them the kind of home that other children had, and we had to live in the back of the secondhand furniture store? Didn't I love my children when I put them in Homewood Terrace? I couldn't even give them my nearness. Didn't my good little children deserve the things other children had? I loved them so much, and I wasn't able to give them what they should have had."

For a long time she shut her ears when I begged her to believe that God had had good reasons. It must, I tried to

make her see, have been because a worse tragedy would have befallen us had Jack come home. I reminded her of the many accidents he had narrowly escaped while driving. He took many risks, always so anxious to do so much so fast.

Perhaps he might have had an accident, I emphasized, at a time when we were all in the car. Perhaps God wanted to avoid something like that.

"God took my baby son; I never understood why. Now, you know, I have you and Carolyn."

The passing of time did seem to ease Betty's grief, and I saw signs that she was beginning to regain confidence in God.

Then an unforgivably cruel thing happened to her which almost caused her to lose faith in everything.

She received a phone call from a young man who identified himself as Mr. Smith. He expressed his sympathy for her loss and said his brother had written and asked him to contact her. He explained that his brother and Jack had been buddies in Germany, and that his brother had been at Jack's side when he was killed. He continued, saying that before Jack had died he had given his brother a message to deliver to her. Betty begged Mr. Smith to visit her, saying that she wanted to hear more about Jack.

Mr. Smith claimed that he was working and that he couldn't afford to take the time off; his wife was sick and about to have a baby, so he couldn't leave her alone at night. Besides, they didn't own a car. However, he did promise to call her again. When Betty asked for his phone number, his answer was that they couldn't afford a phone.

For an entire week this man phoned Betty each day, literally torturing her. Each time he offered his sympathy and asked a few more personal questions about herself and her

family, as well as about the child that Jack had been so concerned about. He told Betty that he was sick, that he had been hurt in the service, and that his back gave him trouble. Not until the day he addressed her as Beverly, and talked of Jack's great concern over her financial situation, did Betty become suspicious and tell me what was going on.

I phoned our friend, Officer Sweeney. He said that this was an extortion racket and asked Betty to continue her conversations, keeping up the pretense of believing him. In attempting to trace the phone calls, they found only that they were being made from out of town. During one call the man claimed that his brother had been sent to his home in Chicago and that one of his legs had been amputated. He said that his brother wanted to meet her but couldn't afford the trip. "Mr. Smith" offered to borrow a portion of the money if Betty could raise a few hundred dollars, too. He made a date to meet Betty in a bar on Fillmore Street.

Officer Sweeney went to the bar first, in civilian clothes. He bought a drink at the counter and became sociable with some of the patrons. Ten minutes later Betty arrived and asked the bartender for Mr. Smith. Upon hearing his name, Mr. Smith appeared from the rear, walked up to Betty, and greeted her warmly.

"Hello, Betty dear. Let's sit down." He led her to a rear booth. As I entered the bar, Officer Sweeney moved to the booth next to them, where I joined him.

The plan was for Betty to give him marked money and then leave. However, when she was face to face with this "Mr. Smith," she started to cry.

"Betty dear," he whined, "last night I talked long-distance to my brother. He said that he was tired of living with only one leg and wished he had been killed instead of his dear buddy Jack."

At this my child let out a hysterical cry that echoed through the whole place. "Stop it, stop it," she screamed.

Officer Sweeney was on his feet immediately and handcuffed "Mr. Smith," whose real name was Andrew Dosovich. At first he looked confused, but, recovering quickly, he declared, "Why, that double-crossing dame has some kind of racket. She asked me to buy her a drink, but when she asked for money, I refused. So she pulls this act on me."

"Okay, tell it to the judge," said Officer Sweeney.

Betty looked at me dazedly and, with all the innocence of a child, said, "Mother, why wouldn't God be satisfied to take him instead of my Jack?"

I prayed that God would help me give the right answer to this bewildered child of mine.

"It isn't how long we live that counts," I said to her. "It's how much we give and receive that matters most. In his short life Jack had the love of everyone who knew him, and he loved the whole world. Even though he didn't reach his twenty-first birthday, he acquired more than many people who live twice as long as he did—and much more than some do in a whole lifetime. He had you and a beautiful baby. And, through you both, he gave and received more love than most people are fortunate enough to experience. He left with wonderful memories. God gave you Carolyn to cherish. Be grateful, and God will love you for it."

At last the war was over, and Sherman was on his way home. He landed in Virginia, and from there we received word that he was ill and being sent to Dante Hospital in San Francisco. When we went to see him there, we were told that he had tuberculosis and that they were making preparations to send him to Colorado for a couple of years.

I couldn't bear seeing my family separated again.

I knew that David had spent thousands of dollars to have his brother Irwin cured of this same dreadful disease. I called David. He made arrangements with the doctor who had cured his brother to diagnose Sherman's condition.

The doctor advised that Sherman be sent to the Belmont Sanitarium, near San Francisco. He promised that Sherman would be cured in eight months provided that he received immediate medical attention.

When the doctor questioned David as to my ability to meet the cost of the sanitarium (the government would not accept financial responsibility for private hospitalization), David answered, "I'm sure she can meet the expenses, but in the event she is unable to, I will be responsible."

Exactly eight months later Sherman was discharged from Belmont to convalesce at home for a time before returning to work.

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The store that had been so good to me now felt like a rope around my neck. What had started as a forty-dollar-a-day business had grown to a hundred-and-eighty-thousand-dollar-a-year proposition. However, each day I worked there I felt more miserable than the day before. I wanted to hold on until Sherman was well and then see if he was willing and able to take over. One thing I knew for sure: I couldn't continue operating it myself. The mental strain was too much, and physically I was failing fast. Yet whenever I felt blue and sorry for myself, I thought of the story my papa had often told me of the

man who complained because he didn't have shoes. Then one day he met his wealthy friend, who could have anything that money could buy but who had lost his feet. Then I would start counting all my blessings and find relief and contentment.

Sherman decided that he could not assume the full responsibility of the store.

Finding a buyer was no problem. What was more important to me was finding someone who I felt was worthy, who would be an asset to the business I had built—someone who would take care of it. (I kept thinking of Jack, and if he had come home . . .)

I was gratified when three brothers, all young married men with families, offered to buy the store. They were Sill, Vincent, and Bruno Giardima, clean-cut, ambitious Italian boys. They were skeptical at first and wanted to investigate by staying with me for a week to verify that I was really doing the amount of business I claimed to be doing.

When the sale was completed, I stayed with them for a while, introducing them to the most desirable customers as my cousins, assuring the customers that they would always be well treated.

One day Sill said, "You know, Gussie, I must admit I thought you were exaggerating about your business. Tell me your secret of success."

I answered him with what I honestly felt was the truth: "Sill, believe me, there are no secrets. Just make every customer feel important and essential to your business. Every person, big or small, wants to feel needed and useful, and you can never tell when a small person may become big—or recommend someone big. My greatest advantage was in starting with so many disadvantages. I knew so little, and

I expected so little. I took good care and appreciated the little things that eventually grew big.

"Because I knew so little, I was willing to learn. My mother used to say, '*A guter veller iz asakh beser vi a guter kener,*' which means: 'An incapable man who is willing may accomplish more than a capable man who is unwilling.' "

I constantly harbored a secret hope that it would be God's will that my Betty would marry again, and that he would once again send her love and happiness. However, this time it had to be double, because we now had Carolyn. As I write this, it is fifteen years since Jack was killed. Because of Carolyn, he has never left us. In his daughter are images of his talk, looks, carriage, his every mannerism, his good nature and kindness. I've yet to meet a single person who knew Jack who doesn't remark that Carolyn is a carbon copy of him. Now this first grandchild of mine is the same age as was her daddy when I first met him. I can still see him running across the street to buy candy bars at a nickel each when he could have saved time and money by buying them three for ten cents, just so he could get a few extra glimpses of her mother.

Shirley and I had been living with Betty and Carolyn since Jack's death three years before. I decided to buy a house for us and gave Betty the job of house-hunting to keep her occupied. A young realtor found Betty more interesting than his job of selling her a house and purposely showed her homes he thought were far beyond her reach in order to prolong the search. He was surprised when she selected a twelve-room house at 75 Mountain Spring Avenue in the Twin Peaks area.

The place was fifteen years old and needed quite a bit of modernization. We started painting and decorating, but

one thing kept leading to another. We even installed a children's playground off the badminton court. It was against my better judgment that we bought the place and refurnished it to such perfection, but I wanted to please Betty.

Before we started reconstruction I permitted Shirley, who was now in junior high school, to hold a dance for her friends. A caravan of cars brought sixty children to our place, and as they piled out of the cars, laughing and talking loudly, I was greeted by a man who introduced himself as a neighbor.

"And are you the new owner of this house?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. I'm pleased to know you," I answered.

"We are humble and refined people," he continued. "You better keep those kids quiet. This is not Fillmore Street!"

I didn't want to spoil Shirley's party, so I quietly turned and walked away from him. His words bothered me. My first instinct was to get away from this neighborhood where we were not wanted. But I knew that would be cowardly, so I decided to forget the incident, though I had been most embarrassed before the children.

Six months later our home was a show place. We named it "Carol Manor" after Carolyn. We held open house twice. The first time was for our Twin Peak neighbors. The neighbor who had been so rude attended, now humbly appreciative of the invitation. The second open house filled our home with our family and all of our friends.

Remembering my childhood, I was anxious to have Shirley bring her friends home often. She enthusiastically obliged me.

Hardly a week went by when an affair wasn't scheduled which entailed much preparation and extra service. How-

ever, we had a household staff of two, which solved the problem of extra work and know-how. After many a Saturday-night party we often had as many as ten sleeping overnight with us and remaining until the following evening. I was glad our house had the facilities for dances and such affairs. Shirley's Tri-Y Club at school used both the inside and outside, for barbecues and dances in the badminton court, to raise money for their various projects. The PTA of which our neighbor Mrs. McKeeman was president has spent many an enjoyable afternoon in our home. The house was always open to family and friends, and to their friends, for showers and other gatherings.

Being geared to such a fast pace after so many years of running the store, I found it difficult to slow down. I still had to be on the go all the time and even found it hard to break the habit of rising early and going to bed late, though I had very little to do.

With my encouragement Betty had been engaged twice, but both engagements were broken off because in each man she was trying to find Jack. I never stopped praying that once again God would bring her happiness and love.

The following year Betty and I took a boat trip to Hawaii. We spent the stopover in Los Angeles with Aaron and Margo Blackman, whom we had met through Aaron's brother Myron.

It was in 1936 that I had first purchased Three G's whiskey from Myron Blackman. It was one brand of whiskey for which there was very little demand. I tried hard to sell it so I could give him an order each time he called. He was a very young man—I doubt if he was twenty years old—but he was very appreciative: he always gave me a couple of free bottles, samples for his customers to taste.

During the war I received a phone call from Myron, who was in Los Angeles. He was home from the war, having been wounded. "Gussie," he asked, "could you possibly do me a favor? Could you reserve a hotel room or an apartment for my brother Aaron and his wife? He's an officer in the Navy, and will be stationed in San Francisco for a short while."

"Why, sure," I answered, and gave him my Betty's address.

"Oh, boy!" he cried. "When will you let me know?"

"It's been ready and waiting for two years." I cut him off without letting him ask me any more questions, since we had been on the telephone an hour already with Myron asking the news of the past four years.

The two weeks that Aaron and Margo spent at Betty's were like a gift from heaven. They devoted more time to the welfare and pleasure of Betty and Carolyn than to their own pleasure.

The love and friendship that blossomed from their visit have been priceless. It brought us not only their friendship but that of their parents and relatives as well. Just to know them makes one proud. They have come a long way, this skinny young couple who gave Betty a wrist watch for letting them use her rumpus room during their brief visit. At that time Aaron couldn't afford to do as much for his young bride. Today he is a prosperous and prominent attorney in Los Angeles. No words can express the privilege and pride we feel at knowing that they are our dear friends.

Betty was the center of attention when we stayed at the Royal Hawaiian. She never wore the same clothes twice; yet with each change she looked more glamorous. She had more male admirers than she needed. In fact, she didn't

need any of them. Most of them were "misunderstood husbands," and the others, who were eligible, were looking for rich widows. I was contented only when she wasn't out of my sight.

In one of her letters Shirley asked that I bring something home for her latest flame in high school. There was no time to buy anything more in Honolulu before we left, so when we stopped at Los Angeles on the return trip, I went shopping. I bought a shirt that looked almost identical to the ones I had bought in Hawaii. I ripped off the label saying "Made in Los Angeles," figuring that the boy would never know the difference. Yet, when I got home and opened the other packages of gifts we had bought in Honolulu, I found that all the shirts were marked "Made in Los Angeles." The only difference was that they had cost two dollars more in Honolulu.

In 1948, when television came to San Francisco, I bought a new-model ten-inch TV set for Helen. She was on her knees, cleaning, when two men appeared at the open front door, carrying the large carton. One of the men said, "We have a television set for you."

Without looking up, Helen said, "Don't step on my wet floor, and don't bring that thing in here. You've got the wrong address."

"Isn't this the Sherman residence?" the man asked.

"Yes, mister, but we didn't order any television. There's another Sherman family down the street." The angry drivers put the set back on the truck.

"Let's deliver it to that lady, Gussie something or other," said one hot driver.

Hearing my name, Helen ran outside and said, "Please, gentlemen, it's for me! Gussie is my mother."

Her daughter Sandra, now six, appeared on the scene and heard her mother saying, "Please bring the television in the living room."

The driver answered, "Okay, Mrs. Sherman, you win. We'll bring it in."

At that little Sandra rushed to the phone and called me. "You know what, Grandma? Mother won a television set, and they are bringing it in right now!"

I was surprised, but I hung up without asking any questions. I figured that I had better cancel the set I had ordered for them that morning. I called the salesman and told him I wanted my order canceled since my daughter had just won a TV set. He said, "I'm sorry, but it already went out."

"Look," I said, "don't kid me. I'll stop payment on my check. What do you take me for, a fool?"

"Yes," replied the clerk. "And I wouldn't cancel that check if I were you," he threatened.

I was determined not to let him get the better of me. He'd probably lie about anything to make a sale, I thought. It was then two forty-five in the afternoon. I phoned the bank, and they told me I would have to come in and sign the stop-payment order on the check. I drove down in a hurry to do just that. When I came out of the bank, I found I had forgotten to check the parking meter. It was on red, and I had a ticket. I still felt lucky; I could easily have gotten a ticket for speeding on the way down and been delayed until after the bank had closed.

I didn't feel sorry for that TV salesman: he had no business talking to me as he had. After all, I had purchased a set there the week before for Shirley. I thought he could at least have said, "Congratulations. You have a smart daughter." I wondered what questions Helen had answered to

win her set. Or perhaps she had won it in a raffle. Anyway, I did some shopping and then went home and phoned Helen.

"Congratulations!" I said.

"Where have you been?" she answered. "I've been trying to reach you for the last two hours."

"Don't worry, Helen," I said confidentially. "Sandra told me the good news. By the way, how did you win the TV?"

"Stop kidding, Mother. I know you sent it."

"Stop kidding, yourself," I said. "I canceled the set I bought for you. By the way, did the store phone you?" I wondered how she knew I had bought her one. Then Helen said, "Wait a minute, Mother. Let's get this straight." She told me exactly what happened.

The next morning I was parked in front of the bank before it opened. When the teller saw me, he said, "The check didn't come in, Gussie. I guess those fellows won't deposit it."

"Good," I said. "I don't want it stopped."

He appeared confused. "What happened?" he asked. I just said, "Oh, it's a long and embarrassing story."

Until now I've never told anyone that story, not even Helen.

But there's one more bit to add. When I went out to my car, I found another ticket—his time for parking in a yellow loading-zone.

Betty was still my greatest concern. Somehow I had the gift of bringing together other boys and girls who proved suitable to one another. However, I couldn't do this for my own child. I had introduced Ben Lewis, who worked for me, to Selma, his future wife. It was through him that I met

his cousin, Leon Bauman, whom I introduced to his future wife Carol. Carol was Helen's girl friend. Now, for the past year, Leon, who was manager of De Lane's Jewelry store in Oakland, had tried to get Betty to meet a young man from Brooklyn who was his assistant manager. Betty refused to meet this man because he was not six feet two inches tall. Unconsciously she was still looking for someone like Jack. Betty herself was only five feet tall.

Leon and his wife were having dinner with our family when he said to Betty, "Will you do me a favor and have dinner with this kid? Goldie [a nickname for his friend, Albert Godhagen] has been after me ever since I told him how cute you are. He is really a nice guy. I have him to dinner often, because he has no family here. They're all in Brooklyn." She finally consented—probably, I think, to please me.

When she came home, she said, "I met the right one. You will really like Al." Somehow, though, I wasn't too impressed with Al when I first met him. He drove a Cadillac and had an overabundance of ambition for a young man of his age. I doubted if Betty could keep up with his enormous enthusiasm for doing big things.

David and Lillian liked Al, but this wasn't the reason I changed my mind about him. Every time he called on Betty he had a present in each hand—one for Betty and one for Carolyn. His love for Carolyn seemed genuine. I wasn't doing so much baby-sitting, either: they usually took Carolyn with them.

When Betty said, "Mother, I'm going to marry Al," I was very happy, in spite of her having known him for such a short time. Then she added, "But I'm going to do the one thing you have objected to.

"Mother dear, it won't make any difference what you say any more. I have already made all the arrangements to bring Jack back." Before I could speak she went on, "I want to marry Al very much, but I can't until I do the thing I know Jack would have wanted—to bring him home."

"If that will bring you peace of mind and happiness, my child, I'm with you all the way."

From that moment on the funeral started. The months of waiting, while Jack's body was brought from overseas, were more heartbreaking than the burial itself. Still, the final outburst of grief provided relief from all the sorrow we had stored up. I was proud of Betty when she handed Jack's mother the flag that had covered the coffin, after it had first been presented to her.

Al called me "Mom" even before they were married, which made me feel even better about him. After the wedding date was set Al said to me, "Gee, Mom, I've never even attended a real wedding. I don't know what a groom should wear or how he is supposed to act."

I was bewildered. I hadn't considered a second wedding for Betty. I thought it neither proper nor necessary. Yet I didn't want Al to be cheated out of a wedding, since he had never been married before. Because he was going to be my child and I have always treated my children alike, I decided that he was entitled to a wedding equal to the others.

Just before the ceremony Leon whispered to me, "You can't say I owe you a thing any more. You got me a wife, and I got you a son-in-law. Fair exchange!"

"Which only goes to prove my point," I answered. "When you light another's torch, you are bound to brighten your

own light."

With champagne and ceremony, my Betty and my Al were married in the Gold Room at the Fairmont Hotel. David again added inspiration to the occasion with his magnificent voice. At the catered dinner he again performed perfectly as master of ceremonies.

Al's father flew in from Brooklyn for the wedding. Since his son refused to live in New York, he was concerned for Al's welfare so far from home, Yet any anxiety over his son's future was dispelled when he arrived. When he met Carolyn, he hugged and kissed her and said, "I am your grandpa," and presented her and me with gifts.

In New York's East Side they used to say, "The apple don't fall far from its tree." In other words: Like father, like son.

With all my heart I thanked God for sending my Betty, twice, what many people don't find once.

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The day after Betty and Al returned from their honeymoon Shirley and I left for New York City. Even though our house was spacious, I felt that they should be alone for a while, given the opportunity to adjust themselves to their new life. So I decided that this was an opportune time to make the trip I had promised Shirley.

It had been twenty-seven years since I had left New York, with a troubled, heavy heart and a sick baby. Fourteen years earlier I had been at death's door and had visited New York in search of I knew not what.

Now, in 1949, with my heart overflowing with happiness and contentment, I was making another trip there—this time a pleasure trip with my youngest daughter.

Seated by the window on the plane, I looked out and whispered, "California, I love you. You are the land of multiplication. I came to you with little hope, little family, no money, no friends, no security. Now, of what I had nothing I have plenty; of what I had a little I have a great deal more." Then, as the plane climbed in the sky, I felt myself getting closer to God, just as I had felt the morning I was granted my freedom from my second marriage, when, on my knees, I had taken God unto myself as my mate, faithful to him ever thereafter. The Bible states, "*man un vaib iz eyn layb*" [Man and wife is one life]." In him I had found the love and peace and contentment for which I had been searching even as a child, but which I hadn't found in my two husbands. God had provided me with everything I love so much, and more than anything else I loved him best.

My sixteen-year-old baby Shirley had blossomed into a beautiful girl. I thought of how changed she was from just three years ago, when she was a skinny, long-legged but vivacious child, always running. It was Lillian who had shown me the advertisement, saying, "This is what Shirley needs to tone her down. She's tall for her age, and she will make a beautiful model if you enrol her in this school."

Shirley was Lillian's favorite, and she insisted that she would enrol my daughter herself if I didn't. I argued that she was too young but finally decided to leave it up to Shirley. Without hesitation she pleaded, "Please, Mother, can I? Betty is so talented in singing and art, and Helen is so smart; I want to be good in something too." Shirley always made the honor roll in school, but what she referred to was the way

I depended on, and consulted with, Helen. I figured I might as well satisfy her and Lillian, although I had the feeling that Lillian had briefed her before talking to me. Also, I thought, what have I got to lose—with ten lessons for thirty dollars?

I gave Betty the money, and she took Shirley to the modeling school. I blew my top when I learned they had high-pressured her into signing a binding contract for a one hundred and twenty dollar course, with the thirty dollars as down payment. However, this turned out to be the best investment I ever made. I showed her off as if I were a child with a beautiful new doll. Now, in New York, I was prouder of her than ever.

We planned a six-weeks' trip and had a lot of territory to cover in that time. We spent two days in New York before sailing for Bermuda, planning to stay longer when we returned.

My first instinct was not to communicate with my family or even to let them know we were in New York. I knew they didn't care. Yet I had a longing to see their children and perhaps to become acquainted with them. I was curious and wondered if the children's ways were different from those of their parents. At any rate, I didn't contact any of my family before sailing.

Shirley and I found Bermuda picturesque and charming, with its narrow streets, small English cars, quaint shops, and many bicycles. We giggled when we saw six-foot clerks, who looked normally dressed standing behind a counter, walk around to the front with knees barely covered by Bermuda shorts.

At the Harmony Hotel, where we stayed, we met two young men who had chartered a boat and who invited Shir-

ley to go fishing with them. She accepted on condition that her mother be included. One of the young men said, "Your mother doesn't have to worry. We will have the Captain along with us."

Shirley said, "Mother is not worried—*I* am. I don't want to leave her behind."

How I wished she had! For four hours I lay on the deck of that little boat, face down. Whenever I lifted my head, I got sicker, especially when I saw the Captain serving food and drinks to the others.

We spent two enjoyable weeks shopping and taking advantage of the eight-hundred-dollar duty-free quota we were allowed.

When we returned to New York, I met Al's mother, Irene, and my happiness increased. She was one of the kindest, sweetest women I had ever met. She prepared a lavish dinner for us in her four-room apartment, and relatives from Long Island, Miami, Atlantic City, and White Plains came to welcome us into their family.

The warm reception we received from Al's parents influenced me to change my mind and phone members of my first family. I felt that I possessed too much to harbor any animosity toward anyone. It was Yom Kippur morning, and a solemn, pious feeling welled inside me. I decided to phone them and wish them a happy New Year.

I phoned Harold, my oldest brother, first.

"Hello, who is it?" he answered.

"Your sister Gussie!"

"Who? Gussie?" There was a pause. Then: "*Du Goye* [You Gentile]! Don't you know it's Yom Kippur today and it's a sin to use the phone?"

"Sure," I said. "I know it's Yom Kippur. I phoned to wish

you a happy New Year. But if it's a sin to use the phone, isn't it just as much a sin to answer it?"

"Well, I thought there was something wrong with one of my properties and one of my managers was phoning me up!" That was all he said. He hung up without even asking me where I was phoning from.

Next I phoned Herbert's home, long distance.

"Happy New Year, Herbert. This is your sister Gussie. I'm in New York with my youngest daughter Shirley."

I could have anticipated Harold's response to my call. But Herbert was so unlike Harold. They never saw things eye to eye, and they were seldom on speaking terms. So why shouldn't I have been surprised when Herbert said, "Gussie! You mean you are here in New York? How could you afford it? That must have been a good racket you were in. What name are you going under now?" He said all this in one breath, as though he thought he had only a limited time in which to speak.

Quietly I said, "I was in no racket, Herbert. In California the liquor business is a respectable, legitimate business. I worked hard, and, with the help of God, it paid well. And I have resumed my former name, the name my daughters bear." I then inquired about his children. He suggested I get in touch with his oldest daughter Ruth, who was attending college in New York City. I thanked him and said goodby.

I wondered why Herbert was ridiculing me now. Was it because he felt superior to me because he was still married for the first time, while I hadn't been fortunate enough to make a success of either of my marriages? Or perhaps it was the kind of business I was in. I didn't suppose it would change his attitude if he knew that I had not been in the

liquor business by choice but because it just happened that way—or how my heart longed to be in the ready-to-wear business, with reasonable hours on weekdays and Sunday off to enjoy the time with my children.

After this reception I decided against visiting any of my sisters or brothers. My Shirley wouldn't have understood such attitudes in a family. But I was anxious to know my nieces and nephews and their offspring. They didn't know us. Ruby and Charles were the only ones I remembered.

So I called Leah's home to get her daughter's address. Joe answered, with that same gentle, kind voice. "Please, Gussie, come and visit us. It's been fourteen years since we saw you last. We are all getting older, and we never know when it might be the last time." He gave me his daughter Ruby's address. She was married, had a little daughter, and lived in New Jersey. Before he hung up he made me promise to visit him and Leah.

I visited Ruby, who had blossomed into a fine young woman. She had an adorable little girl. She told me that Harold's and Blanche's children were living in Brooklyn, not far from each other. Ruby gave me the phone number of Nathan, Harold's youngest son.

I phoned Nathan and also spoke to his wife Mollie. Both were cordial and expressed their desire to meet us. Since there were several of my nieces and nephews living near them, I asked if they could make arrangements for us to see them all the following evening.

In their immaculate little three-room apartment Nathan, Mollie and their two lovely children, a son and a daughter, lived.

Mollie and Nathan were most gracious and hospitable. I learned that Nathan was a mail-carrier and that he had

served in the war. Mollie and Nathan acted so warmhearted as to recall to mind the saying about blood being thicker than water. In the case of my first family, however, it had taken another generation to thicken it.

I couldn't help but wonder if Mother had known that there were exceptions to the rule when she spoke of "*Vi di eltern azoy di kindern* [Children take after their parents]." Harold wasn't anything like my parents; neither were these children like Harold. Mother's first concern had been for her children. I remember the time—we were living on Orchard Street—when a woman who sold underwear could not pay for the material she had bought from Mother. So, in exchange, Mother brought home flannel nightgowns for her three daughters. These were the only ones we ever had, but Mother never owned a nightgown herself.

Handing me a picture of her family, Mollie said, "Aunt Gussie, I want you to have this." Before I could say, 'Thank you," Nathan said, "Taking pictures is my hobby. I'd love to have one of you and Shirley."

After Nathan took pictures of us with his children he and Mollie took us to see Charles. His family occupied an apartment in one of the buildings Harold owned. Clara, Charles's youngest sister, also lived in the same building. I would have liked to become better acquainted with Charles's family, but because of Clara, who was in Charles's apartment, our visit was cut short. At first I found it difficult to understand why she had such an arrogant attitude toward us and why she threw so many sarcastic remarks my way.

Finally I understood, and I said to her, "Look, Clara, I came to see you all in good faith. I wanted to meet my nieces and nephews and their children. I've never seen most of you before, and you've never seen us. Yet you have taken this

offensive stand based on what you claim to know about me in my earlier years in California. You got your ideas from your Aunt Blanche, who has little love for me." My efforts to get acquainted on this visit proved abortive. Then Mollie and Nathan pleaded that we visit their parents.

Since Fanny's home was within walking distance, I consented to visit her. This time, however, as we walked up the stairs of her house, it was I who remarked, "I heard these same squeaking stairs thirty years ago." Everyone chuckled. Fanny was the same good-natured person, only a little heavier and older. I never did learn why Harold didn't show himself. They said he had had to go somewhere, but I was sure I heard someone in the bedroom as I was passing through the hall. I looked around and saw the same furniture in the same places, the same display in the same china closet. I met Harold's oldest daughter, too. She was the only one in Harold's family who wasn't married.

I invited Mollie and Nathan to have dinner with us at the Ambassador Hotel in Manhattan. I also phoned invitations to Ruth and Ruby and her husband. They all accepted, and I found Ruth a pretty and intelligent girl, and Ruby's husband a fine boy.

It did my heart good to see these cousins dining and dancing together, with my Shirley amongst them. When I noticed tears in the eyes of one of my guests, I asked, "Why the tears?"

"I wish the rest of the family were like you, Aunt Gussie." These words more than made up for the lack of affection shown me by the parents of these children.

All I could think of to say was, "Thank you, my dear. You are so very kind."

That night my thoughts went back to Phillip. I was in my

late forties, and only now did I fully realize that I was not wanted in our family; but Phillip at fifteen had perceived the antagonism toward himself and gone away. I am sure these children would have loved their Uncle Phillip. They had neither met him nor seen a picture of him.

The next day I phoned to say good-by to Joe and Leah to tell them our time was running short. However, when Joe insisted that I visit them, assuring me we could return on the same day, I couldn't refuse.

The next morning Shirley and I took the first train out. We visited with them for only a few hours. On our way back to the train depot Joe and Leah stopped at Herbert's place of business. I had distributed among the different relatives presents that I had brought from Bermuda; the two bottles of liquor I had left I presented to Herbert. I thought that he would open one of the bottles so that we could all share a pleasant moment together. Yet he stayed behind the counter, in the exact spot and in the exact manner as he had fourteen years before.

This time, however, I was in high spirits and very proud of my gorgeous daughter beside me. We had a brief conversation, and, as we left, I said, "You know something, Herbert? If I died today, I would have no regrets about anything that has happened in my life. If things hadn't happened as they did, I wouldn't have my three lovely daughters, two wonderful sons-in-law, and my remarkable grandchildren. No amount of money could buy the love and companionship we enjoy together." I doubt if he understood me. He just stood there, looking at me as if I had spoken in a foreign language.

Leah and Joe drove us to the station and stood on the platform until the train left. Looking out of the train window,

I saw Leah standing there, waving good-by. She was quite gray now and still weighed almost two hundred pounds. For a moment I thought it was Mother at whom I was looking. I had never realized before that Leah was the exact image of Mother. If the train hadn't started, I would have gotten off to hug and kiss her, to tell her I loved her.

Once the train pulled out, Shirley said, "Now can we start seeing New York?"

I said, "Yes!" but my heart was singing, "California, we will soon be on our way home, to God's country—back to where we are loved and needed."

I began to realize how little I had seen of the city in the twenty-two years I lived there. Together we saw the Bowery, Rockefeller Center, Riverside Drive, and the Statue of Liberty. We even squeezed in a visit to the East Side. I took a snapshot of the house on Broome Street where Helen had been born. It looked even worse than I had remembered it.

Washington, D.C., was the next stop on our trip. We didn't stay there long, but we did manage to take every available tour. Now, exhilarated, I constantly felt like singing, "America, I love you." On Saturday night, when we went to pick up our plane tickets for New Orleans, the attendant said, "Sorry, we don't accept personal checks." I had only about seventy-five dollars in cash, so, when I went back to the hotel to check out, I made my check for two hundred more than the amount of our bill. However, the desk clerk wouldn't accept a check for more than the amount of the bill. When I asked to see the manager, I was told that he was on vacation. We went back to the airline ticket office, and I pleaded with the girl to let me speak to her superior. She refused my request, saying that her orders forbade this.

I was perturbed at having our travel schedule upset. It was nearing the time when Shirley had to return to school,

and there was still so much we wanted to see.

A young serviceman walked over to us and said, "I'll cash your check. I don't even carry travelers' checks any more, because of the bad times I've had trying to cash them. I just carry cold cash. They take *that* fast enough; in fact, they don't even give it a chance to warm up in your pocket." He pulled out six or seven one-hundred-dollar bills from his pocket and said, "How much do you need?"

"Well," I said, "I have seventy-five dollars, and the tickets are a hundred and thirty."

"Well, how about two of these, then? You gals can't go around without any change."

"Are you sure you want to do this?" I asked as I wrote the check out quickly, hoping that he wouldn't change his mind.

He introduced himself as "Mickey Finn." Shirley and I looked at each other unbelievingly. He pulled out his identification to prove it. I said, "With a name like that, no wonder you have trouble cashing checks!" He laughed and then invited us to take a tour of Washington at night.

"We'd enjoy that very much," I said.

"Great! First I have to pick up a guy in the hotel lobby who has been with me. But I must warn you, he has the homeliest puss you've ever seen."

We followed him into the hotel lobby. Then, suddenly, we saw Mickey sitting just ahead of us. I couldn't imagine how he had gotten there so fast without seeing him! Then, right beside us, we heard Mickey's voice say, "Well, what did I tell you? Isn't he homely? That's my twin brother!"

We certainly enjoyed seeing Washington with the Finn twins. Thanks to Mickey, we were able to stay on schedule and arrived in New Orleans on Sunday.

Early Monday morning we made a stop at the bank to

rectify our money situation. I had seen some exquisite hand-embroidered Irish linen that I wanted to bring home to California. With all my identification I handed a teller my check for three hundred dollars.

"Well, who are you?" she asked in a sneering tone. I thought perhaps she doubted my signature, since she hadn't seen me write the check. Tearing it up, I said, "Oh, that's all right. I'll write another one."

"Well," she said, "you'd better come with me." We followed her to the rear of the bank. "Wait here," she said in her Southern drawl. She entered an office and, in a few minutes, came out, saying, "You better go in now." Her face still wore that sneering expression as she held the door open.

After greeting the man behind the desk I handed him my identification papers.

"What is this I hear about you ladies going around town trying to cash checks?"

I didn't hide the fact that this remark made me angry. "I don't know who you are," I said, "but I know who I am, and if I were you I would be more careful about jumping to conclusions. I'll pay whatever you charge for cashing checks. If my identification is not satisfactory, you can phone the president of my bank in San Francisco."

At this he appeared nettled and, in a more gentle voice, asked, "Will you pay for the phone call?"

"Sure I will," I answered. "I wouldn't expect you or the bank to pay for the call."

"Do you know the number?"

"In this case I think it would be wise if you got it from information."

He hesitated a moment, then asked, "Do you know the president's name?"

"Certainly. It's Mr. Voden."

He made the call and, when he had been connected with the bank's operator, asked, "What is the name of the president of your bank? Oh!" Then he said a bit sheepishly, "Will you kindly put him on?" After a few seconds, in the most respectful tone, he said, "How do you do, Mr. Voden? I have a couple of young ladies here wishing to cash a very large check drawn on your bank." Then he handed me the phone.

"Good morning, Mr. Voden," I chirped.

Then, as if I was deaf, Mr. Voden scolded, "Gussie, what the devil are you doing, running around the country without any money?" When I explained about being on a vacation, he told me that it was about time I got some fun out of life. Then he said sharply, "Put that guy on the wire again."

When the New Orleans banker hung up, he said, "Mr. Voden said to let you have any amount of money you wanted." So I wrote a check for five hundred dollars! The man was so busy apologizing for his attitude that he didn't charge me for the phone call or for cashing the check.

Shirley and I made a point of having each meal at different restaurants—Arnaud's, Honolulu Harry's, and Antoine's. We had been told that Antoine's, in the French Quarter, was always crowded, and was also the place where our late President Franklin D. Roosevelt ate, so we decided to get there during the early dinner hour. However, even at five o'clock the place was nearly full.

As we ate dinner, we wondered why the place was plunged into darkness at periodic intervals. Also, it seemed odd that there was a latch on the front door, with a man standing there as if on guard, admitting only a few people at a time. If I hadn't know the year, I would have believed that it was a speakeasy. When we were served our dessert, we learned

the reason for all the lights being turned out: it happened each time the brandy that was poured over the crepes suzette was lighted, providing a dramatic effect. As we left the restaurant, we learned the answer to the locked, guarded door: outside was a line of people two blocks long. Only a few at a time were admitted as room became available inside.

Our last stop was at the fabulous Shamrock Hotel in Texas. Then we were on our way to California—and home.

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Regardless of how much I enjoy traveling, the best part is the homecoming and my grandchildren's welcoming greeting, "Hurrah! Grandma is back!"

My three daughters are my wealth, and my grandchildren are the interest derived from that wealth, with my principal now working for my interest.

Not long after Betty and Al were married they bought a home in Oakland, so that Al could be nearer his work. Helen and her family moved to Walnut Creek to provide more of a country life for her children. She had now been blessed with two sons; Craig, also named after my papa, and George, named for Sherman's father.

When Betty gave birth to Denise, I felt I held a winning full-house—three queens and two kings.

Somehow I never lost the desire for twins or for hair ribbons, the two things I had dreamed so much about as a child. I couldn't get my girls to wear hair ribbons, so I tried it on my granddaughters. Since Carolyn and Sandra were only two months apart, it pleased me greatly when people took them for twins. I bought them identical clothes, and

when they both called me "Grandma," the clerks had no doubts about their being twins. It was almost as if my dreams had come true. Now I was enjoying the "growing up" of my grandchildren that I had missed, to a large extent, with my own children.

I have never preached any religious doctrine to my children other than that there is only one God, the Creator of us all. We eat ham, bacon, and pork, and spread butter on our bread when eating it—simply because we like the taste of it. I always believed that God doesn't care what goes into our mouths—that he is concerned only with the words that come out of them. I am sure God wants us to have the privilege of doing what we desire, so long as we do not harm anyone else in the process.

It makes me happy that my children are all active members of their temples. They and their children observe all the Jewish religious holidays and attend all services. My grandchildren began going to Sunday school long before entering public school, and they still attend regularly. They are taught to be loyal to their faith, first in their homes by their parents, and then in their temple. I am happy they are doing what they want to do.

When Al asked Denise how she enjoyed kindergarten on her first day in public school, she answered, "Fine, but, Daddy, a boy kissed me in school."

Al, very surprised, asked, "What did you do?" figuring that his daughter must have complained to the teacher.

"Daddy, I just kissed him back."

Her father, moving closer to her, raised his voice and said, "You did what?"

Denise put her hands up, as if to hold her father off, and yelled, "It's all right, Daddy. He's Jewish!"

On another occasion my grandchildren were getting ready to have lunch with me, and it was Easter week. When I asked them if they wanted bread or rolls, they hollered, "Why, Grandma, it's Passover! Don't you have matzos?"

"Why, sure," I answered. "We have it all year round."

"Okay, then, we will have lunch with you!" When I asked them what they wanted with it, they asked for ham and cheese; they didn't eat until they had said the Hebrew prayer they had learned in Sunday school.

Even though Shirley was my baby and we were thirty-two years apart in age, we were very close. We talked together much more intimately than I have ever been able to do with anyone else. The leisure time I had now probably helped the situation, but we enjoyed going out and just being together. When Shirley left home to attend college, I found myself feeling useless with little to do each day. I had no desire to work or to go into any kind of business: I had had enough of that for one lifetime.

Now I found myself alone in a twelve-room house. However, on most days I saw only my bedroom and bath. I preferred eating my meals out to sitting down alone at my kitchen table. I got in my car and rode for hours. I have always had a poor sense of direction, but on those trips I didn't mind getting lost, because I was seldom going any place in particular.

It seemed that my life had suddenly gone from one extreme to another. With so much time on my hands, and starting to feel sorry for myself, I knew that ultimately I could become my own worst enemy. I had to find something: I couldn't go on just eating and sleeping—especially when I wasn't doing a good job of either.

At night, when I couldn't sleep after the last TV program

was over, I tried reading. I found myself reading words I couldn't even pronounce, much less understand. I wished that I had paid more attention to my schooling. It was then I realized that I could still learn—if I wanted to. So I enrolled in the Marina High School for adults and attended classes three days a week. From two until three in the afternoon I studied English, then had a typing class from three until four. Then I would have dinner and return for my real-estate course between six and seven.

The English and typing courses helped make the writing of this book possible.

I enjoyed my real-estate class very much. At the end of the semester the instructor insisted that I was ready to take the examination for a license. I kept putting it off, saying that I didn't feel I was ready for the test and that I wanted to continue learning. He must have been under the impression that I was stalling because I didn't have the five dollars for the application blank, because he graciously offered to advance it to me. Eventually I had to quit to make room for another student.

I saw an advertisement in the paper: "Easy way to learn to play the piano." It interested me, because we had two pianos in the house, both idle.

Those "easy" lessons were the hardest work I ever did. I marked the keyboard. I took my lessons to bed with me to study. I practiced hard. I didn't want to give up, even though I swore each lesson would be my "last."

In a year and a half I had taken seventy-five lessons and could play "Home on the Range." Yet no one asked me to play for them. They were tired of hearing it and "Sleepy Lagoon," both played in slow motion.

I used to look forward to Saturday nights, torn between

two hopes: the hope of having Shirley spend the week end with me, so I wouldn't be spending it alone, or of her going out and enjoying herself with people of her own age. From the time she was sixteen she never dated anyone under twenty-one. At sixteen her first steady boy-friend was twenty-two. At seventeen she went with a boy twenty-six. Both boys were intelligent, tall and good-looking. I would have approved of either if Shirley had been in love with them.

I was constantly praying that God would find it in his heart to send my baby girl whatever she was searching for—provided it included love and happiness. I worried a great deal about her, although I concealed my feelings. She was determined to become an actress, a career I had hoped that none of my children would follow.

When an actor or actress whom she wanted to meet came to town, she found a way to do it. I never found out how she managed to meet Jerry Lewis when he and Dean Martin were appearing in a San Francisco theater. On her second visit to see him she took me along. You would have thought Jerry Lewis was a close relative, the way he treated her. When he complained about not feeling up to par, he seemed pleased at Shirley's suggestion that I bring him some of "Mother's chicken soup." The next day Shirley went back to school, but, as she had promised, I brought Jerry his chicken soup—and even massaged his back! It touched me when he called me "Mamma." There was no doubt that Shirley had a winning way about her.

She had just passed her nineteenth birthday and was home for a week end. We were watching a local TV program when Sandy Spillman appeared on the screen. In a bragging way I remarked, "Gee, he is a swell guy—and he is much better-looking in person."

"When did you see him, Mother?" Shirley asked.

"Why, I had dinner with him about a year ago. You know, you're not the only one who can meet a celebrity!"

"Oh, yeah?" said my daughter teasingly. "Who did the cooking?"

"I don't know who cooked, but it was at Celia Rosenberg's anniversary dinner."

"How about renewing your acquaintance, then?" she challenged.

My shrewd little Shirley never passed up the slightest opportunity to further her career. She surprised herself, however, when, three weeks later, she found not a job on TV but an engagement ring on her finger!

Shirley had found everything she was looking for in Sandy. He was mature (attested to by the touch of gray at his temples), thoughtful and charming. He was in his early thirties, and he claimed that he had just been waiting for my Shirley.

We celebrated the engagement of Shirley and Sandy in our home. The centerpiece on the refreshment table was a globe of the world. On top of the globe were seated two dolls, one in the image of Sandy, the other a miniature of Shirley, dressed exactly as she was.

But it was I whom God had again placed on top of the world!

Four months later they were married in the Gold Room of the Fairmont Hotel.

Again David honored us and contributed so much to the success of my baby's wedding, through the inspiration of his magnificent voice.

With the completion of this marriage ceremony, Rabbi White, who had performed the marriage rite for all three of

my daughters, shook my hand and said, "*Mazl tov. In Yirtze hashem bay di eyniklekh* [Congratulations. God willing, the same repetition for the grandchildren]."

"Thank you, Rabbi," I said. "I hope it will be you who performs their marriage ceremonies."

Shirley was on cloud nine. She had managed to have a "different" sort of married life, a "working partnership." She now assisted Sandy on his daily program. Shirley is a wonderful manager. Why, she could even have her babies without me being there!

I answered the phone at eighty-thirty one morning and heard her say, quite casually, "Mother, if you're not busy, why don't you drop by the hospital and see your new grandson."

Shirley had two weeks to go before her baby was due, but, knowing they had their hearts set on a son, I said, "Shirley, you better stop kidding, or you will end up having a girl."

Then Dr. Sidney Gospe, who had delivered all my other grandchildren, came on the phone and said, "Gussie, you have another fine grandson."

I was so surprised that I said, "How did you ever do it without me?"

To which he answered, "Believe me, it was a whole lot easier!"

Three weeks later Shirley returned to work on TV with her husband. Later, when she presented us with Susan, I wasn't the only one she put it over on. She knew that Sandy was doing an important filming that morning. So, after he left, she phoned Elaine Fitzgerald, her favorite neighbor, and asked that she drive her to the hospital. Arriving there, Shirley asked Dr. Gospe if it was possible to have the baby

before five o'clock, the time Sandy was due home. When the doctor told her it was unlikely, she phoned Sandy's office and left word to call Elaine Fitzgerald before coming home.

Later in the day, when Sandy did make that call, Elaine told him to call the hospital.

I'm sure he must have been as surprised as I was with the birth of Steven when Shirley answered the phone and said, "Hi, honey, you have a beautiful daughter waiting to meet you."

Seeing my three happily married girls, with fine healthy families of their own, I thanked God for helping me to reach my goal. I sold Carol Manor and moved into one of two flats I had purchased. I felt alone and sick at heart. I couldn't believe that at fifty my usefulness was finished.

Rarely did I miss listening to the Sunday-morning radio broadcast from the Cliff House. On one such broadcast Dean Maddux was interviewing a group having breakfast there. They called themselves the "National Smooth Dancers." They sounded so interesting that after they went off the air I phoned the Cliff House, and Andy Anderson, the organizer, was put on the phone. He invited me to meet the group. I attended their social gathering and met the wonderful middle-aged men and women there. I was happy to be accepted as one of them and was introduced to many fine people, who became some of my closest friends. Also, I enjoyed numerous evenings of dancing and lessons. Most important of all, I met people who were later among the main supporters of my third family.

The Smooth Dancers give annual dances for the benefit of crippled children. Their slogan is: "Let's dance so others can walk." They also have chapters in Los Angeles, Oakland, and

many other cities and towns in California. Every year an individual group takes its turn in holding an annual convention.

The gala affairs given by these fine dancers are always honored by the presence of many celebrities. People flock to buy tickets, not only to support charity, but to have the privilege of watching the beautiful dancing-exhibitions presented on these occasions.

My week ends were no longer lonely, spent looking at four walls, for every week end I went dancing with the group of fifty to one hundred members to the El Patio Ballroom; another evening, to the Avalon Ballroom in San Francisco, and on Sunday nights we patronized Sweet's Ballroom in Oakland.

The Smooth Dancers never attended any dances without the ladies' wearing beautiful formal gowns. In the fall most of the men wore dark suits or dinner jackets, and in warm weather, they wore light-colored suits or white jackets, making the beautiful ballroom look like a Royal Ball.

It was a happy occasion for me when the group visited the Los Angeles Chapter to find that they practiced a similar routine. They also went dancing three nights a week; one night at the Château Ballroom, the other at Myron's Ballroom, and the third evening they danced to the music of Lawrence Welk at the Aragon Ballroom at the beach.

Dancing at these ballrooms was usually made more enjoyable by the presence of the well-known team of choreographers, Jeff Jefferies and his partner Margueriti.

This team instructed all the chapters of the National Smooth Dancers in professional dance routines. Often, too, we had the pleasure of watching the couple give a preview of their latest show.

Part III

MY THIRD FAMILY

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One Sunday I was listening, as usual, to the morning broadcast from the Cliff House. Once again this program served as a benefactor for me in my lonely idleness—when I heard Harry Bramstein, president of the TSSL chapter of the City of Hope. He invited its interested listeners to contact the secretary. I lost no time in calling the number given. I was informed that the organization was planning a convention at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles and that those attending would be taken on a tour of the City of Hope. I made reservations to attend the convention.

During the convention I realized what a small world I had been living in. I learned how much misfortune there is among other people and came to understand why contributions to the City of Hope were so greatly needed. Hearing of their humane work, I became a life member of the TSSL, anxious to support its program. I met members from some two hundred other chapters: people all working together to raise money to further the medical research and help provided by this philanthropic foundation.

We were having lunch in the Al Jolson Gardens, made possible by the generous bequest of the late Al Jolson, when I recognized Alice, one of the bridesmaids at my Helen's wedding. I wondered why she was there alone, but I hesitated to ask questions. I hadn't seen her in about ten years, but I knew

she was about a year younger than Helen, and now she looked much older than my oldest daughter. I remembered that she had become engaged shortly after Helen's wedding.

I was glad she set the stage for our conversation by asking about all my girls. We laughed about some of the crazy things they had done as members of the Rainbow Girls, and the good times they had had in the room above the store and in our little apartment, and how the neighbors used to complain about the noise they made. Some of the children had said that they wished their parents also worked until 2:00 A.M., so they could have their house to themselves to do as they wished, too.

Eventually tears came to her eyes, so I said, "Would you like to tell me what is troubling you, Alice?"

"Yes, I would, Gussie," she said. "I know you'll understand and won't think it's because I *fergin nisht* [begrudge or envy] your children. Do you remember that fellow Paul I was engaged to?"

"I sure do," I answered. "I liked him a lot."

"My parents wouldn't let me marry him," she said falteringly, "because of the uncertainties of the war. They said he might come back a cripple and I would have a handicapped husband. So I have nothing today. If I hadn't listened to them, I might at least have had his child. I was sure I loved him, but I didn't realize how much until I heard the news that he had been killed. So I left San Francisco and my family and moved to Los Angeles. I sat in my room crying and feeling sorry for myself. For a long time I couldn't even think of going out with other boys, but, now that I *would* go with any nice fellow, I'm not asked, because I'm considered an old maid."

Then, coming out of her bitterness, she said, "I am work-

ing now, and I've joined the City of Hope group here. It's for a wonderful cause, but I joined mostly to have a place to go out and meet people." Then, as though appealing to me, she said, "Where can a decent girl go to meet a decent man? First I tried going to public dances and bars. I gave that up in a hurry, though, because the more guys I met there, the more I decided I liked dogs. I constantly compared them with my Paul."

We were shown through the hospital and looked in on some of the patients. One was a little old lady who was wearing a *sheytl* (wig worn by extremely orthodox Jewish women) and smiling. When I smiled back, she said, "*Bister a Yidishe* [Are you Jewish]?"

"*Yo zikher* [Sure am]," I answered. She continued speaking in Jewish, asking me to visit with her for a while. She told me that her husband and children lived in New York and couldn't afford to visit her.

"You look fine," I said. "It won't be long before you're home with them again."

She smiled and said, "If you could only have seen me nine months ago, you would have sworn I was playing hooky from the grave. I was yellow as wax from that terrible fresh air on the East Side—even without the pushcarts that used to be that ain't no more."

"I know they will do wonders for you here, and you will be well and strong again," I said.

Then, in the most unconcerned, sweet manner, she said, "No, never can be. They said maybe perhaps I got another year. That's long enough. I'm living here on the fat of the land. Never in my whole life did I have it so good. They treat me like I was somebody I ain't. So I ask you: Who wants to get better to go back to the New York East Side?

Here I even have the *shul* [synagogue] outside, right in front of my nose. Believe me, they shouldn't know here from what's doing there." She sighed. "In the hot summer they pray for the winter, and in the freezing winter they pray for the summer!"

Alice and I were companions for the entire day. When we parted, I wished her good luck and happiness. She said, "Thank you, Gussie. You're a good woman. From your mouth it should go into God's ear, and he should hear you."

For some reason I couldn't get Alice off my mind or forget the way she looked.

That night I thought a great deal about that little old lady—and about Alice. I went over the long list of eligible bachelors I knew, thinking that I might know someone to whom I could introduce Alice. I wondered how many other people were in the same predicament. More fervently than I had done in a long time, I thanked God for all my blessings. I thanked him especially for keeping such misfortune from the lives of my girls. A cold sweat came over me when I realized that this might have happened to Betty if I had not consented to her marriage to Jack. "Dear God," I prayed, "please show me the way to thank you in more than just prayers." Then, as if God were responding, the idea revealed itself. I could organize a chapter of the City of Hope consisting of single people, and, perhaps through their gatherings, I might help some of God's other children find the happiness my children had found.

The next morning I asked the regional director if I could organize such a group. I was told that they didn't have such a chapter but that I could start any kind of group I wanted. However, they didn't think single people would be capable of raising much money.

I wanted more than anything else to help the sick, and, to my way of thinking, no person having a troubled heart is a healthy person.

I stayed the two remaining days of the convention, but I was totally absorbed in my own plans for that new chapter. I started making a list of single boys and girls who were friends of my daughters. I could hardly wait to get back home and call, inviting them to join my new chapter.

My heart sang with joy. I had been sure there was yet something important for me to do in my life.

When I got home, I found few people who thought my plan a really good idea. A few expressed some approval, but they gave me the impression that they were just being polite. Most of them said, "You really mean to organize a marriage bureau or lonely-hearts club!" One person asked if I was going to charge for acting as a matchmaker.

Another person said, "Why, you may even find yourself a young man." I was on the verge of discarding the idea, but I remembered that I had been discouraged before, many times, and had never quit! I figured: What do I have to lose in trying? I had no one but myself to account to if I didn't succeed. I decided to give a few socials at my house and see what happened.

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I phoned every single boy and girl I could locate and set the date for the first social to be held at my house. I knew most of them personally: they were the unmarried girl and boy friends of my children. I tried to get additional names from them, too. One of the fellows suggested that I visit Emanuel Temple on Friday night where the Emanuelites gathered for *Onez Shabot*

[meeting in honor of the Sabbath]. There I would find many young people, most of them single.

I went there prepared to tell them what the City of Hope stands for and that I was giving a social for the purpose of organizing a chapter for single people. The chapter would have the dual purpose of raising money for the City of Hope and arranging socials for its members to enjoy.

But when I got up to talk, I felt that a million butterflies were in my stomach—I could hardly talk. I managed to give my address and to say that I would have a nice spread for them. I was still shaking when I sat down. I tried to figure a way to leave without attracting attention to myself and being further embarrassed.

I had just about decided to walk along the edge of the room and sneak out the door when a young girl came walking across the center of the room toward me, smiling. She was a tiny thing, not five feet tall and probably weighing under a hundred pounds. She was olive-complexioned, and her black hair was cut in a Buster Brown style. She appeared to be of Italian or Spanish extraction. I wondered what she was doing in a Jewish temple.

"I'm Doris Goldberg," she said, extending her hand to me. As I took her hand, I felt like kissing her.

She said, "I think you have a marvelous idea. My mother has been active in the first San Francisco chapter of the City of Hope for over twenty-five years. My brother and I will be very happy to join you. I'll talk to the others. I am sure you will have a good turnout."

I thanked her, but I wondered how she would convince the others. During my attempt to speak many of the young people had heckled me, one fellow loudly remarking, "She's just a frustrated woman. She's probably going through the change of life." I wondered how she would fare with that

short, heavy-set fellow who sighed loudly and said, "Aw, nuts to her."

I wanted everything to be perfect for this first affair. I prepared enough food and drinks for about thirty people, though I really didn't expect that many. I bought a guest-book and a silk American flag. I was prepared with the latest sheet music and records in case anyone wanted to dance. I had plastic badges with name-tag inserts, so everyone would know each other's names without being formally introduced.

I was pleased when Doris and her brother Arnold were the first to arrive. I am sure she knew that I needed their moral support. They complimented me on the appearance of my place and on the spread I had prepared for the group. Doris named many she had talked to who would, she assured me, have been there except for previous commitments. They did their best to make me feel good.

Twelve people showed up. All of them seemed to enjoy themselves. They sang and played the very old songs, in preference to the latest ones I had bought. These boys and girls seemed to get along very well together. I felt that I had made a good beginning, so I set the date for another social, two weeks later. I asked each of them to try and bring a friend next time. They all thanked me as they left.

Anticipating the next affair, I got busy among those friends and acquaintances who I knew had single children and relatives. I also phoned each of those who had come to the first social, reminding them of the next gathering and encouraging them to bring their friends. Four of them told me that they wouldn't be able to make it. They said that they had met dates at my first social and that if these didn't work out they would come again at some future time. I figured my first efforts had not been in vain; here was evidence of some good results already.

These socials continued for several months, with more attending each time. Doris and Arnold, God bless them, were always the first ones there, always willing to offer their services and suggestions. I learned that they were twins and that both had good jobs and were supporting their widowed mother. I judged Doris to be about my Helen's age, and I came to love her and to look forward to her visits.

At each gathering we talked more about what we were going to do, but the plans never seemed to meet with everyone's approval. I felt that we should decide on a name for our group and suggested "The Singletons," membership being limited to single people. The name was objected to by many, especially after one girl said, "We will be called 'The Simpletons.'"

Evidently Doris and Arnold were convinced that I needed assistance, for they diplomatically suggested I appoint a temporary chairman and have someone take minutes. Then they suggested that we have a nomination of officers; we would then be ready to apply for a charter.

I was sure that they knew what they were talking about, though I myself didn't. Fortunately I was too embarrassed to ask questions. What other minutes are there, I wondered, besides those on the clock? And about us getting a charter—what did *that* mean? I thought a charter had to do with a bus or plane or boat. I didn't want to display my ignorance, so I said I intended to visit the head office in Los Angeles and seek their advice.

The following week I flew to Los Angeles and talked with Rose Bertram, the national auxiliary director. She furnished me with printed material describing the procedure for forming a new chapter. I asked her for suggestions on ways to raise money. She showed me samples used in the new perfume project, which was raising more money than any other

device they had tried.

"These little bottles of perfume cost the City of Hope forty cents each, and you sell them for one dollar," she explained. "They are packed in cartons of twenty-five each."

"That sounds wonderful to me," I said.

"How many do you think your group can sell?"

"Well, we have between twenty and thirty attending pretty regularly," I said. "If each one sells twenty-five bottles, that would come to about six hundred. I'll take a thousand bottles; I can sell the balance myself."

She appeared skeptical, saying, "You know that if you order them they have to be paid for in three months."

"That's all right," I said confidently. "I am sure it won't take that long."

"Don't you think you better try just a couple of hundred first?" she asked. I shook my head, and she let me have the thousand bottles, though reluctantly. What I didn't realize was that she was speaking from experience, while I was impelled only by my own ambition.

While in Los Angeles I attended the meeting of another chapter, to see how it was conducted. I read and studied the literature Rose Bertram had given me and went home confident that I now knew how to proceed. I was so enthusiastic that I couldn't wait for the next regular social. I phoned everyone in the guestbook, asking them to come and bring a friend to a special surprise gathering. More people than usual attended, and I began to feel that I was really making progress.

This time I wasn't trusting to my memory, nor was I going to get stage fright, because I had prepared notes for the occasion. I informed the group that we now had definite plans, that we were going to appoint a chairman to conduct

our next meeting, and that we were going to draw up a set of bylaws, elect officers, and determine the amount of dues. Then I told them about the surprise, our first money-making project: each member was to sell twenty-five bottles of perfume.

One would have thought I had told them they had to rob a bank, they acted so dumbfounded. They all gave some excuse for not being able to sell the perfume—no time, no friends, no one they knew who used perfume. They succeeded in completely ignoring the perfume project—but not the refreshment table or the piano. I overheard a remark to the effect that I had had no right to order the perfume and say that they would sell it without their vote of approval. I said no more about it, but I wondered to myself if they were right.

The next day I loaded my car with the cartons of perfume and I went first to see my ten tenants, five of whom are Negroes. For those who didn't know about the City of Hope, I explained its wonderful program. I left a package of twenty-five bottles with each tenant, asking them to try and dispose of them as a special favor to me. I told them that with every donation of one dollar they could offer a two-dollar bottle of perfume free, saying that the City of Hope was a charitable organization and therefore exempt from paying the very high tax on perfume. I told each one that I would be back in a couple of weeks to pick up what they hadn't disposed of, or perhaps to leave more. Then I suggested that this was something they would wish to tell their friends about, so that they also could take advantage of the offer and, at the same time, support such a worthy cause.

Then I decided to cover Fillmore Street, where I knew so many people. My first stop was Below-Cut-Rate Liquor.

Sill greeted me with a big smile and a hearty, "Hello, Gussie! What are you doing in our neck of the woods—seeing how the poor people live?" He asked me how I liked being a lady of leisure; I inquired about his family and asked how business was for him. Fortunately, each of us could say that everything was fine.

"Sill, I have a favor to ask of you."

Without hesitation he said, "Anything, Gussie. You just name it."

"But, Sill, you didn't ask me what it is!"

"I don't have to, it's you who is asking."

I couldn't help but answer, "No wonder I love you, Sill."

I put a carton of twenty-five bottles on the counter and gave him my pitch. He reached under the counter for his checkbook. "Who shall I make the check out to?"

"You don't have to pay me in advance," I explained.

"I'm going to give them to my good customers, Gussie, and list it as a donation to take off my income tax. I'll take two cartons," he answered.

When he handed me his check for fifty dollars, made out to the City of Hope, the words of that song Papa used to sing came to mind: "God in heaven is right; he knows what he does." No wonder Sill was doing so well. They had acquired another liquor store, and it also was doing well.

With the help of Sill's powerful selling point—"You can deduct it from your income tax"—not one person turned me down. Eddie Adair, from whom I purchased all my furniture, gave me a contribution of one hundred dollars and thanked me for my suggestion of giving the perfume as Christmas gifts to his friends and employees. My own girls, who are the world's worst saleswomen, each took on twenty-five bottles.

I left twenty-five bottles at the Alexander Hamilton Hotel, where Lillian lives. The next day I received a precious note and check. Nothing Lillian would do could add to the love I have for her—there just isn't any more room in my heart.

On every occasion, whether it calls for tears or rejoicing, Lillian always treats my children or grandchildren as if they were her own. Lillian has no children of her own, but she finds more reasons than birthdays or holidays to give my family gifts. Even when a grandchild has tonsils removed, or loses a tooth, he is rewarded by her. How does one find ways to thank God for such a friend?

Betty had invited me to one of her celebration parties. I knew the perfume I had been selling was the finest, so I figured that if I was selling it I ought to show how good I thought it was by using it myself.

That evening Dr. Fallow's wife said, "Gee, Gussie, you smell good tonight. What is it you are using?" I opened my purse and took out six little bottles, each of a different fragrance. I said, "I don't know which one I used. Smell them all, and, for a one-dollar donation to the City of Hope, take the ones you like best." This attracted the attention of the other female guests, who wanted to smell the different bottles. When it seemed like the six bottles weren't enough to take care of all the anxious smellers, I told them that I just happened to have more in my car.

That night I went home with contributions totaling one hundred and twenty-five dollars! Last but not least, my Smooth Dancers sold hundreds of bottles.

Within a month I had not a single bottle left. I decided that, until I received the money from all the people who were soliciting for me, I would not mention a word about the perfume to my chapter.

By now Harold Dressler, a young and upcoming attorney, had been chosen president. The others elected were: Arnold Goldberg, first vice-president; Jerry Frankel, second vice-president; Manuel Segal, treasurer; Cecelia Anolik, recording secretary; and my little Doris Goldberg, corresponding secretary.

I was thrilled with the increased membership, but my house was becoming too small for the group. I investigated many rental halls, but found the charges too high for us. Finally I succeeded in renting the Temple House twice a month for thirty-five dollars. The group's treasury was still small, so I paid the first month's rent.

I had one thousand invitations made up and mailed to prospective members. I was very skeptical on the afternoon of that meeting when I brought the refreshments to the hall. I set up the folding chairs, putting them close together at first; then, wondering how many empty seats there might be, I took some chairs away, thinking it would look better if all the seats were occupied.

However, before I left I lined up all the chairs I could find.

That night the response surpassed our highest expectations. Not only was there not an empty seat in the place, but every inch of standing room in the huge hall was taken.

We showed motion pictures of the story of the City of Hope and a history of one of its patients. A professional lecturer spoke enthusiastically to the group about the City of Hope's work. When the meeting adjourned, refreshments were served, and many began dancing to music from a record-player. Before the evening was over a great many of the guests filled our membership applications.

I was elated over the marvelous turnout. I knew everyone

had enjoyed himself, and felt that many of them were now inspired with the desire to join our group and support the City of Hope. I couldn't get the huge attendance out of my mind. If we were able to get half that number as members, our Temple Hall meeting place would be much too small. There must be hundreds more single people in San Francisco who would be anxious to join if they knew about us! We were faced with an important problem. I thought of all the halls that I had investigated, and I couldn't think of a suitable one that cost less than seventy-five dollars a night.

I thanked God for this great accomplishment I had been able to bring about. What a useful, wonderfully good feeling it gave me! I started thinking about how fine it would be to have a hall of our own, like a home.

A home for my Singletons! I thought. It was as exciting as if I had hit a jackpot. "Why, almost everything is possible if you want it badly enough."

A couple of hours before daybreak, having slept little that night, I had it all figured out. I had fourteen thousand dollars in the bank which I wasn't using. My family was married and didn't need anything. If I bought a piece of property that had a large vacant store or market on it, I could convert it into a hall. Such a place should not be too hard to find.

In the morning I could hardly wait to get to the phone. I called every real-estate office I knew, inquiring if they had such a listing, asking them to start looking for something along those lines if they did not. I started looking around on my own, too. At the same time I called on the people with whom I had left perfume.

At the next board meeting, which was held at my house, I turned over checks and currency for the total amount of

perfume sold—one thousand dollars! The confidence and respect shown me as the result of this more than paid for the disappointment I had experienced before.

That night they chose to be called "The Singletons," and bylaws for the group were prepared. Only single men and women over the age of twenty-five were eligible to join after approval by the membership committee. Dues were set at five dollars a year, payable in advance. At the end of the meeting Doris volunteered to take over the perfume project for the future, and we ordered an additional five hundred bottles!

Within a short time we had more than enough paid members to be eligible for a charter. We decided to hold our installation of officers at the Crystal Room in the Bellevue Hotel.

I recommended that we hire a band for dancing to follow the installation and charge one dollar admission.

"Whoever heard of charging admission for an installation?" one of the members demanded. "You can't do it. Nobody will show up. Why, we would be the laughing stock of the whole town!"

I pointed out that we had worked too hard for the money in our treasury to just pay out one hundred and twenty-five dollars for the rental of the room. "That amount would pay for six patients a day at the City of Hope. Anybody can just spend money and get no profit."

It seemed as if I had exhausted all ways of defending my suggestion, while they still found objections. So I used the only weapon I had left.

"You all objected to the perfume project. That was a slap in the face for me. Please don't do it again." This was a viewpoint they understood. They agreed to the plan, and I thanked them.

Four hundred and sixty people bought tickets, including more than one hundred and fifty of my faithful Smooth Dancers, who were glad to attend our affair, and on February 21, 1953, we became the proud two hundred and thirtieth chapter of the City of Hope.

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I was now leading a full life. I had plenty to occupy my mind and body, working at something I thoroughly enjoyed. I felt that I had at last found a way to thank God in a better way than with mere words. Everything I loved and ever hoped for was around me. I wasn't too old in age or in health. I longed to be really alive as long as God would let me live. Certainly this new project would help me to do just that.

Our president, Harold Dressler, got a job in a law office in Los Angeles, and Arnold Goldberg, our first vice-president, became president. To him we owe the success of our first dance at the Fairmont Hotel. It was quite an undertaking for a group of young people, with the hall costing two hundred and fifty dollars and the orchestra two hundred dollars, but we netted a profit of six hundred dollars. Because of all the people attending our dance, which included over two hundred of my Smooth Dancers, there was plenty of liquor sold in the hotel that night, but we received no financial benefit from this, because the hotel controlled the liquor concessions.

It was Arnold's devoted, untiring efforts which laid the foundation for the fine reputation we now have.

In the meantime, I had not stopped hunting for a home

for my Singletons. I kept thinking about that June dance of ours—we could have saved the money spent for the hall. I thought about the liquor the hotel sold that night, and about how many hundreds of dollars more we would have made if we had been able to sell it ourselves.

However, I wasted much time going to look at places which realtors said were "just what I was looking for." Most of the places I saw would have cost more to alter than it would have cost to build a new hall. Then, one day, I passed a lot at the corner of Geary and Thirty-second Avenue with a "for-sale" sign on it. I stopped and got out of the car to look the situation over. In fifteen minutes I was sure that my search had ended.

On the opposite corner was Washington High School, a site two blocks square which would furnish adequate parking space at night. The streetcar and Geary bus both ran by the place, with stops at the corner. The location seemed ideal, and I figured I had made a wonderful new discovery.

When I got home, I thought over the practical points. I figured that the lot would cost ten or twelve thousand dollars. I could move into an apartment and sell the flats. With this money I could make a down payment on a fifty-thousand-dollar hall I intended to build. I could pay the balance, and any expenses, from the rent I would receive for the use of the hall on nights when it wasn't being used by my Singletons.

"Whoopee!" I said to myself.

Then I thought that the hall could even serve as a place for my children to hold celebrations. I would make it attractive enough so that my grandchildren, please God, might some day be married there.

When I inquired about the price of the lot, I found it was sixteen thousand dollars. "Oh, well," I shrugged. "Things

always cost more than we figure." I had bonds that would make up the difference.

Once I had taken possession of the lot, I contacted Mr. Clausen, a highly recommended architect. He was very sincere and had more patience than I had thought it possible for a man to have. I was constantly adding improvements to the plan.

The lot measured fifty-six and a half feet on Geary Street and one hundred feet on Thirty-second Avenue. Since it was on a slope, he suggested I have a small hall on the ground floor, for board meetings and the like. The upstairs would be laid out ballroom fashion for the entire length of the lot, except for a kitchen, two dressing-rooms, and a cloakroom across the rear.

The best estimate I got for the erection of the building was seventy-eight thousand dollars. It was going to be more elaborate than I had originally planned. I hated to eliminate any feature, so I figured it would just take a little longer to pay for the building.

As I waited for the sale of my flats, hundreds of new ideas popped into my mind. During all those days I lived in a dream world.

Then one Sunday Betty and Al came to visit me. They didn't have to say a word for me to know they were troubled about something. I was purposely jolly, but they didn't respond. I surmised that each was waiting for the other to start talking. Then Al finally said, "Mother, we have taken a mortgage on our home, and we are opening a jewelry store in Oakland. We have put down twelve hundred dollars as security and signed a five-year lease."

I was taken completely by surprise. "But, Al," I said, "you were earning such a good salary."

"I know," he answered, "but I was never happy after Leon

left. I just can't get along with the new boss. Besides, I'm not getting any younger. In just two years I'll be thirty. I want to make a better future for my family."

I hardly knew what to say. I knew that they wanted something from me that I had not planned on. I asked, "How come you didn't tell me before you went so far?"

Betty answered, "We knew you would discourage us."

I figured I had better tell them more about my plans. I showed them the plans for the hall, the estimates I had received, and the offers I had for the flats. Then Al burst out: "But, Mother, if you will help us only for one year, I promise you will have your money back, and I will be able to hire and pay for help by that time. Then you could still have your hall."

If the roof had fallen in on me, I doubt if I would have been more dazed. "Look, kids," I said, "I don't intend to work any more."

"But, Mother, the hall would be much harder work," said Betty.

"I don't care," I replied. "Besides, I don't know a thing about the jewelry business—and I'm too darned old to learn."

"But, Mother, you're smarter than most young people."

"Don't 'but, Mother' me," I retorted. "I don't think you realize what you are getting into. It will take a great deal more money than you and I have to run a credit jewelry business."

After a number of hours of pro and con discussion we were all disappointed with the results. We decided to leave it up to David to make the decision. That was the first night in a long time that I couldn't fall asleep.

The following day Betty and I went to see David. He listened to both sides, then said, "Gussie, all I can say is that

you have had more than your share of hard work, but I know you. You will do as you please, no matter what I say." Turning to Betty, he said, "I really can't see how Al thinks he can make it, especially since he will be compelled to extend credit to most of his trade."

"Oh, yes, he can," she replied, starting to cry. "If only Mother will help him."

We left David's office and had lunch. We sat in the booth, neither of us able to eat or say much, nor could either of us hide our tears from the other. When Betty got into her car, I kissed her and said, "Don't worry, honey. Everything will be all right."

"Thanks, Mother dear. I know it will if you say so."

I watched her drive away. I visualized my young Betty crying as she drove away and prayed that she would be careful driving across the bridge. I knew she would be crying, because my girls are like me in that respect—they give way to tears easily.

I sat in my car, meditating. I had been sitting there for about half an hour when the parking-lot attendant, whom I knew, came over and said, "Is anything wrong? Can I help you? Do you feel well?"

"I'm all right," I answered. "I was just thinking."

"Thinking?" he said, with a funny expression on his face. "Do you have to think *pishn mit di oygn* [urinating with the eyes]?"

I laughed and said, "It's been a long time since I heard that. Papa used to say it."

The attendant smiled and said, "Some people have all the luck! I never had a father. Mother said he was a bachelor."

As I drove away, I didn't know if I wanted to go home or not. Automatically I drove to Geary Street and sat in the

car in front of my lot. I knew Betty felt that I was saying I would stand by them. What else could I say? What would any decent mother, who loved her children as I did mine, say when they called on her for assistance?

Then I started to reprimand myself. I had wanted to be useful, but now, when my chlidren came to me because they needed me, what did I do but kick and complain because they were ambitious?

Hadn't Max helped me when I was in need? He wasn't even a blood relation. I hated myself for the manner in which I hesitated. I thought that even David knew I was wrong. Otherwise, he would have said positively, "Don't do it," as he had at other times. I was thankful that he had not said, in Betty's presence, "What's the matter with you, Gussie? These are your children." I realized what he meant in saying, "You will do as you please, anyway." He was really saying, "Let your conscience be your guide."

So I said good-by to my lot for the time being, but I added, "Don't worry, my Singletons. Everything will be all right. It must be God's will to wait."

A long time before, I had promised my second family that they would each have homes and cars, and at that time I had never dreamed that it would be possible. I am promising my third family a hall of their own, which today seems equally impossible. So again I'm leaving it up to God. Only he can do the impossible.

I sold my flats and rented a home in Oakland, about six blocks from the store. It was two months before Al was able to open his store for business. The place required considerable alterations, including painting, floor covering, lighting, and signs. The store fixtures had to be made, a safe purchased, and innumerable lesser things taken care of. Al kept

his job while I took care of the necessary details. Two weeks before the opening he quit his job to do the buying and setting up of the displays.

June 20, 1953, saw the grand opening of Harbor Credit Jewelers, with Shirley and Sandy as added attractions to distribute free gifts. A number of people remarked about how expensive it must have been to have two TV stars make a personal appearance. Perhaps some realized that they were relatives after they appeared a number of times. My beloved Singletons sent a large plant to express good wishes for the opening. My Doris and Arnold came to Oakland to wish us good luck, too. They even bought a gold locket I'm sure they didn't need. How good can "good" be?

Even though, after five years, Al and I were still the only ones working in the store, I have never regretted it, for Al worked hard. He saw and took advantage of every opportunity to build up the business. Al and Betty attended one of the contest dances at Sweet's Ballroom. It was at this time that Al became acquainted with Mr. Sweet, owner of the ballroom. Together they worked out a plan whereby Harbor Jewelers would give away a free watch each week. Through this, Al's business was increased by thousands of dollars each year, and the number of patrons to Sweet's Ballroom increased also. As Mother used to say, when two people benefited by one idea or plan, "It takes one hand to wash the other, and both hands to wash the face."

Had I had any idea of the success that Al was going to make, I would never have rebuked them. I have often regretted the manner in which I protested on the day when they told me they were going into business. I was especially touched when I was told that, of all the things I ever did for him, the one thing he could never forget was the day

we hit a blank, and I knew how badly disturbed he was. It was our first year in business, and I purchased six diamonds at retail price to put into a ring for his daughter, to be put aside until she was old enough to wear it. One day I heard Al say that if he had known the amount of money and hard work it took to run a credit jewelry business he would have thought twice before asking for my assistance.

I was now leaving my third family mostly on their own, for I was working six days a week in the jewelry store. The board meetings were then held at the Goldbergs' home, and Doris and Arnold provided the refreshments.

I was proud of their progress. They were raising thousands of dollars for the City of Hope. In addition, they were practicing what I had preached to all my children: "If you are seeking friends, you must first be one; those who do good gather good."

My Singletons are constantly concerned with one another's welfare. When one of our members became an orphan upon the death of her mother, a great many of the Singletons showed up, offering every kind of help and assistance imaginable. After the funeral she broke down and cried, saying, "I'd be alone in the world if it weren't for my Singletons."

Then, when my Singletons helped ease the burden of some of the other members who needed help, I was even more richly rewarded for being the mother of this chapter. I felt that thanking God in deeds, as my third family was doing, was the truest form of prayer.

Yet, secretly, I was proud for another reason. In the first two years there had been thirty marriages within the group. I kept in close contact with Doris and grew to love her more as time passed. On the eve of one of our installations, when

Judge Alvin Weinberger officiated over the installation of officers and Arnold Goldberg presided, I publicly and symbolically adopted Doris in the presence of her mother and all my Singletons. From that night I prayed that God would send happiness to this new daughter, even as he had done to the others. Six months later she became Mrs. Alex Slivka. Now I receive *four* cards from my daughters on Mother's Day. Doris' card reads: "To my other mother." Also present at the above installation was Robert Adler, our northwestern regional director of the City of Hope, who is always present at all our installations and who never fails to give us a helping hand when called upon to do so.

Our chapter is constantly looking for ways and means to make our meetings more interesting and enjoyable. However, we have been very fortunate in securing some of the most prominent people, such as John K. Chapel and Ira Blue, as speakers. These people have added much color and prestige to the chapter.

It was a great honor to us when our distinguished Judge Lenore Underwood found time from her busy schedule to give us a most interesting talk on crime, and when she so graciously participated in our social and dancing for the balance of the evening, we were doubly honored.

Being affiliated with the City of Hope has given me the opportunity of meeting many prominent people. Long before he was elected mayor of San Francisco George J. Christopher and his wife Tula for years attended many functions of the City of Hope, and he was made an honorary life-member for his numerous contributions and participation.

In 1956 he was awarded a plaque as "Man of the Year," and Max Sobel was general chairman at the City of Hope testimonial dinner honoring the Mayor.

The following year Max Sobel was named "Man of the Year" himself. At the dinner I had the privilege of seeing the famous Dennis Day and Guy Cherney, who generously gave of their talent to help make the affair a success.

I have never forgotten my Papa's words, that a person can do anything he wants to do if he only wants to do it bad enough. But I have often heard said in my later years, "It isu't always what you know or can do, it's whom you know." That also proved true.

We were having a board meeting, preparing for our annual benefit dance at the Fairmont Hotel. Clem and Leona were on the committee, one kept nudging the other to speak. Finally one of them spoke.

"We understand the fabulous Gogi Grant is appearing at the hotel that week. It would be wonderful, if we could have her just make a personal appearance at our affair."

Everyone, including myself, looked amazed at such a ridiculous request. All I heard was, "Gussie, if anyone can do it, it's you." I found myself saying, "I will try."

How do I start, I wondered, and whom could I phone? Then I remembered the days when I was in the liquor business. I would call upon Max Sobel, with my problems. I phoned Max for advice.

I expected to hear, "I'm sorry, Gussie. I wish I could help you," but instead he answered:

"Call Richard Swig, at the Fairmont Hotel and tell him I told you to phone him."

I called Mr. Swig and said, "Max Sobel told me to phone you."

He replied, "What is it you wish?"

His answer to my request was, "Please phone me tomorrow. I will see what I can do."

I figured it was a kind way of saying "No." To my surprise, when I hopelessly phoned the following day, his answer was:

"Gogi Grant will give you two songs at 11 o'clock."

When I stuttered my thanks to him, he said, "You're welcome, but save that thanks for Max."

Saturday evening, November 29, 1958, was the biggest and most profitable affair we have ever held. To see and hear the adorable and talented Gogi Grant the Terrace room was packed, and instead of the usual $1.50 donation we charged $2.00.

Our chapter is much indebted to Leon and Ruth Rood, professional dance instructors, who came to my home and donated their time one Sunday every month for a year, teaching my Singletons the Latin dances. Through their efforts we raised several hundred dollars for the City of Hope. My heart longs to mention the name of every Singleton who has contributed so much to our work, but space does not permit, for such a list would fill volumes.

It is difficult for our Singletons to raise more than a few hundred dollars on any one affair. Only once were we successful in raising a few thousand dollars. It was a two-day carnival. We were fortunate in having Paul Glick, manager of the Quaker Oats Company, fly to Oakland with the talented Aunt Jemima. It was a festive occasion from the moment we met her at the airport. Mayor Clifford Rishell of Oakland, radio commentator John K. Chapel, President Max Brown of Beth Jacob Temple and their officers were all there with us to greet her. Then, in a parade of cars decorated with banners, headed by a police escort, and with a loud speaker, we drove through the city. Finally we arrived at my home for refreshments.

Aunt Jemima and five Singleton girls, who worked the entire two days from opening to closing, stayed with me. Aunt Jemima slept in the spare bedroom, while some of the girls slept on the lounges in the social room.

A mob of children crowded our patio, seeking Aunt Jemima's autograph. There were so many that she couldn't take care of all of them, so she promised that if they would come back the next evening she would have enough time to comply with all their requests. To be sure the children wouldn't be disappointed she stayed up until three in the morning, signing place-mats.

We worked very hard those two days. Aunt Jemima entertained us with songs, and we served free hot cakes all day. We didn't realize just how tired we were until we were able to sit down at the end of the long day. But Pelma Jackson, which is Aunt Jemima's real name, showed no signs of fatigue. "You kids relax," she said. "I make the best coffee." She served us coffee and pastry and began entertaining us. But we did our share of entertaining her—with stories that were new to her.

Ralph, one of our members, told about the time when he had asked his uncle how he had become so rich. His uncle said, "It's a long story. Turn out the lights while I tell it to you."

Ralph replied to his uncle, "Let's wait until morning—it'll be cheaper!"

The story about the two fathers-in-law topped them all. Two fathers-in-law were complaining to each other about how dumb their sons-in-law were. Said one, "My son-in-law is the dumbest person I ever knew. I'll prove it to you." So he called him and said, "Sam, I want you to do me a favor. Here is ten dollars. Go buy me a Cadillac car."

"Okay, Pop," said the young man as he left.

"That's nothing," said the other father-in-law, calling his own son-in-law. "Hey, Harry, will you do me a favor? Go down to the barber shop and see if I'm there."

"Okay, Pop," this young man said as he left. The two sons-in-law met outside and stopped to discuss the stupidity of their fathers-in-law. One said, "Gee, my father-in-law is stupid. He gives me ten dollars to buy a Cadillac, and doesn't even tell me what color he wants."

Then the other said, "That's nothing. My darn-fool father-in-law tells me to go to the barber shop and see if he's there. The dope, why doesn't he phone and find out for himself?"

At the airport Aunt Jemima handed me a beautiful autographed picture of herself, saying, "If you are in our town, please come and see us. We will take the lock off our door for you any time."

It had been four years since I bought the lot on Geary Street, and I was no closer to fulfilling my dream of erecting a hall for my Singletons, who were now paying twice the amount of rent for the larger quarters needed to accommodate the increase in membership. So I sold the lot and planned a home that would welcome my families and friends.

My home is completely different from the average home. The unusual glassed-in garden patio measures forty by forty feet, has a built-in bar, and a large barbecue. In the center is an eighteen-foot illuminated circle for dancing, from which one is afforded a panoramic view of Oakland.

Only when the weather does not permit do we use the spacious social room for our Singleton monthly dances.

Though less than a hundred attended our New Year's

Eve parties, we netted five hundred dollars each year. Yet that was only because my Singletons worked very hard and did all the cooking themselves.

My home is a small fraction of the dream I had of the hall for my Singletons. I had envisioned a place which would accommodate hundreds of people, so that we could raise thousands of dollars at each affair.

Beatrice Lieberman, one of our members, died of cancer at the age of thirty-eight. Subsequently we held a dinner affair at my house with 145 people attending, half of them members of the faithful Smooth Dancers, who put on a beautiful and talented performance to help make the affair more attractive and financially successful.

We were able to raise six hundred dollars for a *yortsayt* [memorial] plaque which was placed in the Beth Hatikvah Temple on the grounds of the City of Hope Medical Center.

The money we raised went to the research laboratory, to be used in the search for a cure and preventive of cancer, with the hope that, in the not-too-distant future, there would no longer be a need to raise money for such causes.

Today, if you come to my house and open the front door, you will see in the entrance the gift that is more precious than any material thing I own, more valuable than anything which any amount of money can buy—my "Golden Tree of Life." It is a miniature of a real tree, made of material that is everlasting.

This tree is a symbol of my families and my friends. It was made possible by my third family. On the night of this particular dinner, my Singletons were honoring their founder. I knew that, because they had told me so. However, I had not the slightest hint from anyone that the tree was included in their plans.

It had taken many months to procure the tree. It was my Doris' project, started even before she met Alex. It was she who was selected to present it to me, an assignment she considered important enough to fly in with her husband from Los Angeles, where they are now living.

Twenty-five dollars entitled one to a leaf on the tree—a leaf bearing his name. I can imagine how much time and effort must have been expended in locating the members of my second family, as well as those family members and friends I had acquired.

To these people I give my heartiest thanks for attending the dinner and for having their names on my Tree of Life. I thank God that the money it took to participate in this project meant comparatively little to them.

It was the members of my third family who stole my heart that night. For some of them the contribution of twenty-five dollars meant doing without something big in their own lives. For others it meant doing without something smaller, or it meant the pooling of their dollars so that a leaf could bear more than one name.

Only once before in my life do I remember having the same feeling I had the night I was handed my precious Tree of Life: that was the wonderful moment when I was handed my first-born, when she made that little whining sound I could hardly hear.

On this night I could hear my precious tree very distinctly. I could hear everyone in my second, third, and acquired families, and all those numerous friends so dear to me, saying, "We love you," while at the same time my heart was crying, "Mother, dear, why couldn't I have told you that I loved you when I had the opportunity while you were still alive?"

If I hadn't realized that God was already a part of me, this night would have convinced me. It was like a dream. Only when I arrived home did I give way to tears of thanks to my beloved God Almighty. I prayed, "Please, dear God, show me the way to serve you. In what other way can I thank you for this wonderful life you gave me?"

Many people have said to me, "Why do you knock yourself out so much?" I have never been able to answer them directly. Yet now, at this time of my life, I am answering that question:

It is because God first gave me three adorable little daughters, and then brought me wonderful sons-in-law and seven gorgeous grandchildren.

It is because God took the place of my children's father, watched over them and guided them, gave them wisdom and understanding that developed into a lasting, loving relationship between themselves and others; and because he made possible the success my children made on their own: Al in his second jewelry-store; Sherman in the sportswear business; and Sandy, producer and director for television.

With Max and David as brothers, Lillian as a sister, little Doris as my adopted daughter, the finest of all single men and women—with all these to love, I love God most.

Looking over my yesteryears, I find no regrets. As Mother would say, "*Dermonen es in freydn* [To recall it with joy]."

Got tsu danken [God I thank].

Keyn ayin hore [No evil eye]. I envy no one. I cannot help but wish that relationships between members of my first family could have been different.

My first granddaughter, Carolyn, is now sixteen. Her father was sixteen when I first met him. I know that Jack, looking down from heaven, is proud of her, happy with the

love and affection given her by Al. I have often told my grandchildren about my life and their parents' childhood.

One day Carolyn said, "Gee, Grandma, you've done so many things, and have been in so many different kinds of businesses, you ought to write a book!"

I laughed. "What, with my sixth-grade education?"

"It never stopped you before, Grandma."

"Well, then, I might just do that," I joked.

But the more I thought about it, the more the idea intrigued me.

So this is my life—starting from the time when I was a skinny little red-haired girl whom only my Papa called "Gitele."