THE EDUCATION OF A POLISH JEW

A Physician's War Memoirs

by HASKELL NORDON

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To the memory of my mother,
Freidl Nordon Grossman

Preface

DURING the last forty years of my life—the busy life of a physician—many images of people and events included in this volume flashed time and again before the eyes of my memory. Repressed, they surfaced with acute vividness as I aged, and as I unburdened my mind from the routine preoccupations in tasks of a physician's day.

However, none of the events of the past has imprinted itself more on my memory, none compelled me more to write this book, than the reminiscense of my rendezvous with a young woman in a Warsaw park, on a cloudless day of September, in the fateful year of 1939.

It was the fourth day of war. There were rumors that the front was approaching the outskirts of Lodz. People were asking: Have the British bombed Berlin? Have the French started their march into Germany? Will Warsaw be defended by the retreating armies? There was little sign of attempts to fortify the city. There was no clarification from the Government. People clung to the versions most appropriate to their temperament.

I had a call from a woman pianist, who urgently asked me to meet her. She lived not far away and I went out to see her as she refused to divulge her request on the phone. She was an exceptionally gifted pianist in her early twenties, with a broad open face, high cheekbones and smiling grayish-green eyes. It was always a treat to gather at her home, to hear her play Chopin and Beethoven. She made her living as an accompanist to a famous Warsaw crooner in a fashionable coffeehouse. I could not even venture to guess the reason for her urgent request to meet

me. I stood on the street corner where I had promised to meet her, in the bright sunshine of that unusually beautiful September 1939. The wail of an air raid siren suddenly filled the air. People tried to empty the streets by crowding into gates, stores or between buildings. Most hugged the walls of buildings. There were no shelters in sight. Traffic came to a halt. There was a buzz from two enemy aircraft circling in the sky followed by loud thuds far away. I was standing in the entrance to a bank that occupied the corner of the street where I was to meet my pianist. After ten minutes there was an all-clear siren, the traffic resumed and people again filled the streets. She arrived shortly afterwards wearing a white muslin dress and a large black hat. She took my arm without a greeting and we walked along the street for a few minutes. She was extremely pale, her gaze directed upwards, above the crowd. She started the conversation asking me how I had spent my vacation and if I still worked in the hospital. She then quickly came to the point. She had had a premonition that the Germans would soon occupy the city. Since the outbreak of the war she had lived in constant terror. She couldn't strike a note on her piano. What she wanted from me was a vial of cyanide. She would only use it, she said, when the Germans entered the city. With the vial in her possession she was certain she would be able to play the piano.

I kept walking in silence. We entered the Saxon garden and sat on the first available bench. The green foliage of the trees contrasted sharply with the blue skies. Not a single cloud. I was at a loss for words, thoughts or even comprehension. I had to overcome again the feeling of unreality of the last days by summoning my total willpower not unlike I used to do when in the hospital treating an emergency case. Everything narrowed now to the fine interface of life and death. I can't fail!

"Wars pass," I finally started. "There is a Geneva convention," I continued. "They wouldn't dare harm women and children." These were not my words. She must have heard them in the last few days, from others. This trite lulling of the defenseless. She sat motionless, her gaze fixed on the blue horizon behind the trees. In the pale tautness of her face only her nostrils quivered when I added, "I have no access to drugs. I haven't been to the hospital for months. You don't find this type of thing in a hospital." These were the first words of truth she had heard from me that day. A deep bitter anger rose up within me. For the first time in my life the thought surfaced in me, "God, why was I not taught to kill." She must have sensed my pain because she rose, stooped over

me, kissed my cheek and with a slight touch of her fingers on my shoulder she prevented me from standing up. She then briskly walked to the gate of the park, a figure in white and black, diminishing, diminishing, disappearing, forever . . .

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Wounds cannot be cured without searching.

—FRANCIS BACON

Read no history: nothing but biography, for that is life without theory.

—BENJAMIN DISRAELI

THE EDUCATION OF A POLISH JEW

I

FROM THE TWILIGHT

ONE CRISP October morning, not long after the feast of Succoth, I walked with my father across the cobblestoned town square to start my education. I was five years old. Dressed up in black shoes made to order by a Polish shoemaker, black socks that left my knees bare, short black velvet pants, a gray woolen jacket and round cap with a large button on the top, I tried to keep pace with my father's long strides. Preoccupied with keeping up with him and also with avoiding the patches of mud that would have dirtied my new shoes, I had no time for forebodings about my first day of school. It was only a short brisk walk through the square, down an alley, and across a courtyard to Reb Michael's Jewish religious school—the *cheder.*

A narrow door led directly into the single school room. A long wooden table caught the light from the only window. Behind the table, rows of benches receded into the dim background, where the indistinct figures of fidgeting boys formed a restless blur.

Reb Michael sat at the head of the table. He was a frail man with a grayish beard, dressed—as were most of the Jews in town—in black, his pale blue eyes inflamed and red around the lids. He rose with a smile to greet us, and shook hands with my father. I was the third son in the family to be brought to him to begin his traditional Hebrew education.

The Rebbe patted my head, pinched my cheek and then guided me towards the table, where he had me sit down beside him. A young woman nodded at me approvingly. This was his daughter and helper.

She sat at the table, her back to the window, her soft womanly coherence easing my trepidations in this strange new place.

With his wooden pointer the Rebbe indicates an Aleph, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, in the large Bible open on the table before me. Under this Aleph, a funny-looking squiggle: *Kommatz Aleph Ohhhhhh* sings the Rebbe in a vibrant voice, at odds with his frail appearance, and weakly but dutifully I follow. Now he introduces me to the second letter, Beith—*Bohhhhh,* I repeat. After a few more attempts, I could vocalize both letters shown to me at random, without help. A great success.

Confidently chanting the *Ohhhhs* and the *Bohhhs,* I am startled by the sound of objects falling on the table and the Bible in front of me. I blink, and I realize that half a dozen or so pieces of hard round candy are scattered around me. The beaming Rebbe pinches my cheek again and exclaims: "How wonderful! The Angels in Heaven have sent down candy for this brilliant student." He then proceeds to shake hands with my father again and dismisses the wonderful novice for the day.

My little hand gripping the candy and my head swollen with pride, I walked out with my smiling father, hardly paying attention to the Rebbe's reminder that tomorrow I had to report at seven in the morning.

At home I got a hero's welcome from my mother, my two older sisters, and a crowd of girls from the neighborhood. Kisses and embraces. It was then that I decided, "No more kisses." From now on, the kisses and caresses bestowed on the darling little boy with the blond locks by the women of the neighborhood would have to come to a stop. None of that nonsense for a grown-up *cheder* boy!

* * *

Next day, I was shaken out of my slumber for my first real day of school. The women of our household stood around my bed, but nothing they could do could make me open my eyes, until someone thought of putting the kitten on my head. They must also have moistened my eyelids with milk, because the vigorous lapping of a tiny pink tongue soon opened my eyes.

* * *

Rising so early was the most difficult part of school life, something I never got used to. I went through the same struggle every morning,

cuddled under a comforter in my bed that was painted brown, protected by sliding bars and a headboard adorned with a landscape of lake, swans and trees. Half-asleep, bundled up in winter clothes, clutching my lantern with its flickering candle, I would make my way through the windy Polish autumn and bitter dark winter.

The year was 1916, and electricity had yet to arrive in our town. The square was filled with darkness. On the left loomed the Catholic church, massive and gray. A few horse-drawn wagons could be made out in the center of the square around the pump. Faintly glowing lights from the lanterns of the other *cheder* boys danced through the misty darkness singly or in hastily-formed constellations.

The schoolroom was lit by a kerosene lamp standing on the table. You sat at your assigned place on one of the long benches, the restless knees and elbows of your neighbors keeping you more or less awake. Reb Michael expected his pupils to graduate after one year of study, during which time they acquired a reading knowledge of the first paragraphs of the weekly chapter of the Pentateuch, and learned to say the blessings that devout Jews offered over food and whenever there was an occasion to praise the Lord. Upon graduation at age six, we were ready to enter a higher institution of learning—Reb Moshe's school, where you studied Rashi, the famous commentator on the Bible.

The hours and hours of sitting on the long backless benches demanded some relief. Quickly I learned to raise my hand with two fingers extended, signifying a need that had to be met with dispatch and over which the Rebbe had no control. This was the only way we could get out of the classroom. Once out, a new and fascinating world was opened to us.

Behind the wall of the outhouse, the boys set up a lively market. At first I could only watch what was going on, but soon I was accepted as one of the gang, and began to take part. The treasures that we bartered included buttons from Russian, German and Austrian army uniforms, colored glass, coins, frayed Russian paper rubles from before the occupation, railroad tickets, odd playing cards. Later, in the spring, a great diversion would be catching flies. At least three distinguishable varieties swarmed around the outhouse. The most valuable were the two larger species: The *Tsadikim,* or righteous ones, of a greyish color with dark spots over the bodies and wings, and the *Meluchim,* or kings, with shimmering metallic blue bodies, of medium size, especially magnifi-

cent in sunlight. The least desirable were the small common houseflies, too common to deserve a nickname.

We kept our prizes in matchboxes perforated to allow air to circulate. We inserted pieces of glass into the tops to allow for viewing and facilitate barter. The strongest and most intelligent flies were picked in specially arranged competitions. First the competitors would have their wings carefully clipped off. Then their owners would place them in starting position on a board and prompt them into action. The Champions—those last to fall off the board—were traded for three to five times their original value.

* * *

During the first weeks at *cheder* I enjoyed scant standing among my peers. Most of them seemed rather rough to me, inclined to fight at the slightest provocation. My status improved somewhat when my long hair vanished beneath the barber's clippers. However, not until a certain great event did I become a full-fledged member of the crowd around the outhouse.

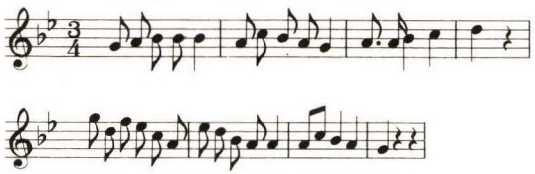
Although there must have been some unusual activity at home before this event took place, I was not aware of it. The night before, I was taken to my grandmother's house, but this was not too unusual. Next morning, I went straight from her house to school. Then, before the midday recess, Reb Michael suddenly hushed the class, summoned me to his table, and announced, "Today, and every day this week, the class will be dismissed in the afternoons to attend special prayers in *his* home." He was pointing at me. "A baby boy was born yesterday evening. *Mazel Tov,*" he added. I didn't know what to make of the news at first, but I sensed from the excited shouts of my classmates that this was probably an important and advantageous moment for me. A more knowledgeable boy, one of those who had started their *cheder* lessons a month or two before, then informed me that for the next week the class would be receiving candy and cookies each afternoon at my house.

And so for a week, I marched proudly each day at the head of the class to my home, where a short prayer was recited by Reb Michael and duly acknowledged by the assembled children with a loud Amen. This was followed by filling eager outstretched hands with candy and cookies. The festive air and the importance I gained in the eyes of my peers made

me love my baby brother, who otherwise, at one or two days of age, looked quite unappealing.

While the gatherings were being held and the prayers said in the living room, my mother lay in bed in the adjacent bedroom, surrounded by well-wishers. The door to the living room was kept slightly ajar. There was good reason for this. The prayers of the children in the living room had to be heard in the bedroom where the *Sheidim,* the demons, lurked around the baby boy's crib. Demons and devils could bring harm to him during the most dangerous period for a Jewish baby boy, from birth to circumcision. It was then, grown-up *cheder* boy that I was, that I began to believe firmly in demons which could be kept at bay only through prayers.

* * *

As it happened, I was lucky to start learning my prayers just when the evil spirits in our town were threatening to get the upper hand. I only vaguely understood that a great war was on, the front far away in the east. What I understood more clearly was that one of the byproducts of war—a typhoid epidemic—was raging around us, and the Angel of Death was hovering over our neighborhood. The old woman who lived on the floor above us and who used to hug me whenever she could get hold of me, and would sing *cheder* songs to me, fell ill.

"In the hearth a fire is glowing (she would sing)
"And the room is warm.
"Here the Rebbe teaches the kids
"Komatz Aleph Ohhh!"

A team of grim-faced, strangely clad men arrived to fumigate her room. The acrid smell of sulphur and phenol permeating the whole apartment house constantly reminded me how close the evil spirits were. Returning from school in the evening, I could feel the Black Angel

lurking in the entrance, hear the rustling of his wings. My skin would crawl. It was only thanks to the fervent prayers on my lips that I was able to reach the door and cross the threshold to safety.

At the old woman's funeral, I first set eyes on our town's black horse-drawn crate inscribed in white with the Hebrew words *Charity prevents Death.* The driver pulled up in front of our kitchen window and waited there for the body to be brought down. As the procession departed for the cemetery, the chilling lamentations of the old beggar women in black filled me with dread. It was a feeling that would come back to me later whenever I happened across a Jewish funeral procession. The gentiles, I was to learn, went about things much less mournfully. For their dead, the church bells pealed, the ornate casket was bedecked with bright white and yellow chrysanthemums, the horses were draped with heavy silver-lined black mantles, and, best of all, there was a band that played the slow and stately cadences of Chopin's Funeral March.

The day after the old woman died, I didn't go to school. Instead, my older sister took me to a public hall, where we joined a long queue. She told me we were lined up to get something quite as crucial in the struggle against typhoid as prayer. When our turn came we entered a room where a nurse was waiting with a syringe in her hand. She instructed me to drop my pants, assuring me that nothing worse than a mosquito bite awaited me. Actually, I felt a sudden sharp pain deep in the buttock.

This program of vaccinations must have been instituted by the German and Austrian occupying authorities. Perhaps because they wished to protect their troops, perhaps because of altruistic motives also, they attempted to stem the spreading epidemic. They encouraged the Jews in town to open their own hospital, under the guidance of an Austrian military doctor, himself a Jew. No sooner had he opened his small, wood-framed structure and started admitting the sick, than he himself contracted the fearful disease and died.

The death of the doctor (whose widow later became my teacher) sent shock waves through the community. The pious Jews would now sit day and night in the prayer houses reciting Psalms. Candles were burning everywhere for the sick whose end seemed near. Pious women prostrated themselves in the cemetery near the graves of their ancestors and the graves of the Rabbis, spreading white linen between the gravestones,

and asking for their intercession with the Almighty. When the town's gravedigger fell ill and died, there was panic.

Now the heroic measures urged by some in the beginning of the epidemic and previously dismissed as nonsense and hocus-pocus, suddenly were accepted as reputable and life-saving. The demands for a ritual long forgotten, though apparently still dormant in the communal memory, changed from whispers to clamor. There was now a full consensus: a wedding ceremony must be performed in the cemetery.

Easier said than done. Where would there be found a young couple willing to have their wedding among the dead? Difficult as this might be, by now the townspeople were sure that the ceremony would take place, due to the full participation of the most respectable and wealthy town elders in the task. And so in a few days, after diligent searching by professional matchmakers and other good citizens, the bride was found. She was one of the many unmarried daughters of a poor widow who almost saw a providential hand in allowing her eldest, and homely daughter to escape spinsterhood. The news of the find spread, the townspeople redoubled their efforts in a frantic search for a bridegroom.

After a few days everyone admitted that the choice narrowed down to one candidate, the son of the town's water carrier. He was a goodhearted, perpetually smiling, half-witted lad, thin and tall, his shoulders bent prematurely from his burden, a wooden yoke from which hung two large pails filled with crystal clear water, which he carried from the pump in the center of the town to the houses of its inhabitants. Thrown suddenly into prominence as the town's most eligible bachelor, the lad gradually seemed to lose some of the feeble-mindedness ascribed to him by the town. He would now listen with unaccustomed concentration to the excited citizens, his smile somewhat larger than before, causing the loose skin on his lean face to turn into a network crisscross of wrinkles. But he said neither yea or nay.

The impatient town debated the enigmatic position taken by the would-be groom. But soon there were unconfirmed rumors of his possible consent, if certain conditions were met. Otherwise, he hinted, he would refuse and "let the epidemic rage" . . . The conditions coming from the town's half-witted pauper made people shake their head with disbelief and ridicule, some even with contempt for this brazenness, this *chutzpah*. Others, however, the town's wits in particular, were heard to speak with admiration for the lad's good sense and unsuspected shrewd-

ness. These wits were then accused of being in collusion with the lad to whom they were apparently supplying instructions that could have no other purpose than to extract a generous compensation for the young couple from the rich of the town.

Be that as it may, the lad did spell out his conditions in detail. Inasmuch as the bride had no father, she was in effect a ward of the town's elders who in turn became the future husband's in-laws. Therefore, a generous dowry was to be expected. The bride had to be furnished with a trousseau, and he with a new kaftan, shoes and two white shirts. He requested a new, specially designed wooden yoke and new pails with glittering metal bands. There had to be enough food and vodka for everyone present and a band of fiddlers should be on hand to provide a fitting background for the entertainment of the guests after the wedding ceremony.

Pressed to the wall thus, the town's elders consented, and one day an excited, holiday clad crowd gathered at the house of the Rabbi from where the wedding procession proceeded through the streets of town to the outlying Jewish cemetery. What followed afterwards was always a matter of historical controversy and, depending on the storyteller, at least two versions were put to the listener's choice. According to the first version, the ceremony in the cemetery was conducted in a hushed atmosphere, the groom was unsmiling, the surrounding crowd observing the ritual blessings and marriage vows with sighs and subdued cries. There were even moans reported from the nearby graves, a sure sign that the right steps were being taken by the community to avert the disaster hovering over it. According to this version the participants, after a perfunctory tasting of the food and a ritualistic gulping of a small glass of vodka while the fiddlers played mournfully, returned to town and their houses, subdued but already feeling the heavy burden on their chests lightened. The very sick seemed to come to life again. In the next weeks the epidemic began noticeably to wear away.

The second version, told usually by a storyteller with winking eyes that revealed a propensity to rebellious mischief, was less credible. According to this rendition, the crowd gathered in the cemetery included some unruly members of the town's community who immediately after the ceremony saw an opportunity to forget the sorrows and plights of everyday life and, imbibing the free-flowing spirits, danced among the graves and carried on to the jumpy tunes of the equally tipsy fiddlers. They also got hold of the newly hired gravedigger and forced

him, if that is the right word since there was little resistance from him, to down almost a fourth of a bottle of vodka. It was argued by an especially wild loudmouth that with the gravedigger knocked out, the grim work of the Angel of Death would be pointless.

Both versions, however, were unanimous in their belief that the results were worth the effort. Whatever the beneficial effects on the epidemic may have been, no one disputed the contribution of the "wedding in the cemetery" to the well-being of the Jewish community: and a young couple were joined in holy matrimony, according to the laws of Moses and Israel.

* * *

If demons troubled me during the hours of dusk and darkness, during the day I was liable to fall prey to the fear of being harmed or incapacitated by someone physically stronger. Everyone must have something of this fear, but I was especially susceptible to it. Early in life—even before my first grown-up days in *cheder*—I discovered that some boys were less afraid of getting hurt, that in fact there were some who looked for a brawl and actually enjoyed the blows they received. I couldn't imagine why. I hated physical violence, especially being overpowered and immobilized. Even during perfectly harmless play, I was afraid of being immobilized, even for a moment. We all liked to wrestle. I was, however, quick to give in as soon as my opponent forced me into a prone position, my shoulders touching the floor. I would give up without waiting for him to pin me with his knees, the usual prerequisite for concluding a bout.

I believe I can trace this fear to an experience very early in childhood, probably the earliest I can recollect. It must have been in the first days of World War I, when the Germans advanced across the border thirty miles to the west and the Russian forces started their retreat. I was three years old. Later I was told that there were rumors that the Cossacks were plundering the towns in the path of their retreat and attacking Jews and other civilians. I remember that the door to our apartment was locked and bolted with boards, then a chest was pushed up against it. The windows would have been the weak points—we lived on the ground floor—but fortunately they were shuttered, and the shutters were held in place by iron bars. I was put under the bed, where I lay on my back for what seemed an eternity. Suddenly there were knocks on the door,

followed by the pounding of rifle butts. Either the door, in spite of everything, was forced, or my father opened it. In any case I soon saw the Cossacks' boots from my hiding place. These must have been Cossacks of the friendly kind, because everything ended peacefully enough. They left after being served a meal of potato pancakes and bread. But the hours I spent under the bed, cramped and frightened, must have left me with a subconscious fear of finding myself in such a trap again.

* * *

In comparison with the Czarist Russians and their Cossack troops who had oppressed Poland for so long, the Austrians and Germans probably appeared more civilized, especially to the Jews. No doubt the German-speaking occupiers were preceded by their reputations as cultured, progressive people. As for me, the Austrian soldiers and officers in our courtyard didn't frighten me at all. One Austrian officer, who lived in a requisitioned apartment in our building, would hold me on his lap, speaking with me in his German that so much resembled Yiddish, and give me chocolate bars wrapped in colorful brown and gold. He maintained that I reminded him of his own little boy, far away. When I learned that this officer was an avid angler in the river Warta that flowed near our town, I took it upon myself to dig up earthworms for him in the backyard.

The officer's commander-in-chief, the Emperor Franz Josef I, came across as something of a kindly figure, particularly in comparison with the Czar. One day during the war my older sister, who was enrolled at the newly-opened Jewish gymnasium—or high school—for girls, brought home a book which I leafed through with curiosity and wonderment. It was probably the first secular book I had ever held in my hands. The layout and the strange letters were astonishingly different from what I was used to in prayer books and the Hebrew Bible, but what impressed me most in the book was the picture of the Emperor in full regalia. Everyone in my family had a look at the book and at the Emperor, and taking my cue from the reactions of my parents and older brothers, I conjured up a rather benevolent ruler, one who was probably "good to the Jews."

A few weeks after the book first appeared, my sister brought it home again. This time, the Emperor's picture was framed in black.

Franz Josef alive or Franz Josef dead, it might be said that in fact the

liberal reputation of the Germans and Austrians was borne out, and the occupation wasn't too harsh. Already as a child I understood that there were shortages of food and fuel because of the war, but this was tolerable, and the authorities imposed no unnecessary hardships on the population, Poles or Jews. One was allowed to conduct one's business in comparative freedom, one noticed the similarity of German to one's own mother tongue, and one was aware of and grateful for the absence of pogroms and major atrocities. The experience of this occupation disposed many Jews with a trusting sentiment toward the Germans . . .

* * *

In 1918, at the end of the war, another baby boy arrived. There were now seven children in our family, five boys and two girls. This child, like all the others, my mother delivered in her bedroom, in her bed. I was seven years old when my youngest brother was born, I was already attending Reb Moishe's academy, and this time I was aware of the happenings around me. First the midwife came, then the doctor. A tall Polish gent with a blond mustache, Doctor Z. was Mother's favorite. I heard her telling other women how she had helped him when he first set up practice in town by sending him patients. To me, he appeared infallible, his mere presence guaranteeing that all would be well. When making his visits he would always inquire whether my mother had any breast problems. We all understood that since my mother couldn't breast-feed her children, a wet nurse was a vital necessity. I remember a wet nurse around us during most of my childhood, although not my own who must have left when I was three. Each of us practically had two mothers.

Frania, my youngest brother's *mamka,* was a tall peasant girl with wide cheekbones and long hair the color of straw. She kept her hair parted from the middle of her forehead to the base of her neck, and from there it continued down over her shoulders to her hips in two thick braids. The combing out and braiding of her hair was a bewitching spectacle that she would always allow me to watch. She drank black beer to enhance the flow of milk from her ample breasts, and she nursed my little brother with the faint serene smile that I encountered later on the faces of Madonnas in museums.

Returning from school one day, I found her reclined on the couch in the living room. Apparently she had fallen asleep, the infant in her arms

sucking at her breast. I could not help but stare at her chest rising and falling with every breath while my brother's little fingers firmly grasped her overflowing white flesh. How vividly I remember this sight! It must have been imprinted permanently in my memory by what followed. While staring at her, I must have come too close, and she stirred. Her eyes opened and before I knew it she unbuttoned her chemise, uncovered her other breast, grasped a fold around the free nipple between thumb and forefinger, and squeezed. A jet of warm milk struck me in the eyes. Momentarily blinded I retreated in haste, never again to observe her at feeding time—at least not at such close proximity.

* * *

Frania was privy to all our secrets and her loyalty to our family was beyond question. One among many episodes that illustrate this is connected with the economic persecution of the Jews that the new Polish government instituted almost immediately upon the declaration of Independence. The last day of the war was November 11, 1918. This was the day on which my youngest brother, the infant at Frania's breast, came into the world, and it was also the modern Polish republic's first Independence Day. Right away, the young state was in dire need of money and goods. Where would they come from? The old Polish adage *"Jak bida to do zyda"*—when in need, go to the Jew—seemed to supply the answer. The inventories of Jewish shopkeepers became targets of the new confiscatory powers of the State. The authorities had no qualms about denuding shopkeeper's shelves, stripping them of their only means of livelihood and giving them worthless receipts in return.

Facing ruin, shopkeepers like my father tried to save some of their stock by removing it from their shops and hiding it. This wasn't an easy task. Officials would show up without warning. However, when bribed, these same officials would warn certain shopkeepers of impending confiscations, although not always in time to remove the merchandise. This must have been the case with our shop. My father only had time enough to lock the store before the raiders arrived. Finding it locked, they departed, but not before posting a soldier in front of the store.

Still, we had a chance. The store had a rear entrance, through which the threatened merchandise might yet be removed. The problem was to somehow divert the attention of the guard from the unusual activity that was about to take place. Here is where Frania saved the day. I recall

the episode in all its details because I took an active part in the operation. As soon as the store was locked, I was placed on the lookout across the street. To my older brother, who was on duty at the next street corner, I had reported the arrival of the search party and the posting of the guard. From my vantage point I had everything in full view. I saw the guard pacing back and forth in front of the store. Then, to my surprise, I saw Frania stroll up to him. She was soon engaging him in a conversation the contents of which I could hardly guess. Whatever she said to him, he became oblivious to his surroundings. In a matter of minutes my brothers and their friends emptied the store of its merchandise—mostly textiles—and hustled it through the rear door. The stock was hidden in a neighbor's home until the storm blew over.

So, with Frania's help, we staved off disaster.

* * *

Whatever might be going on in the outside world, at home the Jewish holidays—including, of course, the Sabbath—were always observed and celebrated. These holidays provided some of the brightest moments of childhood. Thanks to them, time was endowed with a finite quality, passing in orderly, reassuring fashion, with recurrent guideposts. The long harsh winter seemed somewhat shorter if, in the middle of February, you knew it was only four weeks to go to Purim and another four weeks to Passover—the festival of freedom and spring. In the fall the approaching holiday of Succoth—the Biblical feast of harvest—reminded everyone of winter.

Succoth lasted seven days and nights, during which observant Jews took their meals outdoors, in specially constructed *succahs*—huts or booths loosely covered with branches so that, in accordance with the Biblical injunction, the stars could be seen. There was always much bustling activity in the days preceding Succoth. While the children were busy making decorations, the men built the *succah,* sometimes a small one on the balcony for the use of a single family, sometimes a larger one for several families. Since we lived on the ground floor without a balcony, we built our *succah* in the courtyard some two hundred feet from the apartment and shared it with the family of Joseph-the-Baker, who also lived on the ground floor. Once *Succoth* arrived, all of us would feast there, the women carrying the steaming hot dishes across the courtyard. However, last but not least before the eve of *Succoth,* the

bundles of pine branches used to cover the *succah* had to be purchased from enterprising peasants. Pine branches exclusively were used, not only for their aroma, but for a more practical reason having to do with the unpredictable fall weather.

One year my older brother was assigned to get the branches. Probably believing that it was a waste of money to buy them when foliage was available for free in the garden right next door, he cut branches from an apple tree and covered our *Succah* with these. All went well, so long as the weather stayed fine. We sat in the *Succah,* prayed, sang and dined. However, on the fifth day of the week long holiday the weather changed and during the evening meal a nasty wind played havoc with the foliage over our heads. A shower of dry leaves, bits of branches and dust covered the festive party, sprinkling the soup with greenery and giving an unexpected flavor to the wine. At first my father looked perplexed, then shocked as he realized that the shower consisted, not of pine needles but leaves. The embarrassed silence was broken by Joseph-the-Baker who, accustomed to playing with fire and keeping a cool head, started singing a sweetly joyful chasidic tune. We all joined in with alacrity. The soup was a total loss, and the next course—a meat dish—was consumed indoors, a sudden rain now making it all but impossible to stay in the *Succah.* No one ever mentioned this episode again. However, I couldn't help noticing next day at the dinner table indoors that my older brother was quite fidgety, apparently because of discomfort around the parts nearest to the seat of the chair.

After Succoth there was no doubt winter was coming. Mother busied herself preparing cranberry preserves, marinated mushrooms, goose fat, and, for next Passover, dried-raisin wine. Loads of firewood, coal, peat moss, and potatoes, were delivered daily by wagon, and my brothers and I unloaded the stuff for storage in the large cellar under the apartment.

Winter was about to descend down on us.

* * *

By now our household consisted of eleven souls, and sometimes twelve, as there was often a relative staying for short or long intervals. There were seven siblings, a maid and a wet nurse. Obviously it must have been overcrowded in the two-room-and kitchen apartment, but somehow I wasn't aware of it. I do recall that my older brothers slept in

the backroom of the store rather than at home, in part to protect the store from fire and burglars, since insurance was nonexistent. As for privacy in the apartment, it wasn't easy to come by, but it wasn't impossible. The women of the household bathed in the kitchen where a large tub was filled with hot water. Though quite aware of their ablutions, I was never an eyewitness. The males of the house, including me from the age of five, took their weekly bath and vigorous scrubbing in the public bathhouse, to which we marched in file behind my father, Fridays at dawn, summer and winter.

How my parents cared for their brood and managed to educate it, how our family could consider itself well-off despite its meager assets, how a measure of optimism and high spirits, self-respect and even some feeling of superiority, were transmitted to us—these things baffle me still. I considered myself rich because each year I got a new pair of shoes —never mind that a few months later they were in a sorry state. Often, during the winter, I would stuff my shoes with paper, trying to plug the holes. We wouldn't complain about such trifles to our parents, who had more important concerns running a store and coping with a household. I wouldn't dream of asking to have my torn gloves replaced, although my hands would become red and swollen from the winter chill.

There was one important respite from winter—the festival of Chanukah, commemorating the victory of the Maccabees. The polished candelabrum, the lights, the potato pancakes, the gifts of small change, the abbreviated schoolday, made winter briefly bearable and life wonderful. And think of it, after Chanukah it was only a short jump to Purim. Forget the fact that actually it was almost three months, from December to March. In my mind, when Chanukah came, Purim was just around the corner.

Ah, Purim—a festival made to order for children. Each time we heard the name of Haman, the Persian persecutor of the Jews, during the reading of the Book of Esther in the synagogue, we would put our noisemakers, the *greggers,* to energetic use. I was sure that the *gregger* was an all-powerful weapon, a sure safeguard against any persecutor harboring designs against the Jewish people.

After Purim there was more excitement in store. Spring was on its way, and that meant Passover. All kinds of new clothes had to be ordered well in advance, but shoes were unquestionably the most talked about item. Should they be black or brown? Should they be of soft leather, or rough? With great deliberation we chose the hide from which the *cho-*

levki, the uppers, would be cut. Almost every member of the family would examine the various hides, touching and sniffing them. Once the hides were picked out, we would take them across the courtyard to my friend's father, the uppers-maker. A short man whose two-pronged beard reached down almost to his knees, he cut the leather swiftly and efficiently with a razor-sharp knife that always filled me with horror. First, however, he would measure my feet fastidiously while his wife, walking back and forth between the workshop and the kitchen, narrowed her eyes at me in her nearsighted way.

When the uppers were ready, I would be taken on a trip to the shoemaker's. He was a gentile, who lived in a distant part of town. He worked in a dim room, near the window, sitting on a low round stool surrounded by heaps of shoes. Whenever his face, for no apparent reason, was twisted into a grimace, his handlebar mustache would jump rather violently. Somber looking as he was, he was very gentle with me as he measured my foot with a paper tape. By reputation he was the best shoemaker in town, so I always told whoever would listen that the master was making my shoes. According to rumors, he drank heavily, but if he did, it was probably only on Sundays, for I never saw him in anything but a quiet and somewhat withdrawn mood. He was one of three unmistakable gentiles or *Goyim* with whom I came into close contact during my early childhood. The other two were the doctor and the janitor. For some reason, I never considered our maids, or the wet nurse, as gentiles.

* * *

The apartment house in which we lived, together with some thirty other families, was a three-story brick structure that faced the town square. Connecting the interior courtyard with the square outside was a large gate. It was locked at night by the janitor, who lived with his family in a little house detached from the main building. A stocky man with a bushy moustache and a taste for drink, he was given a wide berth by the kids who swarmed in the courtyard in the spring and summer months, for in addition to a broom he wielded a long black leather belt that would lash out with no apparent provocation at anyone near him.

On Thursday, he was always sober and exceptionally dangerous. This was the day that the peasants from the surrounding villages brought their products to market. The square was then filled to overflowing, and

wagons and horses spilled over into our courtyard. We kids had not much room left to play in, and we were sometimes known to start a ruckus. In amongst the confusion of wagons, horses, peasants, and chickens and geese let loose by us, the janitor's swinging belt would appear out of nowhere to land on the heads and backs of any of the boys who happened to be in the courtyard. Within a few seconds, like magic, we kids would disappear like rabbits into their holes.

In the evening, after the peasants left, the janitor would take over the courtyard completely. Everyone took cover, all the windows were tightly shut. There was good reason for this. First the janitor would sweep up the rubbish left over from market day, then he devoted himself to the task of removing the human waste that had accumulated during the week in the outhouse in a remote corner of the backyard. Although some rudimentary plumbing was installed in the apartment block, it was so neglected by the embattled landlord as to be practically useless. So the janitor transported his load in a large open wagon, across the length of the courtyard and town square to some unknown destination. Each Thursday the stench of this operation kept everyone indoors.

* * *

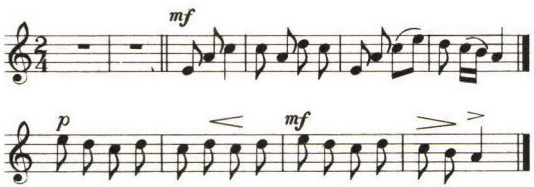
Almost all the breadwinners in the apartment house were small shopkeepers and artisans. There was a carpenter, a baker, a dressmaker, a corsetmaker, a shirtmaker, an ice cream maker, a cobbler and a glazier. Almost all of them lived with their families in two rooms and a kitchen, one of the rooms serving as a workshop.

The cobbler, however, was not that fortunate. He and his family lived in a single room, in the basement. I visited him quite frequently, for his family was considered *really* poor, and my mother would send me over with food, especially on the Sabbath or the holidays. Working in his corner beneath the window the shoemaker would see people walking in the courtyard, but only their shoes and legs. It was fun to stay a while and watch him work. He always had a mouthful of wooden nails, which he would quickly hammer into the moist leather soles. I would look up through the window at the legs and shoes passing by and try to guess to whom they belonged.

It was in the dressmaker's shop that I suffered my first fainting episode. She was sitting at the sewing machine while I stood nearby, my curiosity aroused by the magically flying needle. I must've been very

curious indeed, because somehow my index finger found its way under the needle and was pierced clear through. Instinctively I pulled back my hand and broke the needle, which now protruded from my finger. The dressmaker quickly seized my hand and extracted the needle. I remember little of the pain. But I suddenly heard a buzzing in my head, everything around me became blurred and then receded, and the voices of the people in the shop grew faint and distant. When I came to, I was on a bed, wet from the cold water they must have poured over me.

In the shirtmaker's shop there were always at least three or four men at work. It was great fun to visit there. The owner played the violin during lunch breaks and after work. There were books everywhere, on the floor and shelves, mixed up with piles of white shirts, collars and rolls of linen. The hum of the sewing machines mixed with the singing voices of the shirtmakers gave this place an air quite different from that of the cobbler's gloomy cellar.

One song whose plaintive tune combined with self-deprecating humorous lyrics remains in my memory to this day. It is the *Song of the Tailor:*

"This is the way
"the tailor sews . . .
"He sews and sews
"A full week long
"Then he gets his dole:
"A bagel with a hole."

* * *

Although most of the families were large, none could rival the one that lived above us on the third floor of our hallway. There were 12 children in this family, each born probably no more than a year apart. Ten girls and two boys. Their mother, whom they called *mamunia,*

would entrust each newborn child to the care of an older one. When meals were served in this household, the mother would take her portion first and retire to the bedroom. Only when she was finished would the rest of the food be distributed among the children. While their mother slowly ate, the children were obliged to keep absolutely silent. If I happened to drop in at such a moment, the girls would give me to understand that I must keep still. They had only to whisper the word, *mamunia* in my ear and I would know that it was mealtime in the bedroom. The word *mamunia* was adopted into the apartment house lingo, meaning to enjoy a feast by oneself. They were a cheerful bunch, the girls beautiful, the babies clean and playful. Only two of this family survived the Holocaust.

* * *

My own mother was born in a village about 15 miles away, a considerable distance at the time she and my father first met. According to family lore, he met her in unusual circumstances, quite different from the conventional, prearranged manner in which most Jews met their brides. As a young man making his living in the timber trade in the last years of the nineteenth century, he used to travel from village to village, buying timber from peasants in the form of standing trees, which would then be cut down by hired lumberjacks and shipped to sawmills. One Friday afternoon, my father must have been particularly busy. He failed to notice dusk falling and found himself stuck far from home, since no observant Jew traveled during the Sabbath. He asked the peasants whether there were any Jews living in the neighborhood, and they directed him to my mother's family's house. There he introduced himself to my maternal grandmother and was invited to share in the Sabbath dinner and stay the night. At twilight the next day, according to the story, he left, but not before promising to return and marry his hostess's youngest daughter.

First he had to face the objections of his own mother, my paternal grandmother. It struck her as a most unconventional and unsuitable match. She had in mind for my father—said to be the most capable and best-educated among her eleven children—a very different kind of girl. How could a villager like my mother, almost a peasant really, probably illiterate and no doubt ignorant of Jewish customs and rituals, make a proper wife for her son? My father was in love, and overcame his mother's

opposition. She agreed to the marriage, but she never really came to terms with my mother, who was always regarded by her as an intruder in the family. Rarely did my paternal grandmother visit our home. When she did, she would carefully inspect every corner, check the kitchen, inquire how the meat was prepared and where the dishes for dairy products were kept. The not-very-subtle implication was that my mother, even after twenty years of marriage and seven children, couldn't possibly have learned the dietary laws. My mother didn't like this snooping, but she took it with a smile.

She had the sweetest disposition. Although my father occasionally belted me for misbehaving, my mother would never spank or even scold me. She greeted nearly everyone with an engaging smile and a cheerful gleam in her brown eyes. When I was very young she wore a wig in the traditional fashion of Jewish wives, but later she discarded it, revealing long, lustrous black hair interlaced with white over the years.

My mother was, in fact, practically illiterate—she could only sign her name, and trace a few words in Polish. I doubt that she could read a word of the Hebrew prayer book that she took with her to the synagogue. One way or another, however, she followed the service devotedly, sometimes breaking into tears. At home, she lit the Sabbath candles faithfully, covering her face with her hands and murmuring the Hebrew prayer, which she knew by heart. She kept a kosher house, but without making a fuss about it, and never inquired what we ate when we left town. First to rise in the morning—she woke the maid—my mother was the last to go to bed. Her cooking was bland. Her baking, on the other hand, was famous throughout the neighborhood. A country girl, she knew her way around mushrooms, and also a great variety of berries, from which she prepared delicious pies and preserves.

She was shot to death in 1942 by German-Nazi thugs, while hiding in the cellar of her house, two of her grandchildren, aged four and two, in her arms. My father, after the torment of deportation was asphyxiated, then turned to ashes in the ovens of Treblinka.

* * *

My maternal grandfather was a landowner, a rarity among Polish Jews, who, except in most unusual circumstances, were forbidden to acquire land. I never saw him, as he died a good twenty years before I

was born. A mysterious, almost mythical personage, little was spoken about him in our home. I did learn that he lived to be 92 years of age, married twice and fathered two sets of offspring. He married my grandmother when he was in his seventies and had three daughters by her, my mother being the youngest. He died twice.

The first time he died, he was 80 years old. At the cemetery, as he was about to be lowered into the grave, he opened his eyes, got up, and left the scene, to live another 12 years. I heard this story from many sources, including my second cousin, my grandfather's grandson from his first marriage. This "resurrection" was perhaps not as miraculous as it sounds. My grandfather, who lived on his farm far from any organized Jewish community happened to "die" on a Friday. He was ill at the time and must have fallen into a stupor or coma. Who it was that declared him dead is not known, but preparations for his interment must have been made in great haste, because the Sabbath was coming on, and on the Sabbath Jews may not be buried.

Nevertheless, the local peasants took the event for a miracle. Years after my grandfather had really died, his name remained alive among them, and when I would visit his village, they would call me by his name, even though my grandmother had remarried.

* * *

Visits to my maternal grandmother brought me near to rural life—on occasion, too near for comfort.

I was four years old and found myself near a pond where I saw some ducks coming to shore. I must have thought them quite friendly and trustworthy. I walked a little further and saw a flock of somewhat larger ducks marching in single file along the dirt road. With the best of intentions I tried to bestow a pat on the bird nearest to me. Perhaps my gesture was misunderstood. In any case, I was suddenly surrounded by a crowd of furious birds. Terrified, I ran as fast as I could, the geese in pursuit, their beaks jabbing at my buttocks. I somehow succeeded in escaping them, only to discover myself lost among tall trees in the forest. I wandered about, sobbing loudly, and after an eternity was found by a woodsman. He took me to his house, with some difficulty established my identity, and brought me back to my grandmother.

This episode imbued me with a life-long fear of geese and even swans.

It was also during this episode, I believe, that I first experienced the feeling of "being lost," a feeling that would return frequently in dreams, not only during childhood but in later years as well.

I also learned at an early age to be frightened of sirens. Lying in my bed at night I would be awakened by the terrible sound of the town siren whenever a fire broke out. At the age of four I had a close call. It was during an overnight visit at my paternal grandmother's house. I slept in the same bed with my uncle, a bachelor who lived with his mother. Starting up from my sleep, I saw smoke and flames through the window. The siren was blasting away. Since it was winter, I first grabbed my shoes. I remember quite vividly that while putting them on my chief question to myself was: "Should I tie the laces or not?" I must have stood there thinking for a long moment before my grandmother galvanized me into action. She was determined to save the sacred books of law and commentary. Throwing open the glass doors of the bookcase, she handed me a bulky leather covered *Gemarah* and ordered me to carry it out at once into the street, where a crowd was milling around the fire pump. I did as she told me, laces dragging.

* * *

Whenever confronted with a brazen lie, I enter a state of deep anxiety. This pattern too was established in childhood. Rather than reacting instantly and vigorously, I am momentarily paralyzed by disbelief and fear, even if the lie I have just heard is harmless. I have to make an effort to convince myself that I am really not threatened by it, that it doesn't warrant such overpowering anxiety. My problem with lies started when I was seven years old.

It was Sabbath, and after attending morning prayers in the *shtibel*—a small prayerhouse distinct from the larger, less intimate synagogue, or *shul*—the family was gathered round the festive table. Special dishes, chants, the conversation, a guest from out of town, made this the week's central event. Often a poor stranger would join us, someone my father had picked up from among the many Jews passing through who for one reason or other were stranded when the Sabbath arrived. Dinner would be served early in the afternoon, and it lasted two or three hours. The longest interval was between meats and dessert. This was filled with the singing of religious songs and Hebrew melodies from Palestine. My father would also read aloud portions of the Yiddish newspaper—the

week-end political column, and the much appreciated work of the humorist Kipnis.

It was at this moment one Sabbath that the door opened and two policemen entered. There were only a handful of policemen in our town. I saw them occasionally near the municipal building, the site of the police station and jail. In the winter when the trees were stripped of foliage, the barred windows could be seen quite clearly. I would rather cross the street than walk right by the jail, fearful that somehow I might be sucked inside. Policemen, I knew, were nasty, took bribes and ought to be avoided.

The sudden presence of two policemen in our home terrified me and when I realized that they had come to see *me* and take me to the police station, I froze. The thing was incomprehensible, they would not divulge the reason for it. Escorted by the police, holding my father's hand, I walked through the yard and into the street, as neighbors and passersby stared in disbelief.

At the police station, following a lengthy wait, my father was told that I was suspected of stealing gloves from the cloakroom in our prayer house. This is where members of the congregation left their coats and where we children played when prayers dragged. Gloves had apparently been disappearing systematically during the last few weeks and a boy who had confessed had named me as his accomplice. Brought in from another room for a confrontation, he faced me and pointed his finger at me without hesitating as he uttered his unbelievable lie. I was shattered. I couldn't speak to defend myself.

Two hours later, I was released. The boy made known where he had hidden the gloves, and his father promptly brought them to the station. All the missing gloves were accounted for. My ordeal was over, but I returned home with a residue of nausea which always surfaced again whenever I was confronted with a conscious lie.

* * *

Until I was six, my father attended the town's large synagogue, the *shul,* and on occasion he would take me with him. The *shul* was an imposing edifice with arched portals and wonderful stained glass windows depicting the Twelve Tribes of Israel. It was large enough to accommodate hundreds of people, and I made sure to stay close to my

father's seat so as not to be lost among strangers. Sitting next to him, I would crane my neck to catch a glimpse of my mother, who sat with the rest of the women in the gallery reserved for them, nearer the high, colorful, vaulted ceiling. My father's seat was in the northeast corner, not far from the eastern wall. This is where all the important ceremonies took place, with the exception of the reading of the Torah scrolls, for which purpose the center of the hall was set apart.

The most impressive moments in *shul* came during the services on the Day of Atonement, *Yom Kippur.* In the late afternoon, before the final prayer, the worshippers would sway in rhythmic motion, their steady murmured prayers interrupted now and then by a sigh or groan, their heads and bodies covered by heavy white woolen prayer shawls, under which they wore the *kittl*—the white cotton vestment worn in death. The slanting rays of the afternoon sun filtering in through the stained glass cast magical rainbows over the crowded scene, filling me with awe.

The *shtibl*—there were dozens in town—was far less grand. It was, typically, a small, intimate meeting place, meant primarily for prayer, but it was also a center for conversation, before, after and during prayers, a kind of club. Everyone knew each other, except for poor strangers who came in on Sabbath to be picked up and taken home for dinner. Women, except during High Holy Days, were never present, nor did they participate in the social, cultural, and political activities of the *shtibl.*

Because of his Zionist inclinations, my father joined a *shtibl* most of whose members were adherents or supporters of the Zionist cause. It consisted of just two rooms, the larger of which had wooden pews installed around three walls—the eastern wall contained the ark. In the center of this larger room there was a high table of oak where the scrolls of the Torah were unrolled for reading. The ark where they were kept was shielded by a blue velvet curtain embroidered with twin lions of Judah, their crowned heads facing each other, ferocious and invincible. The velvet curtain, the silken coverlets of the Torah scrolls—in contrast to the somber simplicity of the hard oak panelling, the seats and tables —warmed and soothed my eyes with resplendent blue and gold and, when touched, sent sensuous shivers of softness through my fingertips.

The seating arrangement in the *shtibl* was carefully determined. Those nearer the eastern wall were the more important, usually the wealthier, members of the congregation. The northeast corner was the most coveted and it was here, in close proximity to the ark, that the

owner of the building—who had donated the rooms for the prayer house —sat. Next to him, a man of forty, ruddy-cheeked, his large, square, close-shaven jaw flanked by jowls, a golden watch chain draped over his distinguished paunch, which rhythmically rose and fell in time with his breathing. This was the highest Jewish elected municipal official, a man of wealth and some political clout locally. On Fridays, at twilight, as we waited for the stars to appear that would signal the recitation of *Maariv,* the evening prayer, a crowd of attentive listeners would gather in the northeast corner to hear this dignitary discourse on current affairs in Poland and the world.

The members of the congregation who sat at the southern wall represented a different class, mostly artisans. Though less distinguished perhaps, they were a merry lot, with some fine singers among them—down at the southern wall was where the amateur choir resided. Accustomed to relieving the tedium of their everyday labors with liturgical chants as well as operatic arias, they required no rehearsal, but were always ready, as soon as they were given their cue by the cantor, to raise their voices in harmony. They would make the *shtibl* ring with sweet lyrics greeting the Sabbath, with soul piercing, brooding melodies on Yom Kippur, and with exuberant, joyous tunes on the less solemn holidays. At times they would get quite carried away. Their joyful melody would undergo a strange modulation, changing imperceptibly, but perfectly, into a paraphrase of one of the Italian operas. These strange settings to the sacred Hebrew lyrics would cause eyebrows to shoot up at the northern wall, and quickly but gracefully the leading voices of the choir would steer back to the proper melody, not without a certain prankish look in their eyes.

The other room of the *shtibl* would be opened for prayer only when overflow crowds had to be accommodated, as on holidays. This smaller room ordinarily contained many tables and chairs, and on the wall a portrait of Theodor Herzl, the founder of the modern Zionist movement. An old member of the congregation, an accountant by trade, had drawn this portrait in pen and ink, using minute artfully spaced, almost microscopic Hebrew letters, inscribed in strokes of varying boldness, to produce a life sized likeness of the bearded leader. I marveled at this feat —all the more so when I discovered that the letters made up words and sentences which told the complete history of the life of Herzl.

* * *

I was eight years old before I first witnessed the results of a vicious act of anti-Semitism.

The independent state of Poland had been declared. There was unrest in the south, war with the Bolsheviks in the east. Travelers from the south, from Silesia, reported atrocities by Polish troops against the Jews there. And indeed, one of my uncles who was traveling in that region had his beard torn out by the Hallerchik soldiers, named after their commander, General Haller, a notorious anti-Semite. For months, I saw my uncle going about with bandages on his chin and cheeks while the bruises slowly healed.

Before this, I had been aware of the differences between Jew and gentile, but they hadn't been brought home to me so brutally. I knew that we Jews had been the object of age-old hostility. I had heard of the terrible persecutions in Spain, of the Inquisition, of pogroms in Russia. As a general rule, I knew that it was best to skip those sections of town populated mainly by non-Jews. Yet past catastrophes and present insecurities were facts of life you grew up with and were supposed to get used to, the way you got used to the frost in the winter and the thunder and lightening in the summer.

The Inquisition was remote, and as for the dangers lurking in the non-Jewish parts of town, they were counterbalanced in my mind by the knowledge that the Jews were once a mighty nation in ancient Israel, and that Jewish sufferings had something to do with our belief in and close relation to the one God and the Messiah, who was on his way. I came to believe that non-Jews were all pagans, worshippers of idols, statues and paintings in their churches—was it any wonder, then, that they behaved barbarically? They weren't really responsible before God for their impulsive lives of drunkeness and violence that could sometimes end in murder. I concluded that Christians must be inherently inferior—how else could they believe in a God who has a Father and Mother, when surely there was only one God, the God who revealed Himself to Abraham one star-studded night in the desert, many thousands of years ago?

To be sure, a *Goy* could be a righteous person, more righteous even than many Jews. Doctor Z. was one such exception that proved the rule, and there were also some non-Jewish customers in our shop, of whom my father spoke with the greatest respect. But these I considered exceptional. The janitor—drunk and violent—was my very image of the Goy. Frania, the wet nurse who was loved by God and by everyone else,

I somehow couldn't consider a non-Jew although I knew that every Sunday she went to church to kneel before the idols.

* * *

In the realm of language, too, Jews were distinguishable from non-Jews. Both Yiddish and Hebrew were living parts of our everyday lives. While we spoke Polish with the maid, the doctor, and customers in the shop, Yiddish was our means of intimate communication within the family and with friends. Only when I started attending High School—the "gymnasium"—did I begin using Polish in ordinary encounters with the small number of Jewish boys among my schoolmates. Even in the gymnasium, however, there was no substitute for rich, folksy Yiddish whenever an intimate saying or witty aphorism was needed. As for Hebrew, although it was rarely spoken, we, the boys, were quite knowledgeable in it, from reading the Bible, from prayers, and from formal courses we took when we joined the Jewish scouting movement.

In early childhood I took these various differences between Jew and non-Jew—this effective duality of mankind—for granted, regarding it as a sort of immutable cosmic law, more comforting perhaps than threatening. Sheltered as I was at home, in the teeming courtyard, the elementary Jewish school, and the prayerhouse, I at first perceived the hostility of the outside world as something comparatively muted and remote. It took the bandage on my uncle's chin to set me thinking.

At about the same time, I started venturing into the street by myself in my spare time, and there I saw many new sights, some fascinating, others frightening.

* * *

The square that our apartment house faced was the center stage of town, so to speak—all public events of any importance took place in it, and except on Saturday, there was a constant coming-and-going of all sorts of people. I have already mentioned Thursday, the market day. Nearly all the shops and buildings around the square were owned and inhabited by Jews, but the dominating structure was the Catholic church, the main synagogue being hidden in a narrow side-street. Saturdays the square was virtually deserted, all the stores except the pharmacy closed for *Shabbat*. On Sunday morning it would come to life again

as the Catholics flocked to the church. Since all the Christian holidays were focused on the church and the square, I became quite familiar with them. I would mingle with the spectators jamming the sidewalks during the processions where crucifixes and banners of the Virgin were displayed, but I always did so somewhat cautiously, taking care not to stray too far from home. During such events, Jewish shopkeepers closed their shops, lowered the shutters, and stayed home, for there was no way of knowing whether the peaceful procession might not take a nasty turn. If my curiosity was sufficiently strong to draw me out of doors, nevertheless it was riddled by a certain anxiety.

The square was also the scene of mass demonstrations of a different character on the first and third of May.

On May Day the workers would fill the square with their red flags and sing revolutionary songs like the one of the "spilled blood of the workers." This spectacle and the red flags never failed to make me uneasy. May first always dawned with an air of tension hanging over the town, and in the square the police were out in force. Every year rumors had it that the communist marchers who were in the minority, were clashing with the socialists and with the police, but usually by afternoon the tension had abated and the crowd milled peacefully. Jewish workers were not welcomed to join the Polish socialist and communist marchers as organized groups on May Day. They demonstrated separately, carrying red banners inscribed in Yiddish and Polish. Most of the Jewish workers belonged to the Socialist "Bund," although a small group, mainly independent artisans, were Socialist-Zionists.

In contrast to the Catholic holidays and May Day, the third of May was a happy occasion that I could actually participate in with not-so-mixed feelings. On this national holiday, commemorating the proclamation of the very liberal Polish constitution before Poland's dismemberment at the hands of Prussia, Austria, and Russia in the 18th century, Jewish schoolchildren were expected officially to join their Christian counterparts in the parades. Amid the gaiety pervading the streets on this one day of the year, I for once felt some sense of nearness to the Polish people, some warmth flowing from them to me, a Jewish child.

Such feelings couldn't last long. I was soon reminded that I belonged to an alien minority, that I was barely tolerated in my native land, where my forebearers had lived for hundreds of years.

The Polish army, following initial successes against the Soviets in the Ukraine, had become over-extended, and suffered a series of defeats, including the loss of Kiev—once, in Poland's heyday, a Polish ruled city. Now the Polish army was in full retreat, pursued all the way to the outskirts of Warsaw by the Red Army, organized by Trotsky. The news of these developments depressed the Jewish shopkeepers and traders in our community. To them, communism simply meant ruin. In addition, there were the tales being told by refugees from the east of atrocities committed by the retreating Poles, and quité aside from communist economic policies, there was the spectre of Soviet terror. In my home, the word Bolshevik always denoted a trouble-maker, an atheist, a thug, a terrorist. It was a word that stirred up much the same fear in me as the massed red flags in the square on May Day.

Imagine my shock, therefore, when one day, on the way to school, I saw the official Polish propaganda posters that had been plastered all over town the night before. A large figure in a prayer shawl and phylacteries, cradling a Torah scroll in his blood-stained hands, was leading a charging horde of Mongolian soldiers. The figure was unmistakeably Trotsky. His troops wore the typical pointed hat with its red star, and the caption beneath the Poster read: SAVE POLAND FROM THE BOLSHEVIK JEW.

It was this piece of visual scurrility, more than anything else that convinced me that the frightening but remote persecution of the Jews in Egypt as recounted in the Passover Haggadah, in Persia in Haman's time as told during Purim in the Book of Esther, in Spain under the Inquisition as alluded to in the prayerbook before the chanting of Kol Nidre on Yom Kippur eve, might possibly recur right here, in our town. I dreamt of mobs attacking our house, pouring into the living room through the windows. I dreamt too that I was a soldier of Israel, killed by the Romans. I lay on a barren hill, above me the ruins of the Temple, a large spear stuck in my chest. I was somewhat surprised that I felt no pain, that—though dead—I could see everything around me, and that my death and this scene of destruction were welcome and gratifying. On awakening, and for several years to come, I believed that in a prior incarnation I was a Jewish soldier who died defending the Temple in Jerusalem.

The time of tension and near pogrom atmosphere passed after the Bolsheviks were pushed back from the suburbs of Warsaw deep into the

Ukraine and a peace treaty between Poland and the Soviets was signed in Riga. Life slowly returned to more peaceful conditions as the threats on the Polish frontiers diminished.

* * *

At the age of eight I followed my older brothers and sister into the Jewish Scouts, the Hashomer Hatzair, or Young Guards. This organization took its name from the sentries who protected the Jewish settlements in Palestine at night. Like our non-Jewish counterparts in the scout movement we wore green uniforms, but ours were decorated with a miniature Star of David on the lapel. We too had our overnight hikes, our bonfires in forest clearings, our indoctrination in Baden-Powell's ideology of the universal brotherhood of youth. In addition to the various badges that scouts everywhere strove and studied for, we had our badges signifying knowledge of Hebrew, Palestinean geography, and the history of the early pioneering and Zionist movement.

Scouting introduced me to nature, to semi-military discipline, and to the sometimes contradictory ideals of self-reliance and teamwork. It also began to transform the notion of a free and rebuilt Jerusalem from just a fine, abstract phrase uttered at Passover, to a real possibility and a tangible task, calling for commitment, courage and mutual help. "There, in the land of our forefathers, all our hopes will be fulfilled," we sang. I came to believe that the insults and indignities previously mitigated by the long-delayed arrival of the Messiah would indeed come to an end, but only thanks to our own efforts, with earthly instruments, in the rebuilding of our ancient homeland.

Things were right again. The predicament had a solution.

* * *

My induction into the scouts was one of several changes in my life around this time. When I was eight, my formal religious education came to an end. I was transferred to a secular public school, where I was kept busy from early morning to midday. In the afternoon, I attended a secular Hebrew school.

This was a new departure in education for our town. The school was probably founded to answer a growing interest in Zionism and modern Hebrew, a result of new social and economic conditions following the

war. Although many Jews in town—perhaps the majority—continued in their customary modes of life, others, like my father, discarded some or all of their traditional garb, became increasingly interested in Zionism and other political movements, sent their children to secular schools, and frequented the theater and cinema—all this, however, without ceasing to observe the Sabbath and the Holy Days, without partaking of non-kosher food, or forgetting that they were Jews in an environment that was more or less anti-Semitic. Such Jews were apt to realize that anti-Semitism satisfied irrational fears and desires of individuals and nations, but they were liable to try to cope with it rationally.

We children in the courtyard and at school were, in some respects, a precocious bunch. It was in part from my friends, part from talks at the dinner table, that I now learned that Zionism was in contention with rival movements among those Jews who had implicitly or openly given up on the Messiah and were looking for political solutions to anti-Semitism. One of these movements was Bundism, that is, non-Zionist socialism, and another was Communism.

By the time I was ten or twelve, therefore, I knew that the Bund, which included in its ranks great numbers of Jewish factory workers, held out the hope that in a socialist society Jewish culture, especially the Yiddish language, would flourish. The Bundists were more or less social democrats, who didn't believe in the practicability or desirability of a Jewish nationalist movement having Palestine as its goal, but whose Jewishness was important to them, and who, by force of circumstance, kept independent of the Polish Socialist Party. The Bund was a legal group that took advantage of its right to demonstrate in the streets and put up candidates for the parliament of the new Polish republic.

The small Communist party, preaching the violent overthrow of the government and obviously directed by the Bolshevik regime across the border, was illegal and operated under various disguises. Yet I soon heard what Communists too had to say about anti-Semitism, Jewishness and Zionism. The Jewish Communists declared that the dictatorship of the proletariat would automatically solve the Jewish question in Poland and elsewhere and do away with anti-Semitism. They pointed to the happy situation of the Jews across the border in Soviet Russia as proof of their assertion—there the Jews were no longer subjected to discrimination, and the government even assisted them in developing Yiddish culture.

As for Zionism, I found out from my mates that both the Bundists

and the Jewish Communists could be sharply, even virulently antagonistic when it came to this subject. The Bundists shunned Hebrew and cast aspersions on Zionists who sought to mix their nationalism with socialism. The Communists were coldly scornful of all varieties of Zionism. Still a child, I was informed that Zionism was simply an attempt to divert the attention of the Jewish masses from the capitalist yoke that was pressing down on them, a device to beguile them with this fantastic scheme of building a home on some Mediterranean beach.

I soon learned, moreover, that the Zionist movement was riven by various party and factional splits, by factions-within-factions, which divided, came together, and divided again over differences in ideological interpretation and because of personality clashes. I saw the Zionist movement as an umbrella under which every possible world view could find a place, as long as it recognized the necessity of rebuilding Palestine as a home for the Jews.

* * *

It was a busy time. Mornings and afternoons found me at school, evenings I did homework and Saturdays after the Sabbath meal were devoted to scout meetings. Interspersed with these activities were the errands and duties with which each of the children in the family was expected to help, such as sorting the fabrics in the shop, stacking them on the shelves, arranging the display window, and delivering merchandise.

Busy as we were, we found the time, not only for the political discussions already mentioned, but other intellectual, athletic and mildly sensual diversions.

Chess we played anytime, anywhere we got the chance—in the summer in the park on benches, in the *shtibl* on weekdays waiting for a *minyan* or quorum, at home in the winter in a corner of the living room or on the dining table with everyone present leaning over the board and offering unsolicited advice. So early in life did we learn the rules that I can't remember how and when I started playing chess. I do recall how proud we were to hear that a young Jewish boy from our town who had emigrated with his parents had become the chess champion of America.

Some boys I knew would walk along the street discussing games played days and weeks before. They would gesticulate and exclaim vociferously, fingers pushing imaginary chess pieces in the air, analyzing

the variant, which, if played, would surely have won the game. Some games went on for days, the position at adjournment being carefully noted and studied before play was resumed. An especially clever move, or "combination," would be admired for its beauty by one and all, including the loser.

If chess was a form of mental athletics, an exercise in the finding of abstract solutions to abstract problems, a search for a wonderful, sudden revelation, then soccer—or as we called it, football—was our favorite sport, a pastime occasionally involving some physical danger and exertions due to its nationalistic overtones.

Our town fielded three "big league" soccer teams. One of them was Jewish and went by the name of *Hakoah*—"power" in Hebrew. Competition was fierce. On Sunday afternoons there were large crowds streaming toward the town soccer field. Tempers flared whenever the official made a call which was not in accordance with the wishes or perceptions of the crowd. Toward the end of the season, when contests between one or the other of the Polish team and *Hakoah* became decisive, nationalistic feelings rose to a high pitch. We would root loudly for our side, knowing full well that, in the event of a Jewish victory, we stood a good chance of being bombarded with stones and getting roughed up on the way home by opposing fans. The stadium, after all, was on their turf, far from the center of town where most Jews lived. In such problematic situations the only thing to do was run, avoiding confrontations with superior enemy forces on their own territory. We wouldn't start running, however, until the official sounded the final whistle, bringing the game to an end. Then, like sprinters, we would dash off in the direction of town, always in small groups so that we would have some chance of defending ourselves if intercepted or trapped. Once we reached our own neighborhood, we were safe, for the Polish kids also had a healthy fear of intruding on alien turf. The possibility of receiving a few kicks and punches before we made it home was real, yet a small price to pay for victory, and it never prevented any of us from attending the Sunday games.

It was altogether possible that, having run all the way home from a victory of *Hakoah,* I would curl up in a corner with a book from one of the town's Jewish lending libraries. These institutions were probably more important than any party affiliation in developing mental curiosity and erudition and feeding the daydreams of secularized Jewish boys and girls. It was there we found a window to the world, the great wide world

of new ideas, adventure, travel to distant places, an introduction to the culture of the West and to romance.

The largest library of this kind was a two room suite crammed from floor to ceiling with books, closely watched over by a librarian whose horror of having one of these books lost was almost as great as his generous wish for everyone to enjoy these treasures. A stocky fellow, hatmaker by trade, he would work all day in his shop to keep body and soul together and arrive in the evening to open the library to the public. When he lent a book, it was as if he was relinquishing a cherished child, albeit temporarily, to the care of a stranger. Especially if the book was new, or especially dear to him, he would pet it, open and close it, caress it up and down the spine, before handing it over. A walking reference shelf, he was up-to-date on all the newest publications in Yiddish and Polish, and translations from Russian, German, French, English and many other languages.

Since their funds were limited, the librarians of the various Jewish libraries had to follow certain guidelines in selecting new titles. Naturally, there was a slight bias that could be detected in favor of books in keeping with each library's party affiliation, left or right, Zionist or non-Zionist. This bias, though, was not as strong as the urge to have in the library those books most talked about in the literary sections of the Yiddish newspapers, no matter what their political coloration or message. In fact, the libraries competed spiritedly to be the first to acquire such books, and because internationally known writers quite often appeared in Yiddish translation before they did in Polish, my friends and I read them before they were even noticed in the Polish press. We discussed what we read sitting in the park, on the stoops of shops, or pounding the sidewalks until midnight during the carefree summer months, when school was out.

* * *

Wonders of another land awaited us in the town's only theater-cum-cinema. Although Jews were less than a third of the town's population, most of the theatrical shows were given in Yiddish, put on by troupes of itinerant Jewish actors. These performances were only occasional, however, and even when they did take place, I rarely went or was taken to see them.

On the other hand, a movie program for children and young people

was offered every Friday, and almost every week I would go. The silently flickering screen, the hushed darkness, the piano accompaniment, enchanted me. The proprietor's young daughter played the piano, adding a note of heartfelt melancholy to the sorcery on the screen. She played nothing but Chopin. For those scenes in the picture which she considered sad—that is, most of them—she played Nocturnes. From time to time a waltz would liven things up, and when there was a scene of galloping horses or an automobile chase, a Mazurka or Polonaise would fill the house, sending tremors of excitement through the audience. Here it was that I first fell in love. She was a teenage Japanese girl starring in a Hollywood production. For many months she haunted my dreams, evoking a kind of nostalgia for someone with whom I had fallen in love at first sight, someone I had never known and would never know. It was the first stirring of adolescent desire, safely directed at a celluloid heroine.

II

FORMING THE MOLD

AS I NEARED my thirteenth birthday and *Bar Mitzvah,* I started taking instruction in the use of the phylacteries and the ethical responsibilities of a member of the Jewish Community. Every evening I walked over to Reb Naphtali's home. A bearded man, father of eight children, he was renowned for his piety and scholarship. He wore a short white shawl over his shoulders—a *tallith kuten*—whose long fringes escaped from under his black kaftan. His hands were soft, unused, almost transparent, and his eyes were as brown and lustrous as a gazelle's.

His wife, Golda, sold vegetables in the square. On Thursdays she peddled carrots and turnips from door to door for the Sabbath. Red-cheeked, constantly smiling like an angel, her hands encrusted with flat white calluses and covered with tiny hairline fissures that were black from her handling of roots fresh from the soil, Golda was her family's principal breadwinner. A friend of my mother's, she would bring the choicest vegetables to our kitchen, where she would converse with my mother standing up, shyly sipping hot tea or soup, and occasionally, with a grin that revealed a row of small, widely spaced, childlike teeth, consent to accept the clothes we had outgrown.

Every day Golda was up before dawn to get her products from the peasants. She would sell or peddle 'til late in the afternoon, then return with the unsold surplus for consumption by her family. Reb Naphtali would look long and thoughtfully at me when explaining one of the more difficult precepts, but I never saw him so much as glance at his

wife, who, in the evenings, would squat in the corner mending socks, whispering to her eldest daughter, and furtively beam at her husband.

Her eldest son was an *Ehlah*—genius. He was famous for his precocious knowledge of the scriptures, his amazingly incisive probing of the intricacies of the law. Just slightly younger than I was, he would turn his round, pale face and blueish, bloodshot eyes toward me, and study me with curiosity and disapproval, as if to say, "What can you, almost an apostate, a Jewish boy attending a Catholic school, know of the holiness and mystery of the phylacteries and the joy of joining the congregation as a grownup equal, there to confront God in prayer on your own?"

One evening, delayed at a scout meeting and unable to stop off at home to change my clothes, I appeared at Reb Naphtali's house in uniform. If he was shocked, he didn't show it, but proceeded as usual with his instruction. Later, however, he referred to the futility of those Jews who, aping the gentiles, believed in soldierly virtues, in resisting force with force. "Not by force, but by the spirit," the Jewish precept says. "But how are we to defend ourselves?" I asked. "By submitting to God's will," he answered firmly. "You do not meet the senseless, onrushing surf by holding your head up in defiance. You bend and then straighten up after the crest passes." And then he added, as if to himself, "Until the Messiah comes."

In due course I completed my Bar Mitzvah instructions. On a Sabbath morning I was called up in the *shtibl* to read from the Prophets and was accepted as a full-fledged member of the congregation. There were handshakes all around, but no celebration, no gifts. I received only a newly purchased set of phylacteries, or *tefillin,* two leather-covered boxes containing Scriptural passages, to be worn during morning prayers, one on the forehead, one on the left arm, each small box having attached to it a pair of long leather strips which were tied in prescribed fashion around the head and around the biceps, forearm and fingers of the left arm. The set I received came in a bright blue velvet sack on which my older sister had embroidered a gold Star of David. I wore my phylacteries with reverence during morning prayers for a few months, then less and less, and eventually, as my faith faltered and rituals began appearing hollow, put them aside altogether.

* * *

We took it for granted in our family that all the children would proceed from elementary school to gymnasium. As there was no public education to be had in town beyond the elementary grades, we had to go to private institutions. The tuition must have been far above my father's means. The way he met it illustrated the sacrifices necessary to bring about the economic miracles Jewish parents were ready to make to foster their children's education.

On the surface, their well-stocked windows and shelves gave the appearance of stability and prosperity. Actually, however, most small shopkeepers had no assets of their own. Their inventories were bought on credit from wholesalers and manufacturers. In difficult times the wholesaler would rarely suspend credit and force the debtor out of business. Instead, hoping to recover his investment, the wholesaler would rescue the retailer by extending still more credit. This would enable the shopkeepers to keep their heads above water, but simultaneously it put them deeper in debt—exactly how much, no one knew. Bookkeeping was rudimentary, and there was little incentive to improve it, for it would only have exposed in awful detail the true state of affairs.

The story was told of a wealthy Jewish merchant in a small town, who sent his son to a business school abroad. When he graduated, the young man came back home and applied his knowledge to the modernization of his father's business. He introduced sound bookkeeping and made a detailed list of assets and liabilities. He then announced to his father that according to the books the business was bankrupt. His father promptly destroyed the books, so as to be able to go on educating his other children, providing his daughters with dowries, and otherwise continuing to conduct himself as one of the richest merchants in town.

So too my father miraculously managed to pay for our secondary education on a drawn out, pay-as-you-go basis which was never strictly figured or discussed, thought it must be admitted that our tuition was frequently in arrears for months.

Higher education, and the professional training that was hoped it might lead to, seemed the way out for Jewish middle class families facing a dismal economic prospect. It was in fact a false hope, an illusory solution for their children, yet understandably they clung to it, for otherwise there seemed to be no future. Their everlasting dependence on creditors, confiscatory taxes, their vulnerability to catastrophic fires or theft against which insurance was unkown, the primitive state of the

Polish economy, the unfriendly policy of the government toward Jewish commerce, created a pervading sense of doubt about their livelihoods. Many of their Polish neighbors and customers, still bound by the traditional feudal ethic that gave to commerce a lower status, looked upon Jewish shopkeepers with suspicion and contempt. The Polish peasant didn't trust the Jewish merchant, who, according to an adage, "does not plow, does not sow, yet lives." The Polish merchant, a newcomer to the field, had, for his part, every reason to instigate campaigns against his Jewish competitors, calling on Poles to boycott Jewish shops. In this he had increasingly the support of the government and the church.

Thus the free professions, particularly—in view of the acute shortage of doctors—medicine, became the aspiration of many young Jews, the sons and daughters of struggling shopkeepers. No matter that there was a well-known, rigorous if unofficial *numerus clausus* limiting the number of Jewish medical students in Polish universities to ten percent, a quota equivalent to the Jewish percentage of the population. In spite of this restriction, which ingored the fact that the Jews were exceptionally urbanized and could not get government jobs, middle class Jewish children were thrown or threw themselves into secular studies, half-realizing that no economic benefits might follow. They pursued secular learning with something of the same deeply rooted belief of orthodox Jews in the study of sacred books, that is, that it would somehow stand them in good stead.

If it was an unwritten law in our family that each child would be supported in his efforts to receive a secular education, it was also understood—although again never said openly—that this support would be given only as long as the child made the grade. As soon as he failed to gain a passing grade at the end of the year, it was understood that his schooling would come to an end. This is what happened to one of my older brothers. Having failed at school, he left home at the tender age of fourteen to seek his fortune in Lodz.

My oldest brother, however, did make it through a local gymnasium only to have to go to France to gain admission to a school of engineering, and it was perhaps thanks to the good impression that he made on the principal of the gymnasium that, at fourteen, I was accepted—one of just four Jews in a class of 42, an almost perfect ten percent.

* * *

During my four years at the gymnasium, my family's financial situation got no better. On the contrary—our affairs, reflecting as they did Poland's chronic financial crisis ever since independence, went from bad to worse. In 1925, trying to bring inflation under control, the government started issuing a new currency, the *zloty,* to replace the almost worthless mark. This device worked all too well. The *zloty* not only held its own, it became positively expensive and rare, and widespread unemployment followed the changeover. Goods were cheap, agricultural products were selling at ridiculously low prices, but this was small comfort to most people, because they simply didn't have money. Our peasant customers got a pittance for their crops, and factory workers suffered from layoffs. As my father used to say at the time, "An ox for a *groshen*—But who's got a *groshen?*"

Now my oldest brother had to return from France. He'd been studying engineering in Grenoble, supplementing the support given him by my father with his meager wages as an alien working illegally gluing wooden veneer boards in a French furniture factory. When tight money forced my father to reduce his support, my brother came back. He couldn't continue his engineering studies in Poland—the *numerus clausus* saw to that. For lack of anything better to do, he decided to go to Warsaw and study law. There were few restrictions on Jews entering Law School. This liberalism, however, was deceptive. In fact, a degree in law had no meaning, unless you were accepted to the bar. There, at the threshold to professional life, the door was almost completely closed to Jews with law degrees in hand. Only a small minority were able to squeeze through the crack and practice law.

Knowing what he was getting into, but feeling he had no alternative, my oldest brother set out for the capital. Soon, with his enthusiasm and his quick wits, he made a place and a name for himself in Warsaw, especially in Zionist student circles. His success played a part later in my own decision to travel to Warsaw in search of higher education.

* * *

My other older brother's life was taking a different course. When I visited him in Lodz during the summer vacation, I found him in the airless attic of a textile factory, hunched over a long table applying dye

to an endlessly unrolling band of fabric. He worked six days a week from morning to night in this small Jewish enterprise, one of thousands in the city. In just fifty years, Lodz had been transformed from a sleepy village into what it was now, the biggest textile center in Eastern Europe. Originally planned by the Czarist government to supply textiles to the Russian empire, Lodz had attracted German know-how from across the adjacent border, Polish peasant manpower, and Jewish middlemen. With its tremendous Russian market, the city had grown by leaps and bounds. German tycoons had amassed fabulous fortunes and built splendid palaces for themselves, and a few Jewish entrepreneurs also succeeded in a big way and lived opulently. However, most Jewish businessmen in Lodz were busy evolving a cottage industry of textiles. The cramped shops were owned and operated by family members and a few additional hired hands. Competition was cutthroat. The majority of Jewish owners lived high one year, low the next, depending on their luck and the shifting economic winds.

The city which I saw during my short visit was suffering from the loss of its Russian market, a result of the Bolshevik Revolution. Tens of thousands of Jews who had flocked to Lodz from their little towns, or *shtetls,* now had no regular livelihood at all. Unskilled and penniless, they crowded the city streets in multitudes trying to keep body and soul together. Bearded Jews who in their home town would have been studying in the prayer-house all day, and somehow surviving in dignified poverty, here peddled neckties, shoelaces and trinkets on street corners, harassed by the police and pushed aside by impatient passers-by. Their wives and children, meanwhile, were smoking herring in their slum dwellings hoping to sell it in the market.

Though impoverished back in their native *shtetl,* nevertheless they had been assured of food so long as they lived near peasants. In the *shtetl* they maintained their self-esteem, for there was no great wealth in view and the study of the holy books provided respectable consolation. In the jungle of the city, on the other hand, the air was imbued with the treacherous promise of sudden money, luxury, sensuality, as well as the threat of near starvation.

It was an ideal breeding ground for political parties and religious sects that offered answers to the disappointed and pauperized. For most Jews, however, the Sabbath was the only real escape from their week long debasement. As the sun set on Friday, the nervous bustle of *Baluty,* the city's largest slum, would hush, and the shimmer of the candles greeting

the day of rest would filter through the windows, lending a holiday air to the quiet, darkened lanes.

I had an uncle in Lodz, who had recently been ruined in some unlucky transaction and lived with his family in cage-like rooms on the ground floor of a two-story wooden shack in the slum of *Baluty*. It was at the house of this uncle that I remember sharing a Sabbath meal. He had just come back from the prayer house with his two young sons. We sat at a table that his wife had set with an immaculate white cloth, candles, and a plate bearing a pair of *chalahs* covered with an embroidered napkin bearing a Star of David and the words in Hebrew, *In Honor of the Sabbath.* The place must have been thoroughly aired out, for I detected only a faint smell of herring as I passed the tiny kitchen with its rows of wire and dangling clips, where on other days the fish was smoked. He was dressed in a black silk coat with a silk cord around the waist. His brown, lustrous beard fell over a clean white shirt. He looked at me with his large, warm brown eyes, smiling serenely, the smile of the blessed. During the two hours of the Sabbath I spent with him and his family, I heard not a single word about their weekday plight.

Another uncle lived in the center of Lodz, on the top floor of a portly apartment house that was serviced by a noiseless wood-paneled elevator. The high ceilings of the large and airy rooms were decorated with gilded moldings. The eldest of my paternal grandmother's eleven children, he had arrived in Lodz forty years before, in the early days of the city's tremendous growth, bringing with him a bride, a small dowry, and a knowledge of Hebrew scriptures and ritual. By the turn of the century he owned a factory producing colorful silk and velvet tablecloths and bedcovers that were distributed across the width and breadth of imperial Russia. He was the most prosperous of a family which, through my paternal grandfather's line alone, must have numbered near one hundred souls.

I had met him once before, when he came to our town to "sit" *shiva* —the mourning period—for his father. As I remembered, he wore a modern suit, his beard was trimmed, and he exuded a slight fragrance of cologne and cigars. Although I was already fourteen and a student at the gymnasium, he could not now refrain from trying to press a ten *zloty* note into my hand—a gift which I, despite some embarrassment, could not refuse. He tried to speak French with me, a language I didn't know, tossing off a few phrases that he probably picked up on his business trips abroad. I noticed that his gaiety and wit, proverbial in the family, had

become somewhat forced and buffoonish. Deprived of the Russian market and hit hard by the Polish government's fumbling, destructive fiscal policies, he and his factory were in decline.

My uncle hardly spoke to his wife. She would enter the room quietly, then disappear like a frightened bird. It was obvious to me that she couldn't follow her husband's wordly affairs and concerns, and was resigned to the fact. As for my uncle's four sons, they brought him little joy. They had all—with the exception of the oldest, who was still in a monthly allowance—gone into business successfully at an early age, before they could get much formal education, and it bored the old man to talk with them. His solace seemed to be his daughter, my cousin whose wit and beauty I came to admire during my short stay. Her dark hair, her glittering turquoise-blue eyes, her sparkling, contagious laughter added a measure of womanly exuberance to the dry lavishness of my uncle's habitat.

* * *

Eventually the killing hours and uncertain employment drove my brother to leave Lodz and come back home, although obviously there was nothing for him to do in our town. Our store was hardly breaking even. Those few customers who still came in could be served by my parents and my two sisters, who had dropped out of the Jewish girl's gymnasium and now worked in the store full-time. My two younger brothers were in primary school. To help with family finances, I took a job tutoring orthodox Jewish boys in the afternoon—their *yeshiva,* or religious school, was now required by law to provide its pupils with the rudiments of Polish and arithmetic.

My brother started making plans to leave the country, plans which he kept a secret even from me. In the meantime, he whiled away his idle time by writing short character sketches in Polish, humorous accounts of the life and habits of people around us. I was his audience of one.

I laughed my head off at his description of Philip, the town's eccentric, aging Jewish bachelor, scion of a well-to-do family, who, since his parents passed away, lived in seclusion with his equally eccentric sister in their inherited house. He must have also inherited a steady income, for he was never gainfully employed. Though he shut himself up in his house most of the time, he was not altogether obscure. In fact, he was highly visible every morning, when he took his stroll around town along

a fixed route, invariably swinging a briefcase in his left hand. He was so punctual that people waited for him to set their watches. His meticulously-shaven face was adorned with the largest moustache ever seen in town. It branched out from the middle of his upper lip in two solid horns curving laterally, then spiraling upwards like giant cork-screws and finally culminating, far beyond the oval of his face, in two stiff, threatening needles. These glorious antlers were kept perfectly symmetrical by a goodly application of pommade and what must have been hours of grooming. Philip carried them with an aristocratic dignity in keeping with the rest of his attire—black patent leather shoes, gray striped trousers, black coattails, white shirt with stiff celluloid collar, and giant, glossy black stovepipe hat.

To the town's credit, Philip never had his way blocked during his strolls by interfering passersby or unruly pranksters. At worst, he'd be followed by a small crowd of youngsters calling him by name or singing a little ditty composed by an anonymous writer about "Philip's beautiful eyes." The kids took care, however, not to come too near. Perhaps they were impressed, in spite of themselves, by his stately dignity, his proud, erect posture. More likely, they respected the solid cane with its carved silver handle which he grasped firmly in his right hand.

No one ever found out what he carried in his other hand, inside that black leather attaché case. Its probable contents was the subject of many animated discussions. Some said it was empty. Some—frivolously disregarding the dignity with which it was carried—said it contained his underwear. Some said that for the last twenty-five years Philip would never leave home without taking with him certain important documents substantiating his claim to a further and even vaster inheritance that was still tied up in the courts.

In his comic, pathetic sketch of Philip, my brother didn't say for sure what was in the briefcase, but alluded to a possible tragedy in Philip's earlier life that accounted for his dressing-up and his daily, unchanging exhibition of unruffled dignity. I read this and other sketches with simple pleasure, not yet aware of my brother's gift of insight, a gift that would later lead him to take up work in a Dutch psychiatric institution.

* * *

My brother didn't let me in on his intention to leave Poland until fifteen minutes before his hasty departure. It must have been on a Friday,

because I remember him asking me to wrap a *chalah*—the braided bread made of white flour that my mother baked for the Sabbath—in a newspaper, and bring it out to him in the courtyard. Without knowing his reasons, I did so. Only when I handed him the loaf did he tell me what he was about to do, and made me promise not to tell our parents, who would surely try to prevent him from going. As I looked on, he climbed the wooden fence at the rear of the courtyard, waved to me while straddling it, and then disappeared for the next nine years.

His letters, which included regards for the whole family, were addressed to me personally. At first the messages were short, scribbled on postcards, then they became longer and more literary, describing his doings and whereabouts. His first card was posted from Gdansk-Danzig, the free port on the Baltic Sea. He had worked his way there as a deckhand on a barge from Warsaw. While in Gdansk, he supported himself by peddling fruit. Some months later, I received a postcard from Berlin. My brother wrote that he was trying to sleep at night in the main railway station, and was being watched suspiciously by the police. He had little money, no passport and no visa. Travel documents were very expensive, and hard to obtain from the Polish authorities, especially if you were a minor who had no business leaving the country. Yet somehow, my brother reached his destination, Amsterdam, from which he started shipping out on freighters plying back and forth to South America.

Emigration, legal and open, or, as in my brother's case, secret and beyond the law, was uncommon in our town. There was some emigration to the U.S., but this came to an almost complete halt in 1924, when the Johnson Act slammed the doors of America shut to Eastern Europeans. Emigration to Palestine was also reduced to a trickle due to the limited number of "certificates" granted by the British mandatory power. These certificates were rare, priceless items. The precious few that did become available were distributed according to a complicated formula among the various Zionist parties and factions, and, through them, to their most active and trustworthy young members. One of the lucky recipients was my friend, Berl.

* * *

Berl and I had been friends since our first days together in the scouts. He was eight months older than me at most, but had already been in

the scouts for a year when I joined, so while we were friends, I also looked up to him as something of an authority and a veteran. He taught me how to pitch a tent, read a compass, tie a knot, determine north from the mossy side of a tree. Berl was very meticulous about his appearance. In the summer, his khaki shirt and short blue pants were always neatly pressed and starched, it was almost as if his clothes alone forced him to stand at attention. I admired his way of seeing to it that things were done thoroughly and properly, from sweeping clean the floor of our *keyn,* "nest" in Hebrew, to packing a knapsack tight and trim.

Perhaps Berl picked up his orderliness and attention to detail from his father, a watchmaker. When I visited his shop, I would find him bent over on his stool, the tube of a magnifying lens protruding from his right eye, peering into the innards of a ticking mechanism. He would look up from his work every time and ask me whether I was looking for Berl. I would never answer, I would only nod, for I knew that he was almost totally deaf and that was all he expected. He spoke but rarely, and then only when he really had no choice, for example when a customer would ask some questons in a loud voice about a watch to be repaired. However, when Berl's father did speak, I lent an ear. He was the only Jew I knew who spoke Yiddish with a Lithuanian accent. Lithuanian Jews—"Litvaks"—were a rarity in our town. Much maligned, they were believed by the pious to be insufficiently observant, heretics really. When marriages were being arranged, their children were liable to be quietly shunned. Perhaps it was true, as the stereotype had it, that Litvaks were better educated in modern secular matters, spoke a purer Yiddish, were more exact and tenacious. These might be attributes to admire, but they didn't endear the newcomers to the exuberant, easy-going, yet somehow more traditional Polish Jews.

Berl rapidly advanced in the scout hierarchy. He became a pack leader, then the leader of a whole troop. When I was twelve years old we spent a summer together in a training camp for scout leaders, where discipline was strict and infractions were treated like mortal sins. During these trying days, Berl helped keep my spirits up. He thrived on the precise, clock-like rhythm of camp life. Every minute from morning bugle call to lights out was accounted for. Here Jewish scouts were gathered from all over Poland, chosen for their promise as future leaders. Here I realized that I probably wasn't made of the same stuff as they. The drilling, the unthinking compliance with orders—though tem-

pered by reflective hours around the campfire and talks with idealistic and enlightened older comrades—was calming and natural to Berl, but it simply didn't fit in with my makeup.

Our camp was located on the banks of the River Bug in central Poland, in barracks built by the Germans during the war. Rumors, most likely unfounded, spread through camp that a troop of scouts from a nearby camp was planning to sneak past our sentries and capture a trophy to take home with them. This was a humiliation to be prevented at all costs.

One evening at dusk, at the height of these rumors, I was standing guard at the river's edge. That water's gentle murmur, the rasping of the crickets, and my own fatigue following the day's activities conspired against my willpower. Instead of pacing as ordered along my portion of the perimeter, I sat down to rest on the stump of a tree, my lance with its pennant initialed with my name between my knees. I must have dozed off. When I awoke to the sound of feet scampering over fallen leaves, my pennant was gone. Frantically, and to no avail, I searched for it in the immediate vicinity. Finally I decided to use my whistle to signal that something suspicious had happened. I duly reported my loss to the alerted patrol, but amazingly no immediate action was taken, either to reprimand me or to search the area.

The rest of my watch passed uneventfully, but that night was a restless one for me. I dreamt that my mother had died. It was the first time such an idea had even crossed my mind, and the vividness of the dream filled me with insufferable homesickness. I had never before known such a pain of nostalgia, such a gnawing at my core, my marrow, the center of my existence. I tossed and turned on my straw mattress, and finally fell asleep exhausted just before dawn, only to be awakened by the sound of reveille. I rose automatically, unmindful that this was the day we had to be dressed in parade uniform, rushed outside and took my place in line in front of the barracks. After the flag was raised and the hymn was sung, the camp commander walked slowly down the long line of boys standing smartly at attention. When he came to me he stopped, and to my surprise told me to take four steps forward. When I had done this, the whole contingent was marched off, leaving me standing quite alone for what felt like an eternity, until ordered into the barracks. Only then did I realize that I was the only one in camp wearing the usual green trousers instead of parade blue. While everyone else

spent the day at a picnic, I was confined, to my utter desolation, in the empty barracks.

That evening, Berl came to me and cleared everything up. He got me to tell him my terrifying dream, and then he reported it to the commander, who in turn contacted the scoutmaster in our town by long distance telephone—a difficult thing in those days. The scoutmaster inquired at my home and called back to inform us that everything was all right. The burden on my chest lifted miraculously and I slept peacefully.

* * *

When Berl received his certificate allowing him to go to Palestine and become a real *khalutz*—a pioneer—the glad news spread quickly through town. Not only his friends, but strangers in the street, stopped him to offer congratulations. Our joy wasn't shared, however, by the person who loved Berl most, his mother. She didn't show her distress openly. On the contrary, she went ahead in her quiet and efficient way preparing the things she thought Berl would need in that strange, faraway land of famine and deprivation, of stifling hot valleys and freezing mountaintops, of wild Bedouins lurking in the darkness of night to kill her only son. She would smile to the young guests who crowded excitedly into her apartment, and to the parents of *khalutzim* who had left for Palestine earlier and for whom Berl was now asked to carry letters or small gifts. Careful as she was to keep up a cheerful front, her visitors couldn't help noticing that from time to time Berl's mother would suddenly leave them and go into the kitchen, where she wiped a few uncontrolled tears from her cheeks.

The day of Berl's departure was an important event for many Jews in town, Zionists and non-Zionists. Although he had received his certificate as a member of The Young Guardians, the other parties and factions set aside their rivalries and jealousies for this occasion, and came to the station to see him off. Even people with no Zionist inclinations, even people who may have been heard to deride the Zionist's utopian dreams, were moved by sympathy for the young boy, curiosity at his brave idealism. Long before the train arrived that would take Berl by way of Vienna to the Italian port of Trieste, where he would embark on the long sea voyage to Palestine, the station was overflowing with well-

wishers. There were not too many speeches, these having been delivered the day before at Zionist meetings and get-togethers. All around the station groups of Jews were discussing the details of Berl's journey and pressing towards him for one last handshake. When the gate to the concourse was opened, the crowd spilled through to meet the train. Lined up along the rails, they burst into Hebrew songs from Eretz Yisrael, formed circles and danced the *Hora,* whirling faster and faster while others clapped in unison. Gentile passengers and railroad employees looked on at this spectacle with bewilderment. When informed of what was happening, they nodded with undiminished amazement, and not without some sympathy.

Suddenly a locomotive appeared at the far end of the station. The dancers stopped their whirling, and the crowd took up the wistful, rousing strains of "Hatikvah", the Zionist anthem. As the long train pulled in, the passengers leaned from the windows to get a look at these strange goings-on.

". . . We have not yet lost our hope
"Our ancient hope
"Of returning to the Land
"The Land of our fathers. . . ."

The singing continued as Berl was seen safely to his compartment. It didn't stop until the train, and his waving hand, disappeared into the mist of the gray horizon.

* * *

The aim of the gymnasium I was to attend for the next four years was to introduce its students to humanistic knowledge. Toward this end, two languages in addition to Polish were taught—classical Latin and modern German. Upon receiving his diploma, or "certificate of maturity," the gymnasium graduate was entitled to seek admission to university. Ninety per cent of the students, as I've said, were Catholic. There was a priest on the faculty, and religious instruction by him was compulsory for all students, except Jews. This was a blessing for the four of us, especially in springtime, when we could just loaf in the sun. In winter, however, I sat through the sessions with the priest, and became acquainted with some of the basic Catholic dogmas.

For the first time in my life I was surrounded by non-Jews. They were mostly the sons of the more prosperous peasants from the villages roundabout, with a sprinkling of the sons of government officials, army officers, and railroad functionaries. For most of them, school was a boring, tedious chore. The peasants tried patiently to plow through the dreary lives and wars of long dead kings and emperors, of ancient Greece and the Roman empire. They muddled through the intricacies of Latin and German grammar, they wrestled with the mysteries of algebra and geometry. Many walked miles each morning to reach town, and spent the first hours in class half-asleep. They would remove their boots and sit in their leggings with friendly, tired smiles, hoping to get through the day as uneventfully as possible. A few, however, were immensely absorbed in their studies. It was to these few that the teachers would direct their attention.

I adjusted myself quite easily to this new environment. Perhaps because we felt that we were all more or less in the same boat, I sensed no enmity from most of my classmates, and I don't remember any slurs or anti-Semitic insults directed at me by them.

This is more than could be said of at least two members of the faculty.

The professor of Polish language and literature made it clear to us that no Jew could understand Polish literature, no matter how well he prepared his lessons or how proficient and knowledgeable his essays. This teacher carried a double family name linked by a hyphen, wore a large fur coat in class almost all year, and wrapped a giant scarf around his neck. He taught us with a martyred expression in his eyes, like a saint enduring barbaric tortures. When I stood before the class to recite Polish poetry by heart—an obligatory portion of the syllabus—he would not look at me. He had no choice but to listen as I recited the Polish text, but he saw no reason to actually look at the perpetrator while this sacrilege was being committed. He gave me barely passing grades, which was satisfactory to me, since I never expected anything more of him. Despite the grades, despite his efforts to turn up some secret religious or nationalistic revelation in every verse, he failed to dampen my love of Polish poetry.

Strangely enough, he made no comment when, in studying the epic "Pan Tadeusz" by the Polish national poet, Adam Mickiewicz, we arrived at the verse, *"Zosi, ktora krzyczyla, sedzie objawszy rekami/Jako dziecko od Zydow klute igielkami"*—"Sophie cried out, clinging to the judge, like a child pierced with needles by the Jews."

Of the number of anti-Semitic insults and accusations scattered through Polish literature, none seemed so vile, none so distressed me, as this. It gave me a shock akin to that of confronting the poster of Trotsky. Knowing that the libel on which this passage in "Pan Tadeusz" was based—the "ritual murder" of Christian children by Jews at Passsover—was baseless and fantastic, I couldn't rid myself of the pain of coming across it in what was then for me the most beautiful poem of all. It hurt and grieved me inwardly even more than the passage in the Gospel According to Saint Matthew, "The Jews gathered there answered, His blood be on us and on our children!" I could pity, if not comprehend, a religious creed that needed to be sustained by such contemptible curses. But why should a beautiful poem be marred by such lies?

* * *

A bit of comic relief was brought into the classroom by the history teacher, Schneider. This poor man worked under a number of handicaps. To begin with, his name sounded German. Secondly, born a Catholic, he had become a Protestant in order to divorce and re-marry. These liabilities may have been enough to make him fear dismissal on the slightest pretext. In any case, he lived in permanent dread of the gymnasium's owner and principal, and spent much of his time trying to keep the noise level in our classroom below that which would have brought the principal dashing through the door. Schneider's anxiety was cruelly exploited by a class hungry for diversion.

The game with him got to be almost routine. As soon as he entered, everyone leapt up, as ordained in the rules. One of us would be standing at the door to help him out of his coat. This operation would be carried out so methodically and at such exaggerated length that Schneider, still outwardly unruffled, would finally thank the student for his courtesy and assure him that he could take his coat off by himself. At this the class, still standing, would loudly protest that helping the professor out of his coat was an honor it could not be deprived of. Someone would then nominate another student for the honor. As the tumult grew, Schneider made a show of anger and warned that unless everyone sat down immediately, he would summon the principal. This empty threat at least had the effect that the second student in charge of the coat now succeeded in removing it and hanging it on the rack. This accomplished,

he would graciously invite Schneider to be seated behind his desk on the platform.

That was not all. Schneider would now be lecturing us on the topic of the day, a timid, pleading smile on his face, when a sharp knock at the door would interrupt him. From the benches a whisper went up: "The principal!" Although all the elements in the performance were foreseen, there was always a remote possibility that the principal was actually at the door. "Please be quiet!" Schneider begged in a tremulous voice. The door would then fly open, and, as expected, one of our classmates—the remarkable Friedman—would enter, greet the professor, and introduce himself as the visiting inspector of schools, a personage even more to be dreaded than the principal. By this point Schneider had given up any pretense of being able to control us by force or authority. The only way he could restore a semblance of order and get on with the day's work was to play along. And this he did, inviting the "inspector" to be seated and asking us yet again to "please, be quiet."

Schneider's chief tormentor was one of the Jewish students, Friedman, a born actor and mimic who could bring the whole class to the verge of tears, usually at the professor's expense. Naturally, Friedman was unanimously and permanently cast in the role of "inspector." Schneider accepted his persecution by Friedman fairly patiently, only once exclaiming, "The Jews are the lice under the Polish collar!"

The professor of German. His name was Kapusta—cabbage in Polish. A somber looking man, a chronic alcoholic, he would show up in class in a state of hangover moroseness. Yet he was kind enough to give everyone a passing grade, knowing very well that the acquisition of a foreign language was beyond the capabilities of all but a few of his students. In return for this generosity, he demanded one thing—absolute quiet. He wouldn't tolerate the least unruliness and his classes were conducted in tomblike stillness. He would sit at his desk, his head slightly lowered, his eyes shut, as the class bent over its notebooks, soundlessly trying to cope with some exercise in German. No one took his stuporous look for inattention, for it was known that any noise at all would wake him up, to the guilty party's painful chagrin.

Those few of us who could follow his sporadic teaching were led slowly into selected readings of the German poets. Coming out of his stupor, Kapusta would introduce Schiller, Goethe and Heine with just this small handful of students in mind, ignoring the others. At year's end he would go through the formality of calling on each student to recite a

line or two, so as to be able to give him a passing grade. Most of my classmates, who had learned very little during the year but had been models of good behavior, now crammed for this final oral examination and were usually able to spout a verse or two, without understanding what they were saying.

However, a certain student whom we nicknamed *"fryzyerek"* "The Little Barber" in honor of his fancy hairdo, couldn't or was unwilling to learn even this much. It was common knowledge that his store of German was limited to five words from "Iphigenie of Tauris" by Goethe. The Little Barber's oddity gave us inspiration for our only prank during German class. When Kapusta called on him to recite at the end of the year, we would all stand up and bawl in unison, *"Als Iphigenie zum Tauris Kam!"* Kapusta, letting this breach of conduct go, would smile faintly and, jotting down a passing grade for him, order The Little Barber to sit down.

I respected and admired the mathematics professor. He was a trim, well-dressed man who stood out from the rest of the faculty with his clearly organized lectures and no-nonsense approach. As our homeroom teacher, he disciplined students who misbehaved during classes with his less strict colleagues. I remember his confrontation with the class bully. He was a large, stocky boy, the son of an influential railroad official, who had grounds to believe that he could not be punished by the normally very strict principal and took advantage of this fact to terrorize us. He enjoyed inventing new techniques of intimidation, keeping everyone guessing what might come next.

One day, while we were waiting for a teacher to arrive, the bully tore off a heavy board that had come loose from its hinges on a desk and standing up front, heaved it at the legs of the sitting boys. They sustained bruises on their shins and knees, but were reluctant to squeal. From that day on, the bully wielded his board, and we stayed alert to his movements. Playing it safe, we would keep our legs raised high off the floor to avoid a sudden blitz, lowering them only when a teacher entered. The bully would stand in front of the class with the board in his hand, waiting for someone to forget himself for just a moment and make his legs a target. For a long time he dominated us with this trick until he was caught, back to the door and board in hand, by the professor of mathematics. He was instantly dismissed from class, and his father was informed that the next infraction would spell expulsion, a black

mark that would practically exclude the bully from any gymnasium in the country.

In the weeks that followed, the bully was subdued. However, it was said that he would have his revenge on the mathematics professor in good time. Indeed, one morning when he was called to the blackboard it came out that he had failed to prepare that day's assignment. The bully stood there mutely, the chalk in one hand, his other hand stuffed rudely in his pocket. The professor, annoyed by this impudence, ordered him to take his hand out of his pocket. Suddenly the unbelievable happened. The boy threw the chalk on the floor, reached into his trousers with his free hand, and drew a pistol, which he aimed straight at the professor.

We were stunned. I remember the professor sitting at his desk and looking the bully in the eye for several seconds. Then he got up and walked slowly towards him, his gaze always fixed on his eyes. The professor stretched out his hand with the palm up and said, "Give me that gun." The boy stepped backwards, hesitating. Then he let the pistol drop and fled from the room.

We never saw him again.

* * *

The art teacher was supposed to teach us drawing in two lower grades —no art was taught in the higher grades, probably because it was thought to be useless in preparing for the certificate of maturity. The art teacher was a painter who had turned to teaching to make ends meet. He was a small, wiry man with large dark eyes and a lock of hair falling across the middle of his forehead *à la Napoleon.* He was sharp-tongued and acerbic, and, *horribile dictu,* an atheist. The faculty priest made no secret of his horror of him and his bohemian life style. How he held on to his job in this Catholic institution was something of a marvel, although it was known that more than once the school had tried to find a replacement for him. A couple of our classmates who were gifted draftsmen were allowed to visit his studio. They reported that it was filled with skeletons, skulls, statues of disfigured creatures and animals. According to the visitors, the teacher showed them a large canvas he was working on. It depicted the artist himself, hanging from a rope, encircled by a ring of dancing skeletons.

His method of teaching was to place one of us in front of the class and tell us to draw the boy's profile as best we could. He gave us no instruction, and offered hardly any reaction one way or the other to our finished products. My drawings, however, he looked on with ironic disdain. For reasons I was at a loss to fathom, he decided as soon as he laid eyes on me that I would never amount to anything in his class. He sneered at all my drawings and at the end of the year gave me a failing grade. It marred my otherwise good report card, but didn't trouble me too much, since it didn't prevent me from advancing to the next grade.

One day in art class the following year, I was trying to draw the profile of a classmate who had been appointed as a subject, when the teacher approached me and asked me to hand him my drawing. I gave him my large block of paper, the uppermost sheet of which was sketched with what I intended to be my classmate's likeness. The teacher considered it pensively, and then, instead of making a comment or drawing in a correcting line, he penciled a magnificent tomato on the end of my profile's nose. There was general merriment when he displayed the masterpiece to the class. After the noise abated, he ripped the top sheet off the block, tore it in half, and threw it in the waste-basket. Somewhat to my own surprise, I took the rest of the block, tore it to pieces in front of the class and the teacher, and threw it all into the same basket. There was no reaction from him, and soon the bell rang, apparently bringing the incident to a close.

But there had to be consequences. Having destroyed my quite expensive block of drawing paper, I could do nothing in subsequent classes but sit idle. The teacher was aware of this, of course, but said nothing, and virtually ignored me for the rest of the year. I would sit in his class doing nothing, or sometimes, quickly and stealthily, sketching his face with its Napoleonic cowlick on stray pieces of scrap paper.

When the end of the year and the time for final grades came around, he ordered me to show him my block of drawings. I told him I had none. He asked why and I said that my block was torn up and my parents couldn't afford to buy me another. Again he said nothing, but now his silence worried me. I knew the gymnasium rules. A failing mark in one course did not prevent a student passing on to the next grade, but to fail in the same course in two consecutive years—even in such a minor course as Art—was another matter. If the art teacher failed me again, I was liable to be kept back despite good grades in all my other courses. In effect, it would mean the end of my education.

For two long weeks while waiting for grades to be announced I went about in great distress. I didn't tell my parents what was weighing on my mind, but my mother must have thought I was ill, for she favored me with the choicest morsels at the dinner table. The worst did not come to pass, however—I got a passing grade in Art. Later I learned that at the faculty grading conference, the art teacher at first submitted a failing mark for me. It had taken the strenuous efforts of the math professor to convince him of the absurdity of keeping back a student who ranked fifth overall in a class of forty-two and number one in mathematics.

It was a close shave. I was happy to have my formal training in Art behind me.

* * *

The years of studies in gymnasium passed quickly and there were now only three months left before we sat for our final exams and graduation. It was that time of year between winter and spring, a season between seasons for which the Poles had a fitting word, *"przedwiośnie":* prior to spring. The ice lingered underfoot and the forest was blanketed with snow, but in our nostrils a milder wind carried the promise of thaw. Still wrapped in our heavy coats, we boys would gather outdoors in the evenings, and begin our endless tramping of the sidewalks, wrangling and laughing, gazing at the girls who, probably stirred by similar feelings, cautiously made their appearance too. Strolling in pairs and threesomes, their hands tucked inside muffs, the girls would keep their gaze fixed primly forward, only rarely returning a meaningful glance at the boy who was the current heartthrob of our town's maidens.

We knew that winter's end was coinciding with the end of a significant phase of our lives, and the beginning of another. In just a few months, possessors of our certificates of maturity, we would be ready and fit beyond any doubt to enter adult life. We thought of the freedom that was beckoning to us, of the places we were bound for, but most of all we looked ahead to having done with the onerous cramming of this last school year. In accordance with the custom of seniors in their final semester, we slit our caps with their shiny visors across the top, letting our hair peek through.

Suddenly our teachers were speaking to us almost as equals—we could even smoke, if we weren't too blatant about it. We faced the

forthcoming exams with renewed solidarity. These were the only examinations at the gymnasium supervised by an "outside" inspector, who came up from Lodz with the test questions locked in his suitcase, in order to prevent collusion between faculty and students. Since the reputation of the gymnasium depended in good part on the number of students who won certificates, his vigilant presence was obviously needed. In spite of him, the students at the top of the class—myself included when it came to mathematics—were expected to be discreetly helpful to their neighbors when examination day came.

* * *

I took a last look now at the classmates with whom I'd spent four long years, most of whom I'd probably not be seeing much.

The one in whose company I'd been the most during the last two years yet who was never really my friend, was Shaya. I knew him from childhood. Shaya was a handsome boy, adept with the girls. His complexion was healthy and ruddy, his head of hair was unusual because each hair was wound into a spiral, creating a natural hairdo of woolen consistency, and his hairline was straight giving his forehead the form of a rectangle. He was the only person I knew with this type of hair until, much later in life, I came to know blacks in America. I was then quite baffled that the term "kinky" which correctly describes this type of hair was applied derisively in America to Jews. Shaya's nose was straight with nostrils that would flare when he became angry or was in the presence of an especially attractive girl. Although weak in mathematics, he played an extremely methodical and logical game of chess, and I thought it the better part of valor rarely to take him on. Shaya wrote fine essays on a variety of subjects, mostly literary, as well as poetry, in Polish although he was fluent in Yiddish and knowledgeable in Yiddish literature. He was a Jew and a Communist. In earlier years he shared my Zionist outlook, but then he started voicing strong Communist sympathies. Whether he actually belonged to the Party, which was illegal, I never came to know, possibly because I never asked.

Shaya's radical leanings first revealed themselves to me during a strange incident that took place on the fourteenth of July, Bastille day. There were large iron works in our town belonging to a French company and a number of French officials and engineers and their families resided here. They occupied a large building on the town's "promenade," a wide

tree lined avenue, and it was the custom of the local firemen's brass band to play in front of the building on this festive occasion. The band would attract a large crowd and Shaya and I joined the group. At the end of this daylight serenade, the orchestra struck up the Marseillaise. All in the crowd uncovered their heads and came to attention. The Polish national anthem was played next to end the celebration. To my surprise, midway through the Polish anthem Shaya covered his hat in a gesture of defiance. A tall, burly fellow, who stood near us, gave Shaya an unmistakably offensive look which, however, did not make Shaya change his mind. Instead, he stepped out of the crowd that stood at attention, and walked away, thus avoiding a brawl and severe beating. After the last sound of the anthem passed, I heard the raging hiss of the burly fellow, "Those loathsome Jew-boys, they honor a foreign anthem but not the one of our fatherland. What a disgrace." He scanned the crowd and after being unable to find the offender, he spat and left the scene.

Later in the evening when I met Shaya again I did not hide my disgust at his behavior. But he stood his ground trying to convince me that the Marseillaise was a revolutionary song and the holiday marked the destruction of the infamous prison filled with the oppressed victims of the feudal French aristocracy, while the Polish anthem reminded him only of the oppression of the Polish workers and Jews. I felt differently. Although the Marseillaise always struck me as a fitting vocal symbol of "liberté, egalité, fraternité," the Polish anthem also evoked in me a wistful yearning for national freedom. Its first pensive verse "Poland is not yet lost, as long as we live. . . ." somehow was akin to the Zionist anthem, "We have not yet lost our hope. . . ."

Shaya often visited my home, where he would get drawn into discussions with my father. For some reason, he would accord to my father the polite respect that he refused to show to anyone else, except the Party faithful. His own parents, especially his mother, Shaya treated with barely concealed contempt. My father would greet him half-jocularly, asking, "*Nu,* how are you? Have you taken care of the world's woes today?" The clear implication was that while Shaya was prepared to care for the whole world, he ignored his parents and his own people. Shaya would smile somewhat sheepishly, and then he and my father would engage in a discussion of local and international happenings.

Four years before, when I entered gymnasium, there were, besides Shaya and myself, two other Jews in the class—Messer and Wasserman. The latter I quickly befriended. He was a shy, yet amicable boy, an

accountant's son. Wasserman's father used to toil late into the night over an ink-splattered mountain of receipts and bills overflowing a giant dark oak desk and surmounted by the indispensable abacus. Although he had his hands full working for the merchants whose businesses were large enough to be required, under the new government regulations, to keep books, the accountant was hard put to pay for his son's education. Nevertheless, it was his fondest dream that his son receive the certificate of maturity. So Wasserman's father willingly extended his working hours, while the family's diet became more and more glutted with potatoes. No one questioned whether the effort was worthwhile.

The fourth Jew, Messer, was of a small stature, his face narrow, his nose sharp and red. From the tip of his nose there always seemed to be precariously hanging a drop of mucus. There was a dislike between us at first sight, intense and mutual. Messer was Shaya's constant companion, so it was only natural that I keep company with Wasserman, and share textbooks with him. It was the incident of the history book that marred my first year at the gymnasium.

One day, Wasserman, who sat near me in class, informed me that his expensive history book was missing. I suggested he report it to our homeroom teacher—a pedantic and impartial person—who remarked that lately he'd heard of other books missing, and promised to investigate. This was hardly helpful. Full of indignation at anyone who would steal a book from a guy like Wasserman, I decided to track down the thief myself.

Perhaps my indignation was sharpened by my suspicion that Messer had something to do with this crime and with the other thefts. And if Messer, then probably Shaya also. I had no proof. My only grounds for suspicion were that lately I'd noticed both boys had plenty of money to spend. I decided that there was only one way to test my suspicions, a fairly risky and not entirely honorable way at that. I would drop in to Shaya's house at a time when I was sure he wouldn't be there, tell his mother that he had sent me to get something for him, and, once in his room, search the shelves for Wasserman's book.

It was, I fully realized, a chancy, not honorable stratagem. One afternoon when classes were over for the day, while I was still struggling as to whether to go ahead with it, I found myself being pulled toward Shaya's house. Even while I was walking towards it, even while I stood for a moment in front of it, I was still not completely resolved. Then I calmly entered, found Shaya's mother in the kitchen, told her the ficti-

tious purpose of my visit, stepped into Shaya's room, and there, right on the shelf in plain view, I saw my friend Wasserman's missing history book.

As if in a trance, I walked across town to our homeroom teacher's apartment with the book in my hand. He was in his robe and slippers. I gave it to him and told him where I had found it. Only when I left his place did I begin to have some qualms. What would happen to Shaya, to Messer? How could I deliver these Jewish boys to the tender mercy of gentiles? But my guilt was fleeting, quickly dispelled by the virtuous, strange serenity of self-assured righteousness.

The next day at school nothing happened. I told no one of my exploit, not even Wasserman. From Shaya and Messer, silence. The homeroom teacher was all smiles and gave the class its weekly essay to write, which that day was to be based on a Latin adage I have never forgotten, *"Quisquis agis prudenter agas et respice finem*—Whatever you do, do it prudently, having the end always in mind."

The end came the day after that. Messer, the instigator of the thefts, was expelled for good. Shaya was suspended for the rest of the year, returning only after a special examination and a pardon from the principal. It took almost two years before we were on speaking terms again. Although during the last two years of gymnasium we became companions, if not friends, there always remained a strain of hostility between us. Shaya's mother, however, much to my wonderment, was even more cordial to me than before, smiling and serving me sweets whenever I visited.

* * *

Most of my non-Jewish classmates kept a courteous and inoffensive distance. Only with a few of them did I strike up some closer contact, mostly during recess and strictly on school territory—I was never in the home of a non-Jewish student.

One of my non-Jewish acquaintances was Drymus, son of a farmer near town. He was muscular, and his wide peasant face was covered with deep pits, the result of a bout with smallpox. Krymus wasn't a brilliant student, but he was patient and conscientious, and his dogged attitude won him good grades in almost all subjects. Our conversations were usually limited to school work and reading material. Krymus would ask me to bring him otherwise unobtainable books from the Jewish lending

libraries. Although he never came out with it in so many words, I had the impression that he wished to see an improvement in the lot of the Polish peasantry, even if it took a radical, socialistic program to bring it about. He let me understand that he was interested in the co-operative movement, an organization for collective marketing of agricultural products, and surprised me once by quoting what must have been a tag from a political pamphlet, "Let the peasants and the Jews work together in the co-operative movement for the common good, even though the movement aims to eliminate the Jews as a middleman in the rural economy." I didn't ask him to elaborate, for I knew that political subjects were best not broached in school, not even during recess.

Very infrequently, politics would become a topic of discussion. It happened when in 1926 Marshall Pilsudski, the Polish military hero and ex-socialist started his march on Warsaw to bring down the inept government. News of his march briefly brought politics to the fore in the gymnasium. Some boys, Krymus among them, declared their support of Grandpa, as Pilsudski was affectionately nicknamed, and said they were going to join his troops. This proved unnecessary, because the government quickly and meekly gave up.

I met Krymus after graduation in the street, during my stay in Warsaw. He wore the magnificent military uniform of a Polish officer. He was very formal though courteous, his previous peasant political utterances now quite incongruous with his present uniform and the snow white gloves on his broad peasant hands.

The only other mildly political rumbling that I recall disturbing the relatively apolitical tranquility of our gymnasium was thanks to a Ukranian boy named Bohun, the son of a government official transferred to our town from a far-off, heavily Ukrainian district of Galicia. Young Bohun was an ardent and outspoken Ukrainian nationalist. His views would certainly not have been tolerated in a Polish school back in his native Galicia, but here Ukrainians were rare, exotic, and as the only Ukrainian in the school Bohun was allowed to vent his spleen. Perhaps he was also given license in consideration of his magnificent basso singing voice, which everyone loved to hear. He sang pensive folk songs of valleys and mountains, cossacks and girls, and even though these songs were in Ukrainian, we learned to sing them too. Music sometimes seemed to overshadow politics, for Bohun. He taught us to sing, of all things, the Ukrainian version of the "Internationale." For a few days

during recess, the call to world revolution resounded within the walls of our very Polish, very Catholic gymnasium.

* * *

And so in May, 1928, my secondary education came to an end. The cramming, the tension, were over. With my certificate of maturity in hand I was relieved, joyous, infinitely restless, filled with a desire to go far and away, beyond all bounds. At night I dreamt, as I often had before, that I was falling from great heights, but instead of being terrified, I would spread my arms like wings and glide smoothly, gracefully over canyons, mountain ranges and cities, and wake up in a pleasant languor, savoring the last, delicious, fading images of my dream.

That summer was probably the most carefree of my life. I took trips with my friends to the dense Polish forests, I swam in the cool waters of the Warta. We sat in the park and strode along the Promenade—our town's tree-lined avenue—until the small hours of the night, talking, laughing, prancing, elaborating fantasies about our future.

I saw myself as a doctor, a physician like my childhood hero Dr. Z., hurrying along with my black bag in a *britshka* drawn by two galloping horses, anxiously awaited at the door by the mother and family of a sick child, whom, after a long battle, I would save from the jaws of death. Or, somewhat later that night, when the full moon of summer would dreamily sail through the clouds, I would see myself in the smart uniform of a ship's doctor, proudly walking the deck of a luxurious ocean liner, saluting with nonchalant politeness the international celebrities and beautiful, elegant women whose minor indispositions I would treat. As a doctor on such a ship, I would soon amass a fortune, and retire to a dream house on a hill on some island, perhaps Tahiti, overlooking the emerald sea.

But when summer came to an end and it was time to make a decision, reality could no longer be ignored. Our shop, one of the thousands of shops which constituted the economic shifting sand of the Polish Jewish middle class, provided my family with an ever-diminishing income. All the Jewish merchants in town, including the most prominent, felt the effects of the peasantry's plight and the unemployment among workers. Most damaging were the confiscatory fiscal policies and nationalization decrees of the government. The tobacco, salt, liquor and transportation

industries were nationalized and only non-Jews were hired to work in them. With the purchasing power of the Jewish middle class dropping precipitously, a few tried to save their meager resources by emigrating to Palestine on so-called "capitalist" visas provided by the British mandate. The applicant for such a visa had to show that he was bringing at least 500 pounds sterling into Palestine—a reasonable amount to require of a Western European or American merchant, perhaps, but far beyond the means of even a well-off Polish Jewish family, my own, included. I suppose that, after he paid off his debts, my father's net value would have stood at slightly above, if not below, solvency.

I knew that I couldn't count on financial support from my parents. There were only two paths open to a young Jew like myself, proud possessor of a "certificate of maturity." I could either stay in town, or leave. The first meant slowly but surely joining the burgeoning ranks of young *"Luftmenschen"*—literally, people living in and from the air. All day they cleverly discussed politics, literature and gossip picked up in copies of the newspaper which they borrowed from anyone who had the money to buy one. They made a show of helping in their parent's shops, only getting in the way. In order to have company, to indulge in far-out dreams of a political solution in Palestine, they joined one or another Zionist faction. Or they fell prey to the bittersweet siren call of Communism. None of the consolations along this path were for me. As for religion, the centuries-old tradition of retreat into the bliss of prayer and the study of Talmud and the convivial, sometimes ecstatic tribalism of the Hassids, this I had already left behind me irretrievably.

For myself and others like me in town, the *shtetl* had become an umbilical cord that was already shriveled and dry, and when separation came, it was bloodless and painless. There was no fussing about it in the family, no discussion—it was plain that I had to leave. Supposedly, I was leaving to study medicine, or philosophy, or mathematics, or classical languages. But this was a kind of polite façade, a half-truth, at worst a face-saving device to justify all the expense and sweat of four years in gymnasium. To go to Warsaw to study was at best to take a chance against preposterous odds. It was no secret that the *numerus clausus* limited the number of Jewish students in the university, particularly in the faculty of medicine. Yet even an outside chance of acquiring a professional degree—which might shelter a Jewish doctor, for instance, from the ravages of a mismanaged economy and the discriminatory policies of the government—seemed worth taking.

There was, of course, a kind of detour available—you could go abroad, to France or Czechoslovakia, and enter one of the universities there. But for this you needed expensive travel documents, train tickets, tuition and pocket money for your first months out of the country. My oldest brother had tried this way, and failed. While not yet putting the possibility out of my mind, I postponed it for later. In spite of everything, I was optimistic enough to think that there would always be a "later." For me the world was still out there, like a promising beacon in the fog.

So, in September 1928, knowing that my brother in Warsaw would temporarily put me up in his room, I said good-bye to my family, my friends and my native town and departed for the capital. I was seventeen.

III

A YOUNG MAN'S EYE

DURING MY FIRST DAYS, and especially evenings, in Warsaw, I was in a state of supersensual visual ecstasy. The movement of the crowds, the traffic, the glittering lights in display windows, the flickering neon signs, evoked unfamiliar sensory vibrations that would puzzle and delight any young and responsive mind. This was all the more true in my case. The luminosity of the city struck me with unaccustomed clarity and brightness because it was accentuated by a newly acquired visual capacity. When I arrived in Warsaw I received my first eyeglasses. The blurred outlines of distant objects, which I had gotten used to over the years suddenly turned into a wondrous panorama of sharp, meaningful forms.

I had been near-sighted since I entered elementary school, but my myopia had gone undetected. I was the only one in my family with this handicap. Even if it had been recognized, nothing would have been done to correct it, probably because unlike the far-sightedness of older people which prevented them from reading without glasses, moderate myopia was not considered sufficiently crippling to warrant a constant visual contraption attached to a young face. Until my arrival in Warsaw I could only marvel at others who read from a distance or could identify a person across the street or town square. In class or in the cinema I would always sit in the front rows. Once in a while I would look through the crystal concave bottom of a drinking glass to glimpse the wonderful sharp outlines of distant objects. Now, through my first eye-glasses, the

big city became a wondrous feast of light and color for my constrained and starved vision.

The other impact of the city was of an auditory, musical nature. My sensual perception of music acquired a new quality with my first opera, "The Tales of Hoffmann," but foremost with the first live performance of a Symphony orchestra. Unexpectedly, while on a Sunday stroll in the park, the fullbodied sound of the Warsaw Philharmonic reached me from a distance with the opening phrases of the "Fifth Symphony" by Tchaikovsky. Spellbound I sat on a bench listening to the magic of the sound flowing through the brilliant morning sunshine of September, amidst the green of the grass and the colors of the flower beds. Afterwards, with no orchestra in sight, I walked through beautiful Lazienki park until I saw the full assembly of musicians and instruments of the orchestra strike up the "Scheherazade." I placed myself so close to the source of the magic that I could almost taste its sweetness. The tonal shower reverberated in my ears with a clarity and vibrancy unmatched by the pallid reproductions I was accustomed to when listening to recordings or radio broadcasts.

During my first days in Warsaw I wandered ceaselessly through the narrow streets of the restored Old City; the large Saxon square where military parades were held, the square which previously was the site of a gigantic Russian-Orthodox church, removed after the war without a trace by the Poles. I walked through the parks and the teeming Jewish streets, bursting with the hustle and bustle of daily commerce. I would walk along the banks of the Vistula, beside the royal palace, then cross to the eastern bank toward the suburb of Praga, where I lived.

I shared a room with my older brother in the dormitory for Jewish students. It was an imposing structure, near the river, built by donations from the Jewish community. My brother was immersed in the social and political activity of Jewish student life, centered around the student dormitories. This was home for hundreds of Jewish students from all corners of Poland.

In the meantime I applied for admission to the Warsaw School of Medicine. In retrospect, it was the height of absurdity and futility to do so. The chances of being admitted were nil. Of the 200 students admitted annually, 80 places were reserved for members of the military medical corps, 100 for non-Jewish applicants and the rest, 20, for Jews. This was a strict quota of 20 places which were filled usually by sons of Jewish doctors and four to five candidates with unusual contacts or

fantastic payoffs. Despite the obvious lack of a fighting chance, 500 Jewish applicants would submit applications annually for the nonexistent places and go through the bizarre entrance "examinations." It was a written examination on a subject presented with great formality to the candidates assembled in a giant auditorium. The subject of the examination this time was, "Central heating." It was obvious that no professor ever bothered to read the elaborate examination papers written by the candidates, as they had no bearing on the outcome. Still people were willing to undergo this humiliating, hopeless and costly procedure, hoping, hoping, *tomer doch,* perhaps, shutting their eyes to the obvious truth. I am still perplexed by my own and the other 500 colleagues' willingness to submit to this futile exercise. The nearest explanation I can arrive at is: The subconscious belief of the Jews in miracles and the uplifting state many of us experienced by just being allowed to be candidates, even in vain; to breathe for a few hours the air of the halls of a medical school, and the strange perverse exhilaration of satisfying one's conscience by going through the motions of doing everything possible including the utterly futile.

Two weeks later the list of candidates admitted to medical school was published and, with one illusion less, I had to decide, what to do now? There were few choices.

I did what many of my confrères did. I enrolled in a course of higher mathematics. It was easy for Jews to be accepted into the course because no practical use could be made of it by any of us. It did give me, however, the status of university student, allowing me for the time being to live in the dormitory and enjoy its atmosphere and social and cultural activities.

The dormitory—the Jewish Academic House—was a spacious five story building for two hundred fifty male students. It became my home for the next year. The house was open to Jewish students from all parts of the country, from the various professional schools in Warsaw and of all political beliefs. Its large auditorium was named after Albert Einstein. The general tenor of the place was Zionist and so was the management and the trustee and director, the well-known historian Ignacy Schipper. Both Schipper and the manager Lucy were active in the as yet little-known to me student fraternity, *Betaria,* in which my brother was also an active member.

Early in the academic year I had to decide whether to apply for membership in the fraternity not only because my brother was active in

it but because a freshman with whom I had become friends also applied for membership and obviously expected me to do the same. More out of curiosity than any desire to get involved intimately with a specific group, I accepted the invitation to participate in a session of the fraternity or as it was called the *corporation.* The session consisted of an official ceremony, followed by unofficial but lively beer drinking.

The ceremony and the beer, the Latin songs starting with *Gaudeamus Igitur,* the division of the membership into Foxes, Burschen and Old Boys, the colors, sashes and bright little hats, and most of all the fencing swords—were all the paraphernalia of the centuries old German student organisation, the *Burschenschaften.* I watched the proceedings with fascination, listened with amazement to the old Latin songs mixed with Hebrew Zionist and somewhat bawdy Polish chants and uncomfortably participated in the drinking and for me, the seemingly forced gaiety.

The group was congenial but disciplined and took all of this very seriously. I knew that if I decided to join I couldn't do it halfheartedly. I decided to take my time. During the few days after the introductory session I talked with a few Foxes, attended a fencing exercise and most of all I read up on the history of the *Burschenschaft.*

The Jewish *Burschenschaft* originated in Vienna in 1882 when the *Kadimah* was founded. It was a direct answer to the discriminatory rules governing the German and Austrian *Burschenschaften.* The Viennese fraternity *Liberty* passed a motion to exclude Jews on racial grounds as early as 1887 and by 1890 all fraternities were *Judenrein.* In 1919 the all-German association of fraternities, during a conference in Eisenbach, Germany, extended their discriminatory policy even to Aryans who married Jews.

The corporation *Betaria,* which I considered joining, was a cohesive group, whose Zionist aims under the guidance of the historian Schipper were genuine. It expressed a slightly exaggerated pride in Jewishness, somewhat akin to the nationalistic external manifestations seen in the right wing gentile world. It had a great attraction for those students from assimilationist Jewish homes for whom the colors, swords and ritual drinking made them feel equal to their non-Jewish acquaintances with whom they could not share common fraternity bonds. It was, therefore, not surprising to find an older friend of mine, from my home town, Yanek, in the fraternity. He was the son of an assimilated Jew, who except for the formal conversion, conducted his family life like a gentile and had no ties to Jewish life, language or customs. I found

Yanek exceedingly happy in his cap, sash and sword, a happiness he could not possibly have found in any other organization.

There were days when I looked at the fraternity people with affection. This was when they organized a "counterattack" against the non-Jewish students who had rioted outside the University, assaulting Jewish students. Armed with heavy canes, the *Betaria* members under the command of the burly manager of the Student House would make forays into the vicinity of the University and partake in defense brawls. One of these counterattacks remained in my memory for a long time. It was a fact of University life that during anti-Semitic rioting the Jewish students found themselves outnumbered most of the time. Often the only defense was retreat. Someone in the fraternity thought of a strategy that would teach a lesson to the more aggressive hooligans. Members of *Betaria* armed with heavy canes waited at the gate of the University and soon engaged a group of students from the anti-Semitic *Endek* organization. At a certain moment the *Betaria* fighters seemed to lose their nerve and started retreating, but at the same time jeering the hooligans who pursued them with renewed vigor. The retreating forces managed to lure their pursuers toward a Jewish neighborhood where there was a concentration of tough Jewish teamsters who were used to handling heavy loads. The teamsters who had been alerted to the stratagem waited in the gates of houses and suddenly the situation took a different turn. The retreating *Betaria* boys turned around and with the added force of teamsters faced the pursuers, who only now perceived the trap. The beating the *Endeks* received made them more cautious, and from then on they confined their actions nearer to their own territory.

Although aware of what the opportunity to get into a friendly circle and acquire instant contacts with influential members of the fraternity could mean for me, a boy from the provinces, I decided not to join the fraternity. This I did partly because of my growing awareness that I was not cut out to join a tightly knit group, and partly because I knew that my stay in Warsaw would be temporary as I realized now that there was no chance of being accepted into medical school, and had no intention of remaining a student of mathematics. I had to look for a different course of action. I started in earnest to think of leaving the country for studies abroad.

* * *

In the meantime, even without joining the fraternity, at seventeen Warsaw presented to me, enough possibilities to keep my day full. In the morning I would walk across the bridge over the Vistula and attend mathematics and physics classes at the university. Classes were not obligatory. Knowing well that the subjects would not lead me nearer my goal, medicine, I started skipping classes. I would sit in the library after overcoming my first bedazzlement at the sight of tens of thousands of books open to my whim. Here I could browse among the printed pages of Western civilization, could take any volume to my desk and read to my heart's content, at my own pace, and in the peace and tranquility of the light, airy, high vaulted hall.

Then back to the dormitory for lunch. Afterward I would spend an hour or two tutoring. This was a source of income for students who would help Jewish students in nearby secondary schools to make better grades. This tutoring was, with some luck, more than a source of income. Sixteen-year-old girls from more prosperous families seemed to look forward to being tutored by young university students not only in the strict rules of Latin grammar or trigonometry. Although the school homework was attended to with full seriousness by tutor and pupil, and chivalry and courtesy to the young ladies was *de rigeur,* both sides learned things that were not included in the school curriculum leading to the formal "certificate of maturity."

Another student benefit, stemming from medieval times, was the notion, current even now among the population that university students should not be disdained for their chronic lack of money, their rumpled clothing and bohemian style of life. Well-groomed young women and even their well-heeled but cautious parents would rarely wince at the students who visited their homes, ate their food, and entertained their daughters, knowing well that the meal the student ate in their house might well be the only meal the poor devil had for the day. The acceptance of the "poor student" by the Christian medieval culture; the traditional high regard of Jews for learning; and perhaps, last but not least, the idea that the student after graduation would be a provider and perhaps a fine son-in-law combined to give him a much-needed break in the often heartless big city.

One of my favorite pastimes was wandering through the city and "discovering" its architecture. There there were examples of styles from the medieval Gothic through the Renaissance and Baroque. I read up on the classical foundation of European architecture and later took delight

during my wanderings in the city, in being able to identify a Doric, Ionic or Corinthian component in a column, to find myself suddenly in the front of a Romanesque portal, or, inside a castle, to cast my eyes upon a Baroque staircase. My eyes were suddenly opened to the delights of Greek and Christian artifacts, a territory of visual sensual delectation, far from the purely verbal gratification I knew from Jewish religious and intellectual pursuits I had concerned myself with before.

Here were forms one would like to touch, to embrace, forms that evoked a sensual feeling of wanting to have it nearer, to possess, a feeling almost akin to sexual desire. I was amazed to find that it was not the graceful sculpture of the Greeks, or the seductive paintings of the neo-pagans of the late Renaissance, but the elementary forms of a curved arch, a boldly graceful line of a woman's neck ascending from the firm base of a shoulder girdle, the lightness of a colonnade supporting the roof of a massive portico, that gave me an unexpected thrill. And then I found myself staring at the façade of a church and, cautiously, stepping into the cool spaciousness of its nave. With an irresistible pull I was attracted to a new world.

I had never been in a church before. Now in the early afternoon the church was almost empty. I stood in the back of the nave where a few older men walked slowly busying themselves at long tables covered with rows of lit candles. I lifted my head. Before me was a far and wide vista, above me a soaring height of magnificent space enclosed within a structural artifact built by man. I was struck with wonder and stood riveted, my eyes lifted. And then I overcame the impact of the immense space that made me feel strangely small, and tried to rid myself of the uneasiness that still lurked somewhere inside me, the intruder in a Christian holy place. When I turned my eyes to the surrounding sculptural detail I was unable to concentrate, distracted by the rich complexity of the ornamental magnificence. Until I saw, in the midst of the dazzling splendor, the crucified Christ. Now my gaze was fixed on the suffering bearded face, and only slowly let my eyes glide down the fleshless ribcage and lean limbs nailed to the cross. Above the head four golden letters shone in the afternoon shimmer. INRI—Yes, I knew, it was Jesus Nazareus Rex Judeorum. I turned around and left the church.

That night I slept badly. I walked a transparent glass bridge suspended high over a river. I had before me the full giddy view of the soaring criss-cross of the steel girders. Deep down, spread and nailed to steel beams I suddenly saw a face with a torn bandage around the chin.

A bloodstained tangle of hair tufts. The face of my uncle. My feet became numb and frozen to the ground. He stretched his hands and from far down, from the threatening abyss, his voice sounded strangely near, whispering in Yiddish, "Nemekh aheim—take me home."

I woke up in a cold sweat. Nearby on his bed my brother was breathing rhythmically. The gray light of dawn seeped through the window. There was already an early murmur of the awakening city outside. I got up, dressed without a sound and left the room and the still silent dormitory. Once outside I took a deep breath of cool, damp air and started briskly toward the river.

As a child I saw the crucified Jesus for the first time on a village road when I was on a visit to my maternal grandmother. The simple wooden chiseled face of Jesus was encased in a wooden box and fastened to a tree. It was decorated with foliage and occasionally flowers. Later I saw peasant girls put around the figure blue cornflowers made into garlands, or weave them into blades of grass and sheafs of wheat filled with seed. The image would merge softly with the bark of surrounding trees, branches with greenery and the earthy brown of the dusty country road.

My apprehension connected with Christ came later, at Christmas time. There was a custom among the Jewish boys to play cards on Christmas eve. I had a vague perception that the unusual reason the adults tolerated the kids card-playing was to keep them from the probably unsafe curiosity to venture into the town square where faithful Christians streamed toward the brightly lit church. This sight I took in once, furtively, when at the age of eight I went with Frania, our wet nurse, to the gate of our house, the gate leading to the square. I peeked through the open gate to see the festive throng, and then after Frania left for church, I ran hurriedly back to the safety of home.

Sometime during late childhood I got the notion that Jesus, whom the Goyim worship as the Son of God, although born a Jew, became the main cause for the persecution of the Jewish people. Strangely I never heard this accusation or even the name of Jesus mentioned in our home though Christmas was a household word because of the usual intensified activity in the shops, including ours. However, in Yiddish Christmas was called *Nittl,* from Natal, and in Polish, Christmas is *Boze Narodzenie* —the Birth of God. The maids would not, in moments of puzzlement or fright call on Christ but on the Holy Virgin. So the word Jesus or Christ or Christus came to me much later.

At age twelve, in the summer, before entering gymnasium, I made a

"pilgrimage" to the *Jasna Góra*—the Bright Mountain, in Czestochova, thirty miles from our town. On top of the mountain is the most revered Polish religious and national shrine, a medieval monastery housing the famous painting of "Our Lady of Czestochova," or "the Black Madonna." It was here, in the seventeenth century, where, after a lengthy siege, by a miracle, the tide of the Swedish invasion of Poland was turned back. I made the journey by foot with my schoolmate-to-be, Wasserman.

It was a highly irregular, somewhat freakish thing for two Jewish boys to do. But we had just become friends and were tied by the common prospect of entering gymnasium together. It was summer and our feet were itching to hit the road. Initially we set our sights on a shorter trip, halfway to the Mountain. But when we arrived at midway and got a place to sleep in a barn from friendly peasants and woke up in the morning, we changed our minds. It was only ten short miles or so to the monastery and the sky was cloudless. The peasant's wife gave us bread and milk fresh from the cows udders, still warm and foaming, and told us that on this bright day, on the hill she pointed out to us, it was possible to see the sacred spire. So we went up the hill and from there along the summer-dry road to the outskirts of the town of Czestochova the monastery coming in full view as we got nearer and nearer.

We arrived somewhat tired and dusty. Inconspicuously we mixed with the immense crowd of faithful sitting or standing on the slopes of the hill, their eyes gazing up toward the monastery. If there was any anxiety in us it must have been hidden under the gray dust on our faces. Suddenly the crowd became restless and all heads turned toward a procession of clergymen in white vestments. They were probably carrying the sacred picture of the "Black Madonna", the sight of which was our objective, whether from a rebellious curiosity or the need to be able later back in town to brag about it to the boys. Wasserman, usually shy suddenly became agitated and following the crowd started moving toward the procession. I followed him initially but as the pushing and heaving increased, the anxiety that had never left me since we mixed with the crowd increased almost to a panic. I grabbed Wasserman who, with his blond hair, blue eyes and large face, seemed to be in a state of frenzy, similar to the others around. I must have gripped his arm with force because he turned around and stopped surging ahead. The crowd passed us and we slowly descended the mountain. We never saw the sacred painting.

But on our way back toward the center of Czestochova we heard a slur directed at us by a small group of boys looking at us suspiciously. It was very dangerous territory. I heard the word *Beilis,* and we tried to hurry on, without showing it so as not to invite pursuit. Wasserman now cautioned in a murmur to hurry up but I kept a normal pace while everything inside me was racing ahead. We soon turned a corner and arrived at the center of town. We were safe, though the slur "Beilis" still rang in our ears.

To the slur *Beilis* we would have assuredly hurled back *Macuch,* if we were in less dangerous territory. It usually was a satisfactory retort and it perfectly evened the score against those hurling slurs against us. *Beilis* was an anti-Semitic insult based on the "ritual murder" libel against Mendel Beilis, the Jewish manager of a brick factory in Kiev, some twelve years before. *Macuch* was a Polish thief who managed to steal a diamond from the "Black Madonna" and was later exposed and sentenced, but not before the theft and the sacrilege had been duly attributed to the Jews and spread widely to arouse dangerous anti-Jewish sentiments. The story of Macuch came at the same time as that of Beilis who was accused of the ritual murder of a gentile child, the son of a prostitute Vera Chebriak. With Beilis in prison the Czarist government exploited the event to excite the population, and two medical professors were bribed, as they later admitted, to testify that the boy was drained of his blood while still alive. A nightmarish pall fell over the Jews of the Russian empire. Jews from then on were insulted in the streets by the cry of "Beilis" hurled at them even after the innocent Beilis was acquitted two years after his arrest, when it was discovered that it was Chebriak, the mother, who had murdered her own child, later with the cooperation of government agents planted the dead boy's clothing in Beilis' house. I always felt that the retort "Macuch" for "Beilis" was unbalanced. After all Beilis was acquitted while Macuch was found guilty . . .

In gymnasium there was a crucifix in every classroom. I was now used to the image and as part of the everyday content of the classroom I was not conscious of it any longer. Jesus occupied my thoughts for a while especially in the winter when I was present at the sessions of religious instructions given to the class by the Catholic priest, classes that we Jews were permitted to attend at our option. The priest was a man in his thirties, in a long black habit, tall and exceedingly handsome. His

penetrating steel gray eyes, high forehead and pale almost translucent face contrasting with the blackness of his tall stature, imposed an air of veneration around him. From the corner of my eyes I would see him moving around the hushed classroom like a huge dark shadow gliding smoothly between the rows of desks. Although he rarely, if ever, spoke to me in class, our eyes would occasionally meet and his glance was reassuring. I understood he had spent a few years in Rome and there was a wordly air around him. Once in the senior year, he stopped me on the street, on the town's promenade while I strolled with a girl somewhat late in the evening, and gently, with a smile, he advised me to go home.

I never concerned myself with the divinity of Jesus let alone came to believe in it. Already in gymnasium even my belief in God faltered as I started looking at the world rationally. However, I could not become an atheist, because I never could admit to myself, and in discussions, I rejected firmly the notion that the world, the cosmos, all this wonderful complexity ruled by logical, obvious natural laws, had been created without a plan, a thought, a higher inspiration, or by an accident. I had no proof of the existence of God but I had no proof against it either.

As much as the divinity of Jesus was not on my mind, the man, the Jew, the influence on history and peoples and the impact of Christian dogmas on the fate of the Jews had been constantly in my thoughts during my years in the Polish Catholic school. Whether too young, or too busy with other things, or because of my friend's lack of interest in this subject, I waited for later years to bring some order to this troubling and confusing issue.

Now, in Warsaw, somewhat at loose ends, I had time to cope with my thoughts. And so while I was trying to sort out the onrushing new impressions in the big city, this *embarras de richesse,* of new people, sights, buildings, libraries, theater and music, I suddenly became unstrung by the sight of the crucified Jesus in the magnificence of the cathedral. It was now harping on my mind compulsively and I knew I would have to exhaust myself in search for an explanation, if not for a solution, to be able to proceed in the pursuit of my real interest, something I perceived as the need for a synthesis of sensual beauty and ethical harmony.

Of all the books I read during this period two were most useful in steadying my thoughts and to some degree clearing my emotional confusion. *Jesus of Nazareth* by Joseph Klausner and Spinozas *Ethics.* And so

after months of reading and discussion with others, I could only come to peace with myself when I accepted the following postulates as coming the nearest to the truth:

1. Jesus existed. He lived and preached to the Jews at a most distressing period in their history. He was an extreme nationalist and moralist, a religious Jew although he taught the superiority of the morality of Judaism above its legal and ritualistic aspects, He was a great teacher and a genius in parable. Stripped of mysticism and additions, sometimes hateful, grafted on by later authors, the Gospels or the Book of Ethics of Jesus could be regarded, in Klausner's words, as one of the choicest treasures in the literature of Israel for all times. Jesus was sentenced and crucified by Romans as an agitator of sedition.

2. Christianity was founded by Saul (Paul) for the purpose of spreading the faith in the gentile world, partly by abolition of the Jewish ceremonial laws, including circumcision. Two hundred years later, the Catholic Church after becoming political, acquired the status of the imperial church under Constantine. This became the cause of a theologically based religious intolerance that relegated the Jews to the status of *heretics* and also became the root of modern anti-Semitism, led to catastrophic persecutions during the Crusades, during the time of the "Black Plague" and the Spanish Inquisition. Malicious additions to the Gospels, the accusation of deicide and the ritual murder libel served the need of the church as well as the state rulers to find a scapegoat in critical economical and political times. After 1700 years of Catholic teaching, cruelty and wars between Christian nations were on the uprise rather than being eliminated, and there seemed to be no basis to assume that it might succeed in doing so during my lifetime. From what I could gather it seemed that the preservation of the Church was paramount—above moral and ethical principles—like that of the state.

3. God is beyond rational comprehension, a mystery in the realm of the unknowable and probably exists everywhere and in everything. Ethics have no relationship to God. An ethical man is not ethical because of his religion, he would be so despite it. My ethical conduct could be roughly contained in the principle of the great teacher Hillel, who, when challenged by a Roman soldier to sum up the essence of Judaism while standing on one leg, said, "What thou thyself hatest do not unto thy neighbor." Goodness, like evil, in man is inherent, though it may be enhanced or dimin-

ished by circumstances, example and teaching, especially in childhood. There is goodness all over the world, independent of the religion prevalent in a specific region or of its absence. There is little if any relationship between goodness and "God-fearing." The fear of God and hate of God are not far from each other. It is difficult to trust goodness that depends on fear of God rather than on love of man.

4. Both justice and reason entitled the Jewish people to a homeland of their own, in *Eretz Yisrael.* In fact, another side of the Western European tradition—the liberal, humanistic, rational side—seemed to have recognized this in the Balfour Declaration. I believed that in the struggle between the vestiges of medieval intolerance and enlightened humanism, the latter would prevail, to the benefit not only of the Jews. I looked especially to Western Europe, to the Weimar of Goethe, the Geneva of the League of Nations, the Paris of Pasteur, Emile Zola and Romain Rolland as centers of that civilized belief in the supremacy of the individual, his personal worth and freedom, that would eventually be established as the universal belief of mankind. When obscurantism, myth and intolerance had been done away with, the Jews would be able to develop their new-old culture in their homeland, while at the same time participating as free and equal partners in man's moral and intellectual quests in all the countries of the Jewish dispersion, which I very vaguely anticipated would be transformed but not necessarily liquidated if and when a Jewish state arose.

* * *

Of all the thinking, the questioning that occupied my mind during my stay in Warsaw, nothing troubled my head more, than the problem of how to get a medical education. I realized that as a physician I would acquire a foundation, a solid professional core around which my economical, educational and cultural aspirations might have a chance to materialize. I sensed that by being able to render a service that would be judged on its merit alone, as a free practitioner, I might be able to overcome the limitations imposed by an intolerant, hostile society. To be a physician freely able to prescribe and cure, outside the hostile framework of institutions and government, also suited my individualistic make-up. I sensed that I did not fit in well in any organizational framework, not even political, making me unfit and unable to get support and comfort even from a political party with whose aims I fully

agreed. It was imperative, therefore, for me to get some foothold, some semblance of *terra firma*.

I enrolled in a course of first aid, organized by the Polish Red Cross. It gave me a foretaste of medicine. I applied bandages, made emergency splints and attended a short course in anatomy. The lectures were illustrated with drawings and pictures. I was thinking of getting hold of human bones for purposes of study. So I paid a visit to the Jewish medical student from our town, Yanek, who now in his fourth year of medicine, lived in the Jewish Student House.

Before his arrival in Warsaw, and his acceptance in medical school, it would have been difficult to call Yanek a Jew. He certainly would not call nor consider himself a Jew. If pressed to the wall, for instance in filling out an offical form where indication of nationality (as distinguished from citizenship) and religion were necessary, Yanek would most probably write in: Pole of Mosaic faith. He was what we Jews in Poland called an *assimilator*—short of breaking the last thread, short of conversion to Catholicism, he had no bond with the Jewish people. He had no Jewish religious instruction, he did not understand, let alone speak Yiddish or Hebrew, and neither he nor his parents were ever involved in Jewish communal and social activities. Back home Yanek was never seen on the street with other boys or dating girls in the neighborhood. He would drop in our home for a few minutes to get a book from my older brother, whose classmate he was, and leave.

Yanek's father was a dentist. As a child, I remember him always in a white doctor's coat, cleanshaven and smiling, speaking Polish in an even, clear accent, all the time trying to calm my fear of the shining steel instrument, hidden in the palm of his hand. This would invariably be followed by a lightning pull and extraction of a doomed milk-tooth.

Yanek, tall and meticulously dressed even in his room where he was now busy studying greeted me at the door. He wore a smile which I thought was tinged with slight irony, probably because of my obstinate but futile attempt to penetrate the impregnable fortress of Polish medicine. But then he invited me in and took time to talk with me, sharing some of his precious student medical time. He even kept me from leaving promptly after I had borrowed a human skull and a shinbone. He looked proud when I looked at his student "corporate" cap and sash, fastened to the wall beside two crossed fencing swords. He told me he was trying to learn the Hebrew alphabet . . .

He asked me to drop in on Sunday when I ought to bring back the

bones I borrowed. He promised he would then try to lend me a few more. I felt there was more to his invitation than a mere exchange of bones. He was now almost intimate, his usual aloofness that I remembered so well almost gone. Next Sunday when I came back to his room, he was obviously waiting for me.

I was surprised to see that he was not alone. Sitting at the table as I entered was another boy from our town, Bolek. He rose smartly and with studied courtesy shook my hand greeting me with a friendly *Servus.* Bolek must have been a year older than I was. He was now a second year student at the Higher School of Commerce, a prestigious institution that it was almost impossible for a Jew to gain access to. There were rumors in our town that in order to gain admission Bolek was converted to Catholicism by his parents but this was most probably unfounded. His father was a wealthy furniture factory owner, and lived in an imposing house on the periphery of town where few if any Jewish families lived.

The "assimilated" Jews, or as we called them the *assimilators* comprized a very small percentage of the Jewish population. There were probably no more than fifteen or twenty such families in our town. They were well known because of their status and wealth. Among them were owners of factories, a dentist, an owner of a printing establishment, a woman director of the Jewish Gymnasium, and a pharmacist. They rarely mixed with us except in commercial or professional situations. As far as I could have the notion of such things, they did not mix socially with the gentiles either, something they would obviously have done if they could. It was therefore for good reason that the assimilators mixed socially only with themselves, a rather tight small crowd. I was surprised to see Bolek, because I did not expect to see him at all in Warsaw in the circles I now came to know and certainly not in the Jewish student house. However, his presence in Yanek's room was not totally surprising because I knew of his clannish ways.

We were now sitting at the table. There was beer, tiny, rather expensive sausages, napkins, and cigarettes. I was invited to join in. I must have interrupted a discussion, judging from the somewhat animated expression of their faces, an animation that I knew did not belong to their style. I must have felt somewhat uncomfortable because Yanek assured me that they were glad to have me and to get my views on the matter under discussion. They were discussing the merits and desirability of joining the student corporations. I knew that Yanek was a member

of *Betaria,* a Zionist outfit. I knew nothing of Bolek's affiliation. It was anyway highly unusual for assimilators to air their problems in the presence of an outsider like me, a *Jewish* Jew, someone with a Jewish religious and cultural background, although at present *Polonized* enough to be able to participate in their discussion.

Bolek contended that by joining a Zionist student corporation Yanek had ceased to be a Pole, and became a Jew, something he was not. Yanek, he admitted, "is of Jewish descent, but this was a matter of accident, without bearing on his cultural, linguistic and patriotic qualities, which are Polish. The Zionists are Jewish nationalists, they see their fatherland in Palestine and their national language in Hebrew. They are not Poles, they only have Polish citizenship and in fact most of them, except for the backward, pathetic, medieval orthodox Jews, joined in the Polish parliament and formed a block of national minorities, together with the Ukrainians and the Germans. He can understand the Zionist point of view but he thinks it to be in error, because it impedes the integration of those of Jewish descent into the fold of the Polish nation."

Yanek who during all this time stared at Bolek with a barely concealed smile now extinguished his cigarette and, looking at me, started speaking at first slowly, then with more animation, "Bolek's argument is well founded and I mulled over it three years ago. And I found it invalid. It is theoretically faultless. But in practice, in the reality of our life it doesn't hold water. It leads nowhere."

Yanek reached for a new cigarette, lit it with deliberation and inhaled deeply. "I am a Pole and a Jew. There is no contradiction here. I was born with and I see no reason why this natural hybridization should not produce sound fruit. Perhaps it may even combine the best qualities of both, to the benefit of all." He looked now at Bolek and added playfully with a wink, "Isn't she beautiful, you know who, with one eye blue and the other brown?" But he became serious again, "I was accepted in medical school, I admit, because of my father's heroic efforts. My grandfather fought in the January uprising and the Russians later confiscated all of his possessions. My mother's ancestors fought under Berek Joselewicz in Praga, possibly on the very ground this house stands on. My father must have exhausted all possible avenues to get me in. Perhaps, he went as far as," he said pensively, "as to appeal to Pilsudski himself. Of course, this is injust to others, but things may change, they must

change . . ." He stopped, trying to pick up a lost thread, then resumed with renewed vigor,

"When I arrived in Warsaw, I was refused acceptance into the Polish student dormitories. Those were only for Catholics. I was accepted into this dormitory without a hitch. Everyone here speaks Polish and I have yet to see or feel a cold shoulder. O, yes, some have very bad manners, some, from the Eastern provinces, speak Polish with a funny Yiddish singsong. But when I joined the corporation, *Betaria,*—this one, perhaps because most of the brothers live here in this house—and I got to know them, they took me in with warmth, like another brother."

I sat silent, fascinated by this exchange, by this unburdening of two assimilated Jews whom I would not consider emotionally able to come to grips with their problems, which were much more complicated than my own. I had previously the notion that assimilated Jews lived in a world of unreality, that they faced a truly tragic, unsoluble problem, even if they convert to Catholicism. I thought that they were "men without a shadow" neither Poles nor Jews. But I sat silent.

Now Bolek, somewhat taken back by Yanek's forceful style of debate, asked him sarcastically: "But aren't you now a Zionist? When are you going to settle in Palestine?" Unexpectedly Yanek turned to me and with a smile said: "Well, you should answer this one. You were *born* a Zionist." I had to set aside my desire to remain silent.

"To be a Zionist does not mean that one has to pack his bags and leave for Palestine." I started, "It means that one sincerely believes in an honorable solution for those Jews who will not, cannot and are prevented from living an upright material and spiritual life here. Above all it means to have an unshakable belief that Jews have a historical right to a homeland in Palestine, which now stands desolate. It means the willingness to support, by all means, financial and political, those who because of economic deprivation or emotional fulfillment desire to leave in short order. It has nothing to do with one's loyalty to the country of his birth or citizenship, even if he would enjoy all rights of citizenship."

Bolek looked now at me and interjected, "You also believe in those Zionists who with some one else's money send another to Palestine?" "Yes" I answered, "even in those, if they believe that the cause is just and if it helps to settle one more Jew in Palestine. The main thing is to believe and to convince others that because of the historial injustice to the Jews, they have a right to build a homeland in Palestine and if they

must or prefer to stay in exile they still are entitled to have all the rights of citizens. You can be at the same time a Pole, a Jew and a Zionist, if circumstances of birth and history have led to such a circumstance. It is utopian to think—I admit—that the majority of Poles will accept that, but the Jewish situation is historically unprecedented and some utopian component, some vision is absolutely necessary."

Both Yanek and Bolek looked at me intently. I saw Bolek's stony expression but Yanek's face was smiling in agreement. Encouraged I blurted, "In fact the greatest Zionist utopians were assimilated Jews: Moses, Herzl, and now Jabotinsky." Yanek beamed but Bolek sat motionless not comprehending, probably not fully familiar with the names. I wanted to come to an end. I felt, however, that I had not addressed myself to some dark shadow hovering over this debate, my uncertainty as to Bolek's conversion.

"In conclusion," I said, "let me assert my view that for those Jews who cannot accept Zionism, there is nothing left but communism or conversion to Catholicism. I firmly believe that communism in practice is hostile to our humanistic culture and that religious conversion if not sincere will not serve the individual and certainly is not a solution for the Jewish masses, for the Jewish people."

Somehow I felt that I was not expressing myself clearly enough. "There is still confusion in my own thinking." I thought. The only clear belief of mine was that communism and conversion are not the answer. I turned now to Bolek: "Where do you live?" "I took a private room near the school," he replied. I knew now that the rumors about his conversion were false. For some reason I was suddenly relieved. I shook hands, took the box with bones from Yanek, and left.

* * *

The school year came to an end. I did not take my examinations in mathematics and physics. I was not prepared and I did not consider it worthwhile as I planned to leave for study abroad. Paris was my first choice and, if that was impossible, I thought of Czechoslovakia. In spite of my brother's discouraging experience Paris was for us the center of European culture, of the arts, and of political freedom. To be able to study medicine and at the same to walk the streets of Paris, to acquire a knowledge of French and to feel free from Polish and Jewish parochial-

ism were thrilling thoughts that suppressed any other motivation, or striving.

An opportunity presented itself to earn a ticket abroad and the cost of travel papers. It was through the student travel bureau which was under my brother's direction. If I worked there for a while I would be able to earn part of my travel expenses. In the student travel office I would also be able to observe the swelling tide of emigration to Western universities in France, Belgium and Czechoslovakia, by the increasing number of young Polish Jews with "certificates of maturity," for whom there was no place in Poland to advance. I decided to work the whole month of September to earn my ticket and leave for abroad early in October. It would be somewhat late but there was no other way.

* * *

In the meantime I had a whole summer before me. I accepted summer work for a Jewish philanthropic organization. It was now my duty to deliver a short speech on weekends to assembled guests in hotels at summer resorts located on the sandy outskirts of Warsaw, resorts shaded by forests and blessed with invigorating dry, pine-scented air. The speech, given in the dressing room, explaining the need for a sanitarium for the poor was supposed to arouse the charitable spirit of the wealthy guests. Their bodies were in a weekend languor, their bellies full between the last meat course and dessert, and their charitable impulses could be prodded by the presence of friends and the public, all this making them aware that stinginess equals disrepute. There were no cash collections, a secretary wrote down the sum donated and the name, all this to be published. In the beginning at the start of my speech, I was very self-conscious, but I got used to it in no time, always reminded that my ticket abroad was getting nearer to reality.

The summer resorts were located near the capital along the railroad and were identified by the general name: the *Otwock Line.* It was occupied during the summer mostly, though not exclusively, by the more prosperous thin layer of the Jewish middle class of Warsaw. The wives and children of such families, small in number compared with the poor masses sweltering in the city, would stay all week in the *dacha*-type houses, while the breadwinner, the father would come only on the weekend. During the week the bored women would be entertained

arranging picnics, parties for charity and occasional theatrical performances. Those activities were attended also by young men without permanent work or business in the city but knowledgeable in the ways of charming young (and not so young) ladies; students, unemployed actors, writers and other educated "Luftmenschen," who enjoyed the hospitality of the "straw widows," dining at their tables, and then disappearing Friday morning and re-appearing on Monday afternoon. In such an ordered cyclic fashion, the *Otwock Line* was humming all week with music, entertainment, laughter and interesting conversation, to the seeming satisfaction of all parties concerned.

My strange but exposed job as a speechmaker made it easy for me to be invited to parties, usually outings in the forest. On one such occasion I met my old classmate Shaya. He had just finished his first year of study of Polish literature at the Warsaw University. He was now visiting his aunt who had a summer house in the vicinity of the picnic grounds. He looked well and tanned and he was in the company of a girl who was obviously taken with him. We exchanged pleasantries and then, when we could be by ourselves on the edge of the crowd, we talked more openly.

He lived in Warsaw with his uncle. I remembered his uncle as the owner of a workshop producing silk ribbons. It was a small outfit, barely giving the family the means of living. However, now with the new government of Pilsudski beefing up the army, Shaya's uncle, despite his Jewishness, obtained contracts to deliver in a hurry the large amounts of ribbons necessary for the proper adornment of military uniforms, and medals. Shaya's uncle was making out quite well, he bought a summer home and Shaya had no problem now, living in his uncle's house and being fed regularly by his aunt, while studying his beloved subject, Polish literature. More than ever he now believed in the coming Communist world revolution.

I remember sitting with him later, on the veranda of his uncle's summer house being served fruits and cold drinks. Shaya was in an expansive mood intent on proving to me how erroneous my Zionist thinking was. "The capitalistic order is doomed. America is on its last spree of capitalistic extravagance. The Polish working masses live in misery under the oppressive rule of Pilsudski." He took a sip from a tall cool glass and proceeded to look at me with an almost victorious smile, "The Jewish masses in Poland are pauperized and on the brink of star-

vation. Only a complete change in the social structure will be of any possible help to their wretched condition. Zionism . . ."

"I know," I interrupted him, "Zionism helps anti-Semitism as a tool of the capitalists to split the proletariat . . ."

He became silent now but not in the least perturbed. But he stopped his tirade. I did not wish to continue either. We both knew our positions well, perhaps he knew his even better. Nothing had changed during the year in which I had not seen him. There was nothing new worth saying or listening to. We changed the subject and were now going over our common acquaintances from back home, the gossip. But I was unsettled this time.

I took leave of him and walked back through the woods inhaling the dry fragrance of the pines. Shaya's tirade was still bothering me. I had interrupted him when he started on Zionism. I knew now while walking through the fragrant Polish forest that today I was unsure of my argumentation, that I could not fend off Shaya's tedious slogans, that I had to cut off his tirade when he came to Zionism. I knew now that I did not wish to deliberate with him on this year's happenings in Palestine, the Arab rioting and especially the Hebron massacre that had occurred just two days before and in which more than sixty Jews had been slaughtered. I retreated because I was unable to have a dry verbal kicking around with a heartless communist Sybarite of events which I felt with my raw, exposed sensibility, while he treated it with the cynical logic of his dialectic materialism. For him it was another point won for the infallibility of Marxist historical predictions and the futility and bankruptcy of Zionism. For me, beside my inner outrage and sorrow, it was the realization that the prospect for reconciliation with the Arabs was dim. Our humanistic principles made us believe that Zionism was building up a desolated land, drying the swamps and eradicating malaria and trachoma among the hapless Arab population. But now, the bloody resistance, though reactionary and of a fanatical religious nature incited by the Mufti, disturbed the humanistic, democratic enlightenment we demanded from ourselves and others here as well as from the Zionist movement. For the first time I began weighing in my mind the contention of the controversial Zionist leader Vladimir Jabotinsky that if Zionism is basically moral, through the rights of the Jewish people to a homeland and the indisputable need for it, then it remains moral, even if there is opposition to it. There was, after all plenty of wilderness in

Palestine to accommodate Jew and Arab. There was no moral issue here except for the immorality of the Mufti and his bloodthirsty bands . . .

* * *

The summer of 1929 came to an end. I had some savings now and I started to work in the Student Travel Bureau. It was a crowded small room shared with a Zionist student organization in Warsaw. Here the mountain of letters and inquiries often in the form of desperate telegrams from Jewish Polish youth yearning to study abroad had to be sorted out, read and answered. Government regulations concerning travel documents had to be explained, and information about admission requirements to universities abroad gathered and distributed. Contacts were made with foreign and domestic travel agencies and railroad authorities about schedules and possibilities of reduced fares for students. It was a complicated, hectic effort for three people and a secretary-typist guided persuasively by my older brother.

At last, early in October my passport ready, and my ticket within reach, the decision where to go had to be made. I had to abandon my desire to go to France, to Paris. There was already overcrowding of foreign students and Polish Jews at the Paris medical school. It was quite late for application. On the other hand there were favorable reports of conditions in Czechoslovakia, of good relationship between foreign and Czech students. I packed two suitcases, visited briefly, on my way, my parents and family, my friends in my home town. Then, full of expectation and suspense, I boarded the international train to Czechoslovakia, to Prague.

IV

THE MAKING OF A DOCTOR

I ARRIVED in Prague in the small hours of a crisp autumn day. My drowsiness from the long day and night journey dissolved quickly in the cool morning air and I was kept alert by the busy flow of people on the wide open concourse and inside the large and unusually clean railroad station. Too early to go to town, I had breakfast in the dining room, and got the first taste of foreign cooking, and of the waiter's strange Czech language which he quickly changed to German, probably realizing the cause of my puzzled expression. I had the address of a boarding house where apparently it was possible to get inexpensive lodging, until a more permanent place could be found.

The boarding house was a small place in a narrow lane. A middle aged woman opened the door, looked me over closely at first, then obviously being used to foreigners who initially can hardly explain their visit, let me into the house with my suitcases while at the same time ordering out into the street a large black cat that started rubbing its back on my legs. "A black cat crossing my path at the start," I thought, but I dismissed it as nonsense. Still I wished it hadn't happened. I was told the price of the room with breakfast and showed up the stairs into a small immaculate room. I hardly had the patience to unpack. Within minutes I was downstairs and after getting my key to the front door, in no time I found myself on the streets of Prague.

Of all persons a stranger is apt to meet the first day in a big city none will affect his first impression of the tenor and general character of the population, than the policeman and the streetcar conductor. In Prague

the smile and courtesy of these two, strangely not baffled by my strenuous efforts to make myself understood, quickly endeared the whole city to me. My first order of the day was to enroll in medical school knowing well that time was of the essence. I soon realized from conversations with Jewish students from Poland who milled around the office of admission that although my application might be accepted, admission was questionable at such a late date. There were two medical schools in Prague, one German and one Czech. I applied to the Czech school which according to information was more liberally oriented toward foreigners. There was now nothing left but to wait for two to three weeks for the outcome of my application. In the meantime the city beckoned and I took to it with relish.

The loveliness of this city with its lofty spires, changing vistas of bridges, parks, castles and narrow quaint streets, spread over seven hills, was an eye's delight. Perhaps my enchantment was heightened by the clarity and brilliance of the October day. Certainly the scenic views so constantly changing as one walked up and down the hilly streets made an indelible impression on me. It was the first time I saw a city on hills. Born and raised on the flat of Poland's plain, on which my hometown as well as Warsaw were built, my eye was now captivated by the sensual undulations of the landscape. From above, the curves of the winding Vltava River contrasted gently with the imposing mass of the castle dominating the river bank high atop a hill. Ceaselessly, for days, I pounded the streets, resting on park benches and dining on the ubiquitous *parki*-sausages, sold hot by peddlers on the streets with fresh crisp rolls. But then the unexpected happened.

I was in the old town square looking at the statue of Jan Hus, the courageous religious reformer burnt at the stake by the Church, when tired I started looking for a park. There was one across the river perhaps a block away. I started toward the river when my curiosity was attracted by an old building that could not be anything else but an ancient synagogue. I stood looking at the building in the empty street, when I was startled by the feeling that someone behind me had taken hold of my elbow. I turned around and saw a man in a black suit and black hat trying to explain something to me in Czech. He switched quickly, like almost everyone else in this city when meeting a stranger, into German. He asked me if I was a Jew and, after I nodded, he asked me, of all things, to join the assembly inside for the afternoon prayer. I had noth-

ing of the sort on my mind. But he insisted telling me that he needed the tenth man to make up a *minyan*—the required quorum.

I remembered the old Jewish unwritten law that made the refusal of such a request almost unthinkable. It was a tradition, a human courtesy to nine assembled persons waiting for the one to join them, for the proverbial "tenth man" who would enable them to pray in an assembly. I entered, joined the group of mostly old men, ready to start. In the end I was glad I did.

The synagogue was the famous Old-New synagogue, a medieval, fourteenth century structure with a single hall and vaulted ceiling. While passively participating in the service, my head covered with the prescribed skullcap given me by the man who invited me in, the *shames,* or sexton, I soon became engulfed in the dimly lit medieval ambience of the place, seeing in my mind the faces of the people who must have assembled here and prayed through the long and tortuous ages of Jewish existence in this city, the recurrent expulsions and then return, the destructions and burning, followed inexplicably by renewal and rebuilding, the constant tragic yet inspiring Jewish saga. Phoenix coming to life from ashes.

The prayers came to an end and the *shames* thanked me for my attendance and then took me around the synagogue. At the end in a matter of course voice he asked me if I wanted to see *the Golem.*—It was more than a surprising invitation. At first I could not make out from his straight, old face if he was serious or just testing my credulity. But I quickly reminded myself that it was of course here, right here, where the legend of the *golem* originated. I nodded to the old man and he lead me to a small door, opened it into a dark corridor from where narrow stairs led toward the attic.

The *golem* is an ingrained part of Jewish folklore. Although the word is found in the Psalms, it became attached in the Middle Ages to a man-made clay human figure that could be brought to life only by a secret word, written on a piece of paper and placed in the *golem's* mouth. The now animated clay figure would become a robot, a creature devoid of its own will but able to perform tasks, usually arduous manual work, when ordered by his master, his creator. The usually benevolent monster could, however, become dangerous when uncontrolled and would then have to be quickly deanimated by removing the secret word. I heard the legend innumerable times and knew also that it was a Rabbi in Prague

who lived near an old synagogue who was the creator of the *golem.* An apocryphal story was inevitably attached to the legend and the one that I remembered best dealt with complications the rabbi in Prague encountered after successfully making the *golem* come to life.

He was far from being wealthy and his wife had no help in attending to her domestic chores. She probably was able to convince her husband to make practical use of the *golem.* As this particular version has it, the *golem* was instructed to bring water each morning from the well in the backyard and he dutifully did his job to the *rebetsen's*—the rabbi's wife —satisfaction. But, as expected, something went wrong. One morning while the rabbi was out of the house at his morning prayers, his wife ordered the golem to do his daily task but later absentmindedly went out to the market to do some shopping. She must have engaged in some additional gossip because when she started on her way back and as she came nearer to her home, she saw from afar, a great commotion and the street submerged under a flood. It turned out that the *golem,* robot that he was, had flooded the house, the yard and the street with water he mechanically kept bringing as ordered by his master. After the word was removed from his mouth, the golem finally collapsed on the stones outside the house and broke into small pieces, never again to be restored by his now subdued but wiser master.

And now, unbelievably, I was going to see the legendary *golem.* I looked intently at the old man who now showed me the stairs making an upward motion with his head as if telling me to climb the stairs. I started but he did not follow. Somewhat discouraged I asked him where exactly in the attic would I find the *golem.* He answered me "Under the *sheymis.*" Now, this is, I knew, a pile of old religious books, torn pages and other material that because of age or damage had to be discarded, but being sacred, as religious printed material is, it is usually deposited somewhere, usually in attics or even buried ritually in cemeteries. It was under such a heap of old dusty books and papers piled up in the attic that, according to the man below me, the *golem* lay. I saw now a quizzical smiling grimace on the old man's face and I finally realized the jest. The man later, after he excused himself for making this joke, told me that he was being constantly asked by visitors, mostly tourists to show them the *golem,* giving him tips which he couldn't refuse. He told them to go to the attic. Only very few ventured there and then were so overcome by the dust and ghoulish darkness of the place that they quickly left. Some, he said laughing broadly, saw the *golem.* And then he added, possibly

because of our now friendly relationship: "I am here forty-five years and I never looked for him."

* * *

During my weeks in Prague my knowledge of German and the years spent on German literature in Gothic print stood me in good stead. Beside being able to communicate with most people here within a few days, it was not difficult for me to read German newspapers printed in Gothic letters fluently. I was initially surprised at how difficult it was for me to understand spoken Czech, a Slavic language so similar to Polish. It was mostly the pronounciation, which in the first days for some reason, sounded to me like children's jabber, perhaps because of the many diminutives and some singsong. While trying to read Czech newspapers I was struck by the many words that would lack even a single vowel, like the word *skvrz,* meaning through. Later I came to appreciate the beauty of the language especially its folksy air, not unlike the democratic simplicity of the Czech people, and even to like the singsong especially when spoken by a woman.

The Prague and Vienna newspapers, the latter available on the same day in the morning, were voluminous editions filled with political, literary and art material of a richness and variety I had not known at home. International affairs were treated in large articles under the by-line of many special correspondents located all over the world. To my surprise the two most prominently discussed items late in October 1929 were topics of little interest to me. One that made large headlines on the front page was of a financial nature and read "Crash on Wall Street," the other in the literary section dealt with a newly published book in German, "All Quiet On the Western Front" by a writer unknown to me, Erich Maria Remarque. Nothing was further from my mind than the machinations on the New York stock exchange, or stories of World War I.

For four weeks I waited for a decision on my admission to medical school. It finally came and it was negative. I had come too late. My case seemingly did not merit special consideration by the Rector of the University. I spent a miserable day when I heard of this decision. My cash hoard was shrinking steadily and I faced the loss of a year of study. But then I heard that there might still be time to enroll in a medical

school outside Prague, in Bratislava, and I decided to go there. I had to do this in haste, because the deadline for admissions was within 24 hours after I received the information. Bratislava, a city I never heard of before, I was told, is the main city of Slovakia. I looked at the map of Czechoslovakia, the most elongated country in Europe, and found it hundreds of miles away, in the south-east, near the Austrian and Hungarian frontiers.

I packed my few belongings and took the first available train south-east in the direction of Bratislava. I did not get a direct connection and had to switch to a local train in the middle of the night, a train loaded with cans of milk for morning delivery to the citizens of Bratislava who probably were now deep asleep in their beds. The cold wind blowing in through the open doors of this semi-freight train, the constant clatter of the milk cans, the dark outlines of mountainous country, prevented me from sleeping or keeping warm. I was in a grim state, aggravated by the thought of my dismally melting cash, and the lack of the name of any person I could turn to in this new city. When I finally managed to doze off, the clatter of the cans stopped, waking me up suddenly. I had arrived at my destination.

It was too early to hurry into town so I tried to get warm by pacing up and down the halls of the deserted railroad station. I quickly realized that the town I had arrived in had some peculiarities. All signs and inscriptions were in three languages: German, Hungarian, and Czech —or what I thought was Czech. (Only later did I learn that the last language was not Czech but Slovak.) From my experience in Prague I spoke German asking directions to town and which streetcar would bring me to the Medical School. The people I asked would either politely murmur "I don't understand" and keep on walking or would answer me in a language I couldn't understand. I finally addressed the only policeman I found in the front of the station who gave the information required in fluent German. I arrived at the office of the Dean of the school two hours early. The gates were closed and I stood again somewhat grim with my two suitcases on the sidewalk. It was a cloudy, cold and misty morning with few passersby in sight. Across the street, however, a large structure, whose exterior was almost entirely made of glass, was ablaze with light. Inside two stories were filled with people drinking coffee, reading newspapers served by rushing waiters. It was my first glimpse of an institution which would be my home, school, meeting place, club and refuge for the next six years—the coffeehouse.

Inside, with my suitcases, I was instantly directed by the waiter to the upper level. Here everyone spoke Polish. Here there was warmth, light, familiar sounds and kindred faces. The forebodings in the night train and the station vanished in the vibrant, aromatic and smoky air. I was back on track.

Seated at the table, I was addressed by a waiter in a white jacket: "Herr Doctor, which is your newspaper?" I did not answer. It took me a while to understand. He had in his hand three newspapers attached to rods. He left them all on my table then brought coffee, milk and rolls. The papers were the morning editions of a Czech paper from Prague, a Vienna paper in German and a Budapest paper in Hungarian.

The presence of a newcomer was quickly noted and in no time I was approached by a fellow with a smiling face and an outstretched welcoming hand who sat himself down across from me. Without preliminaries, he said in Polish, "you know you're too late to get into school." This greeting sounded ominous, but was somewhat incongruous with the wide, warm smile on his face. In my desperation, I translated it quickly into: "It is terrible, but maybe something can be done about it."

The man was the ombudsman, a student who helped others in trouble. He told me it was 24 hours past the deadline to apply for special admission or even hardship cases. He said that he was willing to try a method, the details of which he did not care to divulge. He told me, however, to prepare some money in notes of 10, 20 and 50 Koron denominations. I did as he said and at nine o'clock I went with him across the street to the gate of the school. We were the first in the empty office waiting room and took up positions by the closed window where applications for admission were filed. After a few minutes the window was lifted and a wrinkled face, a fleshy reddish nose with reading glasses and a large bald head emerged. I did not understand the short utterance that escaped his lips but, as instructed by my new friend, who stood beside me without being noticed by the official behind the window, I shoved the previously prepared forms for admission together with all necessary documents under the partly opened window. The University official behind the window gave a brief searching look at the bundle of papers and realizing that this was a petition for a late admission, shoved back the papers impatiently. The window then came down with a bang, requiring no words of explanation. It was then that my friend told me in a whisper to take out the 50 korona note, put it on top of the papers and try again. I knocked on the window which after a while was opened

by the official who now looked very angry. He gave a momentary glance at the note on top of the papers and, with an indignant blush on his face, shoved the papers back again. The window came down with a bang. However, this time the intensity of the bang was slightly diminished. I was then instructed to put a 20 korona note on top of the first note and try again. There followed a repetition of the procedure, but the bang of the shut window had changed into a polite tap. When 110 korona were presented, the papers were then accepted and I left the window without ever exchanging a word with the official. I went back to the coffee house assured by my friend that I was now a legitimate student of medicine.

Now, the second most important task was to find living quarters. With my funds running out fast I had to look for a roommate to share expenses. It was late and practically all the students had settled down in rented rooms all over town. There was, however, one latecomer who was in the same situation and we joined in pursuit of accommodation. He was Bohdan, a Polish Ukrainian who had arrived a week before me and, not having many Ukrainian compatriots, could not find a roommate, and by necessity began to hang around places where Jewish students congregated. We found a room in a basement tenement occupied by a workingman and his family in a section of town dating back to medieval times, previously the old Jewish ghetto. It was squalid but inexpensive, it suited us, and we unpacked our suitcases. There were two beds, a table and a kerosene stove with a pipe extending almost across the room. The walls and ceiling were vaulted, like an old wine cellar. A single unshaded electric bulb hung in the middle of the ceiling revealing the greenish gray of the walls and casting a long shadow of the stovepipe along the floor. Above one bed was a picture of Christ with a crown of thorns. Above the other was a photograph of a bearded old gentleman in a military uniform with a row of medals on his chest. In the corner was a wash basin.

Bohdan, a short wiry fellow with dark restless eyes, a tight yellowish face and a shrewd grin, revealed his *Weltanschaung* as soon as we agreed which bed belonged to whom. He was the son of a minor official working for the Polish government in the disputed Polish-Ukrainian city of Lvov. Being an Ukrainian nationalist he was against the Poles who had annexed the western part of Ukraine, against the Russians who did the same with the eastern part, and against the Jews who served Polish interests, by promoting Polish culture. Confronted with this tangle of political realities in Southeastern Poland, tired and hungry by the trip

from Prague and the tedious long day, I suggested we postpone further discussion and instead try to get a decent meal.

Bohdan was more than willing. Out in the street, he showed me a brightly illuminated butcher store. We bought cold meats and sausages in an amount too sizable for the money paid. I commented on the cheapness of meat products here but was informed by my friend with a grin that he had made eye contact with the girl behind the counter with a resulting discrepancy between the actual weight of the purchase and the amount paid to the cashier. He also commented on the way to our room, bottles of beer and bread in his hands, on the girl's natural endowments and the date he was sure to have with her next Sunday. During our meal and for the rest of the evening he expounded on the different approaches required for success with Slovak, Czech, Hungarian and German girls. He sounded quite convincing, though I kept in mind that he had been in town only ten days. Too tired to come to a definite conclusion I fell on my bed into the salutary oblivion of sleep.

* * *

Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, enjoys the unusual distinction of having its name transformed completely when translated into German or Hungarian, languages then indigenous in this city. Bratislava in Slovak, Pressburg in German, Pozsony in Hungarian, on the banks of the Danube between Budapest and Vienna had an unusual air of a town that had yet to find its identity. To the stranger, this capital of Slovakia had nothing Slovak to show. The Slovaks had suddenly surfaced as a politically recognized nation from the depths of history lacking the experience of national independence for centuries. Mostly peasants and farmers they were struggling against odds to make themselves visible in their own capital. Still short in an intelligentsia, overwhelmed by Big Brother, the Czechs, who ruled here through bureaucrats from Prague, they were frustrated by the small inroads they were able to make in the cultural and political life of the city. The Slovaks, when visible, brought to the town a strange tinge of the sulky rebelliousness of adolescence. They demanded the use of their language in public places and the young Slovak students with the fresh honest faces of the rural hinterland would walk in groups through the streets and boulevards speaking loudly and ostentatiously for everyone to hear and take notice, in their soft native tongue of ancient Slavic.

As a stranger the clash of Slovak, Czech, Austrian, German and Hungarian cultures did not bother me. On the contrary, I was only too glad to have access to the multilingual press, theatre and art offered to me in such a small place. Vienna was but a street car ride away, Budapest a boat ride. Here there was a choice of coffee houses with homely Czech music, Viennese waltzes or Hungarian Gypsy music with sobbing violins and cymbals filling the air until the early dawn. Pork with cabbage, the Wiener Schnitzel and the goulash with paprika were authentic local staples. In the fall, fresh wine—the *Heuriger*—from the nearby vineyards in the hills was drawn straight from wooden casks to the accompaniment of the mellow tones of an accordion.

For the first few days, I would get up in the morning, walk out of the basement into the bright sunlight, past the narrow streets of the old ghetto and stroll along the boulevard on the bank of the Danube. On the right, high on a hill dominating the city, the castle, an enormous structure where the Empress Marie Therese entertained her lovers. The hill overlooked the river, and boats, the opera and the quaint winding little streets of the red-light district, its windows with immaculate white curtains, and the scantily-clad, painted temptresses with frozen smiles sitting behind glass panes, under the searching gaze of tipsy Danube sailors, and red cheeked young soldiers.

There was a sizable Jewish community, some 15,000 I was told. But they were barely discernible except for an occasional group of sober clad obviously orthodox Jewish young men whom I saw on the streets of the old town, where I now lived. They must have been pupils of the rabbinical school, a famous centuries old institution. My interest was not in them but in the magnificent river, the mountainous landscape surrounding the city, the architecture, the museum and theatre, the sounds of new languages around me, new faces, new habits. The seductive novelty of European civilization.

* * *

A week passed and my name appeared on the list of accepted freshmen. With great anticipation I attended my first classes on subjects full of mystery to the uninitiated, such as autopsy and detailed anatomical dissection. The school building was new and modern, lecture halls overcrowded with standing room only available for latecomers. This overcrowding was due to the presence of a large number of foreigners,

but it would not last long. After a few weeks students would start skipping classes knowing that they probably could learn more or as much from textbooks as from teachers. They would attend classes early and late in the semester, sit in the front rows—to make their faces familiar to the professors, a definite advantage during oral examinations, and most important to get the professor's signature of attendance in the Index. However, the courses in anatomical dissection were attended scrupulously.

It was my first face-to-face encounter with dead, naked, cold bodies with innards glistening in the frigid light of frosted window panes, with the eye-stinging, acrid odor of formalin and the forced nervous banter of students. The first unforgettable contact of my bare fingers with the cadaver's sallow chill; my fleeting glances at the tousled pubes and young women's ivory frozen breasts; and my first cut with the scalpel into the belly of soulless, bloodless, painless, unimpressed human flesh.

At lunch I hardly touched my food. A senior across from me at the table volunteered to clean my untouched plate. He told the freshmen at the table the old story of the anatomy instructor whose prank was to palpate the anus of a cadaver with his finger, lick it with his tongue and then challenge anyone to repeat it. There would always be one freshman who would bravely repeat the performance, only to learn that the instructor palpated with his forefinger but licked his middle-finger.

Soon the school atmosphere became tense. Because of the shortage of corpses and crowding in the dissection rooms, there was a ready issue for the nationalist Slovak students to rally around and protest against the admission of foreigners. Small groups would demonstrate in the corridors and there were a few anti-Semitic slurs. It seemed rather harmless compared with confrontations on Polish campuses. After a few days the tension dissolved, for a while at least, when all students joined in a mass gathering in the street in front of the school. The students blocked traffic on this heavily travelled thoroughfare and, unhampered by the police, stopped all vehicles, inspected passengers and only then allowed them to proceed. Students still in the school building would leave classes to join the tumultuous crowd outside. I joined the others.

Once on the street I was told that the demonstration was in honor of Professor Picard, the Belgian explorer and scientist, who was to visit our department of physics. Our physics professor went to the railroad station to escort the honored guest and the students decided to receive the guest with special attention. For this purpose they decided to stop

each approaching vehicle, look for the distinguished guest, tying up the traffic and generating turmoil and general merriment on the street. When after half an hour the professors finally arrived they were astonished at the goings-on. But they must have been more puzzled when the students opened the doors of the car and after a short greeting bodily seized Professor Picard and, to the delight of the cheering crowd, carried him up the large stairs leading to the third floor auditorium. The undersea explorer, an exceptionally tall gentleman, his face showing a mixture of incredulity and controlled indignation, winced repeatedly when pinched in his rear by the hysterical students. It ended with great decorum in the auditorium where he delivered his lecture. It was my first pleasurable participation in an unruly event involving a large crowd in the street.

After paying for tuition and textbooks my meager funds for the month were depleted. My roommate was in a similar situation. But always ready with practical solutions he decided to sustain himself, until the next allowance arrived, on bread, butter and tea. He assured me that he would be able to get butter free. The local bread was excellent but when my roommate unwrapped the butter it looked to me unlike any butter I had ever eaten. I discovered for the first time the taste of salted white fat of hog, lard. It was quite palatable at first but became less and less desirable as the days went by. After ten days of lard-and-bread diet I almost felt the grease oozing from my pores. Then I thought I detected a certain pastiness in my face. But my roommate, life-long porkeater that he was, was not only undisturbed, he gained weight. With masochistic malice I reminded myself of the ludicrous but nonetheless threatening proverb: "You become what you eat." I finally decided to quit eating lard and started on a bread-and-tea diet. I proved to myself that I could live on bread alone. After a week we got some money from home and thus ended our first but not last brush with food shortage.

As the winter approached, the confusion and anxieties that beset a freshman slowly subsided. The language difficulty that had loomed ominously at the onset lessened as one got familiar with the soft rounded Slovak and the acute sibilancy of Czech. Many professors, mostly trained in German, could hardly express their thoughts in Slovak anyway. They reduced their vocabulary to simple phrases, most welcome to a stranger. The few textbooks in Slovak and Czech were studied for the language rather than content as they were no competition for the German medical texts printed in Vienna or Berlin. This was true especially in the field of

illustrated books of anatomy, so necessary to the bewildered medical student, trying to cope with the overwhelming though logical complexity of the human body.

* * *

It soon became obvious that to study in our rooms was all but impossible. The cold wet cellar room became instantly overheated as the long stove pipe radiated its heat in all directions only to turn cold again with the slightest effort to reduce the flame of the crude kerosene burner. We gave up and joined the majority of students who made the coffeehouse their second home. A new routine developed. I would get up in the morning, quickly leave the cold room, laden with a cargo of books, and occasionally a box of human bones. After a ten minute walk I would enter the brightly lit coffeehouse, climb the staircase to the upper floor and quickly dispose my load on a chair beside a table. If early enough, I would try to take the same table, until I became well known to the waiter, who elevated me to the status of a *Stammgast* or regular patron and would reserve the table for me. In quick succession I would drink my coffee, eat rolls, read the headlines of the newspapers brought by the waiter, leave the books on the table and rush out to attend a lecture across the street, or laboratory in the not too distant laboratory building. I would then skip those classes considered irrelevant and hasten back to the café, to eat lunch and settle in for the day and evening at my table.

The upper floor of the coffeehouse was permanently occupied by medical students, mostly Polish Jews. Beside the *Stammgasts,* there was a constant stream of students dropping by to chat, to gossip, exchange advice, cadge a loan, swap books, play chess, use the bathroom, join in a meal with a more fortunate chap, listen to the music, or just get warm.

After a while one got to know not merely the residents of the upper floor but, if one's table was near the balustrade with a view of the downstairs and the main entrance, the life and routine of the coffeehouse. The habits of the guests soon revealed themselves and showed a fixed daily pattern. The first to arrive in the morning from the still dark streets were the students. Soon after, the Czech bureaucrats would follow, their smooth-shaven chins blue from the cold morning wind, their coat collars turned up. They would solemnly approach the reserved tables, remove their soft kidskin gloves and reach for a Prague newspaper newly arrived from the capital by the overnight train. They would

leisurely sip their coffee, exchange a few words with the occupant of a nearby table and, after a glance at the large round clock on the wall, they would leave, in no haste.

By now daylight would be seeping in through the large plate glass window, filling the house, and making the electric lights superfluous. Now Czech military men in uniform would arrive and take their seats, usually in the same section where the civilian officials sat previously. By comparison with the Warsaw military, the Czechs in uniform appeared to me less stiff and ceremonious when in public. They would blend with the relaxed atmosphere of the coffeehouse, smile at the waiters, even step aside courteously when they would cross one's path to the toilet. After a leisurely breakfast they would leave unhurriedly, probably confident, as I was, that World War I was the last of all great wars.

After a midday lull there would be an influx of *Hausfraus*. They would come in pairs or threesomes, bringing a new fragrance and filling the place with subdued chatter. They would order *Kafe mit Schlagsahne,* coffee with whipped cream, sprinkle it with finely powdered sugar, lick the tiny spoons with sensual finesse. They would chat with the waiters, making the younger ones tarry at their tables, buy cigarettes from them and ask for aspirin.

The orchestra would have already assembled on the podium in the rear of the coffeehouse and an anticipatory sweet jangle of the tuning up of instruments would fill the air. Then the band would strike up the first notes of an overture to a classical opera, the electric lights would be lit, the pace would quicken and the evening ushered in. The house would fill up quickly. The music would reach me through the warm blue haze and mix with the background chatter and the aroma of freshly ground coffee. As the young men and women ready for the theatre and cinema arrived, the air would acquire a new libidinous, piquant sweetness of the girls' moist skin and Coty's face powder.

Here, one was also surrounded by books, notes, boxes of bones, little notebooks filled with facts, numbers, scribbled down to help memorize the myriads of medical Latin terms, branches of major arteries, nerves, muscles and other details of the structural universe of the human body. Miraculously, the constant chatter in the background, the music, the coming and going around us, didn't interfere with the reading of medical textbooks, the memorizing and the necessary mental concentration. It would in fact relieve the tediousness of study and for many provided warm coziness for their study.

And as the night approached, the lower floor would empty and the waiters would join the students. They knew most of us, were privy to our financial circumstances and were a source of loans in an emergency. After midnight the orchestra would leave. But a gypsy violinist and a cymbalist would stay and then with only a few students and some lonely bachelors not too eager to go back to their cold flats, a gypsy reverie would start. For hours, sometimes into the early dawn, gypsy melodies would fill the dimly lit coffeehouse with the melancholy of unfulfilled yearnings of nomads, with music without beginning or end, tunes of wistful strangeness and throbbing pensiveness.

* * *

The month of December and winter vacation arrived quickly. It was an opportunity to go home for a full month. It could have not come in a more propitious time. The meager diet, the cold, humid weather and the persistent feeling of tiredness, all this would change for the better back home, I thought. I also was eager to see my old friend Berl. I had heard that he was back home, a disquieting fact because no one ever came back from Palestine for a visit. It meant that he came back to stay, an ominous development.

Back home, after a 14 hour train ride, tired but happy, I was soon enveloped in the warm and caring atmosphere of parents and sisters. My physical appearance and cough called for some action and before I could protest I was put to bed and fed good old home cooking. But the old remedy for my chest cold was not forgotten and on the insistence of practically everyone and, despite my then firm disbelief as a budding medical expert in home nostrums, I underwent the traditional ritual of cupping.

My aunt, wise in the art of cupping, was called in and in no time, on a table near my bed, lined up thirty glass cups, turned upside down on a clean white towel. On the side, a wick of a lamp gave the necessary flame from which a short wooden stick with a cotton ball immersed in alcohol would be ignited, quickly inserted into the glass-cup which would even more quickly be placed on my exposed back. The trick was always to heat the inside of the cup sufficiently to produce in it a negative pressure in this way creating a suction cup, and within a split second apply it to the skin. If done correctly, the skin under the cup would react with an immediate swelling and a circular bruise. After the whole

back, from the neck down to the waist was covered with those glass contraptions, I was covered tightly with a woolen blanket to lie there until I could convince the people surrounding my bed that indeed I could not stand it anymore. The cups were then removed one by one, giving the sound of a cork popping from a champagne bottle, the back was rubbed with camphor oil, an important remedy in the family arsenal, and everyone present smiled to witness these lifesaving ministrations. Anyone who has undergone this procedure must admit that it brings the most gratifying feeling of relief when the devilish glass contraptions are removed. Only the victim knows the pleasure of the removal of this ballast, which seems at any moment to prevent one from taking his last breath.

During the next few days I caught up with the news and gossip. My friends dropped in. Most of them were eager to hear of life abroad and were fascinated by my anatomy textbooks and the skull I had brought with me to study. I questioned them about Berl but they had suspiciously little information. As soon as I was back on my feet and ventured outdoors, I went to Berl's parents to find out what was happening. I found his mother in the kitchen. I had not seen her for at least three years, since Berl left for Palestine, and I realized how much she had aged. She sat in the kitchen, knitting needles and woolen threads on her lap, looking at me with an ashen greyness in her blue eyes. She recognized me and without a word got up, made a few steps toward the half open door to the next room, I knew so well, looked inside and in a surprisingly lively voice said "I am sure Berl would like you to come in." I stepped into the room where Berl lay in bed against a pile of cushions. He appeared to be almost sitting. I didn't recognize him. I approached his bed. His face was grotesquely swollen. His eyelids were puffed up so that his eyes were barely visible. He must have recognised me because he lifted his hand in a greeting, only to have it fall back on the bed. His bluish lips moved, but I heard only the sound of his shallow rapid breathing. I sat there, my hand touching his, until I thought he fell asleep. I then got up and slowly left the room, the house, and without stopping ran home through the streets.

Only the next day during my second visit did I get the whole story from his mother. She showed me a bundle of letters and postcards neatly arranged by dates and wrapped with a ribbon. There was separately, an envelope with snapshots. She implored me to read his letters, saying that they were certainly meant for me to read. She had no opportunity

before, because I was away and probably too busy to visit her. I sat in her kitchen and first looked over the photographs. Here was Berl on the deck of a ship with a group of smiling boys standing in a semi-circle with a sailor in the middle of the group. On the sailor's hat the inscription "Macedonia." Probably a Greek ship plying the Mediterranean from Trieste to Haifa. Then a somewhat faded, overexposed shot of Berl in front of a shack, near a cluster of prickly cactuses, his face somber and fatigued, his eyebrows drawn downward, and eyes half-closed in the blinding sunlight. There was a picture of him on a horse, a rifle on his shoulders and a *keffiya*—an Arabic headgear, his face all in smiles, in jest.

The postcards were from Trieste, from Haifa, one from Jerusalem, a reproduction of an old gravure showing the walls of the Old City, the copulas of the mosques, turbaned men stoutly sitting on camels and sheep and goats serenely grazing on the edges of the pastoral landscape. The letters, written initially on solid cream colored paper—obviously the stationary his mother packed in Berl's suitcase changed later into plain paper, pages torn from a copybook. It was Berl's familiar handwriting. Rows of even, unswerving letters starting right at the edge of the page and unbowed ending at the other margin.

He described his impressions of the port in Haifa, meeting friends who had left town before, his first friendly encounters with Arabs, the beauty of spring on Mount Carmel. I was struck by his sentimental style, his open admission of happiness, his exaltation over the color of red poppies, the blue sky and the assurance that with time his mother would share in all this. The later letters were shorter with fewer impressions and more inquiries about his friends in town and his father's health. There was then an interval of silence of almost four months which he acknowledged in a subsequent letter saying that he was very busy and that he had a grippe which he said they called here *pappatachi.* In the next letters he mentioned malaria which he called in yiddish *kadokhess* which could be interpreted both as a fever and the more ominous malaria.

There was a letter afterwards, a long letter describing the repulsion of an attack of Arab "marauders" on the communal settlement, the *kibbutz,* dismissing it as an episode, but still describing it quite vividly with details reminiscent of a military action. In this letter he asked his mother to see to it that his friends in town read it. He sounded proud without openly saying so. There was another gap of almost half a year

interspersed with a few postcards from Haifa in which he sent greetings without so much as a word of explanation for the reason for not staying in the kibbutz. However, the last letter explained it fully.

Berl had been in and out of a hospital in Haifa. He now admitted that he was suffering from chronic malaria, the tropical kind. The *kibbutz* he belonged to was surrounded by swamps which the members of the settlement helped to drain. Everyone who came to the place got the disease within three months after arrival. Medication was available, although the form of disease he had contracted was less amenable to treatment. In addition he had some kidney trouble which in his words "does not help."

Then there was a letter from a town friend in Tel Aviv who, obviously on the request of Berl's mother, talked things over with the doctor in the hospital. Things were somewhat different. "Berl," the friend wrote, "has malaria, but in addition, he lost one kidney. It was removed nine months ago, after Berl was shot in his abdomen during a night attack on the settlement while he was standing guard. Berl was posted on a rock overlooking the valley when a shot was fired from below, the bullet penetrated his abdomen and damaged his left kidney, which later became infected and had to be removed. The doctor said that a change of climate sometimes did wonders for chronic malaria victims and that a good diet might also help, something not easily available in Palestine."

Berl's mother did everything possible to bring him back home "for convalescence." It took the combined efforts of the doctor and the members of the kibbutz to convince Berl to go back to Poland "for convalescence." Here, despite the doctor's best efforts, the change of climate and the care, he was going downhill, swollen and feverish and lapsing into coma. There was no reason to keep him in the hospital anymore the doctors said.

I entered his room again. He did not respond when I called his name. I touched his hand and in a low voice, almost to myself, I said good-bye to my friend and left. He died two weeks after I returned to school.

* * *

The next two years provided little time for reading, or any extensive reflective thinking on political or social aspects of our lives. The first years of medical studies demand that you harness all your energies to the comprehension and memorizing of the mass of important and unimpor-

tant details accumulated by the anatomists, physiologists, chemists and physicists, pertaining to the structure and working of the human body. In the early nineteen-thirties this body of knowledge, although rapidly expanding had yet to arrive to a conclusive framework within which a bewildered student would be able to fit in the physiological and biochemical bits he had to memorize. My memory was decidedly visual and associative, and learning by rote was a chore that left my flesh and spirit weary. Whenever I could I would transfer my learning material into visual form.

To absorb more easily the static visual impressions of human anatomy I started drawing bones, organs and joints. Only through drawing did I come to realize the infinite variety of lines and the finesse with which nature has endowed the human skeleton. Here was the graceful curve of the ribs and the collar bone, the solidity of the thighbone, the beautiful and functional trabecular network of the head of the femur, the girder architectonics that gracefully and firmly give support to the pelvis and hence to the whole of the erect body. It was easier to learn details when the logic of structure and function and the sheer beauty of form came together in my mind. But it would not prevent one from sitting glued to the chair, to acquire *Sitzfleisch,* to pace the floor, to keep oneself awake by all means available. One way was to cram, to stuff the material into the brain in the company of a classmate.

The European system in medical school allowed the student to take his examinations, after two years of study, one by one. We would concentrate on one subject, take the exam, then go on to the next subject. There was no time limit but you could not progress to clinical subjects, thus in effect retarding the day of graduation, a heavy penalty for any of us. We would set ourselves a time limit necessary to cram for an exam, for instance a number of months for anatomy. This obviously could not be done in the coffeehouse and it meant months of virtual imprisonment in one's room, of intensive cramming, without letup, until one talked, thought, breathed and slept anatomy. The dread of failing the anatomy exam, of being forced to start again the months-long torture, was enough to glue one to the chair and to cause him to wake up at night with nightmares. Only someone who has had to memorize all six volumes of a German anatomy can really empathize with me.

To study for the histology (microscopic anatomy) examination I decided to look for a partner. It obviously had to be an uncompromising

grind who would be able to override any of my attempts to let up, in one of my many moments of spiritual or physical weakness. I found one. He was a top grind, a steady, studious fellow, who studied for exams with the tenacity of a bulldog. He appropriately had no sense of the pathetic and humorless aspects of grinding. His name was Rubin, and he was a Polish Jew of Lithuanian parentage, a *Litvak.* We lived together for one month during which we did absolutely nothing but study histology. I soon learned to dislike him intensely for his steadiness, his will power, for his machine-like cramming, and most of all for his total lack of any need for a humorous moment, or the necessity to joke for fun, or out of despair.

The only revenge I had on Rubin was in the morning. He would get up half an hour earlier, which meant when it was still dark. He had to pray. He would put on the phylacteries, as proscribed, and go through the whole sequence of prayers, for half an hour, while I was stretching leisurely in my bed, shamelessly congratulating myself for being free of the shackles of ritual. Never in my life did I enjoy more the grace of the gain of half an hour in bed than during his prayers. It also helped me to see in him a spark of humanity and to start liking him at least until noon. After one month of my agony, relieved only by his prayer, an agony which he did not even notice, we took the examination and parted company. It was an examination I handled with the greatest of ease, on which I got my best grade ever.

* * *

And so, one by one, I reduced the burden on my memory during the year 1931. The tensions normally surrounding examinations were increased this year by heightened anti-foreign, in actuality anti-Jewish, demonstrations in the lecture halls and outside the University. The nationalist Slovak student organization venting their dissatisfaction with policies of the central government in Prague decided to concentrate their activities in the University. Supported and incited by notoriously anti-Semitic German local student groups, the Slovak extremists started harrassing Jewish and foreign students. They were supported in this by a few faculty members, especially the younger ones, who were not advancing fast enough to replace the older members whose views were usually more liberal. Although the disturbances were not as violent as

in Poland, there were ugly brawls, anti-Semitic slurs and attempts to block entrances to lecture halls.

The tension also pervaded the examination room, especially during the anatomy sessions. The professor, of uncertain Slovak-German origin, a point seemingly of importance in faculty politics, publicly declared that he demanded from foreign students—meaning Jews from Poland—a much higher performance. In fact "they better be excellent." He had no difficulty in failing a Polish Jew because the examinations were oral and it was his choice of questions and his final judgment. I admit that my skin was creeping before my examinations and afterwards I did not believe for a while that I passed. I always felt a lingering "morning anxiety" when, later in life, during difficult periods I would have nightmares of failing my anatomy examination.

We lived now three in a room in a suburban community of working people. The landlady was an indulgent woman to whom we would often owe even the little rent she charged us. She had lost her husband, a railroad worker who had been killed in an accident and she now lived on a pension and ran a little shop in town. She had no children. The room was a godsend and quite appropriately discovered by Karel, the son of a Slovak Protestant minister. I met Karel in the coffeehouse where now and then we would become involved in lengthy discussions of a theological and political nature. The majority of Slovak students were Catholic and increasingly showed tendencies toward anti-Semitism. Karel must have been going through a phase of estrangement from his own environment. We took a liking to each other and soon were joined by a third student, a jovial, beer drinking fellow, Kalman, whose *credo* was: "Think communist and live capitalist." While Karel and I were trying to probe each other in our discussions on basic tenets of our views, Kalman provided a welcomed counterpoint that consisted of an unusual mixture of Marxism and buffoonery. Then the three of us, so markedly different from each other, decided to live together. It was probably a sudden effervescence of fellow feeling which seized us and kept us together for some time. We were seen in each other's company so frequently that we became known as the "three musketeers."

It was a time of respite from a long period of examinations. We slept late, roamed the streets, dropped in on friends, made the rounds of coffee houses where we spent the evenings, then drank young cheap wine, *"Heuriger,"* served from barrels in vaulted cellars with rows of long

tables and benches. We struck up casual friendships with other fellows, sometimes much older with whom we would make new rounds of cellars and taverns. Groggy and carefree we would sleep until noon treating our headaches in the afternoon with strong coffee.

These were strange months. There were days after bursts of ebullience when our nerves would be frayed and our debates would degenerate into verbal abuse. Then one or the other would walk out, slam the door and threaten to quit the trio. But in the evening we would all meet in the coffee house and again wander about town.

During one such falling-out I was sitting in our coffeehouse trying to clear my mind with coffee. Soon a fellow student, Mattner, joined me and brought up his old theme of why I would not join the Zionist student corporation. He was an inveterate bore. He could not see why I would not be willing to join though my views were Zionist. His repeated attempts to enlist me as well as my constant refusal did not discourage him from harping on the same string again. I must have been rude to him this time. I do not recall what I said but it was later pointed out to me that at neighboring tables some highly uncomplimentary invectives were heard from me, invectives that loudly explained why I would not join organizations whose membership included crashing bores. I do remember that Mattner walked away murmuring that I would hear from him. I soon forgot the incident.

However, next afternoon while sitting in the same place I was approached by two students known to me only by sight. I was somewhat surprised when I saw them at my table standing formally dressed and gravely announcing their wish to talk over certain urgent matters. I was more than surprised to realize that these were official *seconds* acting on behalf of "Mister Mattner" whose honor had been sufficiently injured by me to require his receiving satisfaction by a duel.

After recovering from my surprise bordering on bewilderment I expressed my belief that together with other outworn codes of behavior duels were medieval debris apparently not sufficiently washed away by the tide of human enlightenment.

The gentlemen remained unconvinced. They demanded, under the threat of officially declaring me dishonored, that I give them the names of two seconds who would represent me and assist them in the choice of arms, the time and place of the contest. Now people at nearby tables were listening to our exchange. I knew there were but two choices:

Either I could accept their challenge which would probably end one morning by reconciliation followed by beer drinking, without so much as a drop of blood being shed but only after prolonged hearings and conferences between seconds and other mediators; or I could make of this an occasion for ridicule. With tongue in cheek I loudly accepted the challenge and told them I was ready to give them two names of my seconds. But then I immediately added that inasmuch as I had the right of the choice of arms I'd instruct my seconds to demand forty-two-millimeter artillery fieldpieces. The roar of laughter that came from the other tables finally convinced the two seconds to leave.

For some reason I never thought of this episode as amusing.

* * *

After finishing the initial series of examinations—the first *rigorosum,* and starting clinical subjects, I was able to find time for my interests in the arts and humanities. I had two full years before the next examinations for the doctorate. The system in our medical school, based on the old free university principle, gave the student almost complete freedom as to how to use his time, provided he received the formal signatures of attendance and performed satisfactorily on the final examinations. This latitude allowed me to mix school duties with extracurricular activities according to my own inclinations and at my own pace.

It was 1932. America was in the throes of a disastrous depression. Germany was in a turmoil. Poland was in the lethargy of economic stagnation under the benevolent but inept reign of the aging Pilsudski. Czechoslovakia practised democracy gingerly with the hope that it could solve its Slovak and minority problem honorably.

I tried to understand the democratic character of the Czech people which in my eyes contrasted sharply with other Slavic nations. I got immersed for a while in the modern history of the Czechs. It was a fascinating story, so different from that of the Poles.

The Czech Reformation was the earliest European movement which fought for liberty of conscience against the Catholic church, after Jan Hus was burned at the stake for heresy. In contrast to the later Lutheran Reformation, the Czech resistance was not only against the authoritarianism of Rome but also against the bellicose German feudalism, and in the forefront of national emancipation. Such an early flicker of light

coming from the Czechs, illuminating the still dark medieval horizon, could only be interpreted as the harbinger of a popular deep seated yearning for enlightenment and liberty.

Some Czechs with whom I discussed their history contended that the Czechs started their fight for religious freedom too early. Therefore, they were subdued by the power of Rome and Spain and although they sowed the seeds of future European progress they did not reap the fruit of their labors until many centuries later, in the twentieth century. I began to understand the importance of Czech history to democracy. And I began to understand why I felt so unburdened and so free when walking the streets of medieval Prague which I visited many times and even in Bratislava.

I "rediscovered," to my embarrassment, after three years as a student of the Komensky University in Bratislava, the work and life of the leading intellect and educator of the seventeenth century, Jan Amos Komensky. Here was a humanist with a dream and a way how to educate and enlighten mankind. His concept of *pansophia,* the universal spread of knowledge among all men and all nations, was like music to my ears, to a wanderer knocking at the doors of others in quest of knowledge. All through life I have been gratified that my diploma carries the name of Komensky, the enlightened educator rather than the name of a King, as did the diplomas of other European Universities of that era. I was tired of kings and Komensky was a refreshing change.

The other man was Thomas Masaryk, the first President of Czechoslovakia, a man in his eighties at that time. I came to love him because for me he was the first authentic humanist and contemporary statesman who having written down his views tried to practise what he preached. Here was a living and active president of a republic who clearly presented his views on history, on religion, on ethics, on democracy, and on the Jews. It was Masaryk who gave support to my now faltering belief in humanism and Western European culture, a belief that needed immediate help, not from the past but from a living, trustworthy contemporary.

Masaryk made no bones about his anti-Semitism in his younger years. He told how in his place of birth, every child was educated in anti-Semitism by his family, school, church and society. His mother forbade him to go near Jewish houses "because they use the blood of Christian children for their Easter holidays." This superstition was so ingrained in the young Masaryk that whenever he met a Jew he "always stared at his

fingers to see if there was blood on them." And not until he became a student did he get rid of this superstition and of anti-Semitism. He took up his pen in the infamous blood-libel case against Hilsner, braving all insults, curses and suspicions, to see, in the year 1900, a victory for justice from the highest court of appeal. He fought the anti-Semitic fervor which, aided by the clerical press, reached a high pitch in the same year in the Czech lowlands by calling attention to the cultural and national meaning of the Hilsner case.

Masaryk, a religious man, did not accept any intermediary between God and man. This agreed with my early intuitive dislike of clericalism. In his words "each must be his own pope." He also was nearer to my own ethical precept when he wrote that it is possible to love your enemy but "as for myself I observe the command to be righteous to him." His optimism in living, in achieving justice here on earth, his opposition to communism which would do away with the individual, only fortified my own beliefs. I was in complete harmony with his views when he wrote on the concept of evil. The sensual, the material is not evil, the body is not worthless and not a source of evil, "the mind is."

* * *

One morning while on my daily bus ride to medical school I came face to face with an incident that forced me to take note of the political activities of some of my colleagues, that were in sharp contrast with my perception of the gratitude we owed to our host country, Czechoslovakia. The bus line connected several city districts, whose inhabitants, mostly workers, low city officials and shopkeepers, were a sociable, down to earth lot. As the bus left the suburb, a young woman got on and after paying her fare approached the passengers, one by one, offering pamphlets and assorted reading material, trying to engage them in conversation. After a few courteous refusals, the young woman with an unperturbed smile on her angular face engaged in a loud verbal interchange with a man who seemed to be offended by the material offered to him. Heads turned toward the disturbance and the bus conductor intervened trying to convince the woman of the inappropriateness of her conduct on a public conveyance.

I looked now more carefully at the woman and I recognized Rose, a Jewish student from Poland. The literature she was distributing was

communist propaganda. I joined the public in the request that she stop her activities. She must have received no preparation for this assignment because she looked somewhat puzzled by this lack of appreciation for her efforts and the hostile reaction of the public. But when she recognized me the bafflement in her eyes vanished. Her evangelistic simper, the oily smile of the pious and true believer, turned into a frown, her face hardened and as she passed down the aisle on her way out of the bus her eyes flashed at me a look of unconstrained hatred.

Although I understood her enmity toward me, not an unusual reaction toward a fellow countryman who chose to join the crowd against her, the intensity of her hostility was unexpected. It vexed me long after I left the bus and persisted to puzzle me for many days until one evening while sitting at my usual place in the coffeehouse things started to unravel. In front of me, at a nearby table Decker was holding court. He was surrounded by his usual coterie but with a newly arrived blond, plump girl, a first year student, Irene at his side.

Decker was the leader of the communist faction of Jewish students from Poland. He was a well-built, midsize man with a firm jaw, a full blond mustache and steely eyes set deep under heavy eyebrows. Son of a Jewish banker he refused, according to rumor, to accept his father's allowance and lived frugally from an unknown source. Although outspoken and adamant in his political views he maintained personal contacts and even friendships with students of different convictions. Although differences between the various factions of the Jewish student body, ranged from Zionism through socialism to communism and resulted in heated debates, the antagonism did not usually acquire a personal character, and students of opposing political views were friends, studied together and shared living quarters. There were, however, instances when acts of extreme militancy would become so obnoxious as to result in personal animosities, mostly stemming from the communist doctrine that "the end justifies the means."

Although the communist faction was small in number it was vocal and cunningly exploited the liberal principles of other students, Zionists and independents. During elections to the Jewish student organization, a non-political body organized mainly for mutual financial help and representation before academic authorities, the communist faction under Decker's leadership would amass a sizable vote, out of proportion to its number. The Czech police and the academic authorities were less than happy to have the local communist party, which was legal, use

foreign students to do their propaganda legwork. They would retaliate by denying visas or informing the Polish police who in turn would deny passports to students returning from summer vacation. The police, not having the names of communist students would indiscriminately deny passports to many hapless students who, unable to return to their studies, would face disaster, the loss of their hard-won standing in medical school.

The plight of these students resulted in an intervention by the president and secretary of the Jewish student organization with the local police, only to be told that the whole problem could be solved, if the names of communist students would be made known to the authorities. This put the representatives of the students in the unenviable position, either to turn informer on their communist members or to allow the wrecking of the careers of many innocent colleagues, who through no fault of their own were denied exit passports and visas. The resulting tug of war between the Decker group and us stirred up bad blood among the students. Decker would not relent exploiting our reluctance to submit a list to the authorities. We finally won visas for the students by appealing to the Ministry in Prague which overruled the unwarranted police procedure. However, Decker was forced to stop his students from distributing propaganda in public places. Rosa whom I saw in the bus apparently did not submit to Decker's orders, an unprecedented breach of discipline for a communist.

While the group at the table before me listened to Decker's dialectics and Irene's spellbound gaze was riveted on him, Rosa appeared. She walked up the staircase to the upper floor of the coffeehouse with a determined masculine stride, approached Decker's table and took a chair to join the group. Almost simultaneously Decker stood up and left the floor, and with him Irene and the whole group, leaving Rosa sitting at the table. She then got up and slowly walked out, alone. There was buzzing on the floor as the spectators quickly assessed the situation. Decker had ditched Rosa, his faithful comrade and mistress for Irene, the curvaceous featherhead. Rosa's super-orthodox effort to start the propaganda bus trips on her own had been to no avail. I understood her wrath now. She was slighted both as a comrade and a mistress. She quit school and was not heard of again.

Decker's fortunes took a decisive setback after the outbreak of World War II. On my way through Russia I came across him, a broken and disillusioned man.

* * *

The year 1933 arrived and in January the unbelievable news that President Hindenburg had appointed Hitler Chancellor of Germany. Only two months before, the German Nazi party lost two million votes in the election and it looked at that time that Nazism in Germany was on the decline. It was unbelievable also that this fanatical enemy of humanity and democracy could come to power by democratic means. Although he represented a minority in the cabinet, he quickly called for new elections and received a majority by skillfully exploiting the fire that broke out in the German Reichstag. He then obtained dictatorial powers from the new Reichstag and became the *Führer.* Darkness started to descend over Europe. But many of us still believed, together with the press that we read, that once this political agitator was made responsible for Germany and his screaming oratory faced and exposed to reality he could not possibly last long.

There was nothing one could do but turn to one's studies. Life had to go on. Cash was scarce and meals had to be skipped. A desperate student found a woman, a widow with special cooking abilities, who was to give us dinners in her home at an appealingly low price. She would have to have, however, at least twenty students to be able to do it. We organized a group and started to take our meals there, a dinner which had to be our main meal for the day. Quickly we got used to assembling in her large living and dining room and while eating discussed all topics of possible interest to us. Around the table there was always the house dog *Fifi,* a dog that became quite well fed and plump from the bits offered to him by the students who could well sympathize with the hungry look in Fifi's eyes.

After dining at the widow's table for five weeks during which time we all agreed that the price was right, the whole enterprise came to a sudden and strange end. Whose fault it was or whether the demise of the undertaking was justified were points debated for a long while in the student community without a final answer. The group ceased to return to the widow's table after the following episode: One day, after soup, meat was served and one of the freshmen students who probably was by now well versed in anatomy, tried with his knife and fork to discern the organ from which the meat on his dish originated. He must have been baffled by his inability to identify the origin of his meat specimen because he brought it to the attention of the rest of us, senior students.

He maintained that the specimen before him, a fleshy piece of meat was a heart. We looked at it carefully and agreed with him. But he demanded more. He was a meticulous fellow, a budding scientist probably. He asked us to establish the animal species to which the heart on his dish belonged. "It is too small for a calf and too large for a chicken or even a goose or turkey," he pronounced with authority. There was a long silence as each of us could not but agree with this fellow's differential diagnosis. Then suddenly, someone started looking around and under the table. And then he said the fateful words: "Where is Fifi?" After everyone suddenly stopped eating what was left on the dish, and after the search for Fifi ended in vain, we left in silence. It was an inglorious end to a good cheap meal.

* * *

Hitlerism was on the march in Germany but in Czechoslovakia, in Bratislava, in Poland, in my hometown, life went on. Hitler was busy with internal affairs, people in other countries went on with their daily lives, their daily troubles and occupations. Students prepared for examinations. The sun shone as usual. Even the papers got tired of the happenings in Germany, and for a time relegated them to secondary news except for sudden unusual flare-ups. But outrages against the Jews in Germany were on the rise. Here there was no letup.

On April 1, 1933 the German government sponsored a nationwide boycott against Jewish enterprises, sending Storm Troopers to block the doors of Jewish shops. Books written by Jewish and progressive writers were burnt in the streets at midnight. A newly issued law barred non-Aryans from public service. Those holding office had to prove their "pure blood" at least three generations back. The terms "half-Jew" and "quarter-Jew," previously a parlor game, a subject for idle, malicious gossips, now became the language of the German law.

These were indeed trying times when the German's evil deeds evoked in many of us desperate attempts to reconcile our beliefs and our hopes with the reality of events. Hitler was marching and his stormtroopers reigned lawlessly in the streets of Germany. Anti-Semitic forces in countries bordering Germany were encouraged to raise their ugly heads with impunity. Even the liberal and socialist parties were afraid because now they could not disregard the latent anti-Jewish feelings of populations easily excitable and looking for a scapegoat for the unemployment

that plagued Europe. France, in the throes of one parliamentary crisis after another, had only weak or ineffectual responses to Hitler's plans. The abolition of Jewish rights in Germany, denounced duly in the liberal French-Anglo press, hardly touched the mass of the people in these countries because the issue was not portrayed convincingly that the Jews are just the first to suffer but that it will not end with them. Nothing in 1933 could have been further from the mind of the French and British masses than the fate, of all things, of German Jews. Hitler's agents saw to it that those European newspapers with endemic anti-Semitic tendencies be encouraged now to make Jews the "war mongers who are against an essentially peaceloving Germany which has no expansionist claims, a Germany ready to make a non-aggression pact with any European nation."

And so some of us in despair looked for a ray of hope, of light. And at that time communism and the Soviet Union had much to promise. Short range and radical solutions appeal to people in desperation. When a nation that was known to Europeans as "the nation of poets and philosophers" reverted overnight, under our very eyes, to the Dark Ages; when American democracy was seemingly helpless to come to grips with a disastrous unemployment; when important personages in European conservative parties looked toward a shrieking, demoniac fanatic with undisguised sympathy; when the British Mandatory Power was firmly against the implementation of the Balfour Declaration—there was little choice for the more impatient, Jewish youth than to listen to the voice of communist propaganda in Europe which seductively promised solutions for all men and all nations.

There was a moment, precisely seven days, when I reached for books on dialectic materialism and communism. Suddenly, I saw the light. I was about, like Paul on the road to Damascus, to turn my back on everything that was my outlook, my conscience, my *credo.* Here I was each day, bit by bit, losing my belief in the humanity of nations, in whose hands lay the destiny of Europe, and, more immediately, that of the Jews. Either one would become a cynical spectator to his own spiritual disintegration by disbelieving all humanity or embrace a doctrine that seemed to contain a set of principles that made economic and political sense that contrasted with the incoherence of democratic "parliamentarian" anarchy as well as the xenophobic, primitive and bloodthirsty principles of fascism. Suddenly Marxism seemed to me a satisfying, logical system of thought that answered all questions of

economics, history, politics, religion and even that of art and science. The almost hypnotic and invigorating effect on my well-being was most unusual. My walk acquired more bounce, my posture straightened, my eyes opened more widely. I saw more, I understood more. Suddenly I felt that there was an answer to everything.

After a few days of intoxication, perhaps during a natural cresting of such a powerful mental seizure, I started looking for a more sober evaluation of my sudden revelation. I read again the writings of Masaryk, the only contemporary in whom I still had full confidence, who was not in the business of wooing adherents to his political views and to decide casuistically and authoritively about right and wrong, but who was lucid and humane, and above all who by his personal conduct was always able to get my confidence.

And in his writings I came across one of his thoughts that communism cannot succeed because it is against human nature. Masaryk came to the conclusion that communism could only exist in a very confined society such as an order of monks. In larger, open societies it must end in hypocrisy and worse. I suddenly saw my friends who were the most outspoken in their belief in communistic ideology and I contrasted their rhetoric with their personal conduct, their relationship to others of their immediate surrounding, indeed to their parents. Their fanatical self-righteous was repugnant to me and so was their casual treatment of the needs of the Jewish people, needs that "will suddenly disappear" under the influence of a new messianic age of global communist love. I now recalled the smug, unjust, anti-Jewish writings of Karl Marx, his contempt for the Jewish people from whom he originated. The Jewish communists had no time for the Jews. They were too busy with the ills of the world.

In the next few days I tried to listen more carefully to their debates, to their doctrinaire, authoritarian way of reasoning, the bending of facts and events to a line given from above. Almost by instinct, with some help of Masaryk, I was, after seven days of intoxication, back to my fragile but my *own* spiritual defense lines.

* * *

In April 1934 I visited my family for Passover. It was a special occasion, a rare reunion because my brother from Amsterdam whom we had not seen for nine years was to be present. I arrived a day before him.

Not much seemed to have changed that I could see. If there was difficulty in holding one's head above water, in earning the daily bread, it was submerged in the pre-holiday atmosphere. It was the time when bottoms of barrels were scratched to celebrate in the way of tradition. Walking the streets I exchanged smiles and words of cheer, those carefree non-obliging, short lived words when greeting old friends, knowing that serious topics will not surface and jar. It was no time to scratch surfaces.

But before my brother arrived from Amsterdam I learned he was not going to return to Holland but that he was on his way to settle in Palestine. Our reunion gained a new dimension. When he arrived and we gathered around the large table in the center of the room, we sat for a while in silence looking at the man who left this house a boy. He now had a serious face, too serious for the boy I still saw in him. He looked at us with the look of one trying to read from our faces what had happened to us during these long years, what happened to him? And then when my older sister came into the room, he looked at her in amazement. He greeted her somewhat haltingly. I could not understand his stiffness. After a while he got up quite abruptly and stepped into the other room. I went after him.

He was sitting on my mother's bed. I had to speak to him to draw him out of his trance. I asked him why he had left the room. He sat silent for a while and started quizzing me about our sisters, their daily lives and habits. I was at a loss to understand his strange interest. Then with a motion of his hand he pointed toward his lips and asked: how could his sister sit at the family table with lipstick on her lips? I hardly believed my ears. I started laughing. His years in Holland had made him something of a puritan. Then he announced gravely, "Only harlots paint their lips." I knew then that he was ready to become a pioneer in Palestine.

Later he told us that there was no future for Jews in Europe. He had left Holland where the Jews enjoyed all the rights of citizens. His respect for the Dutch people was obvious. But when Hitler came to power in Germany he decided to go to Palestine. Like a cancer, he said, Germany will infiltrate every corner of European liberty and of human dignity. He had obtained an immigration certificate because the quota for Palestine immigration for the Dutch Zionists, although small had but few takers. He would be the first in our family to go to Palestine. We hung on his words. My mother dabbed at her eyes. The next day we all sat for

a family photograph, and then celebrated the exodus of the Jews from Egypt.

* * *

It was now the fifth year of my medical studies, the winter of 1934. My financial state had become quite desperate. My father's ability to help me financially was almost nil. I was spending time now in the department of orthopedic surgery learning the fundamentals of splinting broken bones and the art of applying plaster of Paris. An important part of treatment in the department was massage. Although massage was not a part of the medical curriculum, this activity being relegated to technical personnel, I became interested in the subject and received permission to participate in a course of massage which allowed me to become proficient in this generally neglected form of physical treatment. It also helped me to improve my finances because I could function as a part-time masseur.

Soon I was able to perform medical massage especially useful in cases wtih forced inactivity of muscles, after a fracture of a limb, and also in some cases of arthritis and polio. I became associated with a professional masseur, an instructor in general massage, or of the whole body, which in contrast to strictly medical massage, was used as a tonic and general relaxant, mostly a procedure for the well-to-do. This type of massage, although of some benefit to those subjected to it, is more beneficial to the masseur himself. Apart from the financial reward, which can be very high, especially when dealing with the very wealthy, the masseur develops the supple muscles of his hands and a heightened perception and feeling in his fingers through the constant touching, pressing, stroking and kneading of the skin and muscles. I developed the difficult ability to touch in a way both gentle and firm.

Bratislava was nestled at the feet of a range of mountains and there was a good deal of winter skiing, and with it the strains and fractures sustained by ski enthusiasts. One of the unfortunate skiers who sustained damage to the ligament surrounding the knee cap became my patient. She was a woman of thirty, a native of Germany and a passionate skier, who could not wait to get back to the white powder in the mountains, but whose quadriceps, the muscle connected with the kneecap, had to be brought back to shape through exercise and massage. I got the assignment through the professor who treated her, and soon I

made regular visits to her apartment where she lived with her daughter Bridget.

I found the patient, Monica, either reclined on a couch or, when up, on crutches. She was a vivacious brunette with a ready smile, a tanned face with a tendency to wrinkle when smiling. She kept her lips carmine red with an almost invisible film of lipstick frequently moistening them with the tip of her tongue. Her large, almost black eyes, although participative in the sparkling ebullience of the face, would unexpectedly darken with a pall of gloom.

Her physician, who had referred me to her, instructed me that she needed a short two-week course of treatment. After a few sessions, however, she started preparing coffee and we would sit and converse in a low voice, while Bridget worked on her school assignments or played her piano exercises. The daughter's face resembled the mother's, especially her eyes. But there was little sparkle in them. Instead incongruously for her age, a somber, and severe gaze would greet me when she opened the door. While engaged in exercising her mother's leg and massaging her thigh I would feel Bridget's sharp, penetrating look, behind me, and if I would inquire about her school work I would find in her eyes a look of defiance and suspicion.

Monica's knee improved steadily although it took more than two weeks. I became fond of the afternoons I spent in her apartment, the ambience of the winter twilight and the music she played while her aching left leg was stretched out under the piano. Even Bridget was now more gentle and would alternate between aloofness and spontaneously joining us, at the table, sometimes lingering in my proximity and, catlike, fleetingly brushing my thigh with her bony flank. By now there was no more treatment, the crutches were discarded, and I would visit in the evenings alternately carrying flowers or a box with pastry.

Early in February Bridget left for a week's visit in Frankfurt. Her mother told me of her departure with a sudden gloom in her eyes, a gloom that lasted much longer than that to which I was already accustomed. She must have thought of something gruesome because she suddenly froze, lost in thoughts, her eyes widened and she stretched her arms like a sleepwalker, reaching for someone. Startled, I took her hands in mine. She relaxed her hands momentarily, a slight tremor shook her body and smiled at me, a forced smile concealing torment.

I told her I had tickets to the opera. She was eager to spend the evening outside her apartment and without hesitation, as there was not

much time left, she dressed, powdered her nose, sprayed cologne behind her ears and once again her face was alive as she briskly walked in front of me out the door into the frosty evening. She was very amused when she heard the story of how I acquired my theater tickets and was unable to stop chuckling and laughing all the way to the opera house.

We had first row tickets for the Czech opera "The Bartered Bride" by Smetana. In the role of the heroine, the bride, was a well-known diva who also happened to be the lover of my friend, a senior medical student. It was he who gave me a pair of front row tickets, together with a bouquet of flowers, which I was supposed to throw gently on the stage, after the end of the main aria sung by the heroine. It was a pleasant way of getting free tickets. I followed his instructions and when prolonged, enthusiastic applause sounded in the hall, I participated with resounding alacrity.

After the performance we left the theatre humming the catchy, folksy tune from the opera: "Why should we not make merry,/when God gave us good health,/and mother's little house." The gay crowd around us spilled out from the theatre into the streets. Many headed toward the coffeehouses unwilling to break the spell of the evening and return to their homes. We felt the same and soon were sitting in a cozy booth of a dimly lit small coffee house, a gypsy band filling the air with strings full of the agitated melancholy of the *csardas*. Later in the evening, Monica seemingly relaxed said, "This music was made for me," her head was now leaning backward and resting on the cushioned walls of the booth, her eyes half closed, "you want to dance and weep at the same time." Suddenly her voice hardened. She opened her dark eyes and said, "I am unfair to you. I should not bother you with my own shadows. You like to look at the bright side of things. At your age you are entitled to it."

I protested, "Age has little to do with one's outlook. We are only a few years apart"—I tried to forget the gap of eight years—"Anyway one is born with his temper engraved in the chromosomes. You seem to have double-faceted chromosomes"—I quipped—"capable of giving you boundless zest and radiance but with small dark shadows. Let me enjoy the sunny side."

She smiled faintly. "Sorry, doctor, your theory has a weakness. Ten years ago I was a happy bride, for many years a happy mother." I looked at her more attentively. I knew she was about to reveal a clue to the mystery surrounding her. I knew little about her private affairs except that she was divorced. She straightened up in her seat as if trying to

leave. But then she made a to and fro motion so that I could not make out whether she was trying to come nearer to me or go away. But then she looked strangely at me and uttered, "My father is a Jew. He was baptized before I was born. He never told me."

She leaned back as if exhausted. I sat musing in silence. A wave of warmth rose from the depth of my chest toward my throat. My eyes moistened and I saw her now through a fog. Then in a hoarse voice, almost choking, I blurted: "So what?" She looked at me in disbelief as if I did not comprehend the weight of her confession. Then she added, "Bridget's father is a Nazi."

* * *

That night I woke up shivering, in Monica's apartment. I felt exhausted, my head heavy from the wine we had drunk in the coffeehouse and the drinks she poured later from a bottle now standing almost empty on the bedstand. I lay naked, flat on my back in Monica's bed. She was stretched along me, her toes touching the wooden frame, her head and the black stream of her hair on my chest. Through the half opened window light from a street lamp lent a metallic pallor to her face. Her teeth shone bluish-white through the open still carmined lips. For a moment I found it unreal. Then I wished I could close the window but I did not dare move.

I must have moved because she stirred. Without awakening she turned on her side and curled up. Her knees were now almost under her chin while her thighs flattened the white rotundity of her breasts and elevated the reddish-brown firmness of her nipples. I got up, closed the window and pulled back the drape. I covered her and lay on my side near to her rhythmically breathing body, then fell asleep. When I woke up I heard the screeching of a street car turning a corner, then Monica's movements in the kitchen. The aroma of brewing coffee slowly penetrated the air of the room. I pulled the window drapes and looked out to the street below. People were walking to their work and their shops. There was a blue frosty sky above. We were here all to ourselves.

I spent the next three days in the coziness of her apartment, most of the time engulfed in the bliss of her bed. I would run out to do some shopping and one evening we spent, hushed, close to each other, holding hands in the darkness of a movie house, on the outskirts of town. Out in the street the frosty wind painted her cheeks bright red. She ran up the

stairs to show me that she could be there first, then still out of breath would sit at the piano and play a waltz, "Two Hearts Beat in Three-Quarter Time." She looked into the mirror, then put her hair in braids, looking like a schoolgirl. I was in a state of an amazing sensual awareness. I was tasting with the food the moisture of her lips, perceiving everywhere the fragrance of her hair and skin, my fingertips quickened by the roundness and smoothness of her contours. We laughed without reason, at silly news items in the paper, at the way the unattended teakettle was whistling angrily when we suddenly became oblivious to the outside world overtaken by a new wave of urgency and expectation. We talked in spurts like two siblings meeting after a long absence, about remote happenings from childhood, not believing that we finally had met one another, then we would fall into silence and sleep.

There was not a word about Bridget, about her father. At the end of the three days, before we parted, she suddenly cried, then smiled, then looking strangely at me for a while said as to herself: "It was true, like the sparkling snow, the fresh baked bread, the daisies, the cherries."

* * *

Monica was a *Mischling.* In the Teutonic jargon that thrusted itself on our ears it meant a "half-Jew." Bridget was a "quarter Jew." Bridget's father Otto who for years detested "the feverish shriek of the Austrian upstart" became transformed when Field Marshall Hindenburg put the destiny of the *Vaterland* into the hands of "the upstart." He immediately joined the Nazi party like his colleagues. Monica looked after her household, her husband, her Bridget. Monica was not interested in politics. She was apprehensive about her husband's new political excitement, his new search, his new friends. She thought of it as a transient flareup of his old youthful need for comradeship.

Her father also changed. He was an official of the municipality, a war veteran and a collector of old pipes. When he was thrown out of his job he looked at Monica with tired eyes but in a steady voice he told her that he was a converted Jew. Monica who heard this news in her parents' house was seized with a fit of laughter, then with a paroxysm of inarticulate shouts and shrieks that twisted her face and body. Then there was silence in her father's home, while on Monica's face rivulets of tears ran unhindered.

Back home she told Otto the news. His face changed from white to

red. He shattered the glass he was holding in his hand, throwing it violently against the wall. Then with an ashen face he called someone on the phone and with a choked voice questioned the other party, then listened, standing at attention, the receiver at his ear. With his lips tightened he packed his bag. He did not look at Monica nor did he speak to her and left through the kitchen door while the bell was ringing at the front entrance. It was Bridget back from school.

Monica was now divorced. She left Germany with Bridget who was told of the divorce but not of the blood tangle. They lived now in a furnished flat on an allowance given to Monica by her maternal grandfather. He was a Protestant Slovak over eighty years old, who had settled in Frankfurt at the end of the century and who made a small fortune as a roofing contractor. The old man, when he heard of the events from Monica's mother, turned purple, almost apoplectic, then spat, called Otto a brownshirted *Schweinkopf,* and advised Monica to leave the country for Czechoslovakia. "This madness will not last," he said, "there is a God in heaven."

* * *

I saw Monica for the next two months, mostly mornings when Bridget was in school. The child's attendance at school became erratic. Bridget, after her visit in Frankfurt, grew pale and thin. She sat silently staring into space. The doctor prescribed a tonic containing iron and advised fresh air. One Sunday we all went skiing. But Bridget refused to fasten her skis to her shoes. The trip ended with our return by train in silence. Early in March they left for Germany. I received a postcard in May showing a vase with daisies. There was no mention of Bridget and no return address. I waited long for a sign of life from her but she vanished like a flame in the thickening fog.

* * *

During the rest of the winter of 1935 there was again a time of confinement within the bounds of examinations. The news from the outside world was perceived with my sensitivity dulled by preoccupation of a higher, more immediate priority. It was now the end of the tedious years, of the quest for a piece of *terra firma,* on which my future would be hinged. Early in the summer of 1935 I received my diploma of doctor

of medicine. On the left side of the diploma, filled with Gothic printed Latin, there was an annotation in Slovak: The bearer of this M.D. degree has forfeited his rights to practice medicine in the Republic of Czechoslovakia.

I was twenty-four.

V

THE YEARS OF HOPE DEFERRED

I RETURNED back home a few months after the death of Pilsudski. After his successful *coup d'etat* in 1926, expectations ran high that the promising first steps of his government to alleviate the plight of the Polish Jews would bear fruit. These expectations were not fulfilled. The Pilsudski regime moved finally toward dictatorship in internal matters and in 1934 concluded a non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany followed by a visit of Goebbels to Warsaw. In the same year Poland had renounced its commitments to its minorities, a part of the Versailles treaty, helping the Nazis in repudiation of the very treaty that underwrote Poland's independence. Still the death of Pilsudski filled the Jews with sorrow because he was the only leader whose personal prestige seemed to keep the anti-Semitic avalanche from breaking with full force. After his death, his successors, the group of "Colonels," both by their own initiative and under pressure of radical nationalistic *endek* groups, embarked on a program of overt anti-Jewish practices.

Coming back to Poland after finishing my medical studies in Czechoslovakia, where I had no right to practice, brought home the inescapable conclusion, "There is no avenue of escape." What was necessary, in order to survive, "while waiting for better times," was primarily to resist despair. Every possibility had to be found to keep occupied while at the same time, preserving self-dignity and contempt for those who under the cover of patriotism were ruining Poland economically and spiritually, by putting themselves squarely into the fold of the real enemy of the Polish people, the German Nazis.

The rest of the summer of 1935 I spent in my home town. Back from studies in Warsaw and abroad were others like myself, Jewish students and graduates. I joined this circle of young men who spent the summer trying to forget the gnawing thought that come fall they'd have to put their shoulders to wheels going nowhere. In the summer, this was easier to do. People who do not till the land come to look upon their idleness in the summer as a normal state in satisfying harmony with the seeming torpidity of nature.

As for our summer clique, there were two law students, two medical students back from France, and a girl, a student of Polish literature back from Warsaw. There were two other girls in the circle, whose education did not go beyond the gymnasium but who kept pursuing their cultural habits so as to be socially acceptable to the professionally educated, though unemployed young men. They were erudite and witty young women, *panny na wydaniu,* waiting to get married, unable to break loose of the bonds of convention and circumstance.

There was Fisher, who after his graduation from the school of agronomy became the manager of a farm some ten miles from town, a farm that belonged to an absentee Jewish landlord. A Jewish agronomist employed on a Jewish farm was a rarity in this part of Poland and we were quite fortunate to have Fisher join our summer clique. Fisher's life in the summer was that of the intensive activity of a farmer, supervising hired hands, buying seed and farming tools, selling wheat and barley, doing his own bookkeeping and quite accurately forecasting the weather.

He was lonely. On the one hand he was remote from the peasants with whom he came in daily contact. On the other hand, he was never invited by the more cultured owners of farms, mostly descendants of Polish petty gentry, who occasionally asked him for professional advice.

Fisher would walk with us through the fields of ripening wheat, waves of spikes filled with seeds leaning with the breeze. He would caress them with the palm of his square brown hand stopping from time to time to probe the kernels of grain with his fingers.

He told me that he was trying to give work to a group of *Chalutzim,* Zionist pioneers, who lived nearby in a shack preparing themselves for emigration and settlement in Palestine. There were six young men who for over a year had been trying hard to get employment as hired hands in farms and a nearby sawmill. Because of the widespread unemployment, the peasants were not too happy, indeed were quite suspicious, of

these strange townies who despite their obvious education, for some mysterious reasons, were trying to become ordinary field workers. Fisher had to be very cautious in hiring them so as not to upset his working and neighborly relations with the peasants. Now, because of the hay-cutting season and the approaching harvest, it was easier to give the *chalutzim* a break. I heard that Hilman was one of them, and this added to my eagerness to visit the group.

One of the girls in our group, Hela, was also interested in the visit. She was Hilman's friend and it was known that for years they had been on the verge of getting married. It was one of those not infrequent relationships in town whose consummation was frustrated by economic and conventional barriers. Hela, now twenty-two, the daughter of a once-prosperous merchant, madly in love but unable to provide a dowry which could carry her and Hilman through the first years of marriage, could not expect to gain her parent's consent to a marriage that would start in poverty. Hilman, who had dropped out of gymnasium and tried for a while without success to keep body and soul together finally became a *luftmensch*. He lived with his widowed mother, merely subsisting and did not have the slightest prospect of being able to maintain a wife and family. Hela's parents expected her to marry someone who would be in a position not to need a dowry. Obviously this could only be someone wealthy but from a lower social class, without education and social graces, or an older man, a widower. Hela would not go for that.

Hilman believed that for the time being he had no right to Hela, a bright and pretty creature, destined for a better life. He decided to emigrate to Palestine, nursing the hope that after he settled there, Hela would join him. In Palestine small-town conventions and financial necessities would become matters of no importance. He'd join a kibbutz. For the last two years Hilman had gone about trying to get a certificate to emigrate to Palestine with dogged determination but without success. He lived with the group here in their little camp outside town in order to be able to claim some priority because of his preparation as a worker on the land and more important so that he could show his ability and determination to go through the tough regime of manual work, deprivation in a shack and in the winter, the cold and semi-starvation.

It was a rainy Sunday when we visited the camp, and the *chalutzim* were resting. We entered the shack. In the middle of the uneven earth floor stood a table and two chairs. There was an iron stove in the corner. Clothes hung on nails on the walls. On the windowsill a pot with

geranium contrasted starkly with the surrounding drabness. One *chalutz* was reading sitting on a chair near the window. The other was repairing his clothes. We found Hilman on the floor, on a sack stuffed with straw, a book in his hands. He was grinning and glad to see us. He wore a white shirt and khaki trousers. He was barefoot.

Hilman apologized for the lack of seating for the guests. So we sat on the table and the two girls who were with us were given the chairs. We brought some food with us provided by Fisher and in no time we were engaged in a lively conversation on the merits and future of the preparations for emigration—the *hachsharah*. It was an increasingly popular topic among young Jews in Poland. But I was impatient to hear of the exploits of one of the *chalutzim*, Aaron, who had actually journeyed to Palestine without a British certificate, and was turned back.

It needed some coaxing to get the story out of him. Aaron was a taciturn, short and wiry fellow in his mid-twenties already showing two deep furrows running down his face. When Hilman finally got Aaron talking, he himself left the table discreetly and stood at the window holding hands with Hela, looking in silence at the geranium. Meanwhile the somber Aaron warmed up to his story.

It was the story of the trial of going to Palestine illegally. Because of the sudden great number of Jews attempting to flee Germany, Polish Jews were now looked upon as less of an endangered species and the few certificates doled out by the British government were now even fewer. News was circulating that an "illegal" transport of Jews from a Greek ship had landed safely on the beaches of Tel Aviv. It was the *Velos* with accommodations for 150 passengers but for this occasion with 350 illegals aboard. The news electrified young Zionists in Poland, even though two casualties were suffered, when one of the boats sent from the shore to bring in the passengers from the *Velos* capsized. A girl drowned and a boy's skull was smashed on a rock. Still the news was celebrated with great joy.

Encouraged by this success a second transport on the *Velos* was organized and Aaron joined the group. He left by train for Athens, after many in town pitched in to cover his travel expenses. He boarded the *Velos* with the rest of the illegals hoping to land in a few days time on the shore of his life-long dream. But this time fate or rather the British Government interfered. Alerted by the success of the first transport, British agents were on the lookout in Mediterranean ports and also closer attention was being paid by the police to the beaches of Palestine.

But for Aaron and the rest of his comrades, boarding the *Velos* and starting the voyage was already the beginning of a new life and as soon as the Greek shoreline disappeared there was time for singing and dancing. The Greek captain and the crew mixed with the passengers clapping hands to the beat of the dancers. But after two days when the ship arrived at night within six miles from Tel Aviv there was suddenly heard the noise of police motor boats and searchlights from the shore swept the horizon.

The captain turned the ship about immediately and proceeded in haste to a safe legal distance. Short of fuel and in no mood to let his ship be seized by the British the captain steered her toward the Syrian shore and from there to the nearest Greek island—Cyprus. He anchored in the bay at night only to discover in the morning that the ship was in full view of some figures who on the balcony of an onshore house were busily pointing long spyglasses at her. The Union Jack was merrily waving on the mast in front of the building, no doubt a British consular office. The captain got some fuel and food and expeditiously disappeared toward Salonika on the Greek mainland.

Once in Salonika where the owner of the ship lived, the captain got orders from his boss to get rid of the passengers. This was easier said than done. None of the passengers, some one hundred and fifty of them, had valid visas to enter Greece again. There was no food on board for the passengers, though the crew was fed. The port authorities refused disembarcation. The passengers went to sleep without food after looking for hours into the deep blue almost black sky filled with stars and the silver crescent of the new moon above them, and in front of them the flickering lights of the port of Salonika.

Next day some food was delivered from shore by the Greek government but the ship was not allowed to enter port. There was apparently intervention with the Prime Minister who said that he had to consult the Foreign Minister who was out of the country. There was no doubt that British pressure was applied successfully. In the meantime the European press carried sensational headlines of a Phantom Ship on the Mediterranean, while some anti-Semitic reporters alleged that it was smuggling opium and white slave-girls. But all this did not help the stranded *chalutzim* very much.

On board there were still enough people, who could not resign themselves to failure and wanted to convince the captain to try again to reach the shores of Palestine. There was also a plan conjured to buy a dilapi-

dated, unseaworthy boat moored in the port that would somehow make the journey to the Palestine shore and wreck itself on the beach. But when the port authorities got wind of the plan it too failed.

Aaron, who told his story without much expression, almost like a tale of no personal meaning to him, suddenly got animated when he recalled that one day a motorboat approached the ship and a man came aboard with a suggestion that amazed the tired and semi-starved passengers. The guest was a member of the Greek parliament. He advised the *chalutzim* to ask the government for permission to settle on a sparsely populated Greek island where they could live on money sent to them from abroad. Aaron viewed this incident as an example of good intentions leading to bad results stemming from the widespread belief in the fabulous wealth of every Jew and a complete lack of understanding of the Jewish problem in Europe. For some reason he was now agitated enough to forget to pursue his story. When reminded he quickly and perfunctorily went over the dismal outcome of the journey adding that after many interventions the Rumanian government agreed to give transit visas and the ship left for Piraeus and from there to Rumania and then by train back to Poland. "And now" he concluded "I am not unlike Moses. I was shown the Land but I was not to enter." He grinned and we could not help but grin back—and bear it . . .

* * *

August came slowly to an end and the student clique showed signs of fatigue with the daily routine of conversations, gossip and ruminations over events from Germany. Pinkus, the medical student from France, the jester and poet, who through the summer issued a bi-weekly mimeographed periodical, full of skillful satire and limericks peppered with veiled pornography, suggested that we end the "season" with a *bal masque.* We were all willing but Pinkus insisted that we do it in grand style, in the town's dance hall, with a live orchestra, entertainment—the works. At first we were skeptical but Pinkus convinced us that by selling entrance tickets and promising the guests a satirical show, which he had almost ready in his head, we might be able to make a profit. The money would go toward subsidizing the back-to-school train tickets sorely needed by two younger gymnasium graduates, not yet of the clique, who might not be able to start on their studies abroad without help.

All in all, it was a worthy undertaking with a promise of much needed fun. There was some hesitation after we inquired of the owner of the dance hall the amount necessary for use of the premises. But this worry was quickly disposed of when someone suggested a sure new source of income: There would be two beauty queen contests, one with and the other after removal of the masks. We divided the various tasks among us, then chose a date and took on more volunteers. We were off to organize a ball.

The idea of a public ball, especially a masked ball, seemed to hit the town's Jewish intelligentsia and wealthy merchant families with the right note. Tickets sold briskly. The girls busily sewed masks and prepared their gowns. At the nightly meeting of the committee of three, in charge of the project, which included Pinkus, Joseph and myself, things looked bright. A few days before the great event things looked even brighter than expected. Joseph, the law student, tall and lean with the narrow lips of a judge, told us in the greatest secrecy that there was an opportunity to increase the income from the ball by an amount that would not only cover the expense of the two travel tickets for the freshmen but also their expenses for the first two months of studies abroad. He quickly proceeded to elaborate.

Joseph had been approached by Michael Blaufarb the owner of a wholesale dry goods shop. After some general questioning about the ball Blaufarb promised to contribute handsomely to the ball's budget because he was aware "of the philanthropic nature of the undertaking that should not fail." There was, however, a trifling consideration, "a bagatelle," that Blaufarb would like to receive from the organizing committee in return for his generosity.

Joseph stopped now, letting all this sink in, and then, aware of our puzzled expressions, slowly uttered: "Blaufarb wants to be assured that his daughter Adele will be chosen the beauty queen—without a mask." Pinkus was first to react to this unusual piece of news. "That old Blaufarb has lost his touch. His Adele would probably get the prize anyway. She's the most beautiful girl in town." We knew Adele. I knew her by sight only but I was struck by her alabaster white chiseled features framed by long black hair, by her proud gait and posture, willowy figure and shapely legs. But Joseph added firmly: "The old man wants to be SURE and we have to see to it that he is satisfied."

To me the whole affair sounded preposterously silly. And I had no objections when Joseph took it upon himself to rig the contest. He did

it by ingeniously allowing all those present at the ball to vote to elect the masked queen, whereas the unmasked queen would be elected by a jury of three, obviously consisting of the three members of the organizing committee. The ball was a success and the dancing went on almost all night. Old Blaufarb was proud and happy. His daughter won both the popular and the rigged contest. Pinkus who never missed a jab at a silly target took the beaming father of the double crowned queen and myself into a corner and said to him, "Sir, please choose one of the two possibilities: Either you got more than you bargained for, or you could have gotten what you wanted free." Blaufarb laughed, "Neither of those. There is a third possibility. I consider it an insurance premium." His commercial thinking was obviously more advanced than I had suspected.

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In Poland my medical education and my M.D. degree were of little value. To prevent an increase in the number of Jewish practitioners a policy of a quota was practised restricting the number of foreign trained physicians to a very few each year. The system known as *nostrification* made the study of medicine abroad almost totally unacceptable to the Polish authorities, although by allowing a few to "nostrificate," the appearance of total discrimination was avoided. I submitted my documents at the University of Warsaw, but I knew that I'd be notified in due time that I might start my examinations for nostrification of my M.D. degree to become a licensed physician, after a waiting period of no less than seven years. The fact that the country was desperately short of doctors, that my own town of almost thirty thousand inhabitants had only a few doctors, and the large rural surroundings none, had no bearing on the decision to prevent trained, eager Jewish medical graduates from entering the profession. The M.D. diploma I had earned was thus little more than a scrap of paper.

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It was the beginning of September. I was readying myself to depart for Warsaw, where I would live for a while with my brother who in the meantime had graduated from law school. There was, again, no sense staying in town.

But before leaving I witnessed a picket line in front of Jewish shops including that of my own family. It was a Thursday, the day when peasants from surrounding villages came in to do their shopping in town. In front of my family's shop there stood three young Polish toughs with large placards: *Swoj do swego po swoje*—a Polish boycott slogan calling on Poles to buy Polish wares in Polish shops. There was no way to remove the pickets without violence which would produce a riot with dire consequences for the Jewish population.

I stood in front of the shop seeing customers being diverted from our shop by the "peaceful" pickets who would point out to the customers where the "true" Polish shops were. But strangely enough there were some Polish customers inside the shop. You could not see them through the front window but they were inside doing their shopping. I realized that some shoppers, especially old customers, were unimpressed by the anti-Semitic pickets. But unwilling to be harassed by the thugs with the placards, these customers sought the rear entrance to the shop, where behind locked doors they did their shopping. Many Polish customers knew that it made sense to buy in a store they and possibly their parents had known for decades. They knew that the textiles they bought from my father were of the quality they paid for; that the dye on the fabric bought for a blouse or a vivid, flowery summer dress would not bleed when laundered; that the price would be lower than in the "pure" Polish shop which was usually managed by inexperienced personnel, hired by a newly self-proclaimed merchant who charged higher prices and whose substitute for honest competition was to eliminate his Jewish neighbor by anti-Jewish slogans and pickets.

My father, with whom I talked about this in the evening, was not too perturbed. At least not outwardly. He tried to calm people around him. "As long as they don't use violence and destruction, we'll prevail," he said. "Basically the Polish peasant is not anti-Jewish. He wants to get a good product for the lowest price because he works very hard for his money. We've had to face things like this all our lives. This also will pass."

But the very poor, the very small Jewish traders, who had no shops, only open stalls in the market square, did not fare so well. Their tables laden with wares were overturned during provoked altercations followed by rioting, many losing their entire inventory, the basis of their existence. The police would finally intervene, usually too late. The agitators, the *endeks* would disappear, leaving many Jewish breadwinners

without any resources to make even a skimpy living, some with injuries and bruises for good measure.

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Under these circumstances more and more young Jews listened to Vladimir Jabotinsky's exhortations. Jabotinsky was a Zionist leader who openly preached that the British were unable or unwilling to live up to their obligations under the Balfour Declaration to establish "in Palestine a national home for the Jewish people" and that in view of the deteriorating position of the Jewish masses in Eastern Europe only a radical approach to the problem would suffice. He disagreed with the policy of official Zionism under the leadership of Weizman and Ben-Gurion who believed in slow, step-by-step, development of a Jewish Palestine, without overt repudiation of Britain. Now in 1935 Jabotinsky broke away from the establishment and created a new world-wide Zionist organization. This "Revisionist" Zionism, which had impressive support among Polish Jews, especially the young and the intelligentsia, had a not-too-complicated program: A Jewish state in Palestine on both sides of the Jordan achieved through immediate mass emigration and colonization, and the militarization of Jewish youth.

Simple as this program may have sounded to any other people in the world, it was far from evoking general acclaim among the Jews. Two thousand years of dispersion deprived them of the instinct for common defense in time of crisis and put too heavy a burden on the Jewish character not to bring a severe backlash to Jabotinsky's ideas, especially from among established Jewish leaders. His views on anti-Semitism and the call for an immediate plan of resettlement to Palestine of one and a half million Jews within ten years by any means grated on the ears of many Jews who called him an "alarmist," even a fascist, "playing into the hands of enemies of the Jewish people."

Jabotinsky's views on anti-Semitism were secretly shared by many but he stated them openly. He divided anti-Semitism into two categories "of Men and of Things." This division conformed with my own views on the subject. I had come to see in anti-Semitism this human aberration, stemming from two often intertwined roots; one *visceral,* the other *pragmatic.* Visceral anti-Semitism consists of a subjective aversion and antipathy to Jews and Jewishness, a feeling nurtured and ingrained in the life fabric and folklore of many Christian nations through the

centuries. This feeling in an individual, being not of reason and serving his own deep seated pathological needs, cannot be argued with and there is no sense trying to convince the carriers of this habit of mind, by learned treatises or by presenting them with facts and statistics. Such an anti-Semitic Christian will not be convinced by the historical fact that Jesus was the fruit of Jewish thought and heart. By the same token an anti-Semite cured of syphilis that ravaged his body, by the use of Salvarsan, will not be cured of the aberration of his mind by bringing to his attention the fact that the miraculous drug was discovered by a Jew. This category of irrational madness took hold in its most blatant form in Germany, Austria and in France. Political anti-Semitism in these countries, whether in the guise of the Dreyfus affair or the spectacular rise of the Austrian Hitler who by anti-Semitic slogans now so successfully rallied the German people, could not have achieved its hold on human beings were it not for the latent presence of the virus in the population, a virus consciously implanted into the text of the Gospels, and nurtured by theologians, politicians and philosophers. As long as it will be profitable for demagogues to exploit it, the virus will always be with us.

The second pragmatic category of anti-Semitism superimposed on the visceral grew and became intolerably oppressive in Poland. But here pragmatic anti-Semitism grew from a more objective basis, due to the anomalous social, cultural and economic state that Polish Jews found themselves in after almost a thousand years of dwelling on Polish soil. Here the Jews constituted ten percent of the general population and one third of urban dwellers. Most of them were different in custom, language and garb, detached from land and crowded in cities. They didn't share in the nationalistic and Catholic sentiments of the majority. Whatever the moral responsibility of the Church and the real interest of the Polish State might have been, in practical terms, to relieve the immense pressure caused by unscrupulous politicians fanning the omnipresent visceral anti-Semitism, it was urgently necessary to provide for the emigration of large numbers of Jews from Poland.

It was here in Poland that Jabotinsky's plea for mass emigration had an appeal to the Jewish masses and also to the Polish government, albeit from totally different motives. And it was here, in Poland, that his rallies attracted thousands of enthusiastic followers as well as stormy controversy and animosity among the Jewish population and Zionists. Jabotinsky's bold demand to transfer masses of needy people, combined

with his open grand style of temporary political alliances with hostile anti-Semitic governments, became a heady potion raising both desperate hopes and deep anxieties in a Jewish community adrift.

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I left for Warsaw at the end of September 1935, although my thoughts were directed toward emigration. I desperately wanted to practice medicine, to use my knowledge, my skills. But the world was tightly shut. Renowned professors of medicine, German Jews, were clamoring for entrance visas to Western Europe, America and Palestine. My own predicament paled against the background of the darkening skies over Germany. What was happening in Germany was incomprehensible even to sorely tried Polish Jews and the newspaper reports were read each morning and somehow pushed out of our awareness because we could not carry the feeling of hopelessness and futility for twenty-four hours. As the news from Germany grew with depressing consistency, the magnitude of the madness that had overcome the German people and whose first victims were the Jews was such as to have in it a touch of unreality, and somewhere inside us, behind the logic and the cold reason of the facts, was the illogical, unreasonable belief that like a bad dream, this episode would also pass.

In Warsaw, in order not to lose touch with medicine, I applied and received permission to spend half a day in the only Jewish Municipal Hospital in the city. I was allowed to accompany attending physicians on their daily rounds. For this privilege, which had no formal value, but allowed me to be in touch with medicine, wear a white coat and live under the illusion of someone who each morning, like a busy physician, gets up and hurries to his daily professional routine, I was obliged to test the urine and feces of eight to ten patients a day, without compensation. I kept up this illusion of purposeful activity, until pressed by financial necessity to seek some paid work. I was ready to do anything even remotely connected with medicine, which would allow me to earn my keep. Although I was grateful to the Jewish hospital for allowing me to participate in their medical rounds, a privilege I could not get from the numerous non-Jewish hospitals, I was almost happy to receive a temporary job in a Jewish sanitarium for the treatment of rheumatic and joint diseases in a resort some 60 miles north of Warsaw. The official title of my position was manager of the sanitarium. But I was told that,

although I could not function as a legitimate physician, I would be able under the supervision of the consulting physician legally responsible for the patients, to have some contact with the patients and follow their history and course of treatment. I left Warsaw for six months in the resort town.

I was now the manager of the sanitarium and for two consecutive seasons I was able to save some money, which I thought I would badly need when I left Poland. In the meantime the leisurely pace of the resort and my exalted position kept my spirits high. I was twenty-five-years old. I was responsible for the management of a sanitarium with 75 beds in a fashionable resort, a spa that claimed springs of therapeutic waters, salt water baths and mudpacks for treatment of arthritis. Because the diagnosis of rheumatism was very liberally used by the medical profession and applied generously to any pain or ache that defied diagnosis, many patients were sent here for rest and recreation under the pretext of illness. This was especially true for wealthy families, especially women whose husbands stayed in the city, only to visit on weekends. There were in this resort town a substantial number of good looking young women, educated mothers of small children with their nannies, and smartly dressed men. Cafés, parks, the afternoon outdoor concerts of the Warsaw Philharmonic, the well kept flower beds and clean streets, the Olympic swimming pool, all this created an atmosphere of bourgeois summer living with no trace of the depressing atmosphere in the towns and cities of the rest of the country. There was no reason to sulk. At twenty-five years of age, I blended into the surroundings quickly and started my work with zest.

During the two summer seasons spent in this resort town I temporarily came near to fulfilling the desire of many young men of my age: To be self-supporting; to occupy a position of respect; to have a day filled with meaningful activity of managing the daily life of seventy people, caring for their health, accommodations, food and smoothing frictions arising inevitably from close cohabitation of such a diverse group; to enjoy the pleasantness of a cultivated resort and the social interaction with men and especially with women of means and taste.

But I lived on an island of normalcy while less than fifty miles away from the resort there was the festering sore of Germany and in the very country I lived and went about my own business and pleasures undisturbed, a group of young Poles inspired by the Nazis proclaimed an anti-Jewish program more savage than even that of the notorious *Endeks*.

Here in this town life flowed undisturbed. Jewish summer residents mixed with non-Jews in the parks, amusement places and swimming pools. The government-appointed administrator of the resort saw to it that even the slightest infractions of public order or discrimination against Jewish visitors to the resort be immediately stopped and punished.

After learning the routine managerial aspects of running a sanitarium and establishing contacts with the administration of the resort, I devoted my time to the clinical aspects of the patients whom I saw together with and under the guidance of the official physician, an expert in the art of hydrotherapy, the treatment of disease by the external and internal use of waters. The late afternoons and evenings were free enough to enjoy the pleasures of the resort and the company of the many visitors.

One day, however, I was faced with an unusual and unpleasant event. It was Saturday and I was in my office finishing some last business of the week when there was a knock at the door and one of the patients stepped in. Krassner was a man of sixty, an orthodox Jew with a pleasant open face, soft brown eyes and a long grayish beard. He was an exemplary patient, always cheerful and his entrance into my office on the Sabbath undoubtedly meant something was very wrong. He was visibly shaken. Krassner told me that he had attended the Sabbath prayers in the local synagogue and that afterwards the son of the Rabbi approached him asking him where he lived. When he told him that he was a patient of our sanitarium, he was told that this is unfortunate because the place is not *kosher.* He immediately returned to the sanitarium and here he was standing before me trembling as he told me the story.

I was taken aback at first and then angered. The sanitarium was a non-profit charitable institution whose Board of Directors were moderately wealthy Jews, observant but not orthodox. Because the institution was known publicly as a Jewish institution, it was by implication believed to implement the traditional dietary laws observed by the majority of Jews in Poland.

The dietary laws, or *kashrut,* are based on the principle repeated three times in the Pentatuch, "Thou shalt not cook a kid in its mother's milk." The flesh of "unclean" animals, those that do not ruminate and without cloven hoofs like the pig, horse and rabbit, is not permitted. And fish without scales and fins like shellfish are also excluded. Strict, orthodox observance of the biblical law not only explicitly restricts the choice of food but also affects its preparation and requires the use of

separate cooking utensils and dishes for meats and for dairy products. Non-orthodox, but observant Jews would tend to be somewhat lax on the separation of dishes but would not eat pork. As manager of the sanitarium I was instructed to have meats and poultry supplied by butchers under the supervision of the local Jewish religious authorities and strictly observe the double dishes for meat and dairy products in the kitchen and at the table. It was not difficult for me to supervise such arrangements, as I was familiar with them from my childhood and, although I did not myself adhere any longer to the kosher principle, I saw it as my duty to have it strictly observed in this institution. The affair was a very serious and disturbing matter and it could cause psychological harm to many patients.

After my assurances and a visit to the kitchen, my shaken patient seemed a bit more relaxed, and after I asked him to be present at the daily deliveries of meat and poultry and at the preparation of food, he almost recovered his usual benevolent smile. But Krassner insisted that I straighten out the whole thing with the local rabbi. I promised to do so. But I was still angry and at a loss to understand the motives behind these insinuations. I was obviously inexperienced in these matters and after consultation with some local friends it became obvious that the local religious establishment was in need of financial support and that the Board of Directors had never given it any thought.

Although it was not my duty to deal with this religious body, I was responsible for the peace of mind of the patients, and as rumors of the rabbi's son's utterings spread during the same afternoon I decided to take some action on my own, and with dispatch. Next morning was payday for the many suppliers who sold their products and services to the sanitarium, among them the butcher, the poultry man and the man who supplied butter and milk. As soon as they lined up for their pay I quietly announced that I was unable to pay them because the products they delivered had been declared of questionable quality. Their reaction was one of total disbelief because these suppliers were poor hardworking Jews, hardly able to proceed with their trade without receiving the weekly payments from the relatively large consumer, the sanitarium. They demanded an explanation which I gave them immediately referring to the insinuations of the rabbi's son. The group huddled and within a few minutes told me they would go in a group to the rabbi's house adding that they would take their wives and children with them. With this they left.

I did not leave the office as I was sure that things would move quickly. Within half an hour two young men in orthodox garb stood before me to get from me an explanation of the meaning of the sudden invasion of the rabbi's house by men, women and children. I became impatient with their tactic and demanded an explanation of their insinuations. They finally admitted that they knew our sanitarium served kosher food but that it was without rabbinical supervision, which in their estimation was tantamount to being non-kosher. I told them of my neutrality in this matter and suggested they should write to the Board of Directors. I was adamant, however, on an assurance that come next Sabbath the rabbi himself should publicly, before the whole congregation retract the unfounded allegations. My demand caused visible panic in the eyes of one of them, and I now realized that their father, the rabbi, had no knowledge of the affair. I did not relent and I was informed by my orthodox patient that after the next Sabbath prayers the rabbi himself declared to the congregation his personal distress when he heard of his son's unworthy conduct. Whereupon his sons retracted their insinuations.

This was my one and only confrontation with Jewish clerics. I knew that the poor devils were in need of a livelihood, but I was hardly in a mood to commiserate with them and I certainly was dismayed by their actions.

The affair was closed now but not without some benefit for me. I got to know Krassner more closely and I spent some hours with him in discourse or rather listening to his views on matters of religion and conduct. I was struck by his general philosophical and historical knowledge which did not in any way upset his adherence and commitment to his orthodox religious tradition.

Krassner perceived the human personality as imbedded in individual loneliness because it is a bounded and distinct entity. Man's lonely inner personality may be freed from its bounds by an intimate discourse with God with whom, according to Jewish tradition, man may have a private and direct relationship. But to be able to achieve such a closeness man must act in every aspect of his life in accordance with God's will, on a continuous day by day, basis. This requires a disciplined, divinely ordained life founded on a set of principles, based on the *Torah* and the *Talmud,* the *Halakhah.* In the *Halakhah* one finds the right way to act in every area of existence. By being always conscious of what is forbidden, permitted or required, man becomes involved spiritually with his

every action in life, even the purely physical. Such a life becomes harmonious and within such a religious framework gives man a sense of divine purpose. Religion is thus continuously *experienced* not only periodically perceived and the boundary between the secular and religious disappears. The inner personality merges inextricably with the divine and there is harmony between thoughts and experience.

Such intimate, personal relationship with God does not, however, separate the individual from his fellow man. His duties to the community are well defined in the *Halakhah.* His responsibility before God is shared with others. And as a member of the Jewish people one suffers for his own and the sins of others. Because as the prophet Amos told us we were chosen by God from all the families and "therefore I will punish you for all your inequities."

I listened to Krassner and refrained from putting questions to him, questions I knew he could only answer with a resigned reference to "God's will." I knew that the beautiful intimate God-man relationship brought serenity to the individual; that the disciplined faithful observance of rituals gave life the satisfaction of fulfilled duty; that it was a way that allowed the Jews to survive throughout the long ages. But it enhanced the isolation forced upon us. And with the opening of the ghettos and the inevitable contact with the outer world it became impossible for individuals to keep the tranquility of the faithful while engulfed with a different culture, customs, way of life. The faithful Jew had no answer to the social and political problems of modern times except isolation and the hope of the coming of the Messiah.

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Meanwhile the season came to an end and early in October 1936 I was back in Warsaw, my savings standing in good stead to survive the winter until next season. I again applied for unpaid work in the Jewish hospital and this time participated as a volunteer and informal participant in the department of physical therapy. My experience with hydrotherapy and the daily contact with arthritic and neurological patients in the sanitarium led me to continue this branch of medicine at this hospital.

Events outside my personal and now quasi-professional life went on with unrelenting force. Mussolini occupied Ethiopia by force and declared the foundation of a "new Roman empire." This signaled the death of the League of Nations. Encouraged by the lack of will of the British

and French to intervene, Hitler by sheer bluff, without any military strength behind him, in clear violation of the Versailles treaty, re-occupied the Rhineland. Germany started feverishly rearming. In Spain a full-scale civil war was in the offing. In Germany, among others, a law was issued forbidding persons of more than 25% non-Aryan blood to play Beethoven, Mozart, Bach and other "Aryan" composers. I thought of Monica.

Here, in Poland, in the town of Przytyk during a full-scale physical attack on the Jewish population, the defenders were arrested by the police. There followed a half-day strike and demonstrations by the Jewish population against organized violence. In response the prime minister of Poland pronounced his wholehearted support for the economic destruction of the Jews albeit without violence. The Church in a pastoral letter by Cardinal Hlond, emphasized the role of Jews in spreading atheism, immorality, bolshevism and white slavery, gave its blessing to deprive the Jews of their livelihood but condemned physical violence as "non-Christian." The letter ended with the pious declaration that "when divine mercy enlightens a Jew, and he accepts sincerely his and our Messiah, let us greet him with joy in the Christian midst." The hooligans took heart from this sanctimonious charity.

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In the spring of 1937, on May third, the national holiday of the Polish Constitution, the morning was exceedingly fresh and beautiful. I lived in Warsaw, where I spent the winter where I worked, unofficially, in the department of physical therapy in the Jewish Hospital. It was an opportunity to learn the therapy of joint and neurological diseases, a subject that became more and more of interest to me, after the first six months spent as manager of a sanitarium. It was spring, and I was ready to leave in a few days to start my second season in the resort. These were my last days. I and my friends, two girls and two boys, all students, got together this morning for a farewell party. We decided to be outdoors on this spring day and, as it was the custom of many young people in Warsaw, we went to the beautiful gardens of the park of Lazienki. People in a holiday spirit filled the park. We strolled five abreast along a broad pathway talking and laughing. Our walk came suddenly to a halt when two students wearing the small round hats of the anti-Semitic Catholic student league came from the opposite side

shouting *Zydzi na Nalewki*—"Jews to Nalewki" (the main Jewish street) and pushing one of our companions, the dental student—a short and lean boy—broke the file we formed. I was the nearest to the pushing hooligan and, in a sudden rage at this interruption of what had promised to be a splendid day, I pushed the hooligan back with unexpected vehemence. He swayed back, then lost equilibrium and fell. The commotion quickly subsided, as the large crowd behind us kept strolling in a festive mood almost forcing us to form our file again and keep going. Although dispirited, we kept going and after a while our gaiety returned.

It would not last too long. We must have been walking for five minutes when we became aware of a commotion and shouting behind us. I tried to look back when I heard a shout; "Here are the bastard Jews," and for a split second I could discern a gang of students with white and red bands on their little hats hurriedly marching behind us waving canes. I suddenly felt a thud around my right ear, then saw a flickering light. When I opened my eyes I was lying on a stretcher in an ambulance.

As reconstructed later in the emergency room, I had taken two blows, one in the right temple, which knocked me out, the second from a cane whose tip carried a razor blade. The latter accounted for the blood running down my face, even after the blood soaked bandages were removed, and the wounds stitched. After an hour of observation I was released in the care of my friends, who had waited all the time and who had escaped harm themselves. They took me home where for a week I stayed in and out of bed recuperating.

While in bed I had a visitor, Mendel. He was a burly fellow, the son of a teacher of Hebrew in my native town, a boyhood companion who had dropped out of the fourth grade in Gymnasium and since then had tried to earn his livelihood as an unskilled laborer in saw mills, factories in Poland frequently owned by Jews. His broad shoulders and hefty arms, accustomed to wrestling logs big enough to be sawed into boards, embraced me this time carefully, his tongue smacking repeatedly as if to say, "Look what they did to you!" His large head, covered with an unruly shock of light hair, always looked ferocious to me although I knew he was actually mild and shy. It was probably his broken nose, something he had acquired early in childhood from an accident and never set straight, that added to his deceptive image of fierceness.

Mendel whom I had rarely seen in recent years spent some weeks in

Warsaw trying unsuccessfully to get a certificate to emigrate to Palestine. He had been promised a certificate for years because of his dogged devotion to the Zionist cause and mostly because of his physical stamina and, despite his erudition and intellectual flair, his readiness to do any menial work. He now came to Warsaw where he tried to persuade some highly-placed Revisionist party members to help him.

"I was on my way back home"—he started—"when I read about your tough luck. I thought it was a misprint or someone else with your name. I thought you knew better than to take a stroll in the Lazienki park on May third, when the hooligan-students are on the lookout for Jews. You should know that time is running out for us Jews in Poland." I was listening patiently despite my splitting headache. "Jabotinsky teaches us"—he continued—"that time is against us here. The way the British dribble their certificates and the way Weizman kow-tows to the English lords, even another two thousand years will not bring us salvation."

I must have shifted in bed uncomfortably because he stopped as if trying to avoid a political tirade which he probably thought was not proper at a bedside. But I was more than eager to listen. "Go ahead"—I said—"nothing clears the mind so thoroughly as a blow on the head." But he was not in a jocular mood. His unsuccessful stay in Warsaw, a stay that must have cost him his savings, obviously added a note of impatience and bitterness to his speech. "Jabotinsky tells us that we are living in a "Danger Zone", he forsees a catastrophe. He says that the "clock is at twelve" and that the only answer is *evacuation.*"

He rose from his chair beside my bed and started pacing the room in silence. Then he stopped at the foot of my bed and in a low, pleading voice, as if trying to convince himself also, he repeated, "evacuation, yes, evacuation to Palestine is the only answer. Here, we are facing Cain unarmed. Never mind the cold creeps the word sends down the spines of the Jewish establishment, the Jewish press and the rest. There is no other way." He looked at me awaiting some reaction. More from the need to let him continue than from conviction I tried to introduce the arguments of the other side.

"The press, the Jewish press" I started "even the newspaper in which Jabotinsky has a weekly column came out against him, not so much because of his idea but because of bringing into the open his position in a non-Jewish newspaper *Czas* and because of his direct approach to Polish public opinion and the Polish Government thus indirectly relieving the anti-Semitic authorities of the responsibility of alleviating the plight of

the Jews. Doesn't it give the anti-Semites additional ammunition to deprive us of the rights we still have, terribly deficient as they are?"

Here I was on my bed, the bandages on my head showing conclusive evidence of the soundness of Jabotinsky's position while at the same time unable to summon enough courage to accept the inevitability of a catastrophe that would justify such a desperate, apocalyptic, visionary scheme. But then I reasoned, how will millions of people, men, women and children, leave their homes of their own volition, give up their birthrights to a country in which their forefathers had lived for centuries? How will millions of people go voluntarily to a far-off land, an arid land without natural resources, where only slow, methodical pioneering work could prepare the infrastructure for gradual absorption, a land whose authorities were, in any case, dead set against allowing anyone without a visa to gain entrance, and a British government which would obviously see to it that no country whose frontiers would have to be traversed by the multitudes be opened?

Mendel read my thoughts. After a long silence he stood up, gently shook my hand and then added in parting: "You are a doctor and I will say it to you in your language. Jabotinsky is making a 'crazy' but a correct diagnosis. Don't forget it is a 'crazy' condition the patient is suffering from and only a 'crazy' medicine will help." I held his hand a while. "I know, I know," he added, "it is all in vain, the patient won't voluntarily swallow the medicine." His forced grin dissolved before he opened the door and left my room.

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In the fall of 1937, I returned to my unofficial work in the Hospital. I also visited my home town and my family. My younger brother had graduated the local gymnasium and was in the same situation I was in many years ago, if not much worse. What to do now? My older brother who had been in Palestine since 1934, advised him to try to get admission to the technical school in Haifa, which would secure him a student visa to enter the Land. He also described his own life in Jerusalem, where he worked at different jobs including house construction. He needed no qualifications for this job he wrote as it consisted of carrying the Jerusalem stone on his back after it was chiseled by more skilled workers into the required shape. He wrote of an approaching storm in Europe. His letter was thus a mixture of optimism and alarm. We decided to bend all our efforts to enable at least my younger brother to

leave. He was fortunate to obtain admission to the Technion and he left for Haifa. I remember that on the day of his departure he packed a traditional loaf of bread, a *khalah*. Inside it there was a small revolver, a weapon that might elude the British customs and play its small part in defense of the Land. After a year of study in Haifa he was recruited as a railway policeman escorting the train from Haifa to Jerusalem guarding it against Arab saboteurs.

* * *

After my return to Warsaw I rented a room for myself with an older couple. I attended the hospital in the morning without pay. I expected my savings from summer work to last me for some months, if I budgeted my expenses frugally. However, with every day gone by my chances to emigrate were approaching zero.

One day early in March, 1938, I received a letter from a military office in Warsaw. Due to my change in address the letter had only now caught up with me. There was a certificate included saying in so many words that after medical examination the draft board assigned me into a category which released me from the military service, unless called by total mobilization during a war. I knew that my physical fitness had nothing to do with it. It was my medical diploma, duly recognized for this purpose by the military authorities, that prevented my induction into military service. According to military rules, if inducted, as a doctor I would have the right to officer status. It was easier for the army to dispense with my services to the country than put me into an officer's uniform. I was prepared for this and the decision bore no surprises for me except for a last paragraph. It stated that "in order to fulfill my duty to the Republic" I would have to make myself available for one week to the military barracks in a Warsaw suburb for further instructions. On the reverse of the letter there were specified penalties in event of non-conformity. I was puzzled.

The date was for the following week. I excused myself from the hospital for this "military" tour of duty. I had to show up on Monday and as I had a free Saturday morning I decided to spend it in the University library, to look up some references, a task I had wanted to do for many months. The library was in the middle of a sprawling campus facing the broad avenue of *Krakowskie Przedmiescie*. When I approached the large ornate wrought iron gate leading to the campus I became

conscious of a sudden unease that made my fingers tighten into a fist, my usual reflex when facing physical danger. I stopped and from across the street looked at the gate. Only a few passersby were going to their destination. I could find nothing unusual in the front or behind the gate. It was Saturday; the student-thugs were probably not lurking on the extra-territorial grounds of the campus behind the gate or trees for their prey, a single Jewish student, boy or girl, whom they could attack, bruise and insult and then throw outside the gate. I crossed the street, walked through the gate and then to the library building without incident.

I spent almost two hours in the library. On my way out while stepping onto a terrace leading toward the exit I saw a figure in a military uniform coming out of the door behind me. He caught up with me and saluted. Surprised I turned my head and recognized Krymus, my classmate from gymnasium. He was smiling. He removed the white glove from his right hand to greet me. There was a slight drizzle and we stood on the covered terrace near a column. I must have looked at Krymus somewhat puzzled because he opened: "I saw you at the table and immediately recognized you. I was just about to leave but then I thought I'll wait and leave together with you. I am on a furlough now and on my way home. I decided to stay a day or two in Warsaw." I complimented him on his three stars that made him a captain. His broad peasant face was now grinning, obviously flattered.

He was now stationed in Brest. I told him of my studies in Czechoslovakia. He was impressed. "How great it is"—he said—"to be able to afford to study abroad." He had little hope now, as a professional military man, of seeing the cities and countries of Western Europe, especially as he was assigned to the hinterland, to the routine of field work. Still, with luck, he might be sent abroad, sometimes. I told him I worked in a hospital in Warsaw. "It's great to be able to live and work in the capital." And then he added: "This is the advantage of a free profession. You can choose your place."

For a moment I wondered whether he was unknowing and innocent or so devilishly depraved as not to see my disgust at his remarks. To my mind came the Polish peasant's saying: *Kpi czy o droge pyta?*—Is he mocking, or is he asking for directions?

But then I had enough of all this. I had no desire to continue in this vein. Neither was I in a mood to tell him the truth. I looked at his broad, coarse face, at the deep pits in his cheeks, the small grey eyes, so

shrewd and so innocent. The eyes of a Polish peasant. I excused myself and wanted to leave. But he insisted on walking with me to the street.

When we passed the gate I despised myself for the thought, however fleeting, that with this unexpected escort, I was safe now, safe to pass through the "Gate of Polish Learning."

* * *

On Monday I duly reported to the military barracks. There was a group of young men waiting. We were sixteen in the group. I was told immediately on arrival by one in the group that for a week now we'd be assigned some work, in lieu of military service. "In lieu of two years of military service, mind you." He grinned with a malicious look in his eyes. He informed me that he was a graduate of law school. He was now selling kitchen utensils in his father's shop, near the Iron Gate.

Soon two soldiers stepped into the room. The taller one, a sergeant, stepped back while the other a corporal, a short fellow with a gold tooth in the front, yelled, "Attention." There was some commotion among the group, some of us not too quick to realize the urgency of such a command. However, everyone stood up. The corporal looked at the group with obvious disdain but he had no additional comment. He turned to the sergeant who now turned his face from the window where he had previously been absorbed in looking at a column of marching recruits.

The corporal reported to the sergeant that the group of civilians was ready. The sergeant ordered us to be at ease. He explained in a monotonous, bored voice that we were now on military grounds, that military rules applied here. We would be given a task to perform, a task of importance to the military grounds here, in fact to the major himself, the commander of the base. From now the corporal will be in charge. He wished us luck and stepped out of the room. The corporal ordered us out of the room. We formed a double line and marched toward a shack where we were given picks and shovels. With these tools over our shoulders we then marched toward a centrally located brick house. In the front was a large circle of what must have been a lawn. We stood in line, shovels on our shoulders, listening to the corporal.

He read our names. It was obvious that we were all Jews. After reading the list, the corporal gave a sharp look at each of us and then started, "The lawn that was built last year is no good. It was not leveled

correctly, there is no good drainage. They also left stones and pebbles. This time it is going to be an excellent job." He said that there was among us an a-r-chi-tect—he had some difficulty pronouncing the word. He ordered the architect out front. A short fellow with a blond, well trimmed mustache stepped out in an exaggerated military fashion and quickly came to attention in front of the corporal.

The corporal must have been surprised by the smart posture of the architect because with great seriousness he ordered him to be at ease and then asked where he had learned such a nice military attitude. "I was born with it" said the architect, in a rather low voice. Now he was obviously afraid that the group wouldn't be able to restrain itself and that the joke might backfire. But the corporal saw nothing unusual. "Yes" he said, "some of us are born soldiers."

For the next week, for six hours a day, under the guidance of the architect, we ripped up the clusters of old grass together with roots of weeds, stones and debris, then leveled the ground, apparently preparing it for spring sowing. We had forty-five minutes of rest, hardly necessary because the work was far from tiring. According to one of us, a graduate of higher mathematics, the work could have been done with four people in two days. Had it not been for the occasional cold rain I would have enjoyed the hours in the fresh air and the company of the wise-cracking participants of this witless farce, conceived somewhere deep in the obscurity of a Polish military brain.

* * *

Meanwhile in February in the outside world the Austrian Hitler, after browbeating the Austrian Chancellor Schuschnigg for eleven hours, sent his troops into Austria and seized the country in March completing the *Anschluss.* This was a bloodless conquest of a country well prepared by its traditional anti-Semitism. Most of Austria's citizens greeted the Nazi troops with flowers.

In Poland, meanwhile, most Polish professionals and students were busily engaged trying to eliminate the "main enemy," the Jews, from educational and professional life. Not needing too much prodding from their new Nazi friends across the border they succeeded during the academic school year in establishing a "seating ghetto" in the Polish Universities. They tried in vain to compel Jewish students to sit in back benches. Jewish students refused and remained standing throughout the

lectures. This infamous restriction was applied even in the Wawelberg School of Engineering, a school founded by Jews for the training of engineers and turned over to the government with a contract agreement that no discrimination would ever be applied to any group of students. Despite this the school expelled the 50 Jewish students who refused to accept ghetto seating.

To be sure, there were always a few very brave Polish professors who would protest openly against this barbarism. The professor of Medicine Michalowicz reminded the anti-Semitic students that "if God put the spirit of Christ into a Jew's body, it was not for them to claim their superiority over their fellow Jews." But this was a cry in the wilderness. The terror at the universities increased. The student mob now called for "numerus nullus."

* * *

It was now September 1938. The past months had been filled with news from Czechoslovakia, Hitler's next victim. It was the country where I received my medical education that was now on the firing line. It was under the pretext of "liberation" of the German minority—the *Sudetendeutsche*—that the fate of this democratic country was to be decided. By now not only the French and the British were involved but also Soviet Russia. We knew that this was the last confrontation with Hitler that would finally decide the fate of all of us.

Czechoslovakia was a small country but it was known to have a well armed and trained army of 30 Divisions against 40 of Germany. The Czechs had a superb armaments industry at Skoda. They were ready to fight for their independence. The Germans would meet a stiff resistance which might finally expose their weakness. The president of Czechoslovakia, Beneš, called up the reserves. We were all almost certain that Hitler would retreat before this show of force. And in fact, for the first time Hitler was openly confronted he suddenly retreated diplomatically saying that his intentions were "peaceful."

Still glued to the radio and the newspapers, we started breathing easier. The morale of the Czechs was high. But the French failed. They would not honor the guarantees of their alliance and dragged the British with them. The spectacle of the great French Republic hesitating between resistance and surrender—its paralysis of will—sent shivers through our spines. When we heard that Chamberlain flew to Munich

on September 15, we knew in our bones that Czechoslovakia was going to be sacrificed. It was a shameful spectacle. The French insisted that they could not go to war without Britain while the British did not want to be involved in the defence of Czechoslovakia, "that far off land."

In the meantime Poland, my native country, joined the vultures and demanded and got a part of Czechoslovakia, Tesin. The Hungarians demanded their share. And finally on September 30, Chamberlain, his umbrella in his hand, surrendered Czechoslovakia to Hitler and declared to cheering crowds in London, "I believe it is peace in our time."

As I walked the streets of Warsaw in the aftermath of the Munich agreement, Polish students demonstrated for the annexation of Tesin from Czechoslovakia. Although by now I was used to the cynicism and perfidy of governments, this stab in the back of a Slavic neighbor at a time of mortal danger filled me with shame and anguish. Perhaps the hospitality that Czechoslovakia had shown me and hundreds of my colleagues plus the first hand knowledge I had of its democratic way of life made me feel exceptionally bitter and ashamed to see young Poles demonstrating on the street of Warsaw, exhibiting their stupidity in supporting Hitler's assault on a Slavic people whom the Nazis called "a miserable pygmy race."

* * *

A few weeks later, I had a visitor from my home town. Raphael, the bookbinder—a man of sixty whom I had almost forgotten and could hardly recognize. Somehow he had gotten my address, and apologizing repeatedly for his intrusion, told me the reason for his visit. He had received an alarming telegram from his son, from the Polish-German frontier. There, together with his wife and two children, he was waiting for help. I did not know his son but I did recall that he studied in a German university and because of his unusual knowledge of ancient books and manuscripts he had obtained a position with a renowned bookseller in Germany. This must have been fifteen years before.

The bookbinder explained to me that his son and family were suddenly removed from their homes by the Gestapo and without warning rushed into a cattle train. They were brought to the frontier for deportation into Poland. They were Polish citizens and had Polish passports and, although they faced ruin and dislocation, they still thought they might save their lives by going back to their people. But there was a

complication. They had been more than ten years out of Poland and the Polish Government denied them entry into their native land. They were huddled now in the no-man's-land, between Germany and Poland, hungry and without shelter. There were, according to newspapers, twelve thousand such men, women and children dumped at the frontier.

He asked me if I could help find a lawyer who could intervene with the Polish government. I knew I had to do whatever possible. I ran for hours all over town with the old man trying to enlist the help of lawyers. Staggering fees were asked and little encouragement was given because their offices were swamped with a sudden deluge of desperate people crying for help.

Next day the Jewish newspapers reported the tragic scenes from the border. Many deported people were known to have died from exhaustion, many were sick. They were in places where no government took responsibility for their welfare. And then a news bulletin announced the news that a secretary at the German Embassy in Paris had been shot by a Jewish youth.

The seventeen year old boy, Herschel Grynszpan, shot the German, who died three days later. Grynszpan who lived exiled in Paris, was the son of parents of Polish origin who had lived for many years in Germany. They were deported, and hungry and sick now lived in a cattle train in no-man's-land between Germany and Poland. Grynszpan after hearing of the ordeal of his aged parents went into a frenzy, and wanting to call the attention of the world to the barbarity, shot the German official and then surrendered to the French police.

What happened afterwards, on November 9, 1938 revealed the nature of the Nazi madness and inhumanity as never before. A nation-wide pogrom was organized in Germany during which fifty thousand Jews were sent to concentration camps, women and children were beaten on the streets, five hundred synagogues were burned, Jewish shops were looted and windows smashed filling the sidewalks of German cities with broken glass, all this in the sight of the German citizenry and the international press . . .

* * *

What should we do? I recall an evening with a group of friends in the late fall of 1938, when we debated this question. One of the participants was Asher, a known admirer of the Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi.

Asher was in a state of mild agitation because he brought with him the news that the Mahatma had finally declared his views on the plight of the Jews in Germany and even offered a solution.

Asher reported that Gandhi saw the Jews as the untouchables of Christianity and he recommended that "the Jews in Germany resort to *satyagraha* and in this way score a lasting victory over the German gentiles by converting them to an appreciation of human dignity." Gandhi said that if he were a Jew born in Germany and earned his livelihood there, he would claim Germany as his home as any gentile German. He would challenge the gentiles to shoot him or to cast him in the dungeon. The Indians in South Africa resorted to this method of challenging the authorities with passive resistance and *satyagraha.* The British officials tried to dissuade the *satyagrahas* from this step and after eight years, world opinion and the Indian Government successfully came to the aid of the South African Indians.

There was a stunned silence in the room when Asher came out with the Gandhi proposal. Many of us had read Gandhi's work and sympathized with his fight against British colonial policy in India. We knew of *satyagraha*—the famous campaign of passive resistance he initiated in the fight for Indian rights in South Africa. But to advise this method for the German Jews and to compare the present behavior of the Nazis to that of the British, brought to us a bitter taste of disillusionment.

I had suddenly the same feeling I had when I last met my Polish classmate Krymus, the officer in his resplendent uniform. It appeared to me now, as then, that Krymus and Gandhi either mocked us or were ignorant.

The whole group looked at each other with disbelief. Even Asher, Gandhi's fanatical adherent, sat silent and dejected when he came to the end of his master's statement. But then the silence was broken by a bitter denunciation of Gandhi by Duvid, a short fellow with an intense lean face. Duvid was from Przytyk, a Polish town where a pogrom had been perpetrated in 1936 after which a general strike of Jews in Poland was proclaimed, a strike that had no influence whatsoever on the rapidly deteriorating events in the country.

Duvid's cheeks were burning red on his comsumptive pale face and he spoke with a choked, high pitched voice barely able to contain his anger. "It is of no use to ask the world for help or even understanding," he started. "Everyone is busy with his own problems. As for Gandhi, he is against the British and a friend of the Arabs. He denies the rights of

the Jews to settle in Palestine. And political considerations make him, Gandhi, the righteous fighter for freedom, the saint, a hypocrite when he confronts the Jewish catastrophe."

Near me Asher sat silent, his head bowed and turned to the side. For the first time in my life I saw a grown man letting tears wet his cheeks freely in public. He covered his eyes with his cupped hand as if shading them from the light. The corners of his mouth quivered when Duvid in his fervor continued: "The Jews in Germany are being killed and tortured in the darkness of night and in the hidden torture chambers of the concentration camps. Who was even allowed to listen to these martyrs to allow them to voice their *satyagraha?* The slightest word of defiance from a Jew in Germany means to be dragged and killed without witness, without the slightest disturbance of everyday German life. And Gandhi compares this to the public outcry, the dispatches that were sent by journalists letting the whole world know of the hunger strike of an Indian leader."

Duvid seemed now to be at the end of his choked anguish. His voice was now muted but his face was contorted with a grimace of mockery, "Gandhi wants the German Jews to be shot or thrown into the dungeon and thus gloriously bring the German gentiles back to their human dignity." He shouted now again: "But they are being shot by the thousands! Did this have any effect on the gentile Germans? There is no pity for the weak in Germany, there is only disdain and hatred. Gandhi's advice to the Jews is like mocking a victim who is gasping for breath."

It was more than I could bear this evening. I left the room and walked through the empty streets of Warsaw. I knew that there was going to be a tomorrow morning when I'd be confronted with a new day and that life would have to go on. But in my desperation I was as far away from doing away with all this as I ever was. The more anguish, the more bestiality reported, the heavier the pressure on my chest, the less inclination did I have to finish all this and step into the nothingness of the last retreat.

Winter was approaching and the days grew bleak. I recall one afternoon, when from my chair I saw through the window the lonely tree, denuded. Its ashen gray branches tapering off into the leaden sky, called back the hovering claws of the demons of my childhood. Rows of raindrops, like oversized tears threatened by the whining wintry wind, hung precariously from the naked twigs. I sat motionless, staring. The house was still. The dull hum of the city sounded like a rolling surf of black

molten asphalt, waxing and waning with the screech of streetcars and the howling of the wind.

I sat numb, every fiber in me frozen. As darkness fell all my awareness narrowed to a thread. I was suspended in a void, in non-existence. There was no substance, no support, no *terra firma,* no hope. And as nothing mattered any more, I knew I was on the edge of self-destruction.

The grayness of dusk covered the tree's outstretched arms and the roofs melted into the sky. Yellow rays from a swaying street lamp made the shadows in my room quiver. A sudden fright stirred me into a frenzy. Forced into haste, like a galvanized automaton I reached for my coat, ran through the door, down the staircase into the street. Stiff, my head bowed against the wind, I walked the dark streets, through the cold mist, until exhaustion. Back in the room drunk with fatigue, I collapsed on the bed and lay for hours in leaden torpor.

I woke up to the bright light of morning. Sunshine, reflected from the white street, poured through the window. Silently, during the night, the first snow had covered the earth with an immaculate blanket. The skies had cleared and the air was calm. I felt well. I left the room and slowly walked toward the streetcar almost smiling at the soft white down sparkling in the sun. I boarded a car and was on my way to work, to the hospital.

* * *

A few days after that distressing evening I ran into a classmate from medical school and he told me about an opportunity to become a detail man, a salesman who visits physicians on behalf of a pharmaceutical company. I assured him of my willingness to do anything. In the fall of 1938 he introduced me to his brother-in-law, who had organized a drug company with headquarters in Warsaw. After some training that included a course in the pharmacological and therapeutic value of the company's medicines, I was assigned a territory. It included the eastern provinces of Poland, Volhynia and Polesie. I was glad for the opportunity, not only because it was financially rewarding but also because it included a lot of travel in a region unknown to me and allowed me to help in the boycott against medicines of German origin. The Eastern territories of Poland had a high percentage of minorities, Jews, Ukrainians and Byelorussians. The Jews were the majority in the cities and towns, and the rural population was less under the influence of the anti-

Semitic tendencies of the Polish Catholic church and the Endek party. The majority of physicians in this part of the country were Jews, many were pre-World War I graduates of Russian universities. It was to these physicians that the products of the new Jewish company were expected to appeal.

I grasped the opportunity to get employment and an income. To leave Warsaw and the oppressive air of the Polish capital with the demonstrating student bands was a welcoming relief. I took leave of my brother and friends and left by train to Volhynia, in the "Far East" of Poland.

* * *

In Rovno, the main town of Volhynia, near the Soviet border, life went on at a leisurely pace. Remote from the main center of political activity, the town's citizens, mostly Jewish shopkeepers, artisans, physicians and teachers, went about their lives with unruffled zest. Not feeling the direct pressure of Polish extremists, because the Poles in this part of the country were themselves a minority, the Jews here seemed to me to be more exuberant, less inhibited in social encounters and very hospitable. In no time I made friends among local young people and in the evenings, spent many hours in friendly get-togethers in warm, hospitable homes. According to instructions from my employer, I introduced myself to local druggists and explained my mission to them. They were obviously well informed as to the size of the practice of the individual physicians in town. Thus in a short time I was able to plan my activities by devoting most of my energy to calling on the practitioners with the largest practices.

I was told that by far the largest practice in town was that of an old doctor in his eighties, to whom peasants flocked from the vast hinterland. I made it a point to visit this miracle doctor as soon as possible. One morning, with my bag full of samples of bottles of medicines, products of our company, I proceeded in the direction of his office. He practiced in a one story house that stood in the remote corner of a vast rectangular yard, almost the size of the town square. The yard was packed with horse drawn carts full of peasants and their families. I made my way to the house and passed a line of standing and squatting men, women and children, numbering fifty to sixty, a line that had formed across the yard extending all the way to the entrance of the doctor's

office. I made my way through the patiently waiting humanity, and opened the door into a small vestibule, through which the patients were coming and leaving in an almost uninterrupted stream. I stood there waiting until a middle-aged man emerged from the other room, and after I explained the purpose of my visit, he escorted me to the next room, where the doctor received his patients.

It was an ample space devoid of fixtures or furniture, except for a single table in the corner under the window and two chairs. On one chair there sat the old man. His right hand was motionless and limp on the table, while his left hand was either resting on his knee or, with fingers cupped, percussing the back or front of a patient's chest, gently touching the abdomen, or holding the wrist, in the familiar position of pulse-taking. A line of patients proceeded in a single file before the doctor, each of them would stop for a while voicing a short complaint, then point toward the part of the body affected. After being touched or briefly percussed by the old man each patient would receive a prescription, pay or not pay a fee to the man who had escorted me into the room, and with a prescription in their hand would proceed toward the exit.

After a long while, the middle-aged man leaned on the table and whispered in the doctor's ear. The old man raised his head and motioned me to the empty chair beside him. I sat, opened my bag on the floor beside me and as the doctor did not say a single word but proceeded with his routine, I tried silently to absorb the scene. Although the patients uttered their complaints in a local Ukrainian or Byelorussian dialect I understood most of it. These patients were awe-struck as they stood before the old man and their complaints were short. They would say, I have a pain here, and point toward a shoulder, to their back, arthritic wrist or fingers. A mother would silently hold up a child with inflamed eyelids, a woman would lift the hem of her long dress to show swollen feet. No patient was asked to undress. The old man would percuss an old woman's chest through her clothing, probably to assess whether her cough was simple bronchitis or pneumonia. He relied on his pulse-taking and touching of the skin to measure the temperature. He touched every patient with his left hand, the right hand apparently useless from a stroke. I now realized that he was speechless and paralyzed.

No patient left without a prescription. I noticed quickly that the prescriptions were in various colors, predominantly white, red and blue. They were filled out already and it became clear to me that most pre-

scriptions were for a popular German medical tonic, a combination of stimulants in a red syrupy liquid mixed with alcohol, a mild cough syrup and a sulpha drug mixed with aspirin. It was no use interrupting him or trying to engage him in an explanation of the purpose of my visit. I left the room after half an hour again escorted by the doctor's helper to whom I pointed out that the medicines dispensed here had excellent substitutes. I then left many samples which he could present to the doctor. He smiled, as if to say that this would not be necessary. He handed me a few colored blank prescription forms on which I could write the names of the substitute products of my company. I did as he suggested.

Within a few days all the druggists in town were swamped with requests for my company's medicines. When later in a conversation with a local physician, a well-trained internist, I mentioned my visit to the old man and his archaic ways of treating patients, he astonished me by saying that he himself believed that many patients did well by just being touched by the old man's hand and that it was unfortunate that doctors were no longer taught how to touch a patient.

* * *

Winters in these remote eastern provinces arrived early and lasted well into March. Not infrequently I would be driven from place to place in a sled. I was well outfitted with a fur coat and cap and on these journeys I felt strangely tranquil gliding through the pristine, white countryside, the silence interrupted only by the rhythmic jingle of bells. A sudden storm would keep me happily snowed in, for a night or two, in a cozy, warm home of a country doctor. There would be a gathering of friends arranged after dinner. And as I was a guest from the distant capital the young men and women would flock for tea, potato pancakes, and conversation that would last far in the night.

Although Jewish physicians' houses were spacious and their tables filled with abundance, many of the young people partaking in conversations shared the hopeless economic woes of their peers in the rest of Poland. But there were differences. In central and western Poland, where I came from, conversations in such circles was usually held in Polish, whereas here Yiddish was the spoken language even of the educated Jewish youth. The older people would frequently lapse into Russian.

The educated older people were almost untouched by Polish cultural influence and still showed a mysterious enchantment with Russian poets and writers of the old. Their deep displeasure, even hatred of the Bolshevik regime was only slightly more intense than the disdain they had for the Polish regime in Warsaw.

But there was something genuinely "Jewish" about these educated people that I found in the eastern provinces of Poland. It was the candidness and warmth of these people, living in remote, isolated parts of the country, that brought them in short time near to my heart.

One evening we were sitting around a table near a large window through which I could see the falling snowflakes forming ever more dense sheets of white opacity, first obscuring and then blotting out the landscape. The room was warm and tea was served from a large shiny *samovar*. The tea was drunk Russian style. Small pieces of broken-up sugar tablets were kept on the tongue and sucked while the tea was passing through the mouth. Somehow, in this manner, one was able to separate the tea from the sugar, to taste each at will or mix the two sensual qualities in varying degrees, according to one's own choice.

* * *

I remember one evening and Rachel, the doctor's daughter. We ran into each other in a remote, dim nook of the immense country kitchen without design or premonition. Rachel's awakening, her yearning, her curiosity about the stranger in her home. The sudden embrace, the feel of her firm girlish roundness, the sweet taste of her willing lips. An unexpected, passing sensual collision, a fleeting wondrous *non sequitur* imprinted in the memory, for a lifetime.

* * *

I remember one evening and Joel. He joined us late in the evening and sat in a chair by himself, outside the circle of debaters around the table. But his entrance seemed to affect the discussion. The arguments were now somewhat muted, without the usual sharp and over-sharp analysis of the topic. The change was so striking that I could not but turn toward the man that caused it. Joel sat deep in his chair like a tired man enjoying his weariness after a rewarding day of manual toil. His relaxed ruddy face was framed by a rim of tufts of brown hair around his

chin and upper lip. His eyes were half closed contributing to the impression of a faint smile.

My neighbor at the table must have noticed my interest in Joel because he informed me, "This is Joel, our *fundamentalist,* whose religion is *soil and toil.* Now, in the winter he chops wood." Now I could see people from the main table drifting slowly toward the corner where Joel sat where a group was quickly forming around his chair. I moved my chair closer to the group.

Joel now showed little weariness. Surrounded by curious listeners, his eyes were now wide open and sparkling above his fresh, ruddy cheeks. His voice came to my ears just in time for me to overhear that, in the spring he would be "in Eretz Israel." He caught my gaze because with a twinkle in his eyes he added, "I have to do all the chopping of wood I can while I am still in *galut.* There is no chopping of wood over there. No tree cutting. But then, there is no winter, no snow either."

Joel was a rare guest and I sensed that he was expected to be receptive to the questioning youngsters around him. Answering the first question he became suddenly transformed and he was now preaching his truths with a childlike simplicity and smile. "The mystery of our life and our relationship to it cannot be unraveled from intellectual musing. Only by direct contact with the Cosmos, with Nature, with the land and after experiencing the exaltation brought by loving understanding and physical contact with the soil will we be on the road to the truth. We cannot embrace the cosmos, the stars but we can do so with the soil. And we do so when we actively participate in the life of Nature."

There was some disparity between the fluent, literary Yiddish and the simple, roughly hewn body and gestures of the speaker. But the very incongruence also made the listeners believe in his honesty and conviction. Sophisticated, literary Yiddish, which I rarely had the opportunity to hear, usually sounded artificial and pompous to me. But this Talmudic scholar-turned-peasant sounded graceful and simple. He emptied his glass and continued, "Although man was created in the image of God he came from dust, from the soil. Adam came from *adama,* earth. We are the product of the earth, a result of a natural process at work in the evolution of the Cosmos. The contemporary danger is that man will lose the very life-giving force with which he was endowed during creation by losing contact with Nature. We Jews were uprooted from this life-giving union for two thousand years. Only now have we started our return to that speck of desolate soil, waiting for us to redeem it miracu-

lously. Reunited with our ancient soil our people will not only become normal, like the rest of nations, free of this enforced unnatural existence, and the life of outcasts. Through the soil of our Land we will regain our creativity and spirituality and again be able to contribute to the progress of mankind. A rebirth of ideas that grew once on our ancient soil for the whole of humanity is in the future, if only we regain the connection that we lost for two thousand years."

After a silent pause, during which only the diminishing plaint of the storm outdoors could be heard, Joel grinned and in a jovial, boyish gesture he clapped his hands into a rhythmic beat and, at once joined by almost all present, he intoned: *Vetahar libeynu:*

"Purify our Hearts,
to Worship You in Truth. . . ."

As we sang, the howling of the storm over the frozen white expanse of the Volhynia and Poland outside quickly succumbed to this joyous chant of Hassidic faith.

* * *

As I traveled through the vast provinces of Volhynia and Polesie, visiting towns and villages, the feeling of hopelessness abated. It was so perhaps because of the distraction of daily travel, of new places and of new friendships with medical practitioners and their families. Mostly Jews, who practiced medicine in vast rural regions, isolated from social and cultural life, they were extremely hospitable. They would keep me overnight in their home, treating me to the best of their cuisine and it goes without saying, supported wholeheartedly my endeavor to substitute German medicines with our own. And so my travels here were not only financially rewarding but with every prescription that eliminated a German product there was an accompanying good feeling of fighting Nazi tyranny.

As the spring of 1939 arrived, the dismembered state of Czechoslovakia began experiencing new difficulties. The Slovaks under the influence of German propaganda demanded autonomy. Threatened with the bombing of Prague the new Czech president Hacha signed anything Hitler ordered. Hacha agreed not only to autonomy for Slovakia, he signed away the independence of his country. And so while on the 10th of March politicians in England proclaimed the arrival of the Golden

Age of Peace, five days later Hitler was in Prague. Without a shot the Nazi machine took over the country of Masaryk.

Hitler was true to the Latin proverb, *Mundus vult decipi, ergo decepiatur.* (The world wants to be deceived, therefore let it be deceived.) I still heard in my ears the deceitful declaration, "I have no more territorial demands to make in Europe" which Hitler announced to the world after Munich, in the fall of the previous year. How grateful the peoples of Europe had been for this obvious lie! How the Western democracies believed eagerly in a tyrant who to any sound mind was obviously out to subjugate Europe!

But now after the Czechs were devoured, something finally changed. The scales fell from the eyes of the mesmerized European nations. Suddenly no one believed Hitler any more. But it was too late. On March 23 Hitler took Memel from Lithuania. The Lithuanians gave in without a protest. Then, only three days later, Hitler demanded Danzig from Poland. An insatiable monster was on the march. Suddenly, to everyone's surprise, there was resistance and defiance. The Polish government called up reservists. On April 29 Germany repudiated its non-aggression pact with Poland, signed with Pilsudski in 1934. The war of nerves was on.

But now the moment of truth arrived for Poland. Difficult as it was for visceral Polish anti-Semites to swallow, the Polish government suddenly put the brakes on anti-Jewish activities. There was an official declaration that the people of Poland should realize that their destiny depended largely on their attitude toward minorities. The Poles finally came to their senses when faced with mortal danger.

When in June 1939 I had finished my assignment in Volhynia and returned to Warsaw I noticed a significant change in the air of the capital. Nature had also conspired to bring an unusually beautiful spring. The lilacs blossomed in the Botanical Garden. The crowds in the capital were for once gay and almost carefree. Something more genuine and natural seemed to surface from the depth of the national soul. The challenge of Hitler struck some strings in the Polish character and evoked a chord which through the ages had given a dominant coloring to Polish history. Defiance against overwhelming odds, an inclination to sudden self-sacrificing heroism, Polish bravado. I must have had something of it in myself, or perhaps I became infected with the air surrounding me, because I felt in myself a new wave of optimism. Warsaw was suddenly beautiful again, the crowds friendly, and the sun

shining as it was on all of us infused a feeling of common purpose, of together finding a way to defy evil.

Surprisingly, on this spring day of 1939, in Warsaw, few believed war to be imminent. Poland suddenly looked strong, united. From the West there were encouraging signs that Britain finally was through with appeasement. An Anglo-Polish alliance was in the making. Chamberlain in a turn of somersault diplomacy guaranteed Polish borders. The Poles refused to yield an inch. Hitler's bluff was called. Hitler was silent. The shrieking radio tirades stopped. Was it only for a while? Perhaps. But the pause was soothing to our nerves and lifted our badly tried spirits.

I had now two months of summer vacation before me. I had enough money to go on a spree. I decided to spend some time at the seashore, an old dream of childhood. But before starting my vacation I had to visit Lodz, where my older sister, now married, lived with her husband and small child. I also had to go to my home-town to see my parents.

Once in Lodz I could not but notice that the town was showing some signs of prosperity. It was a wave of economic activity that brought a renewed feeling of optimism barely tempered by the sobering voices of those who cautioned that it may be a pre-war bubble. I was struck by the new experience, how quickly people change their gloomy outlook with a sudden change in the wind.

I called on my friend Nathan, who, I had heard, was ready to emigrate to the United States. This was big news because I hardly knew anyone who had been able to get an American visa. I had no one of my friends or of my family living in the States. It was for most of us, a remote giant country, free and spacious, previously very prosperous, but now beset with problems of an economic depression and unemployment. For us, its doors were shut tightly.

Nathan told me that he was leaving for the States within a week. He was my classmate from Bratislava and like myself, a physician unable to practice medicine in Poland. He had a brother in Chicago and he became the only one of the class able to depart for the land across the ocean. When I asked after Hanka, his sweetheart, his face darkened.

Hanka and Nathan were the great love story of our student years. Inseparable, they shared a table in the coffeehouse. It was hardly imaginable to think of one without seeing the other's after-image. It was also the old story of poor Nathan and rich Hanka. Their love was disturbed by the girl's father who had a different view as to whom his only daughter

should marry. Hanka enrolled in medical school just to be near Nathan who found little welcome in his sweetheart's home. Hanka's father, a wealthy industrialist, had no use for a "doctor without a practice." He needed a man who could enter the business and enlarge his factory.

This was the time when Britain issued the infamous White Paper virtually closing the gates of Palestine and, in the face of the catastrophic situation of Europe's Jewish population, practically denounced the Balfour Declaration. Nathan was a Zionist. Unable to go to Palestine, he was, however, able to choose America. He was very outspoken on the gloomy future of Polish Jewry. He was now in pain explaining to me his feelings at leaving Hanka behind. He would do his utmost to send her a visa. He knew she would wait for him. But he worried that time and events were against them. Hanka's father was dead set against his daughter's departure for America. He considered the United States a refuge for those who could not prove themselves, here at home. Or those who ran because they broke the law. "Chicago," he sneered, "the city of Al Capone. Is it there where my Hanka is going to end up? Never!" Nathan left for America at the end of June, 1939, alone.

At home, thirty miles from the German frontier there was a summer tranquility which I could not recall seeing for years. Activity in the shop had spurted in the spring with the renewed economic upsurge and seemed to proceed without undue strain. Now a summer lull descended on the town. The military manoeuvers nearby were not too disturbing. If anything it reassured everyone as to the readiness of the Polish army. My mother was happy with the arrival of her grandson from Lodz. My father looked well. He was now elected *gabai*—a sort of Jewish equivalent of deacon—in the prayer-house and he was obviously immersed in the life of the congregation. My other sister seemed to be ready to marry though I was not able to meet the lucky fellow. How bright things suddenly looked in the summer of 1939! I spent three days at home. I recall that I left a note of 500 zloty—the largest denomination of the Polish currency not usually available in the provinces—as a small token of gratitude. The first and last such gesture I was able to make to my parents in my life.

* * *

My decision to spend the month of July 1939 at the seashore was influenced by my desire to see the sea. Born deep inland, I had cherished

this dream since childhood. Now I was able to fulfill my desire on my own terms: To be carefree for a month on the sandy beach and to live in a sun-and-wind swept fishing village on the Baltic.

Poland held sovereignty over a small strip on the Baltic sea connected to the mainland by a narrow corridor, the corridor of Gdansk or Danzig, now lay in the full glare of world publicity. Gdansk, a free port under the mandate of the League of Nations, was being claimed by Hitler with renewed hysteria. It was this strip of land that the Polish government promised to defend, and with it France and England. It was on this strip of hot sand that I had decided to spend my vacation.

In retrospect, as the unknown future became the known past, the decision was a remarkable folly. But at the time of the decision a marked stillness had descended over wide stretches of Poland. Added to this was also a sense of silly bravado at the idea of taking a leisurely rest in dunes surrounded by navies and armies poised for confrontation at a moment's notice, in a spot on which the eyes of the whole world were riveted. I still have difficulty deciding whether this was a yearning for adventure and defiance or the desire of fools to rush in where the proverbial angels fear to tread.

Be as it may, I left Warsaw by train in high spirits heading north where some of my friends were already enjoying the sand and breeze. After a few hours, as we came nearer to Danzig, I had the first glimpse in my life of the sea. Suddenly as the train passed a narrow open gap between buildings, a silvery green glitter sliced over the horizon. Despite my full awareness of the nearness of the water the shiny metallic sliver streaked across my field of vision like a mirage. I was unable to accept it as more than an optical illusion. And then the wonder stretched itself before me with all its unreal beauty of rippled, tinted infinity. For the rest of my life, whenever I return to the sea, this first feeling is always with me.

The month of July passed quickly. A congenial group of men and women from Warsaw, spending a carefree month in this wind swept village far from daily events and worries, a proverbial summer paradise. Occasionally a battleship would appear on the horizon, people on the beach would follow it through binoculars and, after identifying it as a Polish vessel would return to the momentarily interrupted beach frolics.

A slight reminder that we were in the eye of potential hurricane came on a trip to nearby Gdynia. I took snapshots of my companion, a girl I met on the shore, a girl who later became my wife. We had lunch and

were ready to return to our village when we were approached by two men in civilian clothes, who identified themselves as members of the military intelligence. They told us that they had us under surveillance and that I had taken photographs of the port installations. I explained that I made snapshots of my companion and I offered to remove the film from my camera and hand it over to them. They asked for identification and to my surprise they suggested we keep the film and asked that if after we develop it and find in the background images of port installations, to destroy the film. The episode paradoxically was reassuring to us. We thought highly of the alertness of the naval intelligence. Their courtesy and trust reaffirmed our belief that things could not be that bad because such a relaxed attitude on the part of intelligence officers was to me incompatible with imminent war.

Back in Warsaw I contacted my pharmaceutical company and was told that beginning in September I would be assigned to the south-western territories, around Cracow, an assignment very much to my liking. Cracow was a town full of medieval architecture and historical importance, a cradle of Polish culture. There was also a lively and cultured Jewish intelligentsia. Things couldn't have been going better. I asked and received an advance payment from my company and together with my new acquaintance, my future wife, we left to spend the rest of August on the high range of mountains in the south, the Tatra. Although there was common knowledge of Polish military maneuvers and partial mobilization, this news was more reassuring than alarming, because it confirmed the belief of a strong Polish posture against the Germans. The change from the seashore to the mountains was exhilarating. We lived in a remote spot high in the mountains in a hut without newspapers or radio, isolated, happy.

* * *

The blissful days of August 1939 came to a sudden end. One morning, August 23, the wife of the mountaineer from whom we rented the hut appeared before us while we were at breakfast. Although out of breath—she must have run all the way from her house down the slope —she was still able to pour forth her message. She spoke in her native mountain speech and the only words I could make out were: Mobilization, Hitler, Stalin. Her husband, who shortly afterwards came to our hut was more coherent. The Germans and the Soviets had concluded a

pact. A general mobilization was in effect. War was imminent. He agreed to take us to the nearest train station. We packed in haste, gave a final look at the peaceful valley below and departed.

The railroad station already overflowed with young men, some escorted by their wives, carrying babies in their arms or holding restless children at their sides. The throng was broken up by clusters of men, women and children, their bundles, packages and small wooden chests with painted initials. Each a circle of humanity, families united perhaps for the last time. The sound of the oncoming train for a moment interrupted the crowd's chatter, then there was a sudden increase in the pitch of women's voices while the children became silent. The train came to a screeching halt, embraces tightened then loosened. The train swallowed the men, who after looking for space for their wooden chests and bundles and then standing in the aisles of the crowded compartments, finally realized that a new chapter in their lives was being written by fate and events beyond their control. We also became part of the mass, little grains of sand tossed about by the whirls of the oncoming hurricane.

We arrived in Warsaw the same evening. Crowds larger than usual milled around the railroad station. Except for some tenseness in the faces around there was no change in the face of the city. It was a warm summer evening, the crowds moved briskly along the illuminated avenues, the neon lights scintillated the brands of chocolate and liquor. We parted without a word, my companion leaned forward in the *droshky,* waved silently and was off to her parent's apartment. I caught a red street-car heading toward Muranowska street, the hub of the Jewish district of Warsaw.

VI

WARSAW AT WAR

ON FRIDAY the first of September, at dawn, there was a terse radio announcement, "German troops have crossed the Polish borders." There was no formal declaration of war. The tension of the previous days suddenly eased. The matter-of fact announcement flattened the effect of this climactic event and the transition from peace to war had a numbing rather than jolting effect. I looked through the window. The sun was just sending a shaft of light through the gap between two buildings as it always did on a sunny summer morning. People were crossing the square below, going to prayer houses, to shops, to workshops. Mothers were taking their children somewhere, probably to playgrounds, as always.

I had no plans of my own. I did not receive a mobilization call. Due to the wisdom of the Polish government I was assigned a category to be called last. I had no military training. So as to keep the number of Jewish officers to an absolute minimum, most college educated Jews were excluded from the armed forces. In a time calling for action, I found myself in a state of impotency and inaction. I was ready and eager to join an organized national effort against the hated invader. My grievances, my bitterness against the prevailing order of things in Poland faded before the overwhelming desire to join in the common task of fighting the Nazis. Now, when the supreme effort was a must, I was not to be a part of it. There was, again, nothing to do but wait for developments.

Next day I received a telephone call from an old classmate. He told

me that a man had arrived in Warsaw after fleeing from my native town saying the town had been bombed by the Germans on the first day of war. He described the attack on this open town which lacked any military or antiaircraft facility. The bomb had fallen in the backyard of my parents' house. The population fled in panic and my parents had taken refuge in a forest ten kilometers north of the town.

The news suddenly brought the war right into my very existence. It unglued and removed a substance of unreality. So far war had been only an idea. But now the unbelievable had happened. My town was bombed mercilessly, my family was helpless in a forest.

Do something! a voice inside me demanded. But what? The telephone rang. My summer companion, my girl was on the phone. Had I heard an explosion? There were rumors that the airfield was bombed. I told her the news I had received. I told her I needed a car. "I have to go to the place my parents are hiding to take them to Warsaw." She said she knew someone who possibly could help. He was a high official in the French embassy. She would contact him immediately and call back. I waited feverishly for her call while going over my plan. It was the first time that I opened a drawer and took out a map of Poland, a map that for the next weeks would fill my eyes, my brain. I located the approximate point where my parents were supposed to be and estimated the distance to Warsaw. I also tried to put red dots in places which, according to the radio, the German forces had already seized. I dismissed any thought that driving toward the front looking for my parents in a forest might be futile. It had to be done. The phone rang. My girl had contacted the Frenchman. He said a car might be available tomorrow but that there was no gasoline to spare for me. She told him we would be at the embassy tomorrow morning. He agreed.

I spent the night with little sleep. Whenever I would wake it was with the thought that this was a nightmare. That all this could not possibly be true. I finally fell asleep toward morning and was awakened by a clatter of metallic objects in the yard below. It was the sound of shovels. A few men and women were digging an anti-aircraft shelter in the ground below the window. The radio announced that the Polish cavalry had made progress on the East-Prussian border. Battles were raging along the entire German frontier. Many cities had been bombed and there were considerable casualties among the civilian population.

I dressed quickly and went out to meet my girl friend and we rushed to the embassy. At the appointed hour a weary Frenchman with red

eyelids in a rumpled suit tried to convey to me some information in a roundabout diplomatic way. I must have been unwilling or unable to understand him because he suddenly switched to Polish and in short phrases got his message across, "It is a hopeless task to go to the front line. There is no front line. The Germans have crossed the river Warta and are moving northeast with terrifying speed." He excused himself courteously and disappeared behind a door. We left the embassy stunned. It was the first time that a new disquieting element took hold of me. It was the awareness of the alarming speed with which the German war machine was moving across my native land.

Back on the street, we saw large crowds, streaming toward the British embassy. Banners were aloft: Long live Britannia! Death to the invader! We were quickly engulfed by the mass of people heading toward the British embassy. Someone told us that Britain had declared war on Germany. The crowd was in a jubilant mood. It was a tremendous relief to know that Great Britain was now an ally. We were not alone. It was an unusual spontaneous demonstration of the people of Warsaw, men, women, children, workers, students, housewives, orthodox Jews in black capotes and redfaced laborers marching together in sudden recognition of common danger and common destiny. The crowd filled the square in front of the embassy and cheered wildly when the British ambassador appeared on the balcony. He spoke briefly to the enthusiastic masses. He ended with an appeal to disperse because of the great danger that large gatherings of people invited attack by German pilots. But nothing could frighten these people. They called the ambassador back to the balcony, like a frenzied theatrical audience calling for an encore or another bow.

I went back home with mixed emotions. The fate of my family behind the German lines and the speed with which the enemy's spearheads were moving toward Warsaw were counterbalanced by the immense relief that the British, and a few hours later the French, had joined the war. As night fell on the blacked-out city new hope was infused into the heart of its citizens. In the living room of my older brother's apartment, with whom I was living temporarily, a group of friends gathered for a poker game. They played in silence till midnight and then dispersed into the dark stillness of the restlessly sleeping city.

Next day, the fourth day of the war, there were rumors that the front was approaching the outskirts of Lodz. People were asking: Have the British bombed Berlin? Have the French started their march into Ger-

many? Will Warsaw be defended by the retreating armies? There was little sign of attempts to fortify the city. There was no clarification from the Government. People clung to the versions most appropriate to their temperament.

I had a call from a woman pianist, who urgently asked me to meet her. She lived not far away and I went out to see her as she refused to divulge her request on the phone. She was an exceptionally gifted pianist in her early twenties, with a broad open face, high cheekbones and smiling grayish-green eyes. It was always a treat to gather at her home, to hear her play Chopin and Beethoven. She made her living as an accompanist to a famous Warsaw crooner in a fashionable coffeehouse. I could not even venture to guess the reason for her urgent request to meet me. I stood on the street corner where I had promised to meet her, in the bright sunshine of that unusually beautiful September 1939. The wail of an air raid siren suddenly filled the air. People tried to empty the streets by crowding into gates, stores or between buildings. Most hugged the walls of buildings. There were no shelters in sight. Traffic came to a halt. There was a buzz from two enemy aircraft circling in the sky followed by loud thuds far away. I was standing in the entrance to a bank that occupied the corner of the street where I was to meet my pianist. After ten minutes there was an all-clear siren, the traffic resumed and people again filled the streets. She arrived shortly afterwards wearing a white muslin dress and a large black hat. She took my arm without a greeting and we walked along the street for a few minutes. She was extremely pale, her gaze directed upwards, above the crowd. She started the conversation asking me how I had spent my vacation and if I still worked in the hospital. She then quickly came to the point. She had had a premonition that the Germans would soon occupy the city. Since the outbreak of the war she had lived in constant terror. She couldn't strike a note on her piano. What she wanted from me was a vial of cyanide. She would only use it, she said, when the Germans entered the city. With the vial in her possession she was certain she would be able to play the piano.

I kept walking in silence. We entered the Saxon garden and sat on the first available bench. The green foliage of the trees contrasted sharply with the blue skies. Not a single cloud. I was at a loss for words, thoughts or even comprehension. I had to overcome again the feeling of unreality of the last days by summoning my total willpower not unlike

I used to do when in the hospital treating an emergency case. Everything narrowed now to the fine interface of life and death. I can't fail!

"Wars pass," I finally started. "There is a Geneva convention," I continued. "They wouldn't dare harm women and children." These were not my words. She must have heard them in the last few days, from others. This trite lulling of the defenseless. She sat motionless, her gaze fixed on the blue horizon behind the trees. In the pale tautness of her face only her nostrils quivered when I added, "I have no access to drugs. I haven't been to the hospital for months. You don't find this type of thing in a hospital." These were the first words of truth she had heard from me that day. A deep bitter anger rose up within me. For the first time in my life the thought surfaced in me, "God, why was I not taught to kill." She must have sensed my pain because she rose, stooped over me, kissed my cheek and with a slight touch of her fingers on my shoulder she prevented me from standing up. She then briskly walked to the gate of the park, a figure in white and black, diminishing, diminishing, disappearing, forever . . .

* * *

I decided to walk back rather than to take a street car. To get back I had to walk almost through the whole length of the sprawling Jewish quarter. The streets teemed with humanity. The hum of daily life continued unabated. Streetcars, *droshkis,* peddler's carts moved ceaselessly and purposefully, making one believe that attainable destinations still existed. On the side streets old men were sitting in the front of houses. I suddenly became aware that I was passing the street where Felicja, or as we called her *Felka* lived. I could not refrain from stopping at her house. I had never visited her home before and the number of the house escaped me. I stood on the sidewalk trying to visualize the address on her letters to me, then decided to get help from a little boy with long side-locks, and a round black hat sitting somewhat lopsidedly on his head. Her family name was known to him. "You mean Reb Zalman?" I hesitated. Felka could not possibly be of an orthodox family. I knew that she was a Jew because I met her as a patient in the Sanitarium but I always considered her a product of a thoroughly "assimilated" family. She was petite with a round face, somewhat protruding blue eyes and blond hair that she kept tightly combed over her round forehead taper-

ing in the back into a yellowish bun. She came to the Sanitarium after a bout of Rheumatoid Arthritis, still in a subfebrile state. She should never have come to a spa, because of the possibility of aggravating her still active disease. She was always smiling. Her smile intrigued me because she kept smiling when I examined her swollen wrist trying gently to estimate the degree of motion of the inflamed joint. I asked her if it was painful. "Yes"—she answered smiling, "a little bit." Within a few days she had made herself irreplaceable. With her cheerful face and gentle manner, helping everyone around her, she became the darling of the institution. She was a student of history at Warsaw University, and immersed in political activities in progressive Polish student circles. A strict vegetarian since the age of ten when she witnessed the slaughter of a chicken, she spoke little, always doing something, carrying her little body with a busy purposefulness despite her aching joints. When asked a question requiring a lengthy answer she would blush and her eyes would turn up and protrude a little more, her smile persisting through the ordeal.

I was led now by the boy to the house where she lived. He stopped at a red brick house and advised me to walk up three floors. Once up, I knocked on the half-open door. There was no response. I entered a small rather dark corridor leading to a larger room sparsely furnished with a table almost in the middle of the room. At the table sat an older man, his head bent over an open Talmud, his body in rhythmic motion. A chanting low murmur warbled through the room and continued without interruption while I stood silent. I cleared my throat loud enough to draw the old man's attention. He stopped, looked up, examined me for a while and with an inquiring gesture of his outstretched hands, without uttering a single word requested to know the purpose of my entering the room. I told him I was looking for Felicja. "Feigele?" he said in Yiddish, "she is not here and who are you?" When I told him that I had treated his daughter and that I was a doctor he asked me with another gesture to take a seat at the table. "You are fortunate to be a doctor. There is a great need for doctors in a war." He smiled the smile of his daughter. "God is putting everyone on trial," he continued dreamily. "His ways are mysterious but just" he added and bent his head again over the small print. He became oblivious of my presence and I left the room.

* * *

Back in the street the bustle seemed to diminish as the clear fall day was coming to an end. On street corners small groups of neighbours exchanged information from the radio, and rumors. Eyewitnesses and refugees who had reached the city told of the terrifying speed of motorized German units appearing in places incredibly close to the capital. Some spoke of the Germans crossing the river Pilica, a drive that could lead to the encirclement of the capital and the last natural barrier before the Vistula; of highways clogged with civilians, machinegunned by German pilots. Many believed the rumors were being spread by German spies within the city to create panic. As night approached the impending total blackout slowly emptied the streets.

At home a few friends gathered in the dining room sipping tea, listening to the radio and commenting on the veracity of the communications. We all agreed that the position of young Jewish men was becoming intolerable. Not mobilized into the armed forces, their daily occupations almost at a standstill, with no organized civil defence to try meaningfully to employ the available manpower for building shelters or a defense perimeter around the city, every hour of inactivity while the country outside the capital was being overrun by a mortal enemy was devastating to everyone's morale. There were rumors that the enemy was encircling the city, that the government was evacuating and that the city would not be defended. That the retreating forces would regroup east of the Vistula and once the fall rains and winter snow came there would be a lull in the fighting that would allow a spring counteroffensive against the invader who would also have had to battle the French and British in the West. If true it would be logical to order all men of military age to leave for the East, rather than to defend the city and cause innumerable deaths, suffering and destruction. Was this the opinion of the Government or just rumors?

At midnight, tired but unable to go to sleep I suggested to a friend still present at the table, that we take a walk. The city was blacked-out and deserted. The air was clear and crisp, the sky filled with stars. There was no sign of war activity. I had again an eerie feeling of unreality. The country was in flames but the capital was quietly asleep under a starry sky.

But soon the atmosphere changed. As we approached the large Saxon Square we saw signs of feverish activity in front of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Unhindered by anyone we crossed the large empty square and stood at the entrance to the Ministry. We saw soldiers and

civilians packing crates, bundles, metal files, desks, onto trucks and into cars. The Ministry was blacked-out as was the rest of the city and the darkness lent a ghostly air to the feverish activities. We were not alarmed by the obvious evacuation of the Ministries' papers and archives. It was even perceived by us as a sign of organization and thoughtfulness. But we soon became somewhat doubtful when cars left the Ministry packed with an assortment of suitcases, household items, even pillows and blankets. Whole families including small children were being evacuated. This was not an organized, planned evacuation anymore. The Ministry was fleeing. The government was collapsing in disarray while the city slept.

Next morning, the rumors that the Government was leaving the capital intensified. After what I had seen the night before I needed no convincing. In addition there were persistent rumors that it had been decided not to defend the city and that orders were being circulated for young men to leave the city tonight, and that no radio orders would be communicated so as not to alert the enemy of this momentous decision. We had a little conference in the living room. The women present were gloomily of the opinion that the men should go East and join the Army rather than stay and be taken into the labor brigades that the Germans would surely organize to bolster their war effort against the Western Allies. The decision had to be made immediately, tomorrow might be too late. The decision was then made that three of us, my older brother, myself and Bronek, an architect friend, a reserve officer of infantry, still without mobilization orders, would walk out of the city that evening, cross the Vistula over the Kierbedz bridge and walk east until we could join a mobilization center.

I went to the home of my summer companion to take leave of her and her family. She took my decision stoically. In retrospect I believe that the people of Warsaw on this fifth day of war were so bewildered by the swift turn of events and the absence of guidance from the government that any action based on some logical premise looked correct. "Women, children and the old, if left behind, they are going to have a hard time, but they survived a war only two decades ago, they will with God's help survive this one too," it was said. "Young men, they should leave, they are in the greatest danger, they should join the effort surely to be made in the East." This was also the consensus of the family of my summer companion, my future wife. Her younger brother, aged twenty-three, a

student at the Polytechnique in Grenoble, France—now on vacation in Warsaw—decided to join us.

The same day, in the evening, the four of us left our homes and city. We walked in silence through the empty, blacked-out streets, crossed the bridge over the Vistula to the suburb of Praga. We planned to go to the railroad station and from there try to board a train East. The station was already a picture of disorder. There were no scheduled departures. We were so set upon making progress at once that the idleness of waiting for a doubtful train was intolerable. We were energized for activity and we decided to walk through the night along the main highway leading East to Siedlce and Brest.

After a two hour march, we entered a small village. We rested for a while then decided to continue. It became obvious that to make real headway we would have to use a vehicle and that the night hours must be used to make progress because we knew by now of the continuous strafing of civilians on highways by German pilots. Our plan was to push forward at night and sleep during the day. We approached a peasant's hut and knocked at a window. A sleepy, somewhat frightened figure opened the door. We asked where the *soltys,* the village-elder lived. He pointed to a hut and we proceeded in that direction. The *soltys* who was remarkably alert, was probably used to official night chores, and clearly suspicious of the four civilians whom he invited into the large single room, where his wife and children sat in beds observing us from the dark corner. Bronek, who did the talking this time, informed him that we were on our way to be mobilized and that we had, for reasons he couldn't divulge, to be in Siedlce early in the morning and requested that he give us a conveyance to bring us to our destination. The *soltys* was at first suspicious, and asked for official papers. But after Bronek showed him his reserve officer's military booklet, he became more cooperative. He was, however, reluctant to promise transportation for a distance of more than twenty kilometers to the next village along the main road. From there he suggested we get further transportation from the local authorities. He then took us to a nearby hut, woke up a peasant with whom he conferred for a while. We were soon accommodated on a horse-drawn cart covered with straw and on it we proceeded eastward. It was a bumpy ride but soon we were all asleep. I buried myself in the straw and when I woke up at the destination and opened my eyes to the fading stars above, a feeling of unreality again came upon

me. It took a few days of waking up in the most unusual places to get over this feeling.

We disembarked, but in view of the imminent daylight, it was decided not to ask for the type of transportation we had used to come in but to continue marching because as the dawn changed into full daylight the road came to life. Cars with military personnel, civilians, women and children, cars and wagons filled with luggage passed us leaving clouds of dust behind. At midday more horse drawn vehicles appeared on the road and regular formations of marching soldiers headed east. There were some distant rumblings of aircraft but we could not make out if they were ours or the enemy's. We slept all afternoon on the ground in a little forest shaded by pine trees.

As night approached, the traffic thickened. Everything was moving east. More and more horse drawn carriages overloaded with household furniture, pillows and suitcases slowed the traffic, sometimes to a crawl. There were also more pedestrians walking alongside the road in the fields and we found it easier to walk on the dry open field covered with stubble left after the harvest. As we walked through the night a reddish glow on the horizon was the only sign of the approaching front—to the north of us.

Before dawn we passed a stalled car. The overloaded vehicle, with a child's carriage on the roof, tilted sideways because of a flat tire, loomed in the grey of the dawn like a listing boat on a reef. The occupants of the car, a distinguished looking middle aged gentleman, probably a high official of a ministry, a young woman, a child, and a large peasant girl, probably the maid, sat in a circle on the field outside the stranded car. A tablecloth was spread in the middle of the circle and covered with bread, smoked meats, a wine bottle and cans of sardines. We heard them speak French and asked if we could be of help. The Frenchman told us that he had decided to wait for daylight to fix his car and in the meantime he was trying to have his first meal since midday yesterday. His party had left Warsaw at midnight. He offered the information that a steady stream of young men were leaving the capital on foot. "It is official now," he said, "the city will not be defended. There was a radio announcement by colonel Roman Umiastowski in charge of the Mobilization Office, ordering all men of military age to leave the city immediately and head east." The information that the capital was to be surrendered was a bitter piece of news. But it also confirmed our correctness in leaving our homes and it raised hopes that without being

encircled in Warsaw an orderly retreat of our army across the Vistula could easier defend a new line beyond the river, at least until the rains come. We had little knowledge of the confusion and disorganization of the Polish forces on all fronts because the path we were taking from Warsaw to Brest Litowsk was still relatively quiet. But this changed dramatically next day when the roads became clogged with fleeing civilians and retreating army units from the north, some heading west, some east, some in exhaustion sleeping in fields while German aircraft buzzed like vultures overhead.

For the next few days it became obvious that our expectations to be mobilized were in vain. The flowing human mass, of which we became a part when on the main road, had only one thing in mind, only one striving, how to go fastest and furthest east. The little towns and hamlets on the way were already bombed before our arrival and filled with smoke and rubble, most of their inhabitants fleeing in panic in front of us. Sometimes it looked as if the Germans were everywhere. We reached one little town which was intact, its inhabitants inside their little houses asleep or hidden behind locked doors, the streets empty as the sun was rising slowly. Tired from a night's march we were only too eager to stretch out and sleep. We knocked on a door. After a while, the door opened to reveal an entire family smiling at us and welcoming us into the house. They must have observed us for a while behind the shutters and come to the conclusion that we were harmless. They were all sleeping in the basement where they had brought all of their belongings and furniture from the upper floor. We washed at the pump in the backyard and for the first time in days had a warm meal at a table. We slept a few hours on the floor of the empty upper floor and left in the afternoon.

We were marching in better spirits now up a hilly path outside the town when the buzzing of two airplanes made us scurry from the exposed dirt road into a nearby clump of bushes. Within minutes the town below was on fire. Almost from nowhere, a small crowd of men, women and children appeared within our eyesight trying to reach the cluster of bushes where we were hidden. It was the top of a hill and its exposed position and the crawling crowd must have attracted the attention of the German pilot who after releasing his incendiary bombs on the hapless town was searching for hidden troops or civilians. He approached our hill making a large circle from an unbelievably low altitude. The people instinctively stopped moving toward us, hugging the ground, trying to lay motionless covering their heads with their hands and some lying on

their small children. There was a deadly silence around us, only the buzzing plane's sound diminishing in intensity as the plane flew away. There was renewed motion in the crowd below us when the sound of the plane suddenly grew louder and within a minute the plane was again above us, so low that I could see the pilot's young face distinctly. His begoggled head leaned forward toward me like an apparition from a horror movie. He made a low sweep around the hill and grazed the thistles and top of the bushes with a salvo from his machine-gun. He then made another circle around our hill, this time from a higher altitude. The wild high grass must have hidden the motionless people below because the plane left us without discharging another volley. The pilot headed north unchallenged into the cloudless blue sky.

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The rout of the Polish army changed now into complete chaos. Our thinking of the possible defense line behind the Vistula had now changed and we were speculating about the possibility of a new line beyond the river Bug. We therefore decided after crossing the river Bug to march further east into the territory known as the Prypets Marshes.

After a day's march the landscape changed completely. There was hardly a town or a village. Occasional mud huts, hardly recognizable from the distance as places of human abode, huddled in small clusters near the dirt road we were marching on. It became obvious to us that should the rain come this ground would become impassable not only to vehicles but also to the feet of the uninitiated stranger. The inhabitants, clad in primitive sack-like tunics, short trousers and wooden or rope sandals, looked at us suspiciously and could hardly communicate with us. To our amazement there was a single railroad track in this wilderness stretching before us and before long we found ourselves on board a train with retreating soldiers. There were many civilians mingled in with the soldiers, many were from Warsaw and so we were finally able to understand the confusing rumors about the state of affairs in the city. It was true that during the night of the sixth of September, on the order of the authorities, young men had left the city in large numbers heading east. However, on the eighth of September, only two days later, the mayor of Warsaw had decided on his own to defend the capital, asking every able-bodied citizen to prepare for a long siege. This confusion at the top

caused thousands of men to be on the roads instead in the city where they were badly needed.

The train was moving slowly through the vast emptiness. I was asleep when it suddenly halted. Everyone seemed to be in a hurry to get out. We were not at a station but in the middle of a swampy, grassy plain that stretched for miles to the horizon. It was an air raid and soon a single German plane flew over us dropping bombs. Soldiers scattered along the train aiming their rifles toward the sky. The pilot dropped two bombs parallel to the train missing it and making two large craters nearby, causing a shower of water to rise from the ground. There were no casualties. We waited awhile along the track as there was no order to get on board. Meanwhile a sergeant walking along the train asked if anyone spoke French. Two in our party had studied in France and told this to the sergeant. We were led to the back of the train where there was a car full of crates. A major in charge explained that an antiaircraft gun of French make had been uncrated and instructions for its assembly and use had been found. It was necessary to get someone with the knowledge of French to read the instructions. It was the first useful activity rendered by our party in the war.

We arrived in Rowne in the Volhynia on the 13th day of the war. I knew the town, having lived there only a few months before. Our party split here and Bronek decided to try to get to his home town in Eastern Galicia which was in the extreme southeastern part of Poland and could not have possibly been overrun by the Germans as yet. We never heard of him again. My future brother-in-law decided to go to Pinsk where he had relatives. My older brother and I found shelter in my friend's house in Rowne, where at last we could sleep in beds with sheets.

The rest did not last long. Within the next two days news circulated that the Polish General staff was retreating toward the Rumanian border. We were faced with the possibility of total defeat. With my brother we walked out of Rowne further east toward the Russian border in the belief that in the event of total collapse we'd cross the Soviet border rather than fall into German hands. We arrived the next day at a little town on the frontier. The very minute we arrived we heard the sound of an air raid alert and joined some people who were rushing into a basement serving as a shelter. The room was dim and filled to capacity. We stood at the wall trying to rest from the long march. Suddenly a stench of human excrement filled the air of the shelter. I took my brother's arm

and he understood me immediately. We walked out of the shelter into the empty street to get some fresh air, not caring about the air raid or even about the worse possibility that we might be taken for spies trying to give signals to the enemy pilot. We were sick of running, and life was not worth the stench of it.

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Later in the day we found a room with a Jewish family who told us that the air raid was not by German planes. It was a Soviet reconnaissance overflight—they had become quite frequent over the last few days. There were never any German raids here. There was plenty of food in this frontier town in the midst of the fertile agriculture land of the Volhynia. We were the first refugees from the West to be seen in this remote eastern frontier town. Later, as we walked along the town's main street we saw a large ramp separating the street from the narrow stretch of no-man's land and the beginning of Soviet territory beyond. The town was tranquil and as evening came we fell asleep on fresh-smelling, straw-filled mats.

VII

THE SOVIET "LIBERATION"

SHORTLY BEFORE DAWN I was awakened by the vibration of the floor under me and then I heard a heavy rumble coming from the street. I had had enough experience by now to know that this was the sound of rolling tanks. I woke my brother. We dressed in haste and walked out into the street. It was still dark. We were now in a back alley and couldn't see anything. The rumble, however, was now distinct and seemed to come from the direction of the main street. We were puzzled. According to our evaluation it was inconceivable that the Germans could have reached this outpost so soon. There had been no Polish forces in sight while we were marching the last few days, because the Soviet frontier was completely denuded of Polish army units for the battle on the western front. We decided to approach the main street slowly and as we came nearer we saw clearly through a gap in the houses the silhouettes of the slowly moving tanks. They were moving in a constant stream, a line of giant dark creeping beasts with roaring underbellies. Suddenly we realized they were moving from east to west! It was a stunning revelation. Russian tanks were crossing into Poland.

The town people first cautiously then more freely flocked to the main street standing on the narrow sidewalks or leaning out of open windows. Soviet foot soldiers were marching alongside the tanks. It looked like a parade, a peaceful entry of an army without a trace of battle. Soon, Soviet soldiers, later to be recognized as "politruks" or party propagandists, mingled with the populace, forming small groups of people who listened attentively. The *politruks*—political instructors—smiled

broadly, occasionally flashing rows of steel teeth. They spoke Russian, Ukrainian, Polish and Yiddish. "Everything is now going to be fine" they repeated "we have come to liberate you from your troubles. No more war! You are now secure under the might of the Red Army and comrade Stalin." Somewhat dazed we walked up the street toward the frontier and saw the large wooden ramp separating Poland from Soviet territory. It was lying on the ground smashed by the first entering tank. This was an entry without an invitation. The faint desperate hope that Soviet troops were joining Polish forces against the German invaders quickly vanished. This was a new invasion from the East, a stab in the back to the retreating and disintegrating Polish army.

We walked back along the main street. The sidewalks were filled with people who, after overcoming their initial anxiety were now relaxed, many smiling and conversing with Russian soldiers. The tanks kept rolling seemingly without end. We stood again, somewhat more collected after digesting the incredible event, observing more closely the Soviet war machine, the giant tanks we had never seen before, the soldiers and their equipment, when suddenly to the left of us we heard a single shot from a gun followed almost immediately by a loud detonation. There was a sudden surge of the crowd on the sidewalk toward the side alleys away from the main street. We were pushed into a narrow gap between two buildings where we stayed for a few minutes. No more shots were heard, the tanks rolled without interruption, and we were back on the main street. Across the street to the left of us at a distance of perhaps twenty yards there was a gaping hole in the front wall of a house, filled with rubble and dust. It had obviously been hit by a shell. Soviet soldiers surrounded the scene. The cause of the disturbance quickly became known. A Polish boy dressed in a boy-scout uniform holding a national red and white flag and a long sword in his left hand had fired a shot from a pistol toward a moving tank. There followed almost immediately a cannon shot from the tank killing the boy, injuring a few bystanders and making a large hole in the building. The tanks kept rolling.

Early in the afternoon more than ten hours after the first Russian tank smashed the ramp, Molotov, the Soviet commissar for foreign affairs informed the world by radio from Moscow of the Soviet decision to "liberate the working masses in Western Ukraine and Byelorrusia." He said in the broadcast that the Polish State in the last two weeks had lost all industrial centers, its armed forces were no longer under the control

of a responsible government, which indeed no longer existed. Under these circumstances the Soviet Union had abrogated its treaties, including the non-aggression pact with Poland. Molotov then announced that "the Soviet government cannot be indifferent to the fate of their brothers, Ukrainians and Byelorussians, and the Red Army has therefore been instructed to take under its protection the populations of Western Ukraine and Byelorussia."

Only now did we realize that this Soviet drive into Poland was part of the secret deal made with Hitler three weeks before, leading to the German attack on Poland. Only three weeks ago. To us it seemed years. Before our eyes the country had been overrun and divided. I witnessed the Fourth Division of Poland. We found ourselves on annexed territory, under Soviet rule.

Although we could not even guess at the consequences of the day's momentous event we did feel a sense of relief. "We will not be overrun by the Nazis." Whatever opinion we had of the Soviet state, the Communist ideology and the oppressive dictatorship there was the effect of a break in three long weeks of unmitigated tension. During the first few days the behavior of the Soviet troops, soldiers and officers was exemplary. There was no looting. Soldiers would crowd into the open stores and buy paying with rubles. They would stop and converse in a friendly way. This was apparently a disciplined army with strict orders to win the trust of the population. They were appealing to the Ukrainians and Jews, distributing leaflets and books in Ukrainian and Yiddish.

After a rest of three days we decided to return to Rowne, where we had left some of our belongings and where we could plan for the immediate future, after the military and political situation clarified. We started our march back, westward. The Soviets quickly established their authority. On the roads young local Ukrainians with red armbands, a hastily-organized militia, stood at crossroads and guarded bridges. Some of them were ordinary toughs who took the opportunity, under pretext of exercising their duty to prevent sabotage against the Red army, to search civilians, ostensibly for weapons, but mostly for valuables which they could appropriate for themselves. On our march through a village a group of four militiamen armed with rifles surrounded us and asked if we had any weapons. When we told them no, they demanded we empty our pockets and open our rucksacs. During the search they found a large hunting knife in a leather sheath, a present from a friend which I had kept for years, and, while packing my rucksack

before leaving Warsaw, thought worthwhile to take along with me. The militiaman who took the knife in his hand, a village boy whose eyes lit up when he saw such a desirable object, drew the knife from its sheath. "This is a weapon" he declared. I protested vigorously but after an exchange of the few heated words that I was able to utter in Ukrainian, the threatening posture of the militiaman convinced me that the knife was a total loss. In the meantime, however, a lorry with Soviet soldiers passed us and then stopped suddenly. An officer got out and inquired about the cause of the altercation. He spoke Russian and we tried to explain in Polish. He could not understand us and then asked: "Di redst Yiddish?" We told him the problem we had, in Yiddish, explaining that the only knife in our possession was not a weapon. He severely admonished the dumbfounded militiamen who had listened to the conversation in an unknown language, and then handed over the knife to me, with obvious wistfulness. The officer then halted an oncoming military vehicle and asked the driver to give us a lift down the road.

Later in the day, only a few miles from the outskirts of the town, where we were heading tired and hungry, we decided to ask a passing peasant in a one-horse sledge to take us to town. He demanded money and we agreed to pay the amount he wanted. We thought that we were finally at the end of our wandering for the day and started to think pleasantly of my friend's house where we had stayed before. We encountered, however, an unexpected hurdle. There was already a make-shift roadblock established at the entry to town and a militiaman demanded from us a *propusk,* a permit. It was the first we had heard of such a requirement and the gloomy picture of a night spent in the open so near to town was maddening. Suddenly, without really giving it much thought, I reached into my pocket where I was keeping my last bar of chocolate. It was in a beautiful wrapper with a colorful imitation of a red seal over two blue strings. I slipped out the bar and with an impatient gesture showed the colorful wrapper to the militiaman, saying sharply: "Here is the *propusk.*" The illiterate guard looked at it with astonishment, then saluted with awe and waved his hand to proceed.

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The next days in Rowne were filled with attempts to find friends or acquaintances among the thousands of refugees swarming into town. The Soviet army was proceeding westward without any significant resis-

tance from the dispersed and demoralized Polish troops. The Polish High Command retreated into Rumania. The Soviets met the Germans at the river Bug, which became the new Soviet-German frontier. Poland was divided for the fourth time in history and ceased to exist as a state. The Polish forces east of the Bug surrendered to the Soviets whose policy was to separate the officers from the lower ranks, freeing the latter. The officers were interned in camps. The Polish currency was slowly replaced by Russian rubles. The Russian soldiers using their rubles bought anything in sight emptying the stores in no time. When the fall rains came —how belatedly that year!—a food shortage developed and bread was rationed. It was necessary to look for employment.

Soon the Soviet police started rounding up political opponents, real or imaginary. Active Zionists were rounded up and disappeared. My brother who had been with me through the whole time since we left Warsaw decided to leave town. He was an active and prominent enough Zionist to think that his name was no doubt on the Soviet list. He left one night for Vilna which had been declared a part of Lithuania and seemed to enjoy temporarily a freer political atmosphere than that of the Ukraine. I finally received some news from my parents in the German occupied territories. They had returned home after the cessation of military activities. The report was short and full of cryptic forebodings.

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From within the abysmal events and upheavals there arose one positive development. Looking for employment I suddenly realized that the Soviet town authorities under new special orders were officially validating diplomas from medical schools in foreign countries and thus, at last, I was recognized as a medical practitioner. With one stroke of the pen the discriminatory and unconscionable restraint imposed on my professional life by my own Polish government, was abolished. I felt a sense of professional liberation and could not but feel some cognizance of positive elements in the otherwise oppressive system.

At first I was given duties as a physician in the municipal clinic and later at a hospital on the outskirts of town where a large number of sick and wounded Polish soldiers were being treated. The staff consisted of a few Soviet physicians in military uniform and Polish civilian physicians. The lack of drugs quickly became obvious although I had to recognize the usual war shortages and the probability that the Soviets were not too

eager to supply in abundance a hospital with a preponderance of Polish sick and wounded. These were the first months after the war and many of the Polish officers seized this opportunity to walk off the hospital grounds and disappear, thus avoiding camps where they would be confined for an uncertain future.

It was my duty, for one week, to attend such a camp outside of town to administer emergency medical care. Accompanied by a nurse and equipped with a large box of medicines, bandages and a few instruments for light surgery we drove in a *britska* to the camp. It was my duty to dress light wounds, treat minor complaints and select the sick to be transferred to the hospital. Officer prisoners would line up outside the barrack to receive treatment. Under the circumstances they seemed to be in good, though subdued spirits. Rarely would one of them ask to be admitted to a hospital although this meant a chance to escape. Conditions in camp were still tolerable and the precise status of the Polish officers in captivity was still uncertain. In a way, they were not prisoners of war because the Soviets never declared war on Poland, and there had been practically no combat between Polish and Soviet forces.

But one day during a visit to the camp I sensed an air of tension. Outside the barrack that served as a makeshift ambulatory clinic, there was an increased milling of camp inmates. When I told one of the officers, in the course of attending to his neck furuncle, to show up next day for possible incision of the boil, he informed me that later today they were being evacuated to a new and unknown destination. The next patient, a Catholic divisional chaplain, volunteered the same information and asked me in a confidential and muted voice on behalf of the officers to take a box from him and deliver it to someone in town. It was a highly unusual request, to say the least, as everyone was aware of the possible consequences of such an act. I was intrigued, however, by this unusual request and in the presence of my nurse assistant, who had heard our interchange, I asked the priest the contents of this box. He said these were sacred articles used in celebration of the Mass, of religious and historical significance to the Army division. The nurse, who was a Catholic blanched and without saying a word expressed her views of non-approval with a shake of the head and horrifed eyes. For reasons then unknown to me, possibly in defiance of the obvious fright in the eyes of the nurse, and possibly because it was a true-spirited request from men who otherwise asked no personal favors, I agreed. I proposed

to hide the box under my seat in the carriage. The chaplain then asked us to hand over the sacred contraband to the local Catholic parish priest.

This was not, however, the end yet of this particular visit to the camp. One of the officer-patients showed an elevated temperature. His complaints were a slight malaise and headache and he asked for aspirin. I examined him briefly while he kept assuring me that he was otherwise healthy and all he needed was aspirin. Meanwhile another officer tried to attract my attention and then in whispers informed me that the man I was examining was a professor of medicine from Vilna University and that he had been sick for many days. He asked me, in the name of many officers, to admit the professor to the hospital, because they felt that he might not survive the imminent evacuation. The professor turned to me now and vehemently denied that he was that sick and refused to be hospitalized. He obviously did not want to be separated from his comrades. He took the aspirin and slowly walked out.

When we finished our rounds, the chaplain's box was put under my seat. Two sick officers due for hospitalization were in a separate vehicle following us. The nurse and I left the barrack. The interned officers were already marching in regular formation toward the gates of the camp. The evacuation had already started. As we stood in front of the barrack watching the marching officers we saw the sick professor from Vilna University being dragged by his companions and forced into the carriage in which the two sick officers to be hospitalized were lying. He was probably too weak to resist and finally was separated from his companions. This probably saved his life because we now know in retrospect that none of these officers ever returned. They were massacred in the forest of Katyn.

I stood for a while watching the officer-prisoners leaving the camp through the gate. They were walking six abreast, clad in crumpled uniforms, their insignia torn off, their caps minus the Polish eagle. Some were limping, supported by comrades, trying to keep in line, trying to walk like soldiers. Watching this sorrowful parade, I suddenly saw a familiar face. To my disbelief I recognized Lonek, my older brother's schoolmate. Lonek, a Jew, apparently had been mobilized in time to join the army and was taken prisoner by the Russians. Without thinking, I walked up to him and grabbed his arm. He stopped, recognized me instantly and smiled. I said loudly "You are sick. You should be hospitalized," in this way trying to get him out of the moving

formation and keep him from being evacuated. But he understood my plan and freed himself, waved to me and kept marching, soon to be lost from sight. I never saw him again and he was never heard of despite numerous inquiries I made after the war. He too was murdered in Katyn.

We boarded the *britska* with our sacred cargo, the carriage with the sick officers following us. The Soviet guards, somewhat suspicious now, because of my attempt to extricate an officer from the marching formation, stopped us at the gate and asked questions about the officers we were taking to the hospital. I had good reason to be tense sitting as I was on a box of dangerous contraband. In a flash born of desperation, when the Soviet guard insisted on knowing the reason for taking the officers behind us to the hospital, I told him I suspected these to be cases of typhus. It was a magic word. There was hardly anything more frightening to the Russians than the word typhus, the grim scourge and companion of war.

Once out of the camp I breathed more easily. We had an hour's drive to town ahead of us. The Catholic nurse beside me seemed to recover slowly but soon became restless again. She must have been turning over in her mind the dangers still ahead. How to hand the box over to the local priest without arousing the suspicion of the coachman, a young Ukrainian boy. My thoughts were going in a different direction. I thought of Lonek and his refusal to leave his comrades. I had a grim premonition of the ways in which the Soviets were going to treat these Polish officers. I felt that Lonek's "loyalty" to his group was, at this point, a foolish bravado.

The thought that Lonek refused to be saved did not leave me for a moment. "He would not break ranks—what would I have done in his place?." I had to admit to myself that I would also act "foolishly." "Would it have been bravery or cowardice?" I continued to brood on how I was unable to resist my urge to grab his arm, to pull him away from his comrades. And on how he could, by the same reflex, resist my effort and reject my help.

Then my thoughts turned to the sacred cargo. Somehow I felt proud. I was fully aware of the risks I was taking in carrying Catholic sacramental objects belonging to a Polish military unit. I was certain that in the event of their being discovered by the Soviet authorities, the nurse sitting restlessly beside me would not hesitate to turn against me. Here I was thinking of Lonek as a sort of an honorable fool while I myself had

become involved in an act of unnecessary foolhardiness. Still, I smiled to myself. I felt some strange kinship with the Catholic chaplain who asked nothing for himself or for the interned officers, only this one favor. Then for a moment I thought of Poland's Cardinal Hlond who, during the bitter days after the pogrom in Przytyk, accused the Jews, of all things, of *white slavery*. White slavery! The cardinal refrained from the worn out blood libel. He substituted the canard of "white slavery!" How did this Prince of the Church arrive at that scurrilous inculpation? What mental process leads a presumably intelligent man to accuse a people *in extremis*, a defenseless people exposed to lawless organized hoodlums, of white slavery, of the smuggling of young women for the purpose of debauchery to harems and whorehouses? Were these feverish ravings of starved celibacy or just an echo of the screaming obscene headlines of the Nazi filth paper *Der Stürmer?*

I looked at the nurse near me and smiled. "Here," I mused "I may be accused by Russian Bolsheviks, the adherents of the new intolerant Communist church, of illegally smuggling holy Catholic objects." When the nurse saw my enigmatic smile she tried, emboldened, to communicate some of her own thoughts. I guessed from her frantic though silent gestures that she wanted me to unobtrusively dispose of the sacred cargo somewhere but not at its destination. She threw worried glances at the Ukrainian coachman whom she feared most of all.

We were in an open carriage and approaching town. The wind was now frigid. I became impatient with the nurse and with my own thoughts. I told the coachman to drive to the Catholic church and stop in front of the priest's living quarters. At some distance from the church I ordered the coachman of the vehicle following us with the sick officers, to stop and wait for us. We then drove around the block to the church. I ordered the nurse and the coachman to carry the box into the priest's house.

A young cleric opened the door looking at us and the box suspiciously. I asked for the priest. Obviously afraid to get mixed up in a strange affair or provocation, the cleric hesitated. I left the box in the vestibule adding in an unnecessarily loud voice: "Please take care of this box. It is a present from a Catholic military chaplain." At this point the door to the vestibule slowly opened and I saw the gray head of the priest. But now I was in a hurry. I turned toward the exit and left. The nurse and coachman followed. I still had to report to the hospital with my sick officers. I hoped none of them had disappeared. And indeed they were all waiting

and smiling at me approvingly. They knew well of the goings on. We left for the hospital without further delay. It was my last visit to the detention camp. And it was the nearest I came in my life to facilitating the clandestine transfer of sacred religious paraphernalia.

* * *

The winter of 1939/40 was unusually cold. Fuel was scarce. Refugees from the western Polish provinces huddled in unheated rooms wondering about the future course of the war in the West and their own fate. With the onset of the Russian-Finnish war, wounded Russian soldiers arrived at the hospital.

It was obvious that the Soviet government was willing to transport their wounded soldiers to this hospital in the remote Western Ukraine because it was trying to avoid showing the frozen faces and limbs of their soldiers to the Russian population, inland. This war with Finland was supposed to have been an insignificant confrontation, a "liberation" of a small country by the giant "liberator." But the first month of the war was a calamity. From what I heard from the patients, the soldiers with frozen ears, noses, chins and fingers, it was the combination of temperatures of thirty degrees below zero, five to six feet of snow, a territory of lakes and forests, and the desperate resistance of the Finns behind powerful fortifications that made the Soviet assault both slow and costly.

The initial demands of the Soviets seemed moderate because they claimed twenty kilometers of territory north of Leningrad to diminish the potential threat to this second largest Russian city. But the way this giant country attacked a small neighbour in the name of "liberation" smacked of the same tactic exercised a few months before in Poland. My sympathies, albeit kept to myself, were with the Finns. Equally silent and bitter were the soldiers. One of them, an Armenian, whom I befriended, who, after realizing that I was a "foreigner" physician and a Jew, told me many stories of his experiences on the Finnish front.

He was twenty years old, rather slender and of medium size with large, soft dark eyes. The greater part of his nose had been amputated. When I first removed his bandage to dress the still oozing edges of skin and nasal membranes I made great effort not to show any reaction. The soft face of the young soldier before me suddenly changed into a monstrous caricature. Fortunately he always closed his eyes when the wound was treated as if saving me possible consternation.

He told me of Finnish women clad in white, fighting on the frozen lakes whom he saw shot and lying like slaughtered swans in pools of red blood on the immaculate snow; Russian sentries frozen to death while on duty and remaining standing frozen like statues through the winter; a large fur coat left by Finns in an abandoned house grabbed by an ill-clad Russian soldier, only to be killed instantly by the booby trap hidden in the enticingly warm garment.

He blamed the Germans for the necessity the Soviets felt to start the Finnish campaign. "The Germans are Christian Turks" he once said with a curious look at me. I asked for explanation. He told me that the Turks were the allies of Germany when they killed his many relatives during World War I, when they massacred 800,000 Armenians. He then added, "The Germans and the Turks have the same lust for the blood of innocent men, women and children." He was the first Armenian I had met and his story immediately reminded me of the book *Forty Days of Musa Dagh* by Franz Werfel. I assured the Armenian that the tragic history of his nation was known to me and that I knew that Germans were capable of despicable crimes. But I did not think that such gruesome mass atrocities were conceivable in Europe. He was not convinced.

Before leaving the hospital for transfer to a special hospital where he was to undergo plastic surgery, he wrote me a letter inviting me to visit him in Armenia. He was glad that for him the war was over and he was sure that the specialists would restore his face so he again could "look like an Armenian."

* * *

The Jewish population of this town that found itself suddenly within the territory of Soviet Ukraine was torn by the ambivalence of the situation. The discriminatory and contemptuous posture of the Polish regime left little love for Poland among the Jewish masses of Volhynia. Then the fact that the Soviet Army halted the march of the Germans into the eastern territories of Poland and kept away the Nazi menace could not but allay, at least in the first weeks, the fears that had gripped the population during the sudden terrifying debacle of the Polish army. But on the other hand the majority of Jews, those with the traditional, religious way of life, the Zionists, the shopkeepers and moderate socialists knew only too well the intolerant, repressive Soviet rule.

Then there were the very poor and the communists for whom the entry of the Red army was almost like a dream suddenly come true. It was they who greeted the Soviet troops with enthusiasm, to the chagrin of their Jewish neighbors and especially Poles who saw in their attitude a lack of loyalty to the old state. Although I shared the Polish dismay at the Soviet invasion I could not at that time but question the Polish claim on the loyalty of those Jews here, who had been discriminated against, despised and put into the category of "a surplus population," to be gotten rid of as soon as possible. The Poles could not have it both ways, I thought. To this day I cannot explain the fact that the majority of Jews kept their loyalty to Poland and loved the country of their birth, despite the way they had been dealt with under Polish rule.

Many Jews, especially those sufficiently educated to serve in lower governmental and municipal services, were delighted to be able to get employment. Jobs previously inaccessible were now open to anyone with qualifications. It was apparent that the Soviets were interested in putting the administration of the annexed territories into operation quickly and thus initially accepted anyone who was qualified.

Some saw the change of regime as an opportunity to fulfill their dormant ambitions and satisfy their lust for power. I recall a young Jewish doctor who became the director of the municipal health department. Scarcely a position of power but to this young Jew it seemed the pinnacle of his dreams. Suddenly able to dispense jobs and favors, he radiated self-importance. He was seen riding ostentatiously through the streets in an oversized passenger car, a rarity at that time in town, a car requisitioned by the Soviet authorities. He could often be seen riding with his mother who, beaming, would look down at the populace walking the muddy sidewalks. The shortsightedness of those opportunists who were only temporary puppets in the hands of the Soviets anxious to organize services speedily, was remarkable. But such ostentatiousness could only add fuel to the population's anti-Semitic feelings.

* * *

One day while I was walking the main street of the town trying to obtain information on the situation in Warsaw from refugees from the West I saw a familiar face which at first I was unable to identify. I looked more searchingly at the pale, starved face of a man in a shabby unclean raincoat, obviously in need of a meal. It was Decker, the leader of the

communist faction of the Jewish-Polish students in my medical school. He recognized me but initially was hesitant to identify himself. But then he smiled and told me his story.

He explained his appearance by saying that he had not slept for many nights while trying to evade the Soviet police. He was now a fugitive from a Soviet coal mine in Russia where he had gone to work as a volunteer almost immediately after the Soviets annexed his hometown. An idealist, he saw it as his duty to apply himself to the communist task and he chose the most difficult work, coal mining. After two months of work he realized "that socialism in Soviet Russia was a sham." He found the working conditions of the Soviet miners akin to slavery. The safety of the miners underground was non-existent. He, who in Poland had been preaching safety for workers and helped to organize strikes of miners, found out in no time that the slightest hint of disagreement with the conditions of the mine where he worked meant arrest by the mine's secret police. Strikes were unthinkable and miner's unions were non-existent. The talks that the communist party officials held with the miners were just shameful propaganda tricks to get the miners to increase production for ridiculous starvation wages. And safety regulations were a mockery perpetrated on the hapless miners. Accidents were frequent but never reported by the press. After two months Decker was able to run away just in time before his arrest.

I gave him some bread from the portion that I had obtained on my ration card. I had nothing to say to him. I only looked at Decker, or better, at his shadow. At a man whose god had failed.

* * *

In no time a housing shortage developed. The influx of refugees and Soviet government officials and their families caused the authorities to introduce measures practised in Soviet Russia. Owners of large apartments were quickly labelled "capitalists" and either deported deep into the vastness of Russia or Siberia, or forced to share their homes with many families. This was regulated by allotting so many square meters per person. Soviet officials looked with greedy eyes on any living space of which they probably were deprived in their native towns.

Deportations were now the order of the day. Or rather night, as the secret Soviet police as a rule operated at night. They would surround the district at night and force those to be deported to take a small bundle

and then transport them to trains waiting for them at the railroad stations. The efficiency of such operations indicated long experience and cunning. In the morning there was no trace of the operation, the people were removed and new people, usually Soviet officials, would move into the empty rooms. In the initial stages the deportees consisted of Polish families whom the Soviets considered alien colonists in the Ukraine, connected with the Polish "fascist" regime. Then Jewish, more prosperous families followed. This was supplemented by Zionists and Socialists, especially the members of the Jewish Bund.

* * *

My summer companion Fanya left Warsaw, after surviving the siege and bombardment, and joined me here. We were married and obtained permission to occupy a single room in a house shared with an Ukrainian family. My younger brother who had stayed with my parents in my home town under German occupation, threatened by the roundup of young men by the Nazis, now left home and crossed the border together with a young cousin. Now, four of us shared the single room. The routine was for all of us to get up in the morning and go to work, except my cousin who became the cook and housekeeper. I worked in the hospital, my wife as a secretary and my brother, as helper in a bakery. In this way we were able to keep body and soul together. The Polish currency was now replaced by Soviet rubles. We began to understand how the Soviet economy was run. First of all there was no unemployment. Positions and jobs were created at will without the necessity to back them with money that had value because it was difficult if not impossible to obtain much for the money one collected every two weeks. I had the impression that once you were given your rationed bread the Soviet government had absolved itself from giving the citizen anything for the money it paid out to the workers. After two months of Soviet rule the stores were empty. Only before the big holiday of the Revolution loads of candy, chocolate, perfumes, eau de cologne, cigarettes and Soviet champagne appeared on the shelves of the stores. I was not surprised at the shortcomings of the Soviet economy, as this was in line with my thinking of an economy run by bureaucrats, but I was astonished at the way propaganda tried to cover up shortages, and also by the meekness of the people, the widespread hypocrisy, the double-talk, and mostly the fear—there was a silent all-pervading fear of the benevolently

smiling, fatherly, moustached Georgian, looking at you from the giant posters, pictures, busts and statues and the front pages of the two official daily newspapers, Pravda (Truth) and Izvestia (News). Even the joke circulating that there was no News in *Pravda* and no Truth in *Izvestia* could not detract from the mixture of fear, gloom and boredom with which the two newspapers filled the reader. From these pages it was difficult to grasp the true meaning of the momentous happenings abroad and in Russia whose fate was now intrinsically connected with the fate of the world at war.

As the stores became empty, the peasants stopped supplying the town. There was no wood to heat the room. So, slowly at first, then with more determination we burned anything made of wood. Then when it was thirty degrees below zero we finally got to the furniture. First we burned the heavy oak chest that had belonged to the previous Jewish owner of the house, whom we never knew, and who deported with his family, was now somewhere within the vast spaces of Russia. The wall paneling went next. Some consumptive, naked trees around the house disappeared, then the wooden fence turned to firewood. We learned to live bundled up, drinking hot tea. We warmed ourselves with the most realistic thought: War never lasts forever.

* * *

As the spring of 1940 came, the fall of Paris and the surrender of the French dealt a heavy blow to our already low spirits. The Soviets increased their round-up of refugees who could not show employment certificates. While it was obvious that before long we would all be deported, there were rumors that it might be possible, by crossing the Rumanian border, to escape through the Balkans, not yet occupied by the Germans, to Palestine. Although these probably were empty dreams, the oppressive atmosphere of the town and the imminent threat of deportation left little but hope. One night we packed our few belongings, and with the help of my brother's friend, got on a truck and left for Lvov.

* * *

Lvov was crowded with refugees, mostly Jews from German occupied western Poland. Housing was almost non existent. We slept for a few

nights in the room of a friend who as an expert in electronics had found employment in a radio-manufacturing plant. After two days in the city our friend told us that the manager of the plant, a Soviet official, had warned him not to sleep at home tonight. He said nothing more. It was obvious to all of us that it was a warning that the Soviet police would this night round up refugees for deportation. We all left the apartment before evening and tried our best to find a place to spend the night. We finally landed in the factory where our friend worked, the safest place in town.

Next morning thousands of refugees had disappeared. They were all deported to Russia, even those who were able to show evidence of employment. There was obviously a conflict of interest between the secret police and the industrial managers. The first obeyed orders of a political nature, the latter tried to fulfill their economic goals or quotas. It was a game in which the refugees were pawns. There was never any assurance that the Soviet plant manager would be able or willing to tip off the refugee worker of a possible imminent arrest. There was however some advantage in the dependable consistency in the Soviet way of conducting mass arrests. They always occurred at night and usually did not re-occur immediately afterwards. Thus, if one avoided being at home, the night of the arrests, one could remain at home for the next few nights with relative impunity. Not having a place to live turned out to be a blessing in disguise because we did not appear on any of the lists the police had prepared.

In retrospect, and with belated hindsight, this deportation to Russia of Jewish refugees, to the frozen vastness of Siberia, so dreaded by the men, women and children, turned out to be one of the greatest ironical paradoxes of the Eastern European Jewish Holocaust of World War II. The majority of those forcibly deported, despite great sufferings and adversities, survived the war, while of those who stayed, almost all became victims of planned German extermination. But before the extent of the unbelievable organized bestiality of the Germans became known, the refugees seemed to dread more the known horrors of the Siberian camp than their uncertain fate in the ongoing war.

But then I learned that presently there was recruitment of physicians at a nearby spa, south of the city near the Rumanian border. The Soviets were in a great hurry to activate the spa for the summer season and as usual when in dire need they did not object to filling that need with refugees. I applied, and with the "expertise" acquired during my work

in the sanitaria before the war, I impressed the interviewing physician and was accepted on the spot. We packed our belongings and in haste, before the Soviet police were able to get their hands on us in the confusion, we left Lvov the same night for the spa of Truskawiec.

* * *

The spa was a pleasant country place, nestled in soft rolling hills full of spring foliage and flowers. It was famous for its sulphur springs and mud treatments. There were excellent hotels, well-built homes and guesthouses. The spa was a well-designed resort with its own railroad branch connecting it to the nearby larger town of Drohobycz. The Soviet authorities were eager to make this spa the showplace of their peaceful intentions in the newly occupied or "liberated" previously Polish province, now transformed into the western part of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic. Nothing could serve this purpose better than to engage a team of refugee physicians, mostly Jews eager to find a secure place in which to survive and be able to pursue their profession.

In addition to my spa experience I also had had many months of training in the department of physical therapy in the Jewish Municipal hospital in Warsaw. This now stood me in good stead and I assumed the duties of physical therapist. We were given living quarters consisting of two rooms, near the Catholic church in the center of the spa. I assumed my duties immediately, my wife kept house and cooked, and my youngest brother, who had no police permission to stay in the town, spent most of the day in his room in hiding, leaving only in the evening for short walks.

The spa was run by administrative and medical divisions responsible to the top boss, the general director, a Soviet Ukrainian, Piotrovski. He was a high party official, a shrewd operator, of peasant stock and half illiterate. He was a short, thickly-built man in his middle fifties, with a broad slavic peasant face and sly little eyes, almost always holding a blade of grass in his fingers, which he nibbled at or sucked, even when speaking to assembled bureaucrats and physicians. He ran the place by the carrot-and-stick method. He always managed to let the stick be waved by his underlings whereas he himself distributed the carrots. His stick over the spa's physicians was in the hands of the director of medical affairs, a Soviet Jew, an inefficient and unreliable administrator in obvious terror of the boss. There were the unavoidable birth pains of a new

system trying in a hurry to organize a resort with new people ignorant of the complicated ways of Soviet bureaucracy. The large hotels were quickly converted into sanitaria and filled with vacationers from Soviet Russia, mostly bigwig officials and their wives, but also with a mixture of factory workers, probably compulsive, exceedingly productive individuals, the *Stachanovets.*

The chief physician of the spa was, nominally, a Polish doctor, a Catholic, an important wheel of the spa before the war, and previously the owner of a private clinic. He was in his sixties and carried himself with patrician dignity. He was allowed to keep and live in his large house, an obvious carrot handed him by the boss, temporarily to smooth the transition, until the spa became a going business. The game was obvious, and it was fascinating to observe the boss and him debating an issue before the assembled physicians. The boss, a semiliterate shrewd Ukrainian communist, conscious of his power to deport anyone of the assembled without even the semblance of court proceedings. The doctor, a proud Polish nationalist trying with well-concealed rage to reconcile his patrician dignity with the demanding, shrewd and slightly veiled mockery of the cunning peasant.

The real medical authority, to whom the younger doctors looked for professional guidance, was an older professor, a Czech Jew who had fled the Germans when they took over Czechoslovakia. He was a soft-spoken, cultured gentleman who seemed to look at the world with a benign smile concealing a deep melancholic view of his surroundings. He was a known authority on heart diseases and a scholar of world renown who had left everything he possessed and now he catered to obviously healthy Soviet vacationers, their heart complaints designed to justify their admission to these hotels-sanataria. Most "patients" bore the all-embracing diagnosis of *neurasthenia,* given to them by the referring physicians in Soviet Russia, who, exasperated and no doubt intimidated used the diagnosis as an artful dodge. The professor took his daily walk with his wife and a small Irish setter who must have behaved admirably when clandestinely crossing the border at night with his master.

The sanataria soon assumed all the trappings of their counterparts in the Soviet Union. There was a special corner in the large reading room called, the *krasny ugolok,* Red Corner. It consisted of a panel covered with red cloth, surrounded by small banners covered with appropriate slogans, red flags with hammer and sickle, topped by a large picture of Stalin. On a table beneath the panel were books, booklets and pamphlets

of party propaganda material. It was customary for the guests to turn to this corner after entering the hall, open a book or otherwise give it due attention before attending to reading, smoking or chatting in the interior of the hall. Although no one knelt, I could not think of it other than as an altar.

Well stocked Russian libraries were operating within a few months. Gymnastics and obligatory physical activities were conducted by instructors imported from Russia for the patients. The food was sumptuous and excellent. Menus were printed. Cooks were imported from Russia. The few who were able to vacation in the sanataria were treated by the government with the best the land had to offer.

* * *

Shortly after starting in the physical therapy laboratory I was informed that a nurse had been assigned to assist me. Nadya Petrovna was a trained physical therapist sent from the interior of Russia. She was sixty-two years old and a card carrying member of the Communist party ever since the revolution. She was a petite, lean woman who went about her job with youthful movements. She was an efficient hard worker, and I learned in no time to rely on her scrupulous application of the various treatments I prescribed for the patients. After a while Nadya Petrovna took a genuine liking to me and, as her formal attitude relaxed somewhat, she would tell me about herself and also voice some opinions. I was an eager listener.

Nadya Petrovna took a very grim view of the extravagances that the patients, or better, vacationers, all communists, demanded from the state. She thought there was still a lot of hard work to do before such luxuries should or could be afforded. I had to admit that she herself lived a most frugal, almost ascetic life. She would appear the first at work and leave last. During lunch time she would chew on a piece of stale bread and drink tea. She told me of her early years and her participation in the revolution. In a moment of musing about her life she volunteered, "Of the old communists not many are left. The ones around here are a completely different sort." But then she stopped short.

* * *

We lived quietly in this remote and isolated place that from a previously mostly summer resort changed to a year round spa. We were given

ration cards for bread, sugar and coal for two. My younger brother, still without a permit to live here, could not get his ration. It was not too difficult to live with some additional food obtained on the black market from farmers.

I learned Russian from newspapers, conversations with patients, from medical textbooks and mostly from Russian literature. I read *War and Peace* in the original tongue, at first slowly, with a dictionary in my hand and finally with little digression from the original text. I learned passages from Lermontov by heart. I walked with him through the winding roads of the Caucasus mountains, where "a star converses with a star" . . .

* * *

Then in the middle of the winter, my wife fell ill with what was diagnosed as possible appendicitis. The physicians were not able to achieve a definite diagnosis and I decided to take her to the hospital in the nearby town. She had been in that hospital for almost two weeks, still without a definite diagnosis, when I received a telephone call from her attending physician telling me that her condition was becoming precarious. I rushed to her and realized that the local hospital facilities were inadequate to clear up the diagnostic problem and with every passing day my wife was losing ground with a low grade fever and anemia. I decided to transfer her to the Lvov university hospital. This was easier said than done. Transportation was chaotic and difficult even for the healthy. I tried to get help from the Soviet authorities because I had become aware that within this despotic and very often absurd system there were men and women of great personal warmth ready to help even a stranger in an emergency. I went from office to office describing the desperate situation. I asked for a car or ambulance. When the help came it came with a most generous gesture—I got a special plane for my purpose. My wife on a stretcher, the pilot and I were the only occupants of the plane. We landed in Lvov and were immediately transported to the hospital. That same night an emergency operation revealed a hemorrhaging extra-uterine pregnancy, a condition of extreme danger requiring immediate intervention. My wife remained in the hospital for six weeks as her recovery was slow due to prolonged anemia. We finally brought her home but the meager diet we were allotted would not permit full recovery. Again, the system which many times would have

deported my wife to a Siberian camp without reason, now allowed her for many weeks to receive special food from the sanatorium's kitchen, sumptuous portions of tempting morsels, a gourmet's delight. She recovered fully.

My brother was still in hiding that obviously could not be prolonged indefinitely. To receive a permit of residency he needed employment. But to get employment he needed a residency permit. It was impossible to synchronize these two requirements, an absurdity that kept him in virtual confinement. I was finally able to solve his predicament by sheer luck. One of the patients receiving physical therapy was the local chief of police. I looked after him for a few days with special attention. He was a thin, taciturn man with a severe face. I finally broached the subject, telling him of my brother's predicament. He listened carefully, then with a wide grin said, "*Nitchevo*—it's nothing—let him come to me." I persuaded my brother, although we feared he might not return, to go directly to him. The boy, after sitting in the house for so many months, estranged from human contact except for his two relatives, fainted when he arrived at the police station. But he returned home, with a permit.

* * *

Winter passed and spring of 1941 was in full bloom. The spa was filled with Soviet guests. There were rumors of vast Soviet transports of trains loaded with food and raw material crossing into Germany. There was no indication of any change in the Soviet-German relationship. The borders were tightly shut now, no new refugees were arriving and there was no news from our people across the border. Although we knew of the mistreatment of the Jewish population by the Germans, there was nothing in the Soviet newspapers or radio—the only communications available to us—to make us aware of mass atrocities. The Soviet newspapers praised the Germans, and although we knew better, the lack of information about major persecutions contributed to our wishful thinking. We sent parcels of food to our parents. The parcels were received by the post office but we got no confirmation of their receipt nor did we get letters. We consoled ourselves with the proverbial, "no news is good news."

* * *

In June 1941 the spa was full of Soviet vacationers. They strolled along the promenades smiling in a subdued way. Although obviously conquerors of this foreign territory they behaved without arrogance. These were people of mostly humble origin who had attained standing under Soviet rule. They firmly believed that without the revolution, they—the sons and daughters of workers and peasants—would not have been able to participate in the mainstream of national life.

They played chess, attended concerts, played together in groups, under the guidance and control of sports and entertainment counsellors, watched Soviet movies and mostly walked around with curious eyes scanning this foreign, rather Western place. In public there was no unruliness or drunkenness. Most probably, the secret police had an eye on them. It was also a select group who had the privilege of coming to this resort, a group that was aware of the consequences unruly behavior might have on their careers and standing.

They would not engage in political conversations. Germany presented no problem. Stalin took care of that. England and France wanted the Russian people to get involved in an imperialistic war and to "pull their chestnuts out of the fire" but Stalin had wisely turned this danger away.

We knew the price Stalin was paying Hitler for peace. Trains full of grain, cotton, petroleum, timber and other scarce goods rolled night and day toward the nearby German frontier to supply the German army and people. The same trains would not return empty because while passing the towns nearby they were filled up with masses of deportees into Russia. The supply of goods to Germany and the deportation of refugees to Russia, were the two most efficient and smooth operations of the generally inefficient Soviet bureaucracy. Their importance and priority were obvious. The Soviet papers gave top priority to the description of the cordial relations with Nazi Germany. In the spring of 1941, from our vantage point, the Soviet-German sky was cloudless.

VIII

TO STALINGRAD AND BEYOND

AT DAWN on Sunday, June 22 we were awakened by an unusual rumble of planes flying in large formations. We dressed quickly and went to get more information. It was war again. The Germans were attacking Soviet Russia. German troops had crossed the border and soon distant thuds of artillery could be heard, so near was this town to the border, now the front line. The administration of the spa and their Soviet guests were obviously taken by surprise. There were no evacuation plans for them. Everyone was left to his own devices but there was no transport available. There was one daily train leaving the town at noon but now there was doubt that it would be running. I remembered the speed and terror of the German advance into Poland two years before and I didn't share the estimate of those who believed that the Soviet authorities would have the time to evacuate the crowded sanatoria. We packed our belongings and went first to the railroad station.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon, probably eight hours after the beginning of the German attack. We saw a train moving slowly into the station. It was a military ambulance train filled with wounded Soviet soldiers. It came to a halt and two physicians in uniform stepped out of the train and conferred for a while with station officials. I concluded that their destination was the spas and sanataria which probably were slated to be converted into field hospitals. I reasoned that this would not be attempted, because artillery fire could be heard clearly now and the approaching front line would necessitate the evacuation of the wounded deeper into Russia.

I approached the commanding physician of the train and told him that I was a physician and asked if he needed help. He did not answer at first. We waited patiently for over an hour. Suddenly the locomotive started showing signs of life, readying for departure. The commanding physician walked up to me briskly and asked me to board the train immediately. I told him that I had with me my wife and, pointing to my brother, "my assistant." He nodded and we all boarded the train which almost immediately started pulling out of the station.

The train was well appointed with stainless steel compartments resembling Pullman sleeping cars. They were filled with soldiers, laying strangely motionless with blood-soaked bandages around their heads and limbs, some moaning, others apparently unconscious or doped with morphine. This was obviously a hasty evacuation of the most severe cases. Many had undressed open wounds, oozing deep tissue defects caused by shell fragments. The train was well supplied with splints, bandages, sulpha powders and ointments. There was a fully equipped car for surgery. Within minutes I was thrown into activity and with the help of a nurse applied splints, treated the open wounds, tried to recognize those hemorrhaging for possible immediate surgery and giving blood transfusions. Time passed quickly. We arrived at a larger station and the train stopped.

I stepped out of the train to get some air. It was almost evening. The horizon behind the station glowed with distant fires. Parallel to our train there was a long line of freight cars filled with civilian evacuees. Open platforms were crowded with people, mostly young men. On one of them was my brother-in-law! My wife and my brother went to the platform to see him and it was at that time my brother decided to leave the ambulance train and join him on the open platform. They made room for him on the crowded platform and we waved them good-by and went back to board the ambulance train. We met the two boys again—fifteen years later.

I worked through the night and finally fell asleep until noon when the train again came to a stop. We were on the old Polish-Russian border. We stayed there for many hours until night when the train crossed the border. I looked through the window into the darkness of this strange new land, Soviet Russia. "Again we've fled in time from the Germans," I thought. This was a relief. But where will this take us? What is in store for us in this strange land, with its enigmatic people

and government, now in mortal struggle with our common enemy? I was interrupted in my thoughts by the nurse. The train moved deeper and deeper into Russia. We started rounds again.

* * *

During a stop at a small railroad juncture I stepped out and stood for a while in front of the train. A Soviet physician, an officer and surgeon, whom I had assisted operating without a pause throughout the night in the surgical car, joined me and offered a cigarette. The weariness in his bloodshot eyes and the tension in the broad face seemed to recede with every puff of the pungent cigarette smoke he inhaled deeply, with the delight of an addict just out from an intolerable stretch of deprivation.

We were in for a long stop here because I saw the engine being detached from our train. It was early dawn and a pale, pinkish mist blurred the distant dark line of forest, barely set off from the purple band of clouds suspended on the brightening horizon. We were now far from the front, in Soviet Ukraine.

The surgeon leaned backward now, his head and shoulders resting on the shiny, steel covered car. His eyes were closed but under his eyelids there was a visible motion of his eyeballs. I thought he fell asleep standing, scanning images in a dream. But suddenly he whispered, as to himself: "*Nye vyeroyatno,* unbelievable!" He then opened his eyes and looking into the distant horizon he added: "A complete surprise." He put another cigarette between his lips and for a while looked absent-mindedly at the empty cigarette box. Suddenly he smashed the empty box in the palm of his hand and with a violent castigating thrust of his arm threw it over the rails into a slag heap in front of us. "Bastards," he hissed. He then took the unlit cigarette from his mouth and spat.

Back on the train I tried to sleep. The last curse of the surgeon reverberated in my head. "Did he mean the Germans? Or the men in the Kremlin?" But I quickly fell asleep to be awakened by screaming steam whistles. "Was it an air raid?" Then the shrieking sound stopped and was replaced by the familiar knock of coupling and uncoupling of coaches and the train started moving.

My wife appeared in the open door of the compartment. "I was told that the steam whistles are used as an alert signal. It was a false alarm. You can go back to sleep." But the old monster, the fear of sirens took

hold of me. Sleep was out of the question. I walked as quickly as I could along the train's corridor toward the operating room. Soon I was examining and changing dressings of the wounded soldiers. My fear was gone.

After a few hours of rounds I went to the back of the train for tea. My wife was there. She had been helping the nurses in sorting out and winding bandages, wrapping gauze around wire splints, and in the transport of the wounded from the operating room. She told me of a soldier who, when carried out from the operating room, was mumbling some words either in Yiddish or in Hebrew. She heard the word Israel and Shma or Shmael. He lapsed back into unconsciousness when she tried to listen to him closely.

"Shma-Shma"—the words touched some dark crevice of my awareness. "Was it Shma Israel? Was this a Jewish soldier saying his last prayer?" Suddenly I wanted to see this soldier, to be near to him. My wife remembered where his berth was and we both walked through the corridor, looking into the compartments. She finally located him. He was stretched out totally immobilized with splints. His face was hidden under a ball of gauze with openings for eyes and mouth. On top of his head, tufts of black hair protruded from under the gauze that formed a white blood-stained skullcap. He was breathing fast and shallow as in fever. I took note of his name. It was Michael Mendeleyevich Gurevitch, age 20. "They probably call him Misha"—I thought for some reason. He had been hit by two shell fragments. One tore away a portion of the back of his skull, the other, a smaller fragment was lodged so deep in the base of the skull as to be unremovable. It must have been touching the base of the brain and his respiratory centers because he would go through a cycle of fast breathing then he would suddenly stop breathing, then again go into a spell of faster respirations. I looked through the eyeholes with a flashlight to see the reaction of his pupils. Perhaps the sudden light changed something because his breathing calmed somewhat and became more rhythmic. We left the compartment as my nurse was looking for me.

I managed to return to Misha after an hour. His pulse had now accelerated to a racing pace, his breathing was fast and shallow. But now he would stop for a moment and try to utter some words. It must have been "Mama" or "Mame." He must have been calling his mother in Yiddish. I wished my wife could be here to let him hear a woman's voice. He was obviously in his last hour. Then he audibly said "Shma." I leaned over him. I had no more doubts that he was trying to say the

prayer. I put my mouth over his ear and then loudly and slowly I recited Shma—Isroel—Adonai—Eylohenu—Adonai—Ekhod. Hear oh Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One. Within minutes he was dead.

I turned my head. Behind me was my Russian nurse. She must have listened to my recitation because of her puzzled expression. I must have been in a trance because I could not find any words and I stood staring at her in silence. Then I recovered and said to her: "You see, a physician should help people to live. But sometimes he can do no more than recite for them the last prayer." The nurse, in her white coat over a khaki Soviet soldier's blouse, a syringe in her hand, nodded at me musing. And then, still looking at me, she crossed herself.

* * *

Next day at dawn we arrived in Kiev, the capital of the Ukraine. We disembarked in a remote corner of the railroad station. The wounded soldiers and the dead were quickly removed in ambulances waiting along the tracks. Once loaded the large green ambulances speedily disappeared into the morning mist. The train stood empty like a theatre stage after a hectic performance. No one paid any attention to us. We took our belongings and unhindered left the station and walked toward the still-sleeping city.

* * *

Kiev was the third largest city of the Soviet Union, and the place where my wife had spent her childhood. She left Kiev with her parents during the civil war, after the Bolshevik revolution, to settle in Warsaw. Part of her family still lived here and we intended to visit them. Soon we were wandering about this sprawling city that came to life quickly with the rising sun. We asked our way to the place my wife still remembered. People whom we asked for directions looked suspiciously at us, a couple dressed in foreign attire. The war atmosphere, though otherwise hardly noticeable in this city far from the front, must have aroused the usual degree of suspicion with which the Soviet population viewed foreigners. But we finally arrived at our destination unmolested.

My wife's maternal uncle, Ossip, lived with his wife and two children in the same apartment which they had occupied before the revolution. It was a remarkably large apartment considering Soviet housing conditions. We entered the apartment to find an old woman in a *babushka* at

the door. It was the *nyanya,* the same Olga who had taken care of my wife as a child in Kiev. This unexpected reunion with her and an hour later with the rest of the family filled many eyes with tears. My own feelings were a mixture of wonderment and curiosity about this family that had been living for twenty years under Soviet rule.

My wife's uncle was a chemist, her aunt a physician and her two cousins, both girls, were students of medicine. At first they looked at us with stunned expressions, as if we had come from another planet. Then they surrounded us with the warm feeling of people who had found lost relatives after a long absence, whom they never dreamed of seeing again. And then came the shadow of the war, the realization that they were confronted with palpable evidence of war, with refugees. Somewhat later I sensed a distinct tinge of fear in Ossip's eyes. We were after all foreigners, strangers, without residence permits. Their contact with us and the shelter given to us for the night were dangerous transgressions. Our hosts, however, did not disclose their fears to us—telling us to feel at home, and postpone worries to the next day. The conversation quickly turned to the war. I was astonished at their attitude toward the events of the last years, toward Germany, toward the war. Here were Jews who during the last two years, since the signing of the Soviet-German pact and right to the very day of the outbreak of the current German invasion of Russia, were kept by Soviet propaganda in a state of almost complete ignorance about the Nazi bestiality in their treatment of Jews. Our hosts' unpreparedness to perceive the Nazi danger was frightening. "The war is far away, the Red Army is a mighty power." Although the Jewish aspect of the events of the last years had given Ossip anxious moments, these were no more than feeble reactions to events far away, events muffled by distance and through agreement with the Germans misrepresented by Soviet newspapers, for whom for two long years the Nazis were almost allies.

Together we listened to the official Soviet war bulletin. The information on the course of the war was couched in a language at first difficult to decipher. But I could sense that the Germans had again achieved an enormous breakthrough. It was obvious to me that the first line of Soviet defense had cracked wide open. I tried cautiously to express some of my forebodings. But it was to no avail. They looked on us as refugees from Poland, a country easily defeated by Germany. They could not help but believe that we were traumatized by the speed with which we had been overrun by the Nazi war machine in 1939. "Here," they

contended, "the Germans are dealing with a different country and different power. The first days of adversity do not count."

I now kept my thoughts to myself. After all I could be wrong. How could I come out as a defeatist and alarmist among these people, this family peacefully assembled at the dinner table? I could not. But in my mind I saw the map of Russia and the lack of a natural barrier to halt the Nazi onslaught. I could not but think of the next line of Soviet defense. It was the Dnieper, the very river on whose exposed western bank we were now sitting and dining. Soon I thought Kiev would be in a similar position to that of Warsaw in 1939.

We decided to leave Kiev the next day. It was best to move further eastward, deeper into Russia. Our hosts were of the same mind. We would stay overnight and next day we could leave by train. In the meantime our host Ossip courageously suggested that together with himself and his youngest daughter Vera, we take a stroll through the city. We readily agreed and the four of us were soon walking the streets of Kiev.

It was a summer afternoon and the city was lit by the setting sun. We walked through the magnificent main street, the Kreshchatik, up to the bank of the river Dnieper. Looking at the glittering river and listening to the quiet run of the water my thoughts went back to Warsaw and the Vistula. Like Kiev, Warsaw was built on the western bank of the river, probably as a defense measure against the menace that all through history had come from the east, from the Tartars, the Mongolians, from Asia. But now the plague was coming from the west, from Europe. The rivers had became not a defense but a trap. I thought of the distance we had covered in our flight, the long stretch of flatlands from the Vistula to the Dnieper. Little did I foresee how long our wanderings would last and what distant lands we'd traverse. And least of all, did anything foreshadow the dark events that within ten weeks would occur here, on the very ground we were strolling with Ossip and Vera; events that led to the death of our hosts and companions who together with 33,769 Jews of Kiev, men, women and children were massacred by the Nazis and buried in a mass grave in the nearby ravine of *Babi Yar.*

* * *

Next day we were seen off by Vera at the entrance to the main railroad station. We intended to board a train to Voronezh, some 400 miles to

the east. It was our first experience with civilian trains in Russia. We quickly realized that boarding a train was no simple matter, and that we might have to wait hours if not days to get onto a train. In contrast to the city, which was relatively peaceful, here in the railroad station the war was palpable. The crowds were surging toward the platforms. No one knew when the train to Voronezh was leaving. There was no longer any timetable. We sat with the waiting crowd on the open concourse. It was a lively crowd. Whole families sitting in circles, sometimes three generations together. Old, patient grandparents, a mother nursing her baby with stoic tranquility, a little girl, long braids flapping on bare shoulders, running with a teakettle in her hand to get *kipiatok,* hot, boiled water, the vital ingredient for survival on a Russian train. Young peasants, probably just mobilized, with wooden suitcases, Red Army soldiers amiably standing or squatting, patiently smoking cigarettes, or pieces of newspaper filled with sweetly pungent *machorka.* It was like any peaceful crowd waiting patiently for the arrival of a train to take them home after a summer picnic. And suddenly everything changed. The noise of an approaching train transformed the crowd into a running, shoving and cursing mob. Surging toward the bottlenecks of the open car doors, soldiers, officers, women and children fought their way onto the train, pushing their bodies forward with a grim determination, without looking sideways until inside the car. The train conductors, mostly women, would watch the surging crowd with silent resignation until they would decide that the car could hold no more. With a shout *davay nazad*—"get back" they removed the determined but unlucky passengers who were hanging onto the train. Without a murmur those removed would go back to wait for the next train, sometimes hours, sometimes days. Meanwhile, those happily inside would, in no time, again change back into a lively smiling and helpful company of travelers, offering dark bread, vodka and cigarettes to perfect strangers.

For the next day and night after boarding the train we were in the company of a crowd obviously happy to be moving to their destination, after the long wait on the open concourse. This must have been a group of people going back home to their families, their work. Going east, away from the front, away from the Ukraine, the part of Russia that during all previous invasions had taken the brunt of the wars. Most passengers kept silent, slept for long stretches, until awakened by long halts of the train at stations where there would be a scramble for *kipiatok* followed by renewed subdued conversations, often in whispers. Then

again silence, broken by the cry of infants, the snoring of sleepers, the sudden jolts of train brakes. The air became oppressive with pungency of *machorka* smoke and the sultriness of the hot summer day.

At night I became sick. My trips to the lavatory became more frequent as time went by and in the morning I was exhausted and dehydrated. I arrived in Voronezh in a most miserable state, barely able to get off the train. As soon as the train arrived at the station, the woman conductor reported me to a station official and within a few minutes I was carried off on a stretcher through the tumult and commotion of the crowd, into the station's infirmary. I was examined by a woman in a white coat. She called an ambulance and I was whisked off to a hospital. It was an old brick building with large windows with an arched entrance, through which I was carried into an empty waiting room. Soon a woman doctor arrived, to whom I told my symptoms in my newly acquired Russian. Shortly afterward, washed thoroughly I was put into bed in a room all by myself.

* * *

For a while I lay in the hospital bed, motionless and exhausted between the cool, white immaculate sheets, staring at the ceiling. The transport from the train to the station infirmary, then the ambulance ride, the quick examination and then the bathing, all performed with speed and efficiency hardly gave me a chance to think. Only now did I wearily realize that I was separated from my wife. This was Russia at war. Separation could last for years. People might never find each other again. Does she know in which hospital I am? The only consolation I could muster then was the knowledge that she spoke Russian like a native and that this would allow her to keep contact with me. Meanwhile a nurse stepped into the room and gave me a liquid to drink. It must have contained a soporific because in the stillness of this isolated immaculately clean room I soon fell asleep.

Next day during the morning rounds I told the doctor how worried I was about the whereabouts of my wife. Smiling rather mysteriously she told me not to worry. Only on the third day when I was allowed to get up and walk slowly through the corridor into the reading room, did I see my wife sitting there in a hospital gown. She told me that on the day of admission she came to the hospital to inquire about me. She talked to

the woman physician who realized how worried she was and that she had no shelter for the night and no permission to be in town. The physician, who had the kindest Jewish eyes and face, looked attentively at my wife's pale and exhausted face, and then said in a business-like manner, "You must be sick." She examined her and admitted her to the hospital. She also told her sternly that she was not permitted to visit me until I was out.

During my fifth day in the hospital there was a German air raid on Voronezh. Now there was more evidence that Nazi airplanes were able to penetrate deep into Russian air space. However, it was gratifying to find that there were air shelters ready. Within minutes all the patients were gathered in the basement shelter. It was done with dispatch, little apprehension and in a disciplined manner.

Toward evening there was the usual news bulletin. During the broadcast there was a deadly silence in the wards as the unimpassioned voice recited "Our forces have repulsed severe enemy attacks on Minsk. . . ." By now it was clear that whenever the official radio announcement mentioned the name of a city "under attack by enemy forces" it was a subtle admission that the city had been captured by the Germans. Within ten days the heart of Soviet Byelorussia was in German hands. There was a deafening silence at the end of the broadcast. Only the faces of the nurses, the doctors, and the cleaning women hardened.

Then on the sixth day of our stay a tense anticipation permeated the hospital. All ambulatory patients were huddled in a large hall to hear a broadcast by Stalin. This was the first time, almost twelve days after the start of the German invasion, that he was addressing the people. His long silence, together with the gloomy news of the German penetration into the country, had a depressing effect on the population. The speed with which the Nazis moved visibly shook the Russians, who had always been told that their Red army would, in case of war, attack and fight on the enemy's territory. But now within less than two weeks the enemy was approaching Pskov on the way to Leningrad and was threatening Kiev.

Amid the dead silence of the huddled crowd of patients, doctors and nurses, all fixed on the large loudspeaker, the voice of Stalin came on suddenly. It was a slow, toneless, calm voice, devoid of any emotion. I had heard a few of his speeches before but I would hardly listen to them just as I would hardly read them on the front pages of *Pravda*. But now like everyone else in the hall I absorbed every word. Stalin's first words,

his opening phrases were received by the gathering with stony astonishment. For the first time the feared dictator addressed the people as "brothers and sisters" and "my friends!" He then used words like partisan war, territories occupied by fascists; he gave instructions for a "scorched earth" policy, setting fires to forests, blowing up bridges and roads, driving away livestock and not leaving a slice of bread for the enemy. The facts of war, its reality finally spelled out in the factual, toneless voice seemed to me lacking the power to inspire. But the listeners around me were affected quite differently. Their somber faces seemed to become more assured. After the speech one of the patients said, while slowly walking with me through the long corridor: "Yes, this is going to be a long, hard struggle. But Stalin has an iron will and courage. With him we'll make it. Thank God the Russian people have a leader." I was amazed to hear God's name and instead of "Soviet" the word "Russian." For a moment I thought of Napoleon and his invasion of "Holy Russia," as described by Tolstoi.

* * *

Next day, rested and fed, we took leave of this hospitable, tidy, almost cozy place. The physician talked with us for a while asking us about our destination. We told her that we would like to go further East where I could possibly be useful as a physician, if I could get a residency permit and employment. She gave us the address of her sister and mother in Stalingrad, where she thought I might get employment. We packed and left.

There was an additional good reason for us to go to Stalingrad. It was not only further east but also south. In the north when the summer comes, winter cannot be too far away. A stranger without a permit to work and without a place to sleep, would hardly be able to survive in the winter, whereas the south at least looked warmer. Already on the train to Voronezh we heard advice given to us by an old woman going to live with her son in the north: "Go south—*rebiata,* my children—at least you won't freeze, and what great fruit they have there." On the map the Caspian Sea looked alluring. We quickly decided to sell our coats, the most valuable part of our meager wardrobe that we still carried with us since leaving Warsaw two years before.

* * *

We were now in a train from Voronezh on the Don going south-east to Stalingrad on the Volga. The train was passing wide stretches of steppes, villages surrounded by dusty roads, the roofs in hamlets bleached by the sun. We were in the heart of Russia going toward the Volga, the mother of Russian rivers. I looked through the window and could not but be amazed and awed by the immense vastness unfolding before our eyes. This vast hinterland, would it save Russia from Hitler as it had saved Russia more than a century ago from Napoleon? Would the modern tanks of Hitler achieve what the horses of Napoleon could not? Would Moscow fall before winter came? These were the awful thoughts going through my mind, thoughts hidden in my mind as I looked at the passengers in our compartment, who, aware of the war, were probably far from realizing what mortal danger hung over their country and the world.

The train finally left the steppes behind and entered the suburbs of a city. Long complexes of industrial buildings lined the railroad tracks. We arrived in Stalingrad as the city was enveloped in a scorching dry heat from the surrounding steppe. We hurried to the address we had gotten from the Angel of Voronezh, as we called our doctor, and received a cordial welcome from her mother. She lived with her daughter Sonya in two miniscule rooms. We slept in one of them through the night.

Next morning Sonya, a school teacher, promised to introduce me to her friend Ilya Alexandrovitch. Ilya was a physician in the municipal clinic who apparently knew his way around the medical circles of Stalingrad. By then my wife and I decided to try to remain here, perhaps until the end of the war. When I stood in the morning on the western bank of the Volga, I recalled from my school days that I had before me the largest river in Europe and the historic cradle of Russia. And from the map I also knew that the steppes on the other bank went nowhere. I could see the far bank of the wide river obscured by mist with not a building, not a tree on the horizon. There was no bridge to span the wide waterway. This was the edge of civilized life. There were no towns, no rivers eastward, beyond this river. I told myself, "Here in this remotest place I must get a residence permit and a job and stop wandering until the war ends."

Ilya Alexandrovitch was a man in his forties. His tall figure was somewhat stooped. This, together with his high forehead, eyeglasses and shock of unruly black hair gave him, what was to me, the very likeness of a pre-Revolutionary Russian-Jewish intellectual. He was

quick to tell me that I should feel free to take up his time. He made it clear to me that he was fascinated to see and talk to a physician "from the West," a "species" he had never had an occasion to meet. He said this to me in his office, where it seemed to me, he was busier with administrative than medical matters. He promised to explore possibilities for my stay in town. Meanwhile, he suggested we meet in the evening, for a chat. I looked forward to this opportunity.

Upon leaving his office, I reflected on the openness of this man, even within the walls of his office, something I did not expect from a Soviet individual usually suspicious of any foreigner. It was additional confirmation of my impression that the farther into Russia I went, the farther from western borders, the freer and more open became the attitude of the people we met. Was it the remoteness to the front or, perhaps, the distance from "Big Brother," or just the make-up of the people in the hinterland?

When we met again I soon realized that Ilya Alexandrovitch had little interest in medicine. He as much as gave me to understand that he was glad to be in this provincial town, far from the "cultural turmoil," doing his administrative duties. He was interested in history and literature and here he had enough time and was free of "disturbances" to pursue his writing. In no time he overwhelmed me with questions about "Western" life, about literature, the arts, theatre, even music. I was hardly the man for him. My knowledge was too sketchy to satisfy this intense, voracious literateur, this physician turned savant.

Then he switched to religion. Now he challenged my curiosity and this allowed me to turn the tables. Now I was asking most of the questions. I wanted to know of his background, of his parents, of his "Jewishness," if any. We were now sitting on a bench in a small park-like square in a city, darkened by the wartime blackout. The dimness of the evening blurred his features and my companion's voice seemed to come from a distance almost detached from the man and the impression I had of him in daylight. At times I would forget that we were in Soviet Russia and that a war for the existence of civilization was raging in the West.

Ilya Alexandrovitch responded in a clear though subdued voice. He was born in Moscow. His father a lawyer, his mother a music teacher. They were Jews who saw no connection between their life and Judaism. They were Russians. Religion, or more to the point religious rituals, had no significance in his parents' social circles. During the turbulent

post-Revolutionary years he was in medical school. He finished school, although he was more interested in the meaning of life than in the "mechanics of life preservation," as he called medicine. He was interested in the mystery of the individual—not of nations, of tribes, of classes, of groups, but of the individual.

I realized now that this man was not conversing with me. He was unburdening himself. He had found a stranger, a refugee, intelligent enough to understand, or at least to grasp, his inner life; someone who came from the other world, where such ideas were not dangerous and forbidden, a listener who would have no incentive or acquired impulses to inform on a fellow man.

"I am a Jew," he continued, "I list myself as a Jew on my passport. But I am a Christian. A Jewish Christian who rediscovered the true source of life—love. The love that came from the Jewish heart which stopped beating two thousand years ago for all mankind. Revolutions, wars, systems, technical progress, science will not overcome man's unhappiness. Love will."

I could not help but recall discourses on Gandhi, long before the war. "Love and passive resistance," I thought. "How will love put an end to this war, this terrible slaughter? How will love and passive resistance do away with the demonic forces of visceral anti-Semitism? With the grim harvest of hatred sown for centuries by pious theologians, politicians and demagogues?" I could not refrain from turning to Ilya, to his figure looming in the darkness of the night, and let fall: "The Jews should be the last to spread the Gospel of Love. They had their full say two thousand years ago. Now it can only be perceived as coming from the vested interest of the defenseless asking for mercy. Love should be preached *and* practised by the strong, not the weak. Somehow, all the strong want is to be stronger."

I must have upset his line of reasoning. He was silent for a while. Then he resumed, "I did not intend to be political. But I may as well give you my view on the question that obviously is foremost in your mind. On how the Jews could solve their problem as a weak minority everywhere." He stopped and then uttered, "They must stop listening to their leaders!"

I was surprised at this abrupt and concise solution. It was unexpected and I turned to him with vehemence, almost sliding off the bench. He grabbed my arm as if trying to rescue me from a fall. Then he settled

back and in his clear and now less subdued voice stated what must have been his carefully thought-through belief,

"It is in the vested interest of leaders to keep men bunched up in groups. For two thousand years the Jewish leaders kept their people within the bounds of a tribe separated from the rest of mankind without regard to the consequence of such isolation, to the terrible fate, of persecutions, of massacres. The Jew should be true to his personality, to his individual spiritual kinship with God but he should not be encouraged to cluster, to group, to form bunches. He should dissolve within the larger organisms where he lives . . ."

Suddenly I became very tired. It was weird to hear all this, which I had heard so many times before. To hear it again in this dark place, on the edge of Europe, in Stalingrad—the city of Stalin. We got up and walked back along a wide tree-lined avenue and the wearisome words seemed to hang in the air: "dissolve, assimilate, convert, disappear—by any means, through persecutions, burning at the stake, massacre, and . . . Love." On both sides enormous blocks of houses loomed darkly, only the window panes reflecting squares of shimmer from the starry sky above. Not far from us were the giant factories of tractors, of tanks. Ilya Alexandrovitch, with unexpected pride, pointed out the landmarks of this new, modern city sprawling more than thirty miles along the Volga.

"Is it here you are building your tanks?" I asked, and then, as if continuing the unfinished conversation on the bench before, I almost shouted into the silence of the night, "Thank God for the tanks you are building here. Perhaps with these tanks the evil from the West will be overcome."

Back in the apartment of the mother of our "Angel of Voronezh," my wife was waiting for me with trepidation. She did not believe it healthy to walk at night through the streets of a strange, blacked-out city.

* * *

We left Stalingrad after a few days of futile inquiries, waiting in crowded offices and wandering through the streets, joining long lines to those few restaurants still serving the local delicious fish soup. Although treated correctly, even sympathetically, there was no place for me, a foreigner, a physician-refugee, a stranger without a residency permit.

We were early birds, probably the first refugees from the West to reach this city, a vanguard of the masses of refugees that would sweep into the interior of Russia in the weeks to come. The authorities here had no instructions yet on how to deal with refugees from the West. They politely advised us to move to the interior, to smaller places, where the lack of physicians would favor our acceptance.

We left Stalingrad going south-west. There was no other way except going back north, from where we had come. The mother of our Angel of Voronezh told us: "Go south, to the Caucasus. It is warm there. There is food there." I was also told by one woman—a health official in Stalingrad—that while going south-west it might be worthwhile for us to stop in Kotelnikovo, a town that might be short of physicians. Following this advice we found ourselves after many hours on the train in a little dusty town, in the middle of the steppe, near the river Don. It was here, in the steppe, previously the land of the Cossacks, that we spent more than two months. I found work at the local clinic. The head of the clinic, the *vratch,* doctor Fredrik Maximovitch, after making a telephone call—probably to the local police—looked at us invitingly, with a broad smile. He showed us the clinic and the room for physiotherapy, where presumably he would have a place for me because "the previous physician left two weeks ago, to join the army." We also got to know the head nurse Masha Fyodorovna.

The doctor then took us to his little house almost opposite the clinic, where his wife, a plump middle-aged woman with braided hair wound around her head, showed us where to wash up and then seated us at the table for bread and soup. Fredrik Maximovitch, who left us to the hospitality of his wife, came back after a while telling us the good news: I could start my work the next day. He also told us that Masha Fyodorovna, the nurse, would be glad to rent us a room in her house. "Her husband and her son are both in the army." Everything went so fast that we had difficulty believing we would finally settle down more than two weeks after resuming our flight. It was unbelievably two weeks only. For us it was more like two years. We had traveled two thousand miles.

* * *

Masha's house, as tiny as the doctor's, was located almost three blocks from the clinic. From the dusty, unpaved street we walked into a small spotless living room from which we were led into our room. It was

furnished with a large bed, a bed stand, a chair and a mirror on the wall. There was not much room left for anything else. But we could share the living room where at a right angle to the window stood a heavy upholstered sofa. On the wall above the sofa was a loudspeaker. We unpacked our bundles and when Masha went back to work, we took off to see the town.

It was a sleepy grey conglomerate of one-story houses facing unpaved streets laid out in a monotonous checkerboard pattern. There were no trees to give shade in the scorching summer heat. Passing vehicles raised clouds of fine dust that stuck to our eyelashes and nostrils. We walked for a while through the dust and the scorching heat. There was nothing to attract the eye, no significant structure, no park, no trees. Only rows of small, gray houses enveloped in the dust raised by the passing vehicles. We turned back to our new shelter and slept through the afternoon heat.

* * *

Masha Fyodorovna was a tall woman in her forties. She kept her prematurely partly-grey hair pinned tight over her forehead, braided back into a bun over her long neck. She smiled but rarely, and a tense, determined grimness hung over her face like a cloud. Only her steel-grey eyes would sparkle sometimes with an unexpected silvery glimmer. She went about her work in the clinic and in her home with taciturn efficiency. Slowly, within a few days, she introduced us to the intricacies of providing oneself with scarce, rationed food and the few additional potatoes one could buy from peasants if you got up very early in the morning.

The mornings were ushered in at dawn with the patriotic song "Wide is our native land," from the loudspeaker above the sofa, followed by a communiqué from the front. Then there was additional national and regional news. There was no radio set in the house, only a loudspeaker. All homes had loudspeakers wired to a central receiver, all receiving the same broadcast at the same time.

The news was dreadful. The enemy was nearing Smolensk; the Baltic Republics were overrun; there was fighting in the direction of Leningrad and Kiev. The grim news of encirclement and fall of cities; the relentless Nazi drive of the summer of 1941, filled the bright sunny mornings with dark forebodings. The grimness on Masha's face would tighten. "They won't prevail"—she would mutter to herself or, sometimes, her

face would turn to the sofa, as if challenging the enemy in the merciless loudspeaker.

Never, through that whole dreadful summer, would she utter a single word against the government that had lost a third of its army in the first few months, an army taken by surprise. She never spoke of the army, perhaps as one does not mention a beloved son who has failed. She never spoke of her husband, of her son, or of the fact that she never got any letters from them. Only once did she speak with unrestrained resentment. I asked näively where could I get an apple? I was sick for an apple.

Her eyes hardened when she replied: "There are no apples here. There were beautiful orchards here once. The *kulaks,* before they were deported, cut down all trees." She probably was frightened by her disclosure because she looked instinctively at the door, then thoughtfully at me, wondering perhaps if I knew who the *kulaks* were, the small land owners forcibly dispossessed and deported by Stalin's policy of collectivization.

* * *

Fredrick Maximovitch would drop in to see me in the physiotherapy room, to see how I was doing in this new place. The year of work in the physiotherapy department at the resort, so far away now, had prepared me well for my tasks in this rural town. Soon Fredrick Maximovitch learned to trust my medical judgment and he would refer patients to me with joint troubles or neurological problems, for diagnosis and treatment. After two weeks I began lecturing to a group of practical-nurses on anatomy and the use of splints, tourniquets and simple surgical instruments. The head of the clinic, Fredrik, a Volga German and I, a Polish Jew, were the only two male physicians left. It seemed that all others were in the army.

* * *

As soon as the fall came, a few rainy days turned the dust to mud. How all-pervasive and depressing the mud of the Russian steppe can be! I began to understand the influence of this mud on the character of the people. Toughness and fatalism. Two ingredients are apt to be instilled in a people surrounded by the immense vastness of an ocean of mud. But

also generosity, grandiosity of ideas and utopian hopes once their sights are lifted to the wide endless horizon and the open skies above the steppe. Here the heroism and the immutability of the Russian people meet. Messianic visions above, immobilizing mud below.

It was later, a year later, when I learned of the offensive of German panzers on Stalingrad, of German tanks rolling through the very streets of Kotelnikovo I had gotten to know so well. I perceived then that the Nazis would not prevail, that the combination of Russian toughness and mud would ultimately break the back of the invader.

I recalled then my own reaction to the mighty mud, when I tried once, after a rain, to cross a street in Kotelnikovo in galoshes. After the first two steps, I realized with chagrin that the footwear, my priceless galoshes were irretrievably lost in the bottomless morass of the Russian mud.

* * *

Whenever time would allow and the weather would clear we would walk to the railroad station. Here we could witness one of the most formidable transplantations of machinery and men in history: The evacuation of the industry of the Ukraine and western Russia to the Urals, Siberia and the Volga country. Whole giant plants and factories, equipment, workers, and technicians were passing through the station on a seemingly unending line of trains. An incredible migration of machinery and men on great open railroad platforms passed before our eyes. Men sitting on their equipment, large machine tools torn from their cement bases somewhere in Kiev, Kharkov or Dnepropetrovsk, waving to us, grim-faced or smiling, deeply tanned from the long journey under the open sky. From the names of factories, of towns and cities, visible on the equipment we understood the immensity of the territory evacuated and unparalleled effort involved.

* * *

From the Soviet newspapers *Pravda* and *Izvestia,* from among the dismal news couched in the enigmatic language of the Soviet press we were able to read some hopeful items: "The Soviet Union and the Polish Government in London have resumed diplomatic relations. A Polish

army is being formed from Polish citizens who find themselves on Soviet territory." This was encouraging news. On the other hand winter was approaching fast. The Germans had overrun the Crimea, Kiev was abandoned, the enemy was pushing toward the Caucasus. I had nightmarish visions of being caught by German advances which might shortly cut off the only railroad line to the Caucasus.

Therefore we decided to move south before winter set in. We explained our position to Fredrik who understood us and Masha who would have us stay.

We packed our bundles and after a two-day wait at the railroad station boarded one of the few trains going south-west, toward Krasnodar. We aimed at reaching Tichoreck, a distance of 300 miles, a railroad junction, where we might be able to board a train bound from Rostov-on-the-Don to the Caucasus. Again we braced ourselves for the challenge of a train journey in war-time Russia.

The real test came in Tichoreck. With the Crimean peninsula in German hands, the pressure on the only rail line to the Caucasus was overwhelming. Whenever a train would arrive the frantic crowd formed a blindly moving mass that could trample anyone too weak or tired to withstand the surge. It was even worse for a couple than for an individual. To get into an already filled railroad car by pushing your way almost blindly and not lose your partner was an almost impossible task. And to lose your partner now was to lose her for years, perhaps forever. After days of camping on the open concourse in a chilly drizzle, and after many trials, one evening we accomplished the impossible. We were both on the same train. We were on our way south to the Caucasus.

Squatting on the floor we had our first meal this evening. It was a memorable day. Only yesterday we had run out of bread. While my wife sat with our belongings on the open concourse where we camped, I tried to obtain bread in the street around the railroad station. It was clearly impossible to get bread without a ration card. It was impossible to barter anything for bread in this place. And so I could only look wistfully at those who had ration cards or passengers with special papers allowing them to buy bread during their journey. I must have looked utterly dejected when someone touched my arm from behind.

I turned. Before me was a man in a dark suit of Russian cut, too bulky for his figure. He looked at me intently for a while and then asked, "Are you a refugee?" I hesitated. I saw no reason to answer this stranger. But he continued, "You come from the West?" I looked now at the loaf of

bread he kept in a bag hanging from his left hand. "Yes," I answered, "I come from Poland." I looked again at his bread and thought of bartering something for the loaf. But he suddenly asked, "Vy Yevrey? You are a Jew?" "Yes," I answered, surprised at the turn of this exchange. But he seemed more hurried now. He took the loaf from his bag and handed it to me. I took the bread and stood baffled. He suddenly leaned over toward me and then embraced me and kissed me on both cheeks. Before he released me from his embrace he whispered in my ear, "Tonight is Yom Kippur!" He then abruptly turned around and walked away briskly. He quickly disappeared in the crowd.

* * *

When we disembarked in Piatigorsk, we thought we had come to paradise. We were now in a far-away land, warm, fragrant, exotic. This was the Caucasus, mountainous fairyland between the Black and Caspian seas, where Europe meets Asia; where Prometheus suffered for returning fire to earth; where the Argonauts went for the Golden Fleece. Here for the first time since fleeing Warsaw, more than two years before, we were in a town where people were still going about carefree, going about their daily, little pleasures and on the surface at least, resisting the gnawing thoughts of remote Russia in danger. Although the Germans were already menacing no one here in the Caucasus seemed to be concerned with the abhorrent thought of German soldiery trampling this soil.

The sun was warm, the markets full of fresh, juicy fruit and grapes. People seemed relaxed, smiling at strangers. Although most people spoke Russian, here there was a non-Soviet, freer life style. Perhaps it was the mild climate; the abundance of fruit and vegetables; of vineyards; the variety of nationalities and the more benevolent grip the central government had on this land that conspired to achieve a less oppressive atmosphere here, in bright contrast to grey, grim Russia. Whatever it was, we were flushed with euphoria. For a few hours we forgot the Germans, the war, our people in captivity, the precarious future. We walked the streets, climbed the green hills, ate the long, slim, slightly bent green grapes—*damskye palchiki*—little ladies fingers —picked flowers, talked to strangers, then rested on park benches and laughed, laughed, laughed. Until the evening came and the town became enveloped in the blackout. Then we returned to reality. We had no shelter. We slept, undisturbed, on benches, in the park.

* * *

We spent the next days exploring the town, then we went to the famous resort of Kislovodsk. We sold my wife's Paris-made suit on the *tolchok,* the Russian flea market. We spent the money immediately, leaving only enough for tickets to the next town to the east, the resort town of Nalchik. Here I tried in vain to sell my services but to no avail. The officials were friendly and suggested we go to Derbent, a port on the Caspian Sea, on the way to Baku. Not having any money, we boarded the train without a ticket thinking that if evicted from the train at least we would be further east. We had already learned that conductors did not call the police to arrest stowaways, but ejected them at the earliest possible stop. The danger was, however, that such a stop might not be at a station but in the middle of nowhere, in the wilderness of mountains. But by the middle of October the wave of refugees had reached us. On the train, there was a group of refugees who formed an underground system, relaying information on the approaching ticket-control by the conductor. It was tempting to follow the advice of the underground travelers, who were only too happy to take us into their confidence. But we resisted the temptation. We had been wandering until now, on our own, and we were reluctant to get ourselves bound by the unwritten laws of a pack.

We traveled through the night, undisturbed, past the port of Makhachkala on the Caspian Sea. But after the train left the station, there was a strict check of passengers for travel permits and papers. We were asked for papers which seemed to the conductor more important than tickets. We told him that we were refugees looking for work. Showing no surprise, in a matter of fact tone, he told us that no one was allowed to enter Baku without a special permit and that we had to leave the train in Derbent. It was good enough for us.

From the refugees in the train we got some important and exciting news. The Polish government in exile, in London, after renewing diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union had assigned General Anders to recruit Polish citizens who found themselves in Russia into Polish forces. The possible site for induction into the Polish army might be a place in central Asia. The direction we had taken was right and would ultimately lead us there.

* * *

We were now on the shores of the Caspian Sea. The old port of Derbent lies within the narrowest part of the gap between the mountains and the sea. Here is the road along which nomadic peoples moved from Asia to Europe, the gateway of migration to the West. We were on this road going east. Derbent was the first town in our wanderings with a distinct oriental air and the architectonic imprint of Islam. We walked through the narrow, winding streets of upper Derbent, its little houses and courtyards hidden behind walls. Here was a citadel from the 5th and a mosque from the 8th century. Persians, Arabs, Mongols and Russians had successively captured and ruled the town. We began to feel the aura of Asia.

A huge modern cannery stood on the shore. There was a large fishing industry here. But somehow there were no fish to be had. The whole catch probably went north, to the front, you hoped. We spent many days trying to find jobs, without much luck. The officials were obviously trying to get rid of the refugees. Their advice was always, "go across the Caspian to Asia. There is plenty of work waiting there for anyone." So we went back north to the port of Makhachkala where we awaited transport across the Caspian to Central Asia, to Turkmenistan.

In Makhachkala groups of refugees were gathering around the small port waiting for a boat. Here there were also other passengers eager to get to Asia, many using this route to get back to their homes in the north, in Siberia. We joined the crowd and one day boarded a boat going to Krasnovodsk on the Asiatic shore of the Caspian. It was hardly a boat, rather a barge, a mobile cistern bringing drinking water to the waterless port of Krasnovodsk.

The open deck of the barge was already crowded when we embarked. We found floor space and tried to make ourselves comfortable, as one does when coming to a crowded beach. We had no blankets so we spread the two towels we carried with us on the deck to signify transient ownership of the space. There were more than a hundred passengers on board, Russian families going to Central Asia, to Siberia via Novosibirsk and to the Far East, people stranded by the war trying to rejoin their families in safer parts of the country. There were also a good number of refugees. It was a 24-hour journey and the anticipation of a cold night on the open deck made everyone busy arranging bundles and luggage as shields against the wind. As night fell there was a general huddling to avoid having one's body exposed to the wind.

At dawn there was renewed activity on the deck, after the quiescence

of the night. The tumult grew as many passengers, stiff from the cold, started running on the deck to warm up, and stepped on still sleeping passengers. People were lining up for *kipiatok*—boiling water. Suddenly, there was an outcry followed by shouting and a commotion a few yards away from us. In the center of the disturbance we saw an old man shouting in Russian, *Vot chort*—what a devil! He was a small stocky old man with ruddy cheeks and a gray moustache, enveloped in an oversized sheepskin, shouting to his companion, an old woman of similar chubby build and with red cheeks, in a similar sheepskin. This was a Siberian Russian couple on their way back home after a visit to their daughter in the Caucasus. Just a minute before the old man had noticed that his wallet had disappeared.

Shaking his head with more amazement than fury, the old man told the people gathered around him that at night one of the refugees who was curled on the deck near him seemed to touch his coat. The old man thought that the poor devil was freezing. So he opened his sheepskin and let him huddle with him. In the morning his wallet and sleeping companion were both gone.

We arrived at our destination, our mood somewhat soured by the incident. This mood was not incongruous with the place in which we now found ourselves. It was a God-forsaken, desolate, ex-Czarist outpost and fortress, carved out like a rocky amphitheatre at the foot of the Kuva Dag mountain range, on the fringe of the Kara Kum, the largest desert in Russia. The treeless, waterless, rocky desolation was a fitting prelude to the harsh reality of Central Asia. The only cheerful note was the absence of the blackouts at night, a welcome reminder that in this Asiatic hinterland, life went on with immunity from the flying German predators. With great relief late in the evening we boarded a fully lighted train headed to the capital of Turkmenia, Ashkhabad.

IX

THE DESERTS OF CENTRAL ASIA

FOLLOWING A LONG JOURNEY through the Kara-Kum desert we arrived in Ashkhabad, an oasis, at the foot of the Kopet-Dag mountain. We were now merely 18 miles from the Persian frontier and more than two thousand miles from the starting point of our wanderings. It was the beginning of November but the sun during the day was still warm and the park benches still hospitable. This capital of Turkmenia, named after an old Persian settlement (*ashk*–love and *abad*–town), was a sprawling desert town with lines of small white dwellings laid out along rows of trees with an intricate system of irrigation ditches criss-crossing in all directions. The most precious substance here was water. But there was probably enough of it to allow the center of the city to appear like a garden, and though artificially maintained by water from far away, its green was soothing to our eyes, after the long journey through the arid desert of Kara-Kum.

Once again we slept in the park. By now it had become almost a habit to sleep outdoors and to consider the park bench an intimate though transient friend. My wife would leave such a place with the words, "Good-bye bench!" As long as the weather was warm we had little problem but the nights here were exceedingly cold and we shivered through them. It was urgent to find employment and shelter.

In the morning we went, almost automatically, to the *tolchok*—the Russian flea market, to sell one of the last disposable items in our wardrobe. The place was markedly different from similar places we had seen in Russia. Most people milling around in this market place were in

rags. Here, for the first time we met crowds of Russians, deported from the interior years ago, living in squalor, in primitive huts, in slums, in poverty much worse than the native Turkmens. There was a severe food shortage here. The contrast with the Caucasus was appalling.

I applied myself to the task of finding work with desperate determination. I had a definite advantage here, in Asia, because residency permits were issued more freely, and in fact were not required when initially one looked for employment. Whoever arrived here seemed to be of little concern to the security police. In the office of the health department I was received in friendly fashion. A gray haired woman with an anxious, busy look, after going through a variety of files and papers, told me that she had no place in any of the physiotherapy departments, places where my experience might be used to best advantage. She suggested, however, a position which she believed would be of interest to me, because it might solve our shelter problem.

I listened attentively. There was an opening for a physician in a *yasly,* an infants' day care center, an institution where working mothers left their babies for the day. I was intrigued by the fact that such a center would need a full time physician. But I asked no more questions, when I heard that I would get a room in the institution where my wife and I could live. Only later did I understand why a full-time physician was needed. But for now I cheerfully accepted the position and then ran to tell my wife the good news. The same evening we were installed in the *yasly.*

* * *

The manager of the institution, a tall, thin woman in her early forties received us in her office with a penetrating, appraising look and a forced smile on her thin lips. She outlined my duties in clipped phrases, her Russian hardened somewhat by a barely detectable Ukrainian accent. I had to be on duty early, she said, because the mothers brought their infants in at dawn, so they might be at work on time. She then showed us our quarters, a single room with a door leading to a long corridor. She called the janitor to assist us. He must have been nearby because he stepped in as soon as she opened the door to call him. He immediately brought two chairs and a small night table into our room. When the manager left the janitor came to life.

Ephrem Sergueyevitch, as he asked us to call him, was a Russian, in

his sixties, bald, with a sparse grey beard and small twinkling blue eyes. Although his steps were small, he walked with lively agility thrusting his head and shoulders forward. Soon our austere, cold, long but narrow room warmed up after Ephrem Sergueyevitch kindled a fire in the black stove in the corner of the room. He brought additional coal which he put aside telling us to add as much as we wanted if we felt cold. I was amazed to see coal here, probably a pre-war acquisition. The warm glow radiating from the stove made the room almost cozy. We fell asleep on a large bed, under a real blanket and on real white, clean linen.

* * *

Next morning, I was awakened before dawn by old Ephrem and ushered into the reception room, where mothers were lined up to deposit their babies for the day. It was my duty, I learned, after taking note of any complaints from a mother, to examine the baby brought here from its overnight stay at home and, should the infant appear ill and unfit for regular care, to direct it to the infirmary. Only now did I learn that there was an infirmary within the *yasly* complex, an unexpected piece of information that added to the attractiveness of the place. There were prospects here of acquiring experience in childhood diseases, or at least in the occasional indispositions that would require temporary placement of an infant in the infirmary. But I was in for a shocking surprise.

My knowledge of infant care was rather meager as it dated back to a short course in pediatrics in medical school. However, I immediately secured books on the subject, readily available in the small library of the infirmary. I immersed myself in the study of the care and treatment of infants and children. I had to refresh my memory about the norms of developmental stages through which an infant progresses, nutritional requirements in infancy and the signs and symptoms of childhood diseases.

Most infants were undernourished, many apathetic, even listless. Their mothers, unsmiling and ashen in the light of dawn, would hardly voice a complaint, giving up the babies for the day with a resigned air of an automatic procedure. Some mothers, back from work in the factory, were visibly relieved when informed that their child was in the infirmary and could not be taken home. Most babies were of Russian parentage. There were very few natives. Taken back to unheated homes, many babies, not changed through the night by sleepy, exhausted moth-

ers, developed chronic colds, diarrhea and rashes. Infectious diseases played havoc with their undernourished deficient bodies. There was a constant stream of babies to the infirmary, for many a one-way, no-return transfer.

Soon the work became a daily routine. I became aware that my presence here was needed less for real care than to give an outward appearance of a doctor's professional supervision of the *yasly*. My efforts had minimal effect on the health of the children. I was not treating but at best, I was sorting the infants daily: Which will go back home with the mother and which goes to the infirmary. But I could not overcrowd the infirmary. My advice to the mothers how to care for the children at home was listened to impassively by these exhausted women. There was little hope that they would follow my instructions. My function was to delay the process of admission to the overfilled dispensary, but such delay only worsened the prospects of saving the child.

Old Ephrem was well aware of my predicament. Late in the evening under pretext of keeping our stove going he would linger in our room and soon we developed a rather intimate, confidential relationship. With the building empty and the manager away, we would sit with Ephrem around the stove, chatting. It was he who did most of the talking. It must have been a rare opportunity for him to unburden himself to a foreigner, who presumably knew nothing of the truth of Russia's torment.

One evening Ephrem seemed unusually excited. I knew he was itching to talk to us. The Germans had captured Kaluga and Kalinin, Odessa, Kharkov, Kursk and Pskov. The Nazis were at the very approaches to Moscow. The mood was dismal. That same morning when I stood in the street watching a column of soldiers marching and singing the popular military song: *Yesli zavtra voyna, my sevodnya gotovy. . . .* , if the war comes tomorrow, we are ready today. . . . , a Russian woman in the crowd, murmured loudly enough for me to hear, "*Payot znayut*— to sing, they know." It was a sign of the beginning of desperation, of doubts in the prowess of the army and government to overcome the enemy. "If Moscow falls. . . . ," the fateful words were never spoken outright, but they were on everyone's mind.

It was then during a speech by Stalin at a parade in the Red Square that the situation in Moscow became known. The Germans were forty miles from Moscow. And now Stalin, the Georgian, spoke to the Russian people. He exhorted them in the name of "our great ancestors"

Alexander Nevsky, who defeated the Teutonic knights in 1242, Suvorov and Kutuzov, who fought Napoleon. It was an appeal to "Holy Russia," to the old patriotic, nationalistic feelings of the people. And Ephrem Sergueyevitch was certainly one of them.

Ephrem was now in our room visibly excited. "Now he found us," he murmured, attending to the stove. "Chort," the devil, he cursed to himself. "Now they found us, after they ruined Russia." I was startled by his daring. But he was old and he had come to the end of his silent endurance. "Now you'll have it warm, *rebiata.*" He called us "children" —this fatherly Ephrem, a Russian peasant, a *kulak,* who had been removed one night from his homestead near Tula and deported with his wife and three children to Central Asia. Here he had lived through the years, in a mud hut, in the slum of Ashkhabad, in squalor, never again to be a tiller of the soil. His wife had died. His two sons were now at the front.

Ephrem would let drop broad hints that made me understand that, though the workers and their infants were on a semi-starvation diet, there were places in town where the situation was different. "They and their children have everything"—he alluded darkly to the NKVD and party officials. "Their children don't die like flies." He tried to warn me of the manager, obviously a party member.

Soon an epidemic of measles struck. The disease hit the children with a killer's viciousness. The undernourished victims succumbed to the scourge with hardly a fight. It was of utmost importance to catch the earliest signs of the disease, to isolate the afflicted and nurse them through the most dangerous period, in the infirmary. The complication of bronchopneumonia was almost equivalent to a death sentence. I had great difficulty recognizing the early stages of measles. The runny noses, the cough, the fever seen in the early stage of the disease were of no help because there was hardly a child without a cold or cough. It was the specific sign seen in measles after the first 24 to 48 hours, the sign of *Koplik,* that could help to sort out the kids with measles from others, those with simple colds. With zeal and perseverance I looked for these elusive spots of *Koplik,* these tiny spot-like grains of white sand— surrounded by a pink *areola* inside the mouth, on the surface of the cheek's mucosa.

I could find them in the better nourished children and make the diagnosis early, but not in the undernourished weaklings, who most needed a speedy, possibly life-saving diagnosis of the disease. There was

little help to be found in the textbooks. I finally realized that the weak, listless infants did not show the usual reaction against the invading virus. They did not develop a *Koplik* rash. On the contrary, their whole mouth became covered with a white thrush. These were not normal children and their reaction was not noted in the textbooks. A consulting physician agreed with my observations, but he as much as admitted that not much could be done for most of these debilitated little patients. When pneumonia would develop, the outlook became hopeless.

* * *

It was the beginning of December. The front seemed to begin to stabilize, for the first time. The German assaults on Moscow seemed to meet successful resistance. The Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and the USA and Britain declared war on Japan. Hitler declared war on the USA. The war began to take on global aspects. The whole world was on fire.

* * *

A few days before New Year's I was asked to participate in a meeting of health professionals. I was advised to bring with me statistical data. On the appointed evening, armed with statistical graphs to illustrate the morbidity and mortality in the *yasly,* I sat in a small hall filled with representatives of the various local health institutions. A special panel of experts was on the podium, distinguished professors from universities evacuated from Eastern Russia, now under German occupation. Speaker after speaker gave his report. These were of little interest to me, until a woman physician reported on the state of a *yasly,* comparable to ours. I was dumbfounded by her data. I was especially amazed at her mortality rate which was negligible. When my turn came I presented the factual, grim data. I commented on my findings and attributed the high mortality rate to the undernourishment and the consequent lack of resistance to the complications of measles. There was a deep, almost palpable silence in the audience. I was the only speaker to take up the issue of undernourishment.

I concluded and returned to my seat. A man sitting at the table with the hard look of a party man took the podium and referred to my report, contending that there must be causes of the high mortality other than

those stated by me. He compared my results with those of the woman physician. I had no doubt that the comparison revealed a striking difference, but by now I was very well aware of the source of this difference and so was everybody else. But no one chose to discuss it. I overcame momentary anxiety and returned to the podium without asking for the right to do so. I firmly rejected the validity of making a comparison between my *yasly* and the one of the woman doctor, because her institution served children in satisfactory nutritional state.

All eyes were now on me. I did not specify the reason for this excellent state of nutrition, because everyone present knew that these were the children of NKVD and Party bigwigs. Everyone knew that most of the wives of these officials were well fed and so were their infants. As if näively, I suggested that efforts be made to improve the nutrition of working mothers and infants.

There was silence in the hall. There was no discussion of my remarks and the chairman of the meeting motioned to me indicating that I had had my say. I left the podium and the hall. On my way back I thought of my sudden pique and bravado, useless under the circumstances and obviously dangerous. Again I was seized by a strange mixture of inner satisfaction and anxiety. When I came back home I told my wife nothing of the affair. But I tossed through the night.

Next day my manager was furiously silent. Ephrem must also have been aware of my risky demonstration. He looked proud of me but stopped his evening visits. I finally told my wife of my bravado and we decided to leave the *yasly,* in time.

* * *

After the renewal of diplomatic relations between Poland and the Soviet Union and the formation of Polish forces on Soviet soil, a stream of Polish refugees and ex-prisoners descended from the north to Central Asia. A Polish consular delegation arrived and established itself here in an office in Ashkhabad, called *Delegatura.* The development changed the status of the hundreds of thousands of Polish citizens scattered throughout Russia, not only those imprisoned, in labor camps or deported, who were now freed, but also of those who were able to escape the Nazis on their own and found themselves in Russia, like ourselves.

Registration of Polish citizens was already in full swing. Soon I was told that there was a need for a physician in the Polish *Delegatura,* and

that a large transport of orphan children was expected from Siberia. I was already helping out unofficially in health matters to the increasing colony of Polish refugees in Ashkhabad and now, together with my wife, we volunteered our services to the Polish *Delegatura.* My wife joined as a secretary and her beautiful calligraphic handwriting was a God-sent gift to the consulate's passport division. We moved into the consulate's compound and started a new chapter in this small extra-territorial speck of restored Polish sovereignty in the Soviet Union.

There were only a few officials at this initial stage of organization of the *Delegatura,* and the functions of the Delegate were in the hands of Count Tyszkiewicz who came from Moscow, after his release from the Lubyanka prison. With him was his wife.

Count Tyszkiewicz was the scion of a famous Polish noble family, whose fortunes were closely interwoven with Poland's history through the centuries. Originally of Russian-Lithuanian descent, this family embraced Catholicism, and many of its members became outstanding figures in the legislative, military and religious life of the country. Two brothers, Constantin and Eustachy were widely-known archaeologists in the 19th century, and it is perhaps from them that the Count acquired a keen interest in this subject. During our many conversations and walks I learned from him much about the past, the rich history and ancient monuments of Middle Asia, especially the art and culture of the last Mongol dynasty, that of Timur, that is, Tamerlane.

Count Tyszkiewicz was arrested in 1939 by the Soviets on his estate in Eastern Poland. He was brought to the infamous Lubyanka prison in Moscow where he was released after the Polish-Soviet agreement in 1941. His wife, Hanka Ordonovna, the famous singer, the "Polish nightingale," was not arrested by the Soviets and kept performing until she joined her husband after his release from prison. She was suffering now from tuberculosis of the lungs, from which she died later in Beirut, Lebanon. Whatever it was worth in time of war, I did make an effort to impose on her a regimen that would slow the advance of her illness.

The first two weeks of our stay in the *Delegatura* were uneventful. I did not venture much outside of the compound, as there still remained the possibility of my arrest or an unpleasant retention by the Soviet police who had probably been informed of my speech at the medical meeting. It may all have been my paranoid idea, but I was aware that more innocent remarks in public than mine had been the cause of arrest and deportation to a labor camp.

The loss of the Ukraine, the breadbasket of the Soviet Union, and the dislocations of the war added to the chronic food shortage that had plagued the Soviet system from the start of the Revolution. Even on the black market—the little places where the local peasants would bring a few farm products—there was hardly anything to buy. Once on an expedition with Count Tyszkiewicz to get anything to eat for any price we walked the streets of the city, in vain. There was not a single restaurant or a food store open. Hungry and tired we finally saw an open store with large display windows filled with dummy, paper-wrapped, articles. Without much hope we went inside to try our luck. There was a single item available. Bottles of bubbling champagne! "Well," said Tyszkiewicz, "this is the land of the grim anecdote." It was the first grudging remark I had heard from this nobleman and it must have come from an ignobly empty stomach.

One evening there was a rumor that early next morning a transport of potatoes would be distributed. I decided to try my luck. So I got up at dawn and joined a line of people already waiting, in the hope that the nearer to the front of the line one was the more chance to get the potatoes. I stood in the line preparing myself for the long wait. After a while I felt someone grabbing my hand and spitting on it. I withdrew instinctively with horror. But then I stretched my hand again to the offender. I did so after realizing the intent of the woman who grabbed my hand. She was just trying to write the number of the place one occupied in the line, to keep things in order. She used a chemical pencil and by necessity she had to moisten the hand to make the number indelible.

Fortunately, the state of semi-starvation did not last too long. At least, not for us. After prodding from central authorities in Kuybishev, where the diplomatic corps was evacuated, the *Delegatura* was placed on a special priority list for daily food deliveries. The delegation was now receiving the daily rations accorded to the few privileged institutions in town, the NKVD and the Party. For a small group, as we were, at the time, the amount and quality of food was overwhelming. I was especially amazed at the large blocks of excellent, sweet butter we received: Butter was an item I had not seen for months, a rarity that I had almost forgotten existed. We shared this sudden abundance with refugee friends in town and especially with their children.

There were a number of Polish refugees in Ashkhabad who had come here from Poland. Among them were substantial numbers of actors and

performers. Apart from Hanka Ordonovna, there was the beautiful and famous Polish movie star Jadwiga among others known from the movie *Dzikuska*—"The Wild Girl," a hit in pre-war Poland. There was Leopold Krukowski, "Lopek," a Warsaw entertainer. There were also the well-known Yiddish comedians Dzigan and Schumacher with their families. These actors performed in plays before Soviet soldiers. Some were playing parts in Soviet war propaganda movies made here, a part of the war effort. As a physician I was consulted by the refugees in time of illness and came to know them well.

* * *

With the arrival of Polish orphans life in the delegation's compound changed. Hundreds of children whose parents had perished in the camps of Siberia were now gathered in the small building. These were semi-starved, scared children and many were sick. The task of separating the sick, caring for those in immediate need and providing some semblance of hygiene, filled every minute of my waking hours. I was making my rounds, barely able to walk through the courtyard full of children on the ground, hungry and exhausted waiting to be redistributed into the warmer rooms of the compound. We were short of food, medicines, blankets and soap. Soon we had a full blown epidemic of typhus in the compound.

Typhus, the pestilence more dreaded than war and hunger, became the number one killer of refugees, huddled in groups to keep warm, in railroad stations and trains, overcrowded shelters. The rarely-washed clothes, the rags of the refugees harbored deadly body lice, the transmitters of the disease. At the time there was no remedy against typhus and the fight against lice was little short of hopeless. Disinfection of clothes in steam tanks was rarely successful because most of the equipment was defective. The disease made the victims delirious with high fever for many days followed by a sudden drop in temperature, a most dreadful time, when blood pressure suddenly drops and patients often collapse and die.

I would make rounds kneeling on the ground in the packed courtyard or on the floor of crowded rooms; listening to the fast, feverish breathing of the children; feeling their rapid pulse; their heart beats visible through their emaciated rib cages; listening to their cries for mothers buried somewhere in the frozen tundra. At night, though dead tired,

my sleep was restless. I had frightening dreams of giant lice crawling toward me. As they came nearer to me they changed into snakes tangled into live twitching swastikas. I would awake in cold sweat. The nightmares came after I witnessed a scene from a film being produced in town, a war film in which my friends the actors participated.

It was a street scene at night, showing a Gestapo raid on civilians. The realism of the scene in the street with uniformed Nazis shooting at women and children made an unexpected impression on me and I repeatedly had to remind myself that this was no more than an artificial scene. But it must have made an indelible imprint in my memory, and although consciously repressed at the time, the distorted version of the scene came back to me with a vengeance during the unrestrained anarchy of the dream state.

* * *

After many weeks plans were made for the evacuation of the children and other Polish civilians to Persia. This was probably intended to raise the morale of the men now flocking to enlist in the Polish forces, whom the Soviets anticipated would take part in the battles on the German-Russian front. Families of military men would have the first priority to leave the Soviet Union for nearby Persia, which by now was under joint Russian-British occupation. There arose an unexpected opportunity for my wife, who was pregnant, to leave Russia and ensure more tolerable conditions for her and the baby. I would join the Polish army in the assurance that she would not be left here by herself.

I discussed the matter with Count Tyszkiewicz, who promised to care for my wife until her departure and to facilitate my induction into the army as soon as he got a physician to replace me.

And so, late in February, 1942, I took leave of my wife, who was carrying our child, I said good-bye to the nurses and the orphans I had come to know so well, and left to go farther east, to Uzbekistan, into the Polish Army in the Soviet Union, the army of General Anders.

X

THE POLISH ARMY RESURRECTED

I ARRIVED by train at Kermine in Uzbekistan, early in the morning. By a whim of history, this obscure little town in the vastness of Central Asia changed suddenly into a beehive of activity, a turmoil of milling crowds of men and women frantically trying to get into soldiers uniform. From the immense expanse of Russia, from labor camps, prisons and remote places of deportation in Siberia, hordes of Polish citizens suddenly freed from bondage, their emaciated bodies in rags, happy, hungry, suspicious, streamed here from the north to be transformed into an organized military unit.

The vast field opposite the one story induction building was crowded with men sitting or lying on the ground, camping here, waiting to be inducted. It was impossible to enter the induction building and I stood outside with the crowd. No shelter had been prepared for the arriving throngs and there was no organized reception for the civilians. Everyone was left to their own devices until they got through the induction bottleneck and were put into uniform.

Staying here for a week or longer until inducted became a formidable task. There was no shelter, the nights were freezing cold and food was at a premium on the black market. The evening brought numbness to my chilled feet and I decided to spend the night in the only place still available, if reached quickly before night fell. This was a large teahouse, a sprawling shack converted by some enterprising person into a standing-room-only-huddling place. There, for a fee, one was provided with hot tea, a roof, and the warmth emanating from hundreds of upright

bodies. Here I spent the night, dozing while standing, a talent not confined to horses.

Next morning I returned to the induction building, trying to convince myself that I would be able to go through a week of such an existence. I was standing near the entrance of the building when I heard a woman's voice, "Doctor, what are you doing here?" The source of this unexpected voice was a blonde woman in a smart military uniform, a Polish movie star whom I knew from Ashkhabad. I told her that I had come to join the Army and that I was in doubt as to whether I'd be able to survive until then. After a few more questions and an exchange of news about the orphans in Ashkhabad and the others still remaining there, she asked me to wait a few minutes until she returned. She did return with a smile and told me to wait behind the building where I'd be picked up by a sergeant who'd be able to guide me through the complexities of the situation.

I duly waited until the sergeant appeared and without further ado led me through the entrance to the induction building where he told me to stand in line. I stood and moved with the line of men before me until I got to a desk where my credentials and papers were examined. Slowly I began to be processed through the induction procedure. In due time I was ushered into a room where I was examined for physical fitness, and from there into the room where final papers were issued to those accepted, who were then assigned to their prospective military units.

I was standing in line again, waiting, when the door opened and a stout, ruddy-cheeked moustached officer with the rank of major stepped briskly into the room. He must have been in charge here, because he went from table to table, asking questions and giving brisk orders. He quickly scrutinized the men to be inducted who were still in their civilian clothes. His gaze fell on me and in a short and sharp military tone he asked me how and when I had come to town to be inducted. I told him that I had come by train yesterday. After hearing that, his face suddenly reddened, the veins on his short neck bulged and in a high pitched voice, choked with rage, he uttered, "What is going on here? How did you come here? Hundreds of men are waiting for days in the open field and you came here only yesterday and already in line here? What is your name?," he ranted, his face almost livid. I gave my name and stood silent. "Arrest him!"—he finally hissed, then turned and left the room.

Within minutes two military policemen arrived and I was led out of

the building, through the throngs of people waiting outside, into an open field. We marched for a long while until we came to a place where a small tent was pitched all alone in the open field. I was ordered to get inside. I obeyed and found myself alone in a bare, low pitched tent, in which I could only stand and gaze at the ground or the dirty grey canvas. I heard the military policemen depart. My first move was to open the small canvas flap, serving as a door, and lean outward. "March back!" shouted a soldier on guard in front of the tent, putting his hand on his rifle. I retreated.

Hours passed. I was numb from cold. My few attempts to make conversation with the guard yielded no results. He spoke the Polish of a peasant from Mazowsze in central Poland, cursing me with a low voice whenever I tried to speak to him. He must have gotten pretty cold and hungry himself because he finally agreed to take from me the American biscuits I carried in my coat—a luxurious item, a precious gift brought from India to Ashkhabad by my classmate and kept by my wife for a time of sickness and which she stuffed into my coat when I left for the army. The soldier became clearly corrupted by the taste of the biscuits. He became more talkative and he allowed me to keep the flap slightly open. I was now able to converse with him directly without shouting through the canvas.

He told me immediately that I should not expect any favors from him. He knew I was as good as dead. "They don't pussyfoot here with prisoners." He was angry and obviously frozen and hungry. His superiors must have been late in relieving him because he started swearing loudly as if to warm himself by cursing. "They, the sons of whores, forgot about me. And you, if you try any tricks on me, you'll be shot in no time." I tried to tell him why I had been arrested, as I suspected that he must take anyone under guard as a spy. But he was not interested in my version of my detention because he "doesn't want to get mixed up in anything."

I tried to convince him that we'd both freeze to death if we didn't find a way to warm ourselves. And then I told him that my arrest had been caused by a woman. Only now did his face reveal a lessening of hostility. "Yes," he conceded for the first time, "women are faithless creatures and bring nothing but trouble. Where the devil can't, he sends a woman." I felt that I had made some headway and insisted that he make a fire so that we could warm our bones. He finally took some branches and straw and made a fire in front of the tent. He consented to share the

warmth with me, but he insisted that I stay inside the tent. Finally he consented to allow my head and hands outside the tent. This was accomplished easily. I crawled out from the tent enough to leave my legs in the tent while the rest of my body and hands faced the warmth of the fire.

We were both silent now. There was darkness around us. The glowing embers cast a red glow on the figure of the guarding soldier against the blackness of the dark Asiatic sky. Motionless and silent we were now united in the task of survival under the dark sky of this remote, unfriendly land.

* * *

Around midnight there came the sudden noise of an approaching patrol. A group of military policemen approached the tent, relieved the guard and ordered me out. We marched again toward town. We entered a narrow street. There was no light in any of the houses, the low buildings loomed forbiddingly as if deserted after a disaster. The patrol had difficulty finding their destination and we marched in silence back and forth. Finally they recognized the building they were looking for and one of the soldiers opened a door. He ordered me to enter the darkness of a narrow corridor. He then followed me and struck a match. By the light of the match I saw steps leading down to a cellar. We went down the steps toward a locked door, which he opened. He then pushed me through the door and locked it behind me.

There must have been a step under the door that I missed in the darkness because I fell to the floor before me. It was a soft landing, however, because the floor was covered with straw. It was pitch dark but I knew I was not alone. There were other prisoners in this cellar-jail, a dungeon. The first voice reached me as soon as the door was slammed behind me and I was still dazed from the fall.

"Who is this son of a whore?" "The devil knows," answered another voice. I had yet to recover from the fall, to size up the situation, to decide whether to talk to them or to keep silent. "He is a speculator" a voice from the left announced,. "or maybe a spy—then they'll hang him in the front of the troops." "It'll serve him right—*psiakrew, cholera.*" This traditional Polish curse, related to dog's blood and a dreaded disease, ended the exchange for a short while giving me some time to do some quick thinking. Exhausted and scared, my imagination ran wild.

I hurriedly reasoned that there were at least four more prisoners here. Their speech indicated low grade criminals probably incarcerated for petty thievery. They would not be dangerous. Still, killing, even in prison, to get a pair of shoes was not that infrequent now. Were they imprisoned soldiers or civilians? Soldier—thieves were dealt with very harshly. I decided not to fall asleep and to listen more. But then finally I had to give them some sort of story. I decided to begin with a curse.

"These sons of whores, they treat people like cattle. They show no respect for anyone, even a doctor, who has to treat their asses. How they shit in their pants when they get typhus or even the clap. Tomorrow they are going to pay for kicking me down the cellar!"

There was a silence as though this took time to sink in.

"He is a doctor" a voice started, incredulously.

"Something doesn't square here" another voice complained, "This is not a place where they coop up officers." "He sounds like a doctor to me" concluded another voice, authoratively, adding, "Sing your song, doc, so we can have a few hours of sleep!"

I was reassured. They understood. They could not get away with harming me. A doctor was too important a person. But they still needed some explanation for my sharing the prison floor with them. "A woman," I said with enough contempt in my voice, "cooked up a little game but won't get away with it." It seemed to be credible enough to them for the time being, at least. They kept silent. I was quickly enveloped by the sound of a snoring company. Exhausted, I drifted into oblivion.

I was awakened by a sudden commotion. It must have been morning because through the now opened door to the cellar a dim shaft of daylight revealed the gray walls of the dungeon. Somone called out names behind the door, and the prisoners left, one by one. Eight names were called and eight figures, all civilians in rags, crawled from their lair and disappeared through the door, which was then slammed and bolted. I was left alone in the darkness.

The whiff of air from the briefly opened door must have restored my olfactory sense, because I suddenly became aware of the stench of human excrement around me. But by now I was a veteran. I had learned that you can dull any of your senses, if you allow them, or are forced to let them be saturated with the offending stimulus. This had to be done in a deliberate, continuous way, without the slightest interruption, not to allow the affected sense to restore its function. "Irritate until anesthe-

tized," I mused. After a while, I sensed no more odor. But I felt nothing else either. I did not feel my limbs and did not care to move them or to test them to see if they were still alive. Darkness and silence were around me, I sensed nothing, felt nothing. My mind floated in nothingness. I was suspended in a universe of numbness. And somehow, for a split second, I wished I would be forgotten, that the door to the dungeon would never open again . . .

The sound of the door being unlocked and a cool waft of air stirred me from my lethargy. "It's my turn," I thought sluggishly. I was called out by a loud voice. But not by name. *Panie doktorze* the voice repeated. "Doctor, Sir, please come out!" I rose slowly the way in which one gets up after a long illness. I was light-headed. I walked out the door into the narrow corridor led by a soldier with the insignia of a corporal into the sunlit street. There another soldier, a sergeant waited. Without a word they escorted me with a courteous waving of arms when making a left or right turn at an intersection. We arrived at the induction building and through a back door I was led to a room where I was given a chair at a table across from an officer who smilingly and politely greeted me, "Please sit down, Doctor!"

I went through the induction procedure again, including a physical examination, was declared fit and given an assignment with a medical unit as a physician-private. I was given a British military uniform, shoes and other items. Helped by two soldiers who carried my belongings I marched to my assigned place, the Military Hospital for Infectious Diseases. Here I was received by a sergeant S. who asked me to wash up in his own quarters and change into my military uniform. I then ate my first hot meal in three days. During the meal I tried to sort out the sequence of events, my arrest, my release and the repeated induction procedure.

This was obviously also on the mind of the curious sergeant who was fascinated by the unusual affair of a physician, first arrested, then released, inducted with dispatch and then treated with unheard of, for a private, respect and courtesy. He was itching for information, asking me finally for the reason of all this fuss, adding secretively: "You were released, inducted and assigned here by a personal order of the General, the commander of the Division. We were ordered to take good care of you."

This sergeant, the effective boss of the hospital, did exactly as he had been ordered. He became my protector from then on, and it is to him

that, in the course of the strange events of the following year, I owe my life. But I did not yet myself understand how my release had come about. I could only hint to him that important personalities were involved in the mix-up. That it was better for the time being not to talk about the whole affair, and that he would be in on it in due course. He was quick to understand that I was an important personage and that it would be to his advantage to have me as a friend. In my situation nothing better could have happened.

Next day I was able to unravel the strange events. I had a visitor from division headquarters, an actor now in the process of organizing a military theatre. The actor, famous in prewar Warsaw, had been known to me from my days with the Polish Delegation in Ashkhabad. He became my grateful patient after I unexpectedly revealed the nature of his troubles at a glance, while he was telling me of the shooting pains he had in his back.

It was one of the lucky strikes an observant young doctor may hit on with certain patients who exhibit signs of a specific disease written on their face. This was the case with the actor. As I looked at his face and then into his eyes I could not but notice that his pupils were unequal and narrow. They did not react to light. After testing his knee reflexes and finding them absent I was assured that my diagnosis, made at a glance, was correct. The man showed the effects of syphilis of the nervous system and his pains were only a symptom of the disease. The actor who probably knew of his disease but tried to block it from his awareness was obviously impressed by my diagnostic acumen and became my trusted patient and friend. Now he was before me telling me how he had heard of my arrest and of the events that followed. He also outlined to me the general situation of non-Polish ethnic groups in the Polish Army now being organized in Central Asia, a situation which was directly related to my misfortunes of the last few days.

The mass migration of Polish citizens across Russia toward the recruitment centers initially in the vicinity of Kuybishev on the Volga and later in Central Asia, in the Uzbek and Kirgiz republics involved many groups. The thought of joining the Polish army appealed to many Polish citizens irrespective of their ethnic origin: Poles, Jews, Byelorussians etc. Even for former communists it was a chance to separate themselves from the Soviet masses with the hope of getting one's freedom back, west of Russia where, after the defeat of Hitler, a new, freer life was beckoning.

There were ethnic tangles. Polish Jews who were present on November 1, 1939, in the eastern territories of Poland, annexed by the Soviets, had quickly been claimed as Soviet citizens. Initially, in the first months of the German-Soviet war, when the Russian front was crumbling, the Soviets failed to distinguish between the various ethnic groups within the mass of Polish citizens enlisting in the Polish Army. However, as soon as the first signs of a halt in the German march right at the gates of Moscow occurred, in December 1941, the Soviets began to think of long range political aims. The Polish eastern territories annexed under the agreement with Hitler in 1939 were once again on the Soviet's minds. They began to claim the former inhabitants of these territories, the Jews, Ukrainians and Byelorussians as Soviet citizens and to interfere with the acceptance of Jews into the Polish Army. A complex and paradoxical situation developed because the intentions of the Soviets and the Polish generals were similar but for different reasons. The Polish generals were less than eager to have a considerable number of Jews in their army. Their visceral anti-Semitic stereotypical view of Jewish military prowess and loyalty was deeply engraved in their mind. The Soviets played on this Polish anti-Semitic trait, trying to claim the Jews with Polish approval, and thus gain a basis for later attempts to push the frontiers of post-war Poland further west. Caught in this dilemma General Anders of the Polish Army tried to have it both ways. He did not agree to the Soviet claims of rights over the Jews but, on the other hand, he did not care to admit them in any significant number into the Polish army either. The Jews, as usual in their history, were caught in this double collusion between hostile attitudes. Many tragic losses of life or forced stays in Russia were imposed on Jews of Polish citizenship, as a consequence of anti-Semitism and Polish-Soviet political manipulations.

My friend, the actor, who outlined this complex situation looked at me in silence. But his eyes, with their narrow pupils, I knew so well, expressed now thorough disapproval of my conduct during the last days. He finally decided on the right phrase, "You handled your affairs like an outright imbecile. I may tell you this because I am your friend. You could have ended sadly in this military quagmire here. Your very life was at stake, you imbecile," he repeated.

I agreed with him on the matter of my imbecility but I still was at a loss in the matter of my arrest and release. He knew that, and he continued:

"You arrived at the mobilization center, well fed and clothed, from your warm place in Ashkhsbad. What did you expect? To be inducted the same day, get a new warm army uniform, be fed decently and get a place to sleep? Well, didn't you see the hordes of men waiting in the open field to be inducted? Hordes of men who came down south, filthy, sick, hungry, trying to get a square meal and waiting here in the open field, for days and nights?" I knew that his indignation was less than genuine. But the actor in him made it sound very real.

But then he could not suppress his curiosity. He asked me outright, "How did you manage to get in the inductions rooms? Who took you in? You didn't bribe anybody, did you? I know you well enough to dismiss such a thought. But how did you get in where former colonels sitting in the open field waiting for induction could not make it with the speed you did?"

I could not possibly tell him that the actress that he knew well had volunteered to use her influence, that she had convinced the sergeant in charge of entry to take me into the induction building, that it was she who had managed to get this whole thing started. I said, "Sometimes there are situations in the life of an individual when he cannot reveal some things even to his best friends. I am in such a situation now." But he must have known something because suddenly, after a long silence, he asked, "Was it Yadzia?" I sat silent. He now obviously knew the secret and he seemed to appreciate my silence because in a much more relaxed voice he continued:

"The major who arrested you intended to courtmartial you for a grave offense of military law, the bribing of military personnel. They don't fool around with such cases here, you know. But when the report of your arrest arrived to the commander of the Division, your name seemed familiar to his aide. He recalled that he was instructed to telephone the major in charge of induction to watch for a "physician of Jewish faith" bearing your name who should be accepted into the service despite the standing practice of not accepting Jews into the Polish forces. The commander instructed the aide to do so after receiving a letter from Count Tyszkiewicz who described your medical activities for the Polish Delegation and especially your care of the sick orphans. The Count must have been well informed of the policy of the Soviets and the Polish military not to accept more Jews into the service. His letter to the commander was sent to avoid your rejection. But as it happened, you were inducted, rejected and then arrested before the commander's in-

structions reached the induction office. But when the commander heard of your arrest he acted immediately and this caused your immediate release from prison, induction in the service and the extraordinary treatment you received, after leaving the dungeon. The investigation that was started to find out who admitted you into the induction building was scuttled. There was no problem anymore. Except the wrath you gained for yourself from your new boss, Colonel C. who is in charge of the sanitary branch of the division to which you are now assigned."

Slowly the mess of the last days started to make sense. I was relieved. But then my friend the actor added an ominous warning that would haunt me during the whole time of my army service, "I am sure that your boss, Colonel C., will do everything possible to make your life miserable. It was he who was holding up the instructions to induct you and he was finally forced to admit you. You see, his pride was painfully injured by your case. His anti-Jewish feelings are known. Be careful." We shook hands and he departed.

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The Polish Army, in whose ranks I was now listed as *lekarz-szeregowiec* "physician—private," was formed on Soviet soil under the terms of the Sikorski-Maysky Agreement of July 30, 1941, five weeks after the German invasion of Russia. There was historic irony in the deal the Soviets made under duress of military adversity with the Poles whom they had so treacherously treated two years before. But under the slogan "let bygones-be-by-gones," a cooperative effort began. A Polish Army began to take shape on Soviet territory, which it was hoped would fight the Germans alongside the Soviet Army. The whole affair was a fantastic about-face.

General Anders, an anti-Russian, who became the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army, had to be released from the notorious Lubyanka prison in Moscow. Tens of thousands of former Polish officers, soldiers and hundreds of thousands of Polish civilians had to be freed from NKVD camps, prisons and deportation points in the northern vastness of Russia to enable them to play their part in the formation of the army. The Poles had grim experiences and a deep seated hostility to the Russians. Their lack of enthusiasm for fighting alongside their enemies was understandable. However, at least in the beginning, it looked

as if both sides, the Russians and the Poles, were assuming the common goal of fighting the Germans as a priority.

But soon, by the time of my own induction, late in February 1942, there were indications that prospects of taking part in the fighting of Germans beside the Russians were dim. Aside from the growing distrust between the Soviet and the Polish military commanders, there was a formidable logistic and supply problem: the transport and rehabilitation of tens of thousands of ex-prisoners who were streaming in groups or individually from the frozen tundra toward the Asiatic Soviet Republics where the induction centers were located. Undernourishment and disease were rampant. To make a fighting force of these ravaged and disappointed men was an attainable but difficult task. To make them feel comradeship and soldierly loyalty with the Red Army was impossible.

* * *

My assignment to the hospital entitled me to a place in the physicians' living quarters. It was a large room in a barrack-like structure filled from wall to wall with lower and upper bunks equipped with a pillow and a blanket. I was assigned a bunk at the entrance to the room, the last one available. It had been vacated by the demise of a physician, who had succumbed to typhus.

The occupant of the bunk above me, a pharmacist, a Jew from Polish Galicia, gave me a quick rundown of the rules of the house together with a few of his own observations which he thought might be helpful to me in the event that I was determined to survive here. He was a jovial, middle-aged man, with the courtly demeanor of an Austro-Hungarian officer. He was twice my age and he immediately took a sarcastic but protective attitude. Despite my ordeal of the last 48 hours I looked well fed, my cheeks rosy after a hot meal, and in my new uniform I must have struck him, a veteran of Siberian labor camps, as a näive, young eager-beaver tenderfoot, ready to flunk the supreme test of survival.

"Couldn't you choose a better assignment than this hospital?," he asked ironically as if I had a choice. "In this hospital of six hundred cases of typhus, dysentery and other plagues, where all patients are stretched out on bare floors?" His tone was now rather protective, "The main task of physicians here is to sort out the serious cases from the hopeless, the

dead from the terminal. Do you know how many syringes there are here?" He hardly waited for my answer, continuing now in more obvious distress, "Perhaps it is the latest order that attracted you to this place? The fine order that gives officers of the rank of major and above and all physicians the privilege of being buried in a wooden coffin of their own?"

All I wanted now was to sleep on my bunk. Soon, a pillow under my head, wrapped in the heavenly softness of a woolen, grey military British blanket, enveloped by the warm confinement of the lower bunk, I watched with half closed, tired eyes the strange gyrations of the pharmacist's legs dangling above me. I stopped listening to his mutterings. Things blurred quickly and I sank into the deliverance of sleep.

In the morning I reported to the hospital chief. Captain S., a professional military physician, looked at me quizzically with small blue bloodshot eyes. He tried in an obvious though roundabout way to get some clue to the strange tale he had heard about my arrest and release. He was an ill-tempered, restless man with a red face and a reddish bristling moustache. He was already half-drunk and, in short order, dismissed me mumbling, "You are assigned to the admissions room." He called for the sergeant who had received me the day before and who obviously ran the show.

From now, I was in charge of admissions. My duties included making provisional diagnosis at time of admission and assigning patients to different departments. My additional duty was to taste and assess the quality of the food prepared by the hospital kitchen. For obvious reasons the assignment of food taster pleased me, but it was a shock for my new friend, the pharmacist.

* * *

The personnel of the admission room consisted of a doctor, whose position I now occupied, and a medic, a short, blond very vivacious corporal. He was a meticulous young man with a sharp military demeanor. He would walk in and out briskly, salute smartly, clicking the heels of his brilliant, shiny British military shoes. He ran the place with disciplined efficiency. "I'm lucky to have him," I thought, "I'll be able to devote my time to purely professional matters."

The admissions room was narrow but with enough space for an examining wooden plank, two tables and a chair. A single window faced the street and the open field behind it. There were two small buildings

visible, one as I soon learned was the latrine, the other the steam disinfection station. I settled on the lone chair and listened to the corporal's briefing. His report was short and to the point. He showed me the log with the names of those admitted for the day. The diagnoses were nonspecific: High fever of unknown origin, diarrhea, severe dehydration, cachexia. While looking through the log I said to the corporal that I'd try to make more specific preliminary diagnoses and that I'd follow up the patients on the wards to see how accurate I was. He answered, "Yes, sir," but his eyes expressed incredulity.

He sized me up the way the pharmacist did. The men who came from prisons and Siberian labor camps looked on those who arrived here by their own wits, fleeing rather than having been forcibly deported, as a different breed, pampered by fate and ignorant of Russian reality. My academic interest in the accuracy of a diagnosis seemed to him almost frivolous at a time when everybody's effort in this hospital was to survive until the spring, when the epidemic of typhus would, everyone fervently hoped, subside. He did not waste words. The essence of what he wanted me to grasp became evident when he pointed his finger at the window, "Sir," he said, "That box is making the sixth round today."

I looked outside. A priest, a cross in his hand, marched slowly in front of a horse-drawn wagon that was carrying a long box made of raw, crudely assembled wooden boards. A soldier without a hat walked beside this hearse, reins in his hands. When they had passed, the corporal continued, "They should bury them at night. It's bad for morale. The soldiers wish that once out of the *lagry* in Siberia there should be no more croaking. But one has yet to do one's bit."

He was working on the log book now. On the table near him was a brown bag filled with a fine yellow powder. I had previously seen some of this powder on his boots, something quite incompatible with this soldier's meticulousness.

"Yes, corporal," I nodded. Encouraged, he continued. "They don't bury them in the box. No wood around here. Soon there will be no coffins for the officers or doctors either. The way it's going with typhus, and with Stalin's soup getting down to watery goo, no one is going to last till summer. This is why the Bolsheviks let us leave the camps, in the first place."

We closed the admission room in the afternoon. Late admissions were rare. There were no emergency cases in this epidemic hospital, because life-saving procedures were almost meaningless. When the corporal

readied himself to leave, I asked him about the bag of powder on his table. As an explanation he demonstrated before me the procedure he used to discourage the enemy number one, the louse, from crawling into his clothes. He generously applied the stuff behind the collar of his shirt, around the wrists, under his sleeves, which were tightly buttoned, and inside his shoes where his trousers were tucked in. "It helps" he said, "to keep them out. As long as you don't give your clothes to those disinfection tanks. You have to wash your clothes yourself."

In the next few days I became a true believer in ritualistic powdering, a procedure to allay the all pervading fear of the mighty louse. My friend the pharmacist scoffed at the ritual. "It just irritates the parasite. The Russian louse has developed resistance to everything except flattery and fire. Treat it like royalty: bow or kill."

He advised me to get permission to live in town with a local family. I should sell my civilian clothes and move. I took his advice and rented a bed in a room in town which for the next two months I shared with an old Russian couple.

* * *

The hospital food, strictly rationed to patients and staff alike got worse from day to day. After a week of functioning as taster and assessor of the hospital chow I was relieved of this duty by the protective sergeant who kept me out of danger many times during my army service.

Our main daily meal was a ration of hot soup. At noon each day I arrived at the hospital kitchen where I was greeted with smiles. There were two cauldrons full of soup. One of the cooks would dip a ladle deep into each cauldron and scoop out enough of the brew to fill a canteen cup. Then, seated on a chair, I would taste or rather empty the cup. The soup I was served was of a thick consistency, enough to hold a spoon standing in it. I considered it above reproach and of an acceptable standard. I signed that opinion in the kitchen log. It was a pleasant duty, to say the least. So when I was relieved after a week I took it up with my corporal. He was cautious at first. "Sir, there is no bad that can't end in good" he started, "The sergeant probably thought you shouldn't take the blame for the lousy chow," he continued, musing. My ears perked up. "When the Soviets reduce the rations the cooks are in the habit of adding water. The nearer to the bottom of the cauldron the thicker the soup. For those who are stretched on the floors there,"

he made a gesture toward the main hospital building, "all that is left is water." "After all," he added, looking up at the ceiling, as if wrestling with a higher power "they are so down, they can't swallow the thick stuff. They would puke it out anyway."

Only now did I grasp how dismal my performance had been as taster and assessor of the hospital chow. The samples I was given so generously by the cooks, which I certified with such alacrity, were of the "thick stuff," the rich and meaty grounds scooped up from the very depth of the kettles. There again I could have been in a mess. This was routine procedure and common knowledge, except to greenhorns who had never been in prison camps. I could easily have served as a scapegoat. When I saw the sergeant, during the routine morning report, I made sure he knew that I appreciated my removal from kitchen duty. He looked at me, his eyes somewhat narrow as if in pain, and said, "Doc, I want to see you privately" "Any time" I responded willingly. I saw him the same evening in his small quarters in the hospital compound. His predicament was only too human. He had caught the clap.

* * *

Spring came. The scourge of typhus, the widespread malnutrition, vitamin deficiency, dysentery and tuberculosis wrought havoc among soldiers and civilians alike. Mortality reached proportions threatening the very existence of the Polish forces in Central Asia. There was increasing hostility toward the Soviets, and no one here believed anymore that Polish combat troops would fight shoulder to shoulder alongside Soviet troops. There were some, whose anti-Soviet feelings were so fierce, that they would have welcomed a Russian defeat in the war. Some even had pipedreams of taking over Central Asia in the event of a Soviet debacle that would lead to a disintegration of Russia and the upheaval that would surely follow here, in Central Asia. This was the spring of 1942. The Nazis were at the approaches to Stalingrad on the Volga; threatening the oil fields in the Caucasus; Leningrad was encircled; Rommel was on the move in Africa toward Alexandria and Cairo; The British withdrew from Burma. This was the spring of 1942. The dark spring of 1942. No news from my wife. A total news blackout from Poland, from behind the front, from my people under the Nazis.

I found out early in life that the surest remedy against despair is concentration on work. The human brain, marvelous as it is, cannot

concentrate on two things at once. Man may perform many activities simultaneously if they are automatic, but he can concentrate only on one of them. Although the feeling of despair, like the feeling of pain, is of a different category than intellectual concentration, it must occupy a central core of brain cells to bring it into our awareness. Concentration on one activity will displace the other from our awareness. The wounded soldier will not feel pain while he is concentrating on attack or self-defense. To the obvious disbelief of the corporal I now designed and pursued a project that filled many dismal hours in the admission room of the Military Epidemic Hospital. The work reduced my despair. It also brought me tribulations that could have cost me my life.

I kept a detailed record of all cases admitted to the hospital and I followed the course of their stay, noted the complications and diagnosis at time of admission and discharge or death. Data on the overt effects of malnutrition were noted in detail. The changing patterns in morbidity and mortality as the season changed from winter to spring and summer I evaluated statistically together with other data which I reported graphically on special charts. Charts made with colored crayons I had, by some miracle, found in an otherwise virtually depleted State store. Soon they were decorating the grim, greenish-gray walls of the admission room. The work, aside from filling my craving for concentrated activity, gave me a more factual knowledge of the effects of infectious diseases, the main cause of morbidity and mortality, on the health situation of our Army.

* * *

One morning I received a message from my pharmacist friend, that he would like me to see him in his quarters. I rushed over suspecting bad news. He was lying on his bunk. For the last three to four days he had had a headache and malaise which he dismissed in his casual way as probably not worthy to trouble friends. I checked his temperature, which I found moderately elevated. I looked for a possible early telltale rash. My friend's eyes were half closed but I felt his gaze on me, waiting for a verdict. He was already taking some concoctions of his own against the headache so I left, promising to visit him in the morning.

I left with forebodings. I knew that I had to keep him here as long as the diagnosis was not sure. After all, it might be something else. It would be disastrous to submit him to the shock of the crowded floor in

the hospital, should he not have typhus. But I was only deceiving myself. Sudden headaches, malaise and low fever in this place and time was almost certainly typhus. He had no signs of a cold. I slept badly. Next day I found spots on his skin and he was admitted to the hospital. For the next two weeks I was at his "floorside" frequently. He had a textbook case of epidemic typhus. I was observing simultaneously the classical symptoms of the disease and the spectacle of fate snatching away this kind man and friend.

His fever rose steadily and his headaches became excruciating. The rash quickly spread over his body giving it a purplish tinge. I was sitting nearby on the floor as he would talk about his wife and children, somewhere under the Nazis. One evening I visited him before leaving the hospital for the night. He was somnolent but without a headache, and he almost smiled contentedly. He took my hand and without looking at me murmured, "Could you do me a favor?" There was a strange tone in his voice. I thought, in my ignorance, that he had reached the stage when patients ask for a routine favor: To visit their family, after the war is over, and bring them a picture, a letter, a trinket—some evidence that their thoughts about their kin were with them to the end. I was readying myself for this and in a gesture of compliance to his request I lowered my head to hear him clearly.

"I want you to know," he started, "that I married early. She was my sweetheart since school days. I never cheated on her." He stopped and for a while I thought hopefully that he had fallen asleep. But he kept my hand in his and soon continued. But the tone of his voice changed again,

"Moving one's bowels is most important for a sick man." I was somewhat relieved by this change of subject and I thought of taking leave from him for the night. But he kept my hand rather firmly "I was promised an enema every third day. I am asking you, I demand that I be given an enema every evening." He clutched my hand even tighter and then whispered beseechingly: "Let Marysia do it to me. Only her, please." My hand was now free and I got up.

I postponed acting on his request until the next day. Marysia was a buxom, straw haired, round faced girl. Her nursing skills must have been above average judging from the sudden smiles on the gloomy faces of the patients she would attend to. Her nursing education was shrouded in mystery. She was almost courtmartialed when she destroyed a precious syringe, boiling it with the steel cylinder inside the glass. The

expanding metal shattered the glass cylinder, reducing the hospital inventory of syringes by a fourth. I approached Marysia and she saw no reason to deny the chief pharmacist her ministration.

For many days the pharmacist was in a delirium. And on the fourteenth day of his illness, my friend's high fever fell, and his blood pressure suddenly went down. We had no medicines to intervene. He died the same day.

* * *

We were not aware of the climatic conditions of Uzbekistan. The climate is continental and the summers are hot with little rainfall. Whoever thought of training an army of Europeans on the plains of Uzbekistan in the summer must have been either ignorant or conveniently forgetful. Temperatures in the summer may reach 50 degrees Celsius, or 120 degrees Fahrenheit. More than in the tropics.

Early in the summer I received orders to report to a training camp some twenty kilometers from the hospital. It terminated my assignment at the hospital. I was now to undergo three months of intensive military training, necessary to transform a civilian physician in uniform into a physician-soldier. I packed my belongings, took leave of the sergeant who had guided me through the quicksands of my hospital duties, and from the corporal, and I was off.

We were a group of nearly forty physicians who had never had any military training. Divided in subgroups we lived in small tents, six to a tent. We were stationed in a large orchard, part of an extensive garden, formerly owned by the Emir of Bukhara. Many in the unit were Jews, who like me were without military training because they had not been accepted into military service by the pre-war Polish authorities. Physicians varied in age from thirty to fifty and I probably was the youngest of the group. We quickly developed a spirit of comradeship and I was glad to have an opportunity to live outdoors, get some military training and have routine physical exercise.

The first weeks were quite satisfying. The routine consisted of rising at sunrise, a short inspection by the sergeant, a parade in front of the captain, prayer, and a three kilometer run to the river for bathing. After returning to camp we would get the ration of bread for the day. This was followed by exercises and training with rifle and machine gun, lectures on topography, map reading, military rules and regulations,

etc. Within two weeks we all looked tanned and healthy. Slowly we acquired the bounce and vigor of martial demeanor.

* * *

To my surprise and relief I received a letter from my wife in the most unusual way. I knew she had left Russia but I had heard nothing from her directly until the day of a military parade held for General Szyszko-Bohusz who was on a visit to our division. He was very popular here as the "Hero of Narvik," for his part in the battle in Norway.

We paraded in front of him and other brass and later formed a giant open rectangle facing the podium from which he spoke. I enjoyed the ceremony like everyone else as we expected better food this day. We were, however, puzzled when a young officer, from the entourage of the general, left the podium, turned toward our unit, crossed the field and approached the officer standing in front of us. He in turn, after a short exchange, turned toward us and called out my name, ordering me to come to the front. Startled, I stepped out standing at attention, only to be told that the general requested that I come to the podium. It was extremely unusual, to say the least, but I marched toward the podium, hundreds of soldiers looking at me baffled. At the podium I saluted and stood at attention. The general approached me, ordered "At ease" and shook hands with me. He told me that he had heard of my work for the orphans in Ashkhabad, and asked me how I was doing. He said that he had a letter for me which would be handed to me by the captain after the ceremony.

Then he took off his shirt and turned to the soldiers in the field and in a loud, distinct voice said: "Doctor, put your finger into the hole here," pointing toward an opening in his chest. I put my finger into the opening of a tissue defect under the skin leading deep to his ribs. "Can you feel the bullet?" he demanded. "Yes, General," I replied. He continued, "This is a gift from the Germans. It will stay there until we clean them out of Poland." There was a wild ovation from the troops, "Long live Szyszko-Bohusz." He then shook hands again with me. I saluted and marched to my unit.

In the afternoon, ater the parade, the captain personally brought me the letter. It was from my wife. It was sent by diplomatic pouch from Teheran, Persia, by Count Tyszkiewicz, who was now the Polish chargé d'affaires there.

* * *

We were a group of physicians, Polish citizens, of varied background, faith and outlook. Thrown together by fate, aware of an uncertain future, each one of us tried to lessen the lurking possibility of friction. Apart from Catholics, there was a goodly percentage of Jews. There was also the son of a Russian emigré, of the Russian Orthodox faith. A curious specimen was Alkert, a physician of small stature and unusually large, almost flapping ears. Though a Jew, he was listed as a Catholic. Whether he was actually baptized or, as seemed more feasible, registered as a Catholic to be able to get into the Polish Army, was an issue never debated by us. It must have been an act of desperation for the sake of survival, and we let it go at that.

However, an unspoken veiled contempt mixed with mockery would inevitably surface in our ranks each Sunday morning. On this day, after the usual morning inspection, the chief of the training camp, captain K., a physician and a rather strict professional soldier—liked by most of us for his impartiality—would confront the company and then chat for a while amicably. He would always end his chat with a call to march with him to Mass. Jews were obviously exempt from participation in the Mass. The ranks would dissolve and we Jews would leave the group for our tents. Alkert would try to leave with us. But invariably the vigilant captain would turn to Alkert and in a voice obviously intended to be heard by everyone he would utter, "We Catholics, we all will go to Mass!" Alkert would turn back and join the faithful.

* * *

Malinowski was a fifty year old physician, who in civilian life had been a prominent health official in Eastern Poland. He and his family were the first to be deported by the Soviets. He was a taciturn fellow, his face solemn, his demeanor a blend of dignity and aloofness. When nettled he would explode and then proceed to blame the Soviets and communists for all the ills that plagued mankind. His anti-Semitism was kept under a lid that was constantly in danger of blowing off.

It did erupt once during an unprecedented discussion concerning a Jewish physician, who seemed to be known by many in the group, and who was barred from joining the Polish Army. This physician now lived as a civilian somewhere near the induction center making efforts to be

inducted. His efforts must have been strenuous because echoes of his struggle were reverberating through our camp. The physician, who had previously been a communist "fellow traveller"—basically an opportunist—apparently had been chosen by the Soviet authorities to take over the vacant position Doctor Malinowski had held, before being deported.

Malinowski became livid when the name of the physician was mentioned in the discussion. He asserted that should this man, "this traitor," be inducted, he would do away with him in no time. His violent outburst was followed by hints of "communists and Jews" bearing the responsibility for Poland's debacle. Somehow, the Germans were forgotten in this suddenly-surfaced hatred. It was a wonder of historical circumstances and emotional tangles that bedeviled many Poles. Many from the Eastern provinces gave preference to the hatred of Russians, others from the Western provinces to that of the Germans. The Jews were positioned somewhere in the middle and were beset by animosity from both sides.

* * *

In the middle of the summer things started to go from bad to worse. The bread became hardly fit to be eaten. We received each morning a yellow half brick of corn bread. It was of a heavy, rubbery consistency. A bit would stick to the teeth and gums and could hardly be swallowed. The midday soup was a brown, opaque liquid containing small solid pieces of a dubious nature. Together with hot tea, this was all we got for the day. There were rumors that the soup came from cans sent from Argentina to Ethiopia during the Italian campaign in Africa in 1936. They arrived too late to be of use by the Italian troops and were stored under the sun, until the German invasion of Russia, when they were shipped to Archangelsk and frozen for months, finally to reach us in Central Asia.

A few weeks on this diet was enough to weaken both body and mind. Even worse than the food was the heat. But nothing compared to the punishment one got from the living creatures around us. To avoid the heat of the midday sun one would lie under the canvas of the tent only to be surrounded by swarms of flies. When late in the afternoon the flies would cease their relentless buzzing, the mosquitoes would appear on the scene. There were no nets under which to take cover and there was little we could do to prevent them from feasting on our blood. The

mosquitoes would disappear with sunset only to make place for another torture. Exhausted, ready to fall asleep, we were treated to a concert of the crickets. This would keep one awake until midnight. But then there was still another foe, perhaps the worst, the most elusive: the ants.

One would finally fall asleep only to be awakened by the bugle at sunrise. You would dress in a hurry, half asleep. Then you would construct a regulation cube made of your blanket, your military winter coat, somehow given to every soldier to carry with him through the scorching summer, and the rest of your military gear. When the cube showed signs of keeping its perfect trigonometrical shape you would put your helmet on top of the structure. After accomplishing this feat within a few minutes you had to run out of the tent to join the line, for morning inspection and for the singing of the morning prayer.

But should the corporal in charge find your cube not to his specifications, the whole day would go haywire for you. The corporal gave notice of his displeasure by kicking the cube thus scattering your belongings all over the tent. In due course you would be summoned out of the line back into the tent to make a new effort to construct a more perfect cube. By the time you accomplished this, you had lost precious time. It usually meant missing the distribution of bread rations. A loss of bread for the day.

Somehow, the harder conditions of life in the camp became, the more intense the heat, the more meager the food, the more intensive became the efforts of our commanders to "make soldiers out of us." The sergeants and corporals, assigned to this duty, seemed to relish their function to teach doctors the basic ingredients of marching and running with full equipment, in the hot sun; of crawling with old fashioned rifles—courtesy of the suspicious Soviet government—over the parched earth; and of performing similar tasks, which would enable us to perform our future duties as military physicians. And no wonder that one of us, an older physician, was the first victim of a strenuous exercise under the sun. We became irritable, then apathetic. The exercises were then confined to the early morning hours.

* * *

One night we were awakened by an early bugle call. It was still dark. We dressed rapidly and were ordered to march in formation out of the camp. We were not told our destination nor the purpose of this early

escapade. We thought it to be an alarm exercise, another inanity designed to try our bodies and minds. But it turned out to be a completely different and unexpected trial for us. We were to be witnesses at an execution.

We marched for half an hour and then turned into an open field. We took our place within lines of soldiers from other units, forming a rectangle open westward where a hilly elevation covered with brush formed a semicircular, natural stage. The river to the east behind us formed the base of this God-made arena, perfectly suited for games, parades or executions. In front of us stood a line of soldiers with rifles, the firing squad. Further up, where the flat of the field met the rising slope of the hill, a solid post stood in the freshly dug-up ground.

In the half-light of dawn a prisoner was led onto the stage by four soldiers. He was seated on a bench with a priest beside him. The condemned man, a soldier with a young peasant face, sat impassive, his gaze fixed on the troops before him, as if not understanding his part in this ceremony. A high ranking officer, probably a member of the military court, ordered the prisoner to rise. The court clerk, a girl-soldier, read the verdict.

The prisoner was a 21 year old Polish soldier, who together with a friend, from his company, decided to spend his furlough in town. They must have marched many hours and come to rest along the main road. His friend fell asleep and when he woke up, his boots were gone and so was the soldier, now in front of us, who had sold the shoes, bought food and vodka and did not return to his quarters. He was apprehended a day later by the military police, courtmartialed and sentenced to death by firing squad.

There was a stillness in the air as the girl finished her recitation. The sun was now rising slowly from behind the river casting an unwarranted rosy glow over the scene. The soldier on the stage was tied to the post. His face, previously impassive, now showed a trace of incredulity. A white strip of cloth was wrapped around his head covering his eyes. The priest disappeared from the stage. There was a short barking order. A blast of a salvo cut the face, chest and the thighs of the young peasant into bloody tatters.

"Murderers!" I heard suddenly from the ranks behind me. It was physician-private Teichner, a tall handsome soldier in our company. "Traitor!" came a hiss from my right. It was, as expected, the voice of Doctor Malinowski. We walked back in silence. To the flies, the insects,

the merciless sun; to the domain of military necessity of the hour, the logic of soldierly justice; to the fall-out of human folly.

* * *

A week later, shortly after midnight, I was awakened and ordered to present myself in the morning at the headquarters of the Chief of Staff and to report to Colonel P., the chief of the medical division. It meant a night's march because I was not given transportation. I dressed and left the camp for headquarters. I had no explanation for this order. I marched through the coolness of the summer night, along the dirt road, under the light of the stars. I expected nothing good from this summons. I knew that the colonel, known for his anti-Semitic views, was opposed to the induction of Jewish doctors, even in the face of a shortage of physicians. He had been "sore as hell," I remembered, when he had to admit me into the corps, after being so ordered by the chief of the division, in the spring after my release from detention. The abrupt order plus the fact that he did not provide me with transportation only enhanced my forebodings.

I arrived at headquarters in the morning, after much rest-taking during my march. I was waiting to report to the colonel in a room filled with girl-soldiers, busy at their tables, good-looking and well fed. It was a long time since I had seen a girl powdering her nose, at ease, looking into a round mirror, her legs crossed, the hem of her green khaki skirt well above the caps of her knees. Smartly-dressed officers and heel-clicking orderlies were busily crossing the floor, opening and closing doors. There was here an air of business, importance and arrogance. From time to time I would get a cursive, questioning glance, tinged with mockery. I was unwashed and dusty after the night's march, my uniform wrinkled, my face fallen.

The door opened and I was called in to the colonel. He was a middle aged, darkly handsome man, with bushy black eyebrows and dark eyes. He sat at a large table covered with papers. I stood at attention for a while until, without looking at me, he made a gesture with the palm of his hand, indicating, "At ease." He did not offer a chair and I stood silently.

"It has been brought to my attention," he started, "that while on duty in the admissions room of the Epidemic Hospital, you gathered medical information." He was now leaning back in his chair, his head

and eyes facing the ceiling. "You had no orders to do this, did you?" "No, Sir." "The information you gathered" he continued, "dealt with statistics?" "Yes, Sir." The tone of my voice must have been at variance with what he expected from a private answering a colonel because he glanced at me from the side. I was barely able to stand on my feet. He saw me, probably for the first time, and realizing that I might not be able to go on, he pointed toward a chair. I sat down.

He continued, "I understand you made statistical graphs?" "Yes, Sir." "Did you finish them?" "No, Sir, I was assigned to the training camp, I had to leave immediately. I had no time to finish." "Yes," he said, grinning faintly, "We want to make a soldier out of you." I remained silent. He was now more serious. "I order you to finish your statistical data, present them graphically and write a report with conclusions, within 24 hours. You will get paper, colored crayons and a table in one of the offices here. Report to the lieutenant in the next room. Dismissed!" I got up, saluted and left the room.

A young lieutenant made a room available to me with a chair and table. He provided food and access to a washroom. He suggested I sleep for a few hours before starting my task. It was from him that I grasped the significance of my task. There was a need for documented evidence of the catastrophic state of health of the Polish Forces in Central Asia, evidence that would support the political pressure that General Anders and London were exerting on the Soviet government to allow a speedy evacuation of the remaining troops to the Middle East. Despite my debilitated condition and my chagrin following the encounter with the colonel, I became quite proud of my assignment.

The material was in the sergeant's desk, the boss of the Epidemic Hospital. While a messenger went to bring the material from the place some twenty miles away, I tried to catch up on my sleep, stretched out on the floor of the room where I was going to do my work.

I worked through the rest of the day and almost through the night. In the morning I handed the lieutenant the material, the finished colored graphs and my conclusions. I then marched back to my training camp. On the way, half a mile from camp, I collapsed on the road.

* * *

A roving patrol must have brought me to a nearby military hospital. When my awareness returned I saw a woman physician in a Soviet

military uniform standing by me. She found "extreme exhaustion, a low grade fever and suspicious *rales* in my right lung." I was given a bed in a room occupied by two officers. Once in bed nothing mattered anymore. Too weary to move or think, I lay for the first few days in a semi-stupor, hardly knowing or caring to know about my whereabouts. I was fed some fluids and left alone.

After a few days I was able to sit up in bed and observe my surroundings. This was a Soviet hospital, with Soviet personnel but for Polish soldiers. I was in a long narrow room with high ceilings in an obviously solidly built structure. My bed was at the window from which I could see the courtyard of the hospital. On the bed next to mine was a middle-aged man with a round well-shaven face and ready smile. He was a doctor from Warsaw. The third bed near the door was occupied by a young lieutenant of the infantry, a professional soldier. They must have been here for some time because they were knowledgeable about the affairs of the place. After some time I slowly started participating in their conversations, mostly prewar reminiscences. My neighbor, the doctor, told me he doubted at first when I was brought in the room, that I'd last another day. But now he thought I'd be able to join them here and "stay together until the end of the war."

He had the demeanor of an urbane Jewish professional from Warsaw, his sardonic and often cynical remarks hiding his native warmth. He quickly accepted me into the intimate relationship he had with the lieutenant. He suggested we form a triumvirate whose main purpose would be "physical and cultural" survival. And, I learned further, no one could physically survive for long on hospital chow. The acquisition of food from the outside was, therefore, essential. He and the lieutenant had an arrangement that had worked so far. The second important condition, that of "cultural" survival was to remain in this room, "this fine, intimate clean refuge," and not be transferred to other parts of the hospital, the large halls, where "civilized conversation and good fellowship" were impossible to maintain. As to the efforts to be made for staying in this room, nothing could be added to the decisive contribution made in this respect by the lieutenant, at whose bed, during rounds, the Russian woman physician would linger with more than professional interest.

The main items of food that were obtainable from outside were eggs, potatoes and carrots. There was a contact in the person of a young civilian refugee who was the intermediary between the patients and the

market place. Also he would boil the eggs and potatoes and cook the carrots and bring them in a white canteen dish to be consumed by the doctor and the lieutenant with obvious delectation. I joined by contributing the remaining rubles in my possession. We were able to have feasts two to three times a week.

The more I recovered from my state of exhaustion the hungrier I became. In the off-days when no food was available, the afternoons were the worst. The doctor used a reliable technique to alleviate our hunger pains. He would announce that we were invited by him to dinner at "à la Fourchette," a famous Warsaw eating joint. He would then hold in his hands an imaginery menu, reading out various hors d'oeuvres and canapés to start with. He would then go through the soups, helping us to choose such culinary masterpieces as cold *vichyssoise* and *gazpacho.* He was a great connoisseur of *Chateaubriand,* pig's knuckles and partridge. There was always red wine. Fish was never served, because he found, and I agreed with him, that there was something unpleasant in the mental smell of a phantasized fish, cooked or fried. We drank toasts to our postwar reunions with a frenzy that ended frequently in gloom and despair, each of us lying listlessly through the rest of the evening.

When our rubles ran out we became taciturn and there were long periods of depressing silence. From my suitcase, which had been brought to me from the place I had shared with the old Russian couple, I took out my last possession, a silver pocket watch, my wife's family heirloom, which she had taken with her on her flight from Warsaw. A refugee from Galicia, whom I met somewhere during our wanderings, and who now visited me in the hospital, offered to sell the watch to buy an assorted list of food, a list put together with the help of my two roommates, and bring the rest of the money back with the food. We made a good deal of fantastic speculations of the ways the food would be consumed. We speculated for three days waiting for the treasures, but with diminishing fervor as the days went by. The man never showed up.

* * *

News from the war fronts was dismal. The Germans were at the approaches to the Nile Delta. Palestine was in danger. The Germans had broken the line of the Volga, north of Stalingrad. Kotelnikovo, the town where I had worked in the clinic with Frederic and Masha, was taken by the Nazis.

An oppressive gloom hung over the room, the hospital, the sun-scorched courtyard. The flies buzzed with strength not available to the humans who would wait for the evening cool before starting to move their limbs. Rumors about the one in the hall near the window, the other one in the corridor and so on, who were carried away in the early morning were now too commonplace to be of concern. Big Maciek, a tall peasant from a Polish village near the German frontier, a walking skeleton, who somehow had been able to acquire a large fresh cucumber, and who had devoured it at once, skin and all, was found dead next morning. Was it the cucumber? There were many rumors. But then came one rumor that galvanized the place, causing the immobiles to sit up on their beds or floors, the apathetic to smile, the moribund to open their eyes as if to gaze through the ceilings, to see distant visions. And the rumor was confirmed, *We were being evacuated from Russia!*

The hospital came to life and the place was buzzing. People were talking simultaneously, to neighbors nearby and across the room, some to no one in particular, many to themselves. When will the transports start? Will the sick go first, or will they be last? Will the route be by land or across the Caspian Sea?

Within a few days the rumor became a fact. Lists were compiled of the sick who were physically unable to join their units in order to leave Russia. Everyone suddenly declared himself healthy and strong, ready to put on his uniform and march. Patients who until now had been bedridden were up and milling around, some with the help of others, or leaning on walls and window sills. A team of two doctors and a sergeant came to the hospital to examine the patients and ascertain that they were fit for the journey. Everyone knew that to be left in Russia now, was to perish. Many of the bedridden would sit up on their beds when the examining team approached them. The very sick would get up to show, without being asked, their marching prowess. They would first stand at their beds stiff, at attention. Then, with their fleshless ribcages protruding bravely forward, their wasted to the skin shoulders tucked backwards, hollow-eyed, chins up, they would march up the floor, only to collapse into the arms of their comrades.

* * *

Back in my uniform, I became impatient to join my unit, the hospital unit to which I had originally been assigned. The uniform hung in limp

folds on my wasted body making me wonder how I could have ever worn it before. I parted from my roommates, our bond somewhat loosened by the hectic events of the last few days, and joining other soldiers going in the same direction, I left for my station.

* * *

Back at the hospital, the place of my first assignment, preparations for evacuation were in full swing. The hospital was almost empty, most patients back in uniform. The very sick were to be left with a skeleton crew. We were to march out the next day to the railroad station. From there by train to Krasnovodsk, the port on the Caspian, then by boat to the port of Pahlavi, in Persia. We had the last night to spend here and while preparing my sleeping place on the floor of the hospital office, I was told by one of my colleagues, Doctor R. a bit of disconcerting news.

He asked me if I was going to stay at my old place with the Russian couple after the evacuation? This was a shocking question which, I thought, should not even be asked in jest. He was serious, however. He said my name was not included on the list of those to be evacuated. I was alarmed. I was drained by now of any further strength in the fight for survival, and only the hope of leaving Russia provided me with the last pittance of drive to go on. I had no doubt then that my doom would be sealed if left here.

I went to look for my friend, the sergeant in charge. I found him in his quarters and he immediately seemed to grasp the purpose of my appearance. He took me aside and said: "You have not received any order *not* to leave with us?" "No, of course not" I answered, somewhat bewildered. "Then you are going with us. Make yourself inconspicuous in the train. Do not stay in line for your chow until Persia. You'll receive your food in a different way." I walked out of his quarters to spend a restless night. But in the morning I left for the railroad station, and there I mixed with the hundreds of waiting soldiers. When the blessed time came I looked neither right nor left. I boarded the train.

* * *

There was hardly ever a more wonderful sound for me than that of the engine's steam-whistle announcing the imminent departure of this evacuation train. Soon the voyage of the condemned given a last minute

parole started. I sat at the window looking at the Asian desert and the immense curve of the horizon receding with a speed too slow to calm my tension. From the corner of my eye I would glance at my companions in the compartment. They sat in silence. Some had their eyes half closed, listening to the melody of the rhythmic clatter of wheels, perhaps dreaming.

There were many stops. The soldiers would get off the train and return with long forgotten quantities of bread. Satiated, they would look at the surplus bread with bewildered eyes, not knowing whether to keep it in their hands or to hoard it in their knapsacks. When the train arrived in Ashkhabad for a longer stop I fought any trace of curiosity I had to get off for a last look at the place where I spent many months before. Then through the window I saw Colonel P.

He was walking along the length of the train casting searching looks at the groups of soldiers on the concourse. His gaze suddenly scanned the line of the train's windows and I instinctively withdrew my head into the safety of the compartment. I knew now why Colonel P. ordered my name off the list of those to be evacuated. He must have decided to leave me in Russia to perish. I knew that he had refused to induct me into the Army, then relented under pressure from his commander. His pride was wounded, his anti-Semitic feelings aroused.

I recalled his hard eyes when he ordered me to submit my graphs to him, my work that had contributed to this evacuation. He had no use for me now. Within the framework of his principles there was no provision for unbiased reasoning. He was following his instincts when he ordered this Jew to be left in communist Russia, to perish. But a sergeant had his own way of outwitting a colonel. The sergeant's motivations were complex. I hardly thought of them. My mind was obsessed by the colonel's searching eyes, although I was reassuring myself that it would never have occurred to him even to consider that his orders were foiled.

* * *

We arrived in Krasnovodsk, the port on the Caspian Sea. A boat to Persia was waiting for us. The docks were full of soldiers, milling around or squatting in circles. These were groups from previous trains. There was no checking of lists or documents. Anyone in Polish uniform was allowed on deck. Soon I was engulfed in the crowd pushing its way

toward the gangplank. These were no longer disciplined soldiers. This was a mob on its way out of captivity.

There were two large open decks on the boat and they were filled from bow to stern with soldiers. It was impossible to walk on the decks without stepping on sitting, crouching or stretched-out bodies. Soon a most difficult logistic problem arose. It was a formidable task for the soldiers to reach the lavatories strategically located on both sides of the decks near the stern of the boat. This was aggravated by the prevailing dysentery and the sudden abundance of food that had an unsettling effect on digestive systems unaccustomed for months to a square meal. Long lines of men with painfully strained expressions were forming along the entire length of the ship. And as the ship plowed its way through the dark-green waters of the Caspian, away from Russia, she was trailed throughout the journey by the backwash of a sick army, a giant streaky yellow-red wake.

In Pahlavi, our port of destination in Persia, we disembarked with our eyes wide open to the new world around us. We spent the night in tents pitched along the coast and next morning we were free to move around the camp. We were given our first pay in Persian currency. Enterprising native merchants set up stalls with trinkets, colored post-cards and local culinary delicacies.

It was here that I saw for the first time in two and a half years tantalizing golden-brown fried chicken hanging from a string. The aroma evoked in me an unbridled desire such as I never experienced before or after. I handed the Persian the money and with trembling hands I tore the legs and wings off the bird and devoured the meat, swallowing it almost without chewing. Within minutes my retching and vomiting brought visible disgust, tinged with pity to the eyes of the natives.

* * *

We camped on the sandy shore of the Caspian Sea. This was Persia. For us it was the free world. For me the mild salty breeze evoked memories of carefree days on the Baltic, the days of the lull before the storm. Slowly the mob changed into organized formations. The sick were sorted out and transported south to Teheran where large British field hospitals were being readied.

Persia was now occupied by both the British and Russians. After the

abdication of the Pro-German Rezah-Shah, a new Iranian Government under the new Shah, the son of the former, was set up by the joint British-Russian forces. There was a good Allied reason for this intervention. It prevented the Germans from using the country as an operational base against them and opened a supply line for war material, from the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea. The Russians occupied the North of the country, the British the South, while Teheran was under the rule of both powers.

Although the Russians were on their best behavior in Persia, it was known that their agents were in the port of our encampment. Their presence plus the rumors that in collusion, in some cases with the Polish military police, they were apt to send back to Russia any soldiers who may have arrived without due authorization, cast a shadow on our newly regained freedom. Everyone was now impatient for the further evacuation to Teheran.

No wonder that I was shaken when one afternoon I received an order to report next morning to the Colonel. He must have gotten wind of my arrival. My name was on the list of physicians to be assigned to new duties. I was ready to pay dearly for my evasion of his order but not to be sent back to Russia. And this was still possible.

However, before dawn I was awakened and ordered to report immediately to the transport station. Once there I was put in charge of a convoy of ambulances with sick soldiers to be evacuated to Teheran. I had now two contradictory orders, one of the colonel's and one of the sergeant's. I ignored the colonel's order and after being briefed by the transport officer I took my seat beside the Indian driver in a turban in the first ambulance. I lost no time, and when the convoy was formed and ready, with an urgency in my voice I cried out to the Indian driver the command in Polish, "*Yazda*—Move!" The driver hardly versed in Polish idiom, must have understood me fully because without losing a second he started the engine. At the head of a column of army ambulances I started on a new leg of my long journey, to Teheran, blessings of all sorts on my lips for the sergeant, my providential benefactor.

* * *

Soon the road started to climb from the flat of the Caspian shore up into the wilderness of a mountain range. We were now on an ancient

road, carved on a slope of rock, a road built for caravans of camels and mules. The narrow dusty ribbon twisted around mountain slopes in abrupt loops hanging over startling precipices. The Indian driver beside me would approach a curve with the jaw-tightening determination of a speed-demon, challenging the centrifugal laws of nature. Clutching the steering wheel with a spasmodic embrace and aiming it toward the bend like a lethal weapon, he would turn the quivering vehicle with a jerk and screeching clatter, miss the cliff by a few inches and let the echo of falling gravel reverberate in the abyss of the canyon. He would then, without a glance at me, bare two rows of impeccably white teeth, in a contented smile, oblivious to the moaning of the sick and the rattle of stretchers at the back of the ambulance.

Unable to resign myself to an inglorious end in this wilderness I tried to fight for my own and my patient's survival, but with little success. The man in the turban beside me took no notice of my commands to slow down, indeed of my presence. My threats uttered in broken English and finally, in desperation, in vernacular Polish, caused not a single muscle to move in his impassive face. What he was aware of, most probably was the fact that I had no weapon, which had not been provided by the prudent transportation commander in Pahlavi.

I had instructions to arrive in Teheran next day and to stop midway for the night at a British outpost. There was enough time allotted for intermediate stops, for feeding the patients and for their toilet needs. After my command for a stop was ignored and I resigned myself to this new exotic experience, the ambulance suddenly came to a halt. Within minutes the rest of the ambulances arrived and the drivers left the vehicles to congregate under a lonely tree beside the road. They formed a cozy group of men squatting on the ground in a circle, consuming their meal, oblivious of the happenings a few yards away.

We had the task of pulling out the stretchers with the sick to allow the non-ambulatory soldiers to attend to their needs. There was one female soldier-nurse in the convoy, hardly enough for the task. I näively asked the drivers to help out. There was no answer nor was there any visible change in the expression on their fine, dark, moustached faces. I worked with the nurse, fortunately a strong Polish peasant girl, for an hour. Meanwhile, the drivers ended their meal and after a prolonged meditation or prayer took their places in the vehicles, waiting for us to embark. We had a similar second stop later with a similar sequence.

Early in the afternoon we arrived to the British outpost, halfway to Teheran. Here I was given my first introduction to the minor difficulties the British must have experienced in their rule over the Empire.

We were received by a team of British soldiers who were jolly happy to see us or any human even tired and sick as we were in their desolate outpost. The sick were accommodated in prepared tents, hot meals distributed, and as the evening approached and the activities came to a halt, I had an enlightening conversation with the commander of the outpost. My broken English did not ruffle him in the least as he must have been accustomed to pidgin English. Although I was still technically a private, he recognized my status as a physician. He offered me a drink from a flask he kept in his rear pocket. He must have been anxious not to appear too generous because the stuff was dearer than gold. He may have even thought that I might prefer not to accept his offer, probably convinced that Poles exclusively drink their national *vodka*. He asked me if I drank Scotch. I had heard of whiskey but not of Scotch, but I answered in the affirmative. He then poured the stuff gingerly into tumblers and then from a separate bottle carbonated water. I courtly refused the adding of water. He was somewhat puzzled by my unwillingness to dilute the spirits. I then repeated his *cheers!* and leaning my head slightly backwards, Polish style, emptied the half-filled tumbler with one gulp. He looked at me baffled, waiting for some signs of dire consequences after my face flushed. When nothing of consequence transpired he prudently put his flask back into his pocket with the finality of one who knows how to protect his treasures.

I then proceeded with the ultimate reason for my visit. I told him of the conduct of the Indian drivers and their refusal to help us in caring for the sick. I was now quite agitated and aggressive after the spirits reached my brain cells, and I called for disciplinary action and for assurance that this would not happen again on the last leg of our trip next day. He listened to me, sipping slowly from his glass and at the end of my tirade, when he finally understood my complaint fully, he grinned, "It would be highly improper to order them to do this sort of thing. These *sepoys* belong to a sect that forbids them to touch the sick. He paused for a while then added, "But they are the best ambulance drivers. Aren't they?" I took leave of him and went to my tent. I cursed in my native language until I fell asleep.

* * *

We arrived with the ambulances in Teheran next day in the afternoon, but the buses were almost two hours late. There was concern about the buses because, as I learned, only a week before a bus driven by Persian driver had plunged into a ravine on the road from Pahlavi. I got accommodation for the night in a building that served as a transit center for Polish soldiers. It was a former armaments factory built by Germans for the Reza-Shah. I slept on a large slab of concrete which had previously served as a mounting base for standing machinery for the production of automatic rifles.

My assignment to transport the sick to Teheran had some other benefits for me apart from that of escaping a confrontation with Colonel P. The reorganization of Polish army units in Persia, the changes in command and the speedy transfer of most Polish Army units to the Middle East left me stranded in Teheran. When I reported after a few days to the headquarters I realized that in the meantime my original hospital unit had reorganized and left Teheran. The colonel whom I had most on my mind was given different duties and transferred to Iraq, but so was the sergeant, the man who had saved me. I was ordered to remain in Teheran and wait for a new assignment. I now had some time to wander about the city.

First I called on Count Tyszkiewicz who was chargé-d'affaires in the Polish Legation. He informed me of the whereabouts of my wife. She had left Teheran many months before for Palestine. She had made the arduous journey with two other passengers in a taxi across the deserts of Iraq and Trans-Jordan. Our newborn child, a boy, was probably three months old by now. There was no telephone connection with Palestine. I had to arm myself with patience.

I wandered around the city which sprawled at the foot of the southern slopes of the Elburz Mountains that I had crossed only a few days ago. I enjoyed the dry warm autumn weather of this ancient city standing at an altitude of over 3500 feet, surrounded by magnificent mountain scenery. The Persian bazaar with its labyrinth of vaulted shops and narrow winding alleys, its aromas and smells, its sounds and crowds evoked in me melodies from *In a Persian Market.* It was in Teheran that I saw my first American movie since 1939, "The Great Dictator" with Chaplin. It felt wonderful to see dictators lampooned.

When I got my next assignment I was pleased to have an order to take a course in preventive military medicine, primarily tropical dis-

eases. We started with malaria. The disease was widespread here, especially in the rural regions and was now a scourge for Allied troops. The course was conducted by a British colonel, a professor from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

We would assemble in the morning and drive to a nearby village. Once there we would search for mosquitoes, especially the female of the species Anopheles, for study under magnification later in the day. We learned quickly to catch mosquitoes at noon, when they were nowhere to be seen, at least by the uninitiated. The mosquito escapes the sunlight by hiding in dark recesses. We found enough of them in barns where they were camouflaged by blades of hay which they resembled, when in a resting position, their wings tucked in, their legs attached to the wall. They rested at a characteristic angle to the wall and after some practice they were easily distinguished from the blades of hay. To catch them we used a simple but ingenious technique.

A glass test tube with a long creased blade of hay tucked inside served the purpose. We would spot a sleeping mosquito, looking like an innocent gray speck on the wall of the barn, and with a quick movement cover it with the open end of the glass tube. Then holding our thumbs tightly over the opening we would seal it with a cork. The mosquito could not escape the tube during the short moment when the thumb had to be taken off the opening, because the creature trying to fly out of the tube would get enmeshed in the folded straw while spreading its wings to escape.

Supplied with enough samples we would now go to the village square and enticing the little children with assorted pieces of candy we would make friends with them. Once in their confidence we would examine them, especially their bellies. This was not too difficult as the tots were almost naked. We would look for any enlargement of the spleen trying to define the "spleen index" of the area, because of its correlation with malaria infestation.

We would then study the area, especially the stagnant waters around streams and pools for spraying the mosquito-breeding places. We usually tried to rush back before sundown, so as not to be bitten. After a month of expeditions into the Persian countryside I was stricken with malaria.

* * *

After a bout of high fever, I was taken to a hospital in the vicinity of Teheran. This was a British military hospital in the desert. Here patients were accommodated in a large number of tents pitched on the sandy ground of the desert. I was stretched out on a cot and covered with a fine woolen British army blanket while I alternately shivered and sweltered from the tropical form of malaria.

There were sixteen patients in our tent. There was plenty of food and there was no shortage of medicines. But the tropical form of malaria is a pernicious sickness. High fever may last for a full day leaving one prostrate and with a headache. No amount of blankets seemed to help. Some patients in our tent would go into psychotic breaks from malaria. But the new drug Atebrin saved the day.

The orderlies in the hospital were Indian soldiers. They were divided into groups, and attended their various duties in clusters working simultaneously. There were many misunderstandings caused by this arrangement, one being especially annoying in its absurdity. Each morning a whole contingent of Indian soldiers would arrive, brooms in their hands, and with lightning speed would sweep the ground, raising clouds of fine sandy dust, obscuring vision, covering our faces if one was not alert enough to seek cover under the blanket. After that contingent, whose sole function was the sweeping left, another group would arrive, cans in their hands, spraying water abundantly. It was futile to ask that the procedures be done in reverse order, that the water spraying precede the dusting and thus prevent the sandstorms. Admittedly there were considerable difficulties, stemming from tribal incongruities that prevented the hospital personnel from straightening out the sequence of procedures. Only an appeal to the highest military authority, a General who visited our tent helped and we were able to breathe through the mornings.

* * *

News from the front suddenly brightened. The most dramatic reversals occurred in North Africa and in Stalingrad. Rommel's retreat from the approaches to Alexandria and Palestine brought new hope of a turn in the war with the Nazis. So did the tremendous German losses in the fight for Stalingrad. Finally it was hoped that the German war machine was showing signs of weariness. In the hospital tent, the news from the front brought smiles to feverish and shivering faces. There were

some, however, who hardly felt any raising of spirit from the good news coming from the Russian front. One of them was Boleslaw Waszkiewicz.

Waszkiewicz was a Catholic, a lawyer deported by the Russians from Polish Lithuania. His bed was near mine and as I was ambulant, when free from a bout of fever, I would help in minor chores around him. He was bedridden after a stroke from an embolus, a blood clot carried by the blood stream and lodged in the brain. He had a chronic inflammation of the lining of the cavities of the heart, then an incurable disease. He had no use of his left arm or leg. But he was talkative. His face, already marred by a slight facial palsy would become contorted into a gruesome twist when news of a Russian victory was discussed within his earshot. Invariably he would utter, "This is a lie. War propaganda!" His pale cheeks would show a sickly reddish flush for a moment as he spoke in a hissing voice, obviously straining his waning strength, "Don't believe these fabrications, these communist falsehoods."

As the news from Stalingrad became the dominant conversational topic, Waszkiewicz would turn from complete silence and withdrawal to sudden verbal explosions against the Russians. The outbursts were draining him completely. He became attached to me perhaps because of the small trivial things I did for him and the encouragement I would give him and which, coming from a physician, seemed to calm him somewhat. But he would look at me with reproachful melancholy eyes when I responded cheerfully to the news of the German debacle in Stalingrad. Two weeks after my discharge from the tent hospital I heard of his transfer to a hospital in the city. When I came to visit him I was told that he had died only two days before.

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I was now on a convalescent furlough. But my health was still far from being restored. I was now plagued by jaundice, not a rare complication of tropical malaria. My skin was yellow and itching. Still I was on my feet and walking around town. I now received a long furlough that would allow me to visit my family in Palestine. I made effort to join a convoy going in that direction. Then I was told that a large group of Jewish orphans was to leave shortly from Teheran to Palestine and that physicians would be welcomed to assist them on their way. In due course I got the necessary military permission and made myself available

for this service that would also take me to my wife and the child I had yet to know. I was accepted and made preparations to leave within the next days.

* * *

Before leaving Teheran I called on Count Tyszkiewicz to thank him for his care of my wife and to inform him of my journey to Jerusalem. He had fully recovered from his ordeal in Russia, and the Lubyanka prison and was now immersed in diplomatic life and seemed to have information from Poland through neutral Turkey. In his opinion the tide of the war had shifted in favor of the Allies and he already had been charting plans for Poland after the war. He expressed interest in my future plans. I told him that when the end of the war came and the German nightmare disappeared, I'd try to choose a place where I could pursue my profession freely and without discrimination. Palestine should fit the bill. He was visibly disappointed.

"There is a great future for you in Poland," he responded with conviction. "You have all the makings of a good physician. Poland will need men of your skills and dedication." I was silent, somewhat puzzled by his animated persuasiveness. It was not in the character of this aristocrat and cosmopolitan to be prone to paternalistic and patriotic phrases. "After the war," he continued, "there will be no discrimination in Poland." I must have looked at him somewhat puzzled. How could he predict such a radical turn in Polish sentiments toward Jews, I thought. Then he turned his gaze away and looking somewhere beyond the walls of his elegant office he said in a strange voice, "There will be no necessity for anti-Semitism." He did not elaborate. The conversation turned to other matters. I left him with a feeling of uncertainty and apprehension. The ambiguity of the sentence—"There will be no necessity for anti-Semitism" was to remain in my ears for many months to come. Only much later did I understand the Count. He already had the awesome information, which he would not or could not share with me. He knew of the total destruction of Jewish life in Poland.

XI

WITH 800 ORPHANS FROM SIBERIA TO PALESTINE

THERE WERE 856 Polish-Jewish children waiting in Teheran to leave for Palestine. They were mostly orphans of parents who had left their homes in Western Poland in 1939, escaped to the Eastern provinces and then been deported by the Soviets to Siberia. Many were orphaned in the course of their wanderings or just separated from their parents on the way to their destination in the frozen *tayga*. Many had no recollection of their parents. Bewildered, and in rags they were collected by representatives of the Jewish Agency in Persia. The heroic efforts of the American Jewish women of *Hadassah* secured visas for the children to enter Palestine from a reluctant British Government.

Care of these children became a formidable task. Sickness, malnutrition and infested bodies and clothes were only part of the problem. In their distrust of adults, in their fear of being hurt without warning and in their suspicion of the intention of unselfish kindness many of the children resembled frightened alley cats abused since birth.

Delays in the departure were caused by political considerations of countries whose territories the orphans had to traverse to reach the Promised Land. Like the King of Edom who refused the Children of Israel passage from Egypt to Canaan, the government of Iraq refused passage to the little wanderers. What was planned to be a few days journey through Iraq and Trans-Jordan changed, after long and fruitless negotiations, into an arduous odyssey.

A new, circuitous route was initiated. The children were to be taken across Persia to the Persian Gulf and then by ship to India and the port

of Karachi. From there, after changing ships it was planned to proceed by way of the Indian Ocean to the Gulf of Aden, and the Red Sea to Suez and Port Said. And then through Egypt and the Sinai desert to their destination in the Promised Land. What I thought to be a two day journey to see my family had all the prospects of many weeks of peregrinations on trains and ships, through arid deserts and treacherous waters infested with Japanese submarines. Somehow, although I could have gone by the short route with a military convoy, my choice was to go with the children.

The first leg of the journey was by train from Teheran to Abadan on the Persian Gulf. Here the sub-tropical vegetation contrasted incongruously with the black towers of oil refineries and the pale faces of our children. The weather was warm and we boarded a British ship in high spirits. After discharging its cargo from India the boat received an exotic assortment of colorful Indian troops making their way back home and a restless variegated motley crowd of children under our care. After a night in port, we were on our way to India early in the morning.

The ship's crew, a mixture of British naval officers at the top and Indian and Malaysian sailors at the bottom, were baffled by their unusual human cargo, children without parents, gathered for a reason hardly clear to them, pale, frightened, restless, taking up precious war-time space on a ship exposed to submarine attacks. The ship's captain in an immaculate uniform looked at the children gathered on deck with the eyes of an old sea dog suddenly put in charge of a giant kindergarten. Was he thinking of the complicated rescue operation that might await him if an order to abandon ship were given? Or of fate that threw on him the strange human debris of war?

The ship's surgeon was relieved to hear that there were three physicians accompanying the children. He helped us in the organization of an infirmary, a clinic, first aid, and the framing of sanitary rules. We quickly became immersed in the details of the medical care of our charges.

* * *

It was only at midnight, as things quited down, that I stretched myself on the deck under the bright stars, their sparkle made more brilliant by the darkness of the blacked-out ship. It was a warm night with hardly a breeze from the smooth waters of the Gulf. In the darkness

of the night little red lights floated over the deck back-and-forth like glowing fireflies. These were the illuminated red little bulbs attached to life jackets of sailors meandering on the deck, the red lights which would be visible for rescue at night.

It is said that events of one's life flash through the minds of the condemned during their last moments before a firing squad. Strangely, it was under the dark blue starry sky, for the first time since I left Warsaw, more than three years ago, that I now saw all the events of these fateful years going through my mind. Was it the feeling that we were moving toward a conclusion of the wanderings? But we were moving East, to India, away from my people in Poland, from my family in Jerusalem. Isn't the war still raging, inconclusively?

The stillness of the night and the motionless, tranquil constellations of stars suspended in the velvety blackness of the sky were at odds with my rambling thinking. To steady my thoughts I fixed my gaze on a bright star on the northern sky, like a sailor lost at night without a compass. I assured myself that though we were going East our final destination was West. "I am going with the children to Palestine." Suspended between the blacked-out deck of the ship and the starry sky, surrounded by night, I hardly believed that we'd ever get to that Land.

Then my mind wandered back to the war. Will the Polish Forces fight on the European front or will our Army fight in some remote part of the world? Wasn't the whole world on fire? Will I live to see victory over Evil? Will peace bring redemption to the Jews in Palestine? Will it be there that I'll live with my family, my parents?

Now I lost the star on which my gaze was fixed. For a moment I could not concentrate. I closed my eyes, overtaken by an uneasiness. Was it the thought that like a leaf in the wind I was cast away by the hurricane of war? Or was it the thought lurking somewhere in me that together with the children in this ship surrounded by Japanese submarines we'll all end up on the bottom of the ocean, bringing everything to a dreadful, grotesque, meaningless conclusion?

* * *

The new environment had a healthy effect on the children. The sea air and the warm sun tanned their faces and brightened their eyes. The older children would form groups, gather on deck and listen to the *madrikhim,* counsellors who came to Teheran from Palestine to accom-

pany them on the way. Soon large circles of youngsters were dancing the *hora*. The ship's crew got used to the new passengers. Many sailors tried to make friends with the tots in the common human language of gestures, if not words. But this was hardly the whole story. There were difficulties with some children.

One of them was brought to my attention by a girl counsellor during meal time. Chaim was his name, and he would not take his place at the table when meals were served. Instead he would enter the mess hall and quickly grab a heap of sliced bread from the table, hurriedly put it in his pockets and into his trousers and then disappear from the hall. He would return within five or ten minutes, stand in the entrance door somewhat bewildered and join the group only if encouraged and guided to the table by the counsellor. He hid the bread in crevices known only to himself on the deck, stairways and even in his bunk. Short of keeping a constant eye on him there was nothing that could prevent him from grabbing and hoarding food, first and foremost bread.

I got to know Chaim. He was nine years old when the Germans overran his home town, in Poland. His parents were killed while fleeing on a side road where they had taken refuge, when the main road was bombed. Together with his aunt and sister he was taken by other refugees on a cart heading East. They lived for a while in the Soviet occupied Polish provinces and then were deported in freight trains to a camp in Siberia. The adults were put to work sawing trees. Chaim was too young to work so he was sent to a village school. He was taught to sing the song praising Stalin each morning "for their happy childhood," earning his ration of bread this way. When the winter set in in earnest, he was confined to a shack with six families. His aunt died of pneumonia. When liberation of Polish citizens came in summer of 1941 all the deportees left. They went south, down the river, on rafts they built themselves from logs. This had to be done quickly before the river froze again. They were fifteen days on the raft before they arrived at a railway station. They finally reached Central Asia. In Samarkand there was hunger. Chaim and his sister were put to work in a field outside the town. He was eleven, his sister nine. They finally joined a band of Polish children roaming the streets of Samarkand. Rounded up by the police they were put into an orphanage then being organized by the Polish authorities for evacuation to Persia. They learned not to give their true Jewish names to avoid being thrown out of the transport. The Polish authorities were not inclined to take Jewish children out of Russia. After arrival in

Pahlavi they revealed their identity when representatives of the Jewish Agency searched the camps for Jewish children.

* * *

My efforts to make Chaim trust me were not too successful. He would not stop hoarding bread. I succeeded in giving him a canvas bag which he would fill up with bread given to him by a special arrangement I was able to make with the ship's supply officer. The Scotchman in charge of supply listened to the story. A father of two children, he understood.

* * *

The best hours were at night. The cabins below deck were stifling. I would stretch on the open deck and doze away. Once, while half drowsy, I became aware of a mysterious glow on the horizon. I got up and by now fully alerted I became in turn startled and mesmerized by a fantastic sight. On the night-clouded horizon I saw a cluster of brightly colored lights, rows of brilliant rainbows moving majestically before my wide open eyes. A mirage, a fata morgana, a figment of my skewed imagination? I looked down the darkness of the deck trying to find a flickering red light and attached to it a member of the crew. After I found one I grabbed him, "Do you see this?" I asked. "Oh, yes, it is a Red Cross ship. They sail with all lights on. Won't they be hit by the Japs? Maybe" —he added and walked away. I couldn't take my eyes off the mirage until it disappeared into the black velvet of the night.

* * *

Soon the routine of life on ship and the enforced discipline gave some semblance of organized coherence to the group. The test of the incipient transformation of this ravaged crowd of children into a directable group would occur every day before noon. It was the time for all to assemble on deck for the rescue drill. Divided into small groups, the children, in their red life jackets, would rush on deck and stand assembled before their designated life boats. How well did they understand the necessity for discipline in the fight for survival? Perhaps it was these daily drills that made the children slowly begin to trust the adults, the crew, the counsellors and the physicians. The scene of the assembled, controlled

formations of tanned children on deck in red jackets, under the blue sky, gave one the fleeting feeling of a jamboree at sea, of preparations for a parade on a floating playing field. Only the silhouettes of the escorting warships on the horizon and the large convoy of which our ship was but a small part reminded one of the war and the peril of a Japanese attack.

* * *

We arrived in Karachi at dawn. After breakfast everyone rushed on deck to see the colorful bustle of port life. We were to disembark the next morning. Meanwhile we got an eyeful of the exotic panorama. First to disembark was a high British officer, a tall slender gentleman, in khaki shorts, short sleeves and cork helmet, a swagger stick under his arm. Behind him, at a respectable distance, a line of a dozen natives walked in goose-step carrying luggage, boxes and packages of every size and shape on their heads. From our vantage point, high on the deck, they looked like a caravan of creatures carrying their burdens with the unhurried grace of camels. At the end of the procession, a little boy, barefoot, held in his hand a box of a peculiar shape. In it was a reserve cork helmet for the Master.

* * *

We disembarked next morning and transferred to a military camp on a sandy flat outside Karachi. Here we were to stay until the next ship became available for the next leg of our journey. Days went by filled with routine duties. There was mixed news from the war front. The news of the three day national mourning that Hitler declared after the surrender of the von Paulus Army in Stalingrad was greeted with loud cheers by the Polish-Jewish refugees and with only slightly more subdued bursts of applause by the British officers in the mess hall. Everyone felt that the Nazis and the German people deserved their first humiliation in the war of their making, the proclamation by a barbaric government of a "National Mourning." The news of the fall of Singapore was received with silence.

I had the privilege of taking my meals in the officer's mess and it was there that I saw a familiar face. It was a smartly dressed British major who looked at me for a while with a puzzled expression. Then we recognized each other. He was a physician, a Polish Jew, a classmate

from my medical school. Doctor K. had left seven years before for India. He established a practice in Lahore and after the outbreak of the war joined the army. He was stationed in Karachi where he lived in a private apartment in town together with his wife, also a physician I knew from Bratislava. I cheerfully accepted his invitation and two days later I went to Karachi to his home.

The city sprawled along the coast, a conglomerate of flat roofs with sparse trees and a few curved domes breaking the monotony. There were thousands of birds, scavenger crows all over the place, only outnumbered by the crowds of barefooted men in turbans pulling rickshaws or rubber-wheeled carts loaded with cotton. The dust and heat of the town vanished when I entered my friend's apartment where the large blades of ceiling fans lent a comfortable breeze while we dined and reminisced about our years in school. In the evening we went together to a movie theatre. We were seated in the balcony. Only during the intermission did I note that in the balcony, there were whites only, while the floor below us was reserved for the colored natives. This overt race discrimination marred the reunion with my friends. They seemed to have adjusted themselves to this ignobility of the white man.

* * *

We finally received news of a ship heading to Aden and Port Said. After feverish preparations we were ready for departure one morning but we were delayed from leaving the camp for a few hours by a memorable natural phenomenon. During the final arrangements for departure, the clear blue sky suddenly darkened. At first I thought of an unexpected eclipse of the sun. But the nature of the cloud revealed itself when hundreds of grasshoppers started falling to the ground. They were locusts. A mass of millions of voracious creatures flying above us in swarms so dense as not only to hide the sun and the sky but also to collide and bump into each other sending the weaklings down to earth in droves. But soon the cloud left for greener pastures. After the road was cleared we started for Karachi and embarkation.

We boarded a ship heading for Aden and Port Said. It was February, but as we headed south the heat became more and more oppressive. It became almost impossible to sleep in the cabins, especially when we passed through the Red Sea. The sweltering heat unrelieved by the parched African shore on our left and the Arabian desert on our right,

made care for the children difficult. We were all edgy, our eyes pink from the fine, almost invisible, sand irritating our mucous membranes. A reddish shimmer would cover the haze giving the Red Sea justification for its name. Sailors would take recourse from the heat with a sure remedy, drink, if available. Blackout rules were still in force when we arrived in Port Said. Now again there was the possibility of air raids from German aircraft. None materialized and we were transferred to a train going east to Palestine.

* * *

As the train moved through the Sinai desert, nearer and nearer the Land, and my family, I could hardly sleep. Through the window the sands of the desert shimmered in the light of the half-moon. I dozed off and awakened time and again. At dawn the train came to a stop. We were a few miles from the Palestine frontier. With a few adults I got off the train and walked along the rails looking east, toward the brightening band of the horizon. The children were asleep.

Suddenly the train's long whistle pierced the air with a whining blast. Cut abruptly and carried away echoeless into the distant morning mist, the jarring sound made my head jerk toward the train. Throughout the long line of railroad cars suddenly awakened wide-eyed youngsters strained their heads through the open windows. We rushed back into the coaches. Almost from nowhere a detachment of British soldiers surrounded the train prodding the already rushing civilians into the compartments.

The grim-faced soldiers, probably awakened in the deep of the night only to face the distasteful task of escorting a train loaded with, of all things in wartime, hundreds of children, were in no mood to answer my indiscreet questioning as to the final destination of the transport. They must have been under orders not to allow anyone to escape the train because after the doors were shut, they searched the undulating dunes carefully and scanned the horizon for nonexistent escapees. Satisfied, one of them motioned toward his comrade near the engine, and the train after its initial labor, steaming and wheel-screeching, started slowly toward Palestine.

In no time, before our eyes, there was an abrupt change from the sallow yellow of the desert, the color of desolation that had filled our eyes for days, weeks and months, into the verdant hues of vegetation. In

the light of the rising sun there was before us a new landscape, of luscious iridescence, a renascent green of a precocious spring.

Inside the train excitement grew with every mile of yellow dunes and reddish soil traversed along the coastal plain of the Land. Through the train's open windows the light of the rising sun fell on the now restless children and filled the compartments with bright shimmering shafts of dust. In the compartment opposite, someone was calming a child whose constant "I don't like guards. Where is my brother?" seemed to disturb a group of older boys warming up slowly with the Hebrew song, "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream." In another compartment a teenager, a redhaired boy with a freckled nose, assured his huddled comrades: "Just as I told you. The soldiers will take us back to Siberia. Don't, don't sing." But the singers prevailed. To the silent amazement of the soldiers, the stirring chant of the Psalmist resounded throughout the coaches, "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy."

The train moved slowly along orange groves and sand dunes. Along the rails people on carts, horseback and on foot stood waving, shouting "Shalom." Women smiling through tears threw flowers to the wide-eyed children craning their necks through the windows. It seemed like the whole population of the Land of Israel had come to greet the wanderers. Even the British soldiers could not help but stand on the open doorsteps smiling and waving back to the welcoming throngs. Then the train moved into a station and came to a halt. With a rush we surged off the train.

On the ground I stood for a while in a daze. Then I fell to my knees and kissed the earth.

XII

CLOSING THE CIRCLE

AFTER RELINQUISHING the charges to representatives of the Jewish Agency, I tried to get to my family in Jerusalem without delay. There was an empty seat in a military jeep driven by a British soldier heading to Jerusalem. Critically surveying my oversized British uniform, the driver then fixed his gaze on my military cap adorned with a shiny-wings open-brassy Polish eagle. "Highly irregular," he muttered, "bloody MPs all over the place." But then he consented, with a shrug of his huge, clean shaven prognathous jaw.

Soon the vehicle headed south, on a dusty road along the seashore. As we descended into the plain of Sharon the breeze brought the sweet fragrance of orange blossoms over the passing yellow dunes and shifting sands. On the right of us the Mediterranean glistened in the afternoon sun while on the left, newly planted orange groves beguiled the eye with their foliage. At a distance, proud cypresses defying the line of the horizon sprang out toward the sky. They stood singly and in ranks, like rows of soldiers, or in clusters nestled near the red roofs and white walls of settlements.

We turned left toward Jerusalem. The vegetation of the Sharon was soon behind us and the soft sea-scented air turned into bracing, lucid crystal. On both sides of the winding ascending road, stone-gray, barren ancient terraces stood in bold relief, girdling the onrushing Judean hills and deflecting the golden glint of the late afternoon sunlight.

We rode in silence. The jeep labored as the narrow road became steeper. After screeching around a few perilously sharp bends, suddenly,

without premonition, without the warning of a suburb or isolated, random hamlet, up-there, on the hardedged crowns of hilltops, lit in the oblique reddish sunlight, across shaded valleys, stood the golden, stony relief of the City.

It was evening when I met my family. My son, seven months old, slept in his crib. A round pink face, lips slightly parted, two thin lines of black eyelashes drawn between the closed eyelids and a light strand of hair over a fine forehead finding its way from under a blue knitted woolen cap. He slept serenely tucked under a blue blanket, his cherubic head making a deep indentation in the immaculate white pillow. His mother proud, happy, anxious, tired.

From the other corner of the single room suddenly there was the cry of another infant. There were two infants in the room! "This is Krysia," my wife explained, "the daughter of Wanda, a friend. We all live together in this room. This is her corner." I was silent trying to absorb this culmination to the events of the day. "I take care of the infants," she continued, "and Wanda works in the Soldier's House, in the kitchen." And then with a matter-of-fact tone she added: "We worked it all out with Wanda. You will sleep with me on the couch in our corner of the room. I screened it off with a blanket." With this she ran to the crib, in the other corner, to pacify a healthy but temperamental Krysia, who demanded attention from my wife and got it from her instantly, almost by reflex. I took my wife in my arms again. There was a knock at the door. Wanda arrived to greet me and brought a cooked meal from the Soldier's House kitchen.

* * *

In the morning, eager to see the city, I stepped out of the room into a surprisingly large vestibule. At the three ends of the sparkling tiled floor, doors led to the interior of the house, a solid one story structure built of greyish-pink stone. I opened the heavy wrought-iron front door and stepped out onto a colonnaded terrace, facing the street, now lit with bright morning sunlight. In the corner, standing in a wooden crib with slatted sides, my seven months old son, his eyes now wide open, looked at me with total indifference, while his mate, Krysia, tried tenaciously to raise herself to the still too high railing of the enclosure.

The house stood on the edge of Rehavia, a new sprawling quarter built by German Jews. The houses, all of stone, two or three stories

high, lined with lush spring shrubbery, young pines and cypresses, were bathed in the clear Jerusalem sunlight. The clean swept streets, sloping up and down in graceful curves, ended in little squares with green painted benches. Older men in worn out but meticulously clean suits, white shirts and ties conversed *gemütlich* with each other, in German.

Somewhat short of breath, still the convalescent, I sat on one of the benches taking in the bright but still mild sunshine. I found myself eavesdropping on the German which I had not heard for years, the Nazis shrill language of hatred, the bark of the Huns, spoken now casually, by Jews. Foolishly I thought to tell them to stop fouling the air of the Land, only sheepishly to reflect that this was, after all, their mother tongue, part of their soul and flesh, their cultural possession, a mental instrument, without which, at their age, they would turn tongueless, mute. I smiled at them, and they smiled back looking somewhat baffled at the sickly Polish soldier in a British uniform, trying to warm himself in the Jerusalem sun.

The tranquility of the little square was suddenly interrupted by a loud cry of a woman, whose anguished scream came from a nearby house entrance, "Schrecklich. Gott in Himmel." Terrible! God in Heaven! We all looked toward the source of the lamentation. A gray haired woman in a flowered cotton dress, stood at a house entrance, one arm protecting the green leafy hedge, the other outstretched and pointing toward the distant crest of the hilly street. Up there, on the line of the horizon, cluttering the blue sky, a herd of disarranged goats headed down the street. Led by a small Arab boy, whose efforts to contain his flock within the boundaries of the curbs of the narrow street were without visible results, the horned beasts climbed on hedges and young trees, savoring the fresh juicy foliage, trampling on newly planted flower beds, and filling the *Hausfraus* with speechless horror as they were suddenly alerted and emerged from their kitchens. There ensued complete bedlam, the Arab child holding a rather dignified bearded specimen by the horns, the women bringing out brooms and prodding the now scrambling goats down toward our square, finally succeeding in shoving the enemy into a side street leading to an open field. After assessing the damage and the debris of broken branches and half-chewed leaves littering the street, the women used the brooms to sweep the street clean.

There was again tranquility. But one man on the bench, who had watched the event without ever losing his benign smile, commented in scholarly German, "The goat ruined the Middle East. Together with

the malaria-carrying mosquito the horned beast changed this once fertile and blooming part of the world into what it is today. Malaria rarely kills, it is a chronic crippler and the afflicted become debilitated." The speaker now looked at me curiously and then continued, carefully changing his last words. "They became devitalized, worn away, in other words, they became lazy in body and mind."

I thought him to be a retired judge, a law professor, or even a government prosecutor, in his native Germany. His eyes gazed at me for a moment, and I shifted uncomfortably on the bench, lest he ask me if I had malaria. I was in no mood to be reminded of my past, the war, the pestilences, my sickness.

"When the people here became lazy," he continued, almost to himself because his companions seemed to be at the end of their attention span, "they began to rely for their meager livelihood on their wives, children and yes, *meine Herren,* on the goat. This horned beast gives enough milk and cheese to feed a whole family and survives on anything. It denudes the trees not only of their leaves but of the very bark. It is worse than the locust. It kills the trees. And once the ancient forests were gone, the rain and wind swept the soil down to the sea and what is left now is nude rock and stony terraces." He looked at me again, uncertain if I understood his German and then, pointing a finger toward a distant hill covered with sparse spring grass and countless rocks of every size and description, he concluded: "There is a lot of work to be done here." He then rose to his feet and left with a *"Shalom, auf Wiedersehen."* His figure receding with measured, rhythmic steps was ramrod stiff and taller than I had expected.

"He may have been a cavalry officer under the Kaiser," I mused unnecessarily and compulsively. "A tree pulled out by the roots by a hurricane, by a fit of national madness, by the blind fury of Corporal Schickelgruber foaming over the injustice of the Versailles treaty. Or perhaps, there is more to it. There must be more to it. There are two thousand years to account for it." I became uneasy. "As if it matters! As if I can be of help." I felt faint again and got up.

I moved on toward the center of town. I passed the massive structure of the Jewish Agency and crossed a large avenue, King George Street. I now faced a large gap between the buildings, a space covered, like other empty spaces in Jerusalem, with grass and rocks. Beyond the sloping open field, violating the undulating horizon, sky-scraping and looking down on the surrounding earth-hugging little houses, there stood the

tallest structure in Jerusalem, the gray egg-shaped tower of the YMCA. To the right the windmill of Montefiore. And beyond the vanishing line of roofs of Yemin Moshe, what must be the walls of the Old City. . . .

I resisted the urge to cross the field to get nearer to the walls, in whose defense I was killed early in my childhood, in a dream. Instead I moved on, along King George Street. The crowd became thicker. Children led by a teacher marched along the sidewalk, their faces tanned, eyes bright, pushing each other with youthful prankishness, their exuberant patter strangely familiar and, with some difficulty, understandable. The Hebrew of the *sabras.*

On a small island of grass between buildings, a green painted bench looked inviting. As I walked over, a young woman moved slightly to make space for me. She was knitting with two wool spools on her knees while her eyes followed the movements of a little boy playing hide-and-seek with other children behind trunks of olive trees and rocks.

I looked at an English-language newspaper on the bench and I must have made a gesture, because she turned her face toward me, glanced at the brass eagle on my military cap and said in Polish: "Help yourself." Then she added in a somewhat harsher voice, "This is not my paper. We read Hebrew papers."

I was surprised by her Polish and failed to take in the real meaning of the other half of her remark. However, the unexpected edge in her voice sharpened my attention. I thanked her and said, "I am glad to hear any language except German. I've had enough of it for this morning." She nodded approvingly and then added, "In this part of Jerusalem, German is *the* language. It will take a generation and hard work to silence it here."

We now seemed to have established some common ground. She volunteered the information that she was born in Poland and that she came here, to the Land of Israel, seven years ago with a classmate, now her husband. She pronounced the words "Land of Israel" in a throaty, oriental accent. While she continued, I reflected that her use of that term instead of "Palestine" and the guttural affectation did not clash with her otherwise impeccable flow of Polish idiom.

I told her this. She smiled now and warming up to the subject, said, "My husband believes that the word "Palestine" should not be used because it is a semantic historical injustice perpetrated on the Jewish people by the Roman emperor Hadrian. In their quest to eradicate even the memory of the Jewish state the Romans blotted out the name Judea

and fabricated the name Palestine, after the Philistines who long ago disappeared from history."

Her knitting needles did not stop for a second. They glittered in the bright light of the day, their reflections following in swift succession the to-and-fro movements of her fingers. I sat silent trying to sort out the multiplicity of emotions impinging on my awareness within such a short time this morning. As if reading my mind, she looked at her wristwatch, gathered her knitting, then walked to her son and soon, waving to me from a distance, left the playground.

I walked up the street. I glanced at the papers at the corner news stand. The black, square Hebrew letters of the headlines screamed for attention. I bought my first newspaper since arrival. I walked back to the playground and sat on the same bench.

The headlines hit my eyes like a volley from a machine gun. "Warsaw Ghetto Destroyed," "Reports of Death Camps Confirmed." I read the details.

The unbelievable was true. Two thousand years of theological maligning culminated in planned Teutonic savagery and destroyed my people on the plains of Poland. The Polish Jews, a thousand year old oak planted in treacherous sands of exile, naked and defenseless, were cut, root and branch . . .

I looked around me. The sun was shining through the clear air and the Hebrew chatter of Jewish children, the *sabras,* was carefree and unrestrained. Within the narrow slice of the far horizon, young slender cypresses reached out proudly and defiantly toward the blue Jerusalem arch of heaven.